



Central
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Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Trending Now: Unreached People

Selected Texts

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series: Trending Now

Jesus Christ. It's the name of a person millions of Christians across the world worship and adore. He's most likely the reason you and I are here today. Here in the U.S., we have countless Bible translations encouraging us to read more about him. We have a limitless database of worship songs and contemporary Christian music that proclaim his name. Hundreds of books have been written to help us know and follow him more closely. We can attend conferences almost all year long to help us grow in our relationship with him. You can turn on the TV, radio, and subscribe to podcasts any time of the day or night to fill your heart and mind with encouraging and inspiring sermons. We can stuff our closets with Christian clothing and with goods made all over the world in Jesus' name. You can sign up for a Christian dating site if you are single. You can buy Christian group health insurance. We can go to Christian schools, work for churches and Christian organizations, and put our kids in Christian youth sport leagues. We have amazing Christian summer camps all over the world. Even Hollywood has made incredible films about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. You can go see *Ben Hur* after church today! Please hear me, none of those things are wrong in themselves, but let's not lose perspective.

As you saw in the video, across the world today there are roughly 3000 people groups that have absolutely no opportunity to hear the message of Jesus Christ. Many have never even heard the name Jesus Christ. There are no churches, no believers, no missionaries, no Scripture in their language, and no one engaging them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There's also 3 billion people who we would put in the category of Unreached People Groups or UPG's. They might have the Scriptures in their language, there might even be a few churches and missionaries trying to reach them, but they are still largely not yet Christian with less than 2% of their populations following Jesus. Many of the people in these people groups can't read or live in countries that are closed to Christian influences. What is God's plan to reach them? What, if anything, is your responsibility, as a follower of Jesus, to help reach these people? As a church, what is our role to reach these people for Christ? Is missions work only reserved for hard core people who are willing to go anywhere or is it something we all can play a part in?

In this last and final message in this series we want to look at unreached people groups. Honestly, it is not really a Trending Now topic, but we feel it's so important for us to talk about as a church. What I want you to see today is God's heart for the

nations, for all people groups, from Genesis to Revelation. We don't have time to look at every single book of the Bible, so I'll begin with Genesis, move on to the ministry of Jesus, then the ministry of Paul, and we'll end in Revelation. Let's look first at Genesis 12 and what we'll see is God's mission to seek and save all people groups began with Abraham.

God's Mission to Seek and Save All People Groups Began with Abraham

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

**"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;**

**I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.**

**I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:1-3).**

In Genesis 11 God scatters the nations because of their attempt to build a tower and a city to rival God. For some 300 years God was silent and suddenly speaks to a man named Abram, who would later be named Abraham. The Lord tells Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his father's house to go to a land God would show him. Now before you say, "Wow, how exciting and adventurous!", you have to understand what God was asking Abraham to do was costly and dangerous. Abraham was about 75 years old and his wife Sarah around 65. Sarah and Abraham were not only older, they were also unable to have children. How would God bless them with descendants? To follow God, Abraham would also have to leave his country, the only place he's ever known, his people, which was his identity, and his father's house, those he loved and cared for, to set out for a place he's never been.

But, if Abraham obeys, if he trusts God, the Lord promises to bless him beyond measure. God promises to make him a great nation of people. God says everything you do will have my blessing on it. God promises to make his name great. Today, Abraham's name is renown among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. All three major world religions honor Abraham as a founder of their faith. God promises to bless those who bless Abraham and curse those

who curse him. These promises build up to a climactic seventh, "and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." God says, "Abraham, your people, my people, this new nation, will have a mission to be a blessing to all nations, all people groups." God chose Israel not just to bless them, not as the end game, but so through them the whole world would be blessed. From the very start, Israel had a missionary purpose—to be a light of salvation to all people. So what we see, from the very beginning of the Bible, is God's heart for all people groups.

Overall, the Israelites tried to obey God, but they were still aware that they could not follow God perfectly. They were allowed to live in their homeland, but they were still under the control of foreign rulers. God promised through his messengers that he would send a savior. Some people thought that this would be a powerful military leader like David. Others thought that it would be a spiritual leader like Moses. And what about God's promise that Abraham's family would be a blessing to all nations? The end of the Old Testament leaves God's people waiting for the answer.

Jesus' Mission was to Seek and Save the Lost

Fast forward to the New Testament. The promise God gave to Abraham would ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus was one of Abraham's descendants. Through Jesus the blessing of salvation would be available to everyone. Jesus came, not just to save us and give us inner peace. Jesus came to continue his rescue plan to reach all people groups. The Apostle John puts it this way,

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).

