

NSAC Missions Month - Week 4 January 31, 2021 Pastor Dave Sattler
Title: “ON THE MOVE: Stories of Migrants, Jesus & the Early Christians”
Texts: Matthew 2:13-16, 19-23; Acts 8:1-8; Cf. Mark 10:45

Sources: Bible Gateway & NIV Life Application Bible. Commentaries: Craig Keener (Matthew), Howard Marshall (Acts). Books: *“Beyond Hospitality: Migration, Multiculturalism, and the Church”* edited by Charles A Cook (2020), *“A Biblical Word For An Urban World”* by Raymond Bakke (2000), *“The Dust Off Their Feet: Lessons From the First Church”* by Chris Seay (2006), *“Scatter: Go Therefore and Take Your Job With You”* by Andrew Scott (2016). Interview: Charles A Cook (Jan 19, 2021 — Zoom). Websites: unhcr.ca, quizlet.com/greektragedies. Movie: *“Miracles Happen”* (NSAC, 2021)

I. <Slide> Review & Introduction

- Hello, everyone! I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC today concluding our Missions Month Series: **“On the Move.”**
- The thought of being “On the Move” is a little difficult to fathom lately.
- I’ve caught myself day-dreaming of driving over the Lions Gate Bridge to go downtown to do something fun!
- If you’ve been confined to your ‘home office’, or face significant health challenges and are ‘housebound,’ or, you find yourself far away from loved ones and unable to travel, the thought of being “On the Move” right now may be even somewhat painful to think about.
- Yet, we know, God has done, and is still doing, some of His most important work in, and around, the great people-migrations of history.
- **<Slide>** These days, per capita, Canada is one of the largest importers of ...
 - Human capital. Our nation is the preferred destination of many of our world’s hardest-working, and, most highly-skilled migrants.
 - By 2036, 30% of all Canadians will identify as “immigrants.”
 - And today, with Toronto and Montreal, Vancouver is leading the way, with 47% of its residents registering as “foreign-born.”
— JoJo Remigio in Cook, p.58-59, Cook, p.x.
 - This comes with mixed responses from the church, however.
 - Many view immigration as a threat. With other cultures and other religions coming to our shores, some mourn the loss of our ‘Christian Nation.’ Some find it difficult to process the decline of influence, the perceived loss of the ‘priestly advantage’ the Church formerly held in Canadian society, for centuries.
 - Frankly, I’m excited at the possibilities these days present!
 - People of NSAC, may we rise to the occasion to carry out the mission of Jesus today in our ever-increasing multicultural, pluralistic, and secular nation!
- **<Slide>** The movement of people around the world is a major theme of the Bible. One writer even suggests, Q: “The Bible is a ‘literary tapestry woven from the **stories of migrants.**” — Hoppe in George in Cook, p.17

- Historically, migration has played a massive role in the global expansion of Christianity. **God works in and through people on the move.**
- Today we'll examine a few "snapshots" of the incredible stories of Jesus, Himself a refugee, and, the early Christians, featured in the Book the Acts.
- Let's pray. "God, move me out of the way. Come, speak to us by Your Spirit."

II. Biblical 'Snapshots'

<Slide> JESUS: Escaping to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-21)

- Matthew, the Gospel writer, paints a picture of the early life of our Saviour that is anything but easy.
- When news breaks of a newborn king (2:2), Herod, King of the Jews, is willing to commit mass genocide (16) to maintain his sense of control over Israel.
- Consequently, young Jesus and his family are forced to live **on the move**, or, more accurately, on the run.

<Slide> Matthew 2:13-23 (NIV)

13 An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." 14 So [Joseph] got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. 16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under.

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." 21 So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 Having been warned in a dream, Joseph withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

- <Slide> Matthew wants us to know that the Christmas story features an Asian-born Jesus who becomes an African refugee. — Bakke, p.56.
- Jesus truly is a Saviour for all the world!
- The Book of Matthew parallels a Greek tragedy. Ancient narratives emphasized 'trial by ordeal' — heroes, eventually vindicated, but not before enduring long bouts of hardship.
- And it starts here in Ch2 with a perilous escape.

