

The Ends of the Earth Is Our Present Task

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Preacher: Jeremy M.

[0 : 00] Just to give you a little bit more about myself for those of you who don't know me.

My wife Amy is a high school English teacher. And I really reap the benefits from that often, especially when I'm preaching, because she helps me plan and structure my sermons.

So I'm so thankful for her. I'm thankful to have such a godly wife and helpmate. And we have three children. As Pastor Mike said, we became members here about a year ago.

We moved to Bartlesville about three years ago after living many years abroad, and most recently in the country of Senegal in West Africa. And I've been involved in international ministry, really with different mission agencies for the last 16 years, both in the Middle East and in Africa.

Most recently, my focus is really in Central Africa, covering the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, two countries where in areas of those countries, Christians face severe persecution, very violent persecution for their faith in Christ.

[1 : 23] We've been so blessed to be here at Highland Park, and we're just so grateful for all of you. The theme of Pastor Mike's message last week was that God's people work together to accomplish his will.

Reading from Romans 12, 4 through 8, talking about the human body being used as a metaphor to describe the church, Pastor Mike said, If you are a Christian, Jesus made you as part of his body, his church.

He has a role for you to play. He has a function for you in his body. He has a mission for all of us to work together to accomplish. A key part of that mission, as Pastor Mike discussed with us, and which we're going to talk about in much more detail today, is the Great Commission.

Now, there are many, many warnings in Scripture to the body of Christ. And one of those warnings, which we're going to look at real briefly here, is in Hebrews.

So turn with me to Hebrews 2, 1. It says, Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

[2 : 40] The word drift is key here. What does this mean? It obviously brings to mind something drifting in the water, something that's floating, that goes with the tide, goes with the current, right?

It's stationary. It's not doing anything. It's just drifting. So how does this apply to us? Why do we drift?

Because it's easy. Because it's comfortable. Because we're lazy. Because we're satisfied with where we're at. Rowing, paddling, whatever it takes for you to get to the other side of that river takes work, right?

It takes endurance. It often takes vision. It's hard work. It's uncomfortable. It may mean suffering through a hardship. It takes courage.

So how can we drift away from what we hear in the word? Not being daily in the word, lest we drift away. Not taking heed of Christ's command, lest we drift away.

[3 : 50] We are drifting if we're waiting on a feeling or maybe an audible voice from God. When we already have his word, right? We already have his word, which Peter said is more fully confirmed than even a voice from heaven itself.

In 2 Peter 1.19. And oftentimes we are just waiting. Waiting to get involved. Waiting to go on a missions trip. Waiting to serve within the local church.

Waiting for the right timing or the right circumstances or the right financial state. But waiting for what? Waiting for a feeling, a supernatural word from God? So much of our waiting is wasted.

We have the command. Let's go and let's actually do it. Let's go. Let's serve. Have people over to your house. Call up your friends. Reach out to your neighbors.

Mentor those within the church. Make disciples, right? Talk to Pastor Mike. See how you can get involved within the local church. We all need this reminder constantly. Today's key passage is from the book of Acts.

[4 : 53] And just to give you a little context on the books of Acts before we get started. Because we know how important context is. Pastor Tyler gave us, preached, gave us a really good overview a few weeks ago on the book of Acts.

As he introduced Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians. And I want to highlight or remind you of a couple things that he mentioned in his sermon. First, the book of Acts shows how God, the Holy Spirit, took the message of the gospel beyond the boundaries of Judaism to the Gentile world. And ultimately reaching all of us here in this room today, right? Acts 1.8 is really an outline for the rest of the book. Which says, Second, note that Peter and Paul, or none of the apostles, are the main characters in the book of Acts.

The Holy Spirit himself is the main character. You can think of the book of Acts as really being called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. It's his work alone through his apostles and ultimately through his church that we see throughout its pages.

In the beginning of Acts, in chapter 2, the gospel begins to spread on the day of Pentecost. When people gathered from every nation and the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

[6 : 26] And then it spreads again following the stoning of Stephen, right? The persecution of Stephen. When the Hellenistic or the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians scattered from Jerusalem.

And brought the gospel to other areas, which we're going to talk about in chapter 8. So to set up the context for our passage, which we all need context again. Turn with me to Acts chapter 11.

We're going to be flipping through the word a lot today. So we're just warming up. All right. Verse 19. Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen.

Traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch. Speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some among them. Men from Cyprus and Cyrene.

Who on coming to Antioch. Spoke to the Hellenists also. Preaching the Lord Jesus Christ. So again. Persecution. Following the stoning of Stephen.

[7 : 27] Church in Jerusalem spreads. Goes all the way to Antioch. And then people. Who apparently didn't know any better, right? Maybe they were misinformed. But they weren't only preaching Jesus to the Jews.

But they also were shared with the Gentiles. So let's continue. And the hand of the Lord was with them. And a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem.

