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Zane Pratt

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Press Forward

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Habakkuk 2:12-14



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The original of that letter that you just saw from Karen Watson is framed and hanging on a wall at our International Learning Center in Richmond, and it's hanging next to several cork boards that literally contain hundreds of names of missionaries who have given their lives in service for the gospel. The world is not a friendly place for the gospel or for Christians. In fact, it's not a stable place at all. Just think with me about things that are happening even now, things that are making our newspapers. The island of Sulawesi just last week had an earthquake and a tsunami that left over 1600 people dead, and we are pretty certain that the vast majority of those people not only were not believers, but never heard the gospel, never met a Christian, never had a chance to repent and believe in Jesus.

Here in the Americas, the country of Venezuela is a completely failed state, and over 1.6 million refugees have been displaced in Venezuela since 2015. In Africa, both central Africa and Republic and South Sudan are also failed states with incredible chaos and a complete lack of infrastructure. And in central African Republic, half the population has been forced to flee from their homes. In countries like China, India, and Russia, the governments in those countries are cracking down on Christianity in ways we haven't seen in a long time. In China, in fact, it's said that most likely this is the worst persecution that Christians have seen since the cultural revolution, and in India, a Hindu nationalist government is enacting anti-conversion laws that are being used then to persecute Christians who dare to share their faith.

These are just representations of the state of a world that's in rebellion against God. Here in our own country, this country and culture as we all know is becoming increasingly hostile to evangelical Christianity. And it's incredibly hostile to the idea of mission work or evangelism. Seemingly the most immoral thing you can do in our society is to tell somebody that they're wrong and you're right, that you have a faith that they need to embrace in order to be saved. So countries around the world are closed or are closing or are just plain dangerous for missionary work. Here in our country, things are increasingly hostile to it. And yet here we are at Providence Baptist Church having a missions festival. How can we do that? How can we invest our lives in something like this that is so hazardous and risky? How can we even do this with confidence? In so many ways there are voices calling out for us to back up, to sort of lay low, to press pause. It's dangerous. The environment is hostile. Maybe we shouldn't do this. But scripture bids us go forward.

And there's a text of scripture that I want us to look at this morning that helps us to understand both what's going on in the world and why it is we should press forward. That text is Habakkuk 2:12-14. I would like to ask you to look at that passage. For those of you who are using paper Bibles instead of an electronic one, Habakkuk is in the minor prophets. Not minor because they're less important, but just because they're shorter. I hope you realize that. They're major in theological significance, but they're short. So look to Habakkuk 2:12-14. And the Holy Spirit used the prophet Habakkuk to write this.

“Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity. Behold, is it not from the Lord of Hosts that the people labor merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

To understand this passage, you really need to understand the entire book of Habakkuk, and it's actually a good idea anyway. Whenever you read something, if you can read the whole book it's from, that's a good thing. But Habakkuk was a prophet who lived in Judah in seventh century BC, and Habakkuk was upset about what he saw around him. Habakkuk lived in a time of violence, oppression, and sinfulness. A time of immorality and a time when people were worshiping idols and oppressing other people. It was just a bad time. And violence and wickedness prevail. And so at the beginning of the book, he cries out to God and says, “Look, Lord; look at what's happening. Look at how bad things are getting. Look at how your people have gone astray from you. God, you need to do something. God, I want you to step onto the stage and take action.” And God responds and says, “You're right. I will. I'm bringing the Babylonians to invade and conquer you.”

You can just sort of sense Habakkuk going, “Uh, wasn't exactly what I had in mind. Wasn't really what I was looking for. This was not the answer to prayer I was hoping that you would give.” And yet God goes on to talk about the fact that he is going to conquer his own people with the Babylonians, but then he's going to bring judgment on the Babylonians as well.

The fact of the matter is, the day of Habakkuk was a day like today, and really is like a day like any day in history. Things were bad. See, we live in a fallen world. We live in a world of which the affairs of the human race are really dictated by the fact that our first parents rebelled against God, and that sinfulness has characterized our behavior ever since. And so, ever since that time, there have been wars and famines, there's been crime and corruption, all matter of evil flows not from the particular time we're in, but from the fact that we are fallen human beings. There's never been a time when human sinfulness has not been on display, and there's never been a time when God's people haven't complained about the fact that things are bad.

