

Introduction:

- A. What drives missionaries? *Illus.:* When I was a kid the Evangelical Free Church published a book titled, *117 Ways to the Mission Field*. It told the story of how each of our missionaries became missionaries. I was surprised to find this old book online. I was especially interested in one story titled, “A Sixth-Grader Wrote, ‘I Want to be a Missionary Nurse.’” That sixth grader explained, “*because I like to bandage wounds and take care of children.*”

The story said, “Her four years in high school and three in nurse’s training were lived far from God, even as her mother prayed much for her. On many a night she would come home from some worldly entertainment and before going to sleep would pray for forgiveness.”

Then at a Thursday night service of Easter week in the late 1930s she and two of her friends were converted. More years of nursing and then Bible school followed before she was accepted as a missionary nurse in the Belgian Congo.

Her name was Hilda Stenstadvoid. She was my aunt. She went out to northwestern Belgian Congo in November 1947 as a nurse and dentist, joining a few others, including the parents of our missionary, Dave Alfors. Today there are more Free Churches in Congo than in the U.S.

About 10 years later she wrote, “*There have been trying times on the field but I have never once doubted that God called me to Congo. A sense of ‘oughtness’ has been his most definite way of leading me to this field. It has seemed so naturally to be the reasonable thing to do.*”

- B. Every missionary’s story is different. But if Jesus is involved, every missionary has a commitment to the good news of salvation. And what drives churches and

individuals like us who support missionaries? It ought to be the same thing, our shared commitment to spreading the good news of salvation. Turn with me to **John 10:14-16**.

When I mentioned to the elders that I wanted to preach one sermon in this series on missions, one of them suggested this verse, John 10:16, *“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.”* That’s us. But we’re getting a little ahead of ourselves.

To set the stage, the chapter before this tells the story of a blind man who didn’t know who Jesus was but yet was healed by Jesus.

On the Sabbath day. Which gave the Pharisees an open door to attack Jesus for *working* on the Sabbath. They told the no-longer-blind man, *“This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”* But the man insisted he was a prophet from God.

The synagogue rulers called in his parents and threatened them with being tossed out of the synagogue. They were shaken. *“Ask him!”* they said, *“He’s of age. He can speak for himself.”*

So they went back to the guy and said, *“Give glory to God by telling the truth. We know this man is a sinner.”* To which he replied, *“Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.”*

After some more scathing repartee, they kicked him out of the temple. Whereupon Jesus found him and asked, *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*

“Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

Jesus said, *“You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with.”*

“Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”

So that brings us to **John 10:1-6...**

I know that there's nothing about missions in those verses, but the **focus is on how the sheep listen to the voice of their shepherd**. Because that's where we come in.

I. OUR COMMITMENT TO MISSIONS GIVES VOICE TO THE GOOD SHEPHERD TODAY (10:1-6)

A. The picture here is of a community sheepfold on the edge of a town where all the sheep would be penned for the night. But how in the world will the shepherds separate all those sheep the next morning? Because each shepherd has a unique way of calling his sheep, and no one else's sheep will come when he calls.

Everyone in Israel *thought* that they thought they were God's flock, but they weren't. Jesus says that when he comes "*He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*" It is clear that God knows that we are his sheep before we do, not because he knows ahead of time whether or not we'll choose him, but because *he chose us* before the creation of the world, as Scripture says.

In **Acts 18**, Paul was in Corinth and things were going badly. He was discouraged. Then Jesus appeared to him in a vision and said, "*Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ... I have many people in this city.*" They just didn't know it yet. That's what missionaries face all the time.

B. The Pharisees were the thieves and robbers, just like in the story of the blind man. They did all they could to steal that man back from the Lord, accusing and belittling him and even kicking him out of the synagogue. But he had heard the Lord's voice, *even when he didn't know who the Lord was*, and he wouldn't follow them.

C. A little later in John 10, on a different occasion, Jesus used much the same language. Vv.24-26... Did you notice what Jesus' "voice" was? His *works* testified about him. The

miracles and mercies he did *spoke* of who he was. That's exactly what happened with blind man. Here's another of his feisty exchanges: The Pharisees say,

"We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." [9:29-33]

He'd heard the Good Shepherd call his name and he could tell the difference.

- D. There are all kinds of missionaries, doing all manner of things, but whether they are nurses or professors, teachers or well-diggers, they give voice to the Good Shepherd. The Alfors in Cameroon make friends with Muslim tribesmen. Patsy shares stores from the Bible with the women she meets. And in all this the Good Shepherd is speaking, and among those people someone pricks up their ears to hear Christ speak their name, even before they realize what is happening.

Jesus continues in the same vein in **vv.7-10** but he changes the image a little...

II. OUR COMMITMENT TO MISSIONS WELCOMES LOST PEOPLE TO THE GATE OF SALVATION (10:7-10)

- A. Jesus says twice here, "I am the gate for the sheep." He may be picturing a smaller sheep pen where the shepherd lay across the entrance at night when he slept. But the symbolism is easy to see. No one comes to salvation except through Jesus. *"Whoever enters through me will be saved."* We use the word *saved* so often that it can lose its startling

meaning. Those *not saved* die without hope and without a shepherd. They don't find another way. God has provided no other way to be safe.