And they sent Barnabas to Antioch. So Barnabas goes to Antioch. He sees the number that's been added to the Lord. And then he's going to go back. And he's going to bring Paul with him.

And we're going to jump up to verse 26. Halfway through. For a whole year they met with the church. And taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Now God is doing something totally new here. The late British professor David Gooding says it this way. I like how he put it. As far as Acts tells us. The first great outflow of the gospel to the Gentiles.

[8 : 30] And the establishment of the first predominantly Gentile church. Were not led by Peter. Or any of the apostles. Nor was it initiated. Or thereafter controlled by the church in Jerusalem.

This is truly remarkable. And the more one thinks about it. The more remarkable it becomes. This is something altogether new. The planning of a community. In which Jewish believers and Gentile believers.

Met on equal terms. So new that a new name. Christians. Was invented to apply to the. To apply to the members of this community. So in terms of the gospel going forth.

To the end of the earth. This is a turning point in Acts. Which happens behind the scenes. Without the apostles. Outside of Jerusalem. To a worldly Gentile city.

The incident began a new chapter. In one sense. The most important chapter. Of Christian missions in history. Right. The door which had been opened to the Gentiles.

[9 : 29] In Caesarea by Peter. In chapter 10. Was now being widely open. At Antioch. It wasn't an organized effort. By the church at this point. As far as we know.

From what we're told in the book of Acts. The first church to be planted. Outside of Jerusalem. And Judea. The first sending church. The first healthy church. Which we're going to talk about more.

In the message. Was the church in Antioch. And ultimately. This would become. The main sending church. With this remarkable realization. Of how the gospel reached Antioch.

We cannot view the great commission. As a task for the apostles alone. Even though. When Christ gave the great commission. Right. It was directly to the apostles.

But we can't view it to them alone. Because. They didn't complete it themselves. They didn't. They didn't accomplish the task. Themselves. Of taking the gospel. To the end of the earth.

[10:28] And we see that in Acts 1. 6 through 8. The verse I was referring to. Even in Antioch. It was unnamed. Believers. Who aren't mentioned in scripture. From Cyprus and Cybrine.

As we read. Who were used by God. To bring the gospel. So that many would believe. No. The great commission. Was not a command. For the apostles alone. But is clearly broader than that. It is a command. For all believers. Of which we all must take part. Each of us. Has a role to play. In that command. And there are still. Unreached people groups. There are still.

People who have never heard. The gospel before. A few months ago. I was visiting. Northern Sierra Leone. In West Africa. Actually my colleagues. With us here today.

Who was on that trip with me. It may be difficult. To believe. In this day and age. But every year. A witch doctor. And the local chief. Would. Require.

[11:25] A number of children. To be sacrificed. To the gods. Or to the ancestors. In order to have rain. And a good harvest. That year. It could be up to 10 children.

And this is. So this is an area. Where darkness prevails. Yet the local church. In Sierra Leone. Is sending missionaries. To this area. To these villages. But not without severe.

Being severely persecuted. We had an opportunity. To visit two of these villages. Where we saw over 50 people. Commit their lives to Christ. Because of local mission efforts. From the church.

In Sierra Leone. The gospel. Penetrated the darkness. And the church rejoiced. And praised God. I was able to preach. In one of the villages. And I chose the text.

From John chapter 1. About the light. Coming into the world. And overcoming the darkness.

Women were there. They were mourning. For the children.

[12:19] They had lost. By the darkness. But were overjoyed. That Christ had redeemed them. Had overcome that darkness. And that they would no longer. Need to make such sacrifices.

76 new believers. Were baptized. Were baptized. In that region. The first believers. In that area. That we were able to witness. And some of the sacrificial sites.

The altars. Where these sacrifices were made. Were torn down. In those villages. And in one place. A church was built on top of it. But there are still many. Who live in the darkness.

And the call is to go. The call to go. Is for each one of us. Right? Go therefore. Make disciples of all nations. As we read in Matthew 28. 19. Someone needs to tell them about Christ.

How are they to believe. If they've never heard. Right? How are they to hear. If no one is preaching the word to them. How is somebody to preach to them. If they have not yet been sent.

[13:16] This is. This is really an outline for missions. As we see in Romans 10. 14 through 15. That is the role. That is the role of the church. And really that's the role of the local church. To preach.

To send. To support. John Piper is someone who fired me up for missions. When I was in college. And I love this quote from him. The job is not done in the world.

That Christ gave us to do. And the mandate is still binding. On us today. That's why we speak of unreached people groups. But the missions. Is the back breaking. Culture penetrating.

Darkness shattering. Initial work. To penetrate. Plant the church. See it flourish. Get it. Get its own elders. Train its own people. Evangelize its own networks. That's the task of missions.

It's not over. All of these things that Piper mentions in that quote. Planning healthy and flourishing churches. Equipping it to appoint elders.

[14:12] Train its people. To evangelize. And be great commission focused. Are the role or responsibility. Of the local church.

