

I. Introduction 1 John 5: 11,12 NKJV

- A. Jesus Christ is the world's only hope. Nobody goes to heaven without him. Christ is our only hope for everlasting life.
- B. Nobody finds true joy and satisfaction without Him, nobody finds power to become whole without Him and nobody finds peace without Him. People without Christ certainly have times of happiness and satisfaction, but we believe, apart from being saved through Jesus Christ, no one can be truly happy, genuinely at peace and eternally ready for heaven. Jesus Christ is the world's only hope.
- C. Believing this makes God's people ready to bring the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth.
- D. Our church and our whole family of churches—which is called the Christian and Missionary Alliance—is dedicated to that cause. Every year, together we give over \$35 million to support almost 400 missionaries around the world. We call this the Great Commission Fund. Today and next week we invite you to give to the Great Commission Fund.
- E. In this sermon I'd like to introduce you to a missionary named George Grenfell. He was a missionary to Africa in the 1800's. I had never heard of him, but I was reading an old, smelly book called *Giants of the Missionary Trail*. It had a bunch of short stories about different missionaries. One of them was George Grenfell. His story blew me away. He built a steamship in England, took it apart, shipped it to Africa and rebuilt it on the Congo River. For 30 years, he steamed throughout the heart of uncharted Africa, living and telling about the love of Jesus.
- F. He did all of this at a time when maps showed only question marks, slave trade killed thousands, colonialism treated the people like property and cannibalism was widely practiced. Today, Africa is more Christian than Europe. Africa is experiencing revival and many of the leaders of the church there today are spiritual ancestors of George Grenfell. I want to tell you his story.

II. Neighborhood Church New Phase

- A. Before I get to that, I want to give you a report about our church. Our governing board went on a retreat last weekend to seek God's will for our church and our future. If you came to our town hall meetings, you know about this. In the last several years, we have outgrown our facilities. We have been very creative in using and reusing everything we have. We started other venues, using video to deliver our services.
- B. For a number of years, we have struggled to accommodate the growth God is sending us and we do believe it is God. He receives all the glory.
- C. Our board met to ask, "What's Next Lord?" We met without preconceptions, but with a sincere question before the Lord. We prayed, we did Bible study. If you know me, you know I'm not a weeper. Neither is our board. But, we wept (please don't tell anybody).
- D. There were several options on the table: church planting, multiplying video venues, moving Neighborhood Church to another place and building here. We calculated costs, crunched numbers, projected growth, talked about the state of the economy today and the way that is impacting all of us in the church. We talked about the housing market and recognized that many people in our church are struggling. We listened to you at our town hall meetings and on the town hall blog (www.whatsnextlord.org).
- E. It was a remarkable experience when we finally knew what we had to do. All I can say is that God showed up among us in a powerful way. It was something I have not experienced many times.
- F. So, I would like to make this announcement today. This is the unanimous affirmation by our church board:
 1. God is calling Neighborhood Church to our next level of ministry and effectiveness for God's kingdom. We have a unique opportunity to mobilize an army to fulfill the Great Commission. We recognize the huge leap of faith required to move from our present resources to our future opportunities. Yet, God is able to provide. With an awareness of the many possible pitfalls, yet with full confidence in the faithfulness of God and a deep sense of urgency for our mission, we RESOLVE:
 2. That Neighborhood Church embark on a major building project to build the largest possible sanctuary, children's ministry space and auxiliary space our current property can sustain. With that, we have authorized the following steps:
 - a) Complete all needed drawings and design work from the Larson Group in order to obtain bids.
 - b) Launch a capital campaign with RSI to obtain the maximum possible down payment.
 - c) Build a facility that will form a basis for a gospel ministry that will reach Shasta county, northern California and around the world for generations to come, until the Lord returns.
- G. This isn't because we *want* to, it's because we *have* to. We have to be faithful and we have to leave the next generation the tools they'll need to keep reaching this region for Jesus, until He returns.
- H. Some day soon, you will bring your friends right here to a state of the art worship center with amazing childrens spaces. Here, on this piece of land dedicated to Jesus. It's all part of our mission, here and around the world. Redding is a mission field. So is Africa. I'd like to tell you the story of a man who changed a continent for Jesus.

