

## ABC MISSIONS MONTH

### **Send Us!**

Isaiah 6:8

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### *Title of this sermon*

- Many of you were here two weeks ago when we announced we will be going to serve with ReachGlobal in San Jose, Costa Rica
- In effect, Melanie and I stood here publicly and declared what we had declared to God many years before – “Here we are, send us!”

### *A different sermon*

- In a sense, this will be a different sermon to the ones you normally hear me preach!
  - It will not be as much detailed biblical exposition as it is show and tell
  - I will share with you how we have seen God work in our lives and in our family to bring us to this point where we say to God, and to you, our church family: “Send us!”
  - In another sense, I hope and pray that this sermon will be exactly like the ones you hear me preach, the ones you hear week in, week out, here at Ambassador
  - I want us to leave here today rejoicing in the glory, greatness, and holiness of God, in His atonement, in His eternal purposes for the nations
  - The Morrisses are not the big story today...they’re not even the medium sized story, God is!
  - My hope and prayer this morning is that the experience of my family will be a window that we look through together and rejoice all the more in the God who created the heavens and earth
  - I want us to rejoice together in the God who was making ambassadors by reconciling the world through Christ...making him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:19-21)
  - Will you pray with me?
- **Send Us! (Two)**
- As we’ve seen over the last two weeks, the “send us” story always begins with an encounter with a holy God
  - I grew up with excellent spiritual pedigree!
  - My Dad’s parents were missionaries in Kenya, my Dad was a lay preacher at our church, my great uncle was a theological giant who wrote over 45 books that are still influential decades after he retired and almost a decade after he went home to be with the Lord.

- I grew up with Bible stories at bed time, with Christian songs to put me to sleep, Godtalk was as much a part of my childhood as Sesame Street and Happy Meals!
- But I also grew up as an excellent Pharisee!
- I knew the right answers, I memorized the Bible verses I needed to, but it became more and more clear that I didn't truly understand the gospel
- It wasn't until my teen years that I personally responded to that gospel that I had heard...literally hundreds of times before
- I had been on a camp with my youth group where I heard the gospel preached clearly
- I came home and had a fight with my parents! (As teenagers do)
- I went into my room, got on my knees and prayed – the prayer no little Pharisee wants to pray – I'm broken! Jesus, I need you!
- In that moment, I had encountered a holy God – seen His glory and seen my need and said with Isaiah – “woe is me”
- And then, as we heard last week, I experienced the wonderful atonement that holy God offered through His Son, Jesus

#### *Melanie's story*

- Melanie's story is different in many ways.
- She didn't grow up going to church.
- Her parents were in the military so she spent 9 of her first 12 years in Germany.
- For her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, her parents gave her a Bible and she read it every day – more faithfully than many kids in church homes
- She reached out for Christian friendship but encountered the all too common phenomenon of Christians being jerks!
- A youth pastor made fun of how she prayed, a college small group leader disinvited her from the group
- And yet, God continued to pursue her
- Those of you who know Melanie know she is a seeker at heart.
- She always wants to know the answer! And in her senior year of college, she was searching for answers!
- She read countless books exploring different religions.
- Eventually, she was drawn – not to a religion – but to a person
- She read the gospels and was captivated by Jesus.
- This man who showed compassion to the lost and forgotten

- When he rose from the dead, he didn't appear first to powerful men, to influential men, he appeared first in the garden to a woman, Mary Magdalene
- And so, in college, through the power of His Word and the friendship of an old pastor and his wife, Melanie encountered the holy God incarnate and committed her life to Jesus