So we're a complaining people. That's true in pretty much every era. And you name a time that you may think was a golden age, and if you go and read from people who lived in that age, they complain. And so in many ways, the Victorian era, the 19th century in the English speaking world was probably the time of which evangelical Christianity was at its height of popularity and influence. All of the Protestant denominations were evangelical in their theology. Missionary effort was applauded not only by the church, but by the U.S. government. Society at large, both in Britain and in America, was at least nominally evangelical Christian. And yet if you read preachers from the 19th century, what you see is them saying, “This is a horrible time. Gosh, I wish it was like the time back when the Puritans were alive.” They probably said, “Wish things were like they were back when the apostles were alive.” But that's just our nature, to complain about stuff like that.

But there's never been a time when it was easy. There's never been a golden age globally. There's certainly never been a golden age for everyone. And so even if you think that it sounds really good, the way I just described things back in the 19th century, if you were African American, that was not a golden age to live. Nor were the 1950s. Any time of history, the sinfulness of the human race has been evident. We're not actually conservative. See, a conservative is someone who wants to go back to some era of the past. And so although my particular positions on political and social events may look conservative, really, I'm not desiring a return to a golden age. The golden age for me, for any of us, our best life, is not now, and it wasn't back then. It's ahead. We're looking forward to a new heavens and a new earth in which things really will be glorious.

But it's simply a matter of fact, and scripture is very realistic about this, human sin has created an environment that's messy and evil and violent and destructive. And that is the context of which we are called on to live out the life that God has for us. Now, the good news, of course, is that when we do see violence or injustice, we can be certain that God will judge that violence. Judgment is coming.

And so the text we just read says, "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity." In this letter there are actually five woes that God pronounces on the Babylonians for their violence on his people Israel. So even though he brought them to bring judgment on Israel, the way they brought about it was still a sin in the sight of God, and he is going to judge them. They were instruments of judgment, but they would face judgment themselves for their violence and cruelty. There is an accounting for every act of injustice. It often starts in this life; it certainly did for the Babylonians. The Assyrians had come in and wiped out Israel, and then the Babylonians came and wiped out the Assyrians, and then the Persians came and conquered the Babylonians. Those who live by the sword often do die by the sword, and it's often seen that even in this life, justice is served. But it certainly will in eternity.

God is judge of all the earth. He will not be mocked and he will not be forded. There is nothing anyone can do, no kingdom, no political party, no social movement, nothing, that can stop the purposes of God. He will judge that which is in rebellion against him and that judgment will be final. So don't be overly distressed when the wicked seem to get away with it. They haven't. Take an eternal perspective. Recognize that vengeance is God's and he will repay. And it's said, even in the face of the worst evil, we should take the perspective of the prophet Habakkuk, who, in chapter three verse 16, says, "I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come on those who invade us." So we need to have confidence that the justice of God will be manifested.

So even in looking at this, we see some fairly typical themes that we see in the prophets. We see the reality that the world is messed up. We see the reality that the people of God have been in rebellion against him. We see the reality that God is judge and King and that he will bring justice on those who have committed injustice. But here's where things start getting really good, because what we also see here is that despite what is going on, in fact, in the midst of what's going on, God is in perfect control. God is sovereign, and he is the one who is orchestrating everything that is happening for his glory and for our good.

And so we read in this passage, “Is it not from the Lord of hosts the peoples labor merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing?” You see, everything that’s going on around you, you see empires conquering smaller empires, you see violence and oppression. Don’t you know that behind it all, there is a sovereign God who is master over all of it? God would bring the Babylonians to exact judgment on the wickedness of Judah. He would also bring the Persians to judge the Babylonians. In fact, God is sovereign king over even the most powerful king or president on earth. God is king over President [inaudible] in Venezuela. He’s king of Assad in Syria and Shi in China and Trump in the United States and Putin in Russia. God is the ultimate authority, and he is the one who’s in control. God, in fact, is the king over earthquakes, tsunamis, famines, and floods. God is in control of all of human history and is orchestrating all of it toward his intended goal.

