

Why the Great Commission Is Great

by David Platt

This sermon emphasizes the importance of spreading the gospel to all nations, even in the face of suffering and persecution. It highlights the need to believe in the gospel with conviction, proclaim it with confidence, extend God's grace to more people, and exalt God's glory among all peoples. The message encourages joyfully embracing earthly suffering for the sake of eternal glory with God, reminding believers that nothing can separate them from God's love.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:13, Romans 8:18, Romans 15:20, Revelation 7:9, Acts 20:24, Romans 5:3, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Romans 8:37

Topics: "Spreading the Gospel", "Embracing Suffering for Glory"

Description

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Transcript

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Without question, I am grateful to God for His grace, which is the only reason why I am standing before this group. I'm hopeful that by God's grace I might be able to serve you well with His word. My text is 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 13 through 18.

So tonight, in a world made up of approximately 16,000 different people groups, over 6,000 of whom are still classified as unreached with the gospel, we read these words. Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke. We also believe and so we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence.

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. I know Andy just led us in prayer, but I want to pray for us again.

Father, we open our minds and our hearts to You in these moments. We pray that You would in this room speak to us by Your Word, through Your Spirit. And we pray that through Your Word, You might send us out into the world.

Father, we pray that Your Word at this conference might create a ripple effect in the hearts of pastors and church leaders and church members that will resound to Your glory among the nations. God, we pray that as a result of our encounter with You in Your Word at this conference, even on this night, we pray that as a result, unreached peoples will one day soon be reached peoples. Oh God, that all unreached peoples might one day soon be reached peoples.

Our Father in heaven hallowed be Your name among all the peoples of the earth. Kingdom come, Your will be done in this room, in this moment, in our lives, in our churches, and across the earth as it is in heaven. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. C.T. Studd was a wealthy Englishman who upon coming to Christ sold everything he had to take the gospel to the nations. Many sought to dissuade him, but he went anyway, first to China, then to India.

At the age of 50, he decided retirement was not an option for the Christian, so he spent the remaining years of his life proclaiming the gospel in Sudan. He died there, and his grave became a stepping stone for what was known as the worldwide evangelization crusade, spreading the gospel across Asia, Africa, and South America. C.T. Studd once wrote, believing that further delay would be sinful, some of God's insignificance and nobody's in particular, but trusting in our omnipotent God, have decided on certain simple lines according to the book of God to make a definite attempt to render the evangelization of the world an accomplished fact.

Too long, he said, we have been waiting for one another to begin. The time for waiting is past. The hour of God has struck.

In God's holy name, let us arise and build. We will not build on the bedrock sayings of Christ, and the gates and minions of hell shall not prevail against us. Should such men as we fear before the whole world, I before the sleepy, lukewarm, faithless, namby-pamby Christian world, we will dare to trust our God.

We will venture our all for him. We will live and we will die for him, and we will do it with his joy, unspeakable, singing aloud in our hearts. We will a thousand times sooner die trusting only in our God than live trusting in man, and when we come to this position, the battle is already won, and the end of the glorious campaign in sight.

We will have the real holiness of God, not the sickly stuff of talk and dainty words and pretty thoughts. We will have real holiness, one of daring faith and works for Jesus Christ. Those words summarize my prayer, not just for this conference, but for this movement, TGCT4G, the Coming Across Student Conference, so many other things, brothers and sisters coming together from different churches and diverse streams and varying denominations with a bedrock focus on the gospel, on the glory of God in the gospel, on the doctrines of grace in the gospel, that such gospel celebration and gospel singing and gospel conferences

and gospel books and gospel unity and gospel centrality might compel a gospel urgency in us, that together we might make a definite attempt under the sovereign grace of our God to render the evangelization of the world an accomplished fact.

Now, as soon as I say that, I want to be clear on what I am not trying to do. I'm not trying to propose a particular utopian vision, nor am I trying to posit a particular eschatological position. I'm not trying to say that a small number of us in this room or this movement or even we in the Western church alone can just pull up our bootstraps and accomplish the Great Commission, nor am I at all trying to say that we are ultimately sovereign over when disciples are made in every nation.

As we heard earlier, God is sovereign over all of that, but our sovereign God has given us a specific goal, and it is crystal clear. He's commanded His people to make disciples among all peoples, all the ethne of the world, and He's given us a promise, His very presence, the power of His Spirit to accomplish His purpose. So as we coalesce around the gospel, as we're empowered by His Spirit, I want to urge us not to be content in this conference with the sickly stuff of talk and dainty words and pretty thoughts.

