

God's mercy for the nations

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For those of you who are unfamiliar with First Love International, and as a reminder for the rest of us, the children's homes we go and visit in Nepal and India were started out of a passion to see children rescued from poverty and to be told that Jesus Christ came to save them from their sins. About 20 years ago, a former FBC couple named Bob and Bobbie Clinton from Athens, decided to leave the world of education and partner with his brother and his newly formed First Love Ministries. Bob and Bobbie moved to Nepal and began starting children's homes. FBC got connected to this work because of the previous relationships we had with Bob and Bobbie when they attended here. Today, there are 4 children's homes in Nepal and one right over the Nepal/India border in the city of Siliguri. First Love also operates children's homes in 9 other countries around the world. And after seeing the work of the First Love staff myself now 2 different times, I'm happy that we support the ongoing work of this ministry.

Take a peek at the faces of some of the children we spent time with in Nepal and India (PIC). Their smiles conceal remarkable stories of rescue. They have experienced tragedy that is hard to fathom. Parents dying suddenly; some of these kids have lived on the streets, on some occasions, for several years either by themselves or with a younger or older brother or sister. Their bed has been the streets and garbage bins have been their dinner tables. Listening to them share their testimonies, their stories, is an emotional rollercoaster. At first, you hurt badly for them; the tragedy of their young lives is sobering. But then you look around and you remember where they are at. They are in a First Love children's home. They have plenty of food. They have clean clothes. They are well-groomed and taken care of. They have a loving mom and dad; they have dozens of brothers and sisters. They go to school (they love going to school, by the way... why wouldn't they? They know how much harder life is without an education) and they now dream of being nurses, teachers, missionaries, pastors, and engineers. So, you move from sad to happy; from heartbroken to thankful to God. And more than that, they're introduced to the love of God found in Jesus Christ.

What I want to do this morning is lay a biblical and theological foundation for investing time, energy, and money in this kind of missionary work; I want you to know what the Bible says about reaching out to the nations. Because here's the deal: the emotional tug we get when hear where these kids come from and what's happened to them won't last. The faces of these children will fade from our memory. The emotional power won't endure. So, consider this: if we're primarily motivated to give, to send, to support, to pray for this kind of work because we had an emotional response when we heard their stories, what do you think will happen when the feelings fade? The giving, the sending, the supporting fades, too, right? I bet many of us have had moving, emotional experiences related to our faith. Maybe it was when we went to camp or a retreat; some of you have went on mission trips like me and it was a super-powerful experience. Or maybe some of you had a spiritual high when you started coming to FBC and you started hearing about God's love for and you started enjoying the love of the body of Christ.

Many of us have had that kind of emotional high. But in time, it kind of fades away. Before you know it, your life looks a lot like what it did before you had that experience. What gives?

Having our emotions stirred is totally normal, but that's not how God makes lasting change in our lives. Emotions are fickle things that are bad motivators over time. I actually think God intends to make a lasting impact by changing the way we think; by changing what we believe. When our thinking changes, when we change what we believe is true and good, our giving, our sending, our supporting will remain even if the emotions don't. And how do you think God changes our thinking, friends? Mainly through this: through his word. So, let's open up his word to Romans 15:8-9 so I can lay that foundation that hopefully will change our thinking so we remain really glad in our missionary work and support around the world (READ).

These two verse can be divided into 3 sections. The first section is simply a statement of fact. It says that Christ became a servant to the circumcised (meaning, to God's chosen people of Israel) to show that God is truthful. A question worth asking might be: How did Jesus become a servant? In one respect, it's actually quite odd to think of Jesus as a servant. He's the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He's the Creator of the Universe; he's the author and perfecter of faith. Those titles don't seem to fit well with *servant*. But Jesus is both; he is both Almighty God and servant to others.

The first thing that pops into my mind about Jesus becoming a servant is what we learn from Phil. 2:7-8, which reads, "but [he] emptied himself, *by taking the form of a servant*, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross." Paul says in Philippians 2 that the essence of Jesus' service is him coming to earth to be a sacrifice for sin for you and me. That's what it looks like for Jesus to be a servant; arms stretched wide on the cross so you and I can be united to God.

