

# How God Called Me to a World-Wide Ministry

by Oswald J. Smith

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*Oswald J. Smith shares his journey of faith and the imperative of global evangelism, urging Christians to actively participate in spreading the gospel worldwide.*

**Duration:** 21:31

**Scripture:** Matthew 9:35-38, Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 16:15, Luke 10:30-37, John 4:35, Acts 1:8, Revelation 14:6

**Topics:** "Testimony"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the problem of a plenteous harvest but few laborers, which he believes is a problem in both his time and ours. He emphasizes the importance of spreading the gospel to all nations and all people, as commanded by God. The speaker encourages the audience to either go themselves or support others in spreading the gospel. He shares a personal story of raising funds to support missionaries and how the congregation's generosity led to an increase in the number of missionaries sent out. The sermon concludes with the message that the work of evangelizing the world is ongoing and that everyone has a role to play in fulfilling God's plan.

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## Transcript

This is Oswald J. Smith of the People's Church, Toronto, Canada. I'm speaking now on the subject, How God Called Me to a Worldwide Ministry. Let us turn to the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 9, verses 35 to 38.

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages. Note, if you will, that he went about. Jesus never settled down any one place.

He never became a pastor. He was always on the go. Jesus went about all the cities and villages.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion. What is compassion? Compassion is not pity. Compassion is not sympathy.

Compassion is love in action. And there is no compassion until there is action. The priest never showed any compassion.

The Levite never showed any compassion. It was only the good Samaritan who showed any compassion. He did something about it.

Love in action. Then saith he unto his disciples, Now for the solution. The last verse.

Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. Years ago I went through the Bible to see if I could stay in Canada and still obey God. Would it be possible, I asked myself, for me to enjoy a comfortable pastorate, never cross the boundaries of my country, and still carry out my Lord's commands? Would God be satisfied? And as I studied the Bible, I found such expressions as these.

All nations, all the world, every creature, every kindred and tongue and people and nation, the uttermost part of the earth. In other words, the gospel, I discovered, was to be given to the entire world. Every nation, kindred, tongue, and people must hear it.

When I saw that, then I asked myself this question. Do all nations live in Canada? If they do, and if there are no nations living beyond the boundaries of Canada, then I can stay in my own country, preach the gospel here, and never once cross the borders. But if one nation lives beyond the boundaries of Canada, then I am in duty bound to leave my country, cross the boundaries, and go with the gospel of Jesus Christ to that nation.

And if I cannot, then there is only one thing left for me to do. I will have to spend a lifetime sending out substitutes. And if I do neither, if I refuse to go myself, and if I refuse to send out substitutes, I'll be a missing Christian in the day of rewards.

I will not have satisfied God, nor will I have carried out the post-resurrection commands of Jesus Christ. My friend, what about you? You know that the gospel must be given to all nations, to all the world, to every kindred and tongue and people, to the uttermost part of the earth. What are you doing about it? What are you going to do? Either you must go yourself, or else you must send someone in your place.

And woe betide you if you do nothing. God's orders must be obeyed. His commands carried out.

And there is no way to evade the issue. When I was 18 years of age, I went to the Indians of British Columbia. I realized that I was too young to apply to a board, and so I went on my own.

I lived in a little shack on an Indian reserve, all alone up near Alaska, between three and four thousand miles from home. I stayed away for over a year, teaching school during the weekdays and preaching the gospel to the Indians on the Sundays. Then realizing that I needed more education, more preparation for my life's work, I returned to civilization and settled down to five years of theological studies.

Finally, I graduated from seminary and was ordained to the gospel ministry. Then I took a year of postgraduate work. I was now old enough to apply to a board, and so I applied to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for work in India.

My case was very carefully, very prayerfully considered. I was summonsed to appear before the board, and I did so and answered all their questions. Then I went home to await the verdict.

At last it came in the form of a letter from the secretary of the board. I had been flatly, definitely, and finally rejected for foreign missionary work. The board felt that I was not built of missionary material and that I would be absolutely valueless on any foreign field, and so they turned me down.

Then I turned to homework. I became pastor of Dale Presbyterian Church in Toronto and later of the Alliance Tabernacle, but I was not satisfied. I knew that I had to do something.

I had seen the vision. Finally, I struck out again on my own, going this time to the Russian mission fields of Europe and preaching to vast multitudes all over Latvia, Estonia, and Poland, winning many souls for Christ. Finally, one day, after having preached till I was worn out, I fainted dead away.