Let's dare to trust our God. Let's venture our all for Him. Let's live and die for Him.

Let's go together with brothers and sisters around the world after the most difficult and dangerous-to-reach people groups in the world, and let's do it with His joy unspeakable, singing aloud in our hearts every step of the way. This, I am convinced, is the heart of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5. So based on these words, specifically chapter 4, verses 13 through 18, I want to exhort us in three ways. I want to exhort us who have coalesced around the gospel.

I want to exhort us to live our lives and to lead our families and to preach our sermons and to conduct our conferences and to write our blogs and to publish our books and to shepherd our churches, His church, in a definite attempt to render the evangelization of the world, the great commission, disciples made and churches multiplied in every nation among every people group on the planet. Let's live and die in a definite attempt under the sovereign grace of our God to make that an accomplished fact, for that is what the gospel compels us to do. Three exhortations from this text for a gospel coalesced people.

Number one, as we believe the gospel with deep-seated conviction in our lives, let's proclaim the gospel with death-defying confidence in the world. As we believe the gospel with deep-seated conviction in our lives, let's proclaim the gospel with death-defying confidence in the world. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 1 through 12, which Don preached on earlier, we heard Paul explain the power of the gospel message while acknowledging the weakness of the gospel messenger.

Paul describes the affliction and the suffering which accompanied gospel ministry. And then in verse 13, so picking up right where he left off, Paul reaches back into the Psalms to describe his motivation for persevering in gospel missions. Psalm 116, a song of deliverance, written by a psalmist who had been saved from what looked like certain death.

And the psalmist wrote, I believed even when I spoke, I am greatly afflicted. So the psalmist in Psalm chapter 116, verse 10, draws a clear correlation between believing and speaking. He believes, and so he speaks.

And suffering, affliction, cannot stop him from speaking what he believes. According to the psalmist, suffering cannot silence the spirit of faith. Suffering cannot stop, cannot silence the spirit of faith.

And so Paul says, this is the same spirit of faith in me, in us. Even amidst affliction, in the midst of suffering, we also believe, and so we also speak. According to Paul, believing automatically leads to speaking.

Possession of faith automatically leads to proclamation of faith. You can't disconnect the two, particularly when you consider the content of that faith, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with You into His presence. According to Paul, when you believe in the resurrection of Jesus, you proclaim the resurrection of Jesus.

According to Paul, there's no such thing as a privatized faith in a resurrected Christ. Those who believe the gospel of Jesus, proclaim the gospel of Jesus. No matter what it costs them.

I believe there is a needed word here for us today. Privatized Christianity is a profound curse across our culture and our churches. Multitudes of professing Christians say, believe, or maybe just live like they believe.

Jesus has saved me. Jesus' teachings work for me and my family, but who am I to tell my neighbor or my co-worker what he or she should believe? Even more, who am I to go and tell other people in other nations that their beliefs are wrong and my belief is right? And even more, who am I to tell anyone that if they don't believe what I believe, they will spend eternity damned in hell? I tell our church members from college students to senior adults and everywhere in between who struggle with this. I tell them I can identify with that train of thought.

I think about standing one day in a sea of people in northern India. I tell them, for those of you who haven't been to India, just think people. Lots and lots and lots of people.

Approximately 1.2 billion of them to be precise. Over 600 million of whom live in northern India. Crowded streets, urban slums surrounded by seemingly endless villages that span the countryside.

Economic disparity running rampant with more people living below the poverty line in India than the entire population of the United States altogether. And then I tell them, tell our church members that the church partners whom we've worked with in India estimate that approximately 0.5 percent of the people in northern India are Christians. In other words, 99.5 percent of the people in northern India have not believed in Christ for salvation.

Now obviously no one knows that kind of statistic for certain. I want to be cautious in even putting it out there. But just assume this statistic with me for a moment, which even if it's off, it's likely not far off, up or down.

But assuming this, I look around me one day, that crowded sea of people in northern India, and I I think to myself, I thought to myself, who am I to travel all the way over here to tell these people what they need to believe? Who am I to tell them that all of their gods are false, whether they're Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, or any other gods? Because Jesus is the only true God. And who am I to tell these 597 million non-Christians, 99.5 percent of northern India, who am I to tell 597 million people who surround me at that moment that if they do not turn from their sin and trust in Jesus, every single one of them will spend eternity in hell? I tell our folks that feels extremely arrogant, entirely unloving, and uncomfortably brash to claim that 597 million people, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs around me at that moment will go to hell if they don't confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the

dead. And then I tell our people, absolutely such a claim would be arrogant, unloving, and brash unless the claim is true.