At some point in everyone's life we will eventually wrestle with the question, *Does God really love me?* We can believe in God, go to church and have an understanding of his love. But, to believe that he loves you personally, just as you are, right where you are at, is life transforming. But God doesn't just love you. He loves the entire world. And God proved his love by giving and sending his one and only son Jesus to die for us. Jesus lived a sinless life and died on a cross to pay for our sins so that we might live with him forever. And John says, the greatness of his love is seen in who it is God sent his Son to die for. God gave his Son to die for "whoever" believes in him. God loves and died for every single person in the world, whether they choose him or reject him. That is real love.

Luke, who also wrote an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus, tells us more about why Jesus came to earth.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

Jesus not only came because of love; his mission was to seek and save the lost. This is the very heart of Jesus' ministry. As a shepherd goes and looks for lost sheep to rescue from danger, so Jesus as the Son of Man seeks and saves lost people. Some people are lost because of their own self-righteousness. They think they can earn salvation by being good enough. Others are lost because they do, say, and think things that are morally evil. It doesn't matter how good you are or how religious you lead your life. God's standard is perfection (Matthew 5:48) and we've all failed to live up to God's standards (Romans 3:20). We've all sinned and missed the mark (Romans 3:23). Sin is a deliberate act against God and the penalty for sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

But, God has given us a way to escape the penalty of our sin and the punishment of hell. He understood our problem, and because he loves us, sent his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to the earth to bridge the gap between man's sin and a holy God (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Jesus, who is fully God, became fully human and entered our world to rescue us. Even though he was God, he experienced everything we experienced yet never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus then died a brutal death on the cross and was resurrected to new life three days later. Listen to what happens next.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:16-20).

About a week after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples went to Galilee and suddenly see Jesus. Their immediate response was to fall down and worship him. I love how Matthew tells us that some doubted. The disciples were a mixed bag, like me. At times they had faith and at times they doubted. Jesus then passes the torch of his mission to seek and save the lost to the disciples, what we now call The Great Commission. Because all authority has been given to Jesus, he gives his followers their marching orders, "Go and make disciples of all nations." The idea in the original language is "as you are going" make disciples of all nations. Not just converts, but disciples. This means more than reaching your neighbors next door. Jesus is really commanding us to pursue unreached people groups abroad. Being a disciple, according to Jesus, also includes baptism and teaching. Coming to faith in Christ and baptism are one-time acts while obedience to all Jesus' commands are a life-long task of every Christian. Jesus then promises to be with us always until he returns to earth again. So in The Great Commission Jesus calls all Christians to be both witnesses and disciple-makers of all nations. Yes, God

wants your co-worker to know him, but his plan is for all nations to know him. Let's turn next to Paul's mission which, like Jesus, was to seek and save the lost.

Paul's Mission was to Seek and Save the Lost

God's plan to bring us back to himself, to rescue us, was realized in the death and resurrection of Jesus. But Jesus didn't leave us alone. He gave us the Holy Spirit to be with us and the church was born. Jesus' mission to seek and save lost people was beginning to take off. But, there would be some major obstacles in taking this message beyond the walls of Jerusalem and the hearts of Jewish people. Not everybody was happy with this new Jesus movement. Paul was one of those guys who was not happy and tried to stop the Jesus movement. Jesus meets Paul in a radical way on the road to Damascus and Paul becomes one of the greatest missionaries the world has ever seen.

Paul came to a radical conclusion that shaped the early church and still forms Jesus communities today: **Jesus + nothing = everything**. Christianity could have easily become a Jewish sect with a bunch of religious rules. Instead, in Romans 3, Paul drops a spiritual bomb by saying, *"We are made right with God (justified) by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone."* This was a radical turn of events in the history of religion. Apart from Christianity, no other theological system believes that a righteousness from God is available, yet alone free. Religion is man reaching up to God with our own efforts. Christianity is God reaching down to man and giving man his perfect righteousness. Paul was so excited about this message that he took it to places no one else would go. Here's what he told the church in Rome,

"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" (Rom. 15:20).

Paul was an urban church planter and pioneer. He sought to take the gospel where it was not yet preached. He wanted to go to the hardest ground to plow in and he wanted to reach people far from God. Paul did that by planting churches in the major cities of the region. That's why he could say later, "My work is done there..." Not because everyone heard the gospel, but because there was a major missional outpost, a church, in several important cities of the ancient world.

The primary mission of God, Jesus, and Paul was to take the Gospel into all the world. But why? Why go into all the world? Why reach people who have never heard about Jesus Christ? Because, when it's all said and done, heaven will be filled with all people groups. Look with me at John's revelation,

Heaven Will be Filled with All People Groups

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing

before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands (Rev. 7:9).