Now, God is not the author of evil. Scripture forbids us from thinking that. God cannot do that which is evil. But he’s the absolute master of taking things and using them for his purposes. Really, the classic demonstration of this in the Bible was the life of Joseph. You’ll remember that Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery, then lied to his dad and said that he had been eaten by a wild animal. Joseph ended up as a slave and then as a prisoner, but God used that to save the very family that had treated him so badly. So at the very end of Genesis, we read Joseph reflecting on what had happened and talking to his brothers and saying, “You meant it for evil.” So there was real responsibility there. They were responsible for doing what was wrong. He said, “But God meant it for good.” It’s not that God did a double take and managed to find a way to save the day. God meant it for good. He was sovereign even through that situation for this purpose, for the saving of many lives. God is in control over all things.

And he uses all things to advance his glory and to accomplish our good. But here’s the rub. What God thinks is good for us is not always what we think is good for us. And so just as God did not answer Habakkuk’s prayer quite the way Habakkuk wanted, a foreign invasion and conquest was not his solution to dealing with the problem of wickedness among the people of God, so God is after, often, better things for us than we are for ourselves. See, God has indicated in his word what he’s after for us. God has promised us certain things. God’s definition of our best good is, first and foremost, that we be conformed to the image of Jesus. That he make us like Christ.

We’re actually told this in Romans 8: “Whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” That’s your destiny. That’s my destiny as a follower of Jesus. And it really makes sense. You’ll remember that God created Adam and Eve in his likeness, in his image, for the display of his glory; that Adam and Eve messed up that image when they rebelled against him; that Jesus is himself the perfect image of the invisible God. In Jesus the glory of God is most clearly seen because Jesus is God himself as a human being. But not only then was he the perfect representation, the perfect picture, of God, he was also the perfect representation of what it means to be human in God’s image, as God in human flesh. He now is at work in us to make us like himself, and when we see him face to face, we’ll be like him. We’ll be perfectly conformed to his image and we’ll reflect that image for all of eternity.

And so what God's up to now is doing whatever is necessary to make us more like him. And just as the sorts of things necessary to make an athlete really good at their sport, many of those things are pretty uncomfortable, so God may very well bring things into our lives that, in our mind, aren't exactly comfortable, but God as a good Father knows are the things that we need to make us more like him. And so God does not promise anywhere that we'll be safe. God does not promise we'll be healthy. He does not promise that we'll be comfortable. He does not promise how long we'll live. In fact, one thing we know is that at some point, unless he comes back first, we will all die. But God does promise to make us like Jesus, and that's what God thinks is good for us. And so God will bring the things into our lives that he knows will make us like him. So just as he knew that what Israel needed was a Babylonian invasion. They didn't like it, but that's what God in his wisdom and grace and love knew what was the best thing, so also God will do that for us. God promises to conform us to the image of Jesus and he promises to bring us safely home.

And even if we do die in his service as our sister Karen did, we know that she is right now having actually a much better time than any of us. That she is in a place of glory that we can't even begin to imagine. By the way, he also, along the way, gives us the extra privilege that we get to be used for his glory, but our comfort and even our physical survival are not his primary concerns. God's in control. He's even in control of the bad things that happen. And our serenity is rooted in his sovereignty. Because he is in control, we can rest in peace even in things that are not easy for us to experience.

Where all this is going, though, is one of the most dramatic statements in scripture, and that is the statement that this God who is in control is bringing history that this end, that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. This is the best part of all. See, God is glorious. Intrinsically glorious. And one of our greatest needs is for us to grasp the bigness and the excellence and the perfection and the beauty of God. Everything about him is magnificent and weighty and perfect. Glory is not something God puts on. An earthly king or queen looks just like anybody else if they're wearing ordinary clothes. To look kingly or queenly, they have to put on an incredible robe and this crown on their head that has lots of jewels in it, and they sit in a golden chair and there's a lot of music and it's all external. They're just a human being like the rest of us otherwise. That's not the way it is with God.

God needs no robe or crown to be glorious. It's intrinsic to who he is. Glory is what God is. His very being is infinitely glorious and all of his attributes are infinitely glorious. Such is the brightness of his glory that we could not bear the sight. Think about the response of men and women in scripture. Some of the godliest men and women of history who have caught just the faintest glimpse of the glory of God. Where have they ended up? They've ended up on their faces. They've ended up awestruck. In fact, when Moses asked to see the face of God, God said, "You can't handle it. I'm gonna hide you in the cleft of a rock with my hand and pass by you, but you can't look at my face, because if you do, it literally would burn you up. It would destroy you."