Isn't this what Paul said in his prior letter to the church at Corinth? If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then Christians are to be pitied among men. And the worst thing we could do is to call other people to base their lives on a lie. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then it makes no sense.

It's outright nonsense to go around the world telling people that they either need to follow Jesus or face hell. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, if Jesus alone has paid the price for man's sin, if Jesus alone has conquered sin, and death, and the grave, then going around the world and telling people about Jesus is the only thing that makes sense. If Jesus did rise from the dead, then it is the height of arrogance to sit quietly by while 597 million Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs in northern India go to hell.

And it's the epitome of hate to not sacrifice our lives to spread this good news among every person we know and among every people group on the planet. When you believe this gospel, you speak this gospel. When you believe the resurrection of Christ, you proclaim the resurrection of Christ.

Privatized faith in a resurrected king is practically inconceivable. We believe, and so we speak, and so I ask you tonight, church members, church leaders, pastors, brothers, and sisters, do we in this room really believe this gospel? Do we really believe this good news that the sovereign, holy, just, and gracious creator of all things has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women in our rebellion? He has sent his son, God in the flesh, to bear his wrath against sin on the cross and to show his power over sin and resurrection from the dead. We're not talking resuscitation.

We're not talking reincarnation. We're not talking when unconscious got a vision of heaven and came back to write best-selling book about it. We're talking killed by crucifixion, wrapped in grave clothes, put in a tomb, and three days later, stone in front of the tomb is gone and the tomb is empty.

He's walking around alive. He's risen from the dead so that anyone, everyone who puts their faith in him, turns from their sin, trusts in him, repents, and believes will be reconciled to God forever. Do we believe that? Because if we do, if we do, then we cannot sit quietly by in our churches while 6,000 groups of people in the world, comprising 2 billion people, have never even heard it.

We cannot be content to spend our time and our money and our resources and our lives and our families and our churches on comfortable plans and small pursuits and traditional programs and temporal possessions when hundreds upon hundreds of millions of people have never even heard the news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe, and so we're compelled to proclaim, compelled to proclaim the resurrected Christ to unreached peoples, knowing that as we speak this gospel to them, we will face suffering and affliction, right? We're not fools. These 6,000 people groups are unreached for a reason.

They're hard to reach. All the easy ones are gone. These people groups are difficult to reach.

These people groups are dangerous to reach. These people groups don't want to be reached. Anyone who tries to reach them with the gospel will most certainly be met with suffering and affliction, and this is so key here in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. The more I have studied this text, the more convinced I have become that this text cannot be rightly understood apart from the context of gospel proclamation in difficult, even dangerous places.

I want to be careful here. There's no question that there are truths in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. This passage, principles here, glorious realities here that echo throughout Scripture to form a general theology of suffering for the Christian. Without question, there are truths here that bring deep comfort to Christians, some of whom are in this room tonight, who are suffering with cancer or other physical maladies, and Christians who are grieving over lost loved ones, and Christians who are walking through all sorts of suffering in a sinful world.

But in this letter, Paul is specifically describing, and in a sense defending, the suffering he has experienced as he has proclaimed the gospel in dangerous places among difficult peoples. What Paul is experiencing is not happening to him because he's sitting back on his couch all day, or because he's just carrying on business as usual in life and ministry. No, he's going to dangerous places among difficult peoples, and he's speaking the gospel to them, and much, if not most, of his suffering is a direct result of that.

We see this later in chapter 11, which Don mentioned earlier. All that Paul endured—imprisoned, beaten near death, five times to 40 lashes minus one, three times beaten with rods, stoned once, in danger from Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, often without food and cold and exposure—all of this is a direct result of proclaiming the gospel throughout Asia. So much so that in chapter 1 of this book, Paul began the whole book talking about the affliction he experienced in Asia, where he was so—where we, he says, were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

We don't know what that's a reference to precisely, whether it was the Demetrius riot, literally or figuratively, being fighting with beasts, as he described in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 32 in Ephesus, or severe illness, but whatever it was, it was tied to Paul's proclamation of the gospel in Asia, and it threatened to thwart his proclamation of the gospel in Asia. And it's in that context, the context of mission to dangerous places among difficult peoples, that Paul says, I believe and so I speak, knowing that suffering and affliction and persecution will come, yet knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with him. So see the principle here.

