

Taking the Gospel around the world from Here at Home

Week 11

Slightly edited from CHBC's Core Seminar

Welcome.

We've laid the theological groundwork, building a biblical view of missions.

Now we're thinking about the practical outworking of it. What does missions look like? Last week we talked about the challenges and opportunities in working in a closed countries – those that are fairly hostile to the gospel and outlaw Christian ministry work.

But what if we had the opportunity to minister to peoples of those closed countries in our neighborhood or city? What is many of those same groups are here – and may even be able to take the gospel with them from here back home to Ashgabat...Ankara...or Riyadh?

Today we want to think about doing cross-cultural ministry here. How can we take part in the work of carrying the Gospel to all nations in Alamance County? Is there a way that we can personally be involved in cross-cultural evangelism? Is there a way we can – as it were – do a “test run” of really gauging our interest and heart for missions, without even leaving the area?

As we go through these, we'll mention lots of practical ways to get started in this work, to help the church come alongside you in it...be thinking of examples from your own life you can share as we go.

Let's first start out with motivations...

WHY GET INVOLVED IN THIS WORK IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Let's start with motivations... We should first ask the question, "Why should we get involved?"

Here are three scripture references that will help us answer that question.

First, **Matthew 28:18-20**. This should be familiar by now in this class.

The Great Commission:

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."

Jesus tells us to go and make disciples of all nations. We are called to go out and engage all nations with the Gospel, to tell them about Jesus and make disciples of Jesus. In 21st century North Carolina, in God's kindness, many of the nations have come to us! So we should take advantage of that opportunity.

Next let's turn to **Acts 1:8**. We also read the following in Acts 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Note the progression here. Jesus says that the witness to his name will start in Jerusalem, then move out to the nearby areas of Judea and Samaria, and then will eventually spread where? To the far ends of the earth.

I think the point that Jesus intended is for the Gospel to go out and spread from the place where the believers were, to the places where they were not.

Whatever it might mean for individual believers, the work of the church in aggregate seemed to be starting right where they were and moving out.

So, a helpful principal this verse points us towards is that if we care about reaching the world with the Gospel, we should start with reaching the part of the world where we live, while having an eye to reach out to the places where the Gospel is less known...all at the same time. Perhaps a helpful corollary is thinking about your family. God has given them to you – we know from scripture we have a particular stewardship to those He's placed so closely in our lives. So we want to pray for our close family who aren't believers, share the gospel with them – but not stop there. We want to keep going.

Finally, let's look at **Luke 10:25-37**. In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus explains what it means to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus is asked, "And who is my neighbor?" After telling the story, Jesus asks, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" It was the Samaritan, who gave sacrificially of his time and resources to help someone completely different from himself. Jesus tells the man, "You go, and do likewise."

The priest and the Levite were too busy with their daily responsibilities to help the man who had been robbed.

I think a helpful application for us then, is to be mindful of those around us who are in need.

We should particularly be aware of the people around us with spiritual needs - they are separated from God by their sin and face God's wrath.

So we should ask ourselves: **Are we so busy with everything that we fail to see the spiritual and physical needs of those around us?** What about the internationals among us? There are countless citizens from those very countries here in NC. They have spiritual need – they need Jesus to save them from their sins. Many also have practical needs related to being transplanted in a foreign context.

Are we too busy to engage them with the Gospel? Are we too afraid to cross cultural boundaries and befriend them and tell them about Jesus?

And of us interested in serving overseas we should think about this question: if we have this opportunity before us here and do not take advantage of it, should we expect ourselves to be fruitful in doing cross-cultural ministry in some remote land?

As we've already noted, part of the WHY – why get involved in this – is because of WHO is here...and the great opportunities we have in Washington to do this type of ministry. But what does that look like? Who is here? And what are the opportunities?

WHO'S HERE? WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO WE HAVE?

So now, let's spend some time thinking about the different opportunities the Lord has given us to reach the nations from here. And while we do, we should thank God for the strategic nature of our position.

We live in a strategic location between the Triad and the Triangle in the most powerful country in the world, that has influence in every corner of the globe. And a nation that historically has been incredibly welcoming to those from persecuted countries. Praise God for this strategic church in this strategic location – that He has deigned to bring the nations to us!

So “who's here?” Who do we have the opportunity to share the Gospel with? (Brainstorm together as a class about what people groups are represented in our region)

Examples from a former missionary from GRBC: When we came back home from the field in Turkey for a stateside assignment, we were living in Cary, NC and were surprised to find that there were *thousands* of Turks living right there in Cary! There were enough of them to support a restaurant, two community centers, and a local market. There are enough Muslims in Alamance county to support a mosque in nearby Burlington. What are we doing to reach out to these people who are made in the image of God?