And yet this is our destiny. This is some of the majestic perfection of his glory, that it will be our deepest satisfaction and our greatest delight for all eternity. The thing that makes heaven wonderful is not streets of gold or gates of pearl. The thing that makes heaven amazing is God himself, and God will be our delight for all eternity. That's what makes heaven heaven, is the presence of God. And God is passionate for the display of his glory. Now, we can't glorify God in the sense of making God more glorious. You can't add to infinity. You can't make infinity bigger. We can't add to the glory of God, but we are to display and worship and love and adore and enjoy the glory of God, and God is passionate to have his glory displayed. God created the world for the display of his glory. If you've ever heard in Sunday School or from anybody else that God created the world and then us because he was lonely, please just forget that. Just remove the thought from your mind.

God has never been lonely. God has never had a need at all. God has always been infinitely just extravagantly happy as God in the fellowship of the Trinity and has never needed company. He's never sat around going, "Hmm, I'm feeling kind of lonely right now. I think I'll make somebody." That wasn't what happened. God made the world to display his glory. God made us as men and women in his image to reflect and represent his glory. And since the fall, since we've messed up the image of God and messed up the whole created order, God has been at work redeeming a people for himself, and why is he doing it? Ephesians 1 tells us that he's doing this to the praise of his glory. In fact, it tells us that God the Father sent Jesus the Son to redeem us, and the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to seal us and to be the guarantee of our inheritance, why? Again, from Ephesians 1, to the praise of his glory. It's one of those phrases that keeps popping up again and again in Ephesians 1.

The earth already is full of the glory of God. Already is. As I've said, everything God has made has been a reflection of his glory. Just as art reflects the genius of the artist, so this amazing creation reflects the amazing wisdom and goodness and power of our God. But the knowledge of the glory of the Lord is not. It's because we as human beings have our minds darkened by sin. It's because we were in rebellion against him that the glory of God is on display but is not recognized or known. But the day is coming, the day is coming when the earth will be filled not just with the glory of the Lord, but the knowledge of that glory.

So how's that gonna happen? When you read the Old Testament and then read the New Testament and see how they fit together, you clearly see in the Old Testament an anticipation of a day. The day is coming. It's called the Day of the Lord. It's the day the Messiah would come. It's the day the Holy Spirit would be poured out. It's the day that all things would be made new. It's the day that God will assert his kingship over all the earth. But as you get into the New Testament, you begin to realize that actually the day of the Lord is sort of a two stage process. Jesus came first and he's coming again, and in between those times, the glory of the Lord is advancing as the knowledge of Jesus advances. Remember that Jesus is the ultimate picture of how glorious God is. In Jesus, we see most clearly his character. In the cross of Christ, we see the perfect holiness and justice of God and the perfect love and mercy of God come together in a way that fully satisfies both, and the glory of God is displayed in that most unlikely of places.

And so the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth. And Jesus would say toward the end of his life, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." In seeing Jesus, we see the glory of God. And now the glory of God is displayed in the advance of the gospel to the ends of the earth. See, another element in that day of the Lord was it would also be the day that God would extend his redeeming purposes beyond just one nation to all nations, to all the peoples on earth. And that's what's happening now in this period, the time between times. This time between the first and second coming of Jesus. Is that God has sent his people to the ends of the earth to share the good news of salvation in Christ. See, in the gospel, what we're doing here is not simply, as it were, selling eternal fire insurance. What we are doing is declaring his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all people, Psalm 96:3.

Missions and evangelism are themselves an act of worship. And so as we share the gospel, we are declaring the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. As we share the gospel, we are extolling the glory of this God who is holy and who hates sin and who is merciful and gracious and who loves sinners. We see the glory of God looking at us in our sin, because all of us have rebelled against God and deserve his judgment and wrath. We see his glory displayed in becoming a man to live the life we should have lived in our place as our substitute, and dying the death we deserve to die in our place, as our substitute, bearing on himself the wrath of a holy God against sinful people, and then rising again from the dead, displaying his glory, and conquering death itself as well as sin and hell. Ascending to heaven, interceding for his saints, promising he's gonna come again, and pouring out his Holy Spirit on his people whom he then sends into all the world precisely for the purpose of declaring the repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name, of being his witnesses, of sharing the gospel among all the peoples of the earth.