It's by no means isolated to this portion of Scripture. The persecution follows proclamation. Suffering for the gospel accompanies the spreading of the gospel.

You think about our brothers and sisters in Saudi Arabia or North Korea or Somalia right now. If they believe and stay silent, if they don't say anything about the gospel, they can stay below the radar. But if they believe and they speak, well, I'll put it in the words of one Somali woman who I spoke with in the Horn of Africa just a few months ago.

She said to me, if I speak the gospel to the wrong person, they will slit my throat immediately. Persecution follows proclamation. As long as Christians stay silent about the gospel, there's no problem.

As soon as Christians start speaking about the gospel, it's a problem. Persecution follows proclamation. Now, I'm not saying that every circumstance in the world is extreme as Somalia or Saudi Arabia or North Korea, but I am saying this.

Pastor, church member, if you and I are going to be serious about making disciples among all 6,000 of these unreached people groups, we need to realize it's not going to come without cause. To us, to our families, to our churches, to the lives of people that we love and we lead, I think about three couples that

we've sent out this year to lead church planting teams among some of the most difficult, dangerous-to-reach peoples on the planet. Two of these couples were young children.

As we gathered around them and we prayed for each of them on different Sundays, it was like Acts 20. Paul and the elders at Ephesus just weeping over friends and family that we love, knowing that we are sending them into difficult parts of the Middle East and North Africa and Central Asia. And I tell our people, we're not doing this because we have some sick desire to be dangerous.

This is simply the reality of engaging unreached peoples. They're not only hard to reach, but many of them are resistant to being reached, and they will oppose those who try to reach them. And our people ask, well, Pastor, then why do we go to them if they're going to resist us? And the answer is simple.

It's gospel. We go because God came to us when we were resistant to being reached by Him. He sent His Son to sacrifice His life for our salvation so it just makes sense for people who possess this gospel to have a death-defying commitment to proclaiming this gospel.

We believe and so we speak, knowing that even death itself cannot stop us because He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with them into His presence. Brothers and sisters, as we believe this gospel with deep-seated conviction in our lives, let's proclaim this gospel with death-defying confidence in the world. Second exhortation, which just flows directly from this, leaps off the page, particularly in verse 15.

Second exhortation, as we live to extend God's grace among more people, let's long to exalt God's glory among all peoples. As we live to extend God's grace among more people, let's long to exalt God's glory among all peoples. Oh, don't you love the two-fold goal, the dual aim that Paul has in ministry here.

Verse 15 single-handedly sums up the purpose of Christian missions. He starts and he says, for it is all for your sake, all of it. My preaching, Paul says, my suffering, persecution, affliction, proclamation, it's all for your sake so that more and more and more of you might experience the grace of God.

Isn't this what we want our lives to be about? Isn't this what we want our ministries, our churches, our partnership together as churches to be about? Extending the grace of God to more and more and more people for their sake so that more and more and more men and women and boys and girls might know the resurrected Christ. They might be saved from their sins. They might be brought from darkness to light.

They might be delivered from everlasting condemnation away from God to experience everlasting communion in the presence of God. We want these stories, these testimonies we're hearing in this conference to be multiplied all over the world among all the nations. It's what we live for.

So I mentioned India and I don't want to leave a dark picture of India with you. I want to come back around here and share with you a story about how the grace of God is extending to more and more and more people. So travel to Bihar, India with me.

In the north, one of the most spiritually and physically impoverished places on the planet, Bihar is a state in India that's about the size of Tennessee. The difference between Tennessee and Bihar, Tennessee has six million people in it. Bihar has a hundred million people in it.

So you got a hundred million people in Tennessee spread across 45,000 different villages. Majority of these people extremely poor, millions upon millions living in desperate poverty. But not just physically,

Bihar is lower than the average in northern India, is 0.1% Christian.

Most Indians in Bihar are Hindu, have been for generations. In the particular region we were in, the death rate was about 5,000 people per day, which means that every day in this region we were in, you put that together with the number of Christians there, you realize that in this region every day you've got approximately 4,995 people who are plunging into an eternal hell, most of whom have never even heard the gospel. So we have worked in partnership with brothers and sisters there, helped provide training in disciple making and church multiplication to Christians and pastors who live there.

A few months ago I had the privilege of being in Bihar, seeing what is happening there in a humbling glorious way. My mentor in ministry was with me and his comment at one point was that it was just about the closest that he has ever seen to what we are reading about in the New Testament when it comes to the grace of God multiplying to more and more and more people. So here in Bihar meet two brothers, Anil and Hari.