Of the church here in Bartlesville. To send foreign missionaries to the field. To equip the church. To help it grow in that capacity. Missionary work is church work.

It's building the local church. It might be hard to believe at this point. But that was all just the intro.

So let's jump into our passage now. Or at least into the main ideas of the sermon.

Okay. Okay. So as you see in your bulletin. Three ideas. Main points that we're going to cover.

Missions belongs to the local church.

Missions should be the desire of our heart. And missions is our present task. So before we get started. Diving into the scripture.

[15:11] Let's pray. Father as we come. To this first missionary journey in scripture. I pray that we would remember. The significant aspect.

Of what you have for us. Help us to see our own task in this text. Help us to understand. What you have given us to do. Give us the boldness. And confidence Lord.

To go forward and to do it. Help us to be excited about the future. And our role. And place in it. And I pray that you would strike from us. Any form of passivity.

And apathy. That we would be emboldened by the text today. And see an active church. Going forward Father. Commit this time to you.

And in Christ's name. Amen. Alright. So let's start with the Great Commission. Turn with me to Acts. Or I'm sorry. Matthew 28. Verse 18.

[16:13] And Jesus came. And said to them. All authority. In heaven and on earth. Has been given to me. 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. Teaching them to observe. All that I have commanded you. And behold. I am with you always.

To the end of the age. Notice that Jesus. Has all authority. To make. To give this command. And then gives a command.

Which is not superseded. By another command. So basically. It's as true today. As it was. When it was given then. He says to make disciples.

Not converts. But to make disciples. Of all nations. In other words. Jesus is really saying. Make disciple. Making disciples. Disciples doing what.

[17:07] Pastor Mike. Is doing every Sunday. When he's preaching the word. And he's equipping the church. What Jeremy Norton's doing. In Sunday school. Every Sunday. As he. As he. Preaches.

As he shares the word. Teaches the word. Equipping the church. What you do. Every time you take someone out to coffee. And minister to them. And share your walk with them. And encourage them. In the faith.

These are all aspects. Of disciple making. Disciple making. Is our present task. Again. It's. It's really the heart. Of the great commission. Making disciples. Whether.

You know. We make disciples here. We make disciples. We send them out there. To the ends of the earth. It's. It's the great commission. As Pastor Mike said last Sunday. It's the greatest task. Of all time.

As Tyler preached. On Acts. A few weeks ago. It's. It's. It's an exciting message. That turns the world. Upside down. It's incredible. This task.

[18:01] Our task. That we are given. So how are we. To view this commission. Who is it to? Who is it for? How is it to be accomplished? This leads into our first point.

Missions. Belongs to. The local church. And our passage. In Acts 13. Tells us. Of the local churches. Really. Our. Place. In that command. Leading up to.

Our passage. The book of Acts. Is really building. Transitioning. In the previous chapter. In Acts. We see the gospel. That starts to go abroad.

As we. Talked about. You know. Following the persecution. Of Stephen. We talked about earlier. And. It suddenly starts to go. Towards the ends of the earth. Reaching the church. In Antioch.

Leading into our passage. And you can. You can go ahead. And turn with me. Start turning to our passage. Here. In Acts. Leading into our passage. We already talked about. The beginning of the church. In Antioch. Which kind of sets the stage.

[19:00] For us. But we're going to start with. Acts 12. 25. Actually. So one verse ahead. Of our key passage. For today. And I'm going to read that to you. And Barnabas and Saul.

Returned. From Jerusalem. When they had completed their service. Bringing with them John. Whose other name was Mark. So. This is really a transitional verse. It's a change.

Chapter 12. In our. Preview. You know. Prior to our text. Is really talking about. Peter's imprisonment. He being rescued from prison. It's talking about Herod. And now it goes back to Barnabas and Saul.

Or Paul. Who are associated with the church in Antioch. As we talked about. We read earlier. They have gone to Jerusalem. To give aid. That was needed there.

And then after completing their service. They return. They go back to the church in Antioch. They're accountable. They're not just lone rangers. Antioch is really their new home base.

[19 : 59] And then this leads. Sorry. Leads into our passage. Verse 13. 1. Now there were. In the church at Antioch. Prophets and teachers. Barnabas.

Simeon. Who was called Niger. Lucius of Cyrene. Manan. A lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch. And Saul. So the beginning point. Is so key here.

Because it's. It's really what happens. It's. It's really a starting point. For the rest of the book of Acts. It's. It's a launch pad. So to speak. For the ends of the earth. This verse gives us a list of prophets. And teachers. In the church in Antioch. This is really a picture of a. Of a healthy church. With healthy leaders. And it's. It's quite a diverse cast. Actually. It's.

It's. It's interesting to read about these guys. You have. Manan. Who. Incredibly enough. Was a lifelong. Was a friend. In his childhood. At least. Of Herod the Tetrarch.

