

The Inconvenient Lost

by Dick Brogden

This sermon emphasizes the importance of not being afraid to reach the inconvenient lost, particularly focusing on Muslim peoples. It challenges listeners to overcome fear, be willing to try, cry (proclaim the Gospel), and even die for the sake of sharing the message of Jesus. The narrative draws parallels from historical events, biblical characters, and real-life missionary experiences to inspire courage and self-sacrifice in reaching those who have limited access to the light of the Gospel.

Scripture: Daniel 3:17, Matthew 16:24, Acts 20:24, John 12:24, Revelation 12:11

Topics: "Courage in Evangelism", "Sacrificial Love for the Lost"

Description

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Transcript

Jesus is worth everything. Jesus is not myopic. There are lost in Brazil and in Bangladesh.

There is despair in Denver as well as in Denmark. The devil and darkness are spread abroad. The universities that you hail from are filled with the perishing.

That is true. It is also true that we have a distribution problem. While the lost are everywhere, the light is not.

There are areas of this earth, there are peoples, there are tribes, there are tongues who have less access to light than others. This also is true. And those without adequate access are the inconvenient lost.

The inconvenient lost are locked behind forbidding borders with hard-to-get, harder-to-keep visas. The inconvenient lost are sequestered in sandy, scorching deserts with inhospitable climates. The inconvenient lost are hidden behind veils and burkas and abayas and they live and die damned in the shadow of the minaret.

The inconvenient lost are muzzled by clerics. They are bound by falsehood. They are restricted by fatalism.

They are not allowed to think. They are not allowed to probe. They are not allowed to question.

The inconvenient lost are best represented by the realm and the peoples of Islam. While I admit that there are peoples other than Muslim difficult to reach, inconvenient to our grasp, I also propose that Muslim peoples represent the greatest block of the inconvenient lost. Around the world today there are 800 distinct Muslim people groups that have no witness.

800 distinct groups and I'm not just talking unreached. Unreached means there might be somebody working there but there's no fruit yet. I'm talking about unengaged.

There are no missionaries. There are no believers. There is no scripture.

There is no proclamation. There is no hope. There is no light.

These are the inconvenient lost for no one works amongst them. In March this year I was in Germany for Christabel. Christabel is Europe's equivalent of Urbana.

20,000 young people came together to celebrate Jesus and to seek his will for their life. One of the exhibits was an interactive walk through different tents which had been set up in a cathedral. One of the tents focused on God's will and why you did not pursue it.

As you exited the tent a large oversized blank book was displayed and you were given the opportunity to write the one reason you were not following God's will. I flipped through the pages and of the thousands of entries in that book one was prevalent, written on every page. It was the German word over and over and over again Angst.

Over and over and over it was written fear. It means fear, fear, fear, fear, fear. The greatest hindrance to following God's call.

I do not believe that the greatest hindrance to reaching the inconvenient lost is an external foe. Yes there are demons and there are devils and powers and principalities that mitigate against us but the greatest hindrance to reaching the inconvenient lost lies within us. It is our fear which leads me to ask this evening what would you do if you had no fear? What would you do if you had no fear? What are the impossible dreams? What are the uncrossable mountains? If money was not an issue would you give a year? If security did not matter would you give your life? What is the challenge God has laid on your heart so grand that you have told no one? What inconvenience could you rise to conquer? What people would you rush to reach if you had no fear? Tonight I want to implore you not to fear.

Tonight I urge you to look toward the inconvenient lost, not afraid to try, not afraid to cry, and not afraid to die. One of my favorite biblical characters is Jonathan, son of Saul, rightful heir to the kingdom. He delighted in David but Jonathan was mighty in his own right.

In 1st Samuel 14 Jonathan says to his armor-bearer, nothing hinders God from saving by many or by few. It may be that the Lord will work for us. Let's try.

Let's go and fight the Philistines. If they say come up it's a sign we'll go and fight. But if they say stay down we're coming to you that's a sign we'll stay here and fight.

And I hope you see the humor in Jonathan's remarks. Come up it's a sign. Stay down it's a sign because Jonathan had determined that he was going to fight.

