

Current State of World Missions | Carlos Calderon

SPEAKER	Carlos Calderon
DATE	Sunday, January 8, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 1; Matthew 28; Acts 11; Acts 13
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:17:26 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God is building his church in the hardest places on earth through people with no seminary degree, no budget, no five-year plan and no safety. That is not an accident or a workaround — it is the method 1 Corinthians 1 said God would use, so that no one boasts except in the Lord.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Ninety percent of the people who have never heard the gospel live inside the 10/40 window — and so do ninety percent of the world's refugees, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. The need is not evenly spread.
- ◆ In 1900, ninety-two percent of Christians lived in the global north. By 2020, seventy-seven percent lived in the south. That is not decline; it is the answer to the prayers of a previous generation.
- ◆ By 2020, sixty-three percent of the world's missionaries were sent from non-Western nations. The receivers have become the senders.
- ◆ Western missionary work has drifted from evangelism and discipleship toward relief and development. Carlos called that good work — and insufficient. Community development without the gospel produced men who could now afford a second wife.
- ◆ Among the Berbers of North Africa there were ten known Christians in 1978. Today the estimates run from two hundred thousand to two million.

- ◆ Degrees, savings and strategy are not what advance the kingdom. Carlos put his own family's stack of diplomas on the screen and then asked whether any of it was what God uses.
- ◆ The New Year resolution he asked for was not a new commitment but a new resolution in the photographic sense — a sharper picture of who is actually in charge.

► 1:17:26

Carlos Calderon came back to a room he used to preach in. He and his wife came to Austin from El Salvador as international students, raised their children at Hope Chapel, and were commissioned from this platform for Turkey. He is now a senior leader with Partners International, and he came with three things: a picture of the global church, two stories from the field, and a conclusion drawn from 1 Corinthians 1.

The family photo, and the question under it

► 1:20:24

He opened with slides of his ten children — “we practice the one boy policy,” nine girls and one boy — and then their degrees. Fifteen bachelor's degrees between them, doctorates, master's degrees, medical doctors, engineers, a professor at LeTourneau, a daughter now working with churches in Turkey. Then he asked the question the slides were built to set up: is that what it takes to advance God's kingdom?

The answer was no, and he reached for an old story to say it. Thomas Aquinas watches a pope count out a great sum of money. “The church can no longer say *silver and gold have I none*,” the pope says. “True, Holy Father,” Thomas replies — “neither can she now say *rise up and walk*.” Carlos was careful about the story's provenance and unconcerned about it, because the point stands either way.

► 1:24:09

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:25–27 ↗

Corinth, he pointed out, was a leading city of the Greek and Roman world — the Austin, the Cambridge, the Baltimore of its day. Paul is writing to people in a prestigious place and telling them they are not

the prestigious ones. “If you’re in Hope Chapel you probably fit the bill,” Carlos said, “because all of us are here because at some point in time we realized that we need a God, and we came to him in humility after we thoroughly exhausted all our resources. Welcome to the club.”

1. Where the church actually is

► 1:28:30

The first map was the 10/40 window — ten to forty degrees north, North Africa across to Asia. Inside it live ninety percent of the people with no access to the gospel, ninety percent of the world’s refugees, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus, and the overwhelming share of the world’s human trafficking, displacement, illiteracy, infant mortality and untranslated languages. Carlos was precise about what he was not saying: there is trafficking in Austin, and there are people here who have not heard. But an Austin family can turn on a radio, drive five minutes, walk into a bookstore and choose which translation to buy — “a church that jumps, a church that goes down, a church that has bells, another one that has smells.” The red dots on his map mark places where none of that exists.

► 1:31:08

The second map was the surprise. In roughly the same places, the church is growing faster than the population. In 1900, ninety-two percent of professing Christians lived in the north; by 2020 that had inverted to seventy-seven percent in the south — Africa, Latin America, Asia. Carlos, an engineer by training, was blunt that he collects these numbers rather than makes them.

And he named where the numbers came from. They came from grandparents and parents in rooms like this one who supported missionaries to Africa, Asia and Latin America. “I had a hard time with the accent of the people you sent to my country,” he said, after apologizing for his own — and the room applauded. God prospered that work. He is one of its results.

► 1:36:09

Which produced the third slide: the receivers are now the senders. By 2020, sixty-three percent of missionaries were being sent from non-Western nations. Carlos’ own account of how that happens was disarmingly simple. Someone paid for a Bible in Spanish to reach his country. He read it, came to [Matthew 28:19](#), believed God was talking to him, and obeyed. He had a burden for Muslims and no way in, so he came to UT Austin for a postgraduate degree in water pollution control engineering — and landed at Hope Chapel.

► 1:38:18

The fourth slide was the one he called sad. Western missionaries are decreasingly engaged in evangelism and discipleship and increasingly in relief and development — rescue work, education, community development. He refused to make that a judgment and refused to leave it alone. He

confessed his own version of the mistake: they developed a community, helped men to better jobs and income, restored dignity — and the men were now able to afford a second wife. “The community was better, but the gospel did not take root in that community. That was a huge mistake.” Everything he wants for a village — the restoration of families, the dignity of women, the education of children — happens on a foundation, and there is no other foundation.

2. A hotel swimming pool in Lebanon

► 1:46:29

The first story he showed on video. A gathering of Arab believers in Lebanon, organized by a leader with no budget, which is why it was in a cheap hotel in a bad neighborhood — a neighborhood filling up with the yellow flags of an Iranian-backed militia. People brought their wives, their children, their friends from house churches.