[20 : 52] This is Herod Antipas. Who killed John the Baptist. Right. This guy grew up with him. He had the same nursemaid with him. I. I. You know. I think that's what. This. This is referring to specifically.

He was a buddy. Of Herod's in his youth. And now he's. He's a believer. You have a previous Pharisee. You have. You have a guy from Africa. Simeon.

Who was called Niger. You have Lucius. Of Cyrene. I wish I could tell you about that guy. But I know nothing about him. But I'm sure there's really cool aspects of that guy too. But you have. You have a really cool cast here. But what's important is their names are all listed here. Right. Their names are in the text. And what we see here. Is. What. What are they doing together here? They're not. They're not running around doing a lot of programs. They're. They're together. They're worshipping. It's simple. They're. You know. You see this. The. The. The model of the early church that we see throughout Acts.

[21 : 49] It's. It's simple. It's worshipping together. The church is where the word is preached. And. People are. You know. Are. Are sent.

And then. God calls them to do things. And they go do things. And they do what they've been created for. It's fellowship. And. I. You know.

That's something we. We love about Highland Park. Our family is able to worship here. And be with you all. And. And fellowship with you. On Sunday morning. And. Other points of the week. And then. Go out during the week.

And do the mission that. That God has called us to. But this is. This is a refreshing place for us. It's. It's a blessing to be here. So. Let's jump. To. To verse two here. Continue on.

While they were worshipping. The Lord. And fasting. The Holy Spirit said. Set apart for me. Barnabas and Saul. For the work. To which I have called them. Now.

[22 : 44] It says. The Holy Spirit said. How did the Holy Spirit say? We have. We have really no idea. It doesn't tell us. Right. But it wasn't simply a feeling. Right. It was.

It was overt. God was saying something. Specific to them. God. God. Specifically. Called them. And he doesn't always do this. Throughout the book of Acts. As you see.

As you continue reading on. In the. In the passage. But in this case. It was clear. And Barnabas and Saul. They were set apart. And God had chosen them. For a specific task. To be sent out.

And I. I do want to add. One caveat here. About discerning the Holy Spirit. And. There. There's a book. That. I would definitely recommend. It's called. Decision Making and the Will of God.

By Gary Friesen. If you want more on this. And it's. It's a deep topic. And I'm not. I'm only going to. Touch the surface on it here. As it pertains. To missions. But of course.

[23 : 38] This can be applied. To other aspects. Of your life as well. But sometimes. Sometimes. We can be hesitant. To just go. To take that next step. It goes back to.

What I said earlier. About waiting on God. We wait for the right timing. Or the right circumstances. But if the desire to go is there. Whether on a short term trip.

Or you're thinking. You know. Maybe longer term. Getting engaged in missions. Take that next step. Talk to a leader of the church. Figure. It doesn't mean. They'll send you off tomorrow. But.

But. Start the process. Pursue that. That is God honoring. To pursue. What the desires of his heart are. What. What he commands us to do. Take that next step. You know.

Personally. I. When I. When I started. Just having this passion. Desire to. To do missions. I took.

[24 : 31] I continued to pursue it. And the Lord opened up. And kind of paid the way for me to happen. To. To do it. And when we have people over. And they say. How do I. How do I get my foot in the door?

How do I. Get on the field? Or what. What is the first step in doing that? It's just taking that next step. It's. It's. It's trusting the Lord. and walking ahead and pursuing and seeing what's out there or taking a short-term trip, whatever the case may be. I was in Chad about a year ago, and this was pretty crazy. We were in this remote area in eastern Chad on the border of Darfur, Sudan. And this is, you know, there's been a war going on in Sudan for the past year. There were actually tens of thousands of Darfurian refugees who had just crossed the border into this terrible place. I mean, dusty, hot desert, hardly any water. Refugees covered this area, and there were so many ministry opportunities. These people were vulnerable and desolate, desperate. And so we met this group of missionaries in that area, and among them was this young man that had come to our house several years earlier when we lived in Senegal. We had dinner with him, and my wife and I encouraged him just to go, take that next step.

He asked that same question, how do I get involved? You know, well, you know, let's take that step. What avenues are open? Let's look at that. All of a sudden, years later, he talked about that evening, said, hey, that really encouraged me to get back to the field. And there he is in this remote area serving the Lord. And it was hard to believe, but we praised God for it. That was a short diversion, but I do want to encourage you to take that step. So on with our passage. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

This wasn't to the laying of hands, sending them off. This wasn't to ordain them. Paul and Barnabas, they were already leaders within the church, right? But they were commissioning them, sending them off, releasing them, so to speak. It was an expression of their fellowship with them, recognizing them as its delegates in the field. They went out, they were really sent off by the whole church.

And this is really a picture, again, of a healthy church in its vigor, sending out two of its best people to the foreign mission field. And that's the picture we see here. And I want to point out a couple things here at the outset. What I say is not to preclude the importance of mission agencies.

