



Why the Great Commission is Great

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

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Together for the Gospel 2013

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This is The Gospel Coalition Podcast where we seek to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm your host, Kyle Hanson.

Today's Podcast, Why the Great Commission is Great, was given by David Platt at TGC's 2013 Missions Conference in Orlando.

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to 2 Corinthians 4:13-18. Without question, I am grateful to God for His grace which is the only reason I am standing before this group. I'm hopeful that, by God's grace, I might be able to serve you well with His Word.

Tonight, in a world made up of approximately 16,000 different people groups—over 6,000 of whom are still classified as unreached with the gospel—we read these words:

¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

I want to pray for us again.

Father, we open our minds and hearts to You in these moments. We pray You would speak to us in this room by Your Word and through Your Spirit. We pray that, through Your Word, You might send us out into the world. Father, we pray Your Word at this conference might create a ripple effect in the hearts of pastors, church leaders and church members that will resound to Your glory among the nations. God, we

pray that as a result of our encounter with You in Your Word at this conference even on this night, unreached peoples will one day be reached peoples. O God, may all unreached peoples one day soon be reached peoples. Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name among all the peoples of the earth. May Your Kingdom come. May Your will be done—in this room, at this moment, in our lives, churches and across the earth—as it is in Heaven. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

C.T. Studd was a wealthy Englishman who, upon coming to Christ, sold everything he had to take the gospel to the nations. Many sought to dissuade him but he went anyway. First, he went to China and then to India. At the age of 50, he decided retirement was not an option for the Christian, so he spent the remaining years of his life proclaiming the gospel in Sudan. He died there and his grave became a stepping stone for what is known as The Worldwide Evangelization Crusade spreading the gospel across Asia, Africa and South America.

C.T. Studd once wrote:

Believing that further delay would be sinful, some of God's insignificants and nobodies in particular, but trusting in our Omnipotent God, have decided on certain simple lines, according to the Book of God, to make a definite attempt to render the evangelization of the world an accomplished fact... Too long have we been waiting for one another to begin! The time for waiting is past! The hour of God has struck! In God's holy name let us arise and build! We will not build on the sand, but on the bedrock sayings of Christ, and the gates and minions of hell shall not prevail against us. Should such men as we fear?

Before the whole world, aye, before the sleepy, lukewarm, faithless, namby-pamby Christian world, we will dare to trust our God. We will venture our all for Him. We will live and we will die for Him, and we will do it with His joy unspeakable singing aloud in our hearts. We will a thousand times sooner die trusting only in our God than live trusting in man. And when we come to this position the battle is already won, and the end of the glorious campaign in sight. We will have the real holiness of God, not the sickly stuff of talk and dainty words and pretty thoughts; we will have a masculine holiness, one of daring faith and works for Jesus Christ.

These words summarize my prayer, not just for this conference but for this movement. TGC, T4G, the coming Cross Student Conference, and so many other things where brothers and sisters are coming together from different churches, diverse streams and varying dimensions with a bedrock focus on the gospel, the glory of God and doctrines of grace in the gospel. May such gospel celebration, singing, conferences, books, unity and centrality compel a gospel urgency in us. May we, together, make a definite attempt under the sovereign grace of God to render the evangelization of the world an accomplished fact.

Now, as soon as I say that, I want to be clear about what I'm not trying to do. I'm not trying to propose a particular utopian vision nor am I trying to posit a particular eschatology. I'm not trying to say the small number of us in this room—this movement nor even we in the western world—can just pull up our bootstraps and accomplish the Great Commission nor that we are ultimately sovereign over when disciples are made in every nation. As we heard earlier, God is sovereign over all of that.

However, our sovereign God has given us a specific goal and it is crystal clear. He's commanded His people to make disciples among all peoples, all the *ethnē* of the world. He's given us a promise which is His very presence—the power of His Spirit—to accomplish His purpose. So, as we coalesce around the gospel and are empowered by His Spirit, I want to urge us not to be content in this conference with the sickly stuff of talk, dainty words and pretty thoughts. Let's dare to trust our God, venture our all, live and die for Him, going together with brothers and sisters around the world to reach the most difficult, dangerous-to-reach people groups in the world. Let's do it with His joy unspeakable singing aloud in our hearts every step of the way.