Where might we encounter internationals?

Of the many internationals that are here in NC, some will stay here in the US indefinitely, and some may go back to their home countries.

Immigrant Workers: Some may be here for the long haul. They may *want* to be, anyway. They may be here to earn money and then send or take it back home to care for families.

International Students: Many will go back to their home countries. Often, a degree with a US university will help them to advance in their home country. They may be doing a year abroad.

Consider what God might do...consider the possibilities of living out Christian hospitality to people from other countries. Of prioritizing Christian hospitality to these international groups.

What would look like for us to show the love of Christ to them by opening up our lives and homes to them? Most internationals that come to the US never see inside an American home. They cluster around others of the same or similar ethnicity simply because that's what's comfortable and easy. What might happen if the Lord chose to use us to bring the Gospel to them, and He brought them to repentance and faith in Christ?

Now, **consider also how many internationals might perceive Christianity.** A Muslim friend from Afghanistan has likely been taught that most westerners are Christians and that they are immoral just like they see in movies. They are likely to have been taught that Christians are blasphemers because they believe in three gods.

So, many of these internationals come with misconceived notions of Christianity that are never corrected. Most don't see Christians living out their faith, and they don't hear the Gospel accurately explained. What a tremendous opportunity to bear witnesses to Jesus, and to directly take part in the Great Commission, from our own city!

If we get to share with them and they come to Christ, praise God! That's wonderful in and of itself. But then think of the possibilities of that person going back to their home country and sharing the Gospel with those around them.

One more thing to consider...consider interacting with a foreign friend who eventually lands a governmental role overseas 10-20 years from now. Do you think it's possible that your Christian words and actions would possibly make that government friendlier to the Gospel? Who knows! We should pray for such interactions and such relationships.

None of this is said to guilt about things you haven't done...but I point these things out to help us think and pray about opportunities we may have right in front of us.

Any questions?

HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

OK, so we have a lot of opportunities to engage internationals here. How do we start? How do we break through cultural barriers to bring the Gospel to these people for God's glory?

In reality, it's not that different from any evangelistic outreach – it's built on relationships // don't over-complicate

I've been fortunate in that many jobs I've had in NC have led to friendships with folks from other countries, such as when I worked for Dillard's in Raleigh. But maybe you don't have that benefit. Or maybe you don't have that many evangelistic opportunities at all – with people

from here or abroad. Many of these suggestions are just general Evangelistic...

We'll consider some of these practical ideas...

First:

A. Consider places that you would be happy (or at least willing) to go to on a regular basis, as part of your regular routine. Examples:

Going to the same person or place for hair cuts;

Going to the same checkout line (person) at the same grocer;

Going to the same restaurant for discipleship meetings

By making something part of your regular schedule, it will be more manageable and sustainable.

And if God seems to have pricked your heart for a particular people group or country, go to the restaurants, grocery stores, shops those people own and run...befriend them and love them.

B. Leave room in your schedule to meet and get to know internationals. Just practically, as you think about ways to invest regularly, try to carve out that extra time needed to have conversations. Make it a priority.

C. Right-size your expectations. Don't expect every initiated relationship to turn into a deep evangelistic opportunity. Don't view people as a project. Love them as men and women created in God's image. They will know if you view them as a project. Rather, build a relationship with them and establish trust.

D. In your conversations, be open about your faults – your sins. Show what it means to realize that you're a sinner who has been

forgiven by the work of Jesus! Talk about your struggles, but then point them to see that in Christ you have hope. Talk to them about how your local church is helping you to shoulder these burdens.

E. If they are willing, introduce them to your family, your church, your friends. Know that there might be hidden barriers such as “I won’t come to eat at your home because the meat won’t be halal,” but have others help you navigate those waters. Enfold them into your normal lives...talk more in the next section about church.

F. Show that you are willing to learn about them, their beliefs, their family, their history, etc. Ask lots of questions. Don’t just show interest, but BE interested in their lives, background, etc. Be open about sharing about your own as well. Pray that they would ask reciprocal questions.

G. Don't be afraid to talk about Jesus. Talk about what you're learning at church on Sundays. Talk about your small group. Talk about what the Lord is teaching you in your daily devotionals. Not all, but many internationals are more open to talking about spiritual things. They're in a new context and willing to learn about a new culture and new beliefs. They come already wanting to broaden their horizon and worldview. If your friend is a Muslim or Hindu, he or she would probably expect religion to be a normal part of conversation anyway.

Now a warning...

