

Motivation for Missions

Missions Conference 2005

By [Dr. James M. Baird](#)

Luke 17:11-19

Dr. Duncan: It has been our privilege and delight to sit these days under the ministry of Jim Baird, the beloved former pastor of this congregation; and Jim, we wait expectantly as you break open the word of life again. Welcome, dear friend.

Dr. Baird: Thank you, my good friend. It is a joy...I'll have to confess, I usually say when people ask me, "Where did you minister?" I said, "I've ministered six different...I've been kicked out of a number of good churches!" That's what I usually say. And some of those churches have prospered and some of them have not. And then there's this church. And to see the continuation of the great leadership of this church through Ligon blesses my heart.

Now, having said that, and by the way, I want to tell you missionaries my heart has been warmed and challenged this week by the missionaries, and outstanding missionary faculty. I usually say, "If you want to find out what's going on in this world, forget your magazines and your newspapers, and even some of your Christian periodicals. If you want to find out what's going on in this world, you need to contact these missionaries, and they'll tell you exactly what is going on in this world, and you're going to find out that God is at work." You'll never understand the powerful spread of the gospel across the world today in some of the most difficult situations unless you talk to the missionaries.

And I want to tell you, God is transforming this world. People get discouraged. I'm not discouraged! I'm utterly amazed at the power of God and what He is doing around the world, even in the United States—even in this country. All you hear is the bad news, but there is...anyway! I'm way off!

When I grew up, when I went into the business world in 1953 when I got out of the Army, I did not know in Atlanta, Georgia, one prayer meeting of men in the whole city. Not a one. Never heard that there was a Bible meeting of businessmen meeting together. Not one! Now, you think of what's happening today. Don't tell me God has passed by America. No, I didn't mean to get into all of this...you shouldn't have gotten me going!

The Scripture! The Scripture is found in the Gospel of Luke. It is the seventeenth

chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and the eleventh verse. Let me introduce it by saying keep your Bibles open and we will work our way through this passage. But there's an old saying that came out of the West, and from the cowboys, and it went like this: "You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink." Drink is something that has to be motivated from within. That's what this Missions Conference for me is all about. It is motivation. What does God do to motivate His people to "drink" and spread the gospel missions around this world and across this city? What motivates? Here are the things that I believe, scripturally, God does:

1. He always uses circumstances. Something's going to happen in your life. He used the circumstance of a Mission Conference like this in these walls. There have been decisions I know of people who have given their lives to go out...I could name you...I could name you some of my own family members! Years ago....He's always going to use circumstances.
2. He will always use some person. There will be people who will come and God will use them as a secondary instrument to touch your life.
3. He will always, always use this word. He will bring certain truths or doctrines to bear.

Now, that's what I'm trying to do this week. I'm trying to motivate for world missions. May God help and use us.

The Lord Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. He passes down from what we would call Galilee, down the West Bank. That's where everything is kind of antsy today. That's exactly where He is going. He is going to enter into a certain community. Outside of that community are ten men. They are quarantined because they have a contagious disease. They are lepers. We still, to this day 2000 years later, we still don't have a worldwide handle on leprosy. I have preached overseas in congregations...I have preached in a congregation as large or larger than this, with a great mural painting on the wall of the scene here in Luke. Everybody was a leper, except the man translating and me. We still don't have an answer to leprosy. We've made great progress, but still don't have a full answer.

These ten men are quarantined. They're outside; they cannot leave, they cannot go back to family, cannot do anything. They see Christ coming and they cry out to Him...they cannot approach Him, legally...and so they cry, "Have mercy on us!" The Lord stops and He deals with them.

Let us hear the word of God. This is the eleventh verse, the seventeenth chapter of Luke:

It came to pass as He [Jesus] went to Jerusalem, He passed through the

midst of Samaria and Galilee. As He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off. They lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

I'm going to pause right there. They're saying 'Heal us!' and Christ stops, He looks at those men, and He does a very strange thing as far as we are concerned. He says to those men, "Go show yourself to the priest."

Now they were living in what is called a *theocracy*. God ruled this nation, and He ruled locally through priests. The priest was not only the spiritual leader of that community, he was also the medical leader. He was the physician, and he was also the legal...he was the lawyer. Christ said, "Go, show yourself to the priest." That meant that priest had medically the ability to examine you and declare you healed. He also could give you a legal writ so that nobody could challenge the fact that you once were a leper and that you should be quarantined. You go back to your family, your career; you go back to playing golf! You could do anything! That's how crucial it was. Christ said, "Go, show yourself to the priest."