Here's the main point found in verse 6. With no guarantee of success Jonathan was not afraid to try. He had determined to fight. He had no assurance of the outcome.

It may be that the Lord helps us was as cocky as he allowed himself. Jonathan was going to try even though he did not know how it would end. I'm sure that you have heard of the crisis in Darfur, Sudan.

Seven years now into the conflict 300,000 are dead, 2 million refugees, Arab Muslims slaughtering African Muslims to make it simple. A completely Muslim province of Sudan committing suicide, rape, torture, murder, slaughter, injustice, evil, common. Khalil Ibrahim is the leader of the Zagawa rebels.

Abdul Wahid is the leader of the four rebels. These are the two largest blocks of African Muslim tribes that are fighting against the government and fighting against the Arab militias called the Jinjaweed. Brandon Williams is in his mid-twenties.

He's a missionary in training with us in the Sudan. He just finished one year of language school. We found him an interim job working for an NGO and due to a series of unfortunate events everyone in that NGO bailed and Brandon, this intern, found himself the country director of a non-government organization that's working in the Sudan.

And one week into his job he received a message from these two largest rebel commanders in the province of Darfur and this is what the message said. We are tired of fighting. We are tired of Islam.

We want you, the believers in Christ, to come and help us. We want you to teach our children the Bible. We want you to bring us peace and development.

Now wouldn't it be ironic if a clueless 20-year-old MIT solved the Darfur crisis? And wouldn't it be delicious if Jesus worked through an unknown to do what the United Nations and the African Union and Condoleezza Rice and George Clooney and Brangelina couldn't do? Why shouldn't a 20-year-old win the Nobel Peace Prize? Why shouldn't someone in this place walk out of those doors and change the destiny of nations? Why shouldn't one of you shake the earth and move the mountains? Why shouldn't someone in this room be the next Samuel Zwemer, the apostle to Islam, and lead the King of Saudi Arabia in the sinner's prayer? Why shouldn't somebody here pick up the soon-to-fall mantle of Billy Graham and in humility evangelize the nations? Why shouldn't we be the generation who takes the gospel to the most inhospitable and the most inconvenient places on earth? Is it not fear of the attempt that aborts most efforts for the kingdom before they're even born? I urge you, I implore you, I beseech you, don't be afraid to try, even if there is no guarantee of success. But I am NOT made for perilous quests, said Frodo. I wish I had never seen the ring.

Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen? Such questions cannot be answered, said Gandalf. You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess, nor for power or wisdom at any rate, but you have been chosen and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have. No one answered.

The noon bell rang. Still no one spoke. Frodo glanced at all the faces but they were not turned to him.

All the council sat with downcast eyes as if in deep thought. A great dread fell on him as if he was awaiting a pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. An overwhelming longing filled his heart to remain at rest and peace by Bilbo's side in suburban America and at last with some effort he spoke and wondered to hear his own words as if some other will

was using his small voice.

I will take the ring, he said, though I do not know the way. I will try, said Jonathan. It may be that the Lord helps me.

I think that this task is appointed for you, Frodo, said Elrond, and that if you do not find a way, no one will. This is the hour of the shirefolk when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and the councils of the great. It's not our part here to take thought only of a season or for a few lives of men or for a passing age of this world, said Gandalf.

We should seek a final end of this menace even if we do not hope to make one. Let us not be afraid to try. It may be that the Lord helps us for nothing restricts the Lord by saving by many or by few if we're not afraid to try.

In missions and in the postmodern world today there is great temptation to dilute our message that it might become more palatable to the hearer. Transformational development is a buzzword in my circles for holism and essentially the thinking is that you need to have a balance between word and between deed and most of you would probably agree but I want to ask you tonight to rethink that premise and to examine it again and see if it's biblically supported. St. Francis of Assisi allegedly said, preach the gospel at all times if necessary use words.

I want to remind you tonight that it is always necessary to use words. Humans are receptor oriented communicators. They assign their own meanings to unexplained deeds.

Not only did St. Francis probably never say the faulty line, he certainly did not live it. Grab yourself a biography, look at his life. He preached everywhere to birds and animals for goodness sake.

