

Mission (Un)expected, Mission (Im)possible

11th Sun. after Pent. – 08/20/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 66:18-23 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 18, Yahweh says, “...the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see My glory...”.

v. 23, “From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, declares [Yahweh].”

Introduction

- ⊗ I really enjoy spy movies, ever since I was young and we watched the original *Mission: Impossible* show on TV as a family.
 - ➔ Now there is a series of six *Mission: Impossible* movies so far with two more already in the works, starring Tom Cruise as a CIA spy, named Ethan Hunt. In each of the movies, Hunt embarks on a mission that is so difficult that it seems virtually impossible to carry out. But of course, Hunt as the hero always finds a way to accomplish the impossible.
 - ➔ In one of the movies – the third one I believe, Hunt is actually betrayed by his own comrades so that he not only sets out on a seemingly *impossible* mission but also a completely *unexpected* one where he must work to clear his own name.
- ⊗ Our Bible text for today in Isaiah 66, is not about spies or the CIA, but it is about a mission that seems, at first glance, completely unexpected and virtually impossible.

I. Unexpected – Gathering all nations to save them

- ⊗ On the surface it seems rather unexpected that Yahweh, the God of Israel, would set out to gather the nations to Himself and even more save them as He says in verse 18.
 - ➔ After all, it's the Israelites who were Yahweh's chosen people; His “treasured possession”. It's at the Exodus from Egypt that He gathered them so that they would be set apart from the nations.
 - ➔ When Israel entered into The Promised Land, the nations living there were slaughtered and scattered, not gathered, because they believed in and followed other gods; false gods. They were the foreigners and outsiders, undeserving of Yahweh's care and attention.
 - ➔ In the verse before our text God talks of how their practices made them an “abomination” (66:17) before His eyes.
- ⊗ Well, my dear friends guess what – you and I; we are “the nations”. We are the outsiders; the unclean; the ones unworthy of Yahweh's attention. Why? because of our sin and unfaithfulness; because we let our cravings lead us into practices that show us to be worshipping ourselves and the things and the people of this world.

II. Unexpected – using the nations in His mission

- ⊗ So, at first glance, it seems even more unexpected that Yahweh would use those people, from those very nations to carry out His mission to save all the nations.
 - ➔ The nations around His people were enemies; enemies of both Yahweh and His people. And yet only a few scant years after Yahweh speaks these words, guess what, it's the terrible Assyrian army that descends and destroys over half of Israel!

→ And about a hundred years later, the Babylonians come from the north and destroy the other half of Israel; carrying many of God's Chosen People into exile! Yahweh used these enemies to bring His punishment; His discipline to a chosen people who had turned away from Him into unbelief.

✘ According to Paul, in Romans, chapter 5 you and I were enemies of God in the evil ways of our sin. But then he says this amazing truth in Romans 5:10, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life".

→ To our earthly way of thinking, it seems preposterous, even scandalous, that Yahweh would use those who were His enemies to carry out His saving mission! That kind of mission seems not only unexpected, but even impossible.

✘ But you know folks, for us to think that way is to sell our God short, because His ways are not our ways. For with Yahweh, the unexpected becomes expected and the impossible becomes possible, as Jesus says in Matthew 19:26, "With God all things are possible."

III. Expected – saving & gathering nations to Himself

✘ So perhaps we need to take a second look at things from God's perspective instead of our own. For then we see that it was very much expected that Yahweh would save the nations and gather them to Himself.

→ It has always been a part of His heart's desire to save His entire creation and all people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. Remember, in the beginning, as soon as Adam and Eve rebelled against Him, Yahweh is the One who sought them out; the One who promised them a Savior who would defeat Satan for the nations (Gen. 3:9, 15).

→ And at the opposite end of Scripture, in Revelation 7:9, the apostle John sees "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" in worship.

✘ God accomplished all of this by sending Jesus as our Savior, so that whoever believes in Him, regardless of his/her racial, ethnic, linguistic, or social back-ground, might have eternal life (Jn. 3:16).

→ Yes, Jesus is the "sign" that verse 19 says God will set in place to gather all the nations. In John 12:32 Jesus speaks of going to the cross and He says, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself".

→ It is through faith in the forgiveness that Jesus' death and resurrection gives to us that we are no longer filthy. Now we are clean; no longer God's enemies, but now His own children.

IV. Expected – Using the nations to carry out His mission

✘ It's through this second look at things, from God's perspective, that we see it is also very much expected that Yahweh would actually use the nations to carry out His mission of saving all the nations.

→ He didn't have to do it that way. He could have very easily chosen to intervene directly, or He could have simply used angels as His missionaries. But instead He chose to work through people.

→ In the Old Testament, you could say that Yahweh graciously chose Israel to be His missionaries, so that through them He might save the whole world (Ex. 19:5–6), even though they often forgot that this was their purpose.

→ He chose Abraham, not to be a blessing for Abraham and his own family – a point which the Israelites often forgot – but to be a blessing for “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3), as an ancestor of Jesus.

→ You see, Israel was always meant to be Yahweh’s light for the nations to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth (Is 49:6).

✘ So, we should not be surprised, when Isaiah tells us that Yahweh gathers the nations to Himself and then sends them out to be His missionaries; to declare His glory to the nations (v. 19).

→ And don’t forget dear Christians, you and I; we are those nations!

V. Expect it – making His mission possible through us

✘ So there is no excuse when you look at things the way that Scripture tells us God is looking at things. In fact friends, I’m just going to say it bluntly for all of us to hear, expect it! Expect that Yahweh is going to use you and me for this mission that He makes possible.

→ He is Yahweh after all; the almighty God; the Creator of all and the Redeemer of all. So, yes, He is the only One who gathers us to Himself for salvation and the only One who now sends us out to the nations to fulfill His mission.

→ What a blessing! What a privilege it is to be chosen by God as His “chosen race”; His “royal priesthood”; His “holy nation”; His “people for His own possession...” as 1 Peter 2:9 says, so “that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light!” Why wouldn’t we want to be a part of that glorious mission work?

→ Well, we are! You and I have been chosen and have been made special, to help bring others in, whom God has chosen to make special as well.

✘ To use a couple of fun science terms that we all learned back in school but might struggle now to remember, God’s mission is always both centripetal and centrifugal.

→ It is centripetal (that is pulled inward) as God gathers us into His Church and family by grace and strengthens us through His Word and Sacrament gifts.

→ And it is centrifugal (that is pulled outward) as God sends us out into the world where He intends for us to declare His glory to all the nations.

✘ It’s true, not everyone is called to serve as pastors or sent as called missionaries to serve overseas or even here in North America. But every one of us; let me repeat it – every one of us has been granted the joyful privilege of being witnesses wherever it is that God has placed us in life, in our family, to our friends and co-workers and around our community.

Conclusion

✘ Unlike Ethan Hunt’s missions in the movies, God’s mission – our mission – is neither unexpected nor impossible. So His mission should not be surprising at all, because it reflects His desire from the very beginning of Creation; to have all people with Him.

→ Neither is it impossible. In fact, God’s mission is very much possible because it is God’s mission. In fact, its successful accomplishment is already guaranteed, because Jesus Christ accomplished the mission through His death and resurrection.

→ And now He continues to carry out the same mission through you and through me.

✘ Graciously gathered; graciously sent. That’s what it means to be a child of God; a Christian! What a joyful privilege we have to be His missionaries to the world around us every day! Amen.