

“Beyond the Walls (#5): To the Ends of the Earth”

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Scriptures: Acts 1:8; Philippians 2:5-11

Prayer

Henry Martyn said, “The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to Him the more intensely missionary we must become.”¹ There is truth here that we must explore as we conclude our sermon series, “Beyond the Walls.” You will recall our diagram of circles (see diagram attached) illustrating how Jesus is telling us to Go! – first to Jerusalem and Judea, those near to us whom we see and identify with on a regular basis; then to Samaria, those who may be in our area or even a distance away who are very different from us and with whom we do not normally have daily contact; and today, to the ends of the earth. We have not defined that yet. We celebrate our reaching out to Kazakhstan, Kenya, Honduras, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Cuba; but we are still determining where God is leading us. Much of the world has not been touched by us, and we should examine what we are doing and why.

First Things First

In Acts 1:8, Jesus, tells us we *shall* receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, and that we *shall* be His witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. There is a priority given by Jesus that is instructive to us. We cannot just be witnesses to the ends of the earth and care nothing about the other areas where He has told us to go. Likewise, we cannot just be interested in just local ministry and choose to neglect the imperatives to those who are different and those far away. I sense a disconnect in this congregation on this, and I want us to understand that the arrows in the diagram move outward from us to the ends of the earth.

But more important is the first part that we tend to skip over as we charge into the world. It is a precondition to our success as witnesses anywhere and one that we must focus on if we are to positively impact our world. In the first part of Acts 1:8, Jesus says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....” The admonition to “GO” is of no significance, and no amount of effort in the other circles will be beneficial until we realize that we must first have the power of the Holy Spirit alive and at work within us.

We are the Body of Christ. We have been redeemed by his sacrifice on the cross. We cannot minister in a meaningful way to anyone until we have made the incarnation, the sacrifice of Christ and His resurrection, and His presence with us in the Holy Spirit a reality in our own lives. We cannot be active enough to generate a faith relationship. That is a condition of the heart, an act of surrender where we have placed God’s call on our lives ahead of our own desires and wishes. It takes discipline to come into relationship and to maintain that relationship; however, until we have it, we cannot be effective missionaries anywhere. Simply put, we cannot share what we do not have. If we are to be his

witnesses, we have to be convinced in our own lives that Jesus is the Way. If you do not believe that, then you will have a difficult time convincing anyone else that the gospel message is a truth that truly transforms lives.

Once we have that relationship with God, transmitting the good news to others is done in the relationships we enter into and nurture. No other means of spreading the good news is effective. Too many of us have tried to do the motions of church membership while avoiding the mandates of Christ to build the kingdom through our relationships. True witness comes in the way we live our lives and the manner in which we relate to others in our daily lives. Jean Carl, a member of Team Kenya 2007, gives us some perspective on what it means to be a witness for Christ. Watch and listen to this video clip.

Wanting to Share

We are so blessed, but are we so blessed that we take it for granted? One thing Jean said really stands out: "Our brothers and sisters around the world treasure, not what we hold in our hands, but what we hold in our hearts. We cannot be Christians in isolation. If we have the love of God in our lives, we will *want* to share it. Here is another key – *wanting* to share the good news. We will care even as Jesus cared. Of course the logical place to share and care is in our community and area. So we have an obligation to move from a personal faith to sharing that faith in the community in which we live. While we did a great job on that during the Great Day of Service, we may not be doing so well on a daily basis. An increasing amount of my time is spent with people who have legitimate needs – people who are hurting right here in our community and in our congregation. Yet we lack the available resources to meet most of these needs. This is where the disconnect comes – we simply do not connect the needs of the world with the work of the church when the need exists, and we see it every day.

It is easy to see the need in Kenya. There is no questioning the need among the 73 students we have pictured at the Crossroads. Many of us have responded by paying the tuition for them, and I thank you on their behalf. Still, many are not yet sponsored. Most of us know the benefits of giving to MUST Ministries and to the other local charities. The needs are becoming apparent with the students at Lockheed Elementary and in surrounding communities where we have provided summer lunches and brought onsite Vacation Bible School. But what about the family of Julius Musungu? A distinguished, well-educated emerging leader in the Kenyan community and an active member of this church left us suddenly this week. One who had so much to offer has left three small children for his wife to care for. How many of us have reached out to care for that family? How many of us will? What about putting our hearts and time into caring for others?

The video you saw earlier in the service titled "Nothing But Nets" gives us an opportunity to save a life for \$10.00 you will waste on something else this week. They look like this (show the net), but they can prevent the mosquito bites that could otherwise cause malaria and death. I can see the wheels turning now – Every time we turn around we are asking for money. Yes, I want your money, but I want you to care enough to make a difference in our world because you have

the mind and heart of Christ – not because I ask you for it. I want you to be passionate about strengthening this community of faith - not because it will make any of us look good to the greater church and to the community, but because it is what Christ did and what those with the heart and mind of Christ will want to do.