He even walked into the tent of the Muslim ruler of his day Saladin and he preached the gospel to him. How's that for inconvenience? Take the real-life case of a S.I.M. missionary to China. He determined that he would live the gospel not preach it.

He would live such a life of service and love that the Chinese would be drawn to him, ask him about his faith and then ask him to explain the reason for the hope that he had. One year passed, two years passed, five years passed. Finally a Chinese man approached him.

He said, can I meet with you in secret? I've been watching your life and I have a very important question to ask you. And the missionary was excited. Finally he thought, five years of living the Jesus life, five years of preaching without words and someone has seen the testimony of my life and wants to know more.

They agreed to meet. The Chinese man came and earnestly said, I have been carefully watching your life for five years and I must know, are you a vegetarian? If you want to boil down the message of the New Testament proclaimers to one word, I submit to you that it would be the word, repent. In Matthew 3, John appears preaching, repent.

In Mark 1, Jesus begins to minister preaching, repent. In Mark 6, 12, all of the disciples went out preaching that people should repent. In Peter's Pentecost sermon of Acts 2, he culminates it with, repent, let every one of you be baptized.

Paul in Athens, the proof text for cultural sensitivity and proclamation, yet he ends his remarks by saying, these times of ignorance, you blockheads, God has overlooked, but now commands men everywhere to repent. Jesus in John 6, he feeds the 5,000 so they follow him for more food. You have to eat meat.

Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend? The flesh profits nothing. The words that I give you, they are spirit and they are life. How radical, how essential.

Jesus offends the feeding program beneficiaries. He says that it is word that gives life, not food handouts. Now because of time, I just want to take John the Baptist, a man not afraid to cry.

And I mean, of course, to cry, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus said that this John was the greatest of those born of women. Let me ask you then, if Jesus thinks that John was the best non-divine that we have to offer, who did John feed? Who did John clothe? Who did John educate? The only water he gave out was in orifices as he dunked people in the Jordan.

John went out in the desert and insulted those who followed. Snakes, brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? And no one born of woman, according to Jesus, has done it better. Please understand my context.

In Sudan, we run schools for the orphaned poor. In Sudan, we drill wells for the parched. In Sudan, we feed the hungry and we educate the adult illiterate.

In Sudan, we have volunteers holding convulsing babies that they not die. We do all of these things and we do them gladly, but this is the reality of fear that I learned along the way. No one likes a proclaimer.

No Muslim likes the good news. No Muslim likes to be told that Islam does not cut it and unless he repents, he is headed for hell. No missionary likes constant rejection.

No missionary likes to always be thought a fool. No missionary revels in being the village idiot with the heretical message. We get tired of the scorn.

We get tired of the rolled eyes and the subtle mocking and as the years go by, we want to be liked. We want to be thanked. We want to be respected.

We tire of the inconvenience of an unpopular message, so we offer something that's wanted. We build a school. We dig a well.

We pass out medicine and guess what? We're the good guy again. We're praised and we're blessed and we're interviewed on TV and our pictures put in the paper. This is a temptation that I fight.

It is a battle not yet won, yet in essence, we are proclaimers and we cannot be afraid to cry. Nick Ripken is the pseudonym of a missionary who worked amongst Somalis. There were 100 Muslim background believers when persecution began.

96 out of those 100 were killed for their faith. Nick said out of this experience, he learned that the goal of the devil and persecution is not to chase us away. It is to silence us.

When we shut up in the face of fear, we side with the persecutors. When we stand and continue to proclaim, we stand with the persecuted. Recently, a Saudi girl came to faith.

Her father was a member of the religious police. He found out her conversion. He killed his own daughter, not before he cut out her tongue.

Graphic, but demonically symbolic. The devil wants to shut down our crying. He does not necessarily have to remove us.

If he silences us, he has rendered us ineffective. He uses fear to do it. Fear of man, fear of trouble, fear of rejection, fear of scorn.

After 96 of these 100 men were martyred, Nick began an in-depth study around the world about persecution. He traveled, interviewed numerous Muslim background believers, and at the end of it, one staggering point emerged. He said, what did you learn from the missionaries? What was the essential lesson you learned? And this is what the report came back.

