

## The Church on Mission

Why missions are important in the global sense illustrated by stories from China.

1. Today I want to continue with our current series of messages on what the Church is to be like today. I would like to address the question: What is the scope of missions and why is it important both globally, and in this local body of Christ? Along the way I am going to share some examples from the 20 plus years Kim and I worked in China.
2. Traditionally in the Church, missions is considered to be the means of fulfilling the Great Commission to take the Gospel out into the world. Let's take a more detailed look at Jesus' Commissions in the New Testament

2.1. Matt. 28:16-20 <sup>16</sup> *The 11 disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

2.1.1. Jesus' followers (some are worshippers, and some are doubters) are sent out in the name of the One who reigns over heaven and earth. Phil. 2:9-11 says that, <sup>9</sup> *For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

2.1.2. They were sent out to make disciples and part of that process is baptizing, teaching and being sent to all nations, that is understood to be every cultural-linguistic group.

2.1.3. This task that is given by Jesus was possible for the disciples because He was to always be with them, in every place throughout the rest of time. This is true for modern day disciples as well.

2.1.4. My testimony of being sent.

2.1.4.1. Living ready to go.

2.1.4.2. Seeking to hear His direction

2.1.4.3. Responding to the call, step by step.

2.2. The next Great Commission is to be found in Mark 13:10 and 14:9

2.2.1. <sup>10</sup> *And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations.*

- 2.2.1.1. Once again, we see that word nations, better thought of as cultural-linguistic groups. In China there are 8 different dialects, each with their own subdialects and regional variations, which could officially count as a dialect too. Then there were the languages of the 56 non-Chinese ethnic groups, which are in no way related to Chinese. Interestingly 25 of these groups live in the province of China that we lived in for 18 years, Yunnan Province and make up about 35% of the 46 million people that live in Yunnan. Where is Yunnan? If you look at a map of China...
- 2.2.1.2. One of these ethnic minority groups is called the Bai people. We were close friends of a Bai woman, Natalie, who we mentored for several years. She went on to be a trainer of translators, help people from other ethnic minorities to translate the Bible into their own languages. We had many adventures with Natalie, let me tell you about one of them.
  - 2.2.1.2.1. The *Jesus* film translated into the Bai language, and permission was granted to Natalie for Bai music for intro and outro for movie.
  - 2.2.1.2.2. We took recording equipment to the ancient heartland of the Bai people to record people singing two Bai songs written for the movie.
  - 2.2.1.2.3. The song required someone to play the “sanhu” a traditional 3-stringed instrument of the Bai people. No one could play it, so Kim, whisperer of all stringed instruments played it.
  - 2.2.1.2.4. Unfortunately, we didn’t know the wood on the instrument was covered with a lacquer from the Chinese lacquer tree, and it contained some of the alkaloids found in poison ivy. Kim is super allergic to poison ivy. On the very long bus ride home a horrible rash broke out on her arms and face and by the time we arrive at home, her skin was literally weeping.
  - 2.2.1.2.5. Translation teams of foreign missionaries and domestic believers all over the world are involved in translation of the *Jesus* film. The current practice is, whenever possible, to train local people to be translators.
- 2.2.2. Another great commission verse in Mark is in verse 9 of chapter 14. *“I assure you: Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her.”* This selfless act of worship was to become part of the Gospel proclamation everywhere around the world.
  - 2.2.2.1. Let me tell you how incredible it is to experience this sharing of the Gospel in the remotest parts of the world. Lisu people in the mountains

along China's boarder with Myanmar, also known as Burma. James Fraser, a British missionary went to this area in 1911. He was one of the heroes of the faith for those of us living in Yunnan. One of his ministry distinctives was that local churches should look to God for their needs and to train up their own pastors/teachers. He not only admonished them to pray, but he also wrote many letters back to faithful Christians in Britain asking them to pray for the many specific needs of the Lisu churches. The dependence on God, and not foreign money led to the establishment of strong churches that were able to weather the onslaught of Communism and by the 1990's the Chinese government acknowledged that as many as 90% of the Lisu were Christians, making it one of the most Christian societies in the world. Reminder about the Voice of the Martyrs International Day of Prayer on November 4<sup>th</sup>.

