

Building a Missional Community in a World of Despair

Rich Nathan

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John: Building a Community of Hope in a World of Despair

John 17:6, 26

As we continue in the series that I've been doing from John 17, I'm going to speak today about Christian missions. As you heard in the announcements, next weekend we're going to host our annual missions conference.

Why do we host such a thing as an annual missions conference? Is this just the evangelical version of the Roman Catholic Feast of the Assumption or some way that we carry out our liturgical year? Why do we, as a church, focus attention on Christian foreign missions?

Why have tens of thousands of Americans chosen to leave the United States for decades to live in much poorer, much less clean, infinitely less convenient foreign countries? Why do many Americans, as well as hundreds of thousands of other Christians around the world move away from friends and families to engage in Christian missions?

Let me put the matter even more personally for us. Why have several families and several singles from Vineyard Columbus, who are very well-educated, highly employable, who appear to be sane—in fact, many of them were actually tested by psychologists for different missions agencies and came back as being sane—yet they've chosen to live for years in the Amazon Rain Forest, or in Muslim areas of

Central Asia, where the food is different (to say the least) than in America. There are no Meijers or Krogers open 24-hours a day. You can't go to Wal-Mart and buy anything you want. Medical care is poor to non-existent. The vast majority of people in these areas do not speak English. The electricity can be off half a dozen times in a day and stay off for 3-4 days at a time.

Why do people do this? Why go around the world to unpleasant places, eat unpleasant food; live in unpleasant conditions to engage in Christian missions? How do we understand Christian missions anyway?

As John Stott, a well known Christian leader put it, the whole business of Christian missions needs to be set in the context of the two great worldwide religious trends of the last 50 years—religious fanaticism on the one hand, and religious pluralism on the other. By religious fanaticism, I'm talking about a religious group or individual motivated by religion that uses violence, terrorism, and even murder to compel conformity to the group's view of the world, or the individual's view of the world. By religious pluralism, I'm talking about the perspective that the problem with the world is precisely with people who claim to have the truth. Religious pluralists say, "If we can just get rid of these silly claims that any of us have the truth, the world would be a much more popular, much more peaceful, much more harmonious place."

Let me start with religious fanaticism. This, of course, is not the exclusive possession of any particular religion. A Jewish fanatic murdered the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, while Rabin was attending a peace rally in Tel Aviv. The confessed

assassin, Yigal Amir, said he killed Rabin because in violation of the Jewish scriptures, the Prime Minister was going to give the Israeli land back to the Arabs.

The Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, was assassinated by a bomb explosion while he was campaigning for office. The assassin was a radical Hindu militant who rejected Gandhi's more secular political party.

Christian fanatics have formed organizations like the Army of God and targeted doctors who perform abortions. Christian fanatics in America have bombed abortion clinics. One of them, Eric Rudolph, was linked to a series of Atlanta bombings including the fatal bombing of a Birmingham women's clinic.

At this particular time in history, it is Islamic religious fanaticism that has become the focal point of world attention. Bernard Lewis, who is Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University and is widely regarded as the preeminent scholar of Islam and Arab history today, recently wrote a book titled *The Crisis of Islam*. Some of what I'm about to say comes directly from Bernard Lewis' book.

Islam, of course, is one of the world's great religions. It has given dignity and meaning to otherwise very impoverished lives. It has taught different races and creeds to live together in a reasonable degree of tolerance for each other. Islam inspired a great civilization and for 800 years, during the period that Christians call "The Dark Ages" it was Islamic civilization that was the greatest civilization in the world from about 700AD to 1500AD.

Lewis writes:

Like other religions, Islam has also known periods when it inspired some of its followers to hatred and violence. It is our misfortune that we have to confront part of the Muslim world while it is going through such a period and when most, by no means all, of that hatred is directed against us.

In the last decade, Islam religious terrorists adopted improved on methods pioneered by nationalists of the 20th century, in particular by their lack of concern for innocent bystanders. Their unconcern for the innocent reached new proportions during the terror campaign launched by Osama bin Laden.

The major example of this lack of concern toward innocent bystanders was the bombing of two American Embassies in East Africa in 1998. In order to kill 12 American diplomats, the terrorists were willing to slaughter 200 Africans, many of them who happened to be Muslims, who lived in the vicinity.

