

Imperial Mission: Conquering for Christ

Christianity is a missionary religion. On Jesus' command, Christians for two millennia have been *sent out*, carrying "the gospel" to the ends of the earth, making disciples as they went. Yet many rightly wonder if Christian mission has been good for the world. Hasn't the Christian gospel ridden on the coat tails of colonialism? Or worse, don't we see clear evidence that evangelism in itself is an act of cultural imperialism? Are Jesus' followers—the crusaders, conquistadors and chaplains of the past—guilty of unforgivable intolerance and arrogance? Have we not remade Aborigines, Americans, Africans and Asians in our own Western image?

In this message we will explore whether Christian mission has truly been good for the world. Where has it gone wrong? And, following Christ, how *should* mission be done?

Gospel = The good news that through Jesus we can be forgiven for our wrongdoing, and enter 'eternal life' with God as part of His loving community, for the healing of the world.

This life goes beyond the grave, but it starts *right now*, as Jesus' came to redeem everything he created (Colossians 1:15–20). Thus, where Jesus went 'he preached the good news of God's Kingdom and healed the sick'—when we align with God as King of all, then bodies, souls, and whole societies will come alive. Mission includes what you *do* as much as what you *say*.

Is it *ever* legitimate to 'evangelise'? "Believe what you want, but don't convert others." *But* isn't the critic doing the same thing, proselytising for their view of the universe? Besides, if Jesus really does save us from hell, then this is something we are morally obliged to share: "How much do you hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible, and not tell them that" (Penn Jillette, atheist comedian).

If Christianity is true, then this message is crucial; it can bring great good by allowing people to choose, if they want, eternal life. But over the course of history how has the church gone? Have our methods of mission overshadowed this vital message of life? Has the church brought more harm than good in taking the gospel the world over?

Jesus' Model of Mission (Luke 10:1–21)

No belief should be judged by its heretics. So what model did Jesus set? In a word, *incarnation*. God took on flesh and moved into the neighbourhood (John 1). *Incarnation* means to relate to those we reach, offering salvation as a gift 'from within', not imposed from above.

We see this same mode of mission in the first Christian missionary enterprise in Luke 10. After a trial run by the twelve disciples, Jesus sends the seventy-two to "announce the Gospel of the Kingdom of God", sent to heal the world without money or weapons.

¹ For full notes and a group discussion guide, see <http://logos.kbc.org.au/blog/resources/logos-talks/christian-mission/>. This includes *Fact Sheets* on the *Crusades*, *Inquisitions*, and *Witch Hunts*, plus much, much more.

Peace through partnership. Physical ⇌ Spiritual. Deeds ⇌ Words. Rejection brushed off. Rejoicing in own salvation. Outnumbered and vulnerable. Living with those they served.

Today we'll take a snap shot of three regions of the world—Latin America, China, and Africa—through the lens of Luke 10 to see what good the gospel has brought, and confess where Christian mission hasn't lived up to Jesus' model to see what lessons we can learn. 59% of Christians worldwide are represented in these regions. Christianity is not a 'Western' Religion.

LATIN AMERICA: Healing through Humble Suffering

Big mistakes were made, but Christ was no Conquistador

From Luke 10 we learn that *Christian mission should start with healing the sick, meeting tangible needs, and then proceed not by strength and numbers but by weakness and suffering*. Just like Jesus, life for all comes through loving self-sacrifice. As church father Tertullian commented, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church".

1950s ... 6/10 Waodani deaths in the jungles of Ecuador were from homicide. Enter five American missionaries coming without weapons to build trust. World wide media attention mounted when they were speared to death shortly thereafter. Yet this was only the start of cultural transformation and true reconciliation, an amazing example of how Christian mission can bring healing through suffering.²

Luke 10 ... no army, no forced conversation, 2 by 2 offering practical love and inviting response

Brother Alex in Columbia, and Catholic priests resisting drug wars, advocating for justice

Global Health Ministries working for true peace, the flourishing of all life, healing through hurt

"Would you rather these temples were for child sacrifice or sightseeing?"

Many cultural practices can be preserved, but some cultural practices need transformation.

Is Christian mission good for Latin America? When it proceeds through humble suffering, and heals the hurting, following Jesus, it seems to me the answer must be 'yes'.

