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Bridgeway Church
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Sermon Summary

Becoming a “World” Christian 3 John 5-8

Last week we focused our attention on the absolute urgency of personal evangelism. My point was simply this: *If there is a hell and people are going there, we cannot afford to stink at evangelism.*

Today I want to extend this urgent call from personal evangelism to *global missions*. I want us to think today about what it would mean for us to become “**world**” Christians.

To be a “world” Christian simply means that you have consciously, sincerely, and sacrificially reordered your life around God’s global purpose to glorify himself. A “world” Christian is a believer who has made God’s global purpose a priority in terms of how you pray, what you read, where you spend your time and energy, and perhaps most important of all, what you do with your money.

In his book, *In the Gap*, David Bryant defines “world” Christians as that group of believers who say,

“We want to accept personal responsibility for reaching some of earth’s unreached, especially from among the billions . . . who can only be reached through major new efforts by God’s people. Among every people-group where there is no vital, evangelizing Christian community there *should* be one, there *must* be one, there *shall* be one. Together we want to help make this happen” (62; emphasis mine).

To help get your mind around the task that God has given the Church, consider the six major religious streams in the earth as of 2010.

Christian (RC and Protestant combined) – 32.5%
Muslim – 21.1%
Non-Religious – 15.5% (of which 83% are agnostic and 17% are atheist)
Hindu – 13.5%
Buddhist – 6.6%
Ethnic/other – 10.8% (such as Animist, Taoist, Confucian, Bahai’, Shinto, Spiritist, etc.)

Let’s now break this down into relevant “people groups.”

Best estimates among leading missiologists are that we have a minimum of 13,000 and a maximum of 16,650 “people groups” in the earth today. A “people group” is not a “nation” but a distinct and independent body of people within a nation which shares a common ethnic identity and language.

There are approximately 7.1 billion people on the earth today. 2.9 billion, or 40.7%, of them are unreached.

Thus, on the assumption that the number of people groups is approximately 16,650, more than 7,100, or 43.1%, of them are currently unreached.

To say that a people group is “unreached” means “there is no viable indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize their own people without outside (cross-cultural) assistance” (Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church*, xiii).

What this means is that God’s redemptive purpose in the Great Commission is not complete or fulfilled just because there are now more Christians than there are in any other religious group. Nor does it mean the GC has been fulfilled simply because there are Christians living in all 21st century “nations” or because the gospel has penetrated the territory of every geo-political state.

The fact is that within every geo-political state there are thousands of tribes and castes and sub-cultures and linguistic groups, each of which must finally find representation before the throne of God (see Revelation 4-5).

Thus, a world Christian is a believer in Jesus Christ whose body, soul, spirit, time, prayers, energy, and money are dedicated to the global purpose of God in reaching with the gospel every people group on the face of the earth.

Last week I asked you the question: *Why should we care?* Why should we want to become world Christians? The immediate and first answer is because there is a hell and people are going there. That sobering, inescapable fact is the underlying assumption of missions. And until your heart is gripped and grieved by the thought of the eternal condemnation of men and women, you will never have the heart to become a world Christian.

The late W. T. Conner, former President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas, once heard two of his students flippantly joking about hell. He walked over, put his arms around their shoulders, and escorted them to a large picture window overlooking the city of Ft. Worth. As they gazed out the window, and with tears in his eyes, Dr. Conner said: "Don't joke about hell, men. People are going there. *People* are going there."

If you don't believe there is a direct correlation between belief in the reality of an eternal hell, on the one hand, and a commitment to global missions, on the other, consider this one startling statistic.

Between 1953 and 1980 the overseas missionary force of mainline Protestant churches of North America decreased from 9,844 to 2,813. By "mainline" Protestant churches I have primarily in mind those denominations who have gradually abandoned their belief in the reality of hell. During this same time period, the missionary force of evangelical Protestants, who take seriously the doctrine of hell, increased by more than 200 percent. The Christian and Missionary Alliance, for example, with its 200,000 members, supported 40% more missionaries than the United Methodist Church did with its 9.5 million members. [Statistics provided by John Piper]

Although its melody is beautiful and almost hypnotic, the lyrics of John Lennon's song "Imagine" are theologically horrendous:

"Imagine there's no heaven,
It's easy if you try;
No hell below us,
Above us only sky."

When professing Christians and religious denominations embrace their own version of that abominable concept, world missions will die.

One more thing to note.

