



To the Ends of the Earth

Part 2: Missions: The Big Picture

Pastor Travis Brawner

We tell you every week that we are grateful for your giving and I'm excited to get to share a couple of things with you today. As you probably know we have a team in Kenya as we speak. They left last Tuesday and they are there this week, through Friday. I've gotten some updates from Kent McMillan, our team leader, on everything that's going on. They had uneventful travel there. Since they've been there, they've gotten to work and serve at one of the local feeding centers in Mombasa, Kenya.

They have participated in a community outreach event at one of the local schools, getting to meet some of the community people and be with them. There are a couple of other itinerary items on the list that they have planned, but I have their itinerary in front of me and I love the comment... "It will be tentative until we get back home." Their flights home are about the only thing set in concrete. If you've ever been on a short-term missions trip, you know that to be the case.

Another neat story that has come out of that is there is a young pastor in Mombasa who grew up in the schools that Manna serves. This young pastor has moved back home to Mombasa, has planted a church there, has grown that church to about 200 people, and is currently meeting under a Mango Tree. In my conversation with Kent, I asked what we could do. He said, "15,000.00 will build a church for this church plant." We said, "Great! Let's do it." So, woodland hills, you are building a church for this young pastor and his congregation so, again, we are grateful for your generosity and your faithfulness in giving and we encourage you to continue that.

Today, we are continuing part two of our two-part mission series. Today, we are talking about the big picture, the big picture of missions. We're going to rise up and take a 30,000 ft. view. Many of you are familiar with that phrase if you've ever sat in a business meeting, an organizational meeting. Some of you are tired of that like maybe we spend too much time at 30,000 ft. You're more into the details. Some of you really enjoy it at 30,000 ft. because it's a little less messy than the details.

The question is... Is our God a God of the big picture or the details? The answer is yes, exactly. Our God is a God of both. But we, as people, can get a little hung up in the daily details of our lives – the struggles, even the victories, successes, difficulties, challenges. We can get too hung up in that to where we overlook and forget about God's big picture.

That's part of what we are going to look at today. We're going to start in Revelation 22: 13 - ***13 I am (Jesus) the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.***

He says the same thing three times for emphasis, making sure that we know he is the beginning and the end. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is and was before everything that is. He will be after everything that is. It all comes back to him. So, let's look at the beginning. John 1: 1 says, ***In the beginning was the Word...*** That's Jesus ***...and the Word was with God and the word was God***

In this passage, we learn and understand about his state of being. But he just was. Like in the Old Testament said, "I Am that I Am. He just was.

In Genesis 1: 1, we read, In the beginning God created and there is the beginning of time as we know it. We then turn to 1 Thessalonians 4: 16 – 17 as we look to the end now. ***16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*** That's the end.

Now, I'm not going to get into too much of the details about the end. Next week, we are going to start a five-part series on what's called eschatology or a study of things to come. Our teaching team is going to walk through, in five weeks, the book of revelation and study the things to come. We encourage you to come and be a part of that series. The teaching team is going to tell us the exact day and time that Jesus is going to return... So glad you laughed. Because if you believe that, you really need to come to hear about revelation. Nobody knows the day or the time, not even the angels. But we know that the end is coming. The beginning has happened, and the end is coming.

Where do we find ourselves then. We find ourselves somewhere in the middle in what we call The Church Age. It's a specific chapter of the middle where we are. What is the Church Age? We know that God created Humans. The humans were sinful and then we needed a Messiah. And that Jesus, in his birth, his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection, fulfilled the prophecies that he is the Messiah. In his time and in his life and in his ministry, he launched his church. He established his church. After he died and was resurrected, he said, "I'm leaving, but I'm coming back." And that's the Church Age where he has left... He came the first time, has left, and he is coming back in his Church Age, and that's where we find ourselves waiting in anticipation for the return of Christ.

And that, in a word, is Advent. You may recognize that word from Christmastime when we celebrate Advent. The first Advent when God's people were awaiting a Messiah that had been prophesied about, He came and now we find ourselves in the second Advent, waiting with anticipation for the Lord to return. This Advent time or this middle period can be a little uncomfortable because it can leave us kind of uncertain about things. It can leave us feeling like we're kind of just in a holding pattern, we're just here, right?

