

Missions Sunday: Partnering in God's Global Mission

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[0 : 00] Good morning, brothers and sisters in Christ.! Thank you for inviting Limin and myself to your missions conference.!

And I thought that there is something when we talk about missions,! something I wanted to remind all of us, and to remind you that we must never forget that missions is God's enterprise.

It is His initiative, but He's so gracious. He's so gracious to allow us a part in it. He doesn't need us, but He takes pleasure in us taking part of His great mission.

Now, ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and fell into sin and died, God has been on a mission to save mankind and to save the world.

And it is His business. Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus commissioned His disciples to spread the good news and to make disciples of all the nations.

[1 : 14] And the early Christians, they knew. They knew what Jesus wanted them to do, but it did not mean that they necessarily knew what they had to do. But Jesus did, and so He sent His Holy Spirit.

And on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and baptized them with flames of holy fire, and 3,000 people were added to their numbers. And the church grew exponentially.

Now, when the church grows exponentially, when it grows in depth, when it grows in size, there will always be a counterattack because the enemy will not allow it to go unopposed.

So, persecution came, Stephen was killed, and then the disciples scattered. Now, their scattering was also God's doing because it made the gospel spread even faster.

Philip the evangelist found himself in Samaria, and he was able to preach to the utopian eunuch, who would go back to utopia.

[2 : 23] And then Peter was led to Joppa, where he baptized the first Gentile believer, Cornelius. And later we will see that the Spirit led Paul to Asia and then to Europe.

Now, it's not recorded, but the early church beliefs, the early church had stories that Thomas went to India. Now, there's a church, the Matoma Church, that gives credence to this belief.

Philip went to North Africa. Matthew went to Persia. Bethlehem to Armenia. Simon went to Samaria. And some even say he went to Britain.

And finally, Andrew went to the land of Man-Eaters, somewhere in the region of Russia. And in the 2,000 years since then, the gospel has spread to the ends of the year.

I found a wonderful video, a very short video, just one minute, that shows this in a visual way. Now, when you look at it, the light areas are where the gospel has spread and where the gospel has taken root.

[3 : 32] But you will notice that there will be opposing creeds, opposing powers and principalities that will always challenge the gospel. That is what the Lord has been doing for the last 2,000 years.

Now, we just watched a video. We watched a map spreading. But imagine the untold stories behind it. There must have been millions of people involved, each of them with their own story, their own encounter with the Lord.

Now, the one that we know the best of all, because it was recorded by Luke, is Paul's story.

Because Luke accompanied him and wrote the book of Acts about Paul's exploits.

And Paul also wrote letters to the early churches that he founded. And we know him through the books of the Bible. Some of those letters became part of our New Testament canon.

So, just now, we read an extract of one of his letters, Philippians 1 to 11. I won't read the extract again, but it might surprise you.

[4 : 47] You know, as I said, Philippians is Levin and myself's favorite book, because it's the book of joy. But it's only 104 verses.

Only 104 verses, which you could read aloud in 15 minutes. But to me, it's a book that you could read and reread, meditate upon, and talk to one another about for days, for weeks, forever.

I think, and we would never be able to gather, get all the wisdom, all the richness that's in it. And today, we're just looking at 11 verses, but I must confess, I'm only brushing the tip of it.

Unlike his letters to other churches in the New Testament, in Philippians, Paul doesn't describe himself as the apostle, the apostle of God.

When he did that, it was to establish his authority to them. You know, I am God's servant, you have to listen to what I'm writing. But not in Philippians.

[5 : 57] In Philippians, he's just mere Paul, writing to his faithful friends, writing to people whom he loves. He loves them so much that he even swears.

He even swears about it. In verse 8, he writes, God can testify. You know, that's like taking an oath, an oath before a judge. God can testify how I long for you with the affection of Christ.

To me, Paul is like a lover, you know. He loves them so much that he has to swear about it.

Someone called this letter a dance of words with exclamations of delight.

Now, I like that. A dance of words with exclamation of delight. delight. And I thought, I needed to point out to you how central, how central Jesus Christ is in Paul's letter, in Paul's heart.

In just 11 verses, he mentions Christ Jesus seven times. Servants of Christ Jesus, in Christ Jesus, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the day of Christ Jesus, the affection of Christ Jesus, the day of Christ Jesus again, and the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

[7 : 25] To Paul, Jesus is everything. A poet wrote, and I thought this was so beautiful, a Christian lives in Christ like the roots of a tree live in the soil, like a bird in the air, and a fish in the water.

A Christian is always and everywhere encircled with the presence of Jesus Christ. So, brothers and sisters, when we are involved in missions, we follow a person, we follow Jesus.

