

Roots

14 - Why Missions?

Why Missions? Why in the world would we go to other countries or to people with different beliefs than us, who are perfectly happy with what they believe, and interfere or attempt to convince them that Jesus is the only way? Why would we do that? Why missions?

Instead of going to change their beliefs, shouldn't we just find out what they believe, learn from that and develop some kind of tolerance? Shouldn't we just leave well enough alone? Why do followers of Jesus feel compelled to take the gospel all over the world? Why would we do something like that? Why would you do something like that?

And, isn't it a little presumptuous and arrogant to think that our way is the only way? To think we're right and everybody else is wrong, so wrong that we leave the comfort of our homes, our families, the borders of these United States to convince people to abandon their family, or belief system, their way of life in order to embrace Christianity.

Besides all of that, don't we have enough problems in America? Why don't we just keep the 10% we give away as a church to help with the problems in our own backyard? I mean there's homelessness, hunger, health care, political unrest, a struggling economy, racism and on and on we could go. Isn't there enough going on here to keep us busy? Why export people and resources all over the world to spread the gospel when we have so many problems the gospel could fix here?

Why missions?

Maybe you've never asked the question before but maybe you've asked it like this: why don't we just let everybody believe what they want to believe? I'll believe what I believe, you believe what you believe and we'll tolerate each other, co-exist, whatever you want to call it and the world will be a much better place.

Why missions?

There are certainly many answers to that question but the one we're looking at today comes from the experience of the world's greatest missionary, Paul.

The thing that makes Paul such a credible person to answer this question is that he was born and raised a Jew in Israel. But later in his life he abandoned his roots. He turned away from his religious system and beliefs and embraced Christianity. But even took it a step further by spending the rest of his life traveling all over the known world trying to convince other people to embrace it as well.

He didn't stay close to home he traveled all over the middle east and Europe talking to people from all kinds of cultural and religious backgrounds convincing them to surrender their lives to Jesus, as God, and follow Him.

What I want to point us to this morning is what is known as Paul's first missionary journey. Some of you have maps in the back of your Bible and they've never made sense to you. All those color-coded arrows on the map of the Mediterranean Rim are the journeys that Paul took as one of the churches first global missionaries.

We're going to look at 3 reasons why we should spend time and money to follow the example of Paul and export our faith all over the world. 3 reasons we can't leave people alone and comfortable in their current belief system. 3 reasons that justify being a little bit obnoxious sometimes with people that don't know the gospel story of grace.

I want to warn you before we even get started. This is going to sound a little narrow-minded to some of you. The 3 things we're going to talk about might leave you with more questions than answers. They might make you a little uncomfortable. They might even challenge you into some kind of action. If you find yourself there I want to invite you into a conversation about these things.

I don't know how you'll respond but these 3 things are very evident all throughout scripture and we see them being lived out by the Apostle Paul and the early followers of Jesus. We're a church that's just trying to do the same thing. We're trying to live out the teachings of Jesus and we believe these things are a part of what Jesus asks' of us. So if you find yourself disagreeing or uncomfortable or compelled to some kind of action, I'd invite you into the conversation we're having as a church as we try to figure this out.

If you have your Bible first turn to **Acts 13**. We started back up in this series exploring the book of Acts last week looking at the foundation or the roots of the movement we know of as Jesus' church.

We're barely going to scratch the surface of this passage in Acts this morning because I want us to look at part of a letter that Paul wrote but you can go back sometime this week and read both chapters 13 & 14 and fill in some of the blanks I'm going to leave this morning.

We were introduced to this Saul/Paul guy a few months ago. He was a very educated, extremely religious individual that was persecuting, harassing, torturing and executing early Jesus followers. He was one of the Jewish religious leaders and felt like it was his religious duty to do that.

But he gets stopped dead in his tracks by the resurrected Christ and has this unbelievable conversion experience on the road to Damascus. He's blinded for a few days, then he logs some time out in the desert just waiting, learning, growing, then goes back to Jerusalem and meets up with some of the original disciples and then kind of disappears from the pages of Acts again for a while.

But from chapter 13 on we see Paul step onto the stage as a major player in the expansion of Jesus' church. This is really the beginning of what made Paul so famous. We name our children and churches after him.

At the beginning of chapter 13 Paul finds himself at the church in Antioch. This was a very diverse body of believers, both ethnically and culturally. It's a big church. This is the place where followers of Jesus were first called Christians. And this is where we see the world-wide mission movement of Jesus' church begin. The church in Antioch was kind of the trailblazer when it came to missions.