III. Beginnings

- A. George Grenfell was born in 1849, in England, the son of a carpenter. He would have grown up in the local Anglican church, but a bully there kept beating up young George, so his family moved to the Baptist church.
- B. In 1859, revival swept England. Evangelist D.L. Moody preached and thousands came to Christ. The churches were filled, people loved the gospel. They also loved to bring the gospel to those who had never heard it. In the aftermath of this revival, at age fifteen, George Grenfell was saved and later baptized. His Sunday School teacher kept George supplied with books about great missionaries. A pioneer missionary to Africa, named David Livingstone, became George's hero. *Give your kids biographies of great missionaries and Christian heroes.*
- C. Throughout his teenage years, George was on fire for Christ. Listen to his Sunday schedule and remember he was only seventeen. Seven o'clock prayer meeting, 9:30 Sunday School, followed immediately by church. After services, George and his friends distributed gospel literature to houses and passersby. At 2:30, another hour of Sunday School, followed by a quick lunch and a journey to two rural villages where they passed out more literature and conducted an open air service on a piece of prairie. Then, back to church for an evening service and a final prayer meeting. George and his buddies formed their own theological society. They prepared papers on important biblical topics, met weekly to hear those papers and to study a wide range of the Bible's teaching. Seventeen years old.

IV. Preparation

- A. By his early twenties, George was itching to serve as a missionary. God had touched his heart with the plight of people who had never heard of Jesus. He wanted to go to a place where it would be hard to spread the gospel.
- B. He trained at the Baptist missionary school for a year. Grenfell hated school. He forced himself to do homework. He was an excellent athlete and had a remarkable mechanical aptitude, which would come in handy years later. His fellow students loved him. He could take a joke as well as give one. But in his heart, he yearned to bring the gospel overseas. He was tired of preparing and wanted to go.
- C. In a letter he wrote, *'I can't expect to forge the weapons for so great a fight in a hurry. If I do I must not expect them to wear.'* Very wise. God always prepares His soldiers before He deploys them.
- D. It was decided that Grenfell would join an aging missionary named Alfred Saker to continue his work in Africa. Saker was one of Grenfell's heroes and nothing could have delighted him more. Saker had spent thirty years in the Cameroons, on the left side of Africa, just beneath the bulge.
- E. He established churches and missionary outposts. By the time Grenfell joined him, Saker was old and needed help. George sailed for Africa.

V. The First Phase

- A. In 1874, at age 25, George Grenfell first stepped foot in Africa. He instantly fell in love with the native people. George found them to be warm, intelligent and fun-loving. He had no illusions, however, that his life was in constant peril.
- B. Saker ran a well-established base camp and George fit right in. There was a print shop for producing Christian literature and Bibles, a foundry and blacksmithing shop to keep everything else running smoothly, a church run by converts from Saker's ministry and several missionary homes, complete with cooks and housekeepers. Teams paddled up the rivers into Africa's interior to bring the gospel. George joined these teams. They kept on the lookout for hippo's that would upset the canoes and crocodiles ready to devour the paddlers.
- C. On one of his first expeditions, they paddled to a village that had never seen a white man before. Grenfell sat in the boat at the edge of the village and, through an interpreter, began preaching. George's white skin caused quite a commotion and people flocked to the shore to see him. In his diary, George wrote that he must have seemed like, "a bogey [man] clad in terrors" to the children who "ran away and screamed in the most frantic manner, falling over one another."
- D. On another expedition, Grenfell rowed five or six hours to bring the gospel to a certain village. At bedtime, he found a dilapidated house and asked the chief's permission to spend the night. He was kept up all night by the attacks of mosquitoes, rats, mice and lizards of "exceptional vigor and audacity." One of the lizards tried to make a bed in George's hair, but fortunately his hair was too short and the lizard moved on.
- E. The deeper George paddled into the continent, the more he faced the dangers of cannibalism. A standard part of warfare in the Congo was eating the flesh of defeated foes. Most men wore necklaces made of teeth from their victims/meals. Slaves and captives were routinely butchered and sold off, one part at a time. George wrote that there were benefits to being thin in this part of the world, but nothing stopped him from preaching the gospel.
- F. During this first phase, George fell in love and married. His wife, Mary Hawkes, shared his love for Christ and for the African people. They were overjoyed when, in their first year of marriage, the Grenfells discovered they would soon have a child. But joy turned to sorrow when the baby was stillborn. George buried his first child on the shores of the Congo river. Tragedy struck again when his beloved wife took ill and died. It was a heavy blow and George could scarcely talk or write about it. He dug his second grave alongside the Congo. George wondered how he could be so quickly deprived of one he loved so dearly. But in spite of his questions, he never stopped loving God and he never gave up on his dreams to bring the gospel into the interior of Africa.