The missionaries realized that my work was done. I took a steamer and returned home. Then I founded the People's Church in Toronto.

That was in the year 1928. Four years after, the urge came upon me again, and every time the urge comes upon me, I have to do something about it. This time I left for Africa, and I rode horseback some 30 miles a day, penetrating back into the interior in the company of Dr. Thomas Lambie.

Finally, one day I collapsed in the long grass of Africa. I can still see the natives as they formed a circle around me, wondering how they would get me back to the coast. For many, many weeks I was seriously ill.

At last I recovered, but again I returned to civilization. By this time I was beginning to commence to think that the Board, after all, had not made a mistake and that I was not fitted for foreign missionary work. However, I had seen the vision.

I knew that other nations had to hear the gospel, and so I made a third attempt. That was in 1938. This time I headed for the Solomon Islands, and after traveling some 31 days by steamer, at last I found myself preaching to the cannibals, the savages, and the Christians of the South Sea Islands.

At length I contracted malaria fever, a very dangerous type of malaria fever, which lasted for three years. The missionaries realized if they didn't soon get me out of the islands, there would be another white man's grave in the islands. So they too put me on a steamer and sent me back to civilization.

But I never stopped until I had gone to 66 different countries, and I'm still going. I cannot stay very long, but I can go to these great cities and foreign lands and hold citywide campaigns and thus reach souls for the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm still doing it.

In the early years of my ministry, realizing that I could not go myself, that I could not become a missionary, I turned to substitutes. One day I approached Reverend J. H. W. Cook, the leader of the Evangelical Union of South America. You want to send out new missionaries, I said.

Yes, he replied. We have five ready to go. Why don't you send them, I inquired.

We do not have the money, was his reply. If I can succeed in raising the funds for their transportation, will you allow me to support them, I asked him. His face lit up as he responded in the affirmative.

Never will I forget the day I placed those five missionaries on the platform of the People's Church and challenged the congregation to send them out. They did so. Then the five became ten, the ten became twenty, the twenty forty, the forty one hundred.

And now I felt we had done our duty. We had a hundred missionaries in the regions beyond, but the people were not satisfied. I had trained them to give four missions and they continued giving.

A hundred became a hundred and fifty, and then a hundred and fifty became two hundred. And again I felt that God should be satisfied, but my people still continued to give. And in order to use up the money that was coming in, I was forced to send out more missionaries.

The two hundred became two hundred and fifty, then the two hundred and fifty, three hundred. Never will I forget the day I was able to stand in the pulpit of the People's Church and announce to the congregation that we now had three hundred missionaries in the regions beyond and that we were taking care of their personal support. But again my people were not satisfied.

Again God burdened my heart. The three hundred became three hundred and sixty. And now we have an army of missionaries on forty different fields, under thirty-five accredited faith missionary societies, our representatives there in the regions beyond.

But you say, are you satisfied now? Am I satisfied? I'm continually praying this prayer. Lord, let me live. Let me live if it be Thy will until I can see four hundred substitutes on the regions beyond.

That's the number I feel that the People's Church should be supporting. And I'll never be satisfied until we have at least four hundred missionaries in the foreign fields of the world and until the People's Church is helping with their support. That is what I'm living for.

That is what I exist for. I'm a pastor second. I'm a missionary first.

I'm a hymn writer second. A missionary first. I'm an author second.

I'm a missionary first. I tried to go myself. As a matter of fact, I went time and time again.

But each time I had to come back. I knew then that there was only one thing left for me to do. I realized that I would have to raise as much money as I could raise and send out substitutes.

That's why I travel all over the United States of America, the Dominion of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Great Britain. I go in order to hold missionary conventions and to challenge the young people. I must do all I can to find and send out substitutes.

But, you ask, why go before all have been saved here? There is so much to be done at home. Why not complete the work here in the homeland before going to the foreign field? Everywhere I go, that question is asked. Let me answer it by asking three or four others.

First, why did David Livingstone leave Scotland and go to Africa when there was still plenty to be done in Scotland? Why? Second, why did William Carey leave England and go to India while there was still so much to be done in England? Why? Third, why did Judson leave the United States of America and go to Burma long before everyone in America had become a Christian? And finally, why did the Apostle Paul leave Palestine, his own native land, and go to Europe to preach to your forefathers and my forefathers even before the people of his own country had been evangelized, even before they had even heard the gospel once? Why did Paul leave his own country and go abroad? There is only one answer, and I give it in the words of Holy Writ. The field is the world. The United States of America is not the world.

Great Britain is not the world. Canada is not the world. The field is the whole world.

