

Update from China Missionaries

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- [0 : 00] I want to invite all of our Chinese missionaries. If you're a missionary to China, would you just come up here right quick? And if your wife wants to come, you want to bring her, you can bring her. If she don't, that's fine too. And I just want to let them say a word to you.
- Did that move, did that video touch you? If it did say amen. And there's a great need in China. And I thought as we watched it, I didn't see Mark Tolson. And Mark paid a price to get the gospel.
- And a lot of those young people you saw, you heard his name. Mark did a work over there. And then he's had to be moved and he's in Taiwan.
- I think he's overcoming it, but it broke his heart. It's probably as low as he's been since I've known him. And he has recovered. He wrote me one day, he said, I'm back.
- But it broke his heart to be out of China. And so tonight, I want to have a special word of prayer for him and Natasha and their ministry, just because I think we ought to remember them. And then these guys are going to come. And you just, whatever you, do you want to say something?
- [1 : 02] I mean, if I saw that video and it's about my ministry, I'd want to say something. Y'all want to say anything? You don't want to say nothing? You do? Okay. I thought you did. I have already finished my Sunday night message because it was tonight's message.
- I am going on vacation the rest of the week. All right. Let's have a word of prayer for the Tolsons. Father, I love you. You are such an awesome God. And Lord, I just thank you because of who you are and what you do.
- Thank you for how you sent Jake Talby to China. And you used Jake. You let people get saved and lives get changed. Mark went over there and Mark prepared.
- And Daniel Fleming was over there before Jake. And I knew him. And then you sent Mark. And God, you used Mark. And he went to Dalian. And God, you let him see people saved. Just a few days ago when none of our missionaries were in the country of China, Mark said there's still preachers there.
- Because some Chinese preachers got saved. And they were still there preaching when all of our missionaries happened to be out of the country. I pray you bless Mark and Natasha having to start over. I pray you bless John Walls who also got kicked out of China.
- [2 : 14] I pray you do a work in John and Alicia's life. Thank you that you have let John see six young men prepare for the ministry. What a blessing. I pray you continue to bless John and Alicia. I pray God you bless Mark and Natasha.
- I pray you let them see a lot of people saved and lives changed. I pray to your God that you would let them get this building they're looking at, get the church started, and see lives changed there.
- I pray to your God that you would bless them and use them. And I'll give you praise for that. And then God, I'd like to pray for Ben and Crystal. They're in China. But they are basically on house arrest.
- And they had a vacation planned. I don't know how this is going to affect that. I just pray that you'd encourage them and let them know their church loves them and is thinking about them and praying for them.

And I pray God that as soon as this thing is lifted, his 14 days are over, he can get back to witnessing and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. We love you. We thank you that you have raised up your workers to go into your harvest to do your work, to bring you glory.

[3 : 18] And we'll give you praise for all of it. In Jesus' precious name, amen. Y'all go in any order you want. You've got 19 minutes. Don't go past it. You can go first. I just want to say a couple things.

I remember reading missionary biographies about missionaries that had been in China and just thinking when I was at the training center, I'm like, these stories are so crazy and so exciting.

I'm like, there's no way that would still happen today. It's different today. It's more peaceful and things don't happen like that. And obviously I was wrong. Our first two years have been nothing but excitement with getting chased by the police and then now having the coronavirus there in China.

And some days I look at it and some days it's hard and some days you think, you know, is this worth it? Is it something that I should be doing? I mean, so many things are happening. So many things are different.

But I want to tell you this. The joy that you get to experience when you're talking to somebody, talking to them in Chinese and they've never heard the gospel. You tell them about a savior that died for them.

[4 : 16] And you tell them truth that you know is true from God's word. That there is a way they can be saved. There is a way they can reconcile to God and you hear them and they've never heard that before. And you get the chance to take it to them.

You know, it's worth it. And I'm nobody but a messenger. And Jesus, he uses people that are simply leaning on him that will take the message to China. So I watched the video. It's probably my fourth time watching it.

So I've watched it several times. But every time I watch it, it stirs my heart because I see that's where we were living. That's where we were working. And the people there, they're real people. They're real people just like you.

And there's nothing different about them. I mean, if you really think about it, it's just a different language. It's just a different culture. But it's not that different. And they are many people seeking the truth. And they don't have it.

They don't know it. But if we'll just send messengers, if we'll just send preachers to go take the gospel to them, God has done and is continuing to do a work. And so I'm excited to see what God is going to do in the days to come.

[5 : 09] Well, you know, I remember I had been in China for just around, I guess, three and a half, maybe four years.

