

The missionary God

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Lakuai is a friend of mine. We are about as different from each other as possible. Lakuai is a Kuikuro tribal indigenous man from Brazil, and I am an American guy from Texas. He is a champion Huka Huka wrestler, and I am ok at some sports. He speaks a language that only about 1,200 people in the world speak. I don't speak that language. Despite so many of our differences, we also share one important fact in common. We both believe in Jesus. We are Christians. Today, Lakuai is the first indigenous Pastor inside the Xingo indigenous reservation in Mato Grosso, Brazil. Our families worked together to see his people get reached and to start a church where there was not one. I love him, and God is using him today in mighty ways. I want to tell you a story that happened before the chief in the village got baptized. It happened before they built a church to the one true God and his son Jesus. It is a true story.

In 2012, Lakuai almost died. He was at a meeting of 20 villages to play sports games. It was a kind of indigenous Olympics. While he was there, his side began to hurt. Since the games last several days, Lakuai tried to stay, but the pain got worse and worse. I was over 200 kilometers away, when they first called me. I thought it was not that serious, but after being admitted to the hospital, he got worse. After a day, he was unconscious and suffering from a high fever. I drove the 2-hour drive to visit him. When I arrived, the nurses saw me and looked worried. It was the New Year's Day holiday, and they had not wanted to call the Doctor away from his vacation. When they saw me, they got worried. They thought this indigenous man must be important to have a foreign friend, and they called the Doctor. While this was happening at the hospital, I heard from our tribal friends that his village was so sure that he would die that they had already begun to mourn his death. I also was not sure whether he would live or die. He looked terrible. He was unconscious in the hospital. It was easy to believe he was going to die.

I decided to travel to their village to try and comfort the people. I did not know what was going to happen. When I arrived, the people were wailing and crying. They hugged me when they saw me as if to say, "our friend had died." I felt that this was an opportunity for God to show himself to a people who did not know him. I told the tribe to gather around and listen. When they assembled in the large hut, I told them that I had just been to the hospital and that I had prayed. I told them that now was not the time to cry but to talk to the one true God. I said that Jesus died and rose from the dead and that he had power over sin, death, and the devil. Though, at times, they were a very hard people, God had them all listening that day. I shared the hope we have in Jesus and prayed there with them for a while. I asked them to call out to Jesus with me. So, we all called on Jesus to save Lakuai and to show

his power to the people there. When I looked up, I saw that the chief was holding the short-wave radio receiver in his hand and that he had broadcast my words and prayer to the radios of the villages of the 13,000 people of the Xingo park. For about two hours, I wondered what would happen. If God let him die, would anyone believe? Would they blame Jesus? We found out later that his appendix had ruptured 48 hours before I arrived, but at the moment I had no idea what he had. The Doctor came right on time. Just an hour later and he would have died. Because of the grace of God, Lakuai is still alive, and he tells his story everywhere he goes.

Though God did many things during our time there, that moment was very big for us. We believe it was a very important tool to bring the whole village to Christ. They know that God is not obligated to heal anyone. As a matter of fact, many of them don't get better when I pray. But there is no doubt in their mind why Lakuai is alive. God kept him alive. I could have let my fear or my own human reasoning keep me from calling them together and praying. I am a fearful person at times. I could have changed the gospel to get better results. These were all temptations that missionaries and Pastors face. Missions is hard, and God's ways are not our ways. God could have prevented all that from happening, but he did not. That is what I would have done, but He chose for things to work out exactly as they did. Do you know why? Do you know why God acts in ways that sometimes seem like they are so opposite to ours? To answer the question correctly, you need to have a clear understanding of how and why God operates. If I were to ask you to finish the sentence "Missions is about _____", what would you say? Missions is about helping people? Missions is about seeing people get saved? Though these are true, there is a more foundational piece to Missions. Missions is about worship. In a book by Dr. John Piper called *Let the Nations Be Glad*, Dr. Piper's first few sentences changed my perspective and helped me so much on the Mission field:

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever."

God is passionate about being worshiped. God wants to make himself known. God desires and deserves to be glorified. It is strange to me that I missed this truth for so many years. It is everywhere in the Bible and is the foundation of missions. God wants to save people in a way that brings Him glory, makes himself known and blesses us so we will worship him. God is awesome, and he wants people to know how awesome he is. God is glorious and deserves to be recognized because he is glorious. Missions is about God's desire to be worshiped. Jesus said:

"But the hour is coming, and is nowhere, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." (John 4:24)

God is seeking worshipers. That is the point of missions. Missions exist because the nations don't know who made them or what he has done to bring them to himself. I want to help you see what God says. I want to show you how praise, worship, God's glory, and the good and salvation of men connect together in perfect harmony. Earlier today we prayed for the thousands of "UPG's" all over the world as well as those who don't know Christ right here. It is very practical and helpful to understand this because the three big causes for the lack of participation in Missions are fear of hardships, fear of competence, or discouragement at the results. When you see missions as worship, it can cure all three. It is my prayer that this would feel very practical and encouraging. Missions being focused on worship

means that Missions is for God's glory and Man's good. As we try and reach our neighbors, atheists, peoples of other faiths and those in faraway places, understanding that missions is about worship help us in at least three ways. We should expect hardships in missions because God gets more glory, the harder the challenge. We should expect God to use weak people and simple ways to bring himself more glory. We should expect that even when we feel like we have failed our mission, God will finish his. If you left today encouraged to face trials, encouraged that whatever knowledge or ability you have it is enough for God to do amazing things, and encouraged that he will accomplish the Mission, then you will have begun to live in a way that is missional. Whether you are a missionary, a mother, a businessman, or a student, your mission begins and ends with God. If your goals in missions do not match his goals, you will be frustrated or discouraged or even apathetic. Let me give you three encouraging thoughts from the understanding that Missions is about worship:

1. God chooses difficulties because they give him a chance to be known and worshipped.
2. God chooses weak people and simple methods to inspire worship of the real hero.
3. God's Mission will be accomplished even if we fail ours.

1. God chooses difficulties because they give him a chance to be known and worshipped

Do you know the story of the parting of the Red Sea? The Israelites were in slavery, and God sent Moses to them to free them. Through Moses, God sent a series of judgments on Egypt, and they eventually let the people go. God brought the people into the desert, and the Bible tells us, in Exodus 14, the story of the parting of the Red Sea:

"Then the Lord said to Moses, ² <<Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. ³ For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' ⁴ And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.>> And they did so." (Exodus 14:1-4)

God goes on to part the very water of the sea so that the Israelites pass on the ground. God writes the story in such a way that he gets the most glory possible. He does what he does to inspire worship. He makes the Israelites camp by the sea, when he easily could have led them to total safety in another direction. God chose to cause them to be trapped. He hardens Pharaoh's heart so that he chases the Israelites, when he could have softened it. The army that the Pharaoh brought to do battle terrified many of the Israelites. They were panicking, but even their fear was not an accident. God made it happen in such a way that he would receive the maximum glory from it. Remember that God wants worshipers. What is interesting is that directly after the miracle of Exodus 14 comes the song of Exodus 15. In Exodus 15:11 Moses sings a thought I have had so often on the mission field:

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

"Why does your God answer your prayers?" the indigenous people asked me. Why is your God so much more powerful than ours? They really asked me these questions. God is real, and he wants us to live in faith, not fear. If God wants there to be amazing and awe-inspiring stories of God's power,

then there must be hardships. Missions is hard, so that when God overcomes the greatest obstacles, he will be the one to get the glory. Missions is hard, so that when God's people persevere years and years without one convert, they will ask what makes these people fight on. God makes it hard on missionaries because he gets more glory that way. Don't you see? You don't need to be afraid to be a missionary. You don't need to be afraid of what your neighbor thinks of you. Trust in God. Be people of faith. Believe that the God of the Red Sea will make a way. Keep loving them. Keep smiling. Keep having faith. Don't have fear.

My wife's mother runs a ministry in the largest urban slum in Central America. They have gospel outreach, schools for children, medical help, and much more. The famous "18 street" gang, tried to force her to give the money that was for the mission there to them. They threatened to kill her. She said that she was ready to die. One day not long after that, they called and said if she was not afraid for herself, then they would kill her son. We thought that it might be a trick, but they said, "Is he on a school bus with such and such license plate? Is he wearing clothes like this? You have a day to decide if you want him to live or die." My Mom in law told my brother in law that night. They prayed together, and my 15-year-old brother in law looked at my Mom in law and said, I am ready to die. What can they do to me? If I die, I will be with Jesus. Don't let them steal the money. When they heard that, they gave up. Eventually, the gang leaders were killed or imprisoned. Today, my wife's family is fine and have never paid a gang. Why do you think that trials and difficulties are bad? The best heart inspiring stories come from trials. Don't steal glory from God by fearing or avoiding trials and sufferings. In our library, you will see many biographies of famous Christians. Many of those stories are the stories of missionaries. But all the stories are stories of the work of God. Pick them up. There is not one that you will not see the glory of God in trials and problems. My desire is that God would do through you things that bring him glory.

2. God chooses weak people and simple methods to inspire worship of the real hero

Do you know the story of David and Goliath? The Philistines during the days of Saul the King were bullies to Israel. They were bigger, stronger and better equipped, and because of that, they abused Israel. They oppressed the people. On top of that, the chief bully of bullies was a huge giant of a man named Goliath. The Bible says he was between 8-9 feet tall. Israel did not have anybody that big to fight the giant. Only one teenage boy named David had the faith to face him in battle. The interesting thing is what David says before they fight. 1 Samuel 17:45-47:

"⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.'"

What does David mean? He means that when he has killed Goliath, it will be obvious that it was a miracle. Little boys with slings don't kill giants in armor; only God can do that. God does not only want to rescue Israel; he wants to make his name famous. The way David acts for the fame of God is one of

the clearest signs that his words are really from the Holy Spirit. David, as a youth, leads Israel to victory, and God is worshipped.

Missions is giant killing. However, don't forget that God does not need giants to kill giants. God uses the weak. He uses the unexpected. He uses those who are suffering. He uses the uneducated. He uses those who cannot speak the language well. He uses the fearful and the broken when they cry out to him. David could not even fit in the armor they offered him. You can do missions because missions is not about you, it is about God. That should be a relief for you. It is for me. Most of the time, I really don't know what to do. Seminary helped. Missions training helped, but nobody can prepare you for someone coming inside a church with a gun. That happened to us once. No one told me people did not want to be saved. No one told me that people would not serve me a coke for being a white person. No one told me that I would stand over a bed, praying that my son would not die. I had to learn that only God can really do missions. No one can prepare you for everything you will face. I cannot teach you how to win every argument because I do not know all the answers. What I do know took years to learn, and I am still learning things. You can't wait until you have a doctorate before you share with people. Don't think that you are not able to share. Could you imagine David saying, "I will lift weights until I am muscular, then I will learn every fighting tactic, and when I am perfect, I will fight." The glory in the story is not in David's ability, but in David's weakness and God's power.

We must do our part. We must learn all we can learn and pray all we can pray, but it is God who will win the battle. A boy brought two pieces of bread and five small fish to Jesus. It cost him. It may have been all he had, but when Jesus took it, he multiplied it and fed the masses. If Jesus changed the world through simple men, he can use you and me. Why are we afraid? Many Christians shake with fear before Atheism. They shake with fear before people of other religions. They shake with fear before the scientist who twists science to disprove God. They are like the Israelites who shook before Goliath. So yes, there are still Goliaths, but where are the Davids of this generation? Are you willing to answer the call? If you would just understand that God can use you just as you are, you would join the mission in some way. May God raise up this church to be a church filled with Davids. Do you know the greatest comfort I have about missions? It is this one.

3. God's mission will be accomplished even if we fail ours

"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,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' ¹¹ 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, ¹² saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'" (Revelation 7:9-12)

God, in his infinite kindness, has shown us the end he has planned. Those people groups will be reached. I am not sure of every detail of Revelation, but this passage is clear. God wins. His Mission will be accomplished. Even when you are rejected, His Mission will prevail. Even when it is impossible, Jesus will reach them. All people are sinners. They are hard-hearted, blind, spiritually sick, and they are under the reign of death and the devil. It looks as though the waters of judgment get them. They

will die and face God like the Israelites faced the army of Pharaoh. But do not panic. There is a way maker. When you could not find God or forgiveness, Jesus came to you. He is the way. When you could not defeat the giant of sin and death, Jesus defeated it once for all by giving his life as a payment for sin and rising from the dead to defeat death. When we could not finish the Mission, He finished it, and all the nations will sing, *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* He is the true way maker. He is the true giant killer. He is the true missionary. He is the missionary God. There are thousands of tongues and tribes that don't have a witness. Missions is the heart of God. Our God is a missionary God. He does not hide this. He sent his son on a mission to suffer and face resistance to bring salvation to a hard-hearted people. Missions is not easy. Missions is not safe. Missions is not cheap, but Missions is glorious. Missions is exactly what God has asked us to do. If you want to see God's glory, do God's will and get involved with the Mission.

Discussion questions:

1. Tell someone about a time you saw God do an amazing thing.
2. According to John 4:23, what is Jesus looking for?
3. According to Exodus 14:1-4, why did the Israelites decide to camp by the sea?
4. According to Exodus 14:1-4, why did Pharaoh decide to chase the Israelites?
5. According to 1 Samuel 17:45-47, what did David think would happen through the death of Goliath?
6. According to Revelation 7:9-12, what is going to happen because of missions?
7. How might God be asking you to get involved with missions?