

A Call to Missions

Pastor James Foley – Sunday, April 8, 2018

Main Theme – Considering 3 texts that engage us in the ongoing work of the Great Commission.

WORSHIP & PRAYER

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Upcoming Events (Regular)**

- Post-Service Prayer – Immediately After Each Service
- National Day of Prayer – Thursday, May 3, at Noon (Unity)

Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

- WM – Tuesday Evening, May 8, from 6:30–8:30pm
- Men's Breakfast – Saturday, May 12, from 9–10:30am

MORNING OFFERING

At this time, I want to call forth our ushers.

-Thank you for your faithfulness in giving to the Lord/His work

-Your giving fuels the work of Christ in and through this church

May the Lord bless you as you give! May you experience His faithfulness in kind!

HAITI UPDATES

A number of people expressed interest in serving in Haiti (praise God)! For those who have expressed such an interest – please fill out the Mission E4 application at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions, please see me. Keep Taran in prayer as he's in Haiti.

VOLUNTEER UPDATES

We need to collect CORI/Background Check-related information from any volunteers who serve within a ministry dedicated to infants, toddlers, children or teens. If you have not yet completed the necessary forms, see me or Elysia following service.

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- **DISMISSAL OF CHILDREN FOR CHILDREN'S CHURCH**
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OPENING REMARKS

As always, it is wonderful to see you. I look forward to these weekly moments of worship and instruction. I pray that you are ready to receive what God has for you today! Please have your Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes.

SPRING MISSIONS EMPHASIS PT. 1

This morning I want to share the message I had planned for last Sunday morning. This message is the conclusion of our Spring Missions Emphasis. It also dovetails last Sunday's 'unintended' message on priorities (from the Book of Haggai). FYI – this message from Haggai is online.

It was a pleasure hosting Patrick O'Loughlin and his family two Sundays ago, as he brought the Word and a good report. It was also a blessing to have some missionaries from N. Asia join us for a mid-week service! (FYI – their names are omitted as they are in a sensitive area).

- We were blessed by their timely messages and inspiring accounts
- They were blessed by the tremendous generosity of this assembly

NOTE – We have decided to take Patrick O'Loughlin on as a missionary we will support monthly.

SPRING MISSIONS EMPHASIS PT. 2

The Spring Missions Emphasis is an IMPORTANT week in this assembly. It is a TIME for us to a) consider God's heart for the nations; b) consider our giving unto/support of those who are uniquely called as missionaries; c) hear from such figures; d) consider our commitment to and role in the ongoing work of the Great Commission.

As this week of special emphasis winds to a close, I would be REMISS if I failed to note—as I often do—the key role that you and I play as missionaries/witnesses for the Lord. Do you realize that I am addressing a room full of missionaries at this very moment: missionaries to South Barre, Barre, Hubbardston, Templeton, Worcester, Wheelwright, West Boylston and beyond!

KEY – When you hear the word missionary, it IS perfectly acceptable to think of figures like Patrick and more. But it is NOT acceptable to exempt yourself from the work of missions (not just in the giving, but in the labor of reaching the lost and making disciples itself).

I'll never forget a sign over the exit door of First AG: "You Are Now Entering Your Mission Field"

TRANSITIONS

This morning I would like to consider your level of PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT in the work of missions. i.e., To what degree is sharing your faith a priority that informs and impacts your life and living?

I will do this by exploring THREE TEXTS that contain THREE WORDS that should engage us in this ongoing labor. Please give me the best 30-minutes of your time. May we have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying in this hour!

Let's Delve In...

MARK 16

I would like to turn to an extremely familiar text in the Gospel of Mark (i.e., Mark 16). In fact, it is almost impossible to consider the theme of missions (i.e., our task of reaching the lost world) without considering this passage – often called the GREAT COMMISSION.

Mark 16:15–18 (NIV)

15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

NOTE – Herein the Lord offered His followers some final commands before ascending to His Father in glory. These were among the final utterances of Christ, indicating a degree of great significance for His people. Your final words are NOT a trivial matter!

