



DNA, THE FABRIC OF LIFE
MISSION-MINDED
John 20:19-23
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¹⁹ *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."*
²⁰ *When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* ²¹ *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* ²² *And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* ²³ *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."*

Introduction

We've come to our fifth and final strand of DNA: Mission-Minded. And, in a sense, this is the easiest of the five for us to tackle. Why?—because it's been in our blood for years. A sense of mission, and a corresponding commitment to missions, has been shaping our life as a church for nearly a century.

God has allowed Calvary Memorial Church to faithfully support missions from its beginning, almost a century ago. Currently, we give about 20% of our budget to missions every year. Last year the budget was well over \$300,000. These monies go to support over 40 different missionaries. And, by the grace of God, we're still going strong; there are new missionaries in the pipeline. In fact, as part of our Missions Conference next week, we have the privilege of commissioning two from our own congregation.

We received a poignant reminder of our longstanding commitment to missions just a few days ago, when we received news of the home-going of perhaps our oldest and longest serving missionary: Miss Eva Lodgaard. She entered Heaven around 7:15 on Thursday morning. She was 93 years old and had given 65 years to serving with Scripture Memory Mountain Mission in the remote foothills of Kentucky.

Today we honor Miss Eva, as she was affectionately called, for so faithfully serving her Lord and representing Calvary Memorial Church for so many years. Miss Eva truly exemplifies who we've been, and who we are. We've been mission-minded from the start—and we want to continue to be mission-minded.

But, friends, here's the challenge. Even though we've been mission-minded for many years, we can become *maintenance-minded* in just a few. Mission-minded is a mindset, and mindsets can slip.

And when this happens, you turn the mission of the church into the maintenance of the activities of the church.

When you're maintenance-minded:

- the upkeep of the church distracts you from the advance of the kingdom;
- church membership becomes a right rather than a responsibility;
- worship becomes your weekly buzz rather than a catalyst for mission;
- your own personal decisions—or leadership decisions—become safe and domesticated rather than bold and gutsy;
- prayers become flabby rather than kingdom-focused;
- pastors become religious service providers rather than mission-mobilizers;
- preaching becomes a form of entertainment rather than a battle cry;
- discipleship becomes a sanctified version of self-help rather than recruitment and training to serve the frontlines;
- the Bible becomes a stimulus for self-exploration rather than a summons to join in God's global purposes;
- and God himself becomes a benign means of self-fulfillment rather than a conquering King who's summoned you into His service.

Needless to say, a maintenance mindset is death to a church. When maintenance is how decisions are made, or staff is hired, or ministries are led, or money is used, or prayers are uttered, or services are led, then that church's days are numbered.

So, what must we do to *stay* mission-minded and to avoid slipping into maintenance mode? We must continually root our lives in the gospel, that's what. And we must continually center ourselves upon God, not ourselves. In order to stay mission-minded, we must constantly keep before us the mission of the Son into the world—his being sent by the Father, and his sending of his people.

Listen to the words of our risen Lord: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). This is John's own version of the Great Commission. While in Matthew's gospel we hear the Lord say, "Go and make disciples," in John's gospel we hear him say, "I am sending you." This is the key to being mission-minded: an urgent sense of sending and being sent.

But what does mission-mindedness actually look like? What would it mean for you and me—or us as a church—to be mission-minded?

Accomplish the Great Commission (Matthew 24:14)

The first thing it would mean is this: you and I—we as a church—would be committed to accomplish the Great Commission.

Near the end of his earthly mission, Jesus told his followers about the signs of his coming again. That is, what would happen—what must happen—before he returns.

He said there would be "wars and rumors of wars" (24:6); the world would be in upheaval (24:4-8). And he said there would be persecution and apostasy and false prophets running rampant; the church itself would be in upheaval (24:9-12).

But then Jesus concluded with these words: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (24:14).

