

THE FUTURE OF MISSIONS

INTRODUCTION

Well church, it's time to get into the message today.

Last week we looked at the subject of taking care of your mental health, and I was blown away by the response I had to that message. I received so many comments from different people expressing their gratitude for dealing with mental health. My prayer is that God will continue to use that message online, and use us as a church, to help many people find healing through Jesus Christ. Amen?!

Today, I want to talk to you about missions! It is my hope and prayer that God will speak to your hearts and your minds, and work in us all as he pleases.

I have called this message;

THE FUTURE OF MISSIONS

If you have journeyed with us as a church for a while, you will know that we are a strong missions church. I'm not saying that we get it all right, but missions is really important to us. It is a part of our churches culture.

We have a history of planting churches, sending and supporting missionaries, and have a real heart to impact our local community with the love of Jesus! That is how Living Hope was born.

Recently though, our world has been turned upside down ... Churches have been banned from large physical gatherings. People have been stuck in lockdown. Travel is banned. Financially, churches around the world, ourselves included, have begun to feel the impact of the economic crash. People are struggling. Churches are struggling, and as a result... Missions support is also being affected. What on earth is going on! It feels like everything is falling apart... Or is it?

While the COVID-19 pandemic has created some hard times, for some, tragic times, it is also good to look at what God has been doing beneath the surface. Because there are also some wonderful things that God has been doing in terms of online missions. One pastor has put it like this;

In many ways ... "COVID has been like a mission trip for the church into the digital realm. We have all been on a trip to a place that has felt foreign. We have had to learn some new languages and methods."

And "Turns out, it is not the short-term missions trip we thought it would be, it is becoming more like a long-term mission assignment. We don't all like change, but as they say: necessity is the mother of invention. Maybe this has been God's way of shaking us up and moving us out!" - Carey Nieuwhof.

Let's talk about the future of missions. Please turn with me in your bibles to;

Luke 19:1 (NLT)

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. ² There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich.

³ He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

⁵ When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.”

⁶ Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. (Luke 19:1-6)

Love this story... My first point today is this ...

1. MISSIONS IS MOVING BACK INTO HOMES & COMMUNITIES

The thing that stands out most for me about the story of Zacchaeus, is the fact that Jesus wanted to be a guest in his Zacchaeus' home. Jesus cared about Zacchaeus, and he moved to where he and his family were in order to reach them.

If you read the rest of the verse, it caused some drama with the religious people, who were very put out that Jesus would want to hang out in the home of a notorious sinner and not with them. But Jesus understood the importance of getting the gospel into homes and communities.

Jesus was so good and going to where the people were. Getting into marketplaces, getting into homes, and reaching people. The story of Zacchaeus ends, by Jesus saying this;

⁹ “Salvation has come to this home today...¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.” (Luke 19)

One of the benefits of having the church building off limits over this time, and with gatherings stopped, is that it has reminded us, that God had always wanted us to go out into different places, particularly to homes and households.

God was never confined to a building – to the Temple or a church building – He has always been out ... and moving His people out. Jesus showed this when He found a guy in a tree! So church, Carey Nieuwhof said it like this;

“We need to embrace the home and the community (not the church building) as the hub of ministry.” – Carey Nieuwhof.

One of the things that I think COVID-19 is teaching us, is that we have been pretty addicted to our church buildings as church leaders, and church members. We have

been reminded that you don't need a big building to have church. We have been reminded that ministry, and missions, has always been about reaching into people's homes and into communities.

The old model of what it meant to grow was – come to our facility, and participate in our programs or services! I think we all realize how shallow that is.

In the future, I am praying that as a church, we will be more like Jesus, and get out into the community more, where we will find short guys in trees, maybe somewhere on the Noordhoek Common, and we will become friends, and then we will go grab a coffee with them at their place. Or – in the meantime, grab a coffee at the village roast and drink it socially distanced! That's missions.

Right? All of this has been the theology of the church forever, but it has not always been the practice. Most churches built their ministry around their buildings, COVID has called us out.

Now, don't get me wrong – Christians do need to gather – A great facility has its purpose for gatherings and ministry, but we also need to do more beyond the buildings! Amen?!

Missions is moving back into homes and communities.

2. ALL BELIEVERS MUST EMBRACE THEIR MISSIONS MANDATE

In order to explain this, I thought it would be helpful to share my own personal journey in missions with you.

In my early years of ministry, I had this very particular picture in my mind of what missions was, and who missionaries were! And this picture kind of sums it up...

(Insert picture of white Land Rover)

I knew this for example – all missionaries owned Land Rover Defenders! So if you wanted to be a REAL MISSIONARY – you had to have a Land Rover Defender! I share that as a joke of course, but, it was true, most of the missionaries I knew owned one of these!

So just like so many other things in life, when it comes to missions, there are so many stereotypes ... and our minds immediately conjure up all kinds of pictures of what a missionary is ... and what missions is ... and for a while, when I thought of missions... I always thought of white Land Rover Defenders, well used bibles, jerry cans, and the African bushveld! Because that was my experience of missionaries ...