KEY – The operative word herein is **GO** – wonderfully dynamic v. static term

Let's take a few moments to explore facets/questions related to this word:

- Q.** Go WHERE? Go into all the world (v. 15)
- Q.** Go & DO WHAT? Preach the 'Gospel' (v. 15)
- Q.** Go to WHOM? To the whole of creation (v. 15)
- Q.** Go WHY? Because eternal souls are at stake (v. 16)
- Q.** Go HOW? In the power offered by J. Christ (v. 17–18)

NOTE – And the EARLY CHURCH did exactly this! They went to the lost of their generation! They traveled to the furthest points of their world to bring the Good News of Christ to those in need. They went in the power of the Lord Most High, working signs and wonders in His Name. And they won countless men, women and children to the faith.

These realities are fully explored in the Book of Acts. They are noted as Mark ends His Gospel:

Mark 16:19–20 (NIV)

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Q. How does this call of Christ to GO speak to us in 2018? In the midst of our lives and living?

Q. To what degree are we willing to go into the whole of our worlds (spheres of influence)?

Q. To what degree are we willing to share the Gospel of Christ in both word, deed & example?

Q. To what degree are we willing to bring the Good News of Christ to everyone we encounter?

Q. To what degree do we consider the eternal stakes that are in play (i.e., lit. heaven & hell)?

Q. To what degree are we open to letting the Lord empower us supernaturally? Seek it?

Q. To what degree do we feel a sense of urgency in obeying Christ's command to GO?

NOTE – I noted last week a STATISTIC I heard that shook me deeply. i.e., 51% of church-goers in the United States are unfamiliar with the Great Commission. How can this be? How can so many who sit in church week after week fail to even know about one of the core commands that brings unity and purpose of the church?

-Let this not be said of this assembly and its people! Let's be a people who know AND PROPERLY RESPOND TO Christ's command to GO.

ACTS 16

I would like to consider ANOTHER portion of Scripture this morning from Acts 16. This portion records events that took place a little later in time, as the disciples of Christ are actively engaged in the work of the Great Commission (i.e., as they were engaged in obeying Christ's command to GO).

KEY – We are going to look at some events from Paul's Second Missionary Journey. Consider:

Acts 16:1–10 (NIV)

1 Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. 2 The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Q. What do we see herein?

- We see the dynamic nature of Paul's ministry (i.e., constant movement and progression)
- We see the dynamic nature of the Spirit's ministry (i.e., forbidding, leading, permitting, etc.)

KEY – Unlike many, Paul had the wherewithal to submit to the leading of the Lord, trusting in His wisdom and timing! Finally, the Spirit of God provided direction to the apostle through a unique vision. Consider again:

Acts 16:9–10 (NIV)

9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

KEY – Mark 16 forces us to contend with the word GO, as it was uttered by Christ. Acts 16 forces us to contend with the word **COME**, as it was uttered in the vision from one who is lost. It is as though this figure was channeling the brokenness and spiritual distress of those perishing in darkness, wanting someone—anyone—to bring the good news of love, life and hope.

Q. I wonder today to what degree—as Christ says GO—the lost world says COME. Can someone come and show us the way! Can someone come and give us something transformative, that is genuine, authentic, sincere and real! Can someone bring light into my personal darkness!

We often DON'T THINK in this manner. We often think of the lost as being stubborn, hard-hearted and resistant to the Gospel. Perhaps this is fueled by the region we live in (NE is a tough place). Moreover, there is some validity in this biblically, as many are resistant (hearts are likened to hardened ground).

But, there is GOOD SOIL out there, ready to hear the Word. There were people who resisted Christ's message in ancient times, but there were those who FLOCKED to it. Don't forget that the same Jesus who warned us about the reality of opposition and persecution ALSO said this:

Matthew 9:37b (NIV)

. . . "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

KEY – The issue isn't will people be reached. It's will there be harvesters to go reach them! There are people out there who are weary, distressed and lost – just waiting for the One who can give them life eternal and abundant.