I earlier said that the reality of an eternal hell is the underlying assumption of missions. That's only partly true. There is an even greater reality that ought to stir us to become world Christians. I have in mind the glory of God. John Piper put it best when he said:

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man." (John Piper).

What we must keep foremost in our thinking is that our commitment to world missions must be driven by our commitment to the global glory of God.

So what are we to do? Part of the answer is found in 3 John 5-8.

Gaius, a "World" Christian

Although we read the entire book of 3 John, our primary concern is with vv. 5-8. Let's look at it again closely.

“Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth” (3 John 5-8).

Apparently some itinerant evangelists or missionaries whom John knew had visited Gaius and were welcomed, supported, and loved by him. They later returned to John and told him how well Gaius had treated them. John was so deeply moved and filled with such joy (v. 3) that he wrote this letter to encourage his friend and to commend him for “walking in the truth” (vv. 3-4).

Let me make several observations. As I do, please understand what I'm aiming for. My prayer is that as we unpack John's words the Spirit would take each term and each phrase and impress it on your heart in a life-changing way, awakening you and me to the task at hand and the incredible responsibility and privilege we have in becoming “world” Christians.

First, Gaius's hospitality, support, and encouragement of these itinerant missionaries is the primary reason for John's “great joy” that he mentions in v. 3. When John referred to Gaius “walking in the truth” he primarily had in mind the generosity and love he displayed to these missionaries. ***What does that tell you about the importance of financially supporting missions work that none other than an Apostle would point specifically to it as the reason why he in his old age would greatly rejoice!***

Is this your perspective? If not, why not? Where did we take a wrong turn such that missions became secondary, or worse still an optional dimension of local church life? As far as the Apostle John is concerned, this is the explanation and cause for his joy!

Second, Gaius's generosity and love toward these traveling evangelists was the proof or evidence of his orthodoxy. John says “it is a *faithful* thing” you've done, which is to say, he demonstrated his fidelity to the truth of the gospel by his loving support of these men. ***Being theologically orthodox doesn't matter much if it doesn't bear the fruit of generous and consistent support for those who've ventured out to take the gospel where it has never reached before.***

Third, what specifically did John expect Gaius to do? According to v. 6, he was to “send them on their journey.” This may not sound like a big deal, but this was technical language in the NT for making provision for a traveling evangelist (the language here is used 9x in the NT and always in a missionary context). John is telling Gaius that he would do well to assume financial responsibility for their missionary endeavors.

Fourth, what does John mean when he encourages Gaius to send them on their way “*in a manner worthy of God*” (v. 6)? Does he mean, “treat them the way you would treat God”? Or perhaps, “treat them in the way that God has treated us”? Others think it means to treat them in a manner that will bring praise to God. Most likely he's telling Gaius to ***treat them in the way that God would approve.*** The point is that God is watching Gaius (and us). How we respond to the needs of missionaries and itinerant evangelists is under divine scrutiny! God is not pleased “when our missionaries are simply a name on the back of the church bulletin or a line item in the budget” (Tom Steller, *Let the Nations be Glad*, 236).

Fifth, notice that John says, “you will do *well* to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God” (v. 6). The word translated “well” (*kalos*) is not your typical Greek word for “good” but rather points to the idea of beautiful or attractive or to a deed that is aesthetically appealing and noble. Supporting missionaries in need is more than merely a “faithful thing.” It is also a beautiful and pleasing act of generosity.

Sixth, missions support is also an expression of “*love*” (v. 6a). Here again we see that “love” is not merely a doctrinal affirmation, a paragraph in your statement of faith. It is a deep affection for another that manifests itself in concrete action on their behalf. Love in this instance is very tangible and is expressed in financial support.

Seventh, did you notice in v. 5 how these men are described: “*strangers* as they are.” Gaius receives and supports these men even though he had never met them! They were total strangers to him! He didn’t know them personally. Some people use this as an excuse not to give financially to missionaries in foreign countries: “I can’t give money to support someone I’ve never met.” Oh, really? Why not? If they are doing the work of ministry and are faithful to the gospel, whether or not you know them personally is entirely irrelevant.

Eighth, in v. 8 John says we ought to support “people like these” or “such people.” He’s emphasizing their character and commitment to the gospel. Nowhere does John suggest we should be gullible and let our generosity run roughshod over our discernment. *Not everyone is deserving of our support.* So, who is? That brings us to our next observation.