God's Will vs Our Will

Let's be honest this morning. Some of us are uncomfortable because of all of this emphasis on missions. Let's not get caught up in terminology. Missions, evangelism – both are different sides of the same coin. Reaching out to our world is what we are talking about. I hear comments like, "If we are behind on the budget, why are we spending so much money to support Kenya, MUST, _____, etc." You fill in the blank. Or, "We need to take care of our own first before we do all this for _____." That is a concern we need to address today at this altar.

The more intensely we reach out, the closer we come to the will and mind of Christ. Jesus' example was always to meet the needs of those around him. That is the model for the Church to follow. It defies labels such as "missions" or "evangelism" because it is not programmed. It rather becomes a part of who we are. Most of us want to meet our needs first. Then maybe we will think about the needs of others. That's human nature – not God's. Perhaps we are behind on the budget because we have placed personal desires and goals ahead of the effort to seek and follow God's will for our lives and the life of the church. Perhaps you have withdrawn silently into a wait and see posture because you dislike my style or Brian's, or perhaps we have done or said something that bothers you. You may disagree with the decision to build new facilities here because you cannot connect that decision to the goals we are discussing here. Ministries come from the heart, and if we are in tune with the leading of God, we will have not only new ministries but the right new ministries that make the most difference with the talents and resources God has gifted to us.

I'm sure Peter and the others had reservations about doing things that seemingly did not make sense to them, but they did them anyway. This place is set aside as a place to worship and to prepare the church to go into the world. If we are not coming here for that purpose, then we are missing the meaning of Jesus' great commission and the idea of Acts 1:8 that we *shall* be witnesses. It is not optional for the Spirit-filled Christian. God will call those equipped by the Spirit to something beyond ourselves. For some, that will be a local ministry. For others, that will be places and people most of us have never seen. Follow what God leads you to do, and build relationships as he gives you the opportunity. John Wesley said, "**Go not only to those who need you, but to those who need you most.**"² There is so much need and suffering in the world, sometimes it is difficult to know who needs us most. That's where reliance on the leading of the Holy Spirit takes the guesswork out of discipleship and witness.

Today, and everyday, an average of 15,000 people in Africa become Christians. Why? The Holy Spirit leads average people like you and me to build relationships within which the faith can be shared.

Are You Equipped?

I'm going to say something today that may startle some of you. If you are not being led by the Holy Spirit, please do not attempt to witness to the gospel. That would be like me attempting to do heart surgery. The results would be disastrous to the kingdom. Ask for the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit in your life. Pray and move closer to being what Christ was like. Jesus dealt with people he encountered every day. He did not avoid those who were different, but lovingly set out to meet their needs out of an attitude of love. If we are to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, we have to be authentic recipients of the Holy Spirit and have the courage to share that experience in genuine relationships, wherever God calls or leads you.

Dr. Charles Leber said of us who are the church:

The doors of the church must be closer to the sidewalks. The preaching of the church must go deeper. The sacrifice of the church must be more Christ-like. The worship of the church must mean more actual commitment. The life of the church must rediscover a sense of mission. The ministry of the church must give more upholding comfort. The experience of the church must be more recreative. The fellowship of the church must be more inclusive. The objectives of the church must be bolder and clearer. The branches of the church must be brought into more dynamic unity. The windows of the church must be open wider. The sin of the world must walk freely down church aisles. The pain of mankind must be more evident on church altars.³

In other words, through the power of the Holy Spirit, make a positive difference in your world! The people of God around the world are gathering at his table today to reaffirm faith in the power of God sufficient to overcome all deficiencies in the human condition, including death. You are invited to join the saints of all nations, lands, and peoples in taking the sacrament that professes to the world that we believe in that atoning act of salvation bought at such a terrible price. As you come this morning, I ask you to examine your qualifications to be a witness. Be certain before you leave this place today that you have the assurance of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. Be certain that you are seeking every day to have the mind and heart of Christ trump our human nature. Acknowledge in your life that the name of Jesus is above every name. Bow before Him today, and submit your will to His. Then, and only then, are you equipped to be his true witnesses.

Prayer

Sacrament of Holy Communion

¹ Kelly, Bob. *Worth Repeating*. Kregel Academic and Professional Publishing. 2003. p.231.

² Higl, David A. Theological Editor, The Wesleyan Church, for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology of Northwest Nazarene College (Nampa, ID).] The text for John Wesley's sermons originally came from the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*.

³ Leber, Charles Tudor, *Is God In There?* Fleming H. Revell Co. New York. 1948. p. 35.