[27 : 13] I mean, as a lot of you know, I serve with one. And they have such an important place in, you know, in global missions and coming alongside the church to support the church with missions. But in Acts, in this early stage in Acts, and throughout the rest of the book of Acts, what we see is that missions belongs to the local church. This is the first time in the Bible where organized missions happens. Prior to this, missionary activity really happened again, as we talked about earlier, because people were scattered, right? But this is the first time of a purposeful, planned, practical picture of going forward to the mission field. And it happens from this local church in Antioch.

So turn with me to Acts chapter 14. Skip ahead a page here. And start on verse 24 here. Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Italia. And from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them. And he, sorry, and how he opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And how they remain, and they remain no little time with the disciples.

So in other words, they went on a journey and they went back to where they were commissioned earlier. Really, to give a report of what they had seen there. Again, this is a picture of a church with authority that commissioned them. And they went back to that church to report. And then we keep reading in 15. But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, unless you were circumcised, according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. So it's important to note that unhealthy churches can send bad missionaries, right, in this passage, as the guys who were preaching that you have to be circumcised to be saved. So they were preaching an untrue gospel. We're going to talk about more about this in a minute, but let's see what happens here. And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles and brought great joy to all the brothers. It's overt, right? They were appointed. They were sent by the church. So why do I bring this up? Because I can't have you leave here without making this very clear. Missions belongs to the authority of the

local church.

It begins with the local church. It's supported by the local church. And missionary work is accountable to the local church. Do I sound like a broken record yet? Well, I'm still not done. All right, turn with me to Ephesians chapter 4. Verse 11. And here's why this matters. Here's how we can get into trouble if we're not thinking the right way, right? When we think of this idea about belonging to the local church, let's talk about the goals of the local church in this familiar passage. So verse 11.

[31 : 04] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, for what purpose? To equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves, right? That picture of drifting, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness, and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. The goal of our gathering here is maturity, to build up, to build up the body. I was going to use the analogy of bodybuilding to make a point from this passage, but I don't know too much about bodybuilding because I don't do too much of that.

So, but if I had used a bodybuilding analogy, I would have emphasized really two things that happen, right? One, you strengthen the muscles that you already have. Two, you build on those muscles. You gain more muscles, right? You bulk up, so to speak. Both of these are aspects of growing in maturity.

Maturity is growing up and growing out. Both things are a picture of maturity. Now, the mechanism of that maturity is teaching the word, to equip the saints, as we talked about earlier, right?

Equipping the saints.

Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. Now, what is the work of the ministry? To build up the body. At the end of the day, all missionary work is essentially bodybuilding. It's church work. It's building up other aspects of the body. Other local churches. All of it is to benefit the body. So, what is the goal?

It's not random multiplication. It's not just starting a church and leaving, right? It's quality multiplication so that churches are not tossed to and fro. They don't drift, right? It's building the body. Again, building up to maturity. The point of the church is to grow to maturity, to grow up strong, not tossed to and fro, not drifting from the truth. If missions to the ends of the earth starts with the local church, then we're the ones who raise up the people in this room, in this congregation, who are going to be sent to do the Great Commission. This is where disciples are made, right here in this church. This is where you're trained and equipped and built up. There's other preparation that can happen. You know, there's university degrees that focus on missions. There's seminars. There's all this other stuff that can happen. But the primary preparation is within the local church, is within the body. Because no matter what you do, when you go to the mission field, you're doing church work.

[34 : 30] You're replicating. You're reproducing healthy churches. This is the primary place where missionaries are recognized, going to be trained, supported, and sent out. Pastor Mike said last week, the better you serve in the function of the body Jesus has given to you, and the better that we work together as a healthy functioning body, the better we will share the gospel, and the more likely it is that we will make disciples. This is a great task. It's the greatest task of all time, and it requires all of our efforts working together. Healthy local churches are going to produce elders. They're going to produce missionaries. They're going to produce ministry, right? But here's the problem. An immature church, at best, is going to reproduce immature missionaries, which are going to produce immature churches. Unhealthy churches, at best, are going to produce bad missionaries, as we saw in the case of those that the church in Jerusalem sent out who weren't preaching the true gospel, who were saying that you have to be circumcised to be saved. After being on the mission field for more than 10 years, you know, sadly, Amy and I have seen a lot of this. A lot of unprepared missionaries who have been sent to the field. It's like sending a soldier off to war who has not been trained for battle, who does not have, who is not equipped, who does not have the weapons, the resources to fight, sending him off to the front lines. You have to be prepared. You have to be

ready. You have to be in the Word and know how to study the Word so that when times get tough, you can recall God's promises, and you can cling to it, right? We've encountered many missionaries who have struggled and only last a short time on the field.