### Send Us! (To Participate)

- One of the reasons Melanie and I say "send us!" Is because we have been captivated – intoxicated – with God's heart for the nations
- On your bulletin there's three blank lines after the words "Send Us!" The first blank is "Send Us...to Participate in God's Plan for the Nations"
- From the very moment God makes Adam and Eve he begins to reveal a beautiful truth – humans are made in God's image, not just as individuals but in relationship.
- We are designed to reflect God as we relate to one another and live together in community.
- In Genesis 12 when God makes that big and foundational promise to Abram, he reveals that the blessings he promises to Abram are not just for him and his family but that in [Abram] **all the families of the earth** shall be blessed."
- In the Psalms we so often see the Psalmist rejoicing in God's greatness on display. If you look carefully, it's clear. Rejoicing in the greatness of God isn't limited to His chosen people. It is a greatness that is to be declared among the nations
- Look with me at these verses from Psalm 96
- <sup>1</sup> Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! <sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. <sup>3</sup> Declare his glory **among the nations**, his marvelous works **among all the peoples!** <sup>4</sup> For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods...<sup>7</sup> Ascribe to the LORD, **O families of the peoples**, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! <sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! <sup>9</sup> Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! <sup>10</sup> **Say among the nations**, "The LORD reigns!..."
- In the New Testament, this eternal purpose of God comes into even clearer focus
- At the end of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus delivers to His disciples what we call the "Great Commission."

- Just as God is giving Isaiah his marching orders in Isaiah 6 after revealing who He is; Jesus gives the disciples their marching orders by first reminding them who He is: I have all authority in heaven and on earth, I will be with you always.
- Therefore they receive the command “Go” and “make disciples of **all nations**” – baptizing them and teaching them to observe all of His commands
- Luke records Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8 that the apostles are to be Christ’s witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the end of the earth.**”
- And then we see the gospel ripple out even further as God sends Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch, He sends Peter to Cornelius and his household, and then Paul preaches in Athens
- God’s Word of truth is being proclaimed in places it is not known
- But to me, the most captivating part of God’s eternal purposes is found at the end.
- In Revelation 7, John gives us this amazing picture of God’s ultimate goal of creation.
- Look with me at verse 9 of Revelation chapter 7 and drink in the glory and splendor of this scene
- <sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, **from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with **a loud voice**, “Salvation belongs to **our God** who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” <sup>11</sup> And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”
- *Unity of these diverse peoples*
- So when Melanie and I say “send us” we are saying – we want in on God’s plan for the nations
- We want to speed the day when men and women from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue stand before the throne of God
- Send us!!!

## Send Us! (To Costa Rica)

- So now you know how we came to know a holy God and to experience the atonement and forgiveness purchased by Jesus
- You've heard how we've been captivated by God's heart for the nations
- The next natural question is "why Costa Rica?"
- And that's the second "Send Us"; "Send Us...to Costa Rica"
  
- From before Melanie and I were married, almost 12 years ago, we felt the pull to overseas cross cultural ministry
- One significant barrier that stood in our way was the question of – where?
- We didn't have a burning passion for a particular people group or particular location
- We didn't have a "Macedonian call" – no dream of a person from any country saying "come over here!"
- We were just two people in a cross-cultural marriage, and we wanted to contribute to kingdom work where we were needed
- After a 2008 trip to North Africa, we took some serious steps forward to consider missions in that part of the world.
- But in the following years, through persecution in that country, and illnesses on the team, God closed the door on those possibilities and we were back to the drawing board.
- So on President's Day weekend three years ago, we went away together and prayed over where God might want to send us.
- We came up with a list of countries and a few agencies we wanted to explore
- After much prayer and numerous conversations with missionaries, trusted friends, and leaders here at ABC, by early 2013 we were down to two agencies and one region, Latin America
- We spent some time on a vision trip in Latin America this summer – in both Mexico City and Costa Rica, and we felt confirmed that the vision of ReachGlobal to (1) multiply healthy churches and their core work to (2) develop, empower, and release leaders was a great fit with our gifting and our passions and we wanted to move forward

## To Costa Rica

- More recently, we felt God leading us to accept an invitation to join the ReachGlobal team in San Jose, Costa Rica.

- It became increasingly clear that the City Team there was a place God could use us in at least three important ways:
  1. Impacting future leaders;
  2. Bringing gospel transformation; and
  3. Strengthening the church

#### 1) Impacting future leaders

- Everyone in this room knows my personal, lifelong passion for gospel transformation in families
- And for the past 3.5 years in particular, Melanie has been an amazing partner in that enterprise – particularly in our family!
- Here at Ambassador, we’ve worked to “contextualize” the practices of family worship that come straight from the Words of Scripture – Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78, Ephesians 6, Colossians 3
- It’s what the Hebrews did, it’s what the early church did, and we need to work out how that happens in the American context.
- So as we think about taking the gospel to families and working with pastors and church leaders to make that happen, Costa Rica is a natural fit.
- More than two-thirds of the population is under the age of 30.
- There are many first generation believers, and we want to be a part of impacting families – pastors, church members, new believers – to reflect the truth of the gospel in their lives and homes
- San Jose is also home to numerous universities including the University of Costa Rica which is one of the top 25 universities in Latin America, and the top ranked university in Central America. There is a significant opportunity to impact the next generation with the gospel