VI. The Birth of BMS Peace

- A. Earlier missionaries concentrated on the coast of Africa. But George longed to bring the gospel to the interior. No one had penetrated that region. The Congo river was blocked by waterfalls so no boat could go upstream. The jungles were too thick and the tribes too fierce for land expeditions. There were no maps of the region. No one even knew how big the Congo River basin was or what mysteries lay in Africa's mysterious interior. All George knew was that the people there needed Christ. They needed the gospel and they needed to get saved.
- B. So, George prayed that God would give him the means to bring the gospel inland. God answered that prayer.
- C. Back in England, a wealthy man named Robert Arthington gave the Baptist Missionary Society one thousand pounds for the purchase of a steamship, and three thousand pounds to be carefully invested. The interest was to be used to pay for the ship's perpetual maintenance. Grenfell's prayers were answered. He returned to England to supervise the construction of the British Missionary Society's ship, the "BMS Peace."
- D. The ship was seventy feet long and fourteen feet wide. It drew only twelve inches of water (18" when loaded with 6 tons of cargo) and could run in the most narrow of canals. The Peace was powered by a wood burning steam engine.
- E. George was a mechanical genius and the little ship was flawless. The Peace was fully assembled and tested on the Thames River in London. Then, Grenfell supervised as the ship was carefully dismantled and packed in over 1,000 wooden crates, each one weighed 65 pounds. Each box was sewn in canvas, numbered and carefully catalogued. If a box was lost, its contents could be identified and the part duplicated and replaced. Two engineers accompanied George on the long voyage back to Africa to reassemble the steamship.
- F. Upon landing in Africa, Grenfell hired over 1,000 porters to begin the long trek above the rapids of the Congo. Can you imagine the planning and organization this took?
- G. The first stage was a five week march just to get to the mouth of the river. Then, they had a voyage of 110 miles in canoes upstream to the Livingston Falls, which has more waterpower than all of the waterfalls in the U.S. combined.
- H. Following that, George Grenfell led 1,000 men, with their boxes, on three brutal portages through dense jungle on uneven terrain. First sixty miles, then seventy miles, then one hundred miles above the last of the falls.
- I. At times, the caravan stretched over a mile long through ravines so deep they had to use ropes and pulleys to move the boxes along. They braved deadly precipices, rushing waterfalls and constant danger from wild animals and hostile natives. It was a

monumental undertaking, but George Grenfell believed God could do the impossible. Finally, the BMS Peace was delivered upstream, above the last of the falls on the Congo River.

- J. The trip was costly, however, and both engineers sent to assemble the ship died. A substitute engineer was sent from England, but he died. Grenfell must have been a really tough man to survive, and brilliant too, because Grenfell, himself, assembled his steamship and launched it on the Congo River. All of this to bring Christ to people living in spiritual darkness, sorely in need of a Savior.

1. *"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."*
Matthew 4:16

- K. When you really believe the gospel is precious and souls are priceless, you will pay any price to bring the gospel to those who have not heard.

VII. The Second Phase

- A. To understand the scope of this mission, you must grasp how big the territory covered by the Congo and its tributaries was. If the Congo river were in Europe, it would flow all the way from Spain to Moscow and its tributaries would cover most of Europe and much of Asia. Until George Grenfell, this vast stretch of water and land was unmapped and unevangelized. Grenfell's work was staggering.

- B. So, George began the second phase of his missionary service. He steamed up the Congo River—9,000 navigable miles—preaching the gospel, dispensing medicine, planting churches, drawing maps and establishing missionary bases its entire length. Along the way, he fought the slave trade and the Belgian government's oppression of this land.

- C. Mechanic, engineer, preacher, Grenfell was undaunted in his work. He wrote to a old friend,

1. 'If you saw me sometimes after my engine work you would think there was small relation 'twixt the present G.G. and the old one you knew; not much like an eminent divine [theologian] I can assure you. It's rough sort of work, but suits me very well.'

- D. In a time when even missionaries were expected to dress in suits and behave like proper British gentlemen, Grenfell wrote,

1. 'You must not make my letter public property, people would think I'm going wrong [crazy] and hold up their hands in pious horror. Look, it would not be much use for me to turn out in a suit every day. Pink shirts, minus several of the buttons, sailcloth unmentionables, with a jackknife in a sheath so as to be always handy, a pair of shoes, well ventilated, socks that are a perfect puzzle when I wear them, and often no socks at all. Good boots are a mistake, the water on our beaches spoils them in a day or two. I've a favorite old pair, which, bye the bye are not a pair, for one is a buttoned one, minus the buttons, and the other a lace, tied at the time I write with a bit of bush grass, unless I went one shoe off and one shoe on. This is about the style of my working rig.'

