

Missions Analysis

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Introduction to Missions Analysis

The goal of this Missions analysis paper is to introduce us to the perspective of missions in Barcelona, Spain. I wanted to get a grasp not only of the missionaries experience but more so the cultural temperature of Barcelona with regards to the church. The reason I chose Barcelona was because I actually lived there with a family for a semester in 2013. Since 2013, I visited Barcelona another 4 times staying with my Spain family each time and growing that relationship deeper and deeper. I fell in love with the people of Spain and the city so I thought interviewing a missionary in my favorite city of the world only made sense. I learned so much about the history and current tension between Spain and the provinces, specifically Catalunya where Barcelona is located. In my study abroad time I took history classes where I dove into their times of tyranny with Franco. Finally, I was able to get into the context of Christianity in Spain. This is predominately a Catholicized country and the protestant reformation never made its way down to Spain or Portugal still to this day. This interview allowed me to gain knowledge from a missionary who is a part of one of the largest evangelical churches in Barcelona.

Interview Setting

I met with a missionary Pastor named Zach Adams from a church called International Church of Barcelona. He has been serving there for a little over 5 years now, focusing on discipleship. We were able to meet over zoom by connecting over Instagram. I will say I'm not a big fan of social media but for instances like this, its amazing. We spent almost an hour talking about Spain and the interview was just so much fun. I loved hearing his enthusiasm and knowledge of Spain and the recorded zoom feature has allowed me to hold on to this interview for good. I would prefer to have done this in person for many reasons but mainly because I would have certainly met him in Barcelona at my favorite plaza Real.

Missions Description

The interview started off with us getting to know each other and then quickly we jumped into the interview. I started my first question with: What are some of the challenges the church is struggling with in reaching people in Spain as a country and then specifically Barcelona? His response was carefully thought through with history and practicality. He explained how there is a Christian culture but he put up air quotes and mainly because protestantism never arrived in its early history. He said the reformation stopped at the Pyrenees mountains which is a range separating France and Spain. Then in the late 1800's the Plymouth Brethren came to start evangelizing, however, this was more of a focus to reach people through the doctrine of pre-millennial dispensationalism. He stated only in the last 10 years have Protestant churches just stopped being viewed as a cult leading people astray. Furthermore, he said all these churches were viewed as the cookie-cutter churches who branched off of Catholicism. Within this question he said there are more Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons currently in Spain than there are Protestant or evangelical churches.

He would go on to explain how there are so many Catholic churches in Spain and they have about 7 services a day but only 14 people on average show up to each service. They started to have commercials trying to convince people to join the seminary to become Catholic priests. But overall, Catholicism is rapidly declining and there is really no evangelical or Protestant church presence either. This country is declared a Christianized nation on paper with 70% of people identifying as Christian but hardly any practicing or having Bible literacy. He testified that living in Spain he had to come to terms with this being a completely secular state. He was unsuccessful in even trying to bridge the gap with Catholicism because the people did not practice or have knowledge of their faith.

Now my favorite part is when he started to talk about what the people were like in Spain as a whole. He described them as similar to the North East or New England area. In that he phrased it, “the people are like a tough nut to crack.” But the cool part is if you are committed and stay long term once they are loyal to you they really are trustworthy. He even mentioned that he prefers it this way than the south,(where Zach is from) because people are lovely and southern hospitality is real but the people are superficial. His words are “Once a Spainard lets you in you get to know their true selves and go deep.”

Lastly with regards to this question he mentioned how socialism and the government have become Spain’s father figure and even god. He actually said, “Barcelona’s second favorite sport is to protest with futbol being first.” He briefly mentioned how the region of Cataluyna wants to break free from Spain and be its own country. Barcelona being the most profitable city in Catalonia and Spain, it is the most active city in fighting for independence. Actually, in 2013, I went to the El Clasico, futbol match of Barcelona versus Real Madrid and the image I will never forget is hearing the crowd chant for Independence in Catalan. So Barcelona’s government has been a sensitive topic of conversation in engaging with non-believers. And he ultimately finished this question off by saying Barcelona and Spain as a whole is completely unreached and is desperate for a reevangelizing of the country in a completely different way. It needs to be different because Catholicism is dying but also because there are still fresh wounds of religion being used for dictatorship by Franco. The remants of this dictatorship left a mark of humanism, materialism and a strong belief they can achieve greatness together without God. I was extremely interested by this response.

The next question was how was the process of church planting in Barcelona? This was a quick direct answer. Due to socialism and most peoples money going to taxes, tithing and support for their church has always been extremely diffuclt. He actually pays only local

Spaniards on staff a salary and anyone from America or other countries have to raise their own support. He fears that model will not sustain missionaries to stay and help. He also said that God has been good because although money has been tight an amazing amount of young people have attended the church ranging from ages 30 to 40 years old.