Those men are exactly where you are today. What those men had was Christ's word, and that's all. That's what you have. Now I want to tell you, I go around, and thankfully I'm in, usually, Presbyterian Church in America churches, and I know I'm going to hear the word of God taught and preached by people who believe that it really is the word of God, infallible, and it is not a book that has to be fully interpreted. Instead, it's the word of God. That's exactly where you are today. You have the word of God.

May I say to you, as crucial as that is, that's not enough. *Nothing happened to those men when they received His word...until they started to act upon it.* The text is going to say that "as they went, they were healed." Not when they stood there. The same is true with you. There may be somebody here today who has really thought a lot about Christ, but has never, never made a commitment to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior. Nothing that you hear today is ever going to save you until you act upon that invitation. Once you act upon that invitation, your soul will be healed and you'll have life—and no telling what's going to happen! Let me read it to you, to make sure that I'm not just telling you things.

The next verse—fourteen. Verse 14:

When He saw them, Jesus said unto them, "Go, show yourselves unto the priests." It came to pass that *as they went, they were cleansed.* One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, fell down on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

I'm going to pause right there, again. Samaritan...very unusual for this man...and what I'm going to say to you here is that in your mind's eye of imagination, can

you see this? Here's what I see. Christ is over there...I think there's a field between them. I think when He said, "Go, show yourself to the priests," they thought about that. They thought about that. And it's usually the case...I think one of them said softly, "I'm going." And I think he stepped out in what is called 'a step of faith' in Christ's word. And I think the rest said, "I'm going, too." And they started to.

You see, one of the effects of leprosy is that it kills the nerve endings in your body, and particularly the hands and the feet. And the feet of lepers...so often, they have to hobble. Their feet are ruined. I think they started to hobble towards the village, and suddenly (and this is what a miracle is), suddenly they were all ten healed—feet, hands, everything! That's a miracle! That's the power of God. He can. I think they broke out in a hundred yard dash, like the Olympics, packed in that village. And in that dash, like the freeway, one guy stops. And when he stops, everybody piles around him, and... 'What are you doing?' He said, 'I'm going to go back. I'm going to go back and say thanks.' When he came back and said thanks, there was a reaction by the Lord Jesus. But let me read it to you—the next verse, verse 15:

One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God. He fell down on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks. He was a Samaritan. Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? There are not [any] found that returned to give glory to God except this stranger.' [Stranger to the covenant.] Jesus said unto him, 'Arise, go thy way. Thy faith hath made thee whole.'"

That's the account. You know, our Puritan forefathers in circles across the ocean and here in this country, the power of their preaching was that they could take a passage and then make application. It was the application that made them so vital, and changed men wherever they went, they changed society, because they applied the word of God; and so, I try to do that this morning with you.

And my question to you is, "So what?" What does this mean to you? What is the meaning and application of this for First Church/Jackson today?

I'm going to give you three applications. The first one is a definition: a definition of thanksgiving. What is thanksgiving? Number two, the application of this text to our lives in general—a general application for everybody. The third is a specific application for this week and missions. What does it mean?

I. Thanksgiving defined

Let me ask you: do you think, in your opinion, that those nine men who went back to find that priest, do you think that they were thankless in their hearts?

They'd just been healed! I think that as they rolled over this guy ('Where are you going?' 'Back to say thanks') he says, 'Tell Him thanks for me, too, because I really am thankful in my heart. Tell Him!'

Christ's definition of thankfulness is not ours, so often. Let me give you an illustration. I've had confession of sins in some of the most unusual places. Every preacher has gone through this...being on an airplane, getting in a conversation...I remember the guy, I got in this conversation with him, and finally he says, "What are you, a preacher?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "What kind of a preacher?" I said, "A good one!" He didn't like that....

I've heard every kind of a...and usually the confessions sometimes go like this: the man will say to me, he said, "Now preacher, I'm going to shock you...I'm...I'm...uh...you're not going to believe this preacher." And I say to myself...sometimes I just say to him, "Look, I've been around the block, there's nothing you can ever confess to me that I haven't heard before. Go ahead, big guy!" Except I have *never*—I've heard them all—I have never once heard a confession of sin that goes like this: "Preacher, I am filled with ingratitude. My life is a life of thanklessness." Not once.

You see, none of us think that we are ungrateful, not a one of us. This passage is so scary to me because nine out of ten who just received a fabulous blessing, in Christ's eyes were thankless.

What, therefore, is thanksgiving in Christ's eyes? Not my eyes; His eyes.

It goes like this: *It is a demonstrated act.* There was the difference. Nine, I'm sure—'oh, in my heart'—but one stopped, came back (he could have been interested in getting back to that priest, too!), came back in a demonstrated act, fell down and praised Christ! That, Christ said, is thanksgiving. It means it's not just saying in your heart 'my heart is warmed by this or that, or this, what God has done'; it means I *do* something.

Another illustration: Years ago in a church in Macon, Georgia, I started a program—we started a program—with 14 elders and deacons who volunteered and myself (15)—and we met three hours on a Monday night, and that went on for two years. It finally spread and we had about 500 people in that church in this program. The first thing we were asked to do in this program on this Monday night is come back next Monday night having said 'thank you' to somebody who deserved it. And you had to *act!* It's not that you said in your heart; you had to write a letter, make a telephone call, do something. One guy made a telephone call to a school teacher in California! But of the 15 men, 11 said 'thank you' to the same person. Guess who that person was? Not the preacher! Eleven of the 15 said 'thank you' to their wives, including me.

I want to tell you, it's easy to take blessings for granted. You ask some widower,

or somebody who's lost a child, or a job. For the first time, so often, we say 'I really should have been thanking that person and acting on it, and I wish I had a chance to do it again. I'd show that I was'

Well, that's what Christ says is thankfulness. It's not a moving of your heart, moving in the warmth and cockles of your heart; it is a life of action.

II. Thanksgiving demonstrated

The second of the applications is a general application that goes like this: Christ took that man and lifted him to his feet and said, "Go thy way. Thy faith hath made thee *whole*." It is a different word than the healing that the others received. You say, well, weren't all ten healed? Yeah, ten were healed, but this guy who came back got something special. He got more than just physical healing. I think something happened by God in his heart. That's what happened.

Do you want to have your life transformed? Is there anybody here who's really in trouble? I was telling Ligon, Jane and I were teaching the children, and we had them for about an hour. We'd do chalk talk, and Jane dances around and does everything, you know! She can do it all! And I'm trying to...you know...and I got this little tug on my leg, and so I looked down. And there's Ligon's daughter, and she looks up at me and goes, "Hi....."

But one of the things I did, we did missionary stories. I had a big pad of newsprint paper, you know, and we would draw and tell stories of what had happened to us in mission conferences in places around the world. But then I said, thinking about this sermon, I took a big red pencil and I drew a circle—oh, I'd say maybe two inches in diameter—and I drew that red circle, and I said, "OK, is there anybody here...what color do you see? Raise your hand if you see a particular color." And they'd raise their hand, you know, and I'd say what color? And they'd say "Red...red...red...red." I said, "OK, anybody red? Raise your hand." (Red, red, red, red...) And finally one little boy in the back raised his hand. And I said, "What color do you see?" And he said, "I see white." How perceptive, eh?

You know why a lot of us aren't thankful? Because we have tribulations in our life, and that's all we see. We only see the red. We never see the blessings. I wish all America...how can you live in this country, particularly if you travel overseas....I know there are things wrong in this country, and I know there are things wrong in your life. The Lord Jesus said, "In this world you *shall* have tribulation. Be of good cheer; I have overcome this world." You keep your eyes only on the red and you'll never be thankful, because that's all you see and you miss the white. You miss the white...

Jane and I, serving in a little church in south Alabama, Brewton, and we get called to this church in Gadsden, Alabama. We go up to Gadsden, Alabama, I

preach on a Wednesday night, and on Thursday morning we send the boys off to school, and the knock comes on the door. We're still unpacking, and the door opens and there is the president of the local Coca Cola™ company, and he got cases, these old wooden cases of Coca Cola, 24 Coca Cola's in this case, and he says, "Here's one for each boy!" And I looked at him, his name was Ralph Langford. Ralph had a son who came up here to RTS, one of the first graduates of RTS was a chaplain who got honored in the Vietnam, and I said to myself, "Ralph, you don't know what you're doing. You have no idea."

What he didn't understand is that in our previous pastorate Miss Jane came up with this idea for the Sabbath Day: that in the middle of the Sabbath Day we would all come and sit in the living room around this round table, and for the only time that week we got a frosty Coca Cola. One Coca Cola a week! And here he is, saying, "Here you go—24 for each one of them!"

So when those boys came home, I told them, "This man has come and has given you this case of Coca Cola." "A whole case?" What a Thursday that was! And then on Sunday, we're leaving the church, and around the corner comes Ralph and Lib Langford. I call Ralph over, and I have the boys in the back seat. And I call him over and I say, "This is the man who gave you the Coca-Cola's. What would you like to say to him?" And a boy looks up and says, "Sir, we are out of Cokes!"---would you believe?! Shakespeare said, "Worse than the serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." [Laughter].

May none of us be a thankless child to God. On that great Day of Judgment, if there's anybody here who is not a Christian, God is going to ask you: 'I gave my Son and you did not even choose to hear and believe in Him? My son, my son....'

III. What we as thankful people should do.

Not only that, the whole appeal of Christ at the end is missions. He has saved us to send us out. The gospels, all four, first chapter of the Book of the Acts, and the last thing before He ascends into heaven, they're getting the last word: "You are My witnesses. Go ye, therefore, into Jerusalem [that's Jackson], Judea [that's Mississippi], Samaria [that's the USA]." And then He says, "...unto the utter ends of the world." He said, 'I'll go with you.'

That's what we have been commissioned to do: to bring the gospel of reconciliation, God and man, through Christ and His cross, which leads...I'm going to leave this one again, about your lives: You young people—it's good to see so many young people here; you businessmen, you missionaries, this preacher—may we get a hold of this doctrine of thanksgiving. The Bible says 'in all things give thanks...this is the will of God for your life.' It'll change your life to be thankful. And may the little children learn early.

Now quickly, you know, missions is hard. It's the last thing, I believe, that comes in a sanctification process of the Christian. There are a few that catch on to missions at the beginning, but most of us, we don't get the idea that my life is to be committed to taking the gospel to all those people out there and around the world. We don't get that, until finally it comes and grabs us. There are some teenagers that catch on, and it's amazing to watch them.

You had a pastor here that preceded me, Don Patterson. Don gave to John Kyle an airplane, and you raised the money. They called that airplane *The Spirit of Jackson*, Jackson, Mississippi; sent it to the Philippines. It's a HelioCourier, one of these planes that doesn't have to have a whole lot of room to land or to take off, and it was given to the missionaries so that they could go into the jungles, which would often take them weeks and weeks, they'd get in there just like that, to bring missionaries to those nationals in the jungles.

When that plane was given to the Philippine government, the president and everybody else...it was an amazing thing! The ambassador for the United States to the Philippines turned to John Kyle and said, "Sir, this...I've been three years here in this country. This is the greatest thing that has ever happened to cement relationships between the Philippines and the USA." That's your ambassador! That's thirty years ago! That's what missions is. Took a sacrifice.

By the way, that airplane was landing about a year or so ago, and the wind blew it off the runway and destroyed some of it. They've repaired it, it's back there on its way to the Philippines, and here in Jackson, Mississippi, we're attempting to raise the money to pay for the repairing of that plane that is going back. We've raised about \$30,000 of the necessary—I think it's \$90,000-\$100,000. Who'll finish it off?

But the thing I'm trying to tell you is this: the Philippine colonel in charge turned and said to the representatives—there was an elder from this church with Don Patterson—why did the people of Jackson, Mississippi, do this? Why do they send this airplane to go to people who live in the jungles? And here is what the elder of this church said: He said, "Because the people in Jackson, Mississippi, are thankful for what the Lord Jesus has done for them. That's why."

Thanksgiving! That's what this church has done in times past. I'm going to ask you today: fill out that card. Who should fill out this card? Every five-year-old child. Got a five-year-old grandson? And make it \$100! He'll probably raise that \$100 quicker than you will, or it will be given to him! Who knows? Every five-year-old, every ten, every 15-year-old, every 25-year-old...who knows? Let God give a figure to you! I know it's a little...that's all right. And every 50-year-old couple, and right on down the line. If God has blessed you and you're thankful, you give it! It costs money to get Scott Rich out there in Vancouver! And all the other missions...you're supposed to give a million dollars. May God just bless, and may there be hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of cards—not a few, but

hundreds, and hundreds and hundreds.