Do you know anything about farming? Did you ever know a farmer to settle down and work in one little corner of his field year after year and year after year? I never did. What does a farmer do? He works the

whole field. He works the whole farm.

Listen, my friend. If you are giving your money for work in your own country, and if you are doing all your Christian work in your own country, then you are spending a lifetime in a fence corner. God wants you to get out of your fence corner.

God wants you to do something for the rest of the field. The entire field must be cultivated. The entire farm must be worked.

The whole world must be evangelized. God will never be satisfied until you get out of your fence corner and do everything that lies in your power to evangelize the world. Do you remember when the Lord Jesus fed the 5,000? Do you recall how he had them sit down row upon row on the green grass? Then do you remember how he took the loaves and fishes and blessed them and broke them and gave them to his disciples? Do you remember how the disciples started at one end of the front row and went right along that front row, giving everyone a helping? Then do you remember how they turned right around and started back along the front row, urging everyone to take a second helping? Do you remember? No! A thousand times, no! Had they done that, those in the back rows would have been protesting most vigorously.

They would have been saying, Here, come back to us, give us a helping. We haven't had anything yet. It isn't fair, it isn't right, it isn't just.

Why should those people in the front rows get a second helping before we have had a first helping? And they would have been right. You know as well as I do that there was an absolutely equal distribution of the food. Listen to me, with a few exceptions.

There's never been an equal distribution first. The front rows are getting it all or most of it. The back rows are getting nothing or very little.

We're talking about the second blessing. Those in the back rows haven't had the first blessing yet. We're talking about the second coming of Christ.

Those in the back rows haven't heard that he came the first time yet. Is it fair? Why should anyone hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard it once? Why should anyone get two meals before everyone has had one meal? I want to say again that in spite of the fact that there were 5,000 men besides women and children, they were equally served. And yet, there are churches that do not even go 50-50.

They do not even send as much to the foreign field as they spend on themselves at home. For a quarter of a century now, every time the people's church has spent \$1 here in the homeland, \$7 has gone out to the foreign mission fields of the world. How much of your money is used for foreign missions, for the getting of the gospel to those who have never yet heard? My friends, I have been with the back rows.

I have seen the countless millions in those back rows famishing for the bread of life. Is it right? Should we be concentrating on the front rows? Ought we not rather to be training the front rows to share what they have with the back rows and thus reach them with the gospel, those for whom nothing has been prepared? Why, I ask again, why should anyone hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard it once? Dr. Alexander Duff, that great veteran missionary to India, returned to Scotland to die. And as he stood before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, he made his appeal, but there was no response.

In the midst of his appeal, he fainted and was carried off the platform. A doctor bent over him and listened to his heart. Presently, he opened his eyes.

Where am I, he cried, where am I? Lie still, said the physician. You've had a heart attack. Lie still.

But, exclaimed Dr. Duff, I haven't finished my appeal. Take me back, take me back. I must finish my appeal.

Lie still, said the physician. You will go back at the peril of your life. But, in spite of the protests of the physician, the old white-haired warrior struggled to his feet.

And with the doctor on one side and the moderator of the General Assembly on the other side, he again mounted the steps of the pulpit platform. And as he did so, the entire Assembly rose to do him honor. Then, when they were seated, he continued his appeal.

And this is what he said. When Queen Victoria calls for volunteers for India, hundreds of young men spring to the colors. But, when King Jesus calls, no one responds.

Then he paused. There was silence. Again he spoke.

Is it true, he said, that the fathers and mothers of Scotland have no more sons to give for India? Again he paused. Still there was silence. Very well, he concluded.

Then age it though I am. I'll go back to India. I can lie down on the banks of the Ganges.

And I can die. And thereby I can let the peoples of India know that there is one man in Scotland who loves them enough to give his life for them. In a moment, young men all over the Assembly sprang to their feet, crying out, I'll go, I'll go, I'll go.

After the old white-haired warrior had been laid to rest, those young men, having graduated and having been ordained to the gospel ministry, went as his substitutes to dark, benighted India, there to labor for the Lord Jesus Christ. My friend, has God been speaking to your heart? Has God been calling you? Are you willing to go? Will you answer, Lord, here am I, send me? And if you cannot go, will you make as much money as you can make and put it back of substitutes? Will you do everything that lies in your power to get the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have never heard it? This world must be evangelized. You must have a share in it.

If you are to fit into God's plan, what are you going to do? It is for you to decide. Why? Why should anyone hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard it once?

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