

<Series Slide> Review & Introduction:

- I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC today continuing our series on the core value, Missional Living: "We will go into our neighbourhoods and around the world to express the love & hope of Jesus." That term, "missional" has become a buzz-word in church circles the past 10 years.
- Ross Hastings, in his new book, Missional God, Missional Church says,
 - Q: "The concept of the missional church is not a fad but is theologically foundational," however "the majority of Western churches still need awakening to this core identity." (p.35)
- Not merely what we do, mission is fundamentally part of who we are as God's people.
- And God has 'hard-wired' mission right into the DNA of the church from its very inception.
- Hear the missional heartbeat of the C&MA summed up by our founder, A.B. Simpson:
 - Q: Our "movement stands for a commitment to reach the most neglected fields, to avoid the beaten tracks of other labourers, to press on to the regions beyond ... to preach the Gospel where Christ has not been named." - in "Alliance.ca" Magazine, Fall 2013.
- I love that global mission focus, but here 125 years later, much has changed.
- We now live in a 'post-Christian' world which presents both challenges and new opportunities for living out this missional value.
- The relevance of the church in the West, once the centre of public life, is radically diminishing.
- Some days it just feels so dark - that the message of Jesus that I've embraced much of my life is actually seen as offensive now in our culture.
- Reality is, the big mission of the Canadian church in 2014 is also right here. Not just out there, overseas on the frontier, our mission is touchable everyday right here in our city - at our doorsteps.
- The field has come to us. And, the same Holy Spirit Who brought the presence of Jesus in power at Pentecost is still on the move 2000 years later - longing to fill us, making us 'carriers of God's presence' - bringing His love, hope, & 'freedom' to family, friends, & neighbours today. Amen!
- **<Slide>** The past few weeks we've been exploring the miraculous growth of the early church.
- From that fearful, 'shoulder-glancing' huddle in a small corner of Jerusalem ... to the entire Roman world in just a few short decades!
- Facing significant barriers - the glory of ancient Rome, threat of violent persecution, a monotheistic-'one-God'-religion versus a pantheistic-'many-gods'-world - God built His church. Against all odds.
- And yes, God used heroes like Peter and Paul - but for every one of them, there were 1000's of 'un-famous, not-named-in-Bible-or-history-books, normal' Christian people - just like you and me - that God used to reach out into 1st Century neighbourhoods via simple faith and hospitality.
- God also used the merchants - our teacher/tour-guide on our recent Israel trip called merchants "the CNN of the ancient world" - dealers in spices, textiles, figs, & dates transported their goods along Roman roads and too with them carried the Christian Story to the far reaches of the empire.
- Last week, we learned how God used "early Christians who had been scattered (and forced to leave their homes because of persecution) to preach the word wherever they went." (Acts 8:4)
- Like MP said, Q: These first believers "scattered more as missionaries than as refugees."
- And their suffering actually fuelled the spread of the gospel!
- **<Slide>** So we come to Philippians 1; I invite you to turn to pg.1826 in the blue Bibles in the seat rack in front of you or on your electronic device. Let's set it up ...
- After years of planting churches in places like Turkey, Greece, & Macedonia, Paul returned to Jerusalem where he was very nearly lynched for preaching on the Temple Mount.
- Instead he was arrested. Then, just at the right moment, Paul wisely played his 'Roman-citizen card.' Jewish leaders did not have authority to execute citizens of Rome and Governor Festus famously pronounced, "Paul, You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!" (Acts 25:12)
- And so Paul was shipped to Rome. He'd finally made it to the most important spot on earth!
- Albeit likely not by his first choice of strategy. Where Paul now finds himself. "In chains." Under house arrest. Writing a letter to the church at Philippi.

- <READ 1:12-18; 21> Prayer: "Lord, move me out of the way."

Text Outline:

1. <Slide> Verse 12, **God Had Other Plans (1:12)**

- Paul's whole life & career was consumed by one goal: get the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.
- He'd probably envisioned himself standing up to preach at the speakers' corner - the Rostrum, a 10 foot high raised platform situated here in the Roman forum, where speakers would attempt to sway public opinion among 1000's of city-dwellers bustling all around.
- Or maybe Paul dreamed of drawing on his prestigious education, his legal skills to present convincing arguments to the elite of Roman society gathered at the nearby Senate.
- But instead Paul found himself 'muzzled' in a Roman prison, a mere football's throw away from both the forum and the senate. God had other plans. As God often does.
- His Philippian brothers and sisters likely had grave concerns for their beloved Paul's well-being in jail, but he reported, 'I may be in chains, but the Gospel is most certainly not!' Surprisingly, 'What has happened to me has actually "served to advance the gospel."'
 - ILL - The word translated "advance" here in the NIV literally means "a cutting ahead" ...
 - A moving forward through obstacles; like Marshawn Lynch 'Beast-Mode' slashing, stiff-arming, driving through would-be tacklers ... on his way to the endzone.
 - "Advance" was a term used to describe the military tactic of "servants cutting a way before the army ... to further its march into enemy territory."
- Here again God snatched victory from the vicious jaws of defeat. That's what God loves to do.
- The Gospel advanced in spite of Paul's unfortunate situation. And maybe even, because of it!