One's a school superintendent, the other is a chicken farmer. And both followers of Christ and have been engaged in ministry. But a few years ago these two brothers were at the end of their rope, not seeing any fruit of the gospel in their ministry.

They go to one of these trainings that we've helped lead out when it comes to disciple making, and at this training they were encouraged to go into a totally unreached village, no church, no Christians. Go into a village and the first person that comes up to you say to them, we are here in the name of Jesus and we would like to pray for your village. And Anil and Hari looked at each other and said, this will never work.

Then they looked at each other and said, nothing we'd ever do works, so we might as well try. So they go out into a village, they walk through the village, nobody even comes up to them until they're almost to the end of the village and a man comes up to them. Says, what are you guys doing here? And Anil and Hari start their pre-scripted line.

We are here in the name of Jesus. And they didn't even get to finish their line. This guy stops them, says, Jesus, I've heard a little bit about him.

Can you tell me more? Anil and Hari look at each other, say, yes, we can tell you more. And he said, well, wait, I don't want you just to tell me. I want you to tell some of my friends and family too.

Is that okay? Anil and Hari, yes, that's okay. So they follow this guy to his home. This guy says, wait there.

Anil and Hari just sit in this home, look at each other like, what's going on? The guy goes, gets friends and family, group of people, come back to the house and says, all right, will you please tell us about this Jesus that you mentioned? And so Anil and Hari share the gospel. Long story short, over the next few weeks, about 20 people in that village repent and believe in Christ. This is a village that for generations has never ever heard the gospel.

And the Spirit so prepared the hearts of people, harvest plentiful, workers few. And so they go and speak the gospel. And the power of the gospel rains down in this home, this village, people come to Christ.

Well, the story doesn't stop there because Anil and Hari said, well, you guys now need to go do the same thing in other villages. And so they begin to equip these guys to go and share the gospel in other villages. And so they do.

That was three years ago when they first came into that village. Since that time, people have come to Christ and churches have at least started, begun, begun to assemble in 350 different villages as a result of what happened in that one village. And yeah, we, now we, we worship with these churches.

I get somewhat cynical when I hear numbers like this, particularly, well, not going to go into why, but for a variety of reasons. But these brothers, the ministry partners we're working with can point to each one of these. We're not talking just, or two or three are gathering.

Okay, there you go. No, we're talking churches. And they're measuring the health of these churches.

They've got a grid through which they're identifying characteristics of a New Testament church. And they evaluate churches through that grid. And we've visited them.

They help them think through, okay, how does, how does that continue to grow? And God's pouring out His Spirit in Bihar, India. At least this region in Bihar, India. That's not to say it's easy.

Anil and Hari have faced all kinds of challenges from outside the church and inside the church. They've experienced various afflictions. But in the middle of it all, the gospel is spreading to more and more and more people for the sake of more and more and more villages.

My favorite quote was, we're worshipping together in one of these villages. They took some time where they just said, I mean, all of this is, this is, these are people who gathered together in a church who, the year before there was nothing there. No Christians.

Now they're gathered together worshipping Christ as a church. And they share, went around sharing testimony about how they trusted in Christ. And one guy's line, he looked at us and he said, our village was like hell until we heard the gospel.

This is what we live for, right? All for their sake. We want more and more and more people to know the grace of God. But that's not all.

Remember, this is a twofold goal. A dual aim of gospel ministry. And the purpose of Christian missions is far greater than even the salvation of souls for eternity.

As if that's not enough. Listen to Paul. He says, it's all for your sake so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

Oh yes. The second goal, the higher aim, the ultimate purpose of mission. See it, the proper end, end, proper end of missions is not the salvation of souls.

The proper end of missions is the glory of God. More specifically, thanksgiving, gratitude to the glory of God, the end of missions, see it, is more and more and more people who are happy in God. This is the cry of the psalmist.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy. Let all the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you.

This is the cry of the angel from heaven. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. It's the cry of the apostle Paul himself when he said in Romans 15, my ambition is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named so that so that those who've never been told of him will see, those who've never

heard will understand, they'll see, they'll understand, they'll know God, they'll savor God, they'll worship God, and they'll give thanks to God, which is the problem in the first place, right? Apart from the gospel, they're not giving thanks to God.

We heard earlier from Romans 1, the wrath of God will be revealed from heaven against the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth of God by their wickedness since what we know about God is plain to them because God's made it plain to them since the creation of the world. God's invisible qualities, eternal power, divine nature are clearly seen being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse for all they, although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor did what? Nor did they give thanks to him. That's the problem.