I am convinced this is the heart of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4-5. Based on these words—specifically in 2 Corinthians 4:13-18—I want to exhort us in three ways. I want to exhort us who have coalesced around the gospel to live our lives, lead our families, preach our sermons, conduct our conferences, write our blogs, publish our books and shepherd our churches—His church—in a definite attempt to render the evangelization of the world, fulfilling the Great Commission where disciples are made and churches multiplied in every nation among every people group on the planet. Let's live and die in a definite attempt under the sovereign grace of our God to make that an accomplished fact. That is what the gospel compels us to do.

Here are three exhortations from this text for a gospel, coalesced people.

First, as we believe the gospel with deep-seated conviction in our lives, let's proclaim the gospel with death-defying confidence in the world.

In 2 Corinthians 4:1-12, we heard Paul explain the power of the gospel message while acknowledging the weakness of the gospel messenger. Paul describes the affliction and suffering which accompany gospel ministry.

Then in verse 13, picking up right where he left off, Paul reaches back into the Psalms to describe his motivation for persevering in gospel missions. Psalm 116 is a song of deliverance written by a psalmist who had been saved from what looked like certain death. The psalmist wrote: "*I believed, even when I spoke: 'I am greatly afflicted'*" (Psalm 116:10). The psalmist draws a clear correlation between believing and speaking in this verse. He believes and so he speaks; suffering and affliction cannot stop him from speaking what he believes. According to the psalmist, suffering cannot silence the spirit of faith.

Paul says this is the same spirit of faith in me, in us. Even in the midst of affliction and suffering, we also believe so we also speak. According to Paul, believing automatically leads to speaking. Possession of faith automatically leads to proclamation of faith. The two cannot be disconnected, particularly when the content of that faith is considered knowing that He Who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us all with Jesus and bring us into His presence. According to Paul, when one believes in the resurrection of Jesus, one proclaims the resurrection of Jesus. According to Paul, there is no such thing as

a privatized faith and a resurrected Christ. Those who believe the gospel of Jesus proclaim His gospel no matter what it costs them.

I believe there is a needed word here for us today. Privatized Christianity is a profound curse across our culture and churches. Multitudes of professing Christians say, believe, or maybe just live like they believe: “Jesus has saved me and Jesus’ teachings work for me and my family, but who am I to tell my neighbor or co-worker what he or she should believe? Or who am I to go and tell people in other nations that their beliefs are wrong and mine are right? Even more, who am I to tell anyone that if they don’t believe what I believe, they will spend eternity damned in hell?”

I tell our church members who struggle with this—from college students to senior adults and everyone in between—that I can identify with that train of thought. I think about one day when I stood in a sea of people in northern India. For those who haven’t been to India, just think of lots and lots of people—approximately 1.2 billion to be precise. Over 600 million of them live in northern India where there are crowded streets and urban slums surrounded by seemingly endless villages that span the country side. There is an economic disparity running rampant with more people living below the poverty line in India than the entire population of the United States all together.

Then I tell them that the church partners with whom we’ve worked estimate approximately .5% of the people in northern India are Christians. In other words, 99.5% of the people have not believed in Christ for salvation. Obviously, no one knows that kind of statistic for certain, so I want to be cautious in even putting it out there. Let’s assume this statistic for a moment. Even if it is off, it is not far off, neither up nor down.

I looked around me one day in that crowded sea of people in northern India and thought to myself, “Who am I to travel all the way over here to tell these people what they need to believe? Who am I to tell them all their gods are false—whether they are Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh or any other gods—because Jesus is the only true God? Who am I to tell these 597 million non-Christians—99.5% of northern India—surrounding me at that moment that if they do not turn from their sin and trust in Jesus, every single one of them will spend eternity in hell?”

I tell our folks, “To claim that 597 million people will go to hell if they don’t confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead feels extremely arrogant, entirely unloving and uncomfortably brash.”