Physiologists use this phrase to ascribe that feeling – *Existential Angst*. That's not just a feeling that unbelievers – those who have not placed faith in Christ – feel like what's the purpose of life, but even followers of Jesus can feel that. "Lord, what do you have for me? What's my purpose? What's your big picture for me? What are the details you have for me. We can find ourselves struggling with that. For those who might struggle with that, let's raise up to the big picture a little bit. Let me tell you that we can say, very specifically, but generally, some terms and some things God desires for us in this

Church Age, in this holding pattern. He desires for us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with him. He desires us to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. He desires for us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Are there details about what God wants us to do? Yes. But if you're experiencing that like, *what is my purpose?* Then realize that you can find comfort in that. There are general things that God wants you to do, but Jesus did give us some specific commands. There are details about things that we could and should be doing. In that, one of them we find in Matthew 28: 19 – 20, which is the Great Commission. ***19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*** He will be with us to the end of the church Age. Christ left, he sent the Holy Spirit with us, God with us to the end of the age.

Let's look at this phrase "All Nations." Go and make disciples of "all nations." We realize there are nations all across the country, people groups all across the country. And how did we get to that? We know we started with Adam and Eve when we read the description of creation and when the earth first started and God created everything in it, including mankind. We started with Adam and Eve. And now we have some eight billion people spread out in so many groups across the world. How did we get to that point? He started with Adam and Eve. We know that Adam and Eve fell to sin. Sin entered the world, and the sin condition entered the world. Therefore, acts of sin entered the world. And as they populated the world, sin acts continued and worsened. God saw that it was a bad situation. That's when he decided and reset. So, he had the flood. He preserved Noah and his wife and their three sons and their wives for them to repopulate the earth.

We know what happens after that. More sin. This time, mainly the sin of pride. But God decided he was not going to wipe out the whole earth this time. As most of the people gathered and their sin of pride caused them to want to build a city and show how awesome and powerful they were as people. And they build a tower, thinking, *we can approach God. We can get to the height of God by building this tower.* God acknowledged that. He didn't wipe them out, but he scattered them. We read about that in Genesis 11: 8-9, ***So, the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of the earth and left off building the city. There it's name was called Babel because the Lord confused the Language of all the earth. And from there, the Lord dispersed over the face of the earth.***

Obviously, that was thousands of years ago and some things could have changed. Probably more people groups have developed from larger people groups. Some may have merged. Different languages have developed over that time. And here we are today with what we know now to be about 17 thousand of what are called ethnolinguistic groups across the world. 17 thousand that are distinct in certain appearance characteristics, cultures, and languages. About 5,000 of those people groups have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. They realize that there is something missing, but they don't know who or what that is. 5,000 unreached people groups across the world in all these nations. That can feel very daunting when Christ has commanded us to go and make disciples of all of these people. When it feels daunting as a local church body and as individuals, we know that we can rely on this graphic to help us understand our place in that role.

We are going to start over here on the right side. This is what we're talking about – Go and make disciples of all nations – everyone across the world. But our church, Woodland Hills Family Church is not

alone in this. We have the Big C church, which is the global body of believers across the world that are commanded to go and make disciples of people across the world. And here we are, Woodland Hills Family Church, playing our role in the Big C church, doing that and here you are, as individuals, as couples, as families, participating however the Lord leads you to participate with your local church to then support the Global Church to make disciples of all nations.

And that's where we can be comfortable knowing we can do for one what we can't do for all. We do what we can within our local church to contribute. Woodland Hills financially supports missionaries in different places. It's very important though that we realize if we are going to go halfway around the world, we must remember there are people groups on the way that we need to make sure that we're not overlooking. So, in our support and in our missions, we balance between local, national, and international. And when you look at the Roster of our support and the things that we do, this is one of the ways that we, as leaders here at Woodland Hills, consider support.

One-time gifts

Any groups of people we may be overlooking. Again, we can't do it all. God hasn't called Woodland Hills Family Church to support every ministry that is out there or every people group that's out there, but he has called us to do what we can, so we balance in these three ways, making sure that we don't overlook people right under our nose and in our community as we're going to the ends of the earth.