And in fact, one of the problems, this is a big problem with missions today. Missionaries aren't, generally speaking, aren't staying on the field, committing their lives. They're not equipped to spend their whole life on the field, but only last a few years. And this is the duty of the local church to equip them. It's the duty of the church to pray for them, to equip them, to care for their missionaries. Missionary work isn't for everybody, right? It's something you aspire to. It's hard work. It comes with a lot of challenges. It's incredibly hard. So back to our main point. The goal is not merely to plant churches, but to plant good churches, able to build up to maturity. A couple of examples of this real quick in Titus 1.5, Paul left Titus in Crete because the church was having problems there.

And Titus remained to build up those believers who were still there and to appoint elders and to address issues of sin that were apparent in the church. He left Titus there to strengthen the church. In Acts 15.41, Paul went to Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches, it says. So the purpose is not simply to plant new churches and then move on, as seems to be all too common sometimes in modern missions, but to equip and build up and return to strengthen existing churches. You know, Paul did that routinely throughout the book of Acts. The letters were a way that he wrote to the church to equip them, to build them up, to strengthen them. This goes back to the John Piper quote that I read at the beginning. Missionary work is church work, which only the church is equipped to do. Can you go to the mission field and build houses? Maybe go down to Mexico and help rebuild the school? Yes, that's great.

[38 : 17] That's worship to the Lord, but really that's benevolence, right? It's important, but missionary activity is church work. It's building up the church. Missions has been given to the local church. It belongs to the local church. It's supported by the local church. It's accountable to the local church, and it depends on the local church in order to build local churches. And in the end, and the ends of the earth is our present task to accomplish that, right? A great example of this is a church that we know in northern California, just how this church is engaged in foreign missions. For the last 15 years, they've, in a sense, kind of adopted a people group in the country of Niger, which is in West Africa, and have sent many of their own missionaries to this country who have, who they equipped within their church. They sent them to the field, who lived there for years, who learned the languages, who went to these remote areas in order to share the gospel. And among the missionaries that had been sent there was one who ended up being kidnapped, taken hostage for six years by an al-Qaeda-linked jihadist group in the country. And the reason that

I went to that church to visit them was when he was still, you know, a hostage. We didn't know at the time. I mean, we assumed at that point he was dead. Nobody knew if he was dead or alive. But we went to that church. But when we went there to visit this church, my wife and I, we were just coming back from the, from the field ourselves. We were ourselves greatly in need of encouragement and care. And so we, we go there, we meet this prayer group, all women that gathered together from within the church.

And I can't tell you how encouraged we were by these women, how the Spirit was moving among them, and how we were ministered to by them. And, and even today, they continue to pray for us and kind of on a weekly basis. But we love the picture of doing this kingdom work in the nation of Niger.

From this, this small, you know, town on the coast of Northern California. It's amazing. It's a person, it's a perfect picture of what missions should be like. It's a local body who, you know, despite the cost, despite one of their own being kidnapped, held hostage, almost killed, continued to pray, continued to pray for those local evangelists who were taking the gospel, continued to pray that the church would be planted among this tribe. The pictures you just saw in that photo, if you recognize them, the first man, this man is one of the first believers among this tribe.

And what's amazing about this man is, when the, when the missionary had been kidnapped, I, we went to visit him within months after. And again, we didn't know what happened to him. We hadn't heard any word about this missionary. But this man came down to the capital to meet me in Niameh. And he said, man, you know, have you heard any updates about the missionary? What, what's going on? We were praying for him. We care. And he was personally discipled by this guy. But then his next comment was, what's going to happen now? The missionaries, you know, he was

kidnapped. The rest of the missionaries left the country. How are, how are we going to get the resources we need? Which mainly were, in this case, are audio Bibles to share the word of God, to continue to make disciples and to see more people baptized. Now that the, the Western contacts that were in this village are no longer here. His heart was to, to reproduce himself, right? Disciples making disciples to invest in others.

[42 : 08] The next picture, you can see how they, how they, uh, baptized people in the Sahara desert in this location because there's no water. Um, so it's, it's pretty fascinating to see how the gospel is going forth. Um, but again, this, this body of believers, they were equipping and sending and supporting their own within the local body and knowing that the cost is worth it. Um, so why do we care about missions?

Why does this church in Northern California care about making disciples in Niger? Because going to our second point, mission should be the desire of our heart.

Turn with me to Romans 10, one. There are some necessary understandings, um, if we're going to be effective in doing this.

Effective evangelism, effective mission work flows through a basic attitude, right? That we need to have. And it's illustrated here, uh, by Paul.

Brother, he writes, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them, that is, that is for Israel, is for their salvation. What you see here, uh, what you see with Paul really is a, is a, is a passion.