2.2.2.2. So back to my story. One year we took students from our international school on a trip to visit what is known as Lisuland. Some of the mountains in which the villages were located soared to heights of over 17,000 feet. We generally were in areas that were 6000 to 8000 feet. We were hosted by churches in the villages and it was amazing to worship with so many people whose lives were so different than ours.

2.2.2.3. One thing we did while in the villages was to help farmers with their crops. I remember we helped to plant corn. The fields were so steep that we didn't have to bend over to put the seeds into the ground. We had to be careful, if you lost your footing you could roll down the mountain to the end of the field or beyond. We were in one village when I heard a familiar hymn, "Amazing Grace". It was in the Lisu language and it came floating over the field from a tape player in the farmer's house. Along with the message of amazing grace, were other elements of the Gospel story, including such stories as the woman who worshipped Jesus by adorning His feet with costly perfume.

2.2.2.4. What could we do among these churches as fellow participants in the Gospel? One thing that I remember was showing churches, for the first time, how they could involve their youth in plays and skits where they acted out Bible stories. Leaders were excited because they said they were in danger of losing their youth to the influence of western modernity which was filtering from the outside world.

2.2.2.5. Just as a side note, a noted missionary author, Isabel Kuhn, who as missionary to these mountainous people in the 1930-40s. Her books have

challenged many people to respond to God's call to out into the whole world... Anyway, there was an old lady that we knew in Kunming who has been a little girl in the day of Isabel Kuhn. She once shared with someone, "I don't know why she is so famous, when I knew her all she did was sit around writing."

2.2.3. There is a final commission that appears in Mark 16. <sup>15</sup> *Then He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.* This passage is in a section that is considered by a majority of modern commentators not to be original to Mark.

2.3. Luke also has an account of Jesus commissioning His disciples. In Luke 24:44-49 <sup>44</sup> *Then He told them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled."* <sup>45</sup> *Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.* <sup>46</sup> *He also said to them, "This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day,<sup>47</sup> and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* <sup>48</sup> *You are witnesses of these things.* <sup>49</sup> *And look, I am sending you what My Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high."*

2.3.1. In this great commission the emphasis is on the authority of God's Word, rather than on Jesus Himself as we saw in Matthew 28. We are to go forth, sent by Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Hear again, what we find in verse 46 and 47: *"This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day,<sup>47</sup> and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* This emphasizes the need for the people of God to know, to understand, to teach and preach, and to live out the very Word of God. This should cause us, as followers of Jesus, to ask ourselves the question: **Are we actively studying God's Word so that we tell others things about Christ that are written throughout the Bible?**

2.3.2. Once again the message of the Messiah, His death, resurrection and call to repentance is to proclaimed to all the nations and this proclamation would start in Jerusalem. I'll come back to this point later.

2.4. In the Gospel of John we also have a commission from Jesus. John 20:21 <sup>21</sup> *Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."*

2.4.1. As we go forth in Jesus, we are to go in peace. There are two things I would like to say about peace and missions.

2.4.1.1. History is full of forced conversions. This is not in keeping with the will and intention of God. I expect you would all agree with me. We need to saturate our minds with Christ and follow Him. This alone keeps us on task.

2.4.1.2. But as we go forth discipling the nations, there is conflict within us, between us and with the people to whom God sends us to and with the spiritual powers and authorities which reign over areas where there is little or no Gospel presence. In it all, Jesus says, "Peace to you!" What a wonderful promise, what a wonderful declaration. Read extended quote in article by Hassan John.