ASIA: Incarnation among the Chinese

Fairfield Methodist Church: A case study in serving elderly Chinese in Singapore HDB's

"We never set out purely to preach the gospel and evangelize the residents. ... Following Latin American models of Liberation Theology, we wanted to speak *with* and *for* the poor and

² See the documentary "Beyond the Gates of Splendor" or the movie "End of the Spear" for the full story. As Mincaye (one of the original murderers said), *"We acted badly, badly, until they brought us God's carvings; now we walk His trail"*.

oppressed. Hence, more than 50 of the church's cell groups faithfully visited them every second week after the morning service in their HDB flats – on their turf; we talked to them, asked for their medical needs, prepared meals and ate with them; we even cleaned their apartments. We felt like Jesus' disciples in Luke 10. This is '*incarnation*', entering in, love taking on flesh and working alongside people as worthy of respect."

Christian mission in China is not a new thing.

St. Thomas (1st Century)
Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits (16th Century)
Hudson Taylor (19th Century)

Chinese Mission in the 'modern' world opened up through Western imperialism and the Opium War (1839–42), as the British made money off the drug trade. Many missions were tainted from the beginning. Far from Luke 10, Christian mission was brought into disrepute. Only a few missionaries were courageous enough to separate their work from empire building.

Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), *China Inland Mission* (now OMF)

Moved inland away from military protection

Lost 58 missionaries and 21 children in the Boxer Rebellion

Birthered Chinese Christianity in every province:
"God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

He learned the language, ate local cuisine, dressed as they did, and lived among them in community. As he demonstrated Christ's love within Chinese culture, people responded to the gospel and became truly Chinese Christians, encouraged by local evangelists like John Sung.

1949 ... Under Communism, all western missionaries were expelled.

Indigenous growth continued through House Church movement

Today upward of 10 percent of Chinese people are Christian, being better Chinese citizens than they were before Christ

Christian mission is good for the world when it is *incarnational*, not just speaking foreign words, which people forget, but embodying Jesus' love in local forms, which people see and remember. We must work alongside those we serve, as equals. Today the Chinese people do and understand what Jesus teaches us in Luke 10 and in turn are blessing the Western world.

AFRICA: Holistic Kingdom, Marrying Good Deeds and Good Words

With over 54 countries and 1 billion people, Africa is a big place with huge needs.

The ugly side of western expansionism and Christian mission ...

Slavery; Civil Wars; Colonial plundering; Apartheid; Prosperity Gospel

Luke 10 calls for holistic change and love in action: heal, *then* tell them about God's Kingdom.

Childcare Kitgum Servants: Northern Uganda, Irene Gleeson ⇨ Free Education and Health

Dr. Catherine Hamlin: Ethiopia ⇨ Operating on Fistulas (OBGYN) to restore outcast women

Mercy Ships: Africa Wide, Don Stephens ⇨ Mobile Hospital for the Poor

Journalist Matthew Parris gets it: **good deeds and good words must travel together:**

"As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God."

SENT: Our Response to Christian Mission

Have missionaries made mistakes? *Unquestionably.* The church in spreading the gospel has made many tragic and terrible errors. Like all 'institutions'—think government, and family—we mustn't condemn the whole because of corruption in the part. We must learn and do better.

CHRISTIAN MISSION IS GOOD FOR THE WORLD WHEN it *advances with humility and suffering to bring peace; it adopts local forms, bringing out the best in any culture; and it marries good deeds with good words.* Taken together, *Christian mission is good for the world when it looks like Jesus, and is a loving witness to the Kingdom of God.*

Imagine Latin America, Asia, and Africa WITHOUT Christian Mission ... no World Vision, Kitgum education, Catherine Hamlin, Fairfield Church, or advocates for peace and justice in the jungle. *Do you honestly believe that the world would be better without all this?* And beyond words, it is this inner transformation and dynamic hope that animates social transformation. SO, how would God *send you* to help heal the world? And have you found Jesus' healing for yourself?

For Discussion

1. What impacted you most in this talk? And how would you respond if asked *"Is Christian mission good for the world?"*
2. Is 'evangelism' for any belief valid? Why or why not?
3. As a growth group, watch the classic 1986 movie *"The Mission"* (still available from most DVD stores). This true story unpacks the 1750s tensions between Jesuit missionaries working with the people, and the colonial and Church powers fighting over land. Where does each group succeed and fail in light of Luke 10?
4. Consider a 'mission' experience connected with KBC. What was most, and least, helpful for those you served? What legitimate criticisms might people make of what this mission did? And how could you modify this mission in light of Luke 10 to genuinely bless others?
5. Think on the three principles drawn from mission to Latin America, Asia, and Africa: Christian mission is good for the world *when ... it advances with humility and suffering to bring peace; it adopts local forms, bringing out the best in any culture; and it marries good deeds with good words.* What might this look like in contemporary mission to *Australian Aborigines*?
6. Seek God about how you might be more missions engaged, sent to help heal the world.