

The Call of God to the Mission Field
(Acts 16 v 1-10)

By Rev Ian Harris

Down through the corridors of church history from the Father of all who believe Abraham – through apostolic times, unto this very present age, God has been pleased to call some of his children, according to His divine will to serve Him in lands other than their own. Thousands over the passing years have gone at the call of God to the mission field, and they have proved that to be the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

I still believe God is calling men and women to leave their home country and to serve Him in lands other than their native birth place. This is what I mean by the call of God to the Mission Field. This surely is still the will of God for many in our own church – even perhaps some in this meeting tonight. That in knowing and doing the will of God in your life, the Lord would have you to go and serve Him on the mission field.

Do you have a desire to find out if this is the will of God for your life? Has the Lord called you or is the Lord calling you to the Mission Field?

I do not pretend because of my own experiences to have definitive answers to every aspect of the call of God to the Mission Field, but from what God has taught me over the years, I would like to leave with you tonight a few suggestive thoughts as to what is the call of God to the Mission Field. May the Lord bless it to your hearts and lives and use it to help you know – as part of God's will for your life as to whether or not He has called you to the work of Christ on the Mission Field.

**Firstly let us consider together-
THOSE WHO ARE LIKELY CANDIDATES TO RECEIVE SUCH A CALL.**

[a] In a manner such a call has a reference and application to all Believers. There is NO true Christian who does not have an interest in missionary work. It is part of the great commission and original mandate of the church. To say that you are a Christian but you have no interest in missionary endeavour is a contradiction in terms.

Some time ago I picked up an old book belonging to my father from his Sunday School days entitled – “The Couriers of the Dawn” by R. H. Boyd. In essence it is the story of the missionary pioneers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, who left these shores for India in September 1840. (168 years ago.)

Part of the story of course records the preparatory stages of sending forth Revs Glasgow + Kerr with their wives to the mission field. *Seven years before they left the Synod of Ulster convened a special missionary conference in Dublin to consider the best means of carrying forward and extending the missionary operations of the Church in 1833. The famous Rev. James Morgan said the following:*

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“As soon as anyone knows Christ, he desires that others should know Him too. His love to Him is the measure of his anxiety that others should know Him too. So far as any Church breathes the missionary spirit, it is characterised by the spirit of its Founder; but so far as it wants the missionary spirit, it is destitute of one of the marks of the Church of Christ.”

*The work of missions is not some Para-church group ministry – it is the work of the church in its entirety. **Every church member ought to have an interest in missions, and potentially is one whom God could call to the field.** The individual or the church that lacks the missionary spirit is destitute of one of the marks of the true church of Christ.*

[b] Whilst God can call whomsoever He wills to the Mission Field, it is more likely that the call shall come to those who are involved in the work of the home church. This is a basic biblical principal as the home church is the training ground for the mission field.

- **In Acts 10:5** we read of the call which came to Peter to take the Gospel to the first Gentile convert Cornelius.

The call came when he was heavily engaged in ministry and evangelistic work in Joppa. (cf chap. 9 v 40 – 43) *If you cannot be trusted where you are to do the work of God under the care and supervision of the local church, can you be trusted away from that constant oversight in a distant land?*

- **In Acts 13: 1 & 2** we have the record of the sending forth of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey from Antioch. [R]

When did God call them to their foreign work – when they were busy ministering unto the Lord in the home church of Antioch. *This has always been God’s method of preparing his servants for service abroad by training them first in the church at home. They DID NOT GO FORTH WITHOUT THE CONSENT AND BLESSING OF THE HOME CHURCH. **LEARN THIS LESSON YOUNG BELIEVER – YOU CANNOT GO FORTH WITH GOD’S BLESSING WHEN YOU TRY TO SIDE STEP THE LOCAL & HOME CHURCH.***

- **In Acts 16:9** when Paul & Silas received the Macedonia call to come over into Europe, they were busily engaged in church planting and gospel work in Phrygia and Galatia.

If a person is not a missionary at home, its inevitable he/she will never become one on the mission field. Where you and I are geographically has nothing to do with out commitment and loyalty to cause of Christ. It is here that you must start to learn to work for Christ or in your own local home church. I believe that such a one who faithfully toils away with what God has given them to do on the home front is one whom God can then call to the foreign front.

[c] Another indication of those who are candidates for the Mission Field – is a desire to do the work of God.

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Paul spoke of this in 1 Tim. 3:1

1Tim 3:1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

The word means to reach out after to long for. It is not wrong to desire to work for God at home or some field of service outside N. Ireland. This is what we long to see in the lives of our people.