[43 : 25] My heart's desire, my heart's passion, my heart's longing for the salvation of Israel. This is what motivated him, right? This is what drove him. This is what compelled him. When he wrote to the Corinthians, he said, and it's such a, it's such a telling statement. And in second Corinthians five, he says, we know no man after the flesh. He said, I don't even see people as just human, right? Is what, is what he's saying here. I see them as eternal souls. We don't evaluate people by their earthly status, their success or failure, their wealth, or their, their lack of it, their, in their poverty. We know no man after the flesh. We see all men for what they really are. And that is eternal souls. And when you look at people and realize that they are eternal souls who live forever, either in heaven or in hell, and should, this should, this should compel us, right? Draw us toward evangelism, as it did Paul. And we see how strong this is for Paul. So turn back one chapter to chapter nine, verse one. Now what he's saying here, and Tyler mentioned this passage when he preached a few weeks ago, what he's saying here is so shocking, so extreme, so severe that he prefaces it by saying, I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying, right? My conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit. Basically he's saying the Holy Spirit confirms in my conscience that what I'm about to say is true because it's so shocking. He is garnering every bit of support he can for the validity of his statement. And what is his statement? He says, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, an endless ache, endless grief that never goes away, right? And for what? That I could wish that I myself were accursed or damned, cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. He's saying, I could wish that I would go to hell forever. If so doing, salvation would come to the people of Israel, is basically what he's saying here. He's not just saying that I would give my life for the cause, right? He's saying I would give my eternity for it.

What kind of love is that? What kind of passion is that? When he's saying my heart's desire in 10.1, that's what's loaded in that statement. His prayer to God, his constant pleading.

He was driven by this passion for the salvation of the Jews. And I might add that he had an equal passion for the salvation as the Gentiles, as he expresses time and time again in his letters to the Gentile churches that we see throughout scripture. His passion is clear for all those who are lost, both Jew and Gentile. I've had the privilege to encounter that same passion, that same heart within many of our brothers and sisters in Christ on my trips throughout the world. On a recent trip to Nigeria, I was driving in the north and we stopped off the side of the road, a main road, and we met these five pastors that were coming in from a nearby village. Now, my preference is always to go visit them in their village, to see them where they live. But in this case, we couldn't. It was too dangerous. They were experiencing perpetual, ongoing, you know, daily attacks by a jihadist group that was living in the bush in that area. And where it was so hard for them that some of these pastors would live maybe a 15-minute walk apart, less than a mile.

Their churches would be close, but they couldn't walk to go visit one another, to fellowship together, because to do so, to walk through the bush, they would be ambushed and likely killed. Some of them had to send their families away, their wives and children, because it was too dangerous.

Many of their congregants within their congregations have been killed. But what amazed me about these pastors was their faithfulness. When sharing prayer requests, as we prayed together, they didn't ask things which would be so obvious to most of us, such as their security, right, their safety, the things that we often pray for. No, they asked that, what they asked for was that more pastors would come. Now, among them, a pastor had recently been killed. So there was a church there without a shepherd, right, without a pastor. And these guys needed help. They needed someone to fill the pulpit.

[48 : 07] Who would shepherd the flock and care for that broken congregation who was tempted to scatter, to flee because of the persecution they were experiencing? Who would maintain a Christian witness in that village? And what's amazing about these guys is none of them were native to that community. They were all sent there from their church to go to serve in that area. They could have packed up and left any time. They didn't have any family ties there. These were people they didn't know before they were asked to fill those pulpits. But they were sent there by the church. They were called to God to go to that place. And they faithfully remained there, counting the cost, the cost of their, the likely cost of giving their own lives as a result. I was in northern Cameroon. Similar story on a trip.

And I was meeting with this pastor. Now, Boko Haram was crossing the border from northeastern Nigeria into northern Cameroon. And I got as close to that area as I could, as they would allow me to go, being a Westerner, right? And so I was meeting with some pastors. And one of the pastors said, well, after I meet with you, I'm on my way to visit the church in that area. Again, this area, ongoing attacks against, against the church in this area, against this Christian community. And I asked him, hey, can I go with you? It's naive or maybe foolish as I am. But he said, he said, no, I can't, I can't take you there. I, I, he said, I could take you there, but I don't know if I'll be able to bring you back. Right? I said, well, why, why are you going then? He said, well, because I'm a pastor and that's where God called me to go. And if I don't go, who else will go? Right? He, he counted the cost. He knew that he may not come home that night. Now, then he said goodbye to his wife and children. He got at his motorcycle and he went to encourage the congregation there. Again, just like the pastors from Nigeria, he wasn't native to that area. He was sent by his church to go to, to shepherd that flock. And he faithfully did so to strengthen the local church in a very heavily persecuted area. One more quick story. I love the, the picture a little different of the church in Eastern Congo, where I get to go to on an ongoing basis. This is a church dealing with so much persecution, so much fear and suffering. But what a testament it is to me of, of how they've come together amidst that persecution. How now many are actually fleeing to the church for refuge.