The suicide bombings are a direct contradiction of traditional Islamic teaching. The traditions of the prophet Mohammed are very clear that no one can enter paradise who deliberately kills himself. But Muslim fanatics have distorted Islamic teaching and have recruited hundreds of individuals who attack the United States, including in the World Trade Center attack.

Osama bin Laden, in fact, published his so-called “Letter to America,” which detailed so-called offenses made by the United States under seven headings. This letter was published by newspapers around the world a year ago. It says what these fanatics are calling upon America to do and what we want from you:

1. The first thing demanded is that we embrace Islam.
2. The second is to stop your oppressions, lies, immorality and debauchery.
3. The third is to admit that America is a nation without principle.

And it goes on to demand that:

4. America, pack your luggage and get out of our lands.

This is offered as advice for America’s own good, so that you do not force us to send you back as cargo in coffins.

To Muslim fanatics, even many of the things Americans consider virtues, are crimes and sins against God and humanity. The liberation of women is called debauchery. Free elections mean that Americans choose our rulers and must be accountable for our rulers’ decisions so that there are no so-called innocent civilians in America. All are subject to being attacked. Worst of all, the separation of church and state in America means that America refuses the rule of Allah and invents its own laws according to its own desires.

bin Laden sums up the charge against America saying, “You are the worst civilization witnessed by the history of mankind and you must be destroyed.” Further, this letter declares that it is the duty of every Muslim to “kill Americans and their allies both civil and military in any country where this is possible.”

Now, wherever religious fanaticism prevails, there will be a counter reaction, which many people will advocate, religious pluralism. Religious pluralism essentially says that the problem occurs when any particular group or individual claims to have discovered the truth that other people need to believe. Then pluralists say that all religions are equally true or equally false. The only way we are going to get along is to give every religion equal value and not ever place one truth above another.

It is into this milieu of religious fanaticism on the one hand, and religious pluralism on the other, that Christians engage in Christian missions. What is Christian missions all about? How do we deal with the competing forces of fanaticism and pluralism?

I’m going to talk about that today in a talk that I’ve titled, “Building a Missional Community in a World of Despair.” Let’s pray.

We read in the gospel of John these two verses:

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John 17:6 – *I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*

Now, if you have the NIV translation of the Bible and you look toward the bottom of the page in the margin, you will see that the NIV offers a different translation of v. 6, which reads:

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I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world.

That is the more literal translation. “I have revealed your name...”

Then in v. 26 Jesus says something very similar:

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John 17:26 – I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

Again, if you look down to the bottom of the page in the NIV, you’ll find this as an alternate translation:

SLIDE

I have made your name known to them and will continue to make your name known.

Jesus is talking about the great purpose of God in the world. If you were to ask what is the one great purpose of the God in the Bible, what is the singular thing that the God in the Bible is after—loving people is a part of it, forgiving people is a part of it, healing people is a part of it, reconciling people to each other is a part of what God is after, reconciling the whole universe and healing the whole universe is a part of what God is after, defeating evil, ending wars, ending illness, ending famine, winning peace, showing mercy—these are a part of what the God of the Bible is after.

But if you were to say what is the single grand purpose that drives the ministry of Jesus Christ, who lived his life in conformity to the will of God, if you were to say what is the big thing, the all-embracing purpose of the God of the Bible in the world, there is no verse in the Bible that states the purpose of God any better than John 17:6,

SLIDE

I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world.

What God is after, the reason why God does all that he does, is to gain for himself a great name. In other words, God desires to have a great reputation. And Jesus' whole ministry was designed so that the world would know that God was as wonderful as the Son of God knew him to be.

You see, people are terribly confused about who God is and what his character is like. People frequently accuse God of having motives that are wicked, cruel or heartless. All of us have accused God of doing things in our lives or doing things in the world

that are unjust or unloving. How often have you, when disaster has struck your home, when you or a loved one is diagnosed with cancer, when you lose your job, when you feel betrayed or lonely or friendless, when someone you care about dies, or is murdered, or when you hear about or read about some tragedy like the WTC disaster, or children starving in another country, how often have you said in your heart, “God doesn’t care. God is unconcerned. God is unkind. God is unjust.”

The whole world accuses God of having a character other than the character that he has. The essence of sin is to indict God and put him on trial as if the God of the universe has committed crimes against humanity, or least against us. In our hearts, we often are trying and convicting God.