Then I tell our people, “Such a claim would absolutely be arrogant, entirely unloving and uncomfortably brash unless the claim is true.”

Isn’t this what Paul said in his prior letter to the church of Corinth? “If Christ didn’t rise from the dead, then Christians are to be pitied among men.” The worst thing we could do is call other people to base their lives on a lie. If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then it makes no sense—it’s outright non-sense—to go around the world telling people they either need to follow Jesus or face hell. However, if

Jesus did rise from the dead, and He alone has paid the price for man's sin by conquering sin, death and the grave, then going around the world telling people about Jesus is the only thing that makes sense.

If Jesus did rise from the dead, then it is the height of arrogance to sit quietly by while 597 million Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs in northern India go to hell. It's the epitome of hate not to sacrifice our lives to spread this good news among every person we know and every people group on the planet.

When you believe this gospel, you speak it. When you believe the resurrection of Christ, you proclaim it. Privatized faith in a resurrected King is practically inconceivable. We believe and so we speak. Thus, I ask you tonight—church members and leaders, pastors, brothers and sisters—do those of us in this room really believe this gospel? Do we really believe the good news that the sovereign, holy, just and gracious Creator of all things has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women, and in our rebellion, sent His Son—God, in the flesh—to bear His wrath on the cross against sin to show His power over sin and resurrection from the dead?

We're not talking about resuscitation, reincarnation nor receiving a vision of Heaven when unconscious, then coming back to write a best-selling book about it. We're talking about being killed by crucifixion, wrapped in grave clothes, put in a tomb and, three days later, the stone in front of the tomb is gone and the tomb is empty. He is walking around alive. He's risen from the dead so that anyone—everyone—who puts their faith in Him, turns from their sin, trusts in Him, repents and believes will be reconciled to God forever. Do we believe that?

If we do, then we cannot sit quietly by in our churches while 6,000 groups comprising two billion people in the world have never even heard it? We cannot be content to spend our time, money, resources, lives, families and churches on comfortable plans, small pursuits, traditional programs and temporal possessions when hundreds upon hundreds of millions of people have never even heard the news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We believe and so are compelled to proclaim the resurrected Christ to unreached peoples knowing that as we speak this gospel to them, we will have suffering and affliction. Right? We're not fools. These 6,000 people groups are unreached for a reason. They're hard to reach. All the easy ones are gone. These people groups are difficult and dangerous to reach and don't want to be reached. Anyone who tries to reach them with the gospel will most certainly be met with suffering and affliction.

This is so key here in 2 Corinthians 4. The more I have studied this text, the more convinced I have become that it cannot be rightly understood apart from the context of gospel proclamation in difficult and even dangerous places.

I want to be careful here. There's no question there are truths in the passage of 2 Corinthians 4—principles and glorious realities—that echo throughout Scripture to form a general theology of suffering for the Christian. Without question, there are truths here that bring deep comfort to Christians—some of

whom are in this room tonight suffering with cancer or other physical maladies, grieving over lost loved ones and walking through all sorts of suffering in a sinful world.

However, in this letter, Paul is specifically describing—and in a sense, defending—the suffering he has experienced as he has proclaimed the gospel in dangerous places among difficult peoples. What Paul is experiencing is not happening to him because he's sitting back on his couch all day nor carrying on business as usual in life and ministry. No. He's going to dangerous places among difficult peoples and speaking the gospel to them. Much—if not most—of his suffering is a direct result of that.

We see this later in chapter 11. All that Paul endured—imprisonment, beatings, near death, five times the 40 lashes minus one, three times beaten with rods, stoned once, in danger from Jews, Gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, often without food, in cold and exposure—is a direct result of proclaiming the gospel throughout Asia. So much so, that in chapter one of this book, Paul begins the whole book talking about the affliction he experienced in Asia where he says, “*We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself*” (2 Corinthians 1:8). We don't know to what that's a precise reference—whether it was the Demetrius riot, literal or figurative, fighting with beasts as he described in 1 Corinthians 15:32 in Ephesus or severe illness—but whatever it was, it was tied to Paul's proclamation of the gospel in Asia and it threatened to thwart his proclamation.