The main thing that we learned from missionaries was how to fear. Because one missionary gets kicked out for proclamation, and what do all the other missionaries in the city do? Well, let's lay low for a little bit. It's a little hot right now.

Let's not witness. Let's not proclaim. Or civil unrest and trouble and war and fighting come into a region, and all the missionaries hop on the first United Nations plane, and they're out of there.

We cannot be afraid to cry. And yet that crying does not have to be shrill. It does not have to be annoying.

It does not have to be flamboyant. In northern Darfur, we have a center that teaches English and literacy. One of our workers is a young mother.

She has three children under the age of three. A refugee came to her door and asked for food and money, and she said, well, instead of that, why don't you come in and work with me? Began to sweep the compound. She began to witness to that Muslim refugee, began to show her little blurbs of God's story in the Jesus film, and that little refugee woman, illiterate, could not read or write, gave her heart to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And our worker, because she could not read, but she wanted to pass the message back into the camp, she began with stick figures on blank paper to write little discipleship lessons. And she would teach this woman about Jesus through little stick figures. And this woman would take those stick figures and take them back into the camp and show them to her husband and her Bible, her brother.

She also took a Bible. They began to study it, and the lady began to complement with stories, and her husband and her brother also got saved. Her brother was a driver for an NGO working in Darfur, and one day the Jinjaweed attacked their caravan.

They were looking for a compressor in his car. They couldn't find it, so they beat him within a shred of his life, battered and broken and bruised. Bloody, he had to be evacuated to the capital city of Khartoum.

He was outside the hospital waiting for his doctor's appointment when an Arab man approached him and said, could I pray for you? Would you come to my house so we can pray? He went. He discovered that was a secret believer. They prayed, and they prayed in Jesus' name.

He was instantly healed. He discovered that that man had a secret house church there. He stayed with him three months, was discipled, went back to Darfur, started proclaiming by foot, walking through the

villages, telling people about Jesus.

One day he was with an old blind man. He prayed for the old blind man. He was instantly healed.

The old blind man said, come and speak in my house. He went to his house, but the village rejected him. The healed blind man said, that's all right.

I'll send you 11 men. He sent 11 men back into the refugee camp. He began to share with them.

They came to Christ. They became evangelists. They're out sharing their faith in Muslim Darfur.

And here's the point. A little woman with three children under three years old who was not afraid to draw stick figures on a piece of paper. We are proclaimers.

And the inconvenient loss of Darfur are being reached because a mother with three children under three was not too embarrassed to draw little scrawlings on a piece of paper. I beg of you, don't be afraid to try. Don't be afraid to cry.

And lastly, don't be afraid to die. It was the spring of 1940. Germany had overrun the defenses of France and Belgium.

England had sent its army, the British Expeditionary Force, to help. The cowardly Belgian king surrendered with hardly a fight. The French pulled back in fear and the British army ran for their lives, huddled together at Dunkirk.

350,000 men about to be wiped out by superior German forces. It was a desperate day and King George IV sent this message to his shaken troops. The decisive struggle is now upon us.

Let no one be mistaken. It is no mere territorial conquest that our enemies are seeking. It is the overthrow, complete and final of this empire and of everything for which it stands.

And after that, the conquest of the world. It is a life and death struggle for us all. And if their will prevails, they will bring to accomplishment all the hatred and cruelty which they have already displayed.

But confidence alone is not enough. It must be armed with courage and resolution, with endurance and self-sacrifice. Keep your hearts proud and your resolve unshaken.

Let us go forward to the task as one man, a smile on our lips and our heads held high. King George received a reply from his army commanders trapped at Dunkirk. It was only three words.

But, if not. I don't know if you recognize those words. Perhaps in illiterate, as far as biblically illiterate America today, we would miss it.

But 1940 Britain knew their Bibles. Three Hebrew children refusing to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold. He builds a murderous fire and gives them one more chance to bow.

We have no need to answer you, O King. Our God is able to deliver us and he will. But, if not, let it be known to you that we will not serve false gods, neither will we bow.