And so we are participating now in the spread of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as we engage in global missions. The problem is that there is still a huge chunk of the world that has never heard that good news. You heard it earlier in this service. At least three billion people are among groups of people, ethnic groups, with no witness to the gospel. Three billion people, by the way, is more people than were alive on the planet when I was born. Now that's just the population of unreached people groups. There's many, many more people who technically may have access to the gospel, but have still never heard it. And so God's agenda is to spread the knowledge of his glory to the ends of the earth. His method is the mission of his people, and we have not yet fulfilled that mission.

We go to the ends of the earth to declare the glory of God and the gospel. We also go to summon the nations to give God the glory due his name. In many ways, as I heard a preacher once say, what we're doing in missions is recruiting for the choir. We're recruiting for the choir of heaven. We're recruiting for the choir that is giving God the glory that he is due. God is glorified whenever a sinner is saved, and sinners are saved to join in giving God glory. And one day there will be that multitude that no one can count, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, worshiping God and giving him glory, and we will never grow tired of worshiping that God.

So just to sum it all up, the world is a chaotic place. The nations seem allied against us. Evil seems ascendant in so many places. The work is hard, but God's in control. God's already displaying his glory in the salvation of many in totally unlikely places around the world, and the day will come when all peoples will have representatives around his throne. The day will come when there will be no place left on this planet where the glory of the Lord is not known. And when he comes back, then every eye will see him and every knee will bow before him.

Our ultimate motivation in doing all this work is a passion and a desire to see God receive the glory that is due his name. That's our ultimate motivation. Just as God himself is our biggest and highest and strongest love, you remember the greatest commandment that summarizes all the commandments is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, so also a passion for his glory is what keeps us going and keeps us on course. I've seen many missionaries come and go through the years, and it's always interesting to see the consequences of people's motivation.

Mission work is hard. Guilt will not sustain you. If you go because someone has guilted you into thinking, "I've gotta go do this," then you won't stick around. You won't even always love the people. It is right and good to love your neighbor as yourself. But you'll often find as you go to the mission field that the people don't seem very lovable to you. By the way, you aren't either, but the fact is, people often don't seem very lovable to us, and particularly when you're trying to share the gospel with people who don't initially seem to wanna hear it, can be very frustrating. You can wonder, "Why am I even here?" But God will never stop being glorious. He will never fail you and he will always be worth it. And so a passion for the glory of God is ultimately the motivation that produces and sustains effective missionary service.

So when you find yourself discouraged or doubting whether this whole missions thing is actually worth it, go back to your first love. Focus on his glory and be consumed again with a holy passion for him. Rest in his sovereignty and remember the promise that this task, spreading the knowledge of his glory to the ends of the earth, is the one thing guaranteed to succeed. Everything else is gonna burn. But this task will always be accomplished.

So what does this mean, then, for Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina in 2018? First thing I would urge you, encourage you, don't let the chaos and depravity of the world discourage you from the mission of God. Don't let the scariness of the world out there keep you silent or keep you home. It's always been this way. Until Jesus comes back, conditions will never be ideal. Don't wait and don't hold back just because it's hard or dangerous. People would ask us, "Is it dangerous over there?" Of course it's dangerous over there, but what does that have to do with anything? Our lives are not for ourselves. We do not exist for our own purpose. We're all going to die one day or see Jesus face to face in some way, and what we're supposed to do with this life now is invest it in that which is eternally significant. So don't let the difficulty of the work or the danger of the world keep you back from obedience.

Second, trust his sovereignty even when it is in evident. My guess is when the Babylonians invaded Judah, they did not particularly feel like God was in control. It didn't look like God in control to them; it looked like everything out of control. And we may not understand what he is up to ever in this life. But something that helped me sort of wrap my mind around who God is and who we are and this whole issue of trusting his sovereignty actually came in a point of parenthood. My kids are grown now, but they were once little, and I still remember when my daughter was about two years old. We lived in a place where the electrical sockets were round, not flat like Americans' are. They're two round prongs. And the holes for those were almost exactly the same size and shape as a two-year-old's finger. So it was obvious to my daughter that the purpose of those holes was for her to stick their finger in them. It was obvious to us that that was not the purpose of those holes, nor the purpose of her finger, and we needed to do whatever necessary to keep her from doing that. Right? We're being good parents here.