Look at **13:2**, **²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."** **³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.**

This was a very bold, cross-cultural, never been done before move. But this church, the leaders of this church, sense that the Holy Spirit is telling them to send Paul and Barnabas off to tell the story of Jesus outside of their cultural or ethnic circle. It's

exciting and scary, probably a little exhilarating, all at the same time and this is where it all started.

Paul and Barnabas head down the coast from Antioch to Seleucia and sail about 70 miles to an Island in the Mediterranean called Cyprus. If you remember, Cyprus is where Barnabas is from. Joseph is his real name, Barnabas is his knick-name because he's known as an encourager, which is the perfect kind of person to take with you on a mission trip. You don't want to get stuck with Debbie Downer for a week or two in a foreign country.

Here's where we're going to take a little bit of a detour. Like I said, you can go back and read chapter 13 and 14 later this week because I want to show you part of the effect that Paul's missionary journeys had.

There's another island in the Mediterranean, called Crete, that Paul made a visit to on his trip to Rome that we'll look at towards the end of this series. Crete was an island that a young man by the name of Titus was pastoring on.

Titus was Greek and through Paul's ministry, decided to leave his Greek, Hellenistic roots and embrace Christianity. He was actually a part of the church in Antioch and like Paul, Titus couldn't leave well enough alone and decided to give his life convincing other people to abandon their religious system, their beliefs, even their culture and embrace Jesus as the Lord of their life. Some people believe that Titus was actually with Paul and Barnabas on this first journey but we don't really know.

We do know that Titus was kind of commissioned by Paul to the island of Crete. While he was there Paul wrote him a letter and basically tells Titus what he needs to teach people about and why. I want us to look at the why because that's where Paul unpacks these 3 reasons as to why we should spend the time, the resources, the energy to export Christianity all over the world.

Titus 2, ¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. The first reason Paul gives us for missions is that **the grace of God is a gift to all men**. That means salvation isn't just for Americans. Christianity is not an American thing. We forget this sometimes but Christianity is not a localized religion.

Many of the religions of this world are. If you're brought up in a home in certain country's it's just assumed that you're a part of their religion. If you grew up in Israel,

it's just kind of assumed that you're Jewish. If you grow up in India, everybody just assumes that you're Hindu. If you grow up in Afghanistan, everybody just assumes that you're Muslim. There are many religions that are localized but not Christianity.

Christianity is different. Jesus never intended for his followers to be localized or restricted to a certain area which means it has nothing to do with America. Salvation is a gift given to all men not to a select group.

I mean, Christianity didn't even start here. We spent 3 months in the fall looking at where it started and where its roots are found. Through the apostle Paul and others it made its way up through Europe and eventually a group of people who wanted religious freedom came to this country and brought the gospel with them. It didn't start here.

The reason we're followers of Jesus today has a lot to do with somebody taking the time, spending the money, making the effort to make sure the gospel reached America but it didn't start here. We are recipients of what God has given to ALL men.

Christianity is not localized and it's not confined to a certain culture. Again, many religions are a part of the culture they find themselves in. You go to some countries and the religious system and the culture, even the government at times, are one in the same.

Christianity is different. It has nothing to do with a particular culture or government. It's transcultural. It extends beyond any kind of change in human culture. It can fit in every nation, every culture, every people group all over the world because the gospel has been given to all men.

This is why you can meet followers of Jesus in Europe, in Africa, in Central America, in China and the flavor of how they follow Jesus or organize the church is going to be different than what we're used to. But the message, the gospel remains the same.

It's why the flavor, the way we organize or do church today is completely different than the way we did church 20, 30 or 40 years ago. Even within the borders of our own country the culture has changed. The gospel hasn't changed but the culture in which the gospel finds itself has changed.

When we forget that you know what happens? Historically, when the church has lost sight of reaching all men with the gospel of grace, 1: we've started fighting against each and viewing each other as the enemy instead of our real enemy. 2: We've become irrelevant in the eyes of the world. We've lost ground.

No, the gospel is transcultural which means followers of Jesus have to be wise in how they communicate and live that gospel out. They have to be wise in how they attempt to reach the culture they find themselves in.

It's going to look different in the America of 2012 than it did in the America of 1980. And it will look different in the America of 2030. Why? Because the gospel of grace has been given to all men from 1980, 2012 and 2030 just like it's been given to all men from Europe, Africa, Asia, and all over the world. It's for all people, of all times.

So the first reason we need to be involved in missions is because the grace of God was given as a gift to all men. Paul understood this. It's why he wrote that he would become all things, to all men, so that by all possible means some might be saved.

The second reason, **the grace of God contains the power and truth to set men free from sins tyranny**. Look what Paul says in **v. 12**, **It (the grace of God) teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age**. That's the key phrase.