- One commentator says, Q: “In a world of superhuman tragedies and human brutality, the story of a divinely protected fugitive who will ultimately triumph over those forces **nurtures hope.**” — Keener, p.107
- God is guiding every leg of the flight — even when it doesn’t seem like it.
- God leads the family to settle in obscure Nazareth, but this is no mistake in planning. For it is God Who governs things like our permanent residency.
- Eventually, Jesus even becomes known as “Jesus of Nazareth.”
- **<Slide>** This harrowing reminds that, throughout history, the egregious actions of power-threatened dictators, have been the cause of many displaced peoples in our world.
- ILL — As a result of conflict, persecution, human rights violations, and ...
 - Violence, by mid-2020, there were an estimated 80 million displaced people worldwide. Among them, 26.3 million refugees, roughly half of whom are under the age of 18.
 - In addition, there are millions of “stateless people” who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic human rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and freedom of movement.
 - Today, Syria, Venezuela, South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Myanmar account for two-thirds of the displaced peoples around the world. — www.unhcr.ca
- **<Slide>** APP — Perhaps you’re tuning in today and this is your story.
 - Maybe you’ve been forced to flee your country of birth — become a refugee. And life has not been easy. It’s hard leaving your home. And, it’s never easy coming to a new one.
 - I love what cf. Mark 10:45 says,
 - Q: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to **give his life** as a ransom for many.”
 - In the cross, God goes to great lengths to reconcile humanity back to Himself. But, the rescue of God goes deeper still.
 - You’ve heard me say: the incarnation bridges every human cultural gap imaginable! God intimately identifies with humanity.
 - God the Son, Jesus, fully relates even to the darkest situations humans might find themselves in.
 - Here’s the thing: The God of the Universe, the One Above It All, truly understands the things real people are experiencing in our world. Our Saviour’s no ‘Ivory Tower Princess!’
 - Our Saviour, Jesus identifies with us, and all people, in every way, particularly those living in suffering and exile.
 - May this sweet reality comfort us deeply in these days.

- <Slide> Against the backdrop of Herod the evil tyrant stands Joseph, the humble earthly father of Jesus.
- The story quietly highlights Joseph's simple obedience to God's direction (14/21), even when this meant a life on the move.
- No permanent home or job, no life to settle into. Travelling lightly.
- APP — Sometimes we have no choice but a life on the move.
- And this story reminds that **God walks with us** — even in that.

<Slide> **Early Christians: Scattered By Persecution (Acts 8:1-8)**

- In the Book of Acts, Dr. Luke tells tale of the significant cultural barriers the Christian Church has to bridge to go from being a tiny monocultural Jewish sect to an intercultural global community.
- And, rather surprisingly, the camera lens swings first to the Samaritans.

<Slide> **Acts 8:1-8 (NIV)**

1 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.
 3 Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.
 4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.
 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.
 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

- <Slide> Can't read the Book of Acts without detecting some sweet irony: God uses the thing intended to "snuff" out the Church as a catalyst that causes it to grow: persecution.
- And, God even takes the chief "snuffer," Saul, transforms him, gives him a new name, 'Paul', and then uses him to spread the Christian message!
- I can just imagine, later, Paul pulling up in Corinth and asking believers if he can pitch his tent in their backyard. If I'm them, I'm not sleeping at night! I'm thinking, 'That guy's gonna knife my family!'
- APP — So, if you've ever thought, 'God could never use me. I got a rap sheet a mile long!' That's a bunch of bunk.
- The story of Paul further proves God can transform, and use, anyone!
- <Slide> Acts Ch8 marks the first breakthrough in the mission of the Church.
- And it comes as the lives of the early Christians are severely disrupted.
- APP — Now certainly not all the time, but, sometimes, God works in this way.

- Allows discomfort to prepare us for a new and different task. Or, to remove us from situation, or to move us, elsewhere.
 - Often there's something behind the opposition, the pain we're experiencing. And we have a choice.
 - Ask God for it to 'go away' [and that's okay]. But, maybe, God is wanting us to be more open, to ask, Q: 'God, what's behind this? What are you teaching me? What would you have me do as a result, or as a response, to this discomfort I'm facing?'
 - So the early Christians are forced out of the friendly confines of Jerusalem (1/4). And God puts them **on the move** to destinations like Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Galatia, and Samaria.
 - And they take their skills, experiences, and their faith with them.
 - And they don't 'clam up!' V4 says, those who "scattered preached the word wherever they went."
 - As they scatter, God scatters seeds. And, eventually, through them, the Gospel spreads to the entire Roman World!
- **<Slide>** ILL/APP — Canada is one of the most favourable places to live in ...
 - The world. Yet, in some ways, one could argue that the relative wealth and comfort that attracts people to our nation, has actually contributed to its spiritual decline.
 - To be a devout follower of Jesus today, in Canada, is becoming increasingly countercultural.
 - In Vancouver, the number of people who identify with the Christian faith is in steady decline, especially amongst those of European descent.
 - In our time, the momentum and strength of the Christian Church has shifted to the Global South, and to the Persecuted Church meeting underground, amidst hostile regimes.
 - And I wonder: Will Canada next be evangelized by those flushed out of their homelands, immigrating here, with a deep passion for Jesus?
 - May our hearts be open to mission partnerships with new Canadians, whose faith has been tested, and who're excited, and not afraid, to preach the word right here in Canada!
 - **<Slide>** Philip is a Greek-speaking Jew, part of the Church's Grocery Shop Program for Jerusalem's most vulnerable (Acts 3:6).
 - Then God sends him out — to Samaria of all places! (5)
 - Samaria is populated by Jewish 'half-breeds' who were considered 'unclean' or 'apostate.' In other words, 'untouchable.'