Our God is able to deliver us. But, if he does not, I am not afraid to die. I am not afraid of the inconvenience of death.

You have heard this famous quote from the church fathers, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. If this is true and it is, then is it also true that we have not yet seen great breakthrough in the Muslim world. We have not yet seen an indigenous church widely spread amongst Muslim peoples, simply because we have not planted enough seed, enough bloody seed.

If it is true and it is that the death of martyrs leads to the life of the church, then why are we so afraid to die? And why will we not send missionaries to the Somalias of the world? And why do we shy away from the very thing that will bring life? I was talking with someone about sending personnel to Somalia. Not now, you may say. It's too dangerous.

Yes, it's dangerous. Faith does not deny facts. But, perhaps Somalia is unreached because it has not yet been watered with enough martyrs' blood.

We have been stingy with our seed. We have scattered seed largely where it is safe, where it's convenient. We have forgotten that seeds have to die in order to bear fruit.

In his heart, Frodo begins to understand the quest will claim his life. You know this. You have foreseen it.

It is the risk we all took. I do not wish to talk about death cavalierly. We are not twisted jihadists who madly destroy ourselves.

In fact, in Christianity, if you try to be a martyr, it doesn't count. I am talking about fear. I am talking about not being afraid to die.

I am talking about not being inconvenienced by death and not making our life choices based on fear. Dying biblically is not reserved for one heroic moment. We die daily.

In 1988, I was a young college freshman. Two prominent professors at North Central University fell into moral sin. The academic dean, Dr. Myers, stood up and addressed the chapel.

He said, you don't wake up one morning and decide to commit adultery. All large choices are merely the culmination of a series of daily decisions. The decision to die for Jesus in the heroic sense, it's not ours to make.

The decision to die daily is. When we choose to die to our own desires, our own timetables, our own wills, our own flesh, our own convenience, when we submit to authority, our roommate, our peers, when we yield our rights and our opinions and our preferences, when we say yes to the Holy Spirit, when we say I will give my life for the inconvenient loss, when we lay down our dreams to take up his, we hack away at the fear of dying and we prepare ourselves for the inconvenient loss. I love the dwarf Gimli just before attacking Mordor.

Certainty of death, small chance of success. Well, what are we waiting for? I'm not a prophet. I do not know the dreams that God has laid on your heart.

I do know that God has expectations and plans for us far beyond what we could ask or think. I do know that God wants us to shake this earth. I do know that left to this generation are the most inconvenient and the most inhospitable places and peoples on earth.

I do believe that the most inconvenient for us to reach are Muslim peoples. I do know that Jesus is asking us to do something about it and I do know that the primary hindrance to that is fear. It's not convenient to

give your life for Muslims.

It's not convenient to walk away from budding relationships. It's not convenient to defer grad school. It is not convenient to forego job opportunities.

It's even not so convenient to die. Yet, in the name and in the spirit of Jesus, overcoming all through his aid and his help, we will not be afraid to try. We will not be afraid to cry.

We will not be afraid to die. We will reach the inconvenient lost. It's up to me.

It's up to you. It's up to us. Would you close your eyes? It's time to pray.

We all have our limits of inconvenience. We all have set a boundary to which we have said we will yield this far but no more. Whether you are a student or a veteran missionary, we all have that invisible boundary.

What is your limit of inconvenience? What fears restrict you from stretching that limit out? We want to take some time and respond to the Holy Spirit and I want you to make the place where you are sitting an altar. I want to ask you right now to turn and kneel at your chair and in silence we are going to listen to the Holy Spirit and we are going to ask him what are my borders of inconvenience and will you give me the grace to allow that to be stretched so that every tribe and every tongue and every people and every nation and every tribe and everyone that's inconvenient and everyone that's inhospitable will not be lost or damned because of my fear. Jesus, Holy Spirit, show me what are the fears that restrict the lost, the inconvenient lost from knowing you.

Let him put his finger on it, repent of it, ask for grace and let us in silence allow the Holy Spirit to stretch our limits of inconvenience for the sake of the lost.

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