It is the great purpose of God to uphold his reputation against all of our indictments, in the face of all of our accusations. Jesus came to show us what God is really like. He’s saying in John 17:6, “I made your reputation known Father. I showed your character to the world. I demonstrated to everyone that you are a God who is forgiving. I revealed you as one who is just. I modeled to the world that you are a healer, and that you are one who is sensitive to people who are broken. You are the one who runs toward the repentant. From the beginning, Father, I have demonstrated your name, upheld your reputation the way your reputation deserves to be upheld.”

Now, why does God care about his reputation? Why is that his singular purpose in the world? God cares about his reputation for the same reason that I care about my

reputation. I care about my reputation so that people will trust me, so that people will think about me in the right way, a way consistent with what is best about me, what is true about me, and what is really my heart. One of the things that is most difficult for me as a pastor of a large church is, I will occasionally have statements or viewpoints attributed to me that are in no way reflective of my viewpoints or statements. I'll occasionally have to say to someone, "Where did you ever get that idea from? Why would you think that I or this church would believe that kind of thing?"

"Well, I heard it from so and so."

"I would never say something like that or do something like that."

That kind of viewpoint puts me in a bad light. It causes people to trust me less.

Companies spend millions of dollars protecting their good names. The press had a field day a few years ago when Victoria Secret sued a lingerie and adult novelty store from Kentucky for trademark infringement because they called their new business, "Victor's Secret." Within two weeks of naming their store Victor's Secret, Victor and Kathy Moseley, received a letter from a lawyer demanding that they change their name or face legal action. So they changed their name to "Victor's Little Secret." Victoria's Secret's lawyers said that wasn't enough and so they sued for trademark infringement.

The press loved it. Here you had Victoria's Secret trying to uphold their reputation as a purveyor of what would you call it, intimate apparel against another business, this tiny little operation, selling what is euphemistically titled adult novelties. They said the association was muddying their reputation. Federal courts up to the Supreme Court disagreed.

Companies spend millions of dollars protecting their trade name so that people will trust that the product they are buying is of consistently good quality. When you go to the store and buy the Odd Lots brand of cola that is spelled "Kola" and you look at the stuff in the bottle and found gunk in the bottle looking like a dissolved mouse, Coca Cola wants to make sure that you don't attribute that product to their great company. They zealously police this kind of thing. That's why when you order a coke in a restaurant, they want to make sure you aren't served a Pepsi, or Odd Lots Kola. It has to be the real thing.

God's fundamental motivation in the world is to protect his reputation, his good name. That's what Jesus is saying here.

Why did God, for example, choose the nation of Israel? We read in 2 Samuel 7:23

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And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself...

He chose Israel so that the Jewish people might make a reputation for God. In other words, he choose them so that through the Jewish people, people around the world would esteem God more, trust him more, honor him, and love him more.

Why did God judge Pharaoh with ten plagues? Why didn't he just send a lightening bolt and kill Pharaoh all at once or cause Pharaoh to have a heart attack? Why were there ten plagues?

Certainly, it was great patience in the heart of God with people. The Bible says that God is not willing that any should perish, even his enemies. He desires all to come to repentance. There is a great patience in the heart of God. But God's main purpose in judging Pharaoh with ten plagues is the same as his great purpose in everything, to uphold his great name. We read in Romans 9:17,

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For the scripture says to Pharaoh: I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my powers in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

In other words, the plagues were designed to spread the reputation of God as someone who is awesome, someone who is great, someone who is to be feared, as holy, and someone who does act on behalf of the slave, the impoverished, the one beaten down by forces to stronger than them, that God does hear people's prayers, and that he does care for the weak. God judged Pharaoh with ten successive

plagues to uphold his reputation as a fearsome God and as a merciful God to the weak and lowly.

And did it work? Did God get a reputation for himself? His purpose did work. His reputation went ahead of him. After the Exodus, 40 years later, when the Jewish people were entering the land of Canaan, the Promised Land, Joshua sent some spies ahead of the Jews into the city of Jericho. These spies met a prostitute named Rahab. Living in a pagan culture as a prostitute, hundreds of miles away from where the plagues occurred, Rahab speaks to these Jewish spies and says:

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Joshua 2:9-11 – I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage fell because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Why does God forgive sin? To uphold his reputation as a God of mercy.