2Co 10:16 - To preach the Gospel in the regions beyond you,.... Here the apostle clearly expresses what he hoped for, and explains what he meant by being enlarged according to rule; namely, that he should be at liberty to preach the Gospel elsewhere; and hoped he should be directed by the providence of God, to carry it into the more remote and distant parts of the world, where as yet Christ had not been named:

Would to God that we would have young people in our churches with such a desire. The desire of course is not a call in itself but it is an indication of a spiritual suitableness for the call.

Too many of our youth desire the things which are below and not above. They have their minds full of worldly ambition and no heavenly goals.

If you have a desire/burden about the mission field get involved and get informed. There are so many opportunities today such as internet to find out all you need to know and to keep in contact with the work on the field. May God increase the desire of all and the interest of all in the mission field?

SECONDLY – THE TWO-FOLD CHARACTER OF SUCH A CALL

I believe there is an inward as well as an outward dimension to the call of God.

[a] The inward aspect is the personal & particular call which is heard in the heart. This has been God's method from the beginning of time, when men have been directed to leave their home country at the call of God to remove themselves to a distant or even perhaps not too distant land.

- Abraham in Gen. 12 v 1-4
- Acts 10 v 19-21 – word which came to Peter to go to Cornelius
- Acts 13 v 2 – individual names of Saul & Barnabas mentioned @ Antioch
- Acts 16 v 9-10 – call of God to Paul to go into Europe.

God still uses his Word to call individuals into his work and service. This is a speaking book. It can give direction to the individual by impressing or imprinting a passage/verse etc on the heart. *I am not talking about some random verse selection procedure. I am talking about the systematic, prayerful, reading of the Bible.* God can bring then a word to our attention which guides us in our life and lead us in His will.

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[b] This inner call is verified in the outer recognition and affirmation of the Church.

This is the method for the home ministry and is in essence the same for the foreign mission field. We have already thought of the sending forth of the First Missionaries officially from Antioch in Acts 13 v 2 & 3

Act 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

Act 13:3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, **they sent them away.**

The sending agency is the CHURCH. Whilst I recognise that God has used other agencies – I want to reaffirm again, the primary sending agency is the church. **The individual Christian may think they have a call but it must be affirmed by the church as whole.**

In our own case in FPC, the individuals call must be affirmed locally and then through our Presbytery and its subcommittees such as the Mission Board. The church has to see that the one being sent is suitable to the task and fits the Biblical qualifications. If that is so – then the church sends forth that individual with their spiritual and practical support.

I personally think – we emphasis too much the individuals call at the expense of the outward call by the Church. When the 1st missionaries were sent out by the Presbyterian Church it was the Committee appointed by the Synod which choose the field of service for their first missionaries in India in Gujarat and Kathiawar regions, full well knowing that those who went must be prepared “to labour and suffer”.

What happened next was very interesting – letters were then sent to twenty ministers asking them to consider what their duty might be if the Church should call them. Seventeen replies were received – and seven indicated they would go if called by the Church to that ministry. After prayer the Committee responsible unanimously called Rev. Joseph Fisher and Rev. James Glasgow. There was the inward but also outward call to these men, whom the Church called and sent to India.

I wonder if similar letters were sent out to those in this meeting what sort of response we would have? Say even if we were to write to all the ministers – what would the response be?

Irrespective of those technicalities – the principal still stands, the character of God’s call is two fold, inward to the individual, but also outward by the Church.

[c] The character of the call is often progressive in its nature.

By that I mean God sometimes gives the call, step by step. It is not always immediately clear at once. In Acts 10 when God called Peter to go and preach to Cornelius, he had to be convinced by a vision in which the net was let down three times. There after the Spirit had to reaffirm to Peter’s mind what was meant by it and what action he had to take in light of it.

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It has always been the case. When those first pioneer missionaries were being selected there were also problems and delays along the way. The local congregations of the ministers called objected to their ministers being sent away to India. The end result was that the Rev. Fisher was allowed to stay in his home church and another man the Rev. Kerr of Portadown selected in his place.

Maybe there is someone seeking God's will and it is not clear what to do? Trust in God dear bro. /sis – the Lord reveals his will step by step.

But let it be clear – collectively the church must be a sending agency not a keeping one. It is not our job to keep those who have been called on the home front when they have been called to the foreign field.

[d] If you do not have inward guidance through the Word of God and prayerful consideration, and if the church cannot give you their affirmation, then you do not have a call. **What is my advice – don't go.** I am sure there is plenty you can still do to extend the borders of Christ's kingdom at home. But do not run unless you have been sent!

THIRDLY – COMMITMENT REQUIRED BY SUCH A CALL.

[a] Such a call requires you to be fully persuaded of it in your life.

Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

If you are not sure about the call then you can never give it your full commitment.

[b] Such a call requires full surrender of the live unto God.

Isa 6:8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

The prophet did not come with terms and conditions. I will go Lord if you do this or that for me. He came and simply said – I will go where-ever you send men.

Maybe you want to go into some profession/trade but God has laid the burden of the mission field upon your heart. Yield your ambition to Him, whatever Lord, wherever, whenever! This is the attitude of heart of the one surrendered unto the Lord.

[c] Be submissive to God's providential leading.

As Christians we believe that God in providence leads His children along.

Where in His providence has God allowed the Mission field to cross your pathway? What contacts do you have already in your life?

- Republic of Ireland.
- Great cities over in England/Scotland/Wales
- Vast Continent of Europe – 800 million souls, living in some 30 countries, all of them mostly accessible to Gospel Missionaries. Our only input is our missionary team in Spain.

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- Needy continent of Africa
- Millions in Asia –

May the Lord of the harvest send forth our Members into such fields. Such a call shall require full commitment but has the full authority of heaven behind it.

FOURTHLY – CHALLENGE TO WHICH WE HAVE BEEN CALLED.

It is good to know the business to which we have been called. Over the years I have met so many on the mission field, and I have wondered where was their divine mandate in what they were doing.

- The challenge is to Preach the Glorious Gospel of Christ.

Mar 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. We do not have to dramatise it, or politicise it, or socialise it – all we have been called to do IS TO PREACH IT.

- The challenge is to Plant Biblical functioning churches.

When souls are saved they need to be gathered together into a local church and then instructed in the things of God. This is making disciples and the church is the ground for doing it in.

- The challenge is also to Prepare/equip the national church for leadership. This of course is not only scriptural but has long been the standard practice of the Reformed Churches. I was very interested to read of John Calvin missionary work in Geneva. What a college he had there which impacted the whole of Europe and beyond. **Did you know Calvin tried to send missionaries to what is now Brazil?** The endeavour failed but his missionary zeal did not wane as he trained hundreds of missionaries to go over all Europe and especially his native France with the Gospel of Christ. They then in turn set up Colleges based on the Geneva model which prepared and equipped the national churches for leadership.

(This has been a model our own church has followed in all our missionary fields, from America to Africa, from N. Ireland into Europe. Maybe the Lord would call some to go and help train others so that they might be better equipped in their service for God in their home countries.)

- The challenge of missionary work is also to be mindful of the poor.

Gal 2:9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

Gal 2:10 Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

This can have a reference to the mercy ministries of the church which not only applies to those without but in the NT it seems to apply more to those poor within the church. I give you the example – of

Act 11:27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

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Act 11:28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Act 11:29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

Act 11:30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

There are some ground rules here –

Church in Antioch supported its brethren in Judea in times of famine and sent relief unto them. This relief was not sent by an external agency but through the church. This principal has many varied practical applications on the field and can cover many types of work and service.

However I do not believe you can use mercy ministries as an alternative to Preaching Ministries in advancing the Gospel. This is a reversal of God's order. We do have an obligation to "remember the poor" in our work on the field/even on the home front, but I believe this comes in the form of strengthening and helping the members of the church to overcome their difficulties and then to stand on their own.

There is no greater call – than the call of God to the mission field. The founder of modern evangelical missionary endeavour was William Carey, who went to India in 1793 and pioneered a great work for God. His two sons followed in his fathers footsteps and were both ordained missionaries,

Writing to his son William he said this

"The conversion of one soul is worth the labour of a life. Unto us is this favour given that we should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Hold on, therefore; be steady in your work, and leave the result with God."

To see one soul saved is indeed worth the labour of a life. If God therefore calls you to be a missionary don't stoop to be a king. Don't be afraid to launch out dear young person and leave all the results and all the consequences with God. William Carey at his farewell quoted Benjamin Beddome's hymn

***And must I part with all I have,
Jesus, my Lord, for Thee?
This is my joy, since Thou hast done
Much more than this for me.***

***Yes, let it go! One look from Thee
Will more than make amends
For all the losses I sustain
Of credit, riches, friends.***

Whatever you are holding unto let it go. **Just one look from Christ shall more than repay what we have had to part with in this life in answering the call of God to the mission field.**

Amen may God bless His Truth.