We don't follow a cause. We follow someone. We don't follow something. Our loyalty is to Him.

Our loyalty is not to our culture, our way of life, our ideas, our ideals, not to our country, not to democracy, not to human rights.

our loyalty and our devotion is to a person, to Jesus, and He must be our all in all.

[8 : 42] Because God is Jesus' Father, and because we believe in Jesus and accept Him as coming from the Father, God has adopted us, and we are the sons.

The Bible says we are the sons of God. And what do sons do? Sons imitate their parents. And because our Father loves His enemies, we have to learn to love our enemies.

Because He hates injustice, we have to learn to hate injustice. And because He has a heart for the lost and the desperate, we have to have a heart for the lost and the desperate.

And His business is missions. And as His sons, like Jesus, we must say, our business is with our Father's business.

If you think about it, it is family business. Now, let's think about the people that Paul was writing to, that he intended.

[9 : 52] We, of course, He mentored, the Holy Spirit meant us to read this year, 2,000 years later. But at that point of time, who were the people that Paul wanted to read?

And we start with Timothy. Paul introduces his letter and says, Paul and Timothy. He writes as if Timothy wrote, co-wrote the letter with him.

But you just read a few sentences and you don't know. Timothy didn't write this. It is Paul, Paul who wrote this. So why did Paul give Timothy equal time, so to speak?

And for that, I think we have to go back to Acts 16, Luke's record of what happened 16 years ago. Is there a map?

Now, if you look at the red lines, that is Paul's first missionary journey. And at the tip, you know, the part where it looks very crowded, is where Paul, years before, had gone to Derby, Iconium, and Lystra, and he had warned converts there.

[11 : 00] And now you follow the blue line, the purple, the blue line, and that's where we are talking about. So he goes back to Derby and Lystra, and he finds believers there.

More importantly, he finds Timothy. The Bible describes him as a young man. Scholars think he was in his twenties. And his mother and grandmother were believers, Lois and Eunice.

They might have been converts, probably were converts of Paul in his earlier journey. But Luke writes twice, Timothy's father was a Greek.

In fact, he writes that everybody knew that Timothy's father was a Greek. Greek. And I take it to mean that his father was not only a Gentile, but also an unbeliever.

So Timothy had an unbeliever for his father, and it could be that he came from a broken home.

Now, we here, do any of you have parents who are unbelievers?

[12:07] do they oppose your faith in the Lord Jesus? Or maybe some of us here had broken families, parents who separated or divorced because they were of different faith or different ideas.

Timothy came from that background, but it didn't prevent him from becoming one of the greatest leaders of the early church. Eventually, he ended up as the bishop of Ephesus.

So if his background didn't stop him from attaining God's best for him, our own backgrounds should not prevent us from attaining God's best for us.

And Paul actually, in the letter, provides an update on Timothy's growing reputation as a leader. He knew that the Philippians loved Timothy and they would have wanted to know what's happened to young Timothy who came with you and visited us.

Paul fills in the blanks. Now, at the very beginning, note, he says, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. That's how he introduces them.

[13:23] The translation servant is unfortunate. The Greek word, doulos, should be and must be translated as slave. slave. And for some reason or other, the translators didn't like the word slave.

Two centuries ago, Charles Spurgeon, the British pastor, he criticized this. He said, the authorized version softens it as servant when it really means slave.

And he pointed out, early Christians delighted to count themselves as Christ's absolute property, bought by him, owned by him, and holy at his disposal for use.

Because it's only when a person becomes a slave of Jesus, becomes a slave of our Creator, that we can begin to experience true joy, true freedom.

Jesus himself once said, you cannot serve both God and mammon. Now, our founder, Hudson Taylor, was of the same mind. On one occasion, he was in Australia, and the moderator, the person who introduced him, was effusive in his praise for Hudson Taylor and for the China Inland Mission.

[14:42] He pointed out that the China Inland Mission had established tens of schools in China, hundreds of churches, there were mission stations in every province in China, and just at that time, 600 Chinese believers had become partners of the CIM.

And so he praised Hudson Taylor so much, but when it was Hudson Taylor's turn to speak, he was quiet, and then he said, dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious master.

Paul and Timothy were like that. Paul wrote to the Philippians that there was no one else like Timothy who genuinely cares about their welfare.

Later, when he writes to Timothy himself, he addresses him as to Timothy, my beloved son. My beloved son.

Brothers and sisters, we are all beloved here. we are the beloved sons, sons and daughters of the Father.