They didn't give thanks to him. Instead, their thinking became futile. Their foolish hearts darkened.

They claimed to be wise. They became fools, exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man, birds, and animals, and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over the sins of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever praised. This is the problem. Paul says there's people, there's scores of Gentiles, Paul says in Romans 1, scores of people who aren't giving thanks to God.

They're not glorifying God as God, and this, this, this is why my ambition is to get the gospel to them, to take the gospel to them. Paul says in Romans 15, this is why I got to go to Spain, and I need you to help me get there because it's not been heard there, and there's people there who are not giving thanks to God and not giving God the glory that he is due. This is so key, isn't it? This is what drives missions.

This is why we want to render the evangelization of the world an accomplished fact. Not so we can say we did this or that, or not because even we feel guilty that we got the gospel, and they don't. We feel guilty because we got all these resources, and they don't.

People ask us, are you just guiltting people into going overseas, guiltting people into going unreached peoples? No, no. What drives passion for missions among unreached peoples is not guilt. We feel bad, so we go.

What drives passion for missions among unreached peoples is not guilt. It's glory. It's glory for our God.

Brothers and sisters, we must sacrifice our lives and shepherd our churches to penetrate unreached peoples with the gospel because we are convinced down at the core of our being that our God deserves the praise, not just of a few thousand people groups on the planet. Our God deserves the praise of all 16,000 people groups on this planet. Every member, every new member workshop that we have in that church I pastor, this is where we start.

This is opening. Say to them, Jesus has all authority on heaven and heaven on earth, which means two things. One, He is worthy of our worship.

He is Lord. As followers of Christ, we have sacrificed the right to determine the direction of our lives. The language we use all the time is blank check.

Every one of our lives is a blank check on the table. No strings attached. Our plans, our possessions, our bank accounts, where we live, our lifestyle, our future, our dreams, our ambitions, all on the table.

Whatever you want me to do, God, whatever you want me to give, you want me to let go, wherever you want me to go, no strings attached. This is not for super Christians. This is every follower of Christ, what it means to follow Christ.

So He's worthy of our worship. Our lives are His to spend for His namesake, but He's not just worthy of our worship. If He has all authority in heaven and earth, that means He's not just worthy of our worship.

He's worthy of their worship too. And this is why we do what we do. I tell them, I tell them, this is why we do what we do as church.

This is why I want you to leave soon after you become a member. Because there's thousands and thousands of people around us in this city of Birmingham who are not giving Jesus the worship He's doing. We want His worship more than we want comfortable life in this particular church.

We want His glory. So we're going to go into the cities in North America. We're going to send you out to cities in North America because there's a couple hundred million people in North America who are not giving Jesus glory He is doing.

And Jesus is worthy of their glory. And we're not going to stop there with blank checks on the table because He may send some of you to Africa because there's 3,000 animistic tribes in Africa that are following all kinds of animistic religions that deny the truth of who Christ is and who God is. And Jesus is worthy of every single one of those tribes worship.

This is why we're going to go to Japan, Laos, and Vietnam. There's 350 million Buddhists who are following Buddha's rules and regulations and Buddha is not worthy of their worship. Jesus alone is worthy of all their worship.

It's why we're going to go to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka because there's 950 million Hindus in those countries that are following more gods than you or I can even fathom. But there is only one God who is worthy of worship and His name is Jesus. It's why we're going to go to communist places whether it's China or Cuba or trying to go to North Korea.

We want to go to communist places because there's over a billion people who've grown up in atheistic philosophies that completely deny the existence of God and there is a God. His name is Jesus and He's worthy of their glory. And we're going to go to the toughest places in the world.

We're going to go to Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, Southeast Asia because there's 1.5 billion Muslims who are fasting and giving alms and making holy pilgrimages to Mecca and praying five times a day to a false god. And Jesus has died on a cross. He has risen from the grave.

He has ascended on high and He alone is worthy of their worship. And a people who believe this, a people who believe that Jesus is worthy of that kind of glory, will lay down their lives to go wherever He leads. This is what drives us.

He's worthy of worship. This is our ultimate aim and this is what we mean, right? Put it together. Two-fold aim.

For their sake, for God's sake. This is what we've heard already quoted in Revelation 7, 9, and 10. We are looking forward to the day when a great multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, tongue, and language gathers before the throne, before the Lamb, and cries out, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

There it is. Two-fold goal. Dual aim.