Isaiah 53 calls Jesus the suffering servant; the one who sacrificed himself to save his people. What love, right FBC? What an example, too. Jesus became a servant to rescue us, but he also became a servant to show us the way to live; so that we wouldn't think greatness is linked to position or power, money or talent. One thing makes you great in the kingdom of God: your service.

And Romans 15 is saying that Jesus became this sacrificial servant to show that God is truthful. I think the point of saying that God is truthful is ultimately a way of saying that God can be trusted; he is dependable; you can rely on what God says. That seems to be where Paul goes next in the following 2 sections of this verse, but for the moment as we analyze this first section of three from these two verses, take in the reality that Jesus coming to die on the cross proves or demonstrates the truthfulness of God.

This statement of fact is the foundation of the rest of the verse; it's a statement you are to believe. *Believe* almost sounds too soft. We believe all kinds of things that don't matter all

that much. We believe Chick-fil-A makes better chicken than KFC (or some believe that). Some of you believe that Chevy is better than Ford. That stuff is insignificant in the the grand scheme of life. This statement isn't something merely to be believed; it's a statement of fact to build your life upon - God is truthful and Jesus came to prove it. You're about to bungee jump from the Golden Gate Bridge; you look at your harness and your rope wondering, "will it break? Is it reliable?" Your very life depends on it. Jesus became a servant dying on the cross to prove that you can build your life on everything God says, friends.

So, that's the first part of these two verses. The next two parts basically tell us the two specific things God is truthful about. God is truthful; he proved his truthfulness through Jesus. And here's what God is truthful about. #1, and very quickly because it's not the main point of the message this morning, God was truthful about the promises he made to the patriarchs. The patriarchs are the founding fathers (and mothers) of the faith. All the way back in Gen. 12 God made a promise to Abraham and Sarah. You will have a son and you will be the father and mother of a multitude of nations. And you will be the chosen instrument of blessing for the entire world. And that promise was passed on to Isaac and then to Jacob. Then to his 12 sons. And then to the entire nation of Israel. Then to King David. And then ultimately and perfectly to Jesus. And anyone and everyone who is in Christ and of Christ is an heir to the promises of God made to Abraham. So, in a very real way, if you are a follower of Jesus, if you cling to Jesus in faith trusting your present life and your future life in him that he will forgive your sins and bring you into God's family, you get those blessings because of God's promise to Abraham. Since that's the case - since your salvation is ultimately the result of the promises God made to Abraham and his family after him - you should care very deeply about God keeping his promises to the patriarchs. Jesus came to make sure you know and that I know that God indeed can be trusted to keep the promises he made to Abraham so we can be saved.

But, moving on because I want to get to the main point right now, there's something else God has promised in the sending of Jesus and it's found in the beginning of vs. 9; Jesus also became a servant to show God is truthful *in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy*. This, my fellow Gentiles, is the reason why we are here celebrating the glorious mercy of Jesus Christ. Let me tell you how. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians that that the mystery of Christ is that God didn't just plan to save one group, one nation, one family on earth - he came to save them all. That's what the word Gentiles is getting at. Gentiles means nations, peoples, that are not a part of the ethnic family of Israel. It was the way Israelites referred to people from other parts of the world. It was a way to articulate a distinction. We do this: we are Wisconsinites and everybody else is sorry. In fact, in the NT, the word here used for Gentiles is also translated as nations. So, another way of translating vs. 9 would be *in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy*.

Friends, we serve a global God. He is Lord of all of the earth, but he is also the Savior and Rescuer of all of the earth. God's plan wasn't to save a small, select group of people. His plan and endeavor from the beginning of time was to throw open the gates of heaven so that all

the nations, all the peoples, all the languages of the world would be welcomed to walk the streets of gold.

