

Fil-Am Community Church

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What is Being a Missionary All About?

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Key Verse: Mark 16:15

“Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.”

Many churches today are into missions or support missions. I said ‘many,’ not ‘all,’ because the truth is, strange as it may seem, there are some churches who don't believe in missions, who don't think that it is the church's mission to send out missionaries or spread the gospel. They leave it to God to work in some mysterious way that somehow some people in some nation will begin to look for God and ask for missionaries.

This was the case during the 18th century when much of Christian Europe did not encourage Christians to bring the gospel to the heathen. It took an uneducated shoemaker named William Carey to shake the Christian world from its apathy when he defied England's Baptists and went to India, supported by a few individuals. Today, Carey is considered to be the Father of Modern Missions. Someone said that if it were not for Carey, the missionary cause would have been delayed by 100 years.

That was then; today some churches still have that attitude. When I was a missionary in Russia, I heard about a church that was growing in numbers. I was impressed and so I asked one of the members how they do it. I was expecting an answer in which he would outline their evangelism program. To my surprise, he said, "Oh, we don't do evangelism."

"Then, how do you grow?"

"We fulfill God's very first commandment?"

And I asked, "Is it 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind?'"

"No, that's the greatest commandment," he corrected me. Then, he continued, "The very first is 'Go, therefore, and multiply."

No wonder that church had a burgeoning children ministry. Of course, that is rare. By and large, Christian churches in Russia are very strong in evangelism that's why they grow so fast.

I'm happy that here in Fil-Am, the very first commandment is not our first concern. But, on second thought, with all the little children around and more still coming, I don't know now. Anyway, Jesus' last commandment is our first concern, *"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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."*

Now, let me talk about churches that support missions. These churches naturally take pride in their missionary programs. They have missionary conferences, set aside a budget for missions, put up maps and charts of missions points or profiles of their missionaries, organize prayers for missions, encourage people to give to missions or go on a missions trip.

Now, with all these talk about missions, do we actually know what missionary work is all about? Do we know what a missionary is?

Let me answer that by saying, first of all, that missionaries are not a special class of Christians. Missionaries are believers who take the gospel to others. Therefore, we are all missionaries in the strict sense of the word. You see, we have been given the task by the Lord Jesus to *"preach the good news to all creation."* We are, therefore, commanded to bring the gospel to all people of all nations. That's clearly set out in Matthew 28:19, where Jesus says *"make disciples of all nations."* Nations is translated from the Greek word "ethnos" which means race. From "ethnos" we get the word "ethnic." Here in America, there are lots of opportunities to be missionaries for we encounter people of different races everyday wherever we are, at work, in school, on the street.

We must realize though that there are people who have been called by God to get out of their comfort zones and bring the gospel to a specific ethnic group or class of people. Like the apostle Paul. Paul was called by God to be a missionary to the gentiles. God could also call people to be missionaries to their own people. Like Peter and the other disciples who reached out to their fellow Jews. The bottom line is, every believer is called by God to be a

missionary. Whether it's at the place where you are now or somewhere out there, it all depends on your calling.

Please say to the person next to you, "You are a missionary".

Now, are you ready to become a missionary? Are you sure? Well, let me first give you three things you need to know about missionary work so that you'll know what you're getting into. Then, you won't blame me.

First, missionary work is about **Going into All the World**.

In the Bible, you'll notice that the last words of Jesus to his disciples were about going. For example, in our text, Jesus said, "Go into all the world." Then, in Matthew 28:19, he also said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." And in Acts 1:8, he gave these words, "You will be my witnesses."

All these statements indicate that Jesus wants us to move our feet, step out, and make a deliberate effort to meet people. You see, people will not come to us. We must go to them. That's the only way that the gospel can spread.

And yet, it seems that only a few people go. When it comes to witnessing, people who belong to the cults, like the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons are more prepared and ready than we are. And to think that we are carrying the truth.

Why then only a few people go? Perhaps, because it is easier to serve in the board or teach than to go. Perhaps, it is easier to give money or pray than to go. Perhaps, it is easier to sing or preach in front than to go. But Jesus said, we are to go into all the world. The world is our mission field. Just imagine. If William Carey did not go to India, what would the state of our missions be right now?

To go is to obey. Sometimes, we find it hard to go because it is hard to obey. We're afraid that when we go, we'll encounter opposition, we're afraid that we'll experience physical hardships, we're afraid that our needs won't be met. I have good news for you! After Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission to his disciples, he said in Matthew 28:20, "*And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

I will call this statement of Jesus, the Great Assurance. You see, God will not call us where his grace will not keep us. His faithfulness will see us through.