Frankly, I'm surprised how seldom I hear this verse talked about in conjunction with discussions of the end times. Perhaps this is why the great New Testament scholar, George Ladd,

said that this verse may well be “the most important single verse in the Word of God for God’s people today is.”¹ “There is no verse which speaks as concisely and distinctly as this verse about the time when the Kingdom will come,” Ladd said.² He went further: “This verse is one of the most important in all the Word of God to ascertain the meaning and the purpose in human history.”³

You see, so central is the universal mission of the church that Jesus says gospel proclamation to all nations is what marks the end of the age. The end comes, and Jesus returns, when all nations have received testimony to the gospel.

Now, what you must understand is this: When this verse, or any other in the Bible, refers to nations, it’s referring not to nation-states, but to people groups. It’s referring not to things like the United Nations or China or England or Brazil. It’s referring to ethnic and linguistic people groups, peoples defined by a common cultural and ethnicity and language.

And when you recognize this critically important fact, you realize that the Great Commission is a very specific task. It’s not, as it’s often thought of, some undefined call to go and evangelize as many people as possible until Jesus at some point shows up. It’s not like when you were told as a child, “Go clean your room.” Instead, the Great Commission Jesus gave the church is very specific.

But you also realize it’s a more daunting task than you perhaps realized. Because, while there may be only just under 200 nation-states, there are (depending on your precise definition) anywhere from 7,000 to 27,000 people groups.⁴ So, for example, while we think of India as a single nation, there are in India over 450 (ethno-linguistic) people groups.⁵ And of these between 7,000 and 27,000 people groups, somewhere between 4,000 and 13,000 are what are known as ‘least reached’ or ‘unreached.’ That is, they have no viable, indigenous, sustainable witness to the gospel.

Yet, while this makes the Great Commission a daunting task, it also makes it an accomplishable task—an attainable goal, even in this generation. [Quote here from Patrick Johnstone to demonstrate truth of this claim.]

But what will it take on your part—and ours as a church—to accomplish the Great Commission? One word: prioritization. Making the unreached or least reached peoples of the world a priority is what it will take.

In fact, it will take what I like to call Pauline prioritization. I call it Pauline prioritization because it’s the mission-minded mindset we see in the Apostle Paul. For ten years Paul spent time traveling around what is now modern day Turkey and Greece preaching the gospel and planting churches.

But do you know what he said at the end of those ten years of mission labor? “I no longer have any room for work in these regions” (Rom. 15:23). I’ve completed my job; I’ve finished my task.

In effect, Paul is saying, that in that part of the world, he’s completed the task Jesus gave his disciples: to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony to all nations. A stunning claim, not

¹ George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Eerdmans, 1959), p. 123.

² Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 124.

³ Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 130.

⁴ See the Joshua Project’s research in this area: <http://www.joshuaproject.net>.

⁵ See <http://www.joshuaproject.net/assets/HowManyPeopleGroupsAreThere.doc>. And when caste, religion and cultural factors are taken into consideration, that number rises, astonishingly, to over 2,300 people groups!

least after only ten years—and that traveling by foot and on boat, without the help of airplanes or radios or television or the Internet.

It's hard to believe, I know. That's why you need to hear it from the horse's mouth, in Paul's own words:

from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, 'Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand' (Rom. 15:19-21).

When you're mission-minded, you think like the Apostle Paul. When you're mission-minded you begin to see the world in this way: not as nation-states, but as people groups. And you see the Great Commission, not as a never-ending call to evangelize people in far away places, but as a very specific and accomplishable task: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).

Resource the Global Church (1 Corinthians 12:24-25)

There's a second critical aspect to being mission-minded, and it's this: you're committed to *resource the global church*.