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Psalm 25:11 - For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

Psalm 79:9 – *Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name, deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.*

Show yourself as the God who forgives, who lets people off the hook, who doesn't punish us as our sins deserve.

What are world missions about? Why do Christians engage in missions? To spread the reputation of God, so that who God really is will be known around the world. So that what God is really like would be understood and acknowledged and honored. In fact, followers of Christ, this is the reason why we're supposed to do everything. Colossians 3:17 says this:

SLIDE

Colossians 3:17 – *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

In your workplace, if you are known as a Christian, you are there to uphold God's reputation. What is God like? If Christ has come into your life, does he really change your life? Does it make a difference in the way you treat people? If you are a Christian, won't you be more honest? The reputation of God is at stake.

That is why it is a tremendous scandal today when Christian couples divorce each other without biblical grounds. And an even worse scandal is when ministers of the

church, Catholic priests, are accused and convicted of child molestation. It impedes the great purpose of God in the world to gain a name and reputation for himself.

Now, more specifically, what is the character of God like that he wants us to uphold? Over against religious pluralism which says that all religions are equally true or equally false, the Bible teaches that the God of the Bible is unique. Isaiah 46:5 says:

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Is. 46:5 – To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared...I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me.

Now isn't that narrow-minded, this claim of uniqueness? And that, by the way, is the claim made all through the Bible for the Lord, the God of Israel, and the Creator of the world. This is precisely what religious pluralists deplore. They say that all religions, basically, are equally true or equally false. The fact is that religions would be equally true or false only if they all taught the same thing.

I was a comparative religion major in college and one of the first things I discovered was how different the teaching of the world's religions are. This idea that all religions teach the same thing can only be said by someone who knows nothing of any major religion. People who believe that every religion essentially teaches the same thing are simply proclaiming that they've never read even the most elementary books on comparative religion, not even the Readers' Digest version. Because the truth is, the

world's religions differ on virtually every major question. And if you take the time to actually read the holy books from the various major religions of the world, as I had to do in college and I have tried to do since, you will be immediately struck by how different the religions are.

For example, on the basic question: Is there a God or not? Traditional Buddhism is completely agnostic regarding the existence of God. Classical Buddhism taught that there was no God and no worship. This is not the same as religions that teach that there is a God and that we are called to worship God. Well, pluralism could not be right here when it says that both positions are equally true or equally false. Either there is a God or there isn't a God.

And when you start talking about the religions that believe in God, you will find that some religions are pantheistic, that is they teach everything is God or a part of God. Hinduism is essentially pantheistic. It teaches that you are God, the universe is God, and everything is God. Theistic religion, Muslims, Jews and Christians, teach that you are not God, that there is a radical separation between creation and the Creator. Again, both can't be right. Either you are God or you are not. Either everything is God, or everything is not God. All religions don't teach the same thing.

One religion teaches you need a mediator, a savior to approach God. That religion is Christianity. The other two great monotheistic religions deny this. Who is right? Do you need a Savior or not?

Just think about this logically. As Brian McLaren said in his book, “Finding Faith,” if all religions are equally true, then God must be terribly confused. Because God told Mohammed that you need to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, but God told Jesus that it doesn’t matter where you worship him. If all religions are equally true, then God must be terribly confused. Because God apparently told some people that men should dominate women and not allow them to vote or drive cars or be seen in public with any skin exposed. But God told other people that men and women are equal partners in the gift of life. And if all religions are equally true, then apparently God must prefer some people over others because he’s called some people to turn the other cheek when they are attacked and he’s told other people that they have the right to convert folks with a sword. Believe my religion or die. You’d have to guess that God didn’t like the first group very much.

At some point, friends, you are going to have to make a decision. What do you believe about God? Is there a God or not? And what is the nature of God?

There are many reasons I believe Christianity to be uniquely true. But there is one great reason. All the founders of the world’s great religions are dead except one. Moses died. Buddha died. Mohammed died. But Jesus alone rose from the dead and is alive today. He has unique authority as the world’s only conqueror of death. Have you personally surrendered to the unique authority of Christ? Do you want to? Do you need to today? Christian missions are all about declaring Christ’s uniqueness.