The back half of our interview went into the grittiness of what doing ministry looks like for them in Barcelona and specifically how they do missions. The answers were not what I expected. First, they learned through trial and error that doing ministry with just an American model produced a lot of international visitors but not locals. Then they focused on discipleship and they did this mainly through a lead pastor overseeing small groups. They also noticed that people only came to church through relational invitations. So they deployed everyone in their church not just leadership to speak with their circle of friends. While this was happening they got away from focusing on theological stances and differences and emphasized dialogue with the church. They saw a massive culture change in the last 10 years. People were inviting friends and talking about Spain, but also coming to church. They saw people feel more comfortable with speaking up in small groups and meeting outside of church for dinner and relationships growing. The culture in the church they saw was unity in the midst of a nation that was divided and people were flocking to this unity.

However, Zach emphasized that although there was this great change the numbers of Spaniards was still low but it slightly grew. He stressed that people in Barcelona have this view of Christianity being two main things. First is Christianity was made to be seen as this religion that didn't create unity but forced unity by Franco. He used Catholicism to force Barcelona to support Madrid the heart of Spain in Franco's eyes. The second piece is Franco made Christianity seem like a religion that robbed people of their freedom of conscience. This means people view Christ in some ways like Franco. That Christ is just a bunch of rules that will rob them

of their fun, joy and lives. They see themselves as responsible for making their own decisions and specifically morals that affect their community. They do not need God to do that for them. This is one of the greatest signs of Post-Christendom which is the differentiation from God. They deal with the typical post modern society where people are spiritual and all roads lead to heaven. Zach said the difference he sees though is people have this post modern view of spirituality being you are free to do whatever makes you happy because of Franco forcing religion on them. The Barcelona people value freedom extremely. Franco used the bible to justify killing Barcelona people if they spoke Catalan and this is why its so tough for them to separate religion from Jesus. So Zach stated that they have to be careful to stay away from presenting Jesus as a dictator of moral behavior. Jesus is clearly not this but at times we cant present him in this way.

Finally, this interview concluded with missions being very organic for them. They do a lot of program ministries within the church providing small groups, young adults, youth, children's, and worship. The church does have a very American model of church. The missions aspect though has been really just an encourgment to invite and relationally speak about Jesus. In Spain they love meals together so that tends to be the main context. The missions aspect they do is usually well organized with a program model that they try to do a couple times a year.

Missions Analysis

I think my biggest takeaway from this interview was simply how the pastor was clearly knowledgeable about the Word and Spain. These are great. I even noticed the humility throughout the interview of making sure they listen to the people of Barcelona more than teach. I respected their culture awareness to not colonize Barcelona. On the other hand, I noticed that in the years spent in Barcelona the model of church they do is still very much American. I must say, without a judgemental spirit, the church reminds me exactly like church here at home. Worship, sermon and closing song model. Where they have seen their greatest growth in small groups and

relational evangelism the model of church never changed. I know God is using them and it is considered now as one of the largest churches in Spain. I do feel the model of missions is pretty much opposite of what we learned in this class. Now I must be fair and say that Barcelona is a European trend setter. They stay close to America and London culture! Barcelona is definitely closer to American culture than lets say the Middle East. But I would say that it felt at times I was listening to a church that was picked up from NYC and just planted in Barcelona. I think I was expecting more differences. I certainly feel as well that the church has an incredible amount of people but the demogrphics is mainly 70% international and 30% Spaniards which tells me they are still maybe missing how to reach the lost in Barcelona. Overall, I really enjoyed this interview and I can't help but to say I have wondered if God would call me to go on Mission to Spain one day. I never connected with a people so easily before in my life.

Biblical Foundations

Missions is not something Christians do its the DNA of a Christian. Being a Christian by default means you are living in a way that loves people and helps them be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Missions is living lives that interact with people, helping them with their needs, praying for their healing, preaching to them about the goodness of God. I would argue this isn't even missions this is simply being a Christian. However, there are times when God asks someone to fulfill this same call in a different foreign place or land with the purpose to love on unreached people. This in fact would be a mission. And the first person to do this mission was Jesus Christ! He left heaven to bring the good news to people on earth, that they can become children of God, healed, and cared for. There are three main passages that have changed my perspective on missions and the good news. Isaiah 61 verses 1-6, Isaiah 6:1-14 and Matthew 25:40-45. In the first verse you see Jesus defining the good news for us in a way that I think many miss. He declares the good news is that the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord being upon