2.4.2. *As the Father sent Me, I also send you.* Jesus was sent, now we are sent. It's fairly obvious, but I think it bears some thoughtful meditation. Jesus came and accomplished something. He died for the sins of the world and rose from the dead demonstrating victory over sin and death. He was obedient to the commission He received from the Father. But he also proclaimed Good News to the poor, walked in the power of the Holy Spirit, and considered the needs of others as more important than His own. As we are sent by Jesus, we do not have to die for the sins of others. We do have to proclaim Good News to the poor and live in active consideration of the needs of others.

2.5. Now let's read in the first chapter of Acts, verse 8

2.5.1. *<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

2.5.2. What was it that the disciples witnessed? *<sup>1</sup> I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach <sup>2</sup> until the day He was taken up, after He had given orders through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After He had suffered, He also presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

2.5.3. When the subject of missions comes up, many people think of going to a faraway land, to live in exotic or dangerous places among exotic people. But in today's world, because of globalization, we can speak to others about all that Jesus did and teach to people without even leaving our Jerusalem. I was at Sam's yesterday. Did you know that Saturday morning is prime shopping time for Chinese people?

2.5.4. For the disciples at the time, Judea and Samaria were a matter a few days or weeks walk away, but not for us. We can easily connect with people in a matter

of hours by car or plane and maintain connection via the Internet and smart phone. However, the same principles must be followed that are presented in this passage. Let me read it again. <sup>8</sup> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” Let me outline the principles in list form:

- 2.5.4.1. We must know what Jesus did/does and taught/teaches.
- 2.5.4.2. We must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- 2.5.4.3. We must be part of a company of believers.
- 2.5.4.4. In other words, we must be disciples.
- 2.5.4.5. We must tell others about the suffering and resurrection of Jesus.
- 2.5.4.6. We must teach others the things Jesus taught.
- 2.5.4.7. We must facilitate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the teaching about the Kingdom of God. The observation of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are important for this.
- 2.5.4.8. In other words, we must be makers of disciples.

2.6. Let me share how making disciples worked out for us in China.

2.6.1. Doing business in China. This addressed 3 major areas:

- 2.6.1.1. Challenging people to be honest. **Do you do business honestly, your life matching your words?**
- 2.6.1.2. Teaching Christians how to live out their faith in a hostile environment. **Do people know you are a Christian? Are you using your position to tell and teach about Jesus?**
- 2.6.1.3. Teaching Christians in remote mountain villages how to make money so they could better support their lives and the ministry of their churches. Tell about the “Thanksgiving offering”. A big cash gift amounted to \$1.50 while so many were 50 cents or less. They did bring in sacks of corn and poured them out on the floor in a corner of the church.
  - 2.6.1.3.1. Tell Da Ping Di Bible training institute example of Bible training for young men from surrounding villages, while at the same time so many young men left the villages to go work in the cities where they hauled bricks and cement and often drifted away from their Christian heritage. Along with this training was training in sanitation and health care.
  - 2.6.1.3.2. We also used our business earnings to support kids to go to school. This was a living example for the Christians in our business and daily lives of benevolence. And our benevolent involvement with people with whom we had no family or society relationship was an eye-opening

witness to the non-Christians we took along with us to the countryside. Who were these non-Christians? Students, people from the social circles of our employees, etc.

2.6.1.3.3. So, **Can you use your skills, talents, earnings, to help those in ministry so that they can do the work that God has called them to do?**

2.6.2. Show business in China. Let me share 3 stories.

2.6.2.1. Joshua sharing the Gospel non-stop to show business people. **Is there a young in the Lord person that you can help to share the Gospel?**

2.6.2.2. Dragon lady and the fruit of righteous anger. **Are you able and willing to confront the injustices around you (in obedience to the Holy Spirit)**

2.6.2.3. The dance of Sharing the Gospel with government officials and the media. **Can you ask God to give you guidance by His Spirit to speak His truth in dangerous situations?**

2.6.3. Working with Christian publishing in Beijing.

2.6.3.1. Helping Christians in one of the world's most strategic cities to be Christians in the world of publishing.

2.6.3.2. Writing a monthly article for nationwide family magazine aimed at Christians.

2.6.3.3. Character song project for use by Christian kindergartens, families and even as an indirect injection of truth into public schools.