And somebody has got to pray. Out of this church there's come prayer warriors. Do you remember Mildred Surgis? The missionaries used to come knock, and I'd hear them coming, and "I'm so and so," and I'd go to the door, get ready to come out to meet them, and they'd say, not "Where's Baird?" They would say, "Where's Mildred Surgis?" She's dead and gone. She was in her eighties, a prayer warrior. She wrote every missionary, prayed for every missionary, every month.

Will you get a missionary and really pray for them, and really, really find out about them? And get your son, and really pray! Pray for the blessing of God. And who will go?

Tonight I'm going to preach on my favorite missionary who went. I'm going to ask you to go. 'How about you, Baird?' I promised that I would go if called; I would go. In seminary, I promised. Jane did, too. You know what? I never had the guts that you people have. I always felt that I'd be a hindrance if I ever went, because I can't even get the car door open...I went to the telephone, I couldn't make that thing work yesterday! I'd be a hindrance. That's what...maybe I was wrong, but anyway...but I gave my life to try to get the gospel out. Who will go? Who will go from this church? There are missionary sons that have come from this church, and there are preacher sons. Let there be some great preacher boys come out of this church, out of this conference; and men in their twenties and thirties, and missionaries short-term, and missionary for career. Let God...say, "I'm so thankful," and it is exciting to see people come to Christ. And give my money. I'm going to pray, and I'm going to go. I'm going to go.

Motivation for missions. You know how it comes? I'm thankful for what Christ has done for me. I am so thankful, as we pray together.

O God, our heavenly Father, We thank You for sending the Lord Jesus to this earth. O Christ, we are thankful that You loved us and saved us. We know not why You should choose us, but we are thankful. Holy Spirit, put into my heart to heart Your word and respond, and step out. Hear this prayer. Bless this great church. Bless in faith. For Jesus' sake, as we pray in His holy name. Amen.

Dr. Duncan: As the ushers come forward, we have an opportunity now not only to give our tithes and offerings, but to make a commitment to the support of evangelism and missions worldwide. I'd like to ask you to take your *Faith Promise Commitment* cards and indicate your willingness to pray and to give, and to go. I want to reiterate what Dr. Baird has said. We need a generation of prayer warriors raised up. I want to assure you that these church planters and missionaries, it means a lot when you tell them that you pray for them; but when you write to them month after month, and you tell them how you're praying for them, and they know that they can count on your prayers, it's an especial encouragement and blessing to them. We need a generation of people to do that.

You can be a shut-in, or you can be a twelve-year-old, and your prayers and your writing to these missionaries and church planters can be a great blessing. You can commit to that in the *Faith Promise* card. There are many here today who need to heed seriously the challenge to go. There are some of you who are ready to do short-term medical missions. There are some of you that the Lord is working in your heart to consider being a career missionary. There are some of you who have a burden to reach out here in Jackson, and you have an opportunity to sign up for *Mission to Jackson* or to short-term missions, or to consider long-term missions on the *Faith Promise* card. And all of us have an opportunity to give. Friends, you know that it's something like 35% of this congregation that gives almost a million dollars a year to missions. Now, just think: if every family, just every family in this congregation were giving to missions through *Faith Promise*—just think what we could do. Year after year we have to tell godly men and women who want to go spread the gospel, “We don't have enough money in our missions budget to help you go spread the gospel.” Wouldn't you love to end that forever? So that every time we have the opportunity to support men and women to go to the fields of mission, we could say, “Yes.” Friends, let's make this whole congregation a missions congregation. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your mercies to us. And because of the gratitude of our hearts, we give back to You tithes and offerings for the support of gospel work through this church and around the world. And because of our thankfulness to You in the sending of Your Son, we come today and we commit ourselves, every one of us, to the cause of Christ in world missions through the giving of these Faith Promise commitments. Grant, O God, that by Your Spirit You would work in the hearts of those who have given before, that they would give more than they have ever given; grant, O God, that those who have never given before, that they would begin to give; and that as we give more and as we give, that we would give from thankful, grateful hearts, aware of the magnitude of Your mercies to us, so that from our overflowing there would begin to be a work of grace in the hearts of men and women and boys and girls around this world who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, and we'll give You all the praise and the glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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