

Our Motivation for Missions | Psalm 96

Faith Evangelical Free Church | 1.9.22

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I am excited to be here this morning, with you all, because today we get to do something special, something that speaks to the very core of our identity as believers in and followers of Jesus Christ.

Today we will commission one of the families of our church to return to Indonesia and continue their work and their calling as missionaries. In just a bit we'll invite them up to share a little of their story, and then we'll pray for them and bless them as they prepare for their departure, hopefully and Lord willing sometime in the next few weeks.

But before we get to all that, I want to take a few minutes to talk about why we as a church “send missionaries” out into the world. Why do we encourage and equip individuals and families to uproot their lives and replant themselves in places and among people who don't know very much about Jesus or what it means to be saved by Him? Why do we send and support so many of our own beloved friends and family to live halfway across the world, building new relationships, and seeking opportunities to share the Gospel of Christ?

“Missions” and the sending of missionaries is a practice that is often misunderstood, and quite honestly gets a lot of bad press (and if we're honest, some of that bad press is deserved). And to be sure, there is plenty about this thing called “missions” that is very odd. If you're joining us this morning and you're not a believer in Jesus, you may think this is all pretty weird. And even if you are already a Christian, it is entirely possible that missions is one of those things that you've never really understood and that you mostly hope no one ever asks you to get too involved in.

My hope is that I can provide everyone with a little clarity what we mean when we talk about missions, and why it can be a good, transformative, profoundly beautiful thing. And no matter where you're at today, whether you're not sure what you think about Christianity or you've been a Christian for 50 years, getting a better perspective on missions – on evangelism, or sharing the story of Jesus with others – is important, because ultimately we believe missions is something God invites everyone to be a part of. Because at its most basic, fundamental level, “missions” is simply and joyfully embracing the command to ***tell everyone, everywhere, everything you can about God.***

It's about expressing how good, how glorious, and all the reasons we have to rejoice about who God is and how He loves us. When we are properly engaged in missions, we are drawing people's attention to Jesus. It's not forcing our culture upon another, or requiring worship to look and sound a specific way. It's not about growing the number of Evangelical Free Churches, or setting Christians up as heroes of the world.

When we participate in missions, whether right here in Manhattan or around the world, all we really want to do is seek out opportunities to ***tell everyone, everywhere, everything we can about God.*** Because He is too good and loving and wonderful to keep to ourselves. And it is that passion to share something so incredible with the world that drives our desire to engage in mission.

We could easily confirm this conviction about missions from almost any book of the Bible. All of Scripture speaks to the calling to share what we know about God with the world. But this morning we're going to focus and reflect on how this call to tell others is given to us from Psalm 96.

*1 Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
2 Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.
3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*

Psalm 96 (NIV)

Vv. 1-3 urge all the people of God to...

... *tell everyone, everywhere, everything we can about God.*

Our songs should be full of wonder, our testimonies full of praises and gratitude, and our day-to-day stories be packed with witness to the amazing things God has done in our lives. How has He saved us? How has he changed us? And how might He do the same sort of things in the lives of every single person we meet.

Because make no mistake, this song we sing these truths we share are for everyone – **all** the earth, **all** the nations, **all** the peoples. The marvelous deeds and the offer of salvation from our incredible God are meant to reach the ears and change the hearts of everyone, everywhere, no exception. No one should get left out.

This all-encompassing command to share the marvelousness of God is why Christians all over the world send members of their church communities to different parts of the world. It is why we have missionaries living and sharing the Gospel in Africa, South Asia, Indonesia, Central Europe, and the Caribbean. It's why we shout for joy that the Christians living in places like Brazil, South Korea, India, and the Philippines have sent tens of thousands of missionaries in the last decade to places that Christians from other parts of the world could never hope to gain access to.

Whether we end up sharing the Gospel across the world or across the street, sharing the story of God's salvation and declaring God's glory is absolutely something we're all called and commanded to do. In v2, where it says "*proclaim his salvation day after day*" – that word "proclaim" translates a Hebrew verb that was used to describe "*the duty of a herald who precedes the victor to bring a report to those who wait for good news of the battle.*"

And we live in a world waiting for Good News. Longing for it. Starving for it. And so we go, to our neighbors, to our family, to our friends, to our community, to far away countries and immerse ourselves in beautiful cultures in order to share with all people and all nations the marvelous deeds of God.