In my early days as a Christian, I went on a number of missions trips into Africa. I got to travel to Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, a few times over! And I have got a lot of good stories to share...

(Insert picture of missions collage)

I have travelled in Land Rovers back and forth across the Zambezi River multiple times... dodging crocs and hippo's ... to dig boreholes for remote villages without running water... I learnt how to purify undrinkable flood water during the disaster in Mozambique with a Relief team from Texas... We made safe drinking water for a few villages there.

I learnt how to hitchhike a lift on red cross helicopters. I learnt to get out of some very sticky situations with vehicles... A high lift jack fixes everything! I tried to help raise a Christian radio station mast... With two tractors and a Landy! I learnt how to preach with interpreters ... ate some very interesting meals ... I learnt how to always grab a hot shower whenever you can... and I made friendships to last a lifetime ...

So my early experience of missions – was filled with aid work, land rovers, supporting missionaries, preaching under trees, and in little open air churches ... and it was great, but I had my own paradigm of missions. Because when you boil it right down, what is missions? Jesus gives us the answer in His Word;

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)

This is the command of Jesus. The Great Commission! And if this becomes our definition of missions, as it should be, missions should not just be some teeny tiny department of the church, it should not only be for certain believers, who drive white Land Rovers, it should be the primary purpose of being a Christ follower.

The Great Commission reminds us that each one of us are missionaries.

Each one of us, are “sent ones.” Each one of us are called to make disciples of every people group, immersing them into the life of God, teaching them how to relate to our heavenly father, through the Son and the Spirit.

Now, I will be the first to admit, that there is a danger here ... Because if we just consider everything to be ‘missions’... then it is very easy to let nothing be missions. One pastor and missions coach says it like this;

“When everything is missions, nothing is missions” – Danny Spitters

I know that some people feel it is more accurate to say, that as Christians we are all called to be *‘witnesses and disciple makers’* but the Latin word *‘Missio’* refers particularly to *‘sending’* or *‘being sent.’* So if we see everything in the church as missions, that it is easy for this task can be obscured and forgotten.

Missiologists will tell you, being a missionary means;

- a) **Being ‘sent’**
- b) **‘Across a boundary’ to ‘where the gospel is not known’**
- c) **To see church planted, that...**
- d) **Can reach that region with the gospel once the missionary leaves**

And I totally agree with this... But there is another danger, and that is for Christians to think that we can outsource the great commission, our responsibility, to a select few – ‘our missionaries.’ Here is my concern;

When we leave missions to the brave few, the rest of us mostly fail to obey the great commission.

If we are honest, many of us would all prefer to pay someone to do a job we don't want to do ourselves. And so let's be honest, in a world where it is becoming increasingly hostile toward Christians who are viewed as judgemental and intolerant of others, finding reasons to outsource missions and evangelism is alluring.

So, what am I saying;

The great commission is a co-mission, a corporate mission, it is not a solo-mission for a handful of people. We are all meant to be a part of it, one way or another.

Some of us will need to be specifically sent to particular places where the need for “missions” is great, and we might need to get you a Land Rover to get you there and back safely! and it is good and right for the local church and individual believers to support people in this calling. But let us never forget, missions is not the of job the a select few, it is the privilege and responsibility of each and every single believer.

So the next time you think about missions, I want to challenge your paradigm. Gods ultimate missionary might surprise you. Perhaps they don't own a white Land Rover. Perhaps it is the kid down the road who does not own a landcover, just a skateboard, he does not have an old well used bible, just a bible app on his phone. Yet he has a passion for reaching the lost!

Missions is moving into homes & communities;
All believers must embrace their missions mandate;

3. MISSIONS METHODS MUST CHANGE, BUT THE MESSAGE STAYS THE SAME

The world is changing. Culture is shifting. In order to reach a changing culture, the church needs to change. Rapidly.

But don't misunderstand. We don't change the message. Just the method. You can see it like this;

The message is sacred. The method is not.

This week I recorded a Podcast with Pastor Tristan about the parable of the lost sheep. Just a short while ago there was no such thing as a Podcast. We are using new methods to share the gospel.

The world is constantly changing. We don't know what the future will look like, but we know that our methods will have to change as the world changes. It's nothing new.

When the printing press came along – it was a whole new ball game! It actually eventually led to the reformation.

When radio and broadcast technology arrived – and we were able to transcend borders, even into 'closed' countries, it enabled large scale revival.

Think about it, the ability for us to upload worship services to YouTube in the mornings, have worship on Facebook in the evenings, to WhatsApp one another prayer requests during the week, to pray together on Zoom on Tuesday nights, all of this has made ministry possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a very real sense, it seems that the online technology we have was the God ordained lifeline that kept churches connected, and in some cases, surviving.

So for churches to have a strong missions thrust into the future, they will have to creatively make new technology a part of their strategy. It is literally a watershed moment for the church and it's missions purpose.

James White said;

“I think the pandemic may have just saved the church in many ways. It got us out of a Sunday/weekend-centric approach. It forced us online and into social media, it also made us open to change, being creative when we were not creative before, and open to innovation. It also got us back down to raw mission—what is our mission? You add all of that up, and it is dangerously close to an awakening.” - James Emery White

Stop thinking social media, start thinking social ministry & missions.