It's in that context of missions to dangerous places among difficult peoples that Paul says, “I believe and so I speak knowing that suffering, affliction and persecution will come,” Yet, “*knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.*”

See the principle here. It is by no means isolated to this portion of Scripture. The principle is clear: **Persecution follows proclamation.** Suffering for the gospel accompanies the spreading of the gospel.

Think about our brothers and sisters in Saudi Arabia, North Korea or Somalia right now. If they believe, stay silent and say nothing about the gospel, they can stay below the radar. However, what if they believe and they speak? I will put it in the words of one Somalian woman with whom I spoke in the Horn of Africa a few months ago. She said, “If I speak the gospel to the wrong person, they will immediately slit my throat.”

Persecution follows proclamation. As long as Christians stay silent about the gospel, there's no problem. As soon as Christians start speaking about the gospel, there's a problem. I'm not saying every circumstance in the world is as extreme as Somalia, Saudi Arabia or North Korea. I am saying, pastor and church member, if you and I are going to be serious about making disciples among all 6,000 of these unreached people groups, we need to realize it's not going to come without cost to us, our families, churches and the lives of people we love and lead.

I think about three couples we sent out this year to lead church planting teams among some of the most difficult, dangerous-to-reach peoples on the planet. Two of these couples had young children. As we

gathered around them praying for each of them on different Sundays—it was like Acts 20 with Paul and the elders at Ephesus—we were weeping over friends and family whom we love, knowing we are sending them into difficult parts of the Middle East, North African and Central Asia.

I tell our people, “We’re not doing this because we have some sick desire to be dangerous. This is simply the reality of engaging unreached peoples. They’re not only hard to reach but some are resistant to being reached and will oppose those who are trying to reach them.” Our people ask, “Well, Pastor, why do we go to them if they’re going to resist us?” The answer is simple. It’s gospel. We go because God came to us when we were resistant to being reached by Him and sent His Son to sacrifice His life for our salvation; therefore, it makes sense for people who possess this gospel to have a death-defying commitment to proclaim it.

We believe and so we speak, knowing even death itself cannot stop us because: *“he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.”*

Brothers and sisters, as we believe this gospel with deep-seated conviction in our lives, let’s proclaim it with death-defying confidence in the world.

The second exhortation flows directly from this and leaps off the page particularly in verse 15.

Second, as we live to extend God’s grace among more people, let’s long to exalt God’s glory among all peoples.

Don’t you love the two-fold goal—the dual aim—that Paul has in ministry? Verse 15 single-handedly sums up the purpose of Christian missions. He starts by saying, “For it is all for your sake—all my preaching suffering, persecution, affliction and proclamation—so that more and more of you might experience the grace of God.”

Isn’t this what we want our lives, ministries, churches and partnerships together as churches to be about? Don’t we want to extend the grace of God to more and more people for their sake so that more and more men, women, boys and girls might know the resurrected Christ, be saved from their sins, brought from darkness to light and delivered from everlasting condemnation away from God to experience everlasting communion in the presence of God? We want these stories and testimonies we’re hearing in this conference to be multiplied all over the world among all the nations. We live for this.

I mentioned India, but I don’t want to leave a dark picture of India with you. I want to come back around here and share a story with you about how the grace of God is extending to more and more people. Travel with me to Bihar, in the north of India, which is one of the most spiritually and physically impoverished places on the planet. Bihar is a state in India about the size of Tennessee. The difference between Tennessee and Bihar is Tennessee has six million people in it and Bihar has 100 million. Imagine 100 million people in Tennessee! This population is spread across 45,000 different villages where the

majority of the people are extremely poor. Millions upon millions are living in desperate poverty, and it's not just physical.

Bihar is lower than the average in northern India with a .1% Christian population. Most Indians in Bihar are Hindu and have been for generations. In the particular region we were in, the death rate was about 5,000 people per day. This means every day in this region, putting that together with the number of Christians there, approximately 4,995 people are plunging into an eternal hell—most of whom never even heard the gospel. We are working in partnership with brothers and sisters there to help provide training in disciple-making and church multiplication to Christians and pastors who live there.