Then came a baptism. Carlos knew the drill: someone’s room, a tub filled with water, hush everyone, praise God quietly. Instead the whole conference walked outside to the hotel swimming pool, singing in Arabic, loudly. Did you repent of your sins. Have you committed yourself to Christ. Do you renounce the works of the devil. Testimonies running twenty minutes. Carlos retreated to the second floor behind a wall — “I have grandchildren, I want to go back home” — and every so often leaned over to take a photograph he had been told not to take.

“Are these guys nuts or something? They didn’t go to seminary. They don’t understand that this is not how you plant churches.”

They understand danger perfectly well, he added — they can tell you how many times they have been jailed, fired, how their children were treated at school. They simply are not governed by it. And now he knows how the church in that place is growing.

3. Cyrene, and a gate in Algeria

► 2:02:08

He handed microphones out and had four passages read aloud, then asked the room for the word they had in common. Simon, compelled to carry the cross ([Matthew 27:32](#)); the crowd at Pentecost including “the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene” ([Acts 2:10](#)); and then two that matter more than they look.

“But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.”

ACTS 11:20 ↗

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

ACTS 13:1 ↗

Cyrene. In Libya, near modern Benghazi. Its people were most likely Berbers, the original inhabitants of North Africa, centuries before the Arab conquest. They carried the cross of Jesus, led the church at Antioch, and were in the room fasting and praying when the first missionary journey was commissioned.

► 2:04:48

Carlos imagined God the Father reading Berber history to the infant Jesus and asking an angel what has been done for these people lately. The angel checks and comes back: nothing. And the Father says, fix that, now. Then the history: Cyrene founded as a colony in 630 BC, the churches wiped out after Islam arrived, and in the thirteenth century a Catalan missionary, Ramon Llull, killed at Béjaïa east of Algiers — the last known missionary to that people. In 1978 there were ten reported Christians among the Berbers.

In the 1980s Carlos met Berber economic migrants in the south of France. One of them, Mustafa, was talking about dreams, visions of a shining figure in white, supernatural healings — ordinary reports in his line of work. Then Mustafa mentioned where he was from. Béjaïa. “I’m Latin American, I’m from El Salvador — what am I doing here in France, supported by Hope Chapel, meeting with a Berber from the very town where Ramon was killed?”

► 2:09:28

In 1992 he got to Béjaïa. Mustafa took him to a mosque on a hill, where they prayed in the courtyard because a former Muslim does not go inside. Then Carlos asked where the Gate of Salah ed-Din was, and what the natural path to it would have been — the road Llull was dragged down. Of the old city walls, that one gate still stands, ringed by a broken fence and thistles. He climbed over it, put his hand on the gate, and had Mustafa photograph him: seven centuries later, a Christian from outside the country shaking hands with a local man who was dreaming of taking the gospel back to his own people.

Estimates today run from two hundred thousand Berber Christians to two million. Carlos, who cross-checks everything, will settle for either. “Did you sell your house and give it to missions? Did I? It happened because God is faithful.”

4. Two Berbers in Uzbekistan

► 2:11:58

Three months before this Sunday, Carlos flew to Uzbekistan for a gathering of Muslim background believers from across Central Asia. In the front of the hall stood two people he knew — a woman and a man, both Berbers from Kabylia, the same people group. What are you doing here? The Lord put it on our hearts to gather the family of Muslim background believers from around the planet. Next they go to South Asia to do the same. The common language in the room, he noted, was Russian.

“People who have a passion for God, who don’t believe ISIS is a problem, who are willing to baptize people and be noisy about it. You say that’s stupid. That’s how God is building his church.”

The resolution he asked for

► 2:15:48

The lessons, in his own order: God uses broken vessels — you may qualify. God is always near, but it takes time, and you have to hang around and wait for him to show up. We are strong in our weakness. We need to repent of thinking we have what it takes because of the 401(k), the second house, the diplomas, the books we read. Our failures are the ground of God’s victory.

Then the turn on New Year’s resolutions. He did not want anyone to resolve to do something. He wanted a resolution in the other sense — the resolution of a camera, a sharper focus: that God is in charge, that your trouble may only be an opportunity for God to show his power, and that the state of the world is a chance for God to work through people humble enough to give him the glory.

He closed with the people he suspects are actually in the room — tired of praying, unsure God is listening, wondering whether to keep coming. He is listening, Carlos said. He turned ten Berber believers into hundreds of thousands. There is no prison he cannot break, no mountain he cannot climb. And not even language is a problem, so long as the one who boasts boasts in the Lord.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- [1 Corinthians 1:26–29](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:25–27](#)
- [Matthew 28:19](#)
- [1 Corinthians 3:11](#)
- [Matthew 27:32](#)
- [Acts 2:10](#)
- [Acts 11:20](#)
- [Acts 13:1](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:31](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Carlos showed a wall of diplomas and then asked whether that is what advances God's kingdom. What is your version of that slide — the thing you are quietly counting on?
2. He said everyone at Hope Chapel is here because they exhausted their own resources first. Is that your story, and does it still shape how you pray?
3. The community development project succeeded and the gospel did not take root. Where in your own good work is the foundation missing?
4. The believers at that pool sang loudly in a hostile neighborhood while Carlos hid behind a wall. What are you managing risk around that they would not recognize as risk?
5. Instead of a resolution to do something, Carlos asked for a sharper picture of who is in charge. What would come into focus for you this week if you had it?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Carlos Calderon came to Austin from El Salvador as an international student, studying chemical and water pollution control engineering at UT after a burden for Muslims and no obvious way to reach them. He and his wife raised ten children at Hope Chapel, where he served on a rotation of teaching elders, and were commissioned from this platform for work in Turkey. He is now a senior leader with Partners International, working across the 10/40 window.

Watch the full message:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_NE38IVw50&t=4646s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.