2. <Slide> With **Two Amazing Results (1:13-14; 21)**

- First, the good news spread "throughout the whole palace guard" (13b).
- Likely Paul was being watched around the clock by a rotation of the emperor's own elite troops.
- While they would have provided access to visitors and writing supplies, the guards too would have monitored everything Paul wrote, did, and said.
- Paul had been given time. In close proximity with others.
- Just not with the audience he was probably hoping for.
- Though he wasn't where he wanted to be, Paul had access to the entire palace guard and through them the Christian Story became 'front page news' for "everyone else" (13b) in Rome!
- Even grizzled, hardened soldiers came to know Paul's singular life-passion: relationship with Christ, and his one life-message: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (21).
- **<Slide>** Here I'd like to 'side-track us' a bit to explore CQ#3 in our series:
 - "Aren't all religions the same and lead to the same God?"
- The 'all-roads-lead-to-Rome' argument flowing out of the post-modern rejection of any one story that could be right for all of us and the 'my-truth-is-my-truth & your-truth-is-your-truth' world we find ourselves in today. 'One mountain. Many paths.'
- The real question might be, 'is it possible for them all to be true?' Well, logic says 'no.'
- Or another question, 'is religion what we really need?'
- In my experience, religion is a human construct and always promises more than it can deliver.
- Another 'rapid-fire' question pertinent to this challenge is, 'how can we find truth?'
- Everyone of us is searching for Truth, but on our own we have only limited perspective on reality.
- In believe we need someone to describe absolute reality to us. We need a deity who gets down to our level; we need personal revelation from an infinite God ... down to us limited humans.
- However, not all religions believe a personal God exists.
- ILL - I'm no expert on world religions, but let's take Hinduism for example:
 - Its 330 million gods perform different functions, but not one of them is personal.
 - It's about 'karma' - when our good works outweigh our bad it brings us freedom & salvation.
 - That's religion: people doing stuff to please gods.
- One apologist I checked out this week said, Q: "The reality Jesus described is that no religion leads to God but that God reached us through Himself." - Apologetics Canada Video.

- This is where Christianity differs: not about what we can do, it's about surrender to what God has done, can do, and will do.
- Think for a moment about the countless deities in the ancient Roman world - a pantheon of largely uninterested, impersonal gods, and all the people scrambling to appease these gods through rituals and sacrifices at the nearly dozen temples situated in that 1st Century forum.
- Into this context - like today - came Christianity with its one God who gets involved in humanity.
- The Christian Story is different.
- In creation, through the Word, by the Holy Spirit, the revelation of God comes to the human race.
- Powerfully, graciously in Jesus, God gets down to our level. God gets messy.
- It has been said: 'there are many ways to Jesus, but only one way to God.'
- Ultimately, through faith in Jesus we find that one path to God.
- I think I'll leave it there. It's a little hazy, I know, but I encourage you to sign up for Keith & Daniel's class, "Challenges to Christianity" starting Monday, January 27th. They'll clear it all up for you!
- **<Slide>** Back to Paul's letter ... A 2nd 'amazing result' of his imprisonment was that fellow Christians had been "encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly" (14b).
- Paul didn't allow himself to succumb to his "chains" or stew away bitterly and rot in prison.
- No, he offered up his present suffering and this surprisingly sparked a 'missionary push'.
- I believe a lot of mission to family, friends, & neighbours is defined by how we react 'in the trenches' of life ... like when we suffer loss ... of employment, of relationships, when conflicts hit, when 'the bomb' drops on our lives ... when we find ourselves 'on the road marked with suffering.'
- ILL - Yes. This is strange. Counterintuitive. And if I'm really honest, I just don't like it.
 - You see, rather than expose my weaknesses, I'd love for God to only use my strengths, my expertise, my brilliant parts to sort of 'wow' people into the Kingdom.
 - Probably I would like it because I would get the glory that way.
 - This is something my late friend Steve Anderson and I batted it around quite a bit.
 - Steve had many gifts - he was a great teacher, had a heart for people, and possessed a vast knowledge of the Scriptures, but in his later days he also had some obvious weaknesses: with Parkinson's Disease, he could hardly walk, he stuck out, he was dependent on people.
 - We encouraged each other, that rather than bury our ailments or pretend they weren't there, we would instead allow God to use our glaring weaknesses too as a platform for His work.
 - And what joy we found together in this!
- Now, this message is not meant to gloss over suffering or 'silver-line' it. I know suffering to be very real. Painful. And it's certainly not good, but God can work through it.
- The BQ is: like Paul, amidst our pain, are we willing to subordinate our agenda to God's?
- You see, I believe your story - even the painful bits of it - your "chains" - hardships that just happen to you and how you respond or deal with them - can really inspire those around you and be a catalyst for the ministry of Christ through you into other peoples' lives.
- Tough, but maybe your life - like Paul's in that Roman jail - feels incredibly small right now.
- Perhaps you're home on parental leave, homeless - couch-surfing or living in your car, not in your dream job, or going through a divorce, or fighting for your life with terminal illness ...
- Sometimes it's in these difficult situations clinging to Jesus willing to share our struggles with others that God 'opens the door' for the best spiritual conversations with family, friends, & neighbours..

