



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Global Outreach Week 2017

October 29, 2017

Global Outreach Week 2017

Nik Ripken

Nik Ripken: Oh, I wish I could introduce you all (not that you need it) to the Ethiopian weight-loss program. We have the "parasite of the week." You can decide how many pounds you want to drop, and for a couple of dollars you can get rid of those little critters, but in the meantime, you can share it with your friends and just keep control of the situation. Everybody has their parasite, airplane, and bathroom story on the mission field, and I won't trouble you with any of those except for... Well, I just did.

I have this unquenchable desire for us, together, to put our fingers on the pulse of God and what he's doing among the nations and walk away from here to say, "I know now what God is doing," but part of that is, first, I think I need to open a window for you so you can look out upon the nations and see what God is doing.

I hope in the midst of that, by the time your pastor-teacher stands before you again, that would have raised up a big old mirror you can look in and see yourself the way believers around the world see you. Wouldn't that be cool? Some of you need to be afraid. You need to be very afraid, but I think you're going to be pleasantly surprised.

I remember coming, of course, to Christ in a cheese factory in rural Kentucky. You all know this is not a New York accent. Our sons love to introduce me as their father. They say, "This is our dad. He had to take English as a Second Language in college." See if you all get out before third service. I just won't finish the story, just because of that laughter.

Anyway, I want to open a window and show you a mirror. Both of those, perhaps, will allow you to see the heart of God. I want to speak from Matthew 11 this morning, but I'm begging you for the permission to tell this story and do it the way we would do it in the marketplace, like Jesus did.

I mean, Jesus, in a place like this, in the temple and the synagogues... He just downloaded all of those Old Testament stories and 100 percent of the time, as recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in the marketplace, he told those stories by memory. You do not have to smuggle a

Bible into North Korea if you are the container for the Word of God. That one statement is worth your being here this morning.

So, in the first third of Matthew, you have the kingdom of God already coming to a crescendo. Jesus has sent out the Twelve and they're going to come back with just unbelievable stories. Jesus has raised somebody from the dead. He has healed someone else. He's just doing all of this marvelous stuff, and there's a pattern like this all throughout Scripture. God breaks through and then Satan throws up this huge barrier. Matthew 11 focuses on the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist and teaches us some very deep truths I want you to take from this.

John the Baptist, a prophet, a man of God, eats locusts and honey. We've lived in Jordan. Those little wings get caught in your teeth, you know, but you can swallow a rock if you have enough sense to use honey with it. Here he is, wearing those camel-hair suits. They don't sell those at Brooks Brothers. You'll know John the Baptist is coming, if you're downwind, about an hour before he gets there. This is not a guy who's well-manicured, nor would you want him at the lunch table with you, probably.

He's the nearest thing to a pastor that Jesus has. He's the one who said, "I baptize with water. Someone is coming to baptize with fire. I'm not worthy to unlatch the laces of his sandals." When he saw Jesus coming, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the earth." In a pastoral role, John the Baptist baptizes Jesus and he's there when the very voice of the Father says, "This is my Son. This is who I love. This is the one I approve of."

Now, you get to Matthew 11 and John the Baptist is in Herod's prison because he stands up to everybody for the sake of the kingdom of God. He looked the Scribes and Pharisees in the eyes and said, "You bunch of vipers," and challenged them for what they were doing against the kingdom of God. The Herods and Pilates of this earth are like the North Koreas of today. You don't have communism in those places. You have emperor-worship. If the emperor is lord, there's no room for Jesus to be Lord.

This is where John the Baptist has found himself, pointing the spiritual finger in the face of Herod and saying, "You may think you're God. You may think you set morality by what you do, but I'm here to tell you that under almighty God, you will not take your brother's wife, sleep with her, and have sex with her without calling the wrath of God upon yourself."

So, we find this powerful prophet of God in Herod's prison, and he's about to have his head removed from his shoulders. If you are reading the story for the first time as I remember, what would you think John is going to say next?

When I read this for the first time, in a dorm room in Kentucky, after being saved in a Kraft Foods cheese factory, and read the life of John the Baptist, read that he's in prison and they're coming after him to separate his head from his shoulders, I expected John to have fire in his eyes, his shoulders square, and his back straight, and say, "I will die as I have lived. Do whatever you want to do. I will follow Jesus through the grave!"

Yet that's not what John the Baptist did. That man let us down. I mean, he let me down at least, I thought, because here he is in prison, facing his death, knowing Jesus could release him if he wanted to, and John sends word by John's disciple to Jesus and he wants to know, "Are you the Messiah, or do I wait for someone else?"