I'm going to say something that might not make sense at first but hang with me and nobody is allowed to leave right now because you'll only hear part of it and think I'm a heretic. The gospel isn't about heaven. There are no missionaries in heaven. The gospel isn't just about escaping this ball of dirt and going to some happy place. If it was, Jesus would just take us all to heaven the second we were converted. The grace of God, the gospel is about here and now. It's about this present age.

The power and wonderful truth of the gospel is that men, women and children from every walk of life, in every nation could experience a little bit of heaven in this world. It was given so we know what's right and wrong, so we know the best way to live, the wise way to life, so we have the power to say "no" to the things that bind us. It was given so we could live self-controlled lives.

Think about it like this, it's only through the gospel applied to our lives that we find the power to forgive. The gospel, applied to a human life, is the only tool that can

bring reconciliation to families, that can heal marriages, that can bring prodigal sons and daughters back, that can make enemies friends, it is only the gospel at work in your life that gives you power or motivation to forgive someone who has wronged you. That's the only place that forgiveness can come from.

Christianity is the only other's oriented belief system. Every other belief system is me oriented and here's why: because I'm trying to please God whoever/wherever he is. I'm trying to make sure my next life is better than this life. I'm trying to become one with the universe. I'm trying, I'm trying, I'm trying and all my good works are an effort to please whoever or whatever is out there to make sure I make it. When I'm good to you and treat you justly and fairly it's really for me because I'm trying to score points with whomever or whatever is out there.

In a system like that you can never experience unconditional love.

Christianity is different. In Christianity I'm good and kind and just and virtuous not to gain heaven but because I've already been promised it. Not to gain salvation but because I've already been given it. Not to gain forgiveness but because I'm promised forgiveness. It's only in the context of Christianity that you find unconditional love. There is no unconditional love apart from the grace of God. It's just not there.

Church, people from every tongue, tribe and nation of the world need to experience that. They need to know that. I wonder if we're just so used to hearing it that we forget or we don't know that there are billions of people in this world that don't know what it's like to rest in the unconditional love of Jesus Christ.

It's only the grace of God that sets men free from the tyranny of sin.

I heard this illustrated in a story about a guy who went on vacation to a middle-eastern country. He was walking around a town with a guide and noticed that the men and women weren't walking side by side. That wasn't that strange but the part that struck him was that he thought the men walked in front of the women. But in this part of the world the women were walking in front of the men. The women would carry all of the stuff and the men would walk several yards behind.

Finally he asked his guide what that was all about and the guide kind of laughed it off and talked about it being a part of their culture. This was a very religious culture.

Everybody there is so religious that at certain parts of the day they stop what they're doing to pray, everybody. This was a very religious culture.

So he pushed further and asked the guide, "I thought the women were supposed to walk behind the men. Why are they walking in front of them?" And the guide finally gave in and responded. He said, "They used to walk behind the men until the war but there are still landmines in some of these areas."

Sounds like a sick joke doesn't it? But in this very religious part of the world women just don't count very much. It's a religious system where nobody is taught that husbands are to love their wives like Christ loves the church.

Nobody has taught them that God has given the husband responsibility as the man and He's given the wife responsibility as the woman but in Christ, the two are equal. Nobody taught them that.

That's just one example. There are country's you can get on a plane today and go to where you don't help somebody in need because the reason they have that need is because they're paying for something they did in a previous life. To help them in their time of need would be to set them back in their next life. So you walk around the poor and lame and ignore them because they deserve it.

You know why they think that? Because no one's ever told them that it is appointed unto man once to die and then to face judgment. Nobody's ever told them that as you do it unto the least of these you do it unto me. Nobody's ever told them the story of the good Samaritan. Nobody's told them.

So they live in their poverty, they live in their shame, they live in their degradation hoping someday, somehow to be set free.

Putting my wife first isn't an American thing, it's a gospel thing. Taking care of the poor isn't an American thing, it's a gospel thing. God gave us those values, God assigned us those responsibilities and there is a world, inside and outside of our borders that live each and every day, in this present age, in a living hell because they've never been liberated with the truth or power of the gospel.

It's for all men, of all nations, at all times to be set free from the tyranny of sin. That's why we've got to do missions.

Paul alludes to the third point. This is the one we're most familiar with. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

You know the third reason we've got to do missions? The third reason is that **the grace of God includes the promise of heaven**. The only way a man or woman makes it to heaven is through Jesus Christ. I know that's viewed as narrow-minded and simplistic in our culture but as we said earlier, this isn't an American truth.

Jesus didn't say, "I am the American way" or "I am the European way" or "I am the Jewish way", he said, "I am the way and no one comes to the Father except through me."