Ninth, only those who “have gone out *for the sake of the name*” (v. 7) should receive our support. In other words, these are not people who are trying to build a reputation for themselves. They are not out for fame or fortune. They are driven by one and only one consideration: to promote and bring praise to the name of Jesus Christ! Their sole purpose is to exalt Christ.

Many go out for the sake of providing humanitarian care, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing. But the kind of people that warrant our support are those whose service is compelled by *a driving passion to honor Jesus*. As Paul said in Romans 1:5, the purpose of his apostleship and ministry was “to bring about the obedience of faith *for the sake of his name* among the nations.”

Contrast these men with those whom John denounces in 2 John 7-11!

Tenth, the reason we need to be quick to support their ministry is that they have accepted “nothing from the Gentiles” (v. 7b). In other words, they refused the financial support of non-Christians. How can someone who has devoted himself/herself to the name of Christ solicit support from those who by their unbelief live in open defiance of him?

But what if an unbeliever voluntarily offers financial assistance? Does this text mean it should be refused? John Stott doesn’t think the text addresses that question: “What is here said is that these itinerant evangelists would not (as a matter of policy) seek their support from the heathen and did not (as a matter of fact) receive their support from them” (222).

The point is that it is **our** responsibility as the church, the believing community, to support them. *It is not the responsibility of the non-Christian world to support global missions.* Ideally, missionaries who are offered money by non-Christians ought to be able to say, “No, thank you. I have received 100% of the financial support I need from the church of Jesus Christ.” If missionaries are so desperate that they have to rely upon the support of non-believers it is to our shame for having failed to assume the responsibility God has given to us.

Note again in v. 8 that John says we “*ought*” to support such people. This is a moral and spiritual obligation that falls upon us. This is something that springs from our identity as followers of Jesus. *This is what Christians do! If you are not regularly giving to the church to sustain and expand its support of church plants and missionaries both locally and abroad, you are in sin! If we “ought” to do it, then not to do it is sin. It’s just that simple.*

Eleventh, when you support a missionary or itinerant evangelist you are doing far more than simply making a financial contribution. John says in v. 8 that in doing so we become “*fellow workers*” for the truth of the gospel. It may seem impersonal to write out a check. You may not feel especially spiritual in doing so. But John says that when you give you have become a “fellow worker” with those who toil and suffer and sacrifice by spreading the gospel in lands where it has not yet been made known. You may not be called to the mission field. You may not be gifted to preach the gospel. You may never find yourself on the frontline of evangelistic outreach. But your money can go where you cannot. When you give generously and sacrificially for the cause of church planting and world evangelistic and missionary outreach, as far as God is concerned, it is as if you are out on the field yourself laboring side-by-side with those who are physically present there. You are a “fellow worker” with them.

Twelfth, and finally, John conceives of only two types of people: (1) *those who go* and (2) *those who send those who go*. You either go, you send, or you sin.

Actually, there is a third possibility, but it's not one you want to consider. In vv. 9-10 John harshly denounces a man named Diotrephes who is in the grip of selfish ambition. He "likes to put himself first" (v. 9a). Worse still, according to v. 10, "he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church" (v. 10).

We don't know why Diotrephes resisted and opposed those who wanted to be world Christians. Perhaps he didn't believe missions was necessary. Had Diotrephes rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment for those who die without Christ? Perhaps he refused to support those who might have differed with him on secondary doctrinal matters. Perhaps he wanted for himself the money that otherwise would have been given to those who went out "for the sake of the name."

So, I guess there are three options: you go, you send, or you stand in the way of those who do. I hardly think you want to be in that third category!

Conclusion

What do I hope will come of this? At least three things.

First, my prayer is that Bridgeway emerges corporately as a globally-minded church, a church comprised of "world" Christians whose lives are shaped and governed by a deep and abiding commitment to bringing the gospel to lost souls through personal evangelism, church planting, local outreach, and global missions.

Second, my prayer is that individual men and women at Bridgeway embrace their biblical responsibility to be sacrificial, generous, and consistent in their financial stewardship as it applies to both local and global missions.

Third, my prayer is that some at Bridgeway, perhaps even some who are present today, will heed God's call to go.

In conclusion, let's never forget why we go and why we send those who do: there is a hell, and people are going there. But even more important still: we go and we send those who do because we long to see the earth filled with white-hot worshipers of God. As Piper said,

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man." (John Piper).

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