3. **<Slide>** To Paul, that **Christ was Preached (1:15-18)** was all that mattered.

- I loved what Pastor Mark said last week: 'none of us has the power to wreck the gospel.' We mustn't allow the fear of 'inadequate knowledge' to keep us 'on the sidelines' from sharing our faith.
- No matter the lameness of our presentation, the Gospel always go forth because it's God's - the mission belongs to Him - and the Gospel is Truth; it cannot be ruined, by questionable or even blatantly 'offside' human motives.
- And this was cause for rejoicing in Paul as his life neared its conclusion.
- This too ought also to be a source of joy for us, for the message of Jesus is all that lasts beyond this world and worth giving our entire lives to.

- **<Slide>** ILL - Which reminds me of a powerful missionary story from the last Century.
 - Sensing the call of God on his life, young American Jim Elliot moved overseas in 1952 to begin pioneer mission work among the Auca Indian people in the remote jungles of Ecuador.
 - Over a period of time, several from-a-distance contacts were made with the tribal people who appeared curious and interested in further meetings.
 - Then on January 8, 1956, Jim and 4 missionary colleagues, during their first planned face-to-face visit were brutally killed by Auca warriors - their bodies left to float downstream.
 - A line from Elliot's journal showed his absolute devotion to the Jesus and the Gospel.
 - Q: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep (his life) to gain that which he cannot lose (eternal life for the cause of Christ)."
 - Remarkably, after her husband's death, Elisabeth Elliot began working with the Aucas and eventually God used her to lead them to Christ and plant a church in that tribe!
- At great cost, Christ was preached; let us too make this our life-passion.

Application: 2 points to conclude ...

1. <Slide> Not Wanting to Offend others paralyzes many Christians from talking about their faith.

- In our Fall 2013 Survey, 13% cited this as their #1 barrier to talking with non-Christians about Jesus. Christianity is being perceived as more and more offensive in our day.
- Q: Ours "of all cultures has been most resistant to the gospel." - Ross Hastings, MGMCM, p.34.
- And it's likely only to get worse. How will we respond? Cave, or fight?
- I'm calling for something in-between.
- Never caving - or 'watering down' our message, but also not fighting - getting angry, militant, or lashing out at Christianity's detractors either; that'll never work; but representing in attitude, word, & action - embodying the very countercultural message & heart of Jesus in our world.
- What would it look like for Christians to influence, speak into, walk with people in the very real tension of issues like gender confusion & manipulation, extreme materialism & poverty, human trafficking, and environmental pillaging for the sake of 'freedom' & progress?
- I believe we need to work far more on the 'packaging' for sharing the Christian Story: highly invested and sometimes downright messy, deep relationships.
- Then people might want to hear.

2. <Slide> Finally, the life-example of Paul serves up a clarion call: **Wherever You Are, Be All There.**

- As a typical male, I'm prone to distractions that 'check me out' relationally when people are around: bury myself in an electronic device, hide in my 'man-cave', ignore, not listen, not engage with people.
- ILL - For those of us over 40, there's a song from our childhood TV-watching I think we need to come back to ... we're going to watch it right now ...
 - **<Video>** [1:44] "People in your Neighborhood" - c.1969, Sesame Street. Song Lyrics: 'Oh, who are the people in your neighborhood? In your neighborhood? In your neighborhood? Say, who are the people in your neighborhood? The people that you meet each day.'
 - Ahhhhh, good old Sesame Street ... Bob & the muppets ...
- This great old song reminds us of a key life-mission Q: "Who's around us?"
- ILL - Over the years as my memory fades I don't recall much from many sermons I've heard; or even ones I've preached, for that matter ...
 - But one still sticks with me from way back in my Bible College days in the late 1980's.
 - It was a sermon delivered by our then C&MA President, Dr Arnold Cook'.
 - **<Slide>** He challenged us to make our 'M.I.F.G.', our 'Maximum Impact for God', 'M.I.F.G.'
 - And that grabbed me. Q: "Wherever you are, be all there," he said. I still like it!
- Who has God placed in your life for you to impact?
- I believe God continues to call every Christian to live an 'invitational life'. To be 'all there.' With 'the people that you meet each day.' Wherever you are. And with whoever they are.
- With feet firmly planted. In your gym. Your boardroom. Your home. Your school. Your doctor's office. In your neighbourhood. Truly caring. Being Jesus to whoever is in your life. Today. Amen.