

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

November 04, 2018

A1:8 Missions, Part 1

Dave Schmidgall

{ Video }

These three things remain, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love. As we begin our annual mission series, we thought we'd start with the right posture, the right tone. We gave you pictures and images that position your hearts towards love and tenderness because we're in a cultural moment right now and you would agree it's easy for your heart to be thickened, right? Am I am I the only one? And yet we're invited into a much deeper and richer space. And so we've been doing this series for years. This is the air that we breathe at NCC, A1:8 Missions if you've been a part of us in any way, shape or form. So the methods evolve, the strategies change, but the mission never changes. It's always the same, we are practicing, we are apprenticing under the way, the character and the mission of Jesus. And the mission of Jesus is coming alongside the poor and the oppressed, it's caring for the sick and the sorrowful, it's transforming lives through reconciliation. And so his mission to act intersects with our commission to make disciples of all nations.

So mission's looks a little bit like Jared at a barbershop. You might've seen that image, a guy cutting hair and Jared started a barbershop shop; it goes to our barracks row campus because he believes that here's the gateway to the heart. His mission and his conviction is that the church and the barbershop or two of the most segregated places in America. And so he's transforming lives through reconciliation, one haircut at a time. Come on, somebody. You want to get a haircut from him now, don't you?

Although I was a little offended a couple of weeks ago when we went and shot the video. We went to his place and he took one look at me and he said, man, I'd love to cut your hair. Listened, Jared, I'm going to crush the live Nativity circuit in December, alright, that's my jam. I'm going to hit that thing.

Missions looks like coming alongside for the past six years the brilliance and the creativity of Bishop Ng'ambi in Chingola, who has five agro projects with a car-wash, brick making, new trainings for empowering women and micro loans in order that they can be fully self sustaining, not relying on donor dependence in any way so they can empower and welcome more kids that are either thrown out or have no families. Isn't that amazing? We want to be a part of that, we're called into that. So, whether we are cutting hair or partnering across oceans we're sent on commission every day. So, during this series we want to tell stories that are going to encourage you and they're going to inspire you during this series, we want to spur those that are already on mission every day to continue on, to be encouraged, to be challenged. You don't need to do one more thing. That is not your pressure; you need to be encouraged during the series. And some of you might have never even heard about what this is; you've been here for a short period of time or the last year or two, and we want to help you understand it better, to be energized by it, and to engage in it because as long as there is one person that's being trafficked, someone that is

experiencing homelessness, somebody that has accepted the love of God in their lives, we're going to continue to be a church that's on mission every day. Can I get an amen? That needs to be a little louder at all of our campuses. Can I get an amen? Alright.

And during this series, we want to study God's word. So I invite you to turn to Isaiah chapter 58 if you have your Bibles at all of our locations. If you're familiar with the Bible at all, you probably know Isaiah 58. Yes, it's kind of a legendary passage, but if you are not familiar with it, it's God speaking through the Prophet Isaiah and he's pointing God's people in a direction that is clear in the midst of cultural and political turmoil and chaos that doesn't sound familiar at all, right? It's very similar actually to some of the conditions that we find ourselves in. And so the people are trying to do good, they're trying to do right. They're fasting, and if you're not familiar with what fasting is, it's a spiritual discipline, it's to deny yourself of something, oftentimes it's food, and as your emptied of that physical part, the presence of God fills you. It's a beautiful spiritual practice, but in this instance, God seems to be uninterested in what they're doing.

So, would you join me in verse one?

¹*“Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.(the house of Israel)*

²*Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if (say as if) as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the justice of their God;”*

Now we've talked about this at Lincoln a few weeks ago, but I have to just share it because I think it's this important. We were raised, most of us through a western lens. Our way of thinking and our way of seeing is heavily influenced through that, so when we approach the Bible, it's oftentimes through the lens of it's about getting to heaven. It's about what to believe and there's nothing wrong with that, but the Bible was written through an eastern lens. Let me give you a little bit of a metaphor. Think to yourself, maybe a home that you grew up in or that home that you're in right now, think of a room. You got it? And imagine that hopefully there's a couple of windows in those rooms and I'm going to take you by the hand and we're going to go outside of that room and we're going to look through the window and we're going to see and we're going to here for 20 years specifically through that window into that room. Now, is that going to be an accurate picture of that room? Yeah, I think so. I think it is, but what if I were to take your hand and we were to go all the way to the other side and I were to allow you to see and hear through a totally different window into the same room. Yeah, it's going to be accurate as well, but you're going to see it from a very different perspective and that's what happens when we approach the scriptures from a western lens.