We also have short-term trips

We already mentioned the Kenya team. There are also trips that we take on occasions and that is one way that people from our church family can go, and you can, at least for a short term, go and experience these different cultures, see these different cultures. And grow in different ways and help to make disciples. Some people that go will find themselves coming back from a trip and then going again. They see the need, they see the brokenness, and they want to go again.

And then a number that will go again and again and again. We have those people among us. There are a few that I can think of. Kent McMillan and his Wife, Stephanie, that are there in Kenya right now. They go on many trips a year, serving in missions. We have Paul Ethridge that does many trips throughout his life. He has also helped lead some trips through Woodland Hills. As a matter of fact, he leaves next week for Peru to literally where he is going to be with a group backpacking all of their supplies with not even any water. They have to take filtration systems in to where they are getting the water to reach an unreached people group.

Bobette Lee is a faithful server and has served this church family for so many years. She has a heart for Nicaragua, and she goes back again and again. You can just tell she has love for the people in Nicaragua and a desire to help them to grow and to disciple them.

And our prayer, especially as we talked about missions last week and this week, is that among us would be a young person, a young couple, a young family, that would be in the midst of praying and considering what the Lord would have for them. What's their mission and their individual role? We would pray that someone would go and stay. Because we must go and make disciples of all nations.

Now, there is a particular family I want to talk about and highlight this morning. The Miners are in Southeast Asia. This is a family that we visited a couple of months ago. Christ and Lauren, 11 years ago, felt the calling in their life by the Lord to go and to serve in this country. It was just the two of them. They didn't have any kids. They packed their bags and, with much preparation... It's not that simple. I hope you're not hearing that. There is language preparation, culture preparation, and ministry preparation. They moved there. Talk about a major life change and a commitment to God's calling on their life.

They get there and a couple of weeks later, they find out they are pregnant with their first child in their new country, new language, new culture. Fast forward 11 years, they have three wonderful daughters. Just a great family. We got to visit them. It was a 44-hour travel, 13-hour time zone different. That's why Mason is asleep still on my shoulder there. But the striking thing... this picture is very descriptive because you see this beautiful sunset in the background overlooking the sea where we were having dinner on this rooftop. And with that sunset, you can see the majesty of God's creation. And if you've ever traveled anywhere else in the world, you notice that God's beauty in his creation will follow you. As a matter of fact, contrary to that, you're following God's creation. The beauty of God's creation is everywhere.

There is a mix of emotions when you see this. There is awe and wonder for God's creation, including in his people, his favorite part of his creation, but there is also a burden that you feel. You feel the burden of the angst that people have knowing that there is something or someone that they need. They need people like the Miners that are willing to go and to tell people about Jesus. In this time, along with some other trips that I've been on, God has really illuminated something to me. In traveling to different countries where there is great need, but you see the beauty of his creation, including people. And people are such a wonderful creation, but this theological truth that I feel like the Lord has really hit me with and kind of illuminated it to me that I want to describe for you with a couple of different pictures. One is this scene here where it's like a festival, a concert where a bunch of people are gathered. And where there are a bunch of people gathered, you know that you are going to have a scene like this. A bunch of pots and pans. So, here's the deep theological truth that the Lord has illuminated to me. Where there's people, there is poo.

We recognized this as we went to this Southeast Asian country, stopping over in Tokyo. So, our flight had to stop in Tokyo, we made a connection and went into one of the restrooms and found that people deal with that stuff in a different way, and I saw this picture in the restroom in Tokyo. You can see the different languages and stuff on the signs, and some graphic pictures here like, okay you can put toilet paper into the toilet and here's how you properly sit on a toilet, which I never needed instructions. And this one that shows a picture like don't stand on the stool. Like something happened where they were required to then put a picture showing you not to do this. I've never looked at a stool and thought, I'm going to try something different today.

So, we move on and then in another restroom, we see this scene here. I'm like what in the world is this. This is a different type of toilet that is like flush with the ground. Pun intended. And there is no seat, but rather two foot holds there. They call them the Squatty Potty. But then the other one, where they don't stand on the stool then made sense to me.