To me, this is one of the most beautiful pictures in the entire Bible. One day, we will all participate in a glorious worship service in heaven. And it's not going to be a bunch of white people with guitars and pianos. God will be worshipped by people from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. We're going to sing songs in languages you've never heard of, with all kinds of instruments you've never seen, alongside people you didn't even know existed. The heart of missions is to reach more and more people from all ethnic groups and gather them together in a diverse but unified assembly of people. It's not just about reaching more people for Christ, it's about reaching more people groups. In fact, Jesus says he won't return until all nations, all people groups, have had a chance to hear and respond to his message (Matt 24:14).

What happened back in the OT, the early church, and through church history continues today because Christianity is and has always been a missional faith. We have a message, the gospel, and the motive of love for sharing the greatest news ever. I want to end with three very practical applications: give, go and pray.

Give

Rich Stearns, the president of World Vision, in his challenging book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, points out that the American church is the wealthiest community of Christians in the history of the world. In a 2003 study the total income of American churchgoers was about \$5.2 trillion. That's five thousand billion dollars. The average Christian gives only 2.58 percent of their income to the church and to Christian organizations. And, only 2 percent of that amount ever leaves the country to assist in what God is doing around the world. Stearns calls this the "2 percent of the 2 percent." He argues that if Christians would be more generous and gave 10% of their income, there would be an extra \$168 billion to spend on funding the work of Christ worldwide. With that money, we could eliminate the most extreme poverty on the planet for more than a billion people. In addition, with \$6 billion we could educate all the children of the world. With \$9 billion we could bring clean water to most of the world's poor. And with \$13 billion we could offer basic health and nutrition to every single person in the world. If we did that, do you think people would want to hear our message about Jesus Christ? Absolutely! There really is no greater way to test your commitment to Christ than by looking at where you spend your money. As Christians, we might not all be able to go into all the world, but we can give to the work of Christ in all the world. If you give to CPC, a percentage of your giving goes directly to our mission partners and to mission work in the world.

Go

You might be thinking, "Abraham, Jesus, the disciples and Paul were all the exception to the rule. I'm not qualified to go and reach people for Christ. I'm no missionary. I'm just a normal person." But, I want you to consider a few more examples from the Bible. Abraham and Sarah were old. Isaac was insecure. Joseph was a refugee slave. Moses was a murderer who stuttered. Gideon was fearful. Samson was arrogant. Rahab was a prostitute. David had an affair and then killed a man trying to cover his tracks. Elijah was suicidal. Jeremiah struggled with depression. Jonah was a racist. Mary was a poor teenage girl. John the Baptist was a loner and ate bugs. Peter was impulsive. Martha worried a lot. The Samaritan woman had several failed marriages. Thomas was a skeptic. Paul had poor health. And Timothy was timid. So, what's your excuse? What reason have you been telling yourself why God can't call and use you? God can use **anybody**. God really does want to use **you** to reach the nations. Henry Blackaby, the author of *Experiencing God* once said, "If Christians around the world were to suddenly renounce their personal agendas, their life goals and their aspirations, and begin responding in radical obedience to everything God showed them, the world would be turned upside down. How do we know? Because that's what first century Christians did, and the world is still talking about it."

Pray

The most strategic thing we can do to reach these people groups is pray! Samuel M. Zwemer, a missionary and Christian scholar said: "The history of missions is the history of answered prayer... it is the key to the whole missionary problem. All human means

are secondary." J. Oswald Sanders said: "Prayer is fundamental, not supplementary.... All progress can be clearly traced back to prevailing prayer."

Here's something big: we'd like you all to pray about. CPC currently has 36 mission partners around the world. We support them financially and with prayer and partnership. Recently, we've felt the need to expand our mission efforts beyond our mission partners and get involved with unengaged unreached people groups. I'm so excited to be the first to introduce you to three UUPG's that CPC is going to focus on reaching in the next three years: The Tibetan Jone (Choni) in China, the Samanthan in India, and the Moors (Hassaniya) in Niger. They don't have the Scriptures in their language and they have no church or believers among them. Please be praying for these three people groups and pray with us for God to raise up CPCers who would be part of a team to reach these groups.

This is the incredible thing about God's mission in the world—he wants to use **you**. Over two thousand years ago the world was forever changed by just eleven very ordinary guys who said, "I will follow you Jesus and go wherever you call me." I've never met anyone who comes to the end of their lives and says, "I never made an impact on anything or anyone but, I'm okay with that." God made you and wants your life to have an impact on others. Will you give? Will you go? Will you pray?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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