

**MISSIONS MATTERS****Acts 13:1-3**

I would like to share with you Ten Commandments for parents who want to guarantee that their sons or daughters will never become missionaries.

1. *Never attend church when a missionary is speaking.*
2. *Never invite a missionary to your home for a meal and, above all, never invite a missionary to stay overnight in your home.*
3. *Never make a financial commitment to missions and do not encourage your children to make one either.*
4. *Never sign up to be on a missionary's mailing list to receive their prayer letters.*
5. *Never subscribe to missions-minded magazines.*
6. *Never pray for missionaries during your family devotions. Or better yet, do not have family devotions at all.*
7. *Promote the idea that to be a missionary is only for those who cannot make it in some other job or profession here at home.*
8. *Fervently believe and promote that the era of foreign missions is past, that foreign missionaries are just sticking their noses in where they do not belong.*
9. *Buy into the idea that most countries are closed or are closing to the Gospel, so it is not really worthwhile to prepare for missionary work anyway.*
10. *When presenting possible career choices to your children and other young people, urge them to accept only the advice of secular career counselors and do not include "pastor" or "missionary" as possible options.*

So, there you have it - Ten Commandments for parents who want to guarantee that their sons or daughters will never become missionaries.

And yet, as David Livingstone once said:

*God had an only Son, and He made Him a missionary.*

I recall listening to a sermon back in Bible School that really gripped my heart. I cannot remember the exact words, but the speaker said something like this:

*God is a missionary God. The Bible is a missionary book. The Gospel is a missionary message. The Church is a missionary organization, and when a church stops being missionary minded it has denied its faith and betrayed its trust.*

Do you want your church to deny its faith and betray its trust? Of course not. But if we are not careful, it can happen so easily – often without us even noticing!

Our Scripture readings for today from the book of Acts were ones that were suggested by the Lectionary that you as a congregation have been using. And the passages that were read for us are really quite significant. A huge paradigm

shift was taking place within the Early Church, as recorded in the book of Acts, moving from ministry almost exclusively among Jews to ministry also among Gentiles or non-Jews. Think: cross-cultural. Cross-cultural.

Back in Acts 9, a Jew named Saul was dramatically converted on the Damascus Road, and God said that Saul, who would be later named Paul, was “an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my Name before Gentiles” (Acts 9:15).

In Acts 10, a Jew named Peter, responds to a heavenly vision and visits the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. And while Peter was preaching the Holy Spirit was amazingly “poured out even on the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45).

In Acts 11, after Peter explained to the Apostles and other church leaders in Jerusalem the astonishing things that had just happened in Caesarea, it says in Acts 11:18 that they praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

But it is not until here, in Acts 13, that Saul (Paul) along with Barnabas, is formally commissioned and sent out on this cross-cultural mission to Gentiles.

And my friends, cross-cultural missions is important – very important. If it were not for the Early Church in the book of Acts engaging in cross-cultural missions and evangelism, you and I would likely not be here today.

We are not Jews. We are not Hebrews. We are not Israelites. We are non-Jews or Gentiles. And if those Jewish believers in the Early Church had kept the wonderfully good news of the Gospel to themselves, we most likely would have been headed for an eternity without hope and without God.

That is why it is so important for us as individuals to win people to Christ, to “do the work of an evangelist” (as Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5). And to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” as it says in 1 Peter 3:15.

But it is also important for us, collectively as the Church, to be identifying those within our congregations whom the Holy Spirit might be wanting to be set apart and sent out into cross-cultural contexts, just like Barnabas and Saul were set apart and sent out here in Acts 13.

So, let me ask: are you actively on the lookout for those within your fellowship whom God is tapping on the shoulder, and who might need your encouragement and your support to perhaps boldly go where no one has gone before?

Years ago, Jim Reapsome wrote an excellent article in *Pulse* magazine about what he calls “viruses” that are lurking around, ready to attack, and weaken, and eventually paralyze world missions.

Just like the viruses out there that want to latch onto our computers and cause our hard drives to crash, Reapsome says there are viruses around that have the potential of crippling world missions everywhere.

For example, he talks about the virus that destroys our love for God, whom we are supposed to love with all of our being. And he talks about the virus that constantly chips away at our commitment to follow Jesus as Lord, no matter what the cost. And the virus that undermines our desire to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus, especially if it means any drastic changes in our lifestyle.

Reapsome wrote about a theological virus on the loose that sneaks into our churches and undercuts the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only hope for lost people. This virus tempts us to think that, in the end, somehow all will be saved anyway.

He also wrote about the virus that convinces us that world missions is merely a hobby of a few fanatics, but certainly does not have anything to do with most people in the church. That virus effectively blocks the total mobilization of the Church to really get serious about world evangelization. It is a virus that waters down the single-minded determination that is needed to get the Gospel out to the hundreds of millions of people who have never even heard the name of Jesus even once. Reapsome then wrote this:

*Jesus talked much about the dangerous, seductive spiritual viruses rampant in His day. He constantly bombarded His disciples with warnings like, "Beware!" and "Watch out!" and "Be on your guard against...!" He clearly exposed the viruses and His disciples consistently missed His point. That is what frightens me. Do we really know the viruses that can cripple world missions?*

I close with this. A famous artist was once asked to paint a picture of a dying church. Everyone expected that the artist's painting of a dying church would be of a tiny, run-down old building with only a small handful of people inside, and with the pastor looking tired and discouraged. What the artist painted, however, was quite different.

The finished painting was of a large, beautiful church with stunning stained-glass windows; comfortable, padded pews; a richly carved wooden pulpit. There were lots of people inside the church and they were all well dressed with smiles on their faces. The pastor looked handsome in his long flowing robes.

But near the back of the church, was a small little wooden offering box marked "missions" – and the contribution slot was blocked by a dusty, spider's cobweb. That was the artist's portrait of a dying church. Let's pray.