Supreme purpose of missions. This is what makes the Great Commission great. Salvation for others' sake among more and more and more people.

All leading to glory for God's sake among more and more and more people. As we live to extend God's grace among more people, let's long to exalt God's glory among all peoples. All of that leading us to third exhortation based on Paul's last three verses in this text.

Third exhortation. As we continually envision eternal glory with God, as we continually envision eternal glory with God, let's joyfully embrace earthly suffering from God. As we continually envision eternal glory with God, let's joyfully embrace earthly suffering from God.

So it all makes sense what Paul says at the end of this chapter. As long as we believe this gospel in our lives, as long as we proclaim this gospel in this world, our outer self will be wasting away. We will experience affliction, and we must not be surprised by that.

Who among us really thinks that making disciples of all nations is an easy task? I think back to 2 Corinthians 4 verses 4 through 6, which we heard preached earlier. What a picture! Verse 4, there's a God, little g, God in this world who's blinding the minds of unbelievers. Verse 6, there's a big G, capital G, God who's shining light in our hearts.

See this cosmic battle raging in the heavenlies between the little g God of this world, blinding minds, big g God, shining light in our hearts, and we're right in the middle, verse 5, we're preaching Christ. Do we really think that on the front lines of that cosmic battle things are ever going to be easy for us? The aim for us in this battle is our comfort. Oh, there's suffering.

I was talking with a dear pastor friend of mine whom I respect deeply, who's pastored the same church for 30 plus years. He's been passionate about the nations longer than I have been alive, and recently he told me that this last year was his toughest year in ministry. People in his church resisting the call of God to the nations.

When I heard him say that I was so discouraged. I thought, really? After 30 years of pastoring the church on mission, things are just going to get harder? Is that really the case? And then I realized the folly of my own thoughts. Do I really think that there will ever be a point in this world when pushing back darkness among the nations will be easy? Ministry, missions will never be easy as long as I, we, are on the front lines pushing back darkness among the nations, and this should not be a surprise to me or to us.

You just promised us this. But follow a Savior who sends out his disciples like sheep among wolves. Not a good place for wolves to be, sheep to be, I mean wolves.

He said a disciple is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. It's enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. A servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. The only possible conclusion from those words is that our danger in this world increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship to Christ and our commitment to this commission. The only possible exhortation from those words is clear, to everybody wanting a safe, comfortable, cozy life free from danger in this world, stay away from Jesus.

So Paul similarly exhorted the earliest Christians that through many tribulations they must enter the kingdom of God. For everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ, Jesus will be persecuted. This is expected, Peter says.

Don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange is happening to you. Jesus tells his church in Revelation 2, don't fear what you're about to suffer. Behold the devil is about to throw some of you into prison.

You will have tribulation. Be faithful all the way to death. And then Revelation 6 makes clear that there are more martyrs yet to come before the commission of Christ is complete.

So this is the unavoidable takeaway from the New Testament. The more passionate we are about spreading the gospel to every people group in the world, the more we will suffer. Not because we're seeking suffering, but because we're speaking Christ.

And suffering for the gospel accompanies the spread of the gospel. And all of this is from God. It's not by accident.

This is according to His design. I think about one of those couples that I mentioned to you earlier that we recently sent out from our church. I think about two of the most poignant moments in my brief time pastoring this church over the last seven years.

And both of them happened with this couple. I remember when they met with our elders about the possibility of becoming a part of our international church planning internship and specifically leading a church planning team among a particularly dangerous people group. And one of our elders solemnly looked at this young couple, this older brother, and especially this young wife.

And he said, do you realize the risk involved in where you want to go and what that risk means for you and for your family, for kids? I'll never forget how this wife responded. She looked back with humility and compassion and confidence. And she said in the sweetest yet most solemn southern voice you can imagine, I believe God's word is true.

And His word says that His gospel will spread through persecution, hardship, and suffering. And I am good with that. Our room of elders sat silent.

Nobody spoke for a period of time. Not a dry eye in the room during that moment. And then a few weeks ago, as this husband was sharing with our church, he said at one point, I know that some of you think we are being reckless.

And he was sitting there with his precious wife, his two young kids preparing to go into the heart of this unreached Muslim people group. And he looked at our church and he said, I am convinced that we are in far greater danger of being safe than we are of being reckless in the church today. And as I sat there and I listened to him explain conclusions that he had come to based on his study of Acts and the epistles of the New Testament, I couldn't help but to agree with him.

