SO YOU WANT TO BE A MISSIONARY: WHAT THESE DAYS?

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There was a time when missionaries were respected and looked up to by wider society - that isnâ€™t the case today. There are some Christians who find the idea of missionaries to be rather strange while many people outside of the church are actively hostile to any idea of mission work. If you want affirmation, encouragement and a well respected career path, then perhaps you are looking in the wrong place. If you want to follow God and donâ€™t mind being seen as a counter-cultural anachronism, you may well fit right in!
Category: Observations

I grew up in the North of England and my dad and all of his male relatives were coal miners. They were part of a noble historic tradition, with a culture and vocabulary all of their own. Coal mining was difficult and sometimes dangerous, and miners were respected members of the community. These days, of course, the pits have all closed and that long tradition of mining has all but vanished. There seems to be no place miners in modern Britain.

There are those who argue that the same thing should go for missionaries. They had their place in history, but times have changed and we donâ€™t need them anymore. There is no point in saying that you want to be a missionary these days; the world has moved on.

I reckon that there are two main reasons why we might consider that the days of sending missionaries are over.

- **The changes in the world church.** The church in Africa, Asia and Latin America has grown enormously over the last fifty years or so, while it has declined in much of the West. Places which once were considered to be â€˜mission fieldsâ€™ now often have more Christians per head of population than the â€˜sending countriesâ€™.
- **Who are we to tell others what to believe?** One of the big changes in society over the past few years is that we have become resistant to the idea of people imposing their ideas on others. Itâ€™s fine for you to have strong beliefs, but you should keep them to yourself. This is especially important when it comes to people from other places and other cultures; we have no right to push a Western religion on people who have their own values and traditions.

We need to take these sorts of views seriously, and they have important lessons for us. However, I still think that we need to keep on sending out missionaries.

- **Missionaries Are Good For The West**: there is a spiritual principle that the more you give away in the Lordâ€™s service, the more you have. Churches which use their resources to send or support missionaries tend to find that God blesses them in all sorts of unexpected ways. Missionaries who experience some of the amazing things that God is doing around the world are able to encourage churches back at home who may be finding things tougher. They also gain experience of ministering in different situations which can be very useful as churches struggle with the changing culture of the West. Itâ€™s also true that churches which send missionaries are also more likely to be open to receive help from missionaries coming from other parts of the world.
- **There Is Still Work To Be Done**: while it is true that the church has grown amazingly over the last few decades, there are still literally billions of people who have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ and where there is no ongoing Christian witness. One of the problems of our age is that the majority of Christian workers are actually serving other Christians, not taking the message out to where it has not been heard before.
- **Jesus Commands Havenâ€™t Been Cancelled**: this is the most important reason we should

still be sending out missionaries! Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples all around the world. We are sent out in his authority and empowered by his Spirit to tell people about him and to establish communities of believers right across the planet. Until Jesus tells us to stop doing this, we have to keep going.

Implications for You

- **There is still a place for you** if God is calling you into mission work. Things have changed and mission work has changed along with it, but Christâ€™s call to his church still stands and there is still work to be done.
- **Where are you going?** If you are considering getting involved in mission work, then you need to think about where you are planning to go. The biggest needs for missionaries is where there are , at best, very few Christians. The mega-cities of Asia are not very glamorous and you canâ€™t post photos evangelistic meetings in the Gulf States on Facebook, but these are the places where missionaries are needed.
- **Where Is Your Confidence?** There was a time when missionaries were respected and looked up to by wider society - that isnâ€™t the case today. There are some Christians who find the idea of missionaries to be rather strange while many people outside of the church are actively hostile to any idea of mission work. If you want affirmation, encouragement and a well respected career path, then perhaps you are looking in the wrong place. If you want to follow God and donâ€™t mind being seen as a counter-cultural anachronism, you may well fit right in!