[15:57] Jesus made it possible for God to be our Father. Let us never forget this. Let us never forget it. And Paul, who were the people in Philippians that he wrote to?

He calls them the saints in Christ. Now, Philippi, the Philippian church was one of the unique cases. We actually saw how the first converts were made and presumably they became the founders of the church, the founding members of the church.

And the very first one was Lydia. Acts 16 verse 4 describes how Paul met her. One of us who heard hers, this is in Philippi, was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God.

Now, it's amazing. What happened was Paul wanted to go, Thyatira is somewhere right in the middle in the dot there. He wanted to go there 10 years earlier, but the Holy Spirit prevented him from going there.

And then he had a vision of a man from Macedonia, Europe, saying, come and help us. And Paul obeyed. And that's when he crossed over to Philippi. And who does he meet there?

[17:19] He meets Lydia, a woman who comes from the actual place that he was trying to go to, but which he couldn't. God is amazing.

And that's what's happening now. It's happening now. Countries like Laos, countries like Myanmar, civil war in Myanmar, our missionaries had to leave and couldn't stay anymore in Myanmar. But what happened was, now we have missionaries in North Thailand, we have missionaries in Bangkok, and their task is reaching out to Myanmar refugees, who have fled Myanmar because of the civil war.

And likewise, we have a Malaysian, no, we had, he's come back to Penang, now the family, they were in Nairobi in Africa, and who do you think they were reaching out to there? they were reaching out to mainland Chinese, and they were working with the African church to reach out to the mainland Chinese, because of the belt and, you know, that initiative by China, lots of Chinese are going to Africa, and there are people there reaching out to them.

[18:35] And we ourselves hope to see that in Malaysia, we have so many migrants, so many overseas people coming here, and we hope that Malaysia, including Sarawak, including Kuching, will become a center for missionary activity, with so many aliens, so many foreigners coming.

But back to Lydia, she was not an ordinary person. She, it's written, Luke writes that she dealt with purple goods, fabric made of purple dye.

That's one of the most expensive dyes in the world. It took 8,000 shellfish to create one gram of this purple dye. Only the emperor, the Caesar, who would wear all purple, the sanartists would wear white with only a little line of this purple dye.

And so Lydia owned a supply chain. In modern terms, she would be the CEO of fashion industry, you know, Estee Lauder or something. And she had houses.

She had houses in Thyatira, she had houses in Philippi. But most significant, this wealthy, this high status woman, she knew something was missing.

[19:55] Her heart was hungry for something. And when she heard Paul, and this is Luke's words, she paid attention to what Paul said, and God saved her.

She believed the gospel delivered by Paul that day. So after a while, she and her household got baptized, and household here means her servants, it could mean all her family who are dependent on her, her parents, her children, her husband, I would expect, her extended family, all of them were baptized.

And she urged Paul, if you had judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.

And she prevailed upon us.

That's what Luke wrote. She was like saying, my home is yours. And it's remarkable, brothers and sisters, this woman converted, and immediately she knew that she and what she had belongs to the Lord.

And the amazing thing do you notice, she gets involved in missions. She doesn't have to step a foot out of Philippi. And suddenly she's in the center of missions, of God's mission.

[21:17] The second convert was a slave girl. This is recorded in Acts 16. As we were going to a place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had the spirit of divination and brought her onus much gain by fortune telling.

This poor girl was possessed by a demon who enabled her to tell fortunes, and her onus benefited from it. And then she went around following them screaming, these men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation.

the spirit in her and she was telling the truth. But imagine coming from such a source, it could only discredit the gospel. The way that some public Christians behave in such a way that we are horrified when they start waving the Bible, when they start saying Jesus, praise Jesus, they are a blemish on Jesus' record.

So after several days of enduring this, Paul turned around and told her, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her. And the spirit left. And the church in Philippi doubled.

Two women, Lydia and the slave girl. Lydia was Asian. This girl was European. She was Greek. Lydia was in charge of a huge business enterprise.

[22:54] This girl was a slave to a small enterprise. Lydia had been living the dream. This girl had been living a nightmare.

And the amazing thing is that the gospel, the gospel saved them both. That's what the Lord wants us to be involved in.

Now, this second rescue made headlines. As I said, when souls are safe, you better expect a fight.

You better expect to be challenged. And so the owners of this girl were really unhappy. She could no longer earn money for them by fortune telling. So they rioted.

They accused Paul and Silas of teaching the people to break Roman traditions. And then Paul and Silas were whipped and imprisoned.

[23 : 54] I don't know what they must have thought, but you remember Paul's exhortation to the Philippians. Rejoice in the Lord always. I say to you, rejoice. And that's what he did. Near midnight, he and Silas were singing hymns, singing songs of praises, praying to the Lord.