So then we move on and I see something else where there is no toilet paper, but there's this... A bidet. So, we have instructions here. Some very graphic pictures again. They have shower mode and regular bidet mode and already I'm getting concerned. Then, we see dry mode and already I'm thinking, *This sounds like the cycle on a car wash*. And then below here is a minus button and a plus button and I'm like, *These things have throttles!* And then, finally, we have the flush. And if you don't know, a bidet is a French word that means, "not Travis." So, then there's this. No toilet paper and then I'm like *This is like a kitchen sink hose with a sprayer wand on it*. This is when it occurred to me that they do have red neck in Southeast Asia. That is some redneck engineering right there. It got me thinking... What if some Asians that had never been to the United States came. How would they be uncomfortable coming to the United States and definitely in Southwest Missouri, because when they ask, "Where do I go?" we're going to show them the outhouse. Good luck.

It got me thinking about though when the Lord scattered the people at Babel. He was probably thinking *You know what? I'm going to scatter you all, you're going to look different, you're going to talk different, and when you visit one another and you need to relieve yourself, it's going to be uncomfortable*. And some of you... You can hear it right now. There is some discomfort with the conversation, right? Some of you are laughing, some of you are blushing, some of you are like, "I can't believe he's talking about this from the front. No Potty humor at church, okay?"

So, I'm a physician. We're just scratching the surface of uncomfortable conversations. But here's why it's important and here's the point. People are people. That was the discussion we had in this country. People are people. And where there are people, there is sin. And where there is sin, Jesus is needed. Is the conversation uncomfortable that we just left? It can be. But you know what? In training to be a physician, if we don't train to have uncomfortable conversations, how effective would we be. You have to have uncomfortable conversations. And if we are not comfortable dealing with where there is people, there is sin, then we are not going to get to this. Where there is Sin, Jesus is needed. It can be ugly, it can stink. Pun intended. But we must take Jesus to the ends of the earth. By the way, there are people in your household, there are people at your job, there are people at your school, there are people in your neighborhood, people in your church, people in your small group, people in the stores that you visit, people driving alongside of you in the road, young people. There are People on the teams that you play on, the parents that you interact with. Your peers. There are people all around. And where there are people, there is sin. And where there is sin, Jesus is needed. And when you travel to different parts of the world, you see this need. No matter where you are, people are people.

Not long ago, I was on my music app and wanted to listen to Christian Pop. I opened the search bar, and I typed Christian Pop. Well, as you know, the P and O are right next to one another and I searched for Christian poo. I didn't get any Christian Pop music with that search, which begged another deep theological pondering. Christian Poo, Huh... But what's the difference, Right? Our physiology is the same if we are Christians and our sin condition is the same, but what's the difference? Romans 5: 17 says, By one man, sin was redeemed. And that's the difference that they need. That's the difference for the people that need Jesus.

So, we have to be careful because we can fall into this cultural pride as we take the gospel to the ends of the earth. We have our ways of doing things and kind of our traditions and we can get into this mindset that our ways of doing things are better. Our truth is the same that Jesus is savior, but in our ways, we

can get into this trap. So, we have to be very careful as we go to different parts of the world because we don't go to make them more like us, we go to make them know Jesus. That's the purpose of going. Just to illustrate this point, Toilet paper sales... You thought we were done with it, didn't you? Toilet paper sales in North America in 2021 were 16.6 billion dollars. In 2024, they are projected to be 17 billion dollars. So, when you think about the way we do things, it kind of gets you wondering. Could we save 17 billion dollars if we all used a "not Travis"

I have been to Haiti a few times and one of the times that I went, I was working with some of the leaders. The kids were gathered around and I saw them doing something. I went over and I saw these rubber bands flying around. This is the cluster of rubber bands I brought home with me because I learned something on that trip from these kids playing a game. The game was to set a rubber band out in front of you and then you step back eight or ten paces. There are two of you. You throw rubber bands at that rubber band. Whoever gets one to overlap the main rubber band, gets all the rubber bands and they collect rubber bands.

I won. But I learned something. The simplicity of this. These kids were joyful playing with one another that they didn't need things. What a feeling to see these kids and realize, Why do I need things? Look how they are enjoying the joy of one another with no things, just something as simple as rubber bands. That lesson... And we learn this all the time when we go. Some of the most physically impoverished people... Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Some of the most physically impoverished people will be some of the most spiritually abundant people that you will ever meet. You should ask someone that comes back from Kenya, "How was it? Tell me about your experience." And if you ask them specifically, 100% of them will tell you, "I was blessed by them more than they were by me.

