

MISSIONARY DREAMS, PART 3: GOD'S MISSIONARY DREAMS
Isaiah 11:6-9, Revelation 21:1-7

⁶ *The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

⁷ *The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

⁸ *The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

⁹ *They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*

–Isaiah 11:6-9, New Revised Standard Version

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

*“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;*

*⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”*

*⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”
Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.*

- Revelation 21:1-7, New Revised Standard Version

Two weeks ago I did a sermon called “Missionary Dreams,” and I said, “I’ve always wanted to be a missionary.”

And then last week I did a sermon called “YOUR Missionary Dreams,” and I said, “You’ve always wanted to be a missionary.”

And now this week I'm going to say this:

God IS a missionary!

In fact, God is THE missionary—the original missionary. And all Christian mission flows from the missionary dreams of God!

It starts in Genesis chapter 3 when the first man and the first woman eat the forbidden fruit. And they have the first-ever wardrobe malfunction, and they look at each other and say, “Oh my goodness, we're naked!”

And so they run through the garden and hide from God.

And what does God do? Does he shake his head and say, “Good riddance?” NO! What does God do? He goes looking for his lost children!

And ever since then, God has been on a mission. It's a mission of healing and hope ... a mission of life and love ... a mission of reconciliation and restoration. Theologians call this the

Missio Dei: The Mission of God

I've always wanted to be a missionary. You've always wanted to be a missionary. And God is THE missionary.

And just like you, and just like me, God has “Missionary Dreams.”

LET'S PRAY: Lord, open our eyes to see your vision of the future. Open our hearts and let us catch your dream. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

It was 50 years ago this month that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. His most famous speech was given on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington when he said, “I have a dream.”

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”

“I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

"I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

"I have a dream today.

"I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

Did you know that GOD has a dream? Just like all of us, GOD DREAMS of a better future.

God has a dream—that one day *"...the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"* (Isaiah 11:9b).

And in that day, there will be no more fighting, no more violence, no more war, no more strife: *"They will neither hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain"* (Isaiah 11:9a).

God has a dream—that one day, natural enemies will live together in peace:

Wolves with lambs;
Lions with calves;
Poisonous snakes with little children.

God has a dream—that one day all things will be made new:

Death will be no more;
Mourning, crying and pain will be no more;
And the tears in our eyes will be wiped away by the hand of God.

God has a dream:

It's a dream of joy
It's a dream of peace
It's a dream of relationships and community
It's a dream of prosperity and health:
No more poverty
No more hunger
No more back pain
No more hip pain
No more heart attacks
No more cancer
No more death.

God says, “*See, I am making all things new*” (Revelation 7:5).

GOD HAS A DREAM. And I want you right now, to think of the biggest HURT you have ever experienced. It might be physical. It might be emotional. It might be both. Think about a time when you were really HURT.

NOW: God’s dream is *not* to take that hurt away. Yes, you heard that right: God’s dream is *not* to take our hurts away.

God wants to do something better.

God wants to **redeem** our hurts – not just to erase them, but to *transform* them.

Did you ever notice that even *after* the Resurrection, Jesus still has scars? That’s how Thomas knew who he was. He put his finger in the nail wounds. He put his hands in his side where the spear went in.

The beautiful hymn that was sung at Lorie’s and my wedding says,

*Hail Him, the Lord of Love; behold his hands and side
Those wounds **yet visible above**, in beauty **glorified***

That’s what God wants to do with your hurts and scars—not erase them, but redeem them.

God’s dream is to turn TRAGEDY into TRIUMPH!

And you know, that’s kind of what the story of the Bible is all about:

- The tragedy of sin becomes the triumph of salvation.
- The tragedy of crucifixion becomes the triumph of resurrection.
- The tragedy of death becomes the triumph of new life.
- The tragedy of suffering becomes the triumph of spiritual transformation.
- The tragedy of the Fall in Genesis 3 becomes the triumph of New Creation in Revelation 21.

And when we get there, and God wipes the tears from our eyes, we’re going to realize that that’s worth so much more than if we’d never shed tears at all!

God’s dream is that one day you and I will look back on everything we’ve been through and say, “Praise God – it’s all been worth it.”

God has a dream—that one day the last will be first; the poor will be rich; the weak will be strong; the blind will see; the deaf will hear; and the crippled will leap for joy.