someone causes them to set the captives free, help the poor and brokenhearted. Jesus reads this passage in the synagogue saying this is fulfilled which shows me the good news is not just the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The good news is when the Holy Spirit comes upon a person for a mission to help people be healed, cared for and loved and hear how to be reconciled to the Father through Jesus life death and resurrection. The second verse shows me that when you get a glimpse of the Lord he sanctifies you to send you and Isaiah's response was "Here am I send me." Lastly, Jesus said when you have done these to the least of these you have done these things unto me. Jesus has upgraded what missions ultimately means. He has told us that being on mission to love your neighbor has a direct correlation to loving Jesus. To me this means bringing the good news as defined in Isaiah 61 literally transcends doing righteous deeds, it is fulfilling Jesus' commands. He said paraphrasing love God and love your neighbor in that you fulfill the law. In John 14:21 He says whoever keeps my commandments loves Me. Therefore, the 10 commandments are now longer penal codes of condemnation they are now commandments of action that are in direct sync with each other. Jesus gave two command love God and your neighbor in this you fulfill the law! Jesus has told us the commandments of loving your neighbor is loving God and Loving God is correlated with loving you neighbor. The new covenant commandments are relational no longer laws.

Compare and contrast

I think the pastor's definition of missions would somewhat align with mine. I think the key difference is how we would apply it. His approach would be to do the traditional model of Western Church and have missions as a program or ministry they do a couple times a year. I would argue that his call for people to have meals with their friends and hang out with others and share Jesus that is the definition of missions.

Potential weaknesses in the missions approach

I think the biggest weakness of the missions approach from this interview is the model of missions is programmatic. The model of church is a typical evangelical church in America and they placed it in Barcelona. Now I will say Barcelona as a city has many similarities to big cities like NYC or London. However, the model they are using is not reaching the local people in Spain. My argument to why they may be missing the Spaniards is because the church model is American and not that much different than the Catholic church. The church in Spain has to offer freedom in Christ through relational discipleship and meeting the needs of the people of Spain. The people of Spain are activists and doers and very intimate people. Therefore, the church must be engaging with the community and be providing true fellowship.

Perceived strengths in the missions approach

I think the strengths in their missions approach at ICB is ultimately how they have a church that keeps up with the modernity of Barcelona. They seem to be intuned with the culture and are not afraid to try new things. They hold onto western traditions but also when things fail they do try to change. I think their lack of fear to engage with the culture will be a strength for them to keep pushing on traditions and asking God to guide them in how to reach Catalans and Spaniards.

What insights did you gain from this exercise?

I think for me the biggest insight I have gained is I have to think these new ideas through. Before this class this missionary interview would have made me so impressed and I would have thought their model was perfect. But I was able to see and hear things that gave me a picture of the church and the western values. Ultimately, I do not want to lose this perspective or in Jesus words put new wine into old wine skins. I want Jesus and I want to follow Him! I do not want to follow church and specifically western institutionalized church. I do not want the idol of

Christianity. I want the person of Christianity, Jesus from Nazareth.

Summary

Personal Impact

How has this course impacted you as a potential or current pastor or leader of a church?

In what ways will you see missions differently?

I see my “calling” pretty differently now. I feel the thought of getting stuck within fall walls and doing church every Sunday kind of challenging. I want to be clear, I believe God is using the western church, but I think because of His grace not because of our obedience necessarily. Nevertheless, I burnt out doing church in this way. I was on fire for Jesus talking with strangers, praying for people in the streets, helping family members and even doing a bible study in my house. Unfortunately, I then in my early naive years of my walk let a church conform me into the western model. And I burned OUT! Then I lost my passion and worse everytime I left the church building I wanted to turn Christian stuff off. So I do not know the answer to this question fully but I can say for sure I want to follow Jesus not the great man theory of western church. For me it didn't work and almost caused me to walk away. But I'm thankful that the Lord kept me and sent me to seminary because classes like this confirm what Jesus saved me from and showing me His way.

Missions Possibilities?

If you could choose a mission field to get involved with, to whom or where would it be and tell why.

I think it obvious I would go to Spain! I truly have a heart for the people their and I can not begin to explain some of the amazing experiences I have had with the people of this country. I still stay in contact with my Spain family and friends to this day. I believe God sent me there in

2013 for a reason and I desperately want to see Jesus free these people from their idea of Christianity. They think its rules and religion and connected to a Dictator. I want them to see Jesus for who He is. I can imagine God looking over this country in pain thinking these people have a false image of who He is! I hate when someone describes me wrongly. I would delcare that is not who I am and would want someone to describe me as accurately as possible. I think for most of Spain's history God has been described and displayed wrong. I just pray now if God wants to send me then "Here am I, Lord, send me."

References: