

Missional Living Then and Now

Pastor Richard, series on Missional Living, Sep. 9, 2007 (sermon notes online)

“My desire is that we at EBF would grow to become known as a missional church, where our desire for God’s glory is so strong in our worship that our community knows Who God is, whether they take Him or leave Him. How can we do this? How can we show His truth and His mercy, His holiness and His grace? The more we see of His greatness, particularly in His Son and His gospel, the more we worship and the more we become missional in our worldview. *The key to effective missions is our worship of a great and majestic God.*”

We become missionally-oriented by dwelling on, rejoicing in, and looking for, with our minds and hearts and guts, the greatness of God in Jesus Christ.

Because, to see God's greatness is to be affected by God's greatness, and to be affected by God's greatness is to worship.

Let's look at Philippians ch. 1.

Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians with iron chains around his ankles; he was imprisoned, probably in Rome, and yet his letter to the Philippians is one of the most joyful pieces of writing in Scripture.

-Why is he so happy?-

Because, in the midst of his sufferings, he had found his joy and satisfaction, not by striving for his own comfort, but in making much of Jesus, our great King

Read with me Philippians 1:3-14, and notice the pervasive tone of triumph and joy.

(read Philippians 1:3-14)

Do you hear the joy? Paul's in *prison*! If we just get pulled over by the police and given a tiny little piece of paper, we flip out! He's in *prison*, and writing to encourage the Philippians!

But there's something else in this passage you might not have caught; I know that when I read it my mind passed over it- listen, v. 7:

“You are all partakers with me of *grace*, both in my *imprisonment* and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.”

The Christians in Philippi had a share in Paul's sufferings because they suffered their own loss by send him a generous gift while he was in prison (see 4:10-20). The gift they sent was in order to enable Paul to carry on the work of Gospel-izing the nations.

But look at how he says it- they didn't just partake in suffering for the spreading of the gospel; they partook in *grace*.

He says,

There are things in my life- imprisonment, defending and confirming the gospel- of which you have taken part in, and I call those things *grace*.

When he defends the gospel, that is the grace of God.
When he confirms the gospel, that is the grace of God.
When he is tossed in prison, that is the grace of God.
And he's glad about it.

Grace is a gift from God, right? It's the pouring-out of God's love....
But *imprisonment*?

I want to tell you a story about one of the first missionaries ever sent out from America; a man who, like Paul, was imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel, who suffered far more than I will ever suffer, and got to see the sovereign grace of God poured out on the nation of Burma in the midst of and in spite of his weakness.

Adoniram Judson was born in 1788 in Massachusetts, the son of a Congregational minister. As he grew, though he was raised in a Christian home, he fell in love with the pleasures of this world, and while off at college he met a friend who convinced him that Christianity was bunk, so he became an atheist.

But God had His hand on him, and a few years after graduating he decided to go find adventure “out West” and on the very first night of his journey, stayed at an inn with only one room left- which was next to the room of a sick and dying young man.

Judson took the room, and had a miserable night listening to the groans and shrieks of the dying man; and his thoughts turned to his own life and death. And that bothered him, because no self-respecting atheist worried about such things.

In the morning he inquired as to how the man was, and found out he had passed away in the early hours of the morn.

Inquiring further, out of pity, he found out that, at this seemingly random inn, at the particular day he happened to stay there, a day's journey from home, the young man who had died was the very friend from college who had convinced him of atheism.

And he realized that he knew and believed that his friend was *lost*.
So he turned his horse, headed back to his parent's home, and dedicated his life to the service of Christ.

Within a few years, Adoniram Judson felt God's call to go preach Christ to the lost in Burma.

Burma, which we now call Myanmar, is between India and Cambodia, south of China; and it was a land of strong, deeply-ingrained Buddhism, incurable tropic diseases, no medicine, scant food, and a distrust of foreigners bordering on persecution.

Listen to what Judson wrote to the father of Ann Hasseltine, asking for her hand in marriage a few short months before they would sail to Burma;
He saw God's call to Burma as a gracious call into the darkest prison imaginable; listen:

“I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure for a heathen land, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the

dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness, brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?"

How can we come to believe in a God like *that*?!
That's missional living.

Judson's joy, like Paul's, wasn't found in his circumstances-
It was found in serving and worshiping an incredible God.

He was really saying, "Will you consent to let me have your daughter so that she can partake with me of God's grace?"

Just two weeks after Adoniram and Ann were married, in February of 1812, they set sail from America, for a year-long voyage. Before they reached Burma, they laid their first child to rest in the sea.

No English-speaking person had learned the Burmese language enough to write a grammar or a dictionary. Their task was incredible; for the first 2 years all they did was study the language.

1823, having labored in Burma for 10 years, there were just 18 converts, and due to rising tension with the British, the Burmese government pushed their thumb down on the missionaries and all who were associated with them.

1824, war between Burma and England began, and Judson was imprisoned in a moldy, stinking "death prison" for 12 months, where nearly every day someone was culled out and executed. During this time his wife, Ann, spent every day pleading with officials for his freedom.

For nine months he had three pairs of fetters on; two months he had five. Ann smuggled him his manuscript for the Burmese Bible, and when he could he worked on translating.

When he came down with a fever, the guards finally allowed Ann to build a tiny hut not much bigger than a doghouse, which they allowed Adoniram to sit in for a few hours a day to get some relief from the claustrophobic prison.

This lasted for a few short days, then, during one of their visits, Ann was called away by the guards on some pretense. While she was gone, all the prisoners were moved a long day's march away to another death prison for an additional 6 months.

1826, The British won the war, and Judson was released, after a year and a half. Barely a few weeks later, the English required his services as a translator in the peace negotiations, and so Adoniram and Ann parted for what they hoped would be a few short months.

But four months later he received a letter from a colleague at the mission:

"My dear sir: to one who has suffered so much, and with such exemplary fortitude, there needs but little preface to tell a tale of distress. To sum up the unhappy tidings in a few words, Mrs. Judson is no more."

She had been taken by one of the many tropic diseases.

Adoniram came back as soon as he could, and stood often by his wife's grave. Six months later, their child died of the same disease, and he sank into a depression.

So how do you exalt God in circumstances like that?

They had pledged their lives to God, even unto death; but after 13 years, widowed, and alone (except for a few other white missionaries working nearby), the tiny church of 18 scattered by the war, what was the point?

Ever felt like that?

In Philippians ch. 4, Paul wrote,

“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (4:11-13)

But how? How?

What do I do? I must be making some sort of mistake, to be in this situation, to feel the way I do... how do I find that contentment?

Paul listed off his sufferings in II Corinthians 11-12, including these:

“imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked... adrift at sea... in [constant] dangers.... But He said to me, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

(II Corinthians 11:24-25, 12:9-10)

Jesus says, My grace is *enough*.

We have a great God, and a great Savior, and He is worthy of our everything.

Are we ready to live missionally?

In the shadow of Your glorious cross
Compelled by grace to cast my lot
I'll discard the loss and bear Your name
Forsaking *all* for Your own fame

We sing that; do we believe it? Do we live it?
Do we see Jesus as being great enough?

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but..... loss

And pour contempt on all my pride

Is the cross of Jesus Christ that great to you?

He died for you! He gave His all! Do you not see Him as supreme?

It's in jubilant weakness;

it's in sacrificial death;

it's in joyful suffering that His name is made great!

That's what HIS life was....

That's why we're called "little Christs"

Do you worship that great God?

In 1831, Adoniram still bore the scars around his ankles from the prison shackles, his wife and child had been laid to rest, and he had utterly given up hope.

But something compelled him to preach again....

And then gospel of Jesus Christ exploded in Burma.

Here's what he wrote:

"The spirit of inquiry . . . is spreading everywhere, through the whole length and breadth of the land." [We have distributed] nearly 10,000 tracts, giving to none but those who ask. I presume there have been 6,000 applications at the house. Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China - 'Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.' Others, from the frontiers of Kathay, 100 miles north of Ava - 'Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die.' "

That's the power of God perfected in weakness!

He spent the rest of his life in Burma, suffering much more,

translating the entire Bible into Burmese (which is still the best one), nearly completing a massive Burmese-English dictionary, establishing Christian schools, and seeing native pastors set over the churches.

He died an old man, and on his deathbed he was often heard repeating,

"O! The Love of Christ! O, the Love of Christ!"

Here's the American dream:

retire at 55, earlier if you're lucky;

get a motor home, travel around and see the world;

have a comfortable home with a good view, a bigscreen, and a nice stash of a good vintage;

fish a little;

and have a timeshare in San Juan.

Is that your dream? (not that any of that is inherently bad, but)

Is that what you *live* for?

Or do you aspire to spend your last breath praising God and spreading His fragrance on the lost and

needy?

Look at v. 12:

“I want you to know, brothers, (this is a main reason Paul wrote Philippians) that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.”

Remember who Paul is writing to- Philippi.

He's writing from – a jail.

Can you recall what happened in a jail in Philippi?

-That jail where Paul and Silas were wrongfully imprisoned and chained yet were so intoxicated with the greatness of God that they sang hymns to their Savior all through the night until the earth shook and their chains fell off and their jailer was converted-

Because the gospel of Jesus Christ is not bound!

If we can learn to sing the greatness of our God

when injustice has been done do us,

when we are mistreated,

or when everyone around us is just playing around...

then we are living missionally.

Paul saw it-

He saw God open the door with His graceful hand to use Paul to bring His name glory.....

and that door, sometimes, was a prison door.

Verse 13: “it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is FOR Christ.” (1:13)

For Christ.

For His glory.

So that His name may be worshiped, in Rome, in Burma, and in Eugene.

This is why I shared the story of Adoniram Judson with you:

verse 14: “And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” (1:14)

May we be so enamored with the greatness of Jesus Christ that we will be emboldened at all times to partake in fulfilling the Great Commission.

May He who began a good work in you be faithful to complete it for the glory of His name.

May we learn to display the greatness of our God in every situation so that we may proclaim with joy:

I dare not be seeking my comfort and bliss

Or building my hopes in a place such as this

I look for the city God promised and built

Where Jesus has banished my sin and its guilt

Suffering:

Of Jesus: Mt. 16:21; Mk. 8:31; Luke 9:22; 17:25; **24:26**; Heb. 2:10; 13:12

Of Paul: Acts 9:18; II Cor. 11-12; Eph. 3:13; Philippians 3:8; Col. 1:24; I Thess. 2:2; II Tim. 2:9

Of Christians: Acts 5:41; **Rom. 5:3**; 8:17-18; II Cor. 1:5; Philippians 1:29; II Tim. 1:8; 2:3; I Pet. (17 times)

Resources:

Lives of the Three Mrs. Judsons by Arabella Stuart (get this book!!!!)

Adoniram Judson: America's First Foreign Missionary by Faith Coxe Bailey

Article on current state of Christianity in Myanmar/Burma:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/march/7.52.html?start=1>

Some short Bios on Judson:

<http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biorpjudson.html>