Do you know the story behind the song, "Seek Ye First?" Well, before I tell you, why don't we sing it together. It's a great song. A classic.

The writer of the song is a woman who was called by God to be a missionary to another country. She knew that it meant leaving her job and selling her possessions. Yet, selling her possessions wasn't enough to provide for her needs. And she prayed for God to provide for her. Then, God inspired her to write a song, the song "Keep ye first." It became popular and the royalties she received from the song supported her missionary work.

We can cite hundreds of examples of believers who made an eternal impact on the lives of people. Because they obeyed. God wants to use us in the same way. When he saved us, he meant for us not to just linger with fellow believers and study the Bible with them and pray with them. He meant for us to go and be about his business of saving lives.

Let's say you lost your wallet. It contains your driver's license, pictures, credit cards, and some money. Isn't it that your first instinct is to retrace your steps and go looking for your lost wallet? It would be foolish for you to stay where you are and wait for the wallet to come to you. Because it wouldn't happen.

In the same way, every lost soul is precious to God. That's why he wants us to go looking for them.

So, missionary work is about going into all the world.

Missionary work is also about **Getting the Message Out**.

Verse 15 says, "*Preach the good news.*" **Preach** is translated from a Greek word that means to herald, to publish, or to proclaim. In fact, one of its definitions in the dictionary is 'to advocate earnestly.' So, this applies to every believer, not only to preachers, pastors, or evangelists. We cannot make the excuse that only preachers or evangelists are tasked to advocate earnestly for the gospel. Admittedly, some are gifted in this area. Like the apostle Paul or Billy Graham. God has anointed them especially for this purpose. Yet, being a

humble man, Billy Graham himself acknowledged that one-on-one witnessing by ordinary Christians may be far more valuable than what he is doing.

And so, missionary work is about sharing the gospel. It is getting the message of salvation out. But what is the gospel? If you turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, we will find a simple yet compact definition of the gospel. Gospel, by the way, is a middle English word that means 'Good News'.

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said." 1 Cor. 15:3-4 (NLT)

That, my friends is the pure, unadulterated gospel. Anything less or more than that is not the gospel. So, if I preach about the death of Christ and not his burial and resurrection, then I did not preach the gospel. If I preached about his resurrection and not about his death and burial, then I did not preach the gospel. That kind of preaching does not save souls. The kind of preaching that save souls according to Paul in verse 2 is the one that talks about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, the death of Jesus Christ means that we are forgiven of our sins. We need to be forgiven because our sins condemn us.

The Bible says, *"for the wages of sin is death."* That is why no one ever lived forever. Our sins separate us from a holy God. His justice demands that guilty man must be punished for his sins.

But the Bible says that our just God is also a loving God. He wanted man to be saved. And so, he sent his only son Jesus to die for our sins. It is his sacrifice on the cross that absolved us of our sins. As the Bible says, *"For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."* (Heb. 9:22 NLT)

Yet, the death of Christ is not effective in saving us if Christ did not rise from the dead. After all, what good is a dead savior to us? Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus validated his sacrifice on the cross. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:17-18,

“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.”

To Paul, the resurrection of Christ is fundamental. Without the resurrection, there is no salvation, there is no Christianity. Because he rose from the dead, we too can rise from the dead. Eternal life awaits us.

And so, we must get the message out that there is forgiveness of sins in the death of Christ. That there is eternal life because of his resurrection. What one needs to do is to believe in the gospel and one will be saved.

So, missionary work is about Going into All the World and Getting the Message Out. Lastly, it is also about

3. Giving Hope to All People.

The last part of verse 15 tells us, *“to everyone.”* What this tells us is that the gospel doesn't discriminate. It doesn't favor anyone. Paul says in Romans that he is not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Because missionary work is about giving hope to all people, it means therefore that there should be no racial prejudice in missions. In John 4:7, this is what we read.

“When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’

Jesus was a Jew and yet he reached out to a Samaritan woman. This was an unacceptable practice. Jews despised Samaritans because the latter were not pure Jews. They are of Jewish and Gentile descent. Jews termed Samaritans as half-breeds. But Jesus threw aside that racial prejudice and talked to the woman because he saw her as a soul to be saved.

