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## Why the Nations?

This is a question often asked today: *“Why put such a focus on the nations ... we have such great need on our very own door-step?”*

This is a good question ... sort of. “Sort of” because there are sadly many who ask this question who have no commitment to the need on our door-step. Too many simply snore on the sidelines, throwing stones, whether we reach the nations out-there or help the poor right-here. Others criticise our focus on the nations by asking, “Why don’t we just give our money and put our energies into the poor?” Sound familiar? Yes, Judas coined those words (John 12:5), and as you know, he was not one of the better disciples.

But this is also a good question. There are those who ask “Why the Nations?” who have a sincere heart for the need on our own door-step and need us to answer their genuine concern that a focus on the “nations-out-there” may steal away from people’s initiative to be responsible in the “here-and-now”. There is truth in this concern. It is sometimes a lot easier to randomly pray for a missionary out on the “frontlines” while we live in apathetic comfort, blind to the hurting world all around us.

Again, we ask the question:

### Why the Nations?

There are two main reasons.

#### (1) *The nations are on God’s heart.*

You cannot read the Bible and miss this! The word “nations” is the most used word in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Of course, “nation” (Greek: *ethneos*) refers to *ethnic, cultural groups* not countries with geopolitical boundaries. It is God’s desire that we, as His people, nurture a “Here and There” heart; a commitment to those who need Him in the “here-and-now” and a commitment to those who need Him in the “nations-out-there”.

When Jesus promised His fledgling church the outpouring of the Spirit He made absolutely clear that at the very core of our new life we were to be a “Here and There” people. **“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). The phraseology Jesus used here does *not* imply a *consecutive* approach. He did *not* mean that they were to first target Jerusalem exclusively and to then, only once that was achieved, focus on Samaria. If they followed this plan of action they would never have left Jerusalem!

Jesus' words imply a *simultaneous* approach. The early church were to target Jerusalem – their “Here” – while simultaneously reaching out to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth – their “There”. This DNA deposited into their hearts through the indwelling Spirit was the catalyst for their explosive power.

(2) *Plugging into God's heart for the nations safeguards us from the chronic self-absorption we are so prone to.*

In the same way that Jerusalem, with its cultural (*ethneos*) bias, placed blinders on the early church and their understanding of the Lord's global commission, so the local city we live in, specifically our “part of town,” can easily do the same to us. The inherited, cultural bias of an individual, or church, remains the biggest obstacle to the Lord's global mandate.

It is fascinating that Peter needed to be in Joppa, nearly one hundred kilometres from Jerusalem (a full days journey), to finally see God's heart for the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-48). He had been deaf to Jesus' clear exhortations (Acts 1:8) and blind to Jesus' clear example of the Father's heart for the Gentile people (Matthew 8:5-13; 28-33). As long as he was in Jerusalem – even in the intensity of the glorious flood of the Spirit's deluge – the blinkers remained. Only when separated from his own “cultural zone,” the Spirit ripped the blinds from his eyes and the bias from his mind. His first words to Cornelius' household were: **“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality...”** (v. 34). Finally, the penny dropped!

It is absolutely vital that we connect to God's heart for the globe by embracing our call to the nations. While it certainly must include *crossing our streets* to minister to (and learn from) cultural groupings different from ours; we should also seek to *cross the seas* so that, at the very least, we allow God to enlarge our hearts for the ends of the earth. This is crucial for our spiritual life and health; without which we are destined to be enslaved by our own self-absorption. Unless we have **“Go into all the world”** (Mark 16:15) in our DNA, we will stagnate and petrify in the dead-end quest of 1,000 trivial pursuits!

To the question:

**Why the Nations?**

...we simply respond...

*The nations are on God's heart and therefore should be on ours. This is not to say that we are to neglect the need on our door-step; but the truth is, when we nurture a “Here and There” heart we are actually enlarged to connect more deeply to the here-and-now.*