- E. Grenfell recognized that a proper British gentlemen could neither steam up the Congo, nor win Africans to Christ. If you want to lead someone to Christ, you have to become all things to all people, without altering or violating the message of Jesus.

- F. Imagine how primitive tribes reacted when they first saw Grenfell's ship steaming up the river. Most of the tribes attacked first and asked questions later. The Peace was pockmarked with holes from spears and arrows. Many times Grenfell and his colleagues took cover inside the ship as they simultaneously avoided attacking canoes and shouted out their intentions to marauding natives.

- G. Of the natives, Grenfell wrote,

1. 'How much this part of Africa stands in need of help, I cannot tell you; words seem utterly inadequate. Cruelty, sin and slavery seem to be as millstones around the necks of the people, dragging them down into a sea of sorrows. Never have I felt more sympathy than now for these poor brethren of ours and never have I prayed more earnestly than now that God may speedily make manifest to them that light which is the Light of Life, even Jesus Christ, our living Lord.'

- H. It is a myth that primitive tribes are happy and peaceful without Christ and that missionaries should leave them alone with their native religions. Grenfell knew that, without Christ, without salvation, no one could be truly happy.

- I. The truth is these tribes lived in constant fear. Fear of angry gods, fear of storms and disease, fear of neighboring tribes and slavery, fear of being cannibalized, fear of human sacrifice. It was common practice to bury alive unwanted slaves or for chiefs to commit terrible torture upon suspected criminals. Grenfell fought all of it with the most powerful weapon the world has ever known: the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of these precious people, many did see the light and Grenfell was privileged to plant churches up and down the length of the Congo.

- J. Grenfell tells of the time he met an African prince and, in the background, heard cries for help. He investigated and found two little girls tied to a tree. The prince explained they were the spoils of war and he was going to sell them to Muslim slave traders.

- K. Grenfell purchased them himself and sailed them home. When he got to the girls' tribe, he was met by a war party in canoes. The spears and arrows flew, until Grenfell had his pilot sound the ship's horn. The natives had never heard a ship's horn, got deathly quiet and frozen with fear. Grenfell had the little girls cry out and suddenly the war party turned away. The girls were returned.

- L. The price on his ministry was enormous. In 1887, six missionary colleagues died within seven months. In his second marriage, George suffered the loss of his next two children. Their graves marked the progress of his little ship. The Baptist Missionary Society decided to discontinue efforts in this deadly region, but Grenfell wouldn't stand for it. He wrote,

1. 'We must either advance or retreat; if you retreat, you cannot count on me.'

- M. Grenfell made two more trips to England. There he raised the consciousness of believers toward African missions. He also built two more steamships to travel up the Congo and transfer to other river systems. On one of his return trips, he was presented with scientific awards for his maps and geographical discoveries.

- N. He wore his gold medal to a reception, feeling like a fish out of water. An old friend asked how George felt with his award. He replied, "I feel like a barn door with a brass knocker." George cared nothing for decorations and awards. He only wanted to return to his work in Africa.

VIII. Spiritual Success

- A. Grenfell's ability to stick to his task paid off. By 1902, the year the Wright brothers flew, he could write,

1. 'Our [church] services are crowded as they have never been before. Some are beginning to talk of a larger chapel. God's Spirit is manifestly working among the people. We are all compelled to allow that it is not our own doing, but God's

doing.'

- B. Up and down the river, the tribes came to know of the white man who traveled with news about Jesus and the Supreme God. Again, Grenfell paid dearly. Another of his children died and he buried her along the river. His second wife died and he buried her, too. A line of grave markers stand beside the Congo river to mark the sacrifice and devotion of George Grenfell to the gospel.
- C. On one of his voyages, after landing at the foot of a cliff, Grenfell was awestruck when he heard natives singing, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." The natives were in canoes paddling upstream, unaware of Grenfell's presence and singing. Their voices reached Grenfell's ears.
 - 1. All hail the power of Jesus' name, let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of All.
 - 2. Let every kindred, every tribe, on this terrestrial ball, to Him all majesty ascribe, and crown Him Lord of all.
- D. It's hard to imagine the joy that filled George's heart. Twenty years earlier he had landed at that same spot, only to be driven off with spears. Now, that same tribe had its own church, with their own pastor, praising the name of Jesus and bringing the news of everlasting life to regions beyond hope. Against all odds, Jesus' name was firmly rooted in Africa because of this remarkable man.

IX. The Blemish

- A. I have told the story of George Grenfell for many years, but I found out something new this time, part of his story I'd never heard before. According to the Journals of the Baptist Missionary Society, Grenfell had to resign as a Baptist missionary for a while. After his first wife died, Grenfell fell in love with his housekeeper, Rose Edgerly, and got her pregnant out of wedlock.
- B. I say this, not to condemn him, but for you and me. My first reaction was disappointment, as if this one mistake would erase his lifetime of remarkable service for Jesus.
- C. But the more I thought of it, the more amazed I was that, a) he didn't let his guilty conscience stop his ministry; b) he did the right thing and married her and raised their daughter; and, c) that God doesn't use super-saints to reach the world for Jesus. He uses ordinary people who step out in faith and love for a lost world. George and Rose enjoyed a long, happy marriage. George saw his greatest accomplishments *after* his sin and restoration.

X. Going Home

- A. In his last months, Grenfell penetrated Africa farther than ever before. With joy, he planted his last church and established his final missionary station. His beloved ship, the Peace, had served him well. But his beloved Savior had served him best of all and never let him down.
- B. Over the years, George made many African friends. Many were saved and some chose to become missionaries with him. They called him Tata, their word for Father.
- C. In June of 1906, Grenfell became ill. Years of fevers and warfare had taken their toll. He was dreadfully ill, but never complained. George wrote during this time,
 - 1. 'God has been especially good to me through it all and has shown me many new things out of His Truth, and more and more concerning His wondrous, far-reaching love.'
- D. He knew he was dying, surrounded by his faithful African friends and coworkers, George asked to sail downstream. He wanted to die on the shores where thirty-two years earlier he had begun his work with Alfred Saker. Sadly, he never made it. Grenfell's last words were, "Jesus is mine. God is mine."
- E. It is fitting that African hands lovingly buried him. Balsuti, Grenfell's African secretary, wrote, "Then we sang another hymn. Last of all we closed the grave and replaced the earth. And so the death of Tata was finished." One more grave marker stands, even today, in the depths of Africa. A simple stone with the words, "George Grenfell." A name most of us would ignore, but a name that commands the full attention of heaven. The death of George Grenfell was finished, but not his life.

XI. Conclusion

- A. Jesus Christ is the world's only hope. It is easy to believe when we speak of unreached groups deep in the jungles of the world, but George Grenfell saw that the whole world was a mission field, even Christianized England, even the U.S., Redding and Shasta County. Jesus Christ is the world's only hope and this is just another way of saying that He is your only hope, too. Unless you can say, Jesus is mine, Christ is mine, unless you can say you have a Savior who paid the ultimate price when He died for your sins, unless you can say that, then you are as spiritually lost today as any native of Africa was a century ago when Grenfell served.
- B. In one of his final letters, the aged Grenfell wrote,
 - 1. 'God has been every good to me through all these three weeks on my back, and though some of the days have been dark, and the consciousness of my many sins and much unworthiness has been heavy upon me, yet I have not lost the assurance that it is of His grace that I am saved. This I know, better than ever, that Salvation is of Grace, through Christ, and by faith.'
- C. George Grenfell is a remarkable story. But, you know what? So is your life when you live out your call, in your place, in your time. We might not write a biography about you, but God does. Nothing you do for Christ is ever wasted. May God help us reach our mission field with the same gritty determination, the same unquenchable love George Grenfell exhibited.
- D. If somebody from our church is telling you about Jesus, I want you to understand something, it's not because we want to cram religion down your throat, because we don't. It's just that we have found a treasure and we want you to find it, too. The love of Christ compels us. That's our prayer for you, for all of Shasta county and the world.

- XII. If you'd like to know more about George Grenfell, visit the library or www.bookfinder.com. You'll find his story in older, out of print books. The main reference is George Hawker, *The Life of George Grenfell: Congo Missionary and Explorer*, (The Religious Tract Society; London, 1909). There is a chapter about Grenfell in Eugene Harrison's, *Giants of the Missionary Trail*, (Scripture Press: Chicago, 1954). There is also a chapter on Grenfell in J.T. Mueller's, *Great Missionaries to Africa*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1941). There is an entry in Wikipedia; other web sources quote from the books above.