We have made safety a God, not just in our culture, but in the church. We have equated safety with wisdom. We have sought to ensure safety with our wealth in a way that sure seems completely foreign to followers of Christ in the New Testament.

And I'm not saying we need to be reckless in going to the nations, but I am saying there will be great risk in going to the nations. And if we're not willing to take that risk, we will not be a part of the accomplishment of the Great Commission. Brothers and sisters, God will pass us by as long as we value safety over obedience.

So let us, and I'm not pretending to know the ramifications of what this means for my life, for your life, anybody's life. Let us embrace suffering from God and let us embrace suffering joyfully. How do we do that? And this is the thrust of the crux of the whole text, the hinged sentence upon which everything in 2 Corinthians 4, 13 through 18 turns to the beginning of verse 16.

So we do not lose heart. Same phrase Paul used earlier. He sums up everything with it now.

Though afflicted, though crushed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, though always being given over to death, we do not lose heart, Paul says. Because all these sufferings are simply preparing an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Suffering may be inevitable, Paul says, but God's purpose is unstoppable.

God's purpose in our lives is unstoppable. All of these sufferings, Paul says, all of our sufferings, Paul says, are intended by my God for my good. What does he say in Romans 8? Our present suffering is not worth comparing with future glory that will be revealed in us.

God's working all things together, all things for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to His purpose. So he says in Romans 5, I rejoice in my suffering because I know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, character hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He's given us. So why he says to the Philippians, it's been granted to you and me that for the sake of Christ we should not only believe in Him but suffer for His sake.

It's been granted to us, given to us by God to suffer. He says we want to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings. Just like he said at the beginning of this book, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all of our affliction for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

And just like he says at the end of this book, God's grace is sufficient in me and His power is made perfect in weakness, so I'm content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities, but when I'm weak then I'm strong. Oh, suffering may be inevitable, but God's purpose is unstoppable in our lives. He's working all this for our good, for our joy, and then ultimately for His glory in the world.

It isn't just that God's purpose in our lives is unstoppable, it's God's purpose in the world. Isn't this the story of the church starting in Acts chapter 7 as Stephen is stoned and the church first experienced martyrdom, yet martyrdom in chapter 7 fuels mission in chapter 8 as the church scatters throughout Judea and Samaria preaching the gospel. Oh, I love how Satan not only acts under divine permission, but Satan actually fulfills divine purposes.

Don't you love that? Satan strikes down one of God's choicest servants. Ha, he thinks I'm winning now. Next verse everybody scatters and preaches the gospel wherever they go.

Take that. And even better, Luke tells us that Saul was there approving of the execution, so Saul leads out in the persecution of Stephen, which leads to the scattering of believers, which leads to the founding of the church at Antioch in chapter 11, which becomes the church in chapter 13 that one day sends out Saul, Paul, on global mission. Ha, you can't write that script any better.

Saul inadvertently starts the church that ultimately sends him out on missions. So don't lose heart, brothers and sisters. Satan's strategies to stop the church will ultimately serve to spread the church.

And Satan's strategies to inflict earthly pain in your life will ultimately serve to increase eternal glory with your God. Light, momentary affliction preparing for us an eternal way to glory beyond all comparison. This is where Paul ends the passage.

Our suffering is inevitable, our God's purpose is unstoppable, and ultimately our hope is incomparable. Compared to coming glory, Paul says, present suffering is light and momentary, which doesn't mean easy and painless, particularly not at the time. But in light of all time, our present pain and suffering does not compare with our future weight of glory.

The word Paul uses there is hyperbole, from which we get hyperbole, an exaggeration in English language. And the Greek word literally means beyond all proportion. In other words, Paul says to the great Corinthian church, and by extension to the gospel coalition, the great commission, the gospel going to more and more and more people to the glory of God will involve great suffering, but be sure of this, eternity will prove it was worth the price.

So brothers and sisters in Christ who have coalesced around his glory in the gospel, let us coalesce around the accomplishment of his commission. As we believe this gospel, the deep-seated conviction in our lives, let's proclaim this gospel with death-defying confidence in the world. As we live to extend God's grace among more and more and more people, let's long to exalt God's glory among all peoples.

And as we continually envision eternal glory with God, let's joyfully embrace earthly suffering from God, knowing in the words of the apostle Paul, if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It's God who justifies. Who is he that condemns Christ Jesus who died? More than that, who was raised to life. Is it the right hand of God at this moment interceding for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No.

So as it's written, for your sake we face death all day long. We are considered a sheep to be slaughtered. No.

All these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Glory be to his name.

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