#### 2) Bringing gospel transformation

- Costa Rica has several distinct Indigenous peoples with existing homelands and people living outside of their reserves in urban areas.
- Working with Native peoples has been my primary work for more than a decade and my current full time job is with the leading Native American organization in the US, I hope to contribute to existing ministries with Indigenous peoples while we’re in Costa Rica

- San Jose is also a city where the evils of human trafficking and the sex trade are on open display. San Jose is often referred to as the Bangkok of Latin America. There are emerging ministries to address this great evil and bring gospel transformation.
- San Jose is also a city with growing urban slums where Costa Ricans and many Nicaraguan immigrants live in very difficult conditions.
- By 2020, some estimates say over 1 billion people around the world will live in slums or slum-like conditions. And yet investment in ministry in urban areas generally and slums in particular is surprisingly small.
- In fact, many of the photos you've seen on the screen are from a kids program we participated in Rio Azul, one of the slums.
- The picture on this slide has a bridge in another one of these communities. The words say "Jesus is the bridge of life."
- As the population of urban slums increases around the world, we want to make a difference for the gospel there.

### 3) Strengthening the church

- During our vision trip and subsequent conversations we also saw San Jose as a place where we could strengthen the church – through partnerships with the ReachGlobal team, and work with the churches and ministries in the city and beyond
- Costa Rica is a relatively stable country in a relatively unstable region of the world. There is significant opportunity to impact – not only the city of San Jose and the nation of Costa Rica, but to reach the surrounding nations in the region.
- You see on the slide here the number of countries in Central America, the Caribbean, and South America that can be impacted through work based in Costa Rica
- Costa Rica is also receiving an increasing number of short-term teams – especially as safety concerns are leading churches to reconsider missions trips to some parts of Mexico, especially on the border.
- To serve in that part of the world is an exciting opportunity to impact the American church by hosting short term teams.
- Costa Rica is also a nation with a growing heart to send missionaries. Over the past several years there has been an emerging trend where unlikely nations like Italy, France, and Brazil are beginning to catch up to the United States – and even eclipse South Korea – as the leading nations sending missionaries.

- There are an increasing number of places in the world where Latinos can go and Americans, even Australians, cannot. We see an opportunity to be a part of that exciting movement.

### **Send Us! (All)**

- And that's why we feel God is calling us to Costa Rica!
- But when we say "Send us!" we're not just saying "send us!" – Peter and Melanie, we're saying "Send Us" in at least two other senses.
- That's your third blank – when we say Send Us, we're saying "Send Us...ALL!"
- First, we are saying "Send Us, and our kids!"
- I took this as an excuse to put up cute pictures of the kids from our vision trip!
- We are drawn to missions in part because we want to bless our children by giving them a heart for the nations.
- We desire that they would grow up knowing that the bond of the gospel is stronger than the bonds of geography, culture, or citizenship.
- It's our desire that they grow up knowing a second language, and connecting with people across cultural and language barriers.
- And second, it's our hope and prayer that our role as Ambassador's first long-term, home-grown missionaries enables us to have an ongoing partnership with and impact on this precious fellowship of believers.
- We see really exciting opportunities for many of you to join us in praying for and supporting the work in Costa Rica, to join us on short-term teams, to have students join us as interns, and for some of you to join us on the field long-term.
- There's this quote that has been bouncing around my head over the last few months
- It's from a Keith Green song "Open Your Eyes."
- It's a song I heard a lot on my parent's new CD player when I was growing up. [For those who don't know, a CD is like a small Frisbee shaped shiny object that stores less songs than your phone or iPod]
- He introduces the song with this quote on the slide:  
This generation of believers that you and me are a part of, we are responsible for this generation of souls, all over the world. We're responsible for them. We're responsible to pray



daily for the needs of ministries around the world, and ask God "how about me not sending my money this time, how about me going?" It's so easy to write checks, it's so easy...

