

2021 NORTH AMERICAN MISSIONS EMPHASIS

Sermon Outline

The Mission Moves Forward!

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:56-58 (Key Verse 58)

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

INTRO: Let's get moving again

At this time of the year, our church gives to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Each year, the North American Mission Board chooses a theme for this significant offering, and this year it is The Mission Moves Forward. One way our church can help move the mission forward is by praying for our Southern Baptist missionaries, giving to support their critical work and learning more about them.

Missionaries like Jacob and Francine Zailian in Sanger, California. Jacob is the church planter of Set Free Church and he and his wife serve their community in a heartfelt way.

Their ministry is specifically to those on the margins of society—the homeless, impoverished and addicted, to help set them free through Christ. Everyday, they work beyond the four walls of the church building to care for those in need. During the COVID health crisis, they began serving more than 300 people a week through community meals where they also asked about their needs, prayed with them and invited them to the church worship services

One of the greatest disservices we have done to the Church, the Body of Christ, is allowing the Church to become identified as a *place* to go to instead of a *people* who go out.

It was never intended to be that way. We know this by the Greek word used for “Church” in Matthew 16:18. That passage says,

“And I also say to you that you are Peter [which means ‘rock’], and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (CSB)

The Greek word for “church” in this passage is “ekklesia.” This word means “those who are called out.” It’s not a term that describes a destination, as in a building, but rather one of “movement”—the calling out of those who are compelled to live out their lives in Christ in a public way. It’s a word that should set an image of a group of people assembling to start a revolution rather than sitting still and docile in a congregation.

Movement and mobility are indeed at the very heart and spirit of what the first-century church was all about. And if those first-century believers ever got a little too comfortable or if it became too easy for them to be stagnant and rest on their laurels, God would allow something to happen to get the church *moving* again.

This is still the case in North America today. Even just a casual perusal of North America's spiritual climate will show us that comfort should not be an option for those of us tasked with sharing the gospel.

Often, we see North America as a fairly Christian continent, and when speaking of missionaries, many of us default to think of them as people who go into third-world countries and far-away foreign lands to share the gospel. But statistics show us that there's an ever-growing need for us to see North America as a major mission field.

According to a survey from pewforum.org, 65% of Americans consider themselves as Christians. But that number is down more than 10 percent from 2014 stats and a 20 percent decrease since 2000. Couple that with steadily declining baptism numbers in Southern Baptist congregations, and it signals a disturbing trend that can only be reversed by an increase of people who see themselves as missionaries to North America.

Take a look at the book of Acts, for example. In Acts 1, just before the resurrected Jesus ascended to heaven, He left His disciples a charge to *move!* To *go*. It was an extension of His first command for them to *go*, which we often call The Great Commission. That's when Jesus told His disciples to, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19). And then in Acts 1:8, He gave them the "Go map."

- Jerusalem (start where you are)
- Judea
- Samaria
- To the ends of the earth

In other words, Jesus was telling the Church, "Don't get too comfortable at home." And for those hundreds of NAMB missionaries, like the Zailians, who live their lives to share the gospel and live on mission right here in North America, it is the lack of discomfort "at home" that has motivated them to pursue the lost right here at home for the sake of the gospel.

But through the first seven chapters of the book of Acts, that "comfortability" is what we see, isn't it? The Church is doing good things, but they began to get comfortable and perhaps a bit complacent in their Jerusalem home base.

Enter chapter 8, where a great persecution erupts, and look what it causes the church to do: scatter. While there is fear, there is also a newfound passion to *move* with the gospel, albeit in ways and in places they weren't used to (see Acts 8:1-4).

Sometimes, when He sees we may have become a little too complacent, God will allow a discomfort to invade our lives to get us *moving* again with the gospel.

EXAMPLE: If it did nothing else, the coronavirus pandemic forced many of us as pastors and members to consider afresh how to do ministry on the *move* — beyond the four walls of our comfort zones.

STORIES: (Anecdotes from your church, personal experience or community of how people started moving to be the hands and feet of Jesus)

The key to a healthy body is diet *and* exercise. As important as it is to eat right, it's the movement that takes your nutrition to the next level. Same in our Christian walk. What we eat — the things we are taught about Christ, the things we listen to, etc., are definitely important. That's our spiritual diet. But we aren't really complete in our mission if we aren't doing the other part — the exercise. The movement.

Church, it's time to get moving again.

Ironically, when we consult 1 Corinthians 15:58, which is our key passage, the word that speaks to the continued forward motion our ministries and mission should carry is actually one that, on the surface, sounds like it's promoting a stationary posture. It's the word "immovable."

But it's not contradictory at all. It's actually saying: "Don't move from your mission in Christ," which is to *keep moving* as His hands and feet in this world. And as we examine this passage closely, we can see at least three things Paul mentions that should keep our mission moving forward:

1. The Power That Keeps Us Moving (vv. 56-57): Let's examine verses 56 and 57 where Paul writes, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The most debilitating thing to a Christian's forward movement is sin. When sin enters into our lives, it not only hinders us from being effective in our ministries by derailing our focus, it also intrudes on the relationship and connection with Jesus that is designed to keep us bearing fruit. (*Reference Jesus' words about "abiding" in Him in John 15:4 and how it means both to have no known sin unconfessed and no interest in things apart from His character*).

In verse 56, Paul described sin as a "sting" that results in death if it goes unchecked and unremedied. The law (attempting to live a life of goodness and godliness apart from Christ's strength) is the very thing that fuels sin. But in verse 57, the remedy for sin is evident. Verse 57 says: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

That's the power that keeps us moving—resting and abiding in the victory we have in Jesus.

2. The Posture that Keeps Us Moving (Verse 58a): When we find ourselves able to rest in the power of Christ's victory over sin in our lives, it is the very thing that gives us the strength to be immovable. That's the posture that will keep us moving. And here in verse 58, this immovability is not a matter of being stagnant or lazy, but rather being resolute in the mandate to *keep the mission moving forward*. That mission is the "work" of sharing the gospel that Paul instructs us to do with an enthusiastic spirit. The resolute enthusiasm to keep finding new ways to share Jesus with people and to be His hands and feet, regardless of what's happening or not happening in our world, is the posture that will keep us moving.

3. The Promise That Keeps Us Moving (Verse 58b): Finally, the promise that keeps us moving is in the b-clause of verse 58: "Always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Every word we preach or teach, every act of kindness we show, everything we say or do for God's glory will never ring hollow (see Isaiah 55:11). We may not ever get our name in lights or recognition here on Earth for the things we do, but that shouldn't be our motivation anyway. May the promise that God sees us and will reward us in His own way be enough of a promise to keep us moving forward.

Closing Story: (Anecdotes from your church, experience or community of how small, incremental movement translated into big change)

While life may throw challenges at us that slow our progress, slow progress is still progress. Each of us may move at a different pace, but the thing we must continue to do is *keep moving forward* with the Mission of Jesus Christ.