

Global Warning

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It was one of the most helpless feelings I have ever experienced. I was preaching for a house church and doing my best to encourage missionaries working in and around Beijing, China. While it was a joy to see the Lord's work advancing even in a repressive nation, it was overwhelming to see the millions of Chinese people who had never once heard the Gospel.

I felt especially helpless because I do not know the Chinese language, and there was little I could do to reach these people on the streets. I began praying that Christ would allow me to directly lead at least one soul to Him on this trip.

The day scheduled for sightseeing provided a unique opportunity to witness to our Chinese guide, Lyn, who spoke English. We exchanged questions and information about our respective countries, and I gave her a Gospel tract.

Lyn seemed open to the Gospel. Having been raised in a communist country, she had zero biblical knowledge, so I began at Creation and brought her through Christ's Resurrection. I thought I was making headway. She had listened so attentively, and I had prayed fervently for her.

When I explained the Resurrection, she asked, "Mister, do you really believe that?" The possibility that God would die and rise from the dead was simply incredulous to her. "Oh, yes, I believe it," and I explained it again and again.

Lyn was still curious, and her next question will forever be engraved in my memory. "If you believe that, how do you worship your God?"

How *do* we worship our God who gave Himself for us? We, unlike Lyn, know a risen Saviour. Shouldn't His love to die for us and His power to rise from the dead affect our service for Him? Jesus Himself came to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Surely our worship for Him should honor this, His great purpose.

Jesus told His disciples, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Jesus knew the urgency of His mission. Since the first century, Christians have looked for the coming of our Lord. Now, centuries later, I believe we may very well be in the final days before Christ returns to rapture the saints and looses the final judgment on the world.

God set Ezekiel as a watchman over Israel to warn them of coming disasters. "So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn

them from me” (Ezekiel 33:7). Will the church be a vigilant watchman and deliver the Word of the Lord? Will we give the warning? Acts 13 gives a clear view of God’s divine plan to sound out the global warning.

THE CONTEXT OF MISSIONS

The cradle for missions is the local New Testament church (Acts 13:1). The local church is God’s “Plan A” for missions, and God does not need a “Plan B.” God has used para-church groups to win many to Christ on foreign fields, but even para-church workers will admit that their fruit doesn’t remain. Without the strong support of a local church, new believers struggle to become grounded.

The church at Antioch was comprised of a spiritually mature group of believers. Acts 11:26 describes Antioch as a church that was grounded in the Word of God: “And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Undoubtedly, these believers gained their missionary zeal from the sound teaching of their church. This church was an incubator for missions-minded Christians.

I praise God for mission boards that provide logistical support for missionaries. I am thankful for every Bible college that trains men and women to take the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. But these organizations can never replace the church. God ordained the church as the sending agency for missionaries. It has been said that the greatness of a church is determined by its sending capacity not its seating capacity. Every pastor and every church member must view his church as a center for worldwide evangelism; this is exactly what God intended the church to be.

THE CALLING OF A MISSIONARY

Who will go? The call a missionary hears is a curious thing to those who have not experienced it. How do missionaries know God wants them to go to the foreign field, and how do they know where God wants them to go? In Acts 13 God gives the spiritual makeup of a church with Christians who hear His call to go.

A church that sends and supports missionaries is a church comprised of people who have consecrated themselves to God. The Christians in Antioch “ministered to the Lord.” The modern seeker-sensitive church, being self-centered and self-indulging, is seeing fewer and fewer young people called to missions. Its emphasis on man’s felt needs rather than on ministering to the Lord deafens it to the cries of the lost and the direction of the Holy Spirit.

These Christians were willing to sacrifice all they had for Jesus Christ. Their devotion made them willing to forsake the world while loving the people in the world with a Christ-like love. They hungered to know the will of God, often laboring in prayer and fasting. Fasting is the denial of self in order to take prayer to its fullest development. The Holy Spirit’s work in someone’s heart will cause that person to sacrifice without ever thinking of what he gave up.

David Livingstone was a Scottish missionary, doctor, and explorer whose travels helped open the heart of Africa to missions. He spent over thirty-three years in Africa tormented by disease, theft, attacks from natives and soldiers, loss of his wife, loss of supplies several times over, and a multitude of other suffering—all for the sake of spreading the Gospel. Of these years, he commented: “People talk of the sacrifices I have made.... It is emphatically no sacrifice; rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, danger, foregoing the common conveniences of this life; these may take us and make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink, but let this only be for a moment. All of these are nothing compared with the glory that shall later be

revealed in and through us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk when we remember the great sacrifice that He made who left His Father's throne on high, to give of Himself for us."

God is not looking for the strong or the wise. He is looking for the Christian that is listening. In churches around the world, there are Christians devoted to Christ, spending time with Him, sharing their faith, living the real Christian life, and just waiting to hear what God has for them next. The Holy Spirit's call is not mysterious; it is clear to those men and women who are already listening to God.

THE CONSECRATION OF A MISSIONARY

In such a large world, where do we begin? God has a plan through the local church. He has called out spirit-filled Christians, but what happens next? The send-off for these first missionaries in Acts was simple, "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

The church sent them away with prayer. They didn't stop praying when they sent their first missionaries. If anything, they increased it. Sending missionaries is an awesome privilege and responsibility for a church, and it should not be taken lightly. The missionaries must be upheld in constant prayer.

William Carey was a simple shoe repairman whom God called to be a missionary. He spent forty-two years in India and oversaw Bible translations in forty languages. Many consider this servant of God the "Father of Modern Missions." What was the secret to Carey's success as a missionary?

He had many outstanding qualities of character, but I believe his crippled and bedridden sister back in England had a large part in his ministry. She couldn't go to India, but she spent hours every day bringing Carey and his work before the throne of God in prayer. To reach the world it will take more than a few men willing to leave their homes to go; it will take churches filled with Christians like William Carey's sister who will sacrifice their time to pray.

Sometimes people ask me how they can develop a greater heart for missions. Jesus tells us exactly how this is done—put your money in missions, and your heart will follow (Matthew 6:21). When we participate in giving to missions, it involves more than just money. Paul wrote of the Christians in Macedonia that they "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:5b). Though this was a poor church, they had faith in God and believed in His purpose.

The work of God will continue through prosperous times and lean times because it depends not upon the world's economy but on the Lord's resources. Our giving must not be based on circumstances but on obedience to the Word of God and to the Holy Spirit. When we thus give, our blessings do not rest in the economy but in God's eternal, unchanging promises.

God's plan to reach the world has not changed since He determined it before the foundation of the world. The local New Testament church is His vehicle for raising up missionaries and sending them across the globe. God is looking for Christians who are serving, praying, and listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Those of us who watch these missionaries forsake all and follow Christ must do our part to support them through prayer and giving.

Our task is clear—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). But our time is short—"...the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). The eternal destiny of billions is dependent upon our obedience to God's command to sound out a global warning.