Let me give you an example; John 3:16. Now, this is going to disorient a few of you. Okay? You've heard this your whole life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Now, how can we possibly understand eternal life any differently? Let's look at the original word. Go ahead and pop it up. *Aionios*, listen to this, does not focus on the future per se, but rather on the quality of the age it relates to. Thus, believers live an eternal life right now experiencing this quality of God's life now as a present possession. Go ahead and throw that slide up. See, from an eastern perspective, oftentimes when we think of eternal life, its eternal life is present in this world. It's present tense. It's a quality of age. Westerners oftentimes, think of it in terms of the future. They think of it in terms of quantity of age. Are you with me? Neither of them are wrong, but when we come into encounter the eastern and western lens, we see a much larger, more beautiful picture of what this is about.

So, how do you have eternal life right here, right now? Well, I don't think you can access God's presence because we are already in his presence. I think our path is a path of awareness. Now, that's abstract so, let me give you a tangible picture of this. If you want to see eternal life right here, right now, I invite you to go to Joseph's house in Washington DC. It's a hospice care, it's a Christ centered place where there's dignity for the dying. And when you walk in, here's what's interesting. When you go to be on mission and to serve, they don't want you to serve them. You go into there and they actually want to serve you because the gift isn't doing something for them it's actually sitting and being with them. You see the gifts sometimes and the deeper part of what mission is about is not always going to do something. Oftentimes at the end of the day, what it is, it's the power of communion together with one another. And so, I sit there and I see somebody in there external poverty and that opens me up to look at my internal poverty and now we're just two children loved by God. That is our invitation. We can experience it and encounter it right here, right now. Alright, that was one example.

So, when we come to the word righteousness and justice in the Old Testament, we already have different lenses. Okay? So, can I help you with that a little bit? When you think of righteousness from a western lens, what do you hear? Shout it out. It's okay. All locations. This is awkward.

Purity (shouted from the crowd) Purity, I hear anything else? Perfect (shouted from the crowd) Perfect. Right with God (shouted from the crowd) Right with God. Doing the right thing (shouted from the crowd) Doing the right thing.

This is what we're hearing, following the rules, we often think of religious piety, moral purity, reading my Bible well, studying the Bible well, praying regularly. That's actually not what Biblical righteousness is. Biblical righteousness is not me centered, it's others centered. Righteousness actually means generosity towards others, it's benevolence, it's kindness towards others. See, our understanding of it can oftentimes be very different, so when you see the word righteousness in the Bible think generosity.

I was at the Western Wall just this past year and you walk up and there's somebody that's standing there going *tsedaqa*, *tsedaqa*, that means righteousness and he's asking for money for the poor. It's generosity towards others. That's what this is, so righteousness and justice. Justice is fairness; I think it's actually very similar between the both. It's acquitting or it's punishing somebody on the merits of someone's case, not dependent upon their race or their economic status. It's inviting somebody to the table that you're making decisions for that aren't represented in the room. That's justice. So, it's interesting in the in the Bible you see in the Old Testament

justice and righteousness are together all the time. I see it in the book of Psalms all over the place; righteousness, justice, justice, righteousness there like dance partners, they do the tango, they do the Fox Trot and I don't have any other dance moves or names. They're together, and so they're unique and distinct yet at the same time, they're very, very similar to each other.

Now, pay attention, this is where it gets interesting to me when you move over to the New Testament. Let's look at the beatitudes is one example. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Let's look at that word for a moment together.

dikaiousuné: righteousness, justice

Original Word: δικαιοσύνη, ης, ή

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: dikaiousuné

Phonetic Spelling: (dik-ah-yos-oo'-nay)

Definition: righteousness, justice

Usage: (usually if not always in a Jewish atmosphere), justice, justness, righteousness, righteousness of which God is the source or author, but practically: a divine righteousness.