Paul heard the call of Christ to GO and the plea of the lost to COME, and he was led to reach many for eternity. To what degree do we feel the urgency of Christ's GO and the plea of the lost, COME?

LUKE 16

The FINAL text that I want to consider comes out of Luke 16. Interestingly, all of the texts come from the 16th chapter of different Books (i.e., Mark, Acts and Luke)! Let's consider this gripping text:

Luke 16:19–31 (NIV)

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30 "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

NOTE – There are many NOTEWORTHY ITEMS I could touch upon:

- The reality of life after death (i.e., immortality of the human spirit or soul)
- The torment of the wicked in hell v. the blessing of the righteous in paradise
- The great, insurmountable gulf that is fixed between the eternal condition(s)
- The reality that this is likely not a parable (figurative), but a literal happening

KEY – But I want to focus on this passage as it relates to our engagement in missions...

- If Mark 16 forces us to contend with the word GO (uttered by Christ)
- If Acts 16 forces us to contend with the word COME (uttered by the lost)
- Luke 16 forces us to contend with the word **SEND** (uttered by the damned)

KEY – Recognizing the horror and permanency of his condition, what was the request of Lazarus? First, that Lazarus bring him some water (speaks to relief), which was denied. Second, that Lazarus be sent to warn his family, that they might NEVER have to come to such a place!

Luke 16:27–28 (NIV)

27 “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’”

I can recall how CASUAL I was with the theme of hell pre-salvation. I recall jokingly saying that I would rather end up in hell because all of the ‘cool’ people went there. But this rich man—speaking from his place of torment—didn’t find it to be a place of amazing connection! He wanted no one else to end up in such a horrid condition.

KEY – It saddens me that this damned soul—IN ONE SENTENCE—shows more concern for the lost than many believers do in a lifetime. There are likely more tears in hell for the lost than in most churches.

Of course, Abraham directly denied this request. Lazarus would NOT be sent. If his family was to be saved, they would have to respond to the Word of God. BUT HERE IS AN INTERESTING THOUGHT. Someone would have to bring that Word to them! There would have to be people to warn them of their peril and steer them in a God-ward direction!

KEY – In an odd way, the Church of Christ is the indirect response to the rich man’s plea. His plea to SEND someone is answered as the Lord sends us. We can do nothing for the souls damned in hell, but we can work to reach those who still have time! We can make sure they are given the chance to hear and believe and be saved!

QUOTE – “If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for”. –Charles Spurgeon

CONCLUSION

I will close this message in the same way that I opened it. i.e., By noting the reality that you and I have an integral role to play in the Great Commission. But what is it going to take to engage you in this ongoing work?

- Is it the order of Christ to **GO**?
- Is it the plea of the lost to **COME**?
- Is it the call of the damned to **SEND**?

NOW MORE THAN EVER, the Church of Jesus Christ has to rise up and be what we are called to be: witnesses. I dare say, missionaries. I don't know how to say this to you nicely: if this world is ever going to be reached, we are going to have to change.

- We are going to have to shake out the sin
- We are going to have to inventory our priorities
- We are going to have to assess our interests and passions
- We are going to have to consider what manner of life we're living
- We are going to have to determine the urgency we truly feel in this mission

The Church of Christ for too many generations of our history has been ASLEEP. It has been wayward and sinful, negligent, distracted and more. And people have perished accordingly. In some ways, the Church hasn't reached the world because it is a little too at home/comfortable in it. (These are things I'll address next week).

Q. Can we undo past failures? No! But we can learn from them and move forward in Christ! I can see a day when countless people are swept into the kingdom of Christ, but it's not going to happen apart from the Church being the Church!

Today, when you cross our thresholds and leave this place, consider:

"YOU ARE NOW ENTERING YOUR MISSION FIELD"