- B. Jesus describes the salvation he provides with two phrases. First, he says in v.9, *"They will come in and go out, and find pasture."* This is a picture of safety and plenty. The other phrase in v.10 means the same thing: *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* *Have it abundantly.* People who do not follow Jesus are dying on the inside. Their souls are terminal. It's only a matter of time. But the life of God himself enters us when we put our faith in Jesus. We become immortal, guaranteed of a resurrection in a new body to a new country. We gain a new instinct for righteousness and the power to follow it. We are in intimate fellowship with the Triune God. Even now, despite our sorrows and weaknesses, we are renewed—revitalized—daily through Christ, even though sometimes we don't feel very alive. The abundant life Christ gives us is in our loves and knowledge, in our joys and safety, in life that matters and death that's lost its sting and victory.

Look down to **vv.28-29**, *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."*

Those thieves and robbers, those wolves, cannot rustle us out of God's flock. Ps 23 says of the good shepherd, *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."*

- C. We support missionaries because we want abandoned and abused sheep in other pens to come to Jesus, the Gate of salvation, of life to its fullness. **Heidi Ramer** is working among university students in Perth, Australia. In fact, she is

a university student now. She wrote a couple weeks ago, *“I’ve had a few really good opportunities to talk to people in my course about Jesus. One woman I chatted with 2 weeks ago was really open to talking about faith and her kids are learning stories from the Bible at school. She never learned any of them, but has been encouraged by how much the boys love learning about the Bible. Please pray for an opportunity for Christy and I to continue to talk and to investigate one of the Gospel accounts together.”* That’s why we support Heidi.

Finally, look at **vv.11-16...**

III. OUR COMMITMENT TO MISSIONS RISES FROM JESUS’ DESIRE TO BE THE SHEPHERD OF ONE FLOCK DRAWN FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD (10:11-16)

A. Look once more at v.16, *“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.”* All through the Bible God makes clear that he will draw people to salvation from all the nations of the world. One example is in **Is 49:6**, speaking of the coming Messiah. God says,

*“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”*

So Jesus commissioned believers to *“Go and make disciples of all nations.”* Jesus said, *“As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”* Just before he was taken up into heaven he said in **Acts 1:8**, *“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

- B. Back in **John 10:16**, Jesus continues, *“I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice...”* Jesus will do the bringing, but we are his voice. Paul said in **Rom 10:14**, *“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”* That is a verse that motivates missionaries.
- C. Then Jesus’ last phrase, *“and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”* That is Jesus’ great vision and desire. You know, even in heaven Jesus shall remain a shepherd. **Rev. 7:16-17** says,

*‘Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.
The sun will not beat down on them,
nor any scorching heat.
For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;
‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’
‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”*

In that same passage, we see that great flock that Jesus envisioned:

There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

*“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”*

Conclusion

Why are we committed to missions?

- Our commitment to missions gives voice to the Good Shepherd today.
- Our commitment to missions welcomes people to the gate of salvation.
- Our commitment to missions rises from Jesus' desire to be the shepherd of one flock drawn from all over the world.

Did you notice anything else about all these things that drive missionaries? They ought to drive us as well. *We too* give voice to the Good Shepherd among the people around us. *We too* welcome people to the gate of salvation for Jesus' sake. *We too* want to fulfill Jesus' desire for "one flock and one shepherd."

From Alfors' letter, 2/18, Cameroon

God is AWESOME! Take for example the recent visit our team mates had with a man who is one of the top Muslim teachers in a city here in Cameroon. He was introduced to our teammates by a former Muslim. When Mark (not his real name), dressed in his flowing Muslim garb, entered the room he very warmly greeted our team mates and sat down for a very exciting conversation.

Several years back, Mark had a problem in that he owed someone a large amount of money. He fled from this problem and ended up getting into another difficulty. Someone else's cow that Mark was in charge of disappeared and now he was in debt even more. While out searching for the cow Mark had a dream. **A man shining brightly like the sun appeared to him and told him to not worry about the cow for it would be found. When Mark asked the man his name he said: "I am Christ the Lord."**

After this dream Mark started praying to Jesus. The cow was found. Later on Mark was able to pay off the original debt because of some unexpected large gifts. Mark realized that all this was happening because of the power found in Jesus.

Soon afterwards his wife was deathly ill in the hospital and he told her that Jesus could heal her so they prayed to Jesus asking for healing. The next day the doctors asked them what they had done because she was so much better and she went home soon after that. His wife embraced Jesus as well.

A while later Mark went to his home village where his 90-year-old father was very ill and they didn't expect him to live. His father wasn't even able to sit up and wasn't eating. He told his father that

Jesus could heal him and he agreed that Mark could pray for him. Soon after praying the father said that he wanted to sit up. Mark helped him sit up. Then the father asked for some fresh milk to drink. When Mark went out of the room he told his sister that she should go see their father as he was asking for milk. She didn't believe him and was amazed when she found her father sitting up and hungry. She asked Mark: "What did you do?" He explained how Jesus healed their father. His father recovered quickly and he and the sister embraced Jesus.

The Muslim leaders in this town were not at all happy about what had happened, so they called in all three of them and told them they needed to renounce Jesus. They all refused so they beat the sister severely, they didn't hurt the father physically because he was a respected man, and they threw Mark in jail. They gave Mark a large fine that he was unable to pay but they let him go anyway after 3 days. Not long after this someone gave Mark a large gift of money that was completely unexpected. Mark took that money and returned to his father's town and paid the fine imposed by the Muslim leaders. The Muslim chief exclaimed that truly Mark is an honest and upstanding man.

During all this time Mark didn't have contact with Christians or have access to a Bible. He was just living out his life in obedience to what he knew about Jesus. Now that Mark has a Bible he is learning more about Jesus and sharing what he has learned. He is still a teacher in the Muslim community. When he goes to different mosques and communities he teaches like he did before except for one difference. Now he teaches about how unique Jesus is and how Jesus is the way to God.