A few months ago, I had the privilege of being in Bihar and seeing what is happening there in a humbling, glorious way. My mentor in ministry was with me and his comment at one point was that it was about the closest he had ever seen to what we are reading about in the New Testament when it comes to the grace of God multiplying to more and more people.

Let me introduce you to two brothers in Bihar: Anil and Hari. One is a school superintendent and the other is a chicken farmer. Both are followers of Christ and have been engaged in ministry. A few years ago, these two brothers were at the end of their rope, not seeing any fruit of the gospel in their ministry. They went to one of our training sessions on disciple making and were encouraged to go to a totally unreached village—no church, no Christians—and say to the first person who came up to them, “We are here in the name of Jesus and we would like to pray for your village.” Anil and Hari looked at each other and said, “This will never work.” But then they looked at each other and said, “Nothing we ever do works so, we might as well try.”

They went out to a village and started walking through it. Nobody even came up to them until they were almost to the end of the village when a man came up to them and asked, “What are you guys doing here?” Anil and Hari started their pre-scripted line: “We are here in the name of Jesus and...” They didn't even get to finish their line because this guy stopped them and said, “Jesus? I've heard a little bit about Him. Can you tell me more?” Anil and Hari looked at each other and said, “Yes. We can tell you more.” The man said, “Wait. I don't want you to just tell me. I want you to tell this to my friends and family too. Is that okay?” Anil and Hari said, “Yes. That's okay.”

They followed this guy to his home where he told them to wait. Anil and Hari were sitting in his home looking at each other wondering what was going on. The guy left, got some friends and family—a group of people—came back to the house and said, “Alright. Will you please tell us about this Jesus you mentioned?” Anil and Hari shared the gospel.

To make a long story short, about 20 people in that village repented and believed in Christ over the next few weeks. This is a village that has never, ever heard the gospel for generations. The Spirit had so prepared the hearts of the people. *“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few”* (Matthew 9:35-38)

They went, spoke the gospel and, the power of the gospel rained down on this home and village and people came to Christ.

The story doesn't stop there because Anil and Hari said to them, "Now, you guys need to do this same thing in other villages." They began to equip these guys to go and share the gospel in other villages. And they went. It was three years ago when they went to that first village. Since that time, people have come to Christ and churches have at least started and begun to assemble in 350 different villages as a result of what happened in that one village. We worship with these churches.

I get somewhat cynical when I hear numbers like this for a variety of reasons, but these brothers—the ministry partners with whom we are working—can point to each one of these. We're not talking about where two or three are gathered. We are talking about churches, and they are measuring the health of these churches. They have a grid through which they identify the characteristics of a New Testament church and evaluate it. We've visited them and helped them think through how it can continue to grow.

God is pouring out His Spirit in Bihar, India. That's not to say it's easy. Anil and Hari have faced all kinds of challenges from outside the church. From inside the church, they have experienced various afflictions. In the middle of it all, the gospel is spreading to more and more people for the sake of more and more villages.

My favorite quote is from a time when we were worshipping together in one of these villages. They were sharing testimonies about how they trusted in Christ. These are people gathered together in a church where a year before there were no Christians. Now, they are gathered together worshipping Christ as a church. During the testimonies, one guy looked at us and said, "Our village was like hell until we heard the gospel."

This is what we live for, right? It's all for their sake. We want more and more people to know the grace of God, but that's not all. Remember this is a two-fold goal—a dual aim—of gospel ministry. The purpose of Christian missions is far greater than even the salvation of souls for eternity, as if that's not enough.

Listen to Paul in 4:15: "*For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*" Yes.

The second goal is the higher aim and ultimate purpose of missions is not the salvation of souls. It is the glory of God. More specifically, it's thanksgiving and gratitude to the glory of God. The end of missions is more and more people who are happy in God. This is the cry of the psalmist: "*Let the nations be glad and sing for joy... Let all the peoples praise you (O God)*" (Psalm 67:4-5).