And look what the nations will glorify God for: his mercy! That's what God is putting on display. That's what God is showcasing in sending Jesus to the earth. His mercy. The whole world is guilty of sin; every nation has fallen short. There's not a tribe, there's not a people that doesn't have the stain of breaking God's love tattooed on their hands. But God, according to his great mercy, sent Jesus to save people from every nation and cleanse them from all their sin. God's mercy is so very great.

Thinking again about those kids in Nepal and India, we saw this very thing on display; we saw kids glorifying God for his mercy. These kids knew the best gift God had given to them. Everyday, we'd hear kids share their testimony, their life story and every child would end their testimonies by highlighting how God rescued them from their sins with his saving grace. They all said in their own way that God's greatest gift was including them into his forever family through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You know, it would be understandable for kids who have gone through so much and have been given the exceedingly wonderful gift of inclusion into a new earthly family through the ministries of First Love to think, to believe, that the best gift God has given them was bringing them to the children's home where they have a warm bed and plenty of food. I mean we have hard time not seeing our money, our health, our family as the best gifts God has given to us (of course, they are not). But these kids recognize and believe what we believe: that God is our greatest treasure. That as good as our family, our health, our country; as good as being rescued from the streets and welcomed into a new family is, the best gift, the greatest gift God has given anyone and everyone is the forgiveness of our sins so that we can have eternal life with God; that the best thing God has given to any person is Jesus who has made a way for sinners like us to be welcomed in God's forever family where God is our light and gift forevermore. God said the Gentiles would glorify God for his mercy; that has happened and it is happening. It's happening in Nepal and India as more and more people come to know Jesus. It's happening here, with me and you, as we are a part of that group called the Gentiles. And it's happening in other parts of the world with missionary workers we support here at FBC. God is truthful; we can depend on his word. The nations are glorifying God for his mercy.

This is the foundation of our missionary work. This is why we support and pray for and send workers both domestically and around the world. God's mercy is for all people and he is worthy of praise because of it. We have a mandate to spread the message of his mercy to the ends of the earth. Let me give you a few concluding thoughts.

First of all, know and be happy that as you keep worshiping God by giving money to the ministry and work of FBC, you are contributing to this kind of work. We've decided as a church to dedicate 15% of our budget to the spreading of the gospel in the world beyond what we do through our FBC ministries. Be happy about that, FBC. I am. I'm glad that a portion of my

offerings are going to help people in Nepal, in the Czech Republic, in India, in Ukraine know the love of Jesus.

Secondly, and maybe more fundamentally, remind yourself (or hear this for the first time) that God has given us this missionary mandate. This missionary mandate is to proclaim the excellencies, the glories, of Jesus Christ to people who don't know him so that they might turn from their sin and become a part of God's forever family in Christ. A recent Barna poll stunned many when the Barna group announced that 47% of millennials said it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hope that they will one day share the same faith. Since that poll came out, conflicting data suggests that number is probably way too high. But it does make us ask that question to ourselves: should we share our faith with others with the hopes that they come to know Jesus? We believe the answer to that question is a resounding yes! If we believe, as the Bible says, that Jesus is God's only glorious way to have forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God, then it would be wrong for us *not* to share. What many are saying about the Barna poll is that the results indicate not that millennials think we shouldn't spread the message of Jesus, but that we should be thoughtful and careful on how we share the message. There's a thoughtful way, a respectful way, a sensitive way to tell others about Jesus so we should try to spread the news about Jesus that way. But ultimately, know, FBC, that we have a calling to let people know about Jesus and, again, be glad that we care about that here as a church family.

Friends, God sent Jesus to prove that he is as truthful and trustworthy God. He said the nations would glorify God for his mercy and that's exactly what is happening in Nepal, in India, and around the world. You and I are here because of God's mercy and we will gladly worship God forever with all our brothers and sisters around the world because of his mercy. My prayer is that this message, this word would stick in our mind and our conscience so that when the memories and feelings fade, our commitment to our missionary mandate will remain.

Key vs. Romans 15:8-9

Questions for the week

- Why do our emotional experiences and memories fade? What did you hear today that can help you compensate for this experience?
- How were you inspired by what you heard about Jesus this morning?
- What was the most important thing you heard today about our missionary mandate?