And all the prisoners around them were listening. And then an earthquake happened. And suddenly the doors flung over, their chains were unshackled, and then the jailer woke up.

Now, obviously the jailer wasn't interested in Paul and Silas because he had been asleep. But now he wakes up and when he sees what happened, he is going to kill himself. Why? Because he was as good as effectively dead.

If they had escaped, Roman law said that he will be punished with what their punishment would be. He was as good as dead. So Paul cries out quickly, don't harm yourself.

We are all here. We are all here, not just Paul and Silas. The prisoners were all there. Imagine, why didn't these hardened criminals run away the minute they had the chance?

[25 : 10] And I can only believe, I can only think, they had become Christians. There was a mass conversion in prison. And the jailer must have known this.

He immediately falls on his feet. Sirs, what must I do to be saved? He knew something special was happening. And Paul said, believe, place your faith in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

You and your household. Luke explained to us in the morning that day, all his household were baptized.

Do you know what Luke just recorded? He just recorded a church being planted. And he just recorded missions in practice, step by step.

The winning of a single soul, one at a time. And this is the power of the gospel. The gospel that Jesus told us, that Christ told us, to take to the ends of the world.

[26 : 23] And if you read Philippians, you will see that Paul also mentions a man called Epaphroditus, Euda, Cintia. Now, please read about them if you have time.

But when I read about them, I remembered you. I've been telling pastor that I've been stalking your church in the last week. I went online, and I found your church, and I thought, how were you founded?

Who were your members, your founding members? Some of you will remember. And then I found a picture of your family camp in last year, I think, 2024.

And I was thinking, are there any of you who are like Timothy? Any of you like Lydia? Or the slave girl?

Or the prisoner? And their families? What has God done in your lives? And how have you responded? on Friday, we were at your prayer meeting praying for missionaries, and I think there were six missionaries and nine agencies, and one of them expressed how thankful he was to KEC, how thankful he was.

[27 : 47] And that reminded me so much of Paul, where he thanks the Philippians. I thank God every time I think of you. And when I thought of you, and you have been supporting our own Genevieve and our own Pauline, who's going to become our next executive director, and we are doubly thankful for your church.

And when I think of you, I wanted to share about my own church, Faith EFC. Pastor Brian has been there. Now, it's a much smaller church, but we just celebrated our 50th anniversary, and it was an occasion of joy.

It was an occasion. Our little church has supported four missionaries through OMF in the last 20 years. And as I said, it's a real time of joy to recollect what happened, what has happened in the last 20 years.

Now, OMF, it could not do what it is doing without partnership. And our church has been supporting me and Li Min. Me since 1991, when I first joined Malaysian Care, and Li Min and myself through OMF since 1997, right until now.

And I want to quote William Carey, and this is how it happens. William Carey, during his time, wanted to go to India, but he told his prayer partners, there is a gold mine in India, but it is as deep as the center of the earth.

[29 : 20] I will venture to go down into the mine, but you must hold the ropes. And so, our sending church, Faith EFC, it has held the ropes for me for 30 over years.

years. And last Friday, I discovered that you've been holding the ropes for other missionaries for as many years, for Genevieve since 1997. And I want to thank you, thank God, with the bottom of my heart.

Now, Paul went on to pray in verses 9, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ Jesus, that you will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

I don't have time to look into this, but in detail, but effectively, I feel what Paul was saying is that you are doing well.

You have done well. And God is pleased. Go on. Go on doing well and grow. Now, some details of what the Philippines had done.

[30 : 44] Paul, as I said, this is a book of joy, but you wouldn't know it if you had realized Paul's circumstances. He wrote this when he was in chains. He had been imprisoned.

He wanted to be a missionary to Rome, to spread the gospel to the Romans. And that happened, but not as a free man, as a prisoner.

And in Rome, he was under house arrest. And because of that, he had the opportunity to preach to anybody who came to visit him. He says that even the prison guard of the palace, of the royal palace, have now heard the gospel.

But the bad thing about it, the sad thing about it, he had to pay for his accommodation. He had to pay for his own imprisonment. He had to pay for the prisoners who guarded him.

And the Philippians had sent him a gift to pay for this. They had sent Epaphroditus to help him during this time. And actually, Paul was saying, thank you.

[31 : 49] Thank you for doing this. And in Acts, in the other letters, we can sense that the Philippines had been helping Paul in the past as well. They had collected money once for Paul to take to Jerusalem when there was a famine there.