This is the cry of the angel from Heaven: "*I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people*" (Luke 2:10).

It's the cry of the Apostle Paul himself when he said in Romans 15, "My ambition is to preach the gospel where Christ has not already been named" (so that) "*those who have never been told of Him will*

see and those who have never heard will understand.” They will know, savor, worship and give thanks to God.

This is the problem in the first place, right? Apart from the gospel, they’re not giving thanks to God. We read in Romans 1:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Paul says in Romans 1, “There are people—scores of Gentiles—who aren’t giving thanks to God. They aren’t glorifying God as God and this is why my ambition is to take the gospel to them.”

Paul says in Romans 15, “That’s why I have to go to Spain and I need you to help me get there. The gospel has not been heard there. There are people there who are not giving thanks to God nor the glory He is due.”

This is so key, isn’t it? This is what drives missions. This is why we want to render the evangelization of the world an accomplished fact. It’s not so we can say we did this or that, nor even that we feel guilty because we have the gospel and they don’t, nor that we have all these resources and they don’t. People ask, “Aren’t you just guilt-tripping people into going overseas to unreached peoples?” No!

What drives passion for missions among unreached peoples is not feeling guilty or bad, but rather glory for our God. Brothers and sisters, we must sacrifice our lives and shepherd our churches to penetrate unreached peoples with the gospel, because we are convinced down to the core of our being that our God deserves every person’s praise, not just of a few thousand people groups on the planet. He deserves the praise of all 16,000 people groups on this planet.

This is where we start with every new member workshop that we have in the church I pastor. The opening states that Jesus has all authority in Heaven and on earth which means two things:

He is worthy of our worship. He is Lord. As followers of Christ, we have sacrificed the right to determine the direction of our lives. The language we use all the time is “blank check.” Every one of our lives is a blank check on the table with no strings attached. Our plans, possessions, bank accounts, lifestyle, future, dreams, ambitions and where we live are all on the table. “God, whatever You want me to do, to give, to let go of or wherever You want me to go, there are no strings attached.” This is not for super

Christians. This is for every follower of Christ. This is what it means to follow Christ. Our lives are His to spend for His name's sake.

However, He's not just worthy of our worship. If He has all authority in Heaven and on earth, that means **He's worthy of their worship too.**

I tell our people that this is why we do what we do and why I want them to leave soon after they become a member. There are thousands and thousands of people around us in this city of Birmingham who are not giving Jesus the worship He is due; and we want His glory. More than we want a comfortable life in this particular church, we want His glory. We are going to send our people into North American cities because there are a couple hundred million people who aren't giving Jesus the glory He is due. Jesus is worthy of the glory.

We're not going to stop there either because the blind checks are on the table. He may send some to Africa because there are 3,000 tribes following all kinds of animistic religions that deny the truth of Who Christ and God are. Jesus is worthy of every single one of those tribes' worship.

That's why we are going to Japan, Laos and Vietnam. There are 350 million Buddhists following Buddha's rules and regulations but he is not worthy of their worship. Jesus alone is worthy of all their worship.

That's why we're going to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. There are 950 million Hindus following more gods than you and I can even fathom; but there is only one God Who is worthy of worship and His name is Jesus.

That's why we're trying to go to communist places such as China, Cuba or North Korea. There are over a billion people who have grown up with atheistic philosophies that completely deny the existence of God. There is a God. His name is Jesus and He is worthy of their glory.

We're going to go to the toughest places in the world. We're going to go to Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia. There are 1.5 billion Muslims fasting, giving alms, making holy pilgrimages to Mecca and praying five times a day to a false god. Jesus has died on a cross, risen from the grave, ascended on high and He alone is worthy of their worship.

People who believe that Jesus is worthy of that kind of glory will lay down their lives to go wherever He leads. This is what drives us. He's worthy of worship. Putting it together, this is our ultimate aim and what we mean by a two-fold goal: for their sake and for God's sake.