They're coming to the church because that's where they see the light of Christ. How the local church itself is growing and maturing in the midst of these hardships. For example, in the next picture, I'm, I'm, I'm here with a, with a pygmy pastor. And, um, if, if you know, you know, the history of the pygmies in the Congo, uh, it's, it's a dark, uh, sad history. They've been mistreated. They've been, uh, brutally treated, ostracized from the community. And, and it's hard to give you the context to see how important this is. But this pygmy pastor is among other pastors who, who have brought him in. And, and, and really it's, it's, uh, seeing how the gospel is transforming the lives of the church where he's included among the other pastors, people from different tribes. Um, and they're worshipping together because at the end of the day, they're all being persecuted and they realize there needs to be unity within the body and fellowship with one another. I, as we're in the group of this, these, these pastors, they used to say, you know,

[51 : 50] I used to preach about so-and-so. I used to condemn him from the pulpit because of some of our, uh, doctrinal differences because of jealousies, whatever the case may be. But now we're brothers in Christ. We're fellowshiping together. We pray together weekly. I can't do it without my brothers.

Right? So this intense persecution has brought them together. The church is the light. The church is the focal point. The church is Christ's bride. The church, its people should be our ultimate passion. And this leads us to our final point. Now this is going to go quickly. So hang, bear with me here.

We're nearing the end here, but turn with me to, to second Corinthians chapter 10.

And, uh, chapter 10, verse 13. But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned us to reach even to you. For we are not overextending ourselves as though we did not reach you.

For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others, but our hope is that your faith increases. Our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged so that we may preach the gospel and lands beyond you. Again, let me read that one part one more time. Our hope is that as your faith increases, right? It's, it goes, it takes us back to the Ephesians passage that we read earlier. As you mature in the faith, their influence will go on and the gospel will go on to lands beyond you. Do you see that? Do you see the picture of what I'm trying to, trying to say throughout this message? Notice what Paul is saying here. He planted the church, but the church's job wasn't done, right? As they move on to maturity, the by-product of that is the missionaries. It's the movement. It's all the rest of it, right? So let me ask you this question. How can we accomplish this in a foreign mission field if we're not doing it at our home church?

[53 : 53] If Paul is saying that our growth and faith and maturity is pivotal in foreign missions, it starts with us and it's our present task, then it matters that we're strong in growth and maturity right here, right here in Bartlesville first, right? How can we penetrate foreign cultures if we're compromised in this one? How can we raise up, appoint elders, and build healthy churches on foreign fields if we can't do it here? How can we do it across the world if we're not willing to go across the street? Now, not every one of you is going to go, but everybody is a part of this mission.

Everybody has a part to play. For those who don't go, you're senders, right? We're all senders. Those who don't go, we send those who do, every one of you. And you pray. And I don't want to neglect the importance of prayer here. It is critical to be reminded that prayer is a vital part of the work of evangelism. When Paul writes to Timothy, he says to him in the second chapter of the epistle that I urge that entreaties, entreaties, and prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men for kings and all who are in authority in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. So what's he saying? You pray for everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth because that's the heart of God. God's desire desires men to come to the knowledge of the truth, and that's how we pray. So back to our initial question from Hebrews 1-2.

Let's not drift from what we see here in the word. We have a choice. We have a choice either of courage or of comfort. God doesn't call us to passive waiting, but to active obedience. So what does this imply? Well, 2 Corinthians 5 will tell us, and this is our final passage we'll read. 2 Corinthians 5-20.

Such an encouraging word. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us, we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, in a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is a favorable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry. But as servants of God, which we all are, we commend ourselves in every way by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, by truthful speech, the power of God, with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left, through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise, we are treated as imposters and yet are true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold, we live as punished and not yet killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making rich, as having nothing yet possessing everything. Meaning God has prepared a good work for you.

Here in Bartlesville, right now, this week, do you believe that? God has prepared good works through you, through your endurance, through your afflictions, through hardships, everything we just read in that passage, the list goes on. His work of grace is blowing through your life. So what are we waiting for? This is the application. You don't need a title, because you've already been given one. Ambassador, as we just read in this text, right?

[58 : 25] Christian, as the church in Antioch was initially called, or the Christians were first called in Antioch. You don't need a commission. You've already been given one. Go and make disciples.

You don't need his promise, because he's already given it to you, right? And lo, I am with you always to the ends of the age. Let's pray. Father, I thank you for this word.

I pray that we will rise up to the callings that you've given us, as Christian, as ambassador for Christ, here in Bartlesville, to the ends of the earth, Father. I thank you for your promises, that lo, you are with us always, even to the ends of the age, Father. We trust in you. You are faithful. You have always been faithful. And Father, we rest in that, in that truth. So I pray that we would stir up to do what you have before us this week, and throughout, until the end of the age, that your gospel would go forth, that the unreached would hear the name of Christ, and would bow down and worship you. That when we are all together in heaven around your throne, Father, and hearing praises of your name from every tribe and language, Lord, that we would not waste what you have given us to do now, but we would be faithful to the task at hand and fulfill the great commission. In Christ's name, amen.