- Those words resound inside me: "how bout me not sending my money this time, how bout me going!"
- I probably haven't heard them for 10 years or more, but I remember how he said them...
- And I think one impact of having homegrown missionaries out on the field is that we will start asking ourselves, hey! How bout me not sending my money this time, how bout me going!
- Having been at Ambassador for nine years, we know and count so many of you friends – as well as brothers and sisters in Christ!
- I know your kids! I know them well!
- We hope and pray that as we prepare to go; as we show our face on that video screen in the not too distant future; that God prompts parents and singles, newly weds, and ignite kids to say "maybe we should go!" SEND US!
- And maybe you're sitting there thinking, I am definitely not a missionary! I will never go, that's not what God has for me.
- Can I say two things to you about that?
- First, it is absolutely clear that not everyone is called to be a missionary by occupation, BUT every believer is called to be on God's mission by preoccupation
- Second, everyone is on the frontlines somewhere. No matter where you are, what you do, you encounter people who need Jesus.
- And the Bible is crystal clear that it is all of our responsibility to "make disciples" to "always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have" to not be ashamed of the gospel, trusting that it is God's power for salvation.
- Each one of us should wake up in the morning saying "Send me!"
- Send me to impact **my world** for the gospel – at work, in my neighborhood, with my kids, in the grocery store, at school. Send me!

## **CONCLUSION**

- When you say "send me"? You're embracing a very important truth. For those who trust Jesus, the gospel isn't just a story that you know, the gospel is YOUR story.

- On that camp, when I heard that God created the world – He owns everything, He is king over all things – I wasn't hearing book information, I was hearing the very words of God
- When I saw the reality of my sin, I didn't just see my every day life of sin, I **felt** the...weight. I realized – in some small way – the judgment that I deserved
- And as I looked to the cross, I didn't just look to a decoration for a church building or the scene we talked about at Easter, I saw the very place where Jesus hung as my substitute.
- That painful, humiliating death – it was what **my rebellion** deserved.
- And when I heard about the victory and renewal of the resurrection, it was not just a victory, it was **MY victory**
- When God made those promises to Abraham, He had me in mind.
- When David pointed to the glad nations rejoicing in YAHWEH, God had Australia in His mind, and America, and Korea, and Costa Rica and the Lummi Nation and Venezuela!
- When Jesus said “the ends of the earth” he meant those places too
- And yes, when John saw that vision from the island of Patmos, he SAW people from every tribe and nation and tongue – worshipping before the lamb. He saw you, he saw me
- Friends, this is not a story you know. If you trust Jesus, this story is YOURS. This is your family history, your citizenship today, and your glorious inheritance forever.
- **It...is...yours!**
- I mentioned my great uncle earlier. I have fond memories of every visit I made to see Uncle Leon.
- He was a slight man and softly spoken but he was a spiritual and intellectual giant.
- He and his wife Mildred had no children of their own but faithfully prayed for me and my family
- There is one visit in particular that I remember so vividly.
- I was in college and had a conference in Melbourne, where Leon lived
- He had been retired for some time and was in the early stages of dementia. It was so hard to see the look on his wife's face as she saw this great intellectual losing his short term memory.
- But that's not the memory that stands out for me. It's how the 19 year old Peter responded.

- I was **transfixed!** I didn't have nearly enough time with Leon this side of heaven.
- Even as dementia set in, his long term memory was exceptional, so this wonderful man was sitting there patiently telling me the stories of his life and ministry over and over again.
- I sat there using every mental trick I could to record his memories to honor what God had done through this man's life.
  
- And it's that clarity that I want to leave you with today.
- When you're 80 years old – if the Lord blesses you with that many years – what stories do you want to tell?
- Will your family or your friends be transfixed?
- Will they want to hear them over and over again?
  
- And it's that clarity that God gave to Isaiah isn't it? He saw God's glory, he saw his sin, and when God called, nothing else mattered.
- At the end of Leon's life, nothing else mattered but the gospel.
- I didn't want to hear about his grades at school, his bank account, the value of his house or the nice things he'd acquired, only the gospel mattered.
- At the end of our lives friends, only the glory of God, and the atonement He offers in Jesus truly matters.
- And that's why we say "Send us!"