But the uniqueness and exclusivity that we find regarding God is in no way fanaticism. Because the one true God, at least the God revealed in the Bible, is radically inclusive and welcoming. Whole books of the Bible are devoted to show God's infinitely large heart for the whole world. If you go back in the Bible to the book of Jonah, you will find religious and ethnic bigotry utterly condemned. God regularly condemns narrowness of heart. Jesus' ministry was a ministry of welcoming outcasts. In fact, he was criticized for it. In the words of Luke 15:

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Luke 15 – *He welcomed sinners and ate with them.*

Probably Jesus' most loved story is the story of the Prodigal. The young son takes his father's inheritance and spends it all on foolishness. But the whole story of the Prodigal was designed to communicate that God welcomes people. God welcomes religious people and non-religious people. He welcomes those who know a lot about the Bible and he welcomes those who don't know anything about the Bible. He welcomes anyone, in fact, who comes to him.

This was the ministry of Jesus. It was a welcoming ministry. He welcomed outcasts and tax collectors and prostitutes—people who have messed up their lives. He welcomes folks who the rest of the religious people rejected and kept at arm's length. He welcomed lepers and healed them. He welcomed women, who were considered second-class citizens back then. He welcomed people with disabilities. He welcomed children and blessed them.

There is a word in the Bible that shows the size of the heart of God. It is the word “all.” Hundreds of times, the Bible speaks of God’s love for all. The apostle Paul, in particular, was fond of the word “all.” I want you to see this in Paul’s most important book in the Bible, his letter to the Romans. Here’s how Paul describes his ministry:

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Romans 1:5 – *Through him and for his name’s sake [there is that idea again, the purpose of God, the purpose of missions to spread Christ’s name] we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.*

Paul’s ministry was for all. And the reason why he preached Christ is because all of us have sinned—you, me, the Pope, Billy Graham – all. Romans 3:9,

SLIDES

Romans 3:9 – *What shall we conclude then, are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.*

Romans 3:12 – *All have turned away. They have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one.*

Romans 3:23 – *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Do you see yourself as someone who has sinned? Do you recognize that everyone in the world has sinned and needs a Savior? Missions are about helping everyone to find the Savior.

But because of Jesus all, you and me, all of us can be declared righteous through faith in Christ.

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Romans 3:22 – *This righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference...*

It doesn't matter if you commit socially respectable sins like being greedy and hoarding your money, or being proud, or socially unacceptable sins like being a drug addict, an alcoholic, or an adulterer. All can be in the right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. All of us can.

And all who have faith are a part of God's chosen people, not just Jews, but Gentiles also.

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Romans 4:16 – *Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.*

I come from a Jewish background. Paul is saying Abraham is not just my father, my ancestor as a Jew, but he is the forefather spiritually all of you who place your faith in Jesus Christ. You may not even know your father, or you may come from Asian descent, or English descent, or Irish or German descent, or African descent. Paul says you are all spiritually descended from Abraham. You can all, if you put your faith in Christ, trace your ancestry back to him.

And it is God's will to bless and to save all who call upon Christ.

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Romans 10:12 – For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Perhaps your life, up to now, has been a big mess. Paul says if you call upon the Lord, you will be saved. Everyone who does this will be saved and God will bless all who call on his name. It is God's desire to show mercy upon all.

There is an "all" in the heart of God. All of us are included – you, me, the rich, the poor, those with 5,000 sq. ft. homes, and those who are homeless. There is but one God, the true God, the one who revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. But this one true God has an infinitely large heart for all.

And what is the method of God for reaching all? Over against religious fanatics, those who believe that because they possess the truth they have a right to impose that truth on others, or force others by violence to accept their truth or die, the God followers of Christ believe in employs very different missionary methods. His methods are those of service.

We come to another culture not as a dominator, to impose our will on other people, to turn everyone in the world into an American or Westerner. That is not Christian missions. Christian mission is about winning people to Christ and revealing the nature of God by serving others.

One scholar exhaustively searched through historical documents of the Greek and Roman world before Christ came and declared that antiquity has left no trace of any organized charitable effort before Christ. The famous historian, Will Durant, said that in ancient Rome charity found little place. Hospitality survived as a mutual convenience at a time with inns were poor and far between. Roman historian, Polybius, reported that “in Rome no one ever gives anything away to anyone, if he can help it.”

But when Christ came and he taught his followers to win the world by out-serving them, he taught his followers to give to those who could not repay us. He encouraged generosity toward the poor. He told us that judgment, in part, would be on how we related to the poor and needy. He said that he so identifies with the hungry and

needy in the world, that as we do it to these, the least of his brethren, we do it unto Christ.