H. Beware of long, heated debates. At the end of the day, all you have to offer is the Gospel. Debates often get nowhere. Points are fired back and forth, and there's increased motivation for more ammunition each time. So, be careful about debates, and always think of ways to steer people back to the cross of Christ. I'm not saying "ignore your friend's

questions." But, help people to understand why they're asking questions. Get at the root of their questions or else they will never end.

I. Pray for opportunities to share the Gospel. Pray for their salvation!

Q: Other strategies/practical ways to get started?

REACH OUT AS A CHURCH [How can our local church help?]

Praise God, we are not called to go about this work of cross-cultural evangelism on our own. God has given us this local church where we can learn to serve our Lord together.

1. Get to know members of GRBC from different cultural backgrounds.

This will help you to relate to others from different cultures. It will help you wade through those waters of what Christianity is vs. what American culture is.

You'll start to learn to "contextualize" while still maintaining a strong faithfulness to the Gospel.

These friends are also great people to involve in ministering to internationals. It's good for your international friends to see that Christianity is not just for Americans... the Gospel has power to save *all* who believe - from every nation and tongue! Accepting Christ does not mean ignoring your cuisine, your culture, your history.

2. Allow yourself to be discipled by others who are comfortable reaching out to internationals. You don't need to look for a "template" or "formula" for international ministry – in fact, you shouldn't! Everyone is different, but at least you can observe what types of questions people ask to break the ice and get to know others.

3. Get members of the opposite gender involved. Especially if you start to get to know internationals of the opposite gender, get others in the church involved. Particularly in international cultures, it is often inappropriate for men and women to form close relationships.

4. Particularly if you are limited in time, involve others – utilize "swarm hospitality"

5. Get others to pray for you and involve them in social events with internationals. Also, **invite** your friend to come to church. Explain that you don't have to be a Christian to come. See if you can schedule a lunch afterwards, possibly with a couple others from church.

Offer to answer any questions they have about the service. That's a great way for them to understand the Gospel better. It's also a good way for them to see the love that Christians genuinely have for each other.

Many internationals may view our most evangelistic events as quasi-cultural events...

BE PREPARED//HOW DO WE EQUIP OURSELVES FOR MIN.

How can we prepare ourselves for this ministry? How can we better equip ourselves for conversations with them? Often, they will be coming from very different religious beliefs than us. You might come across Muslims, Buddhist, post-moderns, nominal Catholics, Animists,

Hindus, Secularists... you name it. How do we equip ourselves to talk to them?

Know the Gospel.

That's the most important thing. What does Paul say about the Gospel?

VOLUNTEER TO READ ROMANS 1:16

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

Build a vision for “all nations” in your mind. VOLUNTEER TO READ Revelation 7:9.

Do you desire to see that? Do you desire to see all nations worship God as He deserves? Realize that's something God *will* certainly accomplish. Pray for the people that you meet, that they might be included in that gathering of worshippers in heaven! When cultural barriers seem high and Christianity might seem impossible for them to embrace, remind yourself that people from your friend's nation *will certainly* be represented in that worship scene in heaven.

Read about international news events

Realize that there's a lot more happening in the world. Realize that an earthquake or political revolution happening in country X is very possibly affecting your friend's relatives in that country. Pray for those countries and the people there in response to the news, and talk to your friend about how and why you're praying.

Learn about your friend's country, culture, and religion.

We mentioned the idea of showing an interest in men and women you're evangelizing...but be truly interested and invested in them and their background. Spend time researching. Learn about Gospel reach in those places at www.thejoshuaproject.net.

Be willing to ask questions of your friend and show that you want to learn. Find a restaurant that cooks their cuisine and take them. Even if you don't have friends, start to build up your international awareness. Pray in your family or with others about one country per week (Operation World, etc).

Just another logical step:

Talk to others at church and research about your friend's culture and religion.

This is a great way to learn from missionaries. It will also encourage your friend to see that you're taking steps to engage people around you with the Gospel by crossing cultural barriers. Start to learn what some stumbling blocks might be to Christianity for them.

SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITIES

So, hopefully we're starting to be equipped to reach out to internationals in our midst. Before we close, I want to list some specific ways that you can get involved with international ministry:

- The ESL ministry
- Go on short term missions trips to open your eyes to the opportunities that exist here!

Ask: what other opportunities might we have at church or outside the church?

CONCLUSION

So, we have many opportunities to take part in the Great Commission here in NC. It's not easy, and it'll take members of this church working together for the sake of the Gospel.

Let's pray for God to be glorified in this work. Remember that ultimately, we desire to see God glorified as people from all nations bow before His throne.

PRAY.