3. In summary how can we answer the question, "What is the scope of missions and why is it important both globally, and in this local body of Christ? As fellowships of disciples of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are to tell those to whom Jesus leads us who Jesus is, what He has done, and to receive into fellowship who seek to follow Jesus, teaching them all Jesus has taught us.

## **Boko Haram Put a Bounty on My Head**

By Hassan John Oct. 25, 2018 6:46 p.m. ET

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I received a phone call several years ago saying that someone had found my wallet, and I could pick it up at an abandoned racetrack. I don't carry a wallet. Shortly thereafter, while investigating a story about a massacre of Christians in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, I saw a charcoal message emblazoned on a wall: "Hassan, we know about you and will meet you one day." A Muslim friend confirmed that Boko Haram had put a bounty of \$700 on my head. Such is life for a pastor in modern Nigeria.

Nigerian Christianity is under siege from radical Islam. The country's importance to Africa, and to Christianity as a whole, makes this siege particularly noteworthy. With a population of nearly 200 million—about 50% Christian, 40% Muslim and 10% animist—by 2050 Nigeria will become the third most populous country in the world, the United Nations estimates. No wonder Nigeria has been a strategic target for radical Islamists for several decades.

Boko Haram, a radical Islamic movement whose name roughly translates to "Western education is forbidden," has ramped up attacks on Christians this year. Since 2009 when Boko Haram began its rampage, about 20,000 Nigerians have been hacked with machetes or shot. Two million have been displaced. Pastors and their families have been specifically targeted for death.

The government's response has deepened Christian frustrations. President Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim, describes the violence as "clashes" between Fulani tribesmen and farmers, who are mostly Christian. But many Christians, who often become refugees, believe the government is telling the world what it wants to hear, that this has nothing to do with religion. Yet why are all the attackers Boko Haram? And why do they target Christians? We sense that Muslims generally are killed as collateral damage, not as primary targets.

In 2010 I started reporting about these attacks for a popular radio show in Nigeria and then for CNN. By 2012 people started calling me whenever there was an attack around Jos, a city in the Middle Belt, the region where the majority of attacks were occurring. I am often the first reporter on the scene of an attack. I have come to the scene of over 100 massacres, one time finding 500 mutilated bodies.

Pastors in northern and central Nigeria face daunting pressures. Some conduct funerals almost every week for victims, often in mass burials. They struggle to answer their parishioners' questions about God's love and justice. They hear powerful voices dismiss this as an ethnic clash, but they understand it is a strategic scorched-earth war, a jihad against Christianity.

Because of this desperate situation, I have organized apologetics seminars for pastors. We meet secretly. Our meetings are announced by cellphone only an hour before, lest our venue be discovered by secret police. To protect against informers, we invite only those pastors who are recommended by another reliable pastor. Twice we have had to cancel at the last minute because of a suicide bomber. Boko Haram has used dozens of young girls as suicide bombers. How can we make sense of this to our flocks?

We use five approaches to talk about God and evil. First, we explain that God made us free to love or hate him. Without that freedom there would be no love. Second, life does not end on this earth. Third, God is just. Someday there will be judgment, and no evildoer will get away with the evil he has done. Fourth, God is love. That can be hard to believe in this evil time unless we look at Jesus' cross. There God himself suffered at the hands of evil men, and because of it love was released for the whole world. Fifth, we listen to testimonies of pastors and other Christians who saw the manifest presence of God in the midst of suffering and were transformed.

Our seminars have gone well, energizing those who attend and giving many the confidence to die for their faith. But they shouldn't have to. The Nigerian government should better use its military and police to protect the lives of all citizens. It should see that Nigeria's courts give speedy justice to the victims of these massacres. And they should be guaranteed safe return to their ruined homes to rebuild their lives. Americans can help by asking Congress and President Trump to pressure President Buhari to do better.

*Mr. John is an Anglican priest and journalist.*