In contrast, we find the story of Jonah in the Old Testament, an Israelite who had deep hatred against the people of Nineveh. And so, when God

commanded him to preach against the Ninevites, he ran away from God. It took some painful experiences before he finally obeyed God.

There should also be no social discrimination in missions. Everyone is equal in the eyes of the Lord in terms of status. There is no rich or poor, no man or woman, no young or old. Each should be reached out with the gospel. Again, in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan, it was a cultural taboo for a rabbi to speak with a woman in public. To Jesus, this was not as important as saving a soul.

There should be no religious bias in missions as well. In John chapter 3, we read that Jesus was approached by a Pharisee named Nicodemus to inquire about something. Did Jesus turn his back away from him thinking, "Well, he's just one of those narrow-minded religious leaders who will not accept what I'll say"? Certainly not. Jesus patiently shared with Nicodemus how to be born again.

Contrast that with an experience I had with a friend years ago. A friend of mine and I were talking outside their house when a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses approached us. They said something and hadn't even finished their sentence when my friend, who I held in high regard because of his knowledge of the Bible, said rather sternly, "No, No...we're busy." With that, he hurriedly asked me to come inside the house as if he had seen a ghost. I was surprised to say the least.

You see, if you believe in divine appointments, you will interpret such encounters as an opportunity God has given you to share his word. I'll give you a tip. If you don't want to get involved in a lengthy discussion, don't let the Jehovah's Witness inside the house. Right there at the door, ask the person, "What is your belief regarding how one can get saved?" or "Can you please tell me briefly how a person gets saved according to the Bible?" More often than not, they will oblige. And they will oblige happily. Listen, or at least, pretend to listen. Then, when the person is finished, say, "May I share with you what I believe the Bible says how to get saved?" Almost always, the person will say "Yes" because you just gave the person the opportunity to talk first. Then, present the gospel in all its glory and splendor. Of course, you're not going to get a profession of faith right away although I believe God can make it happen

but the important thing is you were able to plant a gospel seed in that person's mind. Now, it is the Holy Spirit's job to do the follow-up.

That's how I got converted. As a former Jehovah's Witness, I went from house to house and those Christians who were caring enough to speak with me planted the gospel seed in my mind until it sprouted and its roots reached deep down into my heart.

You see, God loves the Jehovah's Witnesses, too. Jesus died for them, too. And so, it behooves us to share the gospel with them as well.

My brothers and sisters, it will be a tragedy if we choose only those who we are going to share the gospel with. It will be a tragedy if we deny some people the message of salvation.

We must learn to love all people. Throw away our prejudices and biases and hatred, if there are any. All people are lost and need salvation. So, we need to be compassionate like God. We need to have his heart of mercy and compassion toward people. Let us pray that God gives us compassion. Let us pray that God moves our hearts in genuine love to share his word with all people. 2 Peter 3:9 says,

“The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives.” Remember, Christ died not only for a select few, he died for all. Isaiah 53:6 says, *“All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.”*

There's the story of a businessman and his wife who were busy to the point of exhaustion. They were committed to each other, their family, their church, their work, their friends. Needing a break, they escaped for a few days of relaxation at an oceanfront hotel. One night a violent storm lashed the beach and sent massive breakers thundering against the shore. The man lay in his bed listening and thinking about his own stormy life of never-ending demands and pressures.

The wind finally died down and shortly before daybreak the man slipped out of bed and took a walk along the beach to see what damage had been done. As he strolled, he saw that the beach was covered with starfish that had been thrown ashore and helplessly stranded by the great waves. Once the morning sun burned through the clouds, the starfish would dry out and die.

Suddenly the man saw an interesting sight. A young boy who had also noticed the plight of the starfish was picking them up, one at a time, and flinging them back into the ocean.

“Why are you doing that?” the man asked the lad as he got close enough to be heard. “Can’t you see that one person will never make a difference—you’ll never be able to get all those starfish back into the water. There are just too many.”

“Yes, that’s true,” the boy sighed as he bent over and picked up another and tossed it back into the water. Then as he watched it sink, he looked at the man, and smiled, and said, “But it sure made a difference to that one.”

Every day, millions are dying without Christ. And we may say, “What difference will I make?” But Jesus wants us to just go and reach one person at a time. Then, perhaps, it will make a difference in that person’s life.

Christ calls us to be his missionaries. Christ calls us to be his spokespersons. Christ calls us to share his message with everyone. To whom will you go with the gospel today?

Let us pray.....