--- Biblehub.com

How confusing is that? Here's what's really interesting. They're distinct in the Old Testament, but they're combined in the New Testament. In over 300 verses are mentioned in the New Testament, 97 percent of the time the word righteousness is used.

What's your point?

There are some that believe that justice is secondary to the Gospel. Why don't we just stick with Jesus? Why don't we just stick with Jesus saves, for the forgiveness of sins, make disciples of all nations? But I wonder why is it in the church we have stripped Jesus of justice and made it an agenda? It's become a political word much more than it's been that's at the very heart of our heavenly father. On the flip side, yes, that every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. 7,000 people groups that don't know the name of Jesus. Absolutely, we are called to that. So, which is it justice for the oppressed or make disciples of all nations? Yes. See, I think what happens is in our lived experiences, in our community groups that we're raised in, oftentimes, not every time, but oftentimes we get a little bit more of a narrow slant of what the Gospel is. And when we come together in great variety, we begin to expand and explode the beauty and the greatness and the whole Gospel that's much bigger than we ever asked or imagined. Are you with me? It's both; it's spiritual, physical, and social dimensions of transformation. Amen.

So, let's just spend the rest of the time; you got your books. Can you go ahead and pull those out? I want to talk through these local and global. Let's see how this plays itself out within our strategy as we think about missions at NCC. The aim of our mission in our neighborhoods in our cities is conscientious; it's holistic, spiritual, physical, and social dimensions. For us, we try to apply short term physical care along with long-term spiritual and social transformation. Are you with me? So, a year ago we announced this because we felt like there was a little bit of a gap

we're a large community and there's so many needs in our cities and our neighborhoods and we said, how can we improve the efficiency of that? And so what we did was we created A1:8 Commons. I think there's a slide up on that. And we've had hundreds and hundreds of people sign up for it and using it and it's become an incredibly effective tool.

For one example, and I think Barracks Row you've heard this, on September 19th, a couple months ago, Arthur Capper, Senior Public Housing Complex, started on fire just a couple blocks away from our Barracks Row campus. 160 seniors have been displaced and immediately jumped into action working in partnership with the DC local government, we've been placed with 19 residence and over 45 NCCers signed up immediately to be involved. Now they lost everything and if only we had a tool to use to be able to connect the needs with the resources. We do A1:8 Commons. This is a perfect example of how we become the mobilization unit of this city where we can meet needs quick. That's what this church is about, and so when we see a need, we're able to sign up, post something and you're going to be able to sign up and be involved in that, so I encourage you on our Commons.

We see the city as an ecosystem. We're not here to come and take over the city. I hear that language way too often and it makes me sick. We evaluate any new efforts in any of our nine core causes in our city, in partnerships. We look at each issue and we do swot analysis. We try to look at the gaps and try to say where are the gaps and how can the church step in and fill in those. And there's been several over the years we looked at refugee care, we saw that there was a gap that refugee services provide up to three months of care and then afterwards they're on their own and so we said we need to step in and we want to make sure every family and the DMV is cared for by the church. Are you with me? We believe that, we're called to that and so we have so many different ways now in which we have engaged in that space and I think 65 percent of all of our housing settlements; shout it out; of all of our housing settlements are established by NCCers, by the church. That's what we're about.

Can I share just a prayer request in terms of a gap? Would you pray with us as we consider affordable housing for returning citizens? This is absolutely a huge need. In 1972, there were 300,000 people in jails across America. Today, there are 2.2 million, which is more than any other industrialized nation combined. The US has the highest rate of incarceration, I just repeated that. 6 million people on probation, one in three black men between the ages of 18 and 30 are in jail, on probation or on parole. In places like Alabama, 35 percent of black males no longer have access to service or are able to vote. There are poor and urban communities where over half of the men of color are in our criminal justice system and that has collateral damage. I know it's complicated, but there is an injustice here that we as a church feel convicted by. So, returning citizens we want to love on and care for. Anybody with me?

Let's talk global missions. In the year 1900 US and Europe was home to 70 percent of the world's professing Christians. In 2000 that number is 20 percent. It's the most significant and massive demographic shift in history. So, missions is less and less from the west to the rest, but from everywhere to everywhere. The day of western driven missions that sets its agenda independently of majority world Christianity is shifting, it's done, and we welcome that shift.