And so in history Christians have gone through the world serving others. It was the church's care, not only for its own poor, but also for outsiders that so impressed the Roman Emperor, Julian, that he declared famously, "It is disgraceful that when no Jew ever has to beg and the impious Galileans, that is the Christians, support both their own poor and ours as well. All men see that our people lack aid from us."

People are won to Christ because Christians serve them. This is the method of the God of the Bible in spreading his name. To call his people to serve. And so we see service in the famous ministry of St. Francis of Assisi. And in the more recent ministries of Mother Theresa in the streets of Calcutta, the Salvation Army in providing shelter for families whose home just went up in flames.

The church's method has also always been to win people by persuasion, not by compulsion. You see, the God of the Bible reasons with us. He tells us in Isaiah 1:18,

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Is. 1:18 – Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

This word “persuade” or “reason” is used dozens of times by the premier Christian missionary, the apostle Paul. This one verse,

SLIDE

Acts 17:17 - (and you can find this sort of thing over and over in the missionary career of Paul) *So he, [that is Paul] reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happen to be there.*

Christians have always placed an enormous value on education. Most of the world’s languages were first set to writing by Christian missionaries in order for people to be able to read the Bible for themselves. This is still true today. The Wycliffe Bible Translators are carrying on this work in obscure areas of the world. According to the Wycliffe Bible Translators, there are several hundred million people in the world who still don’t have a way to write their own language.

The most famous literacy-training program in the world was developed by an American Christian missionary to the Philippines. His name was Frank Laubach. He developed a literacy program that has been used around the world now for about 70-90 years. The Laubach method has been estimated to have taught over 100 million people worldwide to read, including many illiterate people in America.

God's method is to engage our minds, to reason with us, to increase our dignity, not to rob us, enslave us, nor to impose something on us, but to liberate us and call us to develop our highest potential.

The primary method of God in reaching this world is to suffer at the hands of the world. It is this, most of all, that shows the difference between the way of Christ and the way of religious fanaticism. Religious fanatics cause suffering to others, those they declare to be their enemies. Religious fanatics have no problem in pursuit of what they believe to have legitimate ends, murdering their enemies for sake of their God.

Christians throughout the ages have chosen the way of suffering to bring God's truth to the world. I just read a story of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. On one occasion Dr. King was assaulted by a member of the American Nazi Party right before he was going to deliver a sermon. This man jumped out of the audience and punched Dr. King in the face.

Dr. King immediately dropped his hands and didn't defend himself. The man was restrained by some of Dr. King's aides. Dr. King immediately went over to the man and spoke kindly to him. Later on that day, he and a couple of his aides spent time with the man counseling him and praying with him. The missionary method of Jesus is to win people not by causing people to suffer, but rather to suffer at their hands.

Last thought. We've talked about the purpose of God, the character of God, and the method of God. I want to talk for a moment about the church of God. Christian missions is all about God's desire to build a multinational, multicultural, missionary community that is under orders to reach the world until Christ returns.

Today we are going to have a baptism. The apostle Paul declares that baptism is specifically designed to break down dividing walls between people. This is what we read in Galatians 3:26,

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Gal. 3:26 – You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you all one in Christ Jesus.

Over against religious fanaticism, all the manmade distinctions among people disappear in baptism. God's heart is for all. Over against religious pluralism, all these distinctions disappear only in Christ Jesus. When he reigns, when he has control, when people put their faith in Christ, we finally can have peace with each other. Let's pray.

- I. The Context of Christian Missions
 - A. Religious Fanaticism
 - B. Religious Pluralism
- II. The God of Christian Missions
 - A. The Purpose of God (Jn. 17:6; 2 Sam. 7:23; Rom. 9:17; Josh. 2:9-11; Col. 3:17)
 - B. The Character of God
 - 1. Unique/Exclusive (Is. 46:5, 9; Ex. 20:3; Jn. 17:3; Acts 4:12)
 - 2. Welcoming/Inclusive (Lk. 15:1,2)
 - C. The Methods of God
 - 1. Serving
 - 2. Persuading
 - 3. Suffering
 - D. The Church of God: Multicultural (Acts 13:1,2; Gal. 3:26-28)