- Philip goes anyways. And, his message, along with some incredible miracles of God, leads to a mass movement of salvation amongst the Samaritans (7/8).
- ILL — Powerful movements of God are often accompanied by miracles.
 - Many of you have seen the short movie, “Miracles Happen,” that tells the incredible story of a woman new to Canada who received groceries when she wasn’t even on our list!
 - Then, one of our congregants befriends her, shares the Gospel in her own language, and prays for her husband who’s dying with doctors encouraging her to sign for MAID. You know the story:
 - ☐ God heals the man and the couple are praising Jesus today!
- <Slide> O how I love the picture Acts 8:8 paints!
 - It says, Q: “So there was great joy in that city.”
 - ILL — During the first 5 months of the pandemic NSAC was doing weekly 6am Grocery Shops & Deliveries at our local Save-On Foods. And, one of the full-time employees there said to me,
 - ☐ Q: “You and your team come in here every week with such joy — it’s infectious!”
 - ☐ [I think she meant the good kind of infectious!]
- Joy is both an ingredient, and an outcome, of the mission of Jesus taking root in individuals, families, churches, and cultures. Joy is a beautiful by-product of what happens when God, and His people, are **on the move!**

III. Application

- Time to ‘land the plane’ now with a couple quick applications.
- A. <Slide> **GROWING OUR INTERCULTURAL FLUENCY**
 - In many ways, the ‘mission field’ has come, and is still coming, to us.
 - God is bringing the nations to our doorsteps.
 - And I believe this presents tremendous opportunities for us to step up the mission of Jesus — to represent Jesus well, to reflect His compelling light here in our city and nation!
 - However, in order to interact meaningfully with people from all sorts of backgrounds, we must cultivate for ourselves an intercultural fluency.
 - Like one writer puts it, Q: “To be ‘on mission’ means we sit often at the table with new friends, we open up our lives, and we bear witness [to Jesus.] It means we learn of other cultures, eat strange foods, and **stop insisting everybody be like us.**” — Seay, p.157
- <Slide> ILL — In the earlier interview, Charlie Cook mentioned ...

- He believes the Christian Church has been given the “software” to genuinely care for immigrants and enable them to feel welcome, and, at home, here in Canada. — Cook Interview, Jan 19, 2021
- What’s this ‘software’ Charlie’s talking about?
- I believe it’s the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in us!
- And, the unstoppable mission of Jesus that we’re invited into — full of excitement and meaning, worth giving one’s life to!
- Evidenced throughout history, and especially the past ten months, the Christian Church has ample people and financial resources, and the absence of ‘red tape’ to move quickly and effectively ... to care for, to invite in, to befriend the poor and marginalized, the refugee and asylum-seeker.
- APP — People of NSAC, I am praying God will continue to grow in us a vision for, and real ministry with, new Canadians.
- I believe Christ-followers, under the powerful equipping of the Holy Spirit, and deeply committed to the mission of Jesus ... can impact this nation by offering what people truly need!

B. <Slide> SCATTERING THE GOOD NEWS

- In his book, *“Scatter: Go Therefore and Take Your Job With You,”* of Acts Ch8, Andrew Scott says, Q: “God’s people were scattered into every strata of society from slave to king. From mothers to queen. God scattered them en masse expecting them all to fulfill their role.” — Scott, p.59
- **<Slide> ILL** — As a long time soccer coach, a key principle ...
 - To build into my players is the concept of space.
 - Two instructions you’ll hear me shout a lot are,
 - ☐ Q: “Spread out!” And, “Get into space!”
 - A soccer pitch is very large with many players.
 - And teams that fill the space well are usually most successful.
 - Young players tend to travel in clumps around the ball. I suppose that’s the most natural, or comfortable thing to do. Even a veteran player can get drawn into ball-chasing rather than spreading out to play their unique role, in their particular space.
 - ☐ Q: “Spread out!” “Get into space!”
- These mantras too apply to the church on the mission of Jesus.
- True, getting into space, spreading out, scattering to new and unfamiliar places, can be unnerving and downright scary at times.
- But, the story of the early church is one of regular people boldly living out their faith in the new communities into which they had been scattered.

- <Slide> Today global mission-strategies are being revamped.
- How will we reach 80% of the world's population who live in countries where missionary activity is severely restricted, or, illegal? Where pastors and missionaries cannot go anymore? We need to bust the myth that 'God's mission is strictly for pastors and missionaries.'
- Why the Alliance is preparing a new mission pathway for our business people, tradespeople, and others, **to live out their faith**, in the context of their work life, in the marketplaces of the world, where people have little or no access to the Gospel.
- APP — I believe God may be particularly calling our ...
 - Millennials and GenZeds, who seem already “hardwired to scatter.”
 - And, our mobile retirees, with a flare for adventure, to channel their passions into God's Kingdom work, overseas.
 - Your work skills, your education, and your experience may just be your 'passport' to one of the largely-unreached urban centres of our world for the mission of Jesus.
 - Never trite or easy, a decision to say 'yes' to Jesus calls for courage to live with discomfort, to trust God even when it's difficult to see.
 - People of NSAC, I've been praying for a greater openness, in all of us, to a life **“On the Move”** with God. Amen.