Now I know it, especially our millennials. I'm going to call you out. I love you millennials. I'm like an elder millennial. For millennials, oftentimes if we're not careful, cynicism is our language and sarcasm is our dialect and usually that's the result of some kind of wound or frustration with the world around us, and so we become very cynical. I hear oftentimes why do we do missions overseas isn't it just another form of neocolonialism? Why do we even go overseas when we can't even take care of people that are across the streets? And I actually think these are really legitimate questions. And I'll be totally honest with you, I do think that there is a lot of arrogance and ignorance when it comes to missions and churches and we're going to be honest with that, but what I will tell you is this, God never intended people to be our projects. Yes, there are causes and issues, but those experiencing homelessness are not our project. The projects are not our project. The villages in the country of Africa are not our project and the reason why I say this is if we're not careful we reduce people to projects and we dehumanize them and we forget the idea of mutuality and reciprocity. And so that's why at NCC we want to be very conscientious as we are absolutely called to go and make disciples of all nations, unapologetic to that. That's why our posture and language is partnership alongside listening, exchanging mutual empowerment that's so critical to our missions landscape at NCC, whether we're going across the street, in our cubicle or across the ocean our mindset is that of humble servants.

In 2019, I think it's in your books, we're sending a bunch of teams, overseas, nearly 10 percent of our congregation goes overseas every year and I think that has a phenomenal effect because when we don't go overseas with the intention of projects, but we go overseas because number one we're called and number two, we mutually need and empower one another in the work that God's doing in around the world. Now they come to us, we go to them, and now we're seeing God at work in a really beautiful way around the world. We're seeing this constantly with over 150 partners all around the world.

In your book, you see the transformation journey. We try to be incredibly strategic and conscious with our relationships and our partnerships. I'm not going to go through each phase, but you'll see that our intent is to mobilize effectively, to walk conscientiously, to invite the spirit, to empower us as we engage in all of these issues around the world.

Let me end with this story. When you receive your next book, I want to point you back to the cover. I'd love for you to take a look at that and at the very end there's a dedication. We dedicated this cover, which we've actually never done before, to Wendy Martinez. Some of you may know, a few months ago, Wendy's life was tragically taken away from her. She's part of our community and her fiancé just been engaged a week before and part of our NCC community. About five months ago, I began reading in the mornings obituaries. I know that seems a little strange, but there's something really powerful about reading someone's life in 50 words or less. And David Brooks wrote a book and he began it by saying, 'lately, I've been thinking about the difference between resume virtues and eulogy virtues.' We spend our whole lives building resume virtues, but at the end of the day, what you read in these columns is character and someone's heart for others and their passion for these things. And when I think about Wendy, she had an amazing resume, but what was more powerful was the life that she lived oriented towards others, especially the marginalized, the poor and the oppressed. In 2015, she went on a mission team to Bethlehem and she literally was the hands and feet of Jesus. She ran a marathon and

solidarity with building bridges and seeking justice and compassion in a region that desperately need needs the love of God.

And so we end with this as we're launching this series my question to you is this, how are you on mission every day throughout your day? For some of us, we've never even thought of it this way and maybe my question for you is as you're thumbing through this book throughout this month, what's one thing, what's one thing that the spirit of God is inviting you to step in and to be a part of his mission that is advancing around the world? His kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We're going to close all locations with a confession, so I'd just like to invite all of our locations to go ahead and stand up. In the twelfth century St Francis penned this and we end our services at Lincoln oftentimes with this and it's a powerful confession that is as relevant 900 years ago as it is today, but here's how we're going to end. Before I do that, I'm going to take a risk. We don't do this very often, but I wonder if before I do that we could take a moment of silence and instead of just standing there awkwardly, I'm going to invite in that moment of silence for you to allow the spirit of God to lead you. When I say the word love, who comes to mind? So let's just take a moment of silence.

{ Silence }

Would you join me in the reading? May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts. May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace. May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger and war so that we may live, reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And finally together would you join me? And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor. Peace be with you.