We learn things as we go. And we don't get in the trap of trying to take our culture and our traditions to them, but rather take Jesus to them.

Proverbs 14: 4 say, ***Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.***

What does this mean? It's going to be messy. The manger, the feeding trough has to be cleaned. If you've ever been around livestock or had a pet, you know there are things that have to be cleaned up. You have a scooper, you have bowls that have to be washed, and it's messy. What's the easier thing? We're not going to have any livestock. We're not going to have any pets. But what does scripture say? Abundant crops by the strength of the ox.

The Miners, that I mentioned before, this is a picture of us at our family meeting with them and this SPAM. The SPAM is Sending Professionals as Missionaries. They work with this group at a local university, evangelizing, raising up, and discipling young people from the villages around this country from unreached people groups and they raise up goers within that university ministry. They will find goers that will go out, will evangelize, and will plant churches in these villages. That's their ministry. They have sent dozens over the years. They go through some difficult things raising up goers and dealing with goers and sending people. Is it worth it? Yes. They are not afraid to have an ox in the barn because the harvest is abundant as a result.

Something else that the Miners do... and this was humbling... That any one of us would be uncomfortable... Some may not be uncomfortable with this. They do flat out street evangelism, walking along the streets of their town on that same coastline, finding people to strike up conversations with and talk to, steering conversation into spiritual conversations. These were four young ladies that the girls met and struck up conversation with. They are four English majors at the local university, so they were delighted to get to speak English with us. So, Lauren got their phone numbers, didn't direct any spiritual conversation, just made connections and relationships and texted them, "Would you be willing to come over and have a meal with us? We can practice more English, and we'd love to tell you some stories." Three of them said yes and they went. Guess where the stories come from? Scripture. And so these three young ladies continued to meet with Lauren and her friends and hear stories about Jesus. The Miners are not afraid to have an ox in the barn. Is it going to be messy? Yes. Do they deal with things? Yes. But the harvest is great, taking Jesus to the ends of the earth

John 17: 18 says, As you've sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And R.C. Sproul says about this passage... *"Here we see the bases for the mission of the church. God sent Christ; Christ sent the church." The biblical basis for mission is the word of God spoken in divine authority. It is the mandate of Christ. He commands us to do this. So, what is the big picture? He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the beginning and the end. He is the first and the last. He created us. People were sinful and we scattered. He had a covenant people through Abraham, through which he would provide the Messiah, Jesus, that by the death of one man, sin was redeemed and the end is coming."*

The end is the next thing. This is where we find ourselves in the big picture here in 2024 and it's why we believe that missions is important. Missions comes from the Latin word mission, which means "to send"

R.C. Sproul went on to say, *"The apostle means one who is sent. In the time of the New Testament, an apostle was one who would carry the authority to speak in the name of the one who had sent him. In the New Testament, the first apostle was Christ himself. The one was sent by the Father. Then, the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit. Then the Spirit was poured out on the church and the church was sent to complete the ministry of Christ in all the world to every tongue, to every nation, to every tribe."*

This is the essence of the church age and why we are committed to missions, and this is the God's big picture.

Father, we love you and we are thankful for you, the Alpha and Omega, we pray for the Kenya trip and all of those on that trip, that you would bless them with safe travel home, that you would continue to be fruitful in that trip. Lord, for the missionaries, we pray for Dee Dodson in Tanzania and her adjustments in life as her husband, Bob, went to be with you, Lord. We pray for Travis and Tammy Sterns in Nicaragua. For the Miners in Southeast Asia, for Austin and Kayle Trulove serving Haiti. Lord, that you would provide a way in such unrest in their home country of Haiti that they could get home. For Ray and Laura Pitman in Fiji and the other pacific islands. For Bill and Theresa Landers in Eleuthera.

And, Father, for the one who is considering that they may be one that we should send. The couple that may be praying for this, that this may be the step in their ministry and their mission. We pray for their families, for their marriages, for their children. We lift up their work. We pray for their safety, for their

health. And, Lord, that hearts would be softened where they go, to hear and believe and confess the gospel of your son, Jesus Christ.

We love you and we give you praise in Christ name, and everyone agreed and said... Amen