God has a dream—that one day people of every nation, race, tribe and tongue will stand together before the throne worshipping with one voice. Division and enmity will be swallowed up in unity.

God has a dream. And here's the thing – GOD'S DREAM WILL COME TRUE.

The only question is will you be in on it?

One time I was in Chicago with a bunch of Methodist preachers for a training event. One evening we decided to take the famous Chicago Elevated Train (L) down to the South Side and catch a White Sox game. (The Cubbies weren't in town, or we'd have spent the evening within the "Friendly Confines" of Wrigley Field!)

We went to the L station and we bought our tickets, and started through the turnstile. And at that point I saw the train coming and I said, "Come on, guys, we can just make it!" And I took off and ran up the steps, and I was just about to get on the train—and I turned around and looked, and the other guys were way, way back, clomping up the steps.

I said, "Come on, guys, hurry up!" And they said, "Hold the train!"

And I said, "Guys, there's no 'hold the train' – this is Chicago – this train's going whether we're on it or not!"

And at that moment, the doors closed and the train was gone.

And here's the thing: *The train of God's Dream is going whether you get on it or not!*

So are you on it?

I need to say two things about getting on the train of God's dream. First: If you're going to get on the train, you need a ticket. The train of God's dream is headed toward a New Creation where those who belong to God will live together forever in his presence. But to get on that train, you need a ticket.

Now some of you are thinking, "No problem. I've got the ticket: *I was baptized.*" But that's not the ticket.

Others of you might be thinking, "I've got the ticket: *I've attended church my whole life!* I've gone to Sunday school, I've served on committees, I've kept the nursery ... surely I've got the ticket." Well, I'm sorry—but that's not the ticket.

Others of you might be thinking, "Well, I'm sure I've got the ticket—because *I'm a good person.* I've always been a good person. I'm always nice, and kind, and fair. I've never broken the law. Well, except maybe that time I cheated on my taxes. But that was just

that one time. Otherwise, I'm a law-abiding citizen. Except for I did get caught speeding a few times. But other than that, I'm a good person."

But that's not the ticket, either. Because against the standard of God's holiness, you and I are not nearly as good as we think we are.

There's only one way to get a ticket to get on the train of God's dream. **You have to ask for it.** You have to humble yourself and admit that all your attempts to purchase a ticket have fallen short. "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). You're not going to earn your way onto this train. But the Good News is that Jesus has already bought you a ticket. He paid for it when he died on the cross. What you have to do now is ask to get on the train—not because of your goodness, but because of God's grace.

So first, to get on the train, you need a ticket. And here's the second thing: Once you're on the train, you need to get to work.

On the train of God's dream, God has work for the passengers to do. Yes, it's 100% God's train. God is the engineer. God supplies the power. God makes the train go. But God calls us to *participate with him* in making his dreams come true.

So what's your job on the train of God's dream? Have you found it? Are you doing it?

Maybe your job is to tutor at-risk students at Kids First on Thursday nights. Maybe your job is to feed the hungry at Bethany Café. Maybe your job is to teach children's Sunday school, or help lead Kidspace or Vacation Bible School. Maybe your job is to cook in the kitchen or sing in the choir. Maybe your job is to lead a Disciple Bible Study.

Maybe your job is to fight human trafficking. Maybe your job is to do something about extreme poverty—to help the millions of people living on less than \$2 a day—including many right here in the United States. Maybe your job is to blow the whistle on workplace harassment.

Maybe your job is the most important job in the church—to spend time on your knees battling the forces of evil through prayer.

There's no one in this room who doesn't have a job on the train of God's dream. No matter your age, your abilities, your physical health—there is a job you can do.

Have you found it? Are you doing it?

LET'S BOW OUR HEADS:

To get on the train of God's dream, you need to **Admit** your sin, **Believe** in what Jesus did for you, and **Commit** your life to Christ. **Admit, Believe, Commit.** If you've never

done that in a real and personal way, I want to give you a moment to do it now, in your own heart, in your own words.

[Silence]

And now, consider this: Have you found your job on God's train? And are you doing it? If not, talk to God now, and ask him to show you what he wants you to do, and give you the power to do it.

[Silence]

God, thank you that the world we see around us, with all its pain and sorrow, sin and suffering, is not always going to be that way. Thank you that you have a dream. Thank you for allowing us to be part of that dream. In Jesus' Name. Amen.