And at the time, Annie Grace and I, we were engaged to be married. We were part of this church there. And they had a Saturday night Bible study for the 20-somethings there.

And after attending that Bible study for some time, there was this young man who started to come. His name was Lean. And Lean, he came in a wheelchair.

And someone would actually have to go to his house and push him along the sidewalk, however many blocks it was, to just get him to church or get him to this Bible study. And where we had this Bible study, there were some steps that kind of led up there.

And so I remember on many occasions actually having to help the one who would bring him to church pick up his wheelchair and put it there into the Bible study room there for us to get started. And his story was that he was involved in some gang activity and what have you for quite some time.

[6 : 15] I think there were some drugs involved as well. And one day there was kind of some sort of fight or something that happened. And he was basically pushed out of a second or third floor window, fell out, and was paralyzed from the waist down.

And because of being in a smaller city in China with perhaps somewhat subpar medical care and what have you, he was in and out of the hospital quite frequently, even months after that incident.

But through it all, actually I believe it was a believing nurse or maybe a doctor that led him to the Lord. And he got saved. And once he got out of the hospital, he started coming to church and he started coming to this Bible study as well. Well, there was a time he had been coming for a few months and something happened.

I don't know if there was some sort of complication with his condition, but he had to go back to the hospital for a while. And he was heartbroken that he couldn't be around the teaching of God's word. He was heartbroken that he couldn't be around God's people there at church.

And he talked to one of the pastors and he asked if maybe somehow he could get the teaching that was going on there at the church and at the Bible study. And so an arrangement was made where different groups from the Bible study would go out to the hospital each week and basically re-teach what we had learned at the Bible study.

[7 : 26] And so I'll never forget, they kind of tapped me on the shoulder one day. They wanted myself and Annie Grace and there were two others who all went down to this hospital. It's kind of late at night and we're looking for him in his hospital bed to teach the Bible lesson.

And we were going to re-teach the parable of the four soils there. And we get into the hospital and you have to understand this hospital there in China, there just wasn't enough room. And so he was actually out in a bed in the middle of the hallway.

And, you know, it's about seven, eight o'clock at night. But here I come. I don't exactly look Chinese. Maybe you've noticed. And got Annie Grace and two others with me. And we're going to there in the hallway of this hospital teach this Bible lesson to him.

And I started getting kind of nervous, but I thought, well, I mean, let's just go with it. So we started teaching. And next thing you know, behind us are coming all of these people from, you know, they're down tending to their relatives a little bit further down the hall.

They're maybe back in a room over here tending to some other people. And they're all coming out and they're congregating around trying to figure out why this big white man is talking about this Jesus guy that they've never really heard of before.

[8 : 29] And next thing I know, I'm turning around and Annie Grace and the other two, they are just sharing the gospel with all of these people there behind me as I'm teaching them all that we had learned a few days before at the Bible study.

But what was so amazing was. They never heard. I know many of you have heard me tell the story of another young man that I encountered a few years before that in China who looked at me and just said, what is Jesus?

He never heard of Jesus, didn't realize Jesus was even a name. And the people there were the same. Who is he talking about? Who is this Jesus that he keeps talking about? So many people know nothing about the Lord.

They don't know. And all they need is someone like Mark Tolson who's going to surrender and say, you know what? I'm going to go over there and I'm going to tell him.

I'm going to take this book. I'm going to take God's word. I'm going to pack up my life here on this side of the world. I'm going to move to the other side of the world. And when I get there, I'm going to learn the language. I'm going to do all the work required.

[9 : 27] And I'm going to go out and open this book. And in their hearing, say, you know what? This is what God has to say. He created you. He loves you. He died for you. And he commended his love to you.

And that while you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you. They need that. They need someone surrendered over to the Lord that's going to go over there and say, you know what? I'll tell you about your creator.

Let me tell you about your God. And these three men that we see here in the video, Charles, LeBron, and Mark, Chinese Mark, not to be confused with American Mark.

But the three of them, they're in ministry today or have stayed in ministry until today because of Mark Tolson and his encouragement and his investment there in their lives.

And friends, would there be one here who, like Mark Tolson, would say, you know what? I'd go to China. You know, sure, America is great and all, but I mean, if there's people that don't know about him, there's people that don't know about Jesus.

[10 : 31] I mean, after all, Jesus is the name, is it not? There's salvation in Thunhouse. There's no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, whereby they must be saved. And they're looking to Buddha.

You saw there was that one clip there. I don't know if you caught it, but if you think about it, it's tear jerking. I mean, you had a family of three, a father, a mother, and there in the middle, their son. And they were basically taking him by the hand to a Buddhist temple, showing him this large golden Buddha statue and saying, pray to him.