One of the reasons Jesus was sent to this earth is because of the reality of hell. Why send someone to the rescue if there's nothing to be rescued from? We can debate who Jesus was and whether or not the miracles really happened the way they're recorded in scripture but you can't deny that Jesus really did walk this earth. Why send someone to the rescue if there's nothing to be rescued from?

When you compare the grace-filled gospel to what most other people in this world believe it is so foreign to their way of thinking that they can't help but hear it as good news. To their ears it doesn't sound narrow minded because they are groping in the dark trying to find their way to God on their own, groping in the dark trying to work themselves to God on their own, and they come to the end of their life with absolutely no assurance.

When a man or a woman makes the gospel clear to somebody like that it's like a light turns on. And they don't criticize or make fun or call you narrow-minded, they thank you for setting them free from the religious treadmill they've been on their whole life.

I heard a story this week about a young man, his name was Larry, who went on a mission trip to Macedonia which is primarily a Muslim country. Larry met a Muslim man who was somewhat of an intellectual and he knew he wasn't going to be satisfied with

the basic gospel presentation so he said, “Why don’t you tell me what you believe and I’ll listen. And then I want to tell you what I believe if you’ll listen.”

The Macedonian man said that was fair enough so he started to talk about what he believed. He talked about life after death and what happened to people who weren’t righteous, about how he viewed God and how all of those things fit together. He talked for an hour and when he was done Larry said, “Can you give me one word that describes or summarizes what you believe?” The Muslim man paused for a moment, looked at him and said, “Fear, because we never know when we’ve done enough.”

Larry began to share the gospel, how there was a God in Heaven who understood that we could never do enough. Who sent his only son to die on the cross, who did enough, so that we don’t have to do enough. And he went on for an hour explaining the gospel and this gentlemen looked at Larry at the end of that hour and said, “Tell me one word that summarizes what you believe as a follower of Jesus.” And Larry looked at him and said, “Peace.”

And immediately the Muslim man’s eyes filled with tears and he said, “There is much to learn.”

That’s why we have to do missions. That’s why we have to figure out ways to either go or send people all over this world. We’re not interfering, we’re not trying to make people American, it’s not about a certain style, it’s not about any of that, it’s because Jesus came for the whole world and the gospel is the only thing that can set men and women free from sin and give them the promise of heaven.

So here comes the application of all of this. You and I, as a part of Jesus’ church, along with the rest of Jesus’ church around this world, have been given the responsibility to insure that people of every tribe, nation and tongue hear and understand the gospel. We can’t force them, we can’t convince them, all we’re told to do is to be witnesses to the glory of Jesus Christ.

It’s why some of you need to figure out how to get out of this country in the next year or two. You need to sit down and look at the next year or two years of your life and budget and plan your calendar around a week or two weeks and get out of this country.

It's why some of you who are planning to retire soon need to rethink the first 1 or 2 years of your retirement and ask God, "God, you've given me so much, you've blessed me with more than I need, is there something I can do for a year or two in another part of this world to give back to others what you've blessed me with?"

It's why some of you need to figure out how you can give directly or indirectly to missionaries because you're unable to go. And the way you're going to be involved in reaching the nations with the gospel is through your giving and sending. We saw in the opening video that there are really only 3 kinds of Christians when it comes to missions: zealous goers, zealous senders, or disobedient.

There are so many vehicles, so many opportunities, so many sending agencies and organizations that make it so easy to get involved in missions, it's a shame to think that you would spend another year of your life as a follower of Jesus and never think beyond your family, never think beyond your community, never think beyond the borders of our country.

One of my prayers and part of the vision for our church is that we will always be known as a sending church and going church. That sends people and resources all over this world because as excited as I am about what God is doing here in Topeka, I want us to be world Christians that never lose sight of the fact that we are personally responsible, to some degree, for what God is doing all over the world.

It's why we send 10% of every dollar we collect right back out the door to local and global missionaries. For those of you who are faithful in your giving to this church, you're already involved in sending missionaries through your giving. You're giving indirectly to multiple missionaries all over the world.

We want to get better at this and we're praying and planning about what that looks like for us to get better at sending and going as a church.

But here's my challenge to you, as an individual today. I simply want you to ask God, "What do you want me to do? Do you want me to go? Do you want me to give? Do you want me to give more? Do I need to rethink my summer plans? Do I need to rethink the first few years of retirement? Do I need to rethink my job or career?"

I know that's a scary thing for some of you to even think about praying but if we're going to take seriously the call to go into all the world and make disciples we can't pray anything less. "God, what would you have me to do?"

The grace of God is the hope for a dying world, not only for eternity but for this life. As we're obedient, as we trust God with our lives and our resources you and I will be a part of bringing a little bit of heaven to this real world for men and women who need to hear, understand and apply the gospel of Jesus Christ to their lives. That's why we have to do missions.