Why is this so important? Because Christianity is on the move. Many Christians in the West, and especially in North America, are unaware of this reality. But the fact is that the church of Jesus Christ is moving south. In fact, from a global perspective, Christianity's center of gravity is shifting: away from Europe and North America to South America, Asia and Africa. Some even talk of the dawning—after 1500 years—of a post-Western Christianity.⁶

Few writing today have done more to draw attention to the changing face of Christianity than Philip Jenkins. Listen to how he describes this new Christendom that is emerging:

Between 1900 and 2000, the number of Christians in Africa grew from 10 million to over 360 million, from 10 percent of the population to 46 percent. If that is not, quantitatively, the largest religious change in human history in such a short period, I am at a loss to think of a rival. Today, the most vibrant centers of Christian growth are still in Africa itself, but also around the Pacific Rim, the Christian Arc. Already today, Africans and Asians represent some 30 percent of all Christians, and the proportion will rise steadily. Conceivably, the richest Christian harvest of all might yet be found in China, a nation of inestimable importance to the politics of the coming decades. Some projects suggest that by 2050, China might contain the second-largest population of Christians on the planet, exceeded only by the United States. More confidently, we can predict that by that date, there should be around three

⁶ See Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Eerdmans, 2003).

billion Christians in the world, of whom only around one-fifth or fewer will be non-Hispanic whites.”⁷

So, friends, the Body of Christ is experiencing a profound transformation—even more remarkable than puberty. Its geographic center is changing, its cultural center, its racial composition, its ethnic makeup, its social and political and economic standing.

This change is presenting some fascinating new opportunities. *But it's also exposing some profound and enormous needs:* for financial resources, theological education, pastoral training, discipleship resources, Bible translation work, and so on.

And as Christians in the West, not least in the United States, we have a responsibility to do what we can to meet these needs in the global Body of Christ. For it is, after all, not someone else's Body—but yours and mine. There is only one Body (Ephesians 4:3-6). Listen, therefore, to Paul's challenge to the church in Corinth:

The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Cor. 12:21-26).

You see, this, in short, is a call *to show concern for the needs of the global church*—to resource the global church out of our abundance; to see to it that, “there may be no division in the body,” on the one hand, and “that the members may have the same care for one another,” on the other (12:25).

And we have an astonishing supply of resources to give. We have . . .

- our wallets (i.e., money),
- our degrees (i.e., education),
- our resumes (skills and experience),
- our smiles (i.e., encouraging presence),
- our tears (i.e., impassioned pleas),
- and our blood (i.e., our poured out lives).

Friends, the Body of Christ—the church—is bigger than you think.⁸ Bigger and more complex, with stunning potential for gospel advance, and with a stunning need of resources which we have

⁷ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford, 2006), p. 9. See also his, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, 2002).

⁸ See Patrick Johnstone's excellent book by that title: *The Church is Bigger Than You Think: The Unfinished Work of World Evangelization* (Christian Focus, 1998).

the privilege of supplying. And if we are to be truly mission-minded, we must do what we can to resource this global church.

Pray to the Lord of the Harvest (Matthew 9:35-37)

Now, as you begin to take in the changing face of global Christianity and the tremendous needs on the ground in places like Sudan and Indonesia and Morocco, it's easy to be overwhelmed by it all: the massive throng of humanity, the massive scope of the need.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was exposed, of course, to similar realities—the realities of suffering and the plight of scores of people. But what did he do? Well, he didn't call a committee meeting, or start a hospital, or even plant a church. Instead, what he did was he told his followers *to pray*:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest' (Matt. 9:37-38).

Here is, then, the third critical aspect to what it means to be truly mission-minded: prayer. But, more specifically, prayer to the Lord of the harvest—and earnest prayer, at that.

We see with these verses, Jesus gives us two incentives to pray. We should pray, first of all, because there is a real need: *there is a shortage of gospel workers*. In a few parts of the world this is not so much the case; in many parts of the world, however, it definitely is the case. Consider the fact, for example, that there are only 80 missionaries per 1 million people in Africa; only 9 per 1 million in Asia; and only 7 per 1 million in the Middle East. That's like having 3 missionaries responsible to evangelize the whole of Chicago!