Worship him. He'll solve your problems. He'll pick up your grades at school. He'll help you one day find a wife. He'll do all of those things.

And they're looking to Buddha, and they're looking to money, and they're looking to atheism, and they're looking to all education and all of these things for salvation. But in Isaiah 45, God is so clear. He says, look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth.

Look unto Jesus. Look unto him. And wouldn't you want to go to China and tell them, look unto Jesus. Look to him. There is no salvation in Buddha.

[11 : 37] There is no salvation in your education. There is no salvation in the Communist Party or any of these other things that you think are going to help you in your life. You need Jesus.

And let me tell you about him. Well, this might sound a little bit strange, but when I was in China, I was thinking about us coming back to America, and I was fearful.

I was looking at the news and thinking about Atlanta. I mean, there's a lot of crime in that city. And I was like, maybe we shouldn't go. You know, it's just these fears were getting in my head. And now I'm in America, and I'm looking at China thinking, oh, boy.

Maybe I better stay here. And I think there's probably more logic with being here, being fearful there. But, you know, I mean, there's some scary things to think about.

And, you know, for a while I was thinking to have fear, to have the feeling of fear is kind of a shameful thing. But, you know, I don't think that's true. You know, Jesus said to count the cost.

[12 : 37] And to count the cost, you have to think about what you might face. And so, but, you know, Ken, he said it. When the joy of doing God's work goes above the fear, and that's where it's at.

And so, you know, I was thinking that when God called the people out of Egypt, I mean, think about what they had the water in front of them. They got the enemy behind them. I mean, that was pretty fearful, right? And they didn't have to solve the problem before them or behind them.

They just had to walk and go. And that's what we got to do. And, you know, how can we do anything in China? Well, we don't do anything. God does it. He builds his church. I mean, if we take the word and we preach the word and we share the gospel, the word of God, God's going to do something.

And so we just have to get up and go. That's it. That's all we got to do. Just start walking. And so I'm so thankful for the team that we have because I was there by myself for a long time, and I didn't do much.

But when you're with people who are walking in the same direction, and there's strength in numbers. And God has the church for a reason. And so I'm just so thankful for all these, this whole team, whole church, actually.

[13 : 43] Ken, and what didn't you say that you wanted to say? Because I know you're sitting over thinking, I didn't say what I want to say. So you got another two minutes. I really said what I wanted to say.

But give us an update on the coronavirus. I just want to say this. You know, this is God's work. And something in China, something here that we all struggle with is we get distracted.

We get distracted by just the things of this world, just the normal cares, the normal needs, whether it's just our taking care of ourselves, taking care of our finances, taking care of our health. We get, you know, that weighs on our mind.

And obviously it does. It's things we need. But Jesus tells us to seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

And I think in my life, as I think about China, as I think about the need, many times I let the things going on in my life, the things going on in this world keep me from having that burden more.

[14 : 45] Keep me from thinking about it more. Keep me from caring about other people more. And so I want to encourage you, in China, there's a great need. And you might see the video tonight, you might be thinking, well, we ought to, you know, pray for somebody to go, or maybe I ought to be the one to surrender to go.

But if you're not careful, tomorrow will come, and you'll have all these cares, and you'll just forget about that. And so I want to encourage you, let's keep God's work on the forefront. I love this church because we're always talking about taking the gospel to the world and completing the mission that Christ has given us.

But let's not get distracted, and let's remember that there's a world around us all over the world where people need to hear the gospel. And let's keep that burden in our hearts, keep seeing the need, keep thinking about it, and keep praying for laborers and surrendering our lives to go take the gospel to people around this world that need the good news.

Y'all can have a seat if you'd like. So I would like to ask you to pray. I don't know that you understand, so I'm going to kind of bring you up to speed on what these guys are doing.

When the law came after the work there in Dalian, and Cannon came running out of the country and came over, if you recall, Mark has now left the country.

[15 : 56] And so before, there was this little nest of Americans that could all lean on each other. Mark was like the big daddy, and he could say, I've been here, and I know the language, and I'll help you. Now, Ed is by himself.

I don't know if you have any idea what that's like. He is by himself in a city all alone. Ben and Crystal are by themselves. Cannon and Nancy are by themselves. No other missionaries, no other Christians except people they lead to Christ or meet that God brings across their path.

They're by themselves. I asked Cannon today, I said, how are you staying focused? How are you getting up every morning? Continuing to do the work? How are you? Because there's no motivator.

There's no boss there. And I would just like to remind you, we need to pray.