This is what we've heard quoted already in Revelations 9-10: "We are looking forward to the day when a great multitude that no one can count from every nation, tongue, tribe and language gathers before the throne and the Lamb and cries out, 'Salvation belongs to our God Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" There is the two-fold goal, the dual aim and the supreme purpose of missions. This is what makes the Great Commission great: Salvation for the sake of others among more and more people, all

leading to glory for God's sake among more and more people. As we live to extend God's grace among more people, let's long to exalt God's glory among all peoples.

All of that leads us to the third exhortation based on Paul's last three verses in this text.

Thirdly, as we continually envision eternal glory with God, let's joyfully embrace earthly suffering from God.

What Paul says at the end of this chapter all makes sense. As long as we believe this gospel in our lives and proclaim it in this world, our outer self will be wasting away. We will experience affliction and we must not be surprised by it. Who among us really thinks making disciples among all nations is an easy task?

I think back to 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 which we heard preached earlier. What a picture! In verse four we read: "...*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbeliever.*"

Verse six says, "God is shining light in our hearts."

See this cosmic battle raging in the heavenlies between the little 'g' god of this world blinding minds and the big 'G' God shining light. We are right in the middle in verse five preaching Christ. Do we really think on the front lines of that cosmic battle that things will ever be easy for us? That the aim for us in this battle is our comfort while there is suffering?

I was talking with a dear pastor friend of mine recently whom I respect deeply. He's pastored the same church for over 30 years. He has been passionate about the nations longer than I have been alive. He told me this last year was the toughest year in his ministry. The people in his church were resisting the call of God to the nations. When I heard him say that, I was so discouraged. I thought, "Really? After 30 years of pastoring a church on mission, things are just going to get harder? Is that really the case?" Then I realized the folly of my own thoughts. Do I really think there will ever be a point in this world when pushing back darkness among the nations will be easy?

Ministry and missions will never be easy as long as we are on the front lines, pushing back darkness among the nations. This should not be a surprise. Jesus promised us this. We follow a Savior Who sends out His disciples like sheep among wolves. That's not a good place for sheep to be. He said, "A disciple is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. It's enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. A servant is not greater than his master meaning if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

The only possible conclusion from those words is our danger in this world increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship to Christ and our commitment to this commission. The only possible exhortation from those words is clear: to everybody wanting a safe, comfortable, cozy life, free from danger in this world, stay away from Jesus.

Paul similarly exhorted the earliest Christians that through many tribulations they must enter the Kingdom of God for everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Peter says this is expected: *“Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you”* (1 Peter 4:12).

Jesus tells His church in Revelation 2: “Don’t fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison. You will have tribulation. Be faithful all the way to death.”

Revelation 6 makes clear that there are more martyrs yet to come before the commission of Christ is complete.

This is the unavoidable takeaway from the New Testament: The more passionate we are about spreading the gospel to every people group in the world, the more we will suffer. Not because we’re seeking suffering but rather because we’re speaking Christ. Suffering for the gospel accompanies the spread of the gospel. All of this is from God according to His design. It’s not by accident.

I think about a couple we recently sent out from our church. I also think about two of the most poignant moments for me in pastoring this church over the last seven years. Both of them happened with this couple. When they met with our elders about the possibility of becoming part of our International Church Planting internship—specifically leading a church planting team among a particularly dangerous people group—one of our elders solemnly looked at this young couple, especially at the young wife, and said, “Do you realize the risk involved in where you want to go and what that risk means for you and your family?” I’ll never forget how this wife responded. She looked back with humility, compassion and confidence and said in the sweetest yet most solemn southern voice you can imagine, “I believe God’s Word is true and His Word says His gospel will spread through persecution, hardship and suffering. I am good with that.” Our room of elders sat silent. Nobody spoke for a period of time and there was not a dry eye in the room.

Then, a few weeks ago as this husband was sharing with our church, he said at one point, “I know that some of you think we are being reckless.” He was sitting there with his precious wife and two young kids preparing to go into the heart of this unreached, Muslim people group. He looked at our church and said, “I am convinced that we are in far greater danger of being safe in the church today than we are of being reckless.”