The first three verses of Psalm 96 are an Old Testament anticipation of a New Testament command, the mission Jesus would one day give to his first followers, a mission that has been passed down to us:

8 Then Jesus came to them [his followers] and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28 (NIV)

So what do we share? What sort of news do we pass on? What will the missionaries we commission today tell their neighbors and friends in Indonesia, even as we continue to tell our friends and neighbors the same sort of things here in Manhattan?

According to vv4-6, ***we tell everyone, everywhere, everything we can about the greatness of God.***

4 For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.

5 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

6 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Psalm 96

No matter where you go on this earth, people are looking for something greater than themselves to put their hope in. It's a strange, common human yearning: we know we have limitations, we know we are mortal, we know this world is a dangerous place, and we know something is terribly wrong, so we look beyond ourselves for something or someone to save us.

The conviction of Christians, of those who have encountered God the Father, who believe in the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and who have been filled with the Holy Spirit is this: we know and have found the One who is worthy of our hope. Our mission is to pull peoples eyes and hearts and devotions away from all lesser things and show them the splendor and majesty and strength and glory of God.

The Lord made the heavens. The Lord made the earth. The Lord made you, and He made me. The Lord made – through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus – a way for us to enjoy eternal life. There is nothing above His greatness. He is the One that we all long for.

So we share the stories of His greatness. How He is strong when we are weak. How he is comforting when we are wounded. How He is forgiving when we are wrong. How He is loving when we do things we think ought to make us unlovable.

I'd challenge each of you to consider: if someone were to ask you, "what do you think makes God so great", how would you respond? What story from your own life would you choose to share about how God turned out to be greater than anything or anyone else you've ever looked to for hope? I'd encourage you to write that story down. Because sharing that sort of thing is not just for those we send out as professional/vocational "missionaries"...this is for each and every one of us who loves the Lord.

And for those of you still seeking, still trying to decide what you think about God or Christianity, this is an invitation to you: ask some of our believers here what they think. How has God showed up in their lives? We're commanded to be ready to tell you about these things. So, please, ask us for a story. I hope and pray you'll find many so happy and so ready to share.

As we go to the Psalm we also find that we are to ***tell everyone, everywhere, everything we can about giving glory to God.***

*7 Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.
9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.
10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.*

Psalm 96

We want to invite everyone, everywhere to a celebration of the Lord of glory. We want to bring all we have and all we are to offer the King of Creation. We want to be absolutely blown away by His splendor.

I love v. 10. "*Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."* Period. No debate. This is a fact of the universe. God alone is sovereign and there is no challenger. All glory – all worship, all devotion – is rightly given to Him.

And yet no one is dragged before God. He is not a dictator or tyrant. The word "ascribe" in vv7-8 translates a word that in Hebrew appears as an imperative, a desperate plea to anyone who will listen to choose wisely and come before this glorious Lord willingly.

This is another reason we send people out to tell the story and share the Gospel. Because God is not one to force tribute or make demands that override our wayward worship of other, lesser things. No, He wants us to turn to Him and worship Him because we love Him. And so we go and tell people, beg people, explain to people, reveal all we can to people about the gloriousness and worthiness of God.

Finally, we tell ***everyone, everywhere, everything we can about the reason we rejoice in the judgment of God.***

*11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
12 Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
13 Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

Psalm 96 (NIV)

Too often we think about the judgment of God as only something that is to be feared. We talk about it like a threat. For many, missions and evangelism come across as religious bullying. "You better believe in our God, or else you are doomed!"

But this psalm offers a different view of God as judge and our response to His judgement. It reminds us that the reason we follow and obey and worship God is not just to keep the danger of His wrath at bay. It is also to celebrate the salvation that is connected to His judgment for those who love Him. We hope in and long for the righteous and faithful judgement of God. We trust that God loves us, and in Christ we trust the promise of God's forgiveness, and we believe His judgment will ultimately bring about a better world full of goodness.

So as we prepare to send two more missionaries, and their kids, into the world to share with everyone, everywhere, everything they can about the goodness and the gloriousness and the reason for rejoicing in God...I encourage you all to ask yourselves, how might you do the same? Who in your neighborhood, in your family, in your workplace, or anywhere in your sphere of influence needs to hear about the Lord who you love? (And who loves them!) Keep these people in your prayers this week. Seek the courage you need to take advantage of the opportunity God may bless you with to speak to them. Because missions is not just for the few we send to different parts of the world. Missions, outreach, evangelism, sharing the Gospel – it is something that all who love Jesus are meant to try.

So please, this week, go: Tell everyone, everywhere, everything you can about the goodness and gloriousness and joyousness of our God.