Think about it from her point of view. Every time she does something that looks inviting, natural, obvious to her, her parents are these mean, awful people who stop her, won't let her do it. Sometimes stop her with a certain amount of vigor, should we say, and give her incentive not to try again. And so to her, this is just, "What's wrong with those big people? Why are they being so mean to me?" When in fact we were saving her life. And if you think about it, the distance of understanding between the two-year-old and adult is small compared to the distance of understanding between any of us and an infinite and all-knowing God.

And so God may very many times be up to something that is for your good, and you are simply incapable of understanding it because you don't have his perspective. But we need to trust God not just when things are comfortable for us, but when they aren't. We need to trust God when it looks like everything's going bad because God is sovereign and wise and good. Let me add to this. In many ways, this is the bedrock of missionary motivation. If we didn't believe God is sovereign, we could not go to the nations. If we didn't believe that God was going to open doors that are shut, we couldn't go, and if we didn't believe that God was going to save people who look humanly unreachable and utterly resistant, we couldn't go. It's because I believe that God saves sinners, God raises the dead, and he does it everywhere on earth that I am emboldened to take the gospel to some of the places we have been that were I to name them you would say, "Why in the world would you go there?"

But I will say this also, that what we have seen as we have engaged in mission work is that every single place we have gone, planted our lives, learned the language, shared the gospel, built relationships, without exception we've seen people come to Jesus. Without exception. And so it's not that some places are simply too hard and it's not that some people are simply too resistant; it's simply that we've been disobedient. The issue is not the resistance; it's our obedience when it comes to gospel fruit.

But we're only gonna be able to do this if we cultivate our passion for the glory of God. Missions flows out of worship, so we need to read the word, pray, and meditate much on God. We need to be in the habit of worshipping God. We need to sing his praises throughout every day, and then we need to let him be the standard by which we evaluate every other desire that we have in our lives.

One of the things that has always excited me is that this church, Providence Church, is a missionary sending church. You've sent us. You've sent many others throughout the years. My prayer for this church is that it continues to be a missionary sending church. In fact, I pray that Providence becomes a slightly scary place to come. People are sort of nervous about coming here because it has the reputation, if you get with those people, who knows where you're gonna end up in the world? You hang out with them, and you name it, you could go there and live there. But if this is a church where people spur each other on to ask the question, "Why not me?" They spur each other on to consider God's heart for his glory known among the nations.

And then finally I would simply ask you, challenge you to ask yourself the question, "Why not me?" To ask yourself the question, not "Should I go," but "Why shouldn't I go?" As we look at the world and we look at the missionary needs of the world, for the most part, there are certainly places where you can go as traditional missionaries, but most of the places that have the fewest Christians are places that you also can't legally go as a missionary. Or they don't grant Visas to let you in as a religious worker. But they will let in engineers and they will let in agriculturalists and they will let in medical workers of every kind and business people of every kind and sports coaches of every kind, and you name it. If you have a profession, you can leverage that to take the gospel to places where missionaries as missionaries are not aloud to go.

So I would simply say that our default should not be, "I'll stay where I am," unless God rearranges the clouds, spells out your name, and then says, "You are supposed to go to Jibudi," or some place like that. That instead we recognize that we belong to him, that we are mobilizable resources at his disposal, and our default is we go where the need is the greatest unless God shows us that we're to be somewhere else. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much for the faithfulness of people through the ages who brought the gospel to us. We're a long way and a long way in time from first century Jerusalem. So we thank you, Father, for missionaries and parents and churches and pastors who have faithfully shared the good news until finally we heard it. And Father, I pray that the gospel wouldn't stop with us. So I pray again for this church, and Father, I pray that you would stir up a missionary passion here unlike any even that has been seen to this date, and I pray that there will be many here in this room right now who will find themselves in places where Jesus is not known, sharing the good news and spreading the knowledge of your glory until it fills the earth as the waters cover the sea. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.



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