But don't miss the second incentive to pray, which Jesus actually mentions first: pray to the Lord of the harvest because of the amazing *opportunity*—there is an abundant harvest ready to be had! Did you hear what Jesus says? "The harvest is plentiful." The fruit is ripe; it's in season; it's even weighing down the limbs of the trees, nearly touching the ground. It's ready for the picking; but who's going to do it?

So, you see, in order to be motivated to pray—indeed, to pray earnestly—we need to see both the need and the opportunity. Not just the 1.2-1.4 billion who've never heard of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ; but the unbelievably ripe harvest fields, ready for the picking.

When the Apostle John was privileged with a vision of Heaven and wrote about what he saw in the Book of Revelation, one of the remarkable things he did see were your prayers to the Lord of the harvest. In fact, he saw what happens to your prayers, where they go, when they're offered up to the Lord of the harvest by faith.

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on

the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel (Revelation 8:1-4).

May the reality that your prayers don't fall flat to the ground, but enrich the atmosphere of Heaven itself, continue to encourage you to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Conclusion – Concentration of Every Vital Energy To One End

Few leaders understood the importance of being mission-minded as well as Sir Winston Churchill. In the throes of World War II he said this:

A European war cannot be anything but a cruel, heart-rending struggle, which, if we are ever to enjoy the bitter fruits of victory, must demand, perhaps for several years, the whole manhood of the nation, the entire suspension of peaceful industries, and the concentration, to one end, of every vital energy in the community.⁹

If we're going to be mission-minded ourselves, as individuals or as a church, we too need to concentrate every vital energy toward this one end. And let me leave us with a few challenges as to what this will mean for us:

- First, we need to increase our exposure to what God is doing around the world by improving our communication. Think back to the second Gulf War and the steady stream of up-close footage from the frontlines. In fact, we saw the advent of the so-called 'imbedded reporter' riding on the top of a tank into Baghdad. Similarly, we need a steady stream of up-close footage from the frontlines so that we can all see how the gospel of the kingdom is advancing around the world.
- Second, we need to teach more consistently about God's global mission from the perspective of the Bible. The mission of God truly is the great storyline of the Bible. We should be drawing lines in all our reading and study and teaching of the Bible from the passage or topic at hand to the mission of God in the world. Let me put it this way: as we strive to be Discipleship-Focused, we ought to be cultivating greater Mission-Mindedness.
- Third, we need to devote ourselves, both individually and corporately, to consistent and fervent prayer for missions. This ought to be a regular feature of our corporate worship services, our Life Groups and Adult Bible Fellowship, and around our dinner table in our homes.
- Fourth, we need to stretch to increase the percentage of our annual giving to missions and, in particular, to those serving the unreached and least reached. In fact, I'd like to see us move from giving somewhere around 20% to 25% in the next five years, a percentage point a year.
- Fifth, we need to develop more fully our recruitment and training of future missionaries. We're doing well, and God continues to supply us with remarkable individuals like those already serving. But we can do more.

⁹ Paul Johnson, *Churchill*, p. 21.

- Sixth, we need to excel at both sending and sustaining our missionaries. 3 John 5-8 provides us with our challenge: “to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name . . . Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.”¹⁰
- Seventh, each one of us needs to grapple with the question: Should I go? In fact, put it like this: you should think: I need a good reason *not* to go, rather than to go. We must all be able to say with the prophet Isaiah, “Here am I! Send me.” For what we see is a man who’s been rooted in the gospel and centered upon God—which creates mission-mindedness.

This is what it means to be mission-minded: to concentrate every vital energy in the community on that one end, that one great goal—accomplishing the Great Commission, to hasten the Day when we shall join that great throng of redeemed humanity around the throne of the Lamb, and there triumphantly sing:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10).

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¹⁰ Tom Steller provides an insightful application of this text from 3 John in, “The Supremacy of God in Going and Sending,” the Afterword to John Piper’s, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, pp. 225-228.