That was the response of their love for the Lord and their thankfulness. And Paul was saying to them now, you've done well. I pray that you will persevere and perseverance is necessary, brothers and sisters, because the world today is not so different from the world in Paul's time.

Then you had the Roman Empire. Now, we have countries like China, we have countries like North Korea, we have even countries like the US or Europe, who fundamentally are threatened by the gospel.

Despite whatever they say, powers and principalities are hostile to the Lord. Hostile to the gospel. And we must be prepared for that. Even as we watch the map and we saw how the gospel spread, but you may not have noticed that some of the parts where the gospel have spread are turning dark again.

[33 : 20] It's a battle until the final day when Jesus will be triumphant. It's a battle that continues. And they say last century was a century when the most Christians ever, the estimate is 63 million Christians, have been martyred, killed, their leaders taken, and some disappear into prisons.

the place where we went had pastors being in prison constantly. And that reminds me, I wanted to ask you a question, brothers and sisters.

Why do you think Paul sang in prison? Why do you think he sang in prison? Because he was a jailbird.

I'm very bad at telling jokes, okay? The reason why I'm telling this joke is because we heard a story of a jailbird.

It was told to us about a month ago. And this friend of ours, he's in constant touch with pastors. And one of the pastors had a prison ministry.

[34 : 32] And the pastor said that he went to prison and he met a prisoner who was a gangster, a wicked person who had committed a lot of crimes.

But he had been sentenced for a crime that he didn't commit in prison. And for some other reason, again through the law, miraculously, he had come across a Bible and he had read it and he had become a believer.

So when he met this pastor, there was this unspoken question of baptism. And the pastor was prompted to baptize him. He was prompted, but he felt, how can I?

Imagine this is in a visiting hall, there's a thick glass door between the prisoners on one side and the prisoners on the other side. And he said, no, I can't do this, I can't, it's impossible.

And he wanted to go away, but he felt an urge, baptize him. And so what he did, what he did was look for water, he asked the man, press your head against the glass.

[35 : 42] And he baptized him through the glass. I'm not saying whether this is correct practice or not. But the fact is that, moments, you know, times later, he heard that this man had become, was on fire for the Lord.

And he heard that he had brought 500 other prisoners to Christ. And this is true, you know, the people who told, the person who told us this has credibility.

He wouldn't tell lies. So this man had brought 500 people to Christ. And the prison authorities were not happy. The higher-ups had heard about it and they were not happy.

And they said, transfer him out. Transfer him to another prison. But other prison wardens had heard about this. And they didn't want him in their prisons. They didn't want him to be converting Christians in their prisons.

But eventually we heard that he was transferred to a different prison. But the story, it was told among pastors upon full-time workers who were under great persecution, who were at any time going to be imprisoned, who are going to be sentenced just because they belong to Jesus.

[37 : 03] And this story, Paul's story, was a great comfort to them. They realized, whatever happens, go to prison, not go to prison, do this, not do that, whatever happens, the Lord is in control.

And then if we are faithful, faithful, the Lord will accomplish his business. We, his children, we go about his business.

Brothers and sisters, we, Li Min and myself, we have experienced a little bit of this. In our 20 years serving where we were, it didn't end well.

we were accused of being spies, we were accused of training gullible young local Christians to be sent to Pakistan, to be sent to the Middle East, to be slaughtered, to have their throats cut.

And in that time when we were accused of that, I remember one day when I was being escorted to the interrogation room, you know, there were security people sitting beside me so that I can't run out of the car.

[38 : 23] And suddenly, you know, in the fear, in the confusion, I felt joy. I felt this fierce joy.

And it was a great privilege to think I have read about Paul, I have read about Stephen, I have read about Jesus. And in a little way, not, you know, nothing at all, in a small way, he has given me the privilege to be part of it, and the great joy that came.

This is the first time I have shared this in church, with a group, because it's something so personal. But because we are talking about Paul, we are talking about the Philippian church, and what was happening there, and because it's the book of joy, I thought I would share this so you can anticipate the joy that comes when we are part of our Father's business.

Now, I'd like to end with us all praying a prayer, and it's part of St. Francis of Assisi's breastplate, and many of you may not know it, but he was one of the greatest missionaries in the time of the crusades, in the time when there was war between Europe and the beginning Turks, the Seljuk Turks and the Arabs.

St. Francis of Assisi took the most courageous to reach out to the enemies to reach, and so I believe his prayer is a prayer that we all need to pray, and like Paul, it's all about Jesus.

[40 : 18] Let's pray together. Christ with me, Christ before me. Let's do it simultaneously. Let's start again.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.

In Jesus precious name, Amen.