It's time to rethink “missions.” As I write this, Facebook has more than 2.6 billion monthly active members, which by population, makes it one of the largest countries in the world. Here is my question... Who's sending missionaries to that country? Who's planting churches there? To be effective in a media-driven culture, we need to stop thinking of missions solely in *geographical* terms and start thinking *virtually*.

Over the past few weeks we have been putting our church services on YouTube, some of those services have been watched by about 600 people. On facebook, our one evening service called “Worship on the couch” was watched by over 1,000 people.

We have a whole new missions field, and since arriving in this new world, we have been reaching people we never thought possible.

Now don't get me wrong, in-person services are important, and one day, we will all be able to gather together as a bigger church family again – but we want to keep reaching out into the online world – because this is where the people are!!!!

So I want to quickly share a project with you that I hope you will partner with us in;

Give to our LIVE STREAMING PROJECT

As you probably know, we have been releasing pre-recorded services online on YouTube, like this one that you are watching right now. But our hope is to transition to LIVE STREAMED services. In order to do this we are needing some more hardware and software equipment. Probably around R60,000's worth. Because we don't have that money right now – we are holding back. But if you would like to give toward that, please let us know. It would need to go towards that specific fund.

Missions methods must change, but the message remains the same.
Stop thinking social media – start thinking social missions!

4. WE MUST INSPIRE & EQUIP THE NEXT GENERATION TO LIVE ON MISSION

I wish I had more time to address this point today, but I want to say just a few things. Young people today are questioning a lot about missions, and we as a church have a responsibility to engage with them about this, and to help them catch the heart of God's mission on earth. Many of them simply have real questions and genuine concerns.

They are questioning the ethics of missions - They are wrestling with the churches missions past and it's tainted association with colonialism.

They are asking questions about how we go about missions funding with integrity. In a recent missions report by BARNA, the big Christian research company in the US, they found that Millennials and younger Christians agreed that missions was very important – but they had a lot of concerns.

They think tent-making is great – but they think tent-faking is terrible.

So I would just say this; if you are a more mature believer, who like me is convinced of our missions mandate by God – I encourage you to help inspire younger believers to catch your heart. There is a lot of important work to be done in healing the churches missions reputation, and helping inspire the next generation to become passionate about God's mission on earth.

Parents – you've also got a responsibility here. I know there are some of us who would be a little cautious of our own kids becoming missionaries. We have our own dreams for them – I encourage you to allow them to chase God's dream for their life!

So let me wrap things up...

HOW IS GOD CALLING YOU INTO MISSIONS?

Is God perhaps calling you to get involved in His mission in a different way? I enjoyed talking with Mike & Kim earlier – to show you how they were using the

opportunity they have to get on mission with God – by reaching children online with the Alpha Course. What about you? It does not have to be complicated you know. Here is some practical ideas;

1. Love your neighbour

We can all do this, right?! You can do this on your own, or you can help volunteer through Living Hope. There is a ton of things you can do here!

2. Share your faith

I am going to boast for a moment here about my brother in law – Clinton. Clinton is just a normal guy, who loves Jesus. He works hard every day in his job in the financial sector. But whenever he gets the chance, he shares his faith. A few years ago, he took on the role as a radio presenter on CCFM, a local Christian community station, and he shares his faith! And over the past few years, literally, Clinton has led thousands of people to faith in Jesus Christ. Clinton does not get paid a cent by our church. He is not an official missionary of our church. He does not even own a Land Rover. He is just a normal guy, who by day works hard to earn and income and support his family, and in the evenings, he is like a missions super-hero!

How is God calling you to share your faith?

3. Pray for missionaries

Last year, we as a church lost a great man of faith – Ed Newman. Just before he left for a short term trip to the US, which none of us knew he would not return from, he wrote me an email – which he sent to some of our missions committee as well. These were his words about praying for our missionaries;

“The greatest thing we can do for our people is to pray for them. This is critical for accomplishing God's plan and for their well-being. If you are committed to being a ‘prayer warrior’ for a particular missionary (or missionaries), bless you; this is an outstanding task to undertake for the Kingdom.” – Ed Newman

Here is another we can do;

4. Support missionaries

Let me read to you what God's word says in Romans 10;

¹³ “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:13-14)

This is what my brother Ed said about this passage in his email to me...

“Realize that this passage says nothing about geography; believers can be called to missions right in their own "backyard". More important, our obligation is to support them financially as well as prayerfully.”

He ended his email like this;

“We are all called to missions, this is what Matthew 28 teaches us, but since we cannot all go, we are all OBLIGATED to provide support for our people who do. After prayer, invariably, the second greatest need for our missionaries is financial support. Don't give because of the "wrong headed" idea that you are so charitable, but because of the OBLIGATION to God and the "someone" who went to serve in your stead.”

“And please remember; we are all missionaries when it comes to our willingness to show the Gospel, by both deed and word, to the world around us.”

Amen.

Let's pray.