As I sat there and listened to him explain conclusions that he had come to based on his study of Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament, I couldn’t help but agree with him. We have made safety a god, not just in our culture but in the church. We have equated safety with wisdom. We have sought to ensure safety with our wealth in a way that sure seems completely foreign to followers of Christ in the New Testament. I’m not saying we need to be reckless in going to the nations. I am saying there will be

great risk in going to the nations, yet if we're not willing to take that risk we will not be part of the accomplishment of the Great Commission.

Brothers and sisters, God will pass us by as long as we value safety over obedience. I don't pretend to know the ramifications of what this means for my life, nor your life, nor anyone else's life. Let us embrace suffering from God and do it joyfully. How do we do that? This is the thrust—the crux—of the whole text. This is the hinge sentence upon which everything in 2 Corinthians 4:13-18 turns.

Beginning at verse 16, it says, “*So we do not lose heart...*” This is the same phrase Paul used earlier and he sums up everything with it now: “Though afflicted, crushed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down and always being given over to death, we do not lose heart.” All these sufferings are simply: “*...preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

“Suffering may be inevitable,” Paul says, “but God's purpose is unstoppable. God's purpose in our lives is unstoppable. All of these sufferings are intended by my God for my good.”

As he says in Romans 8, “*The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us... And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*”

In Romans 5:3-5, Paul says,

We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (NIV).

That's why he says to the Philippians: “It's been granted to you and me for the sake of Christ that we should not only believe in Him but suffer for His sake.” It's been granted—given—to us by God to suffer. He says, “(We want to know Christ), *the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings.*”

Just like he says at the beginning of this book:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

Just like he says at the end of this book:

“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 (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Suffering may be inevitable but God's purpose is unstoppable. He's working all this for our good, for joy in our lives and ultimately for His glory in the world. It isn't just that God's purpose in our lives is unstoppable. God's purpose in the world is too. Isn't this the story of the church starting in Acts 7 as Stephen was stoned and the church first experienced martyrdom? Yet, martyrdom in chapter seven fuels mission in chapter eight as the church scatters throughout Judea and Samaria preaching the gospel.

I love how Satan not only acts under divine permission but actually fulfills divine purposes. Don't you love that? Satan strikes down one of God's choicest servants and thinks he's winning. In the next verse, everybody scatters and preaches the gospel wherever they go. Take that!

Even better, Luke tells us Saul is there approving the execution and leading out on the persecution of Stephen. This leads to the scattering of believers, then the founding of the church in Antioch in chapter 11. This becomes the church in chapter 13 that one day sends out Saul—now Paul—on global mission. You can't write that script any better! Saul inadvertently started the church that ultimately sent him out on missions.

Don't lose heart, brothers and sisters. Satan's strategies to stop the church will ultimately serve to spread it. Satan's strategies to inflict earthly pain in your life will ultimately serve to increase eternal glory with your God.

Paul ends the passage with: *"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison"* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Our suffering is inevitable. Our God's purposes are unstoppable. And ultimately, our hope is incomparable. Paul says, "Compared to the coming glory, our suffering is light and momentary." This doesn't mean it is easy and painless—particularly not at the time—but in light of all time, our present pain and suffering does not compare with our future weight of glory.

The word Paul uses there is *hyperbolé* from which we derive the word hyperbole—an exaggeration in the English language. The Greek word literally means beyond all proportion. In other words, Paul says to the great Corinthian church—and by extension to The Gospel Coalition—"The Great Commission, the gospel going to more and more people to the glory of God, will involve great suffering but be sure of this: eternity will prove it was worth the price."

Brothers and sisters in Christ who have coalesced around His glory in the gospel, let us coalesce around the accomplishment of His commission. As we believe this gospel—a deep-seated conviction in our lives—let's proclaim it with death-defying confidence in the world. As we live to extend God's grace among more and more people, let's long to exalt God's glory among all peoples. As we continually envision eternal glory with God, let's joyfully embrace earthly suffering from God knowing, in the words of the Apostle Paul:

If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,
“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”
³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).

Glory be to His name!

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