

38 “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. **39** Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. **40** Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

41 “Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.”

42 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. **43** When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. **45** When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. **47** For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

The Ends of the Earth?

Point Nemo is literally the end of the earth. It's a remote location called the oceanic pole of inaccessibility. It's situated more than 1,000 miles from any landmass with so much ocean I doubt any of you will make it a destination point for your next cruise. When your nearest neighbors are Easter Island and Antarctica - I'd say you're at the end of the earth, the middle of nowhere.

Many of you know what it's like to go to the ends of the earth. Some of you have taken an all expense paid cruise to the ends of the earth with our military forces. Others know what it's like to pay for your own trip. I volunteered and traveled with Kingdom Workers to what felt like the middle of nowhere and after a 17 hour flight and multiple bus adventures I made it to a location where I stuck out like a sore thumb, no one spoke English, and I was instructed to hop into a van with a man name Gilberto.

Did that mean I fulfilled the call to go where no one has gone before? Did I accomplish the great commission of making disciples to the ends of the earth? What about you, what about Paul? How far do we have to go?

Paul certainly traveled around the Mediterranean. He went to the known world. Acts 13 marks the beginning of Paul's missionary journeys. This is the first one. Uncharted territory. Nobody had ever gone there, except for maybe Jonah but he didn't want to go there. As they head out of their comfort zone to the ends of the earth, they stop in

Paphos, from there they move on to Perga where John Mark leaves their group and heads home. (Maybe he was afraid to go. Maybe he wasn't ready. This caused a great disagreement between Paul and Silas later on the 2nd journey). After Perga they traveled on to Pisidia Antioch.

There Paul finds a synagogue and begins to unpack his precious cargo, starting with his credentials as a Jew, Paul connects their history to Jesus' arrival. He spoke of what happened to Jesus, how Jesus died, how Jesus was raised, and how he brings a message of salvation for you. Paul wants them to understand his message so he quotes from the LXX Septuagint. People are amazed. They ask Paul to come back next week and the place is packed. The whole city showed up but then Paul faces opposition and jealousy. The word was at work even on their way to the ends of the earth. .

How about you? It seems as if some churches have made the word, "Missional" a mandate and you better go or else you're not a real Christian. They lead with the law and beat the sheep of God's flock rather than feed them. That being said, the sad fact remains we often haven't gone anywhere. Like John Mark we too have turned back afraid to speak up or say anything, let alone step out of our comfort zone. So we keep this precious cargo to ourselves or we simply stop scared of the daunting task that stands before us, the ends of the earth...?!

How can we hope to fulfill this? "To the ends of the earth!" There are the physical challenges of our health. There are the physical dangers do to terrorism and hatred toward our country. There are political problems with passports and then if we make it through that: there is still the language barrier and the fear.

How far do we have to go? You don't have to go far to serve and love your neighbor. I'm not calling you to sell your possessions, get on a boat, and head for Africa - but if you feel the urge to go I will point you to our mission fields and how you can be of service instead of a burden. But I want you to realize that you don't have to go to the ends of the earth to bring your precious cargo to your neighbor. If someone ask, "are you a Missional Christian?" I want you to be able to respond with, "Absolutely." **Because going to the ends of the earth does not exclude your neighbor next door.**

I'd also like to point out that the church in Antioch did not follow the apostle Paul wherever he went. They called him, they commissioned, they sent, they supported him, because not everyone is able to go but everyone can speak of the hope that they have.

The message that Paul proclaimed was just as much for those in Antioch as it was for those on his journeys. The gospel message that Paul proclaimed is that God has come for the ends, the least of this world. The message God wants us to know is *that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.* Jesus came for those who would never leave home, who ran home afraid, and for those who continued on.

Jesus did this not because of the quality of our obedience or our effort under the law of Moses but because of his love. You don't have to go far to be fully assured of your salvation. Salvation has come to all apart from works. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is the servant of the Lord the subject of Isaiah 49. Jesus is the light of this world, we reflect that light.

Missionary John Roebke reports on what he's seen among the people of Malawi, "*When they see water splashed on their child's head, or the head of an adult, they understand that Baptism saves souls by washing away sin's stain and covering them with the pureness of Christ. When they see people swallowing wheat wafers and sips of wine, they*

understand that Communion is uniting them with the body and blood Christ used to pay for their freedom. When they see the pastor standing in front and hear him say, "I forgive you all your sins in name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" they understand that it is Christ who is speaking to them, the same Christ whose words give eternal life."
<https://welsfriendsof africa.com/what-am-i-seeing/>

You have reached the ends of the earth. You sent Pastor Marquardt (sometimes unwillingly and wishing he never left) to India. We struggle with an interesting problem as people around the world are asking us to send pastors, send people to prepare seminaries and students to reach their world. In Vietnam we've provided worker training for the past three years. The Hmong Fellowship Church has grown from 65,000 to 100,000 members and formed 53 new churches. Thanks to the Lord's ever-guiding hand and blessing, the Vietnamese government has invited WELS to build a theological training facility in the capital city of Hanoi. We have opportunities and doors opening in Ethiopia, Liberia, Kenya.

There aren't just opportunities for them. There are opportunities for you, in your location, with the world of people at your door. Be the light or rather reflect that light. Create opportunities not conflict. If people want to argue just show them Jesus. And then expect opposition, even the apostle Paul didn't have yacht out on the Mediterranean. Rejection can be the sign of success, not failure. And even if you are failures (we all are) you are forgiven, fully freely, completely absolved. Go in peace. Go knowing there are others who still need to hear these words. People near and dear to you.

But please don't go to Point Nemo. There is nothing there. There is literally no one there. Moreover it happens to be NASA's junkyard where rockets re-enter and fall from space. So don't go there because the closest life are the astronauts flying 258 miles overhead. How far do you have to go? You don't have to go far to love and serve your neighbor. You don't have to go far to be fully assured of salvation because this message has come to you.

God is already enabling us to go to the ends of the earth. The God who made his Son a light for the Gentiles has called us to bring the light of his salvation to the ends of the earth. With the gospel of forgiveness and the power of his Spirit, he's equipped us to do just that. Thanks be to God. Amen.