What? *What?* I mean, if there was anybody who should have known who the Messiah was, it was John the Baptist, and yet now that his faith is called to its ultimate challenge, it looks like John doubts. John gives up. John backs up. I have to admit to you, as a brand-new Christian, I was so disappointed I walked away from John the Baptist. It's not only bad when the prophet, that baptizing guy, lets you down. It's worse when the response of Jesus is not what he... He did not stay on script! I've been to seminary. I know what he was supposed to say.

So, the disciples of John went to Jesus. "Are you the one, or do we wait for somebody else?" If you're being honest, what was Jesus supposed to say? "I'm the Alpha! I'm the Omega! I was there before the world was created," and give us these words theologically that have like five or six syllables in them that nobody understands, usually even those of us who are spouting those.

So, Jesus goes off the script and he says, "You go back and tell John what you see. The blind see. The lame walk. The deaf hear. The lepers are cleansed. The dead are raised. The good news is preached to the poor. Then, he says to John, "Die like the man of God I created you to be. Blessed is the one who does not stumble on account of me."

John says the same thing the Holy Spirit had done with Joseph in Pharaoh's prison: "The kingdom of God can gain more, John, if you'll just stay faithful. Thousands of years from now, if I let you just live your life out to an old age... A lot of people get to do that, but if you die for the sake of the kingdom of God, thousands of years later, there will be this redneck kid from Kentucky, up in Seattle, still telling your story!"

That's what God does. God gets to decide whether we live or whether we die. We don't become Christians to negotiate the end-of-life issues with Jesus so we can die in our sleep with three or four cars in the garage. You can't sell that in India. You shouldn't sell that in Seattle.

So, I walked away from John the Baptist for years, just thinking, "Well, here's a man who had a chance to knock it out of the park." I usually don't use sports illustrations. I've listened to a lot of women speakers lately and I don't understand a single one of their illustrations, so I don't use mine. "Here he was. Man, he could have knocked the ball out of the park, and he didn't."

Now, just sort of put a comma there. Years later, my wife and I are doing a very foolish thing. We find ourselves in South Africa. We went over with a 5-year-old and a 3-year-old, and now we've had a third son in spite of all the malaria and health problems Ruth and I had in Malawi that forced us to leave there. Now we have three boys.

Ruth and I got so unsettled that we did what you'd think was a very foolish thing for two missionaries to do. We opened up the Bible. I wrote on a piece of paper the word *missionary*, and we read the book of Acts together, and then we wrote on that piece of paper what it is that,

for us, a missionary does. Two months later, we're in Kenya trying to go into Somalia. That's what reading the Bible will do for you, and a lot of you know that. That's why you're not reading it. I know how this works. I wasn't born tomorrow.

We're reading this, but in the midst of this... Some of you might know. Most of you don't even need to know Ruth and I grew up in the, not just Baptist, but the Southern Baptist tradition. One of the things you all know about us Baptists is we don't dance. That's not true. We *can't* dance. No, it's pretty ugly. I've watched them. Anyway, they made a rule about it so they wouldn't embarrass themselves.

So, we're praying about this Somali stuff, and I go to Kenya. Another thing we Baptists like to do is have a meeting about a meeting. Then we'll schedule a meeting to review the meeting we just had. So, I went to one of these never-ending meetings and left my wife and three wonderful boys out in the bush with a crank telephone and on a generator. I'm such a leader in their lives. I go up where there's just paradise.

While I was there, one of our leaders who was quite a bit older than I came to me and said, "Nik, I hear you're praying about going to Somalia." He said, "I have contacts with United Nations and Red Cross, and there's a brand-new refugee camp down near Mombasa, and 10,000 Somalis have just been off-loaded from a ship that has been in that harbor for three months." There's a place you want to go on a cruise: that ship, three months, with 10,000 Somalis.

These are the ones who can get out. These are the doctors, lawyers, teachers, university students, politicians, and military people. There's this refugee camp now with 10-12 feet of chain-link fence. He said, "I can get you in there for a couple of weeks. Here you are saying you and your wife and kids want to go and be part of reaching the Somali people in the midst of their civil war. You haven't met a Muslim, and you've never met a Somali, so go there, stay in the camp, and feel it, taste it, touch it, and get a real sense of what the Holy Spirit is saying."

Man, I love new experiences! I love challenges. I think I take wise risk according to Jesus; not according to most people. Just get me a ticket, let me get on a plane in Nairobi, and get me to Mombasa, and I'll get me a taxi and I'll go to that camp. This guy grabbed me by my shirtfront and pulled me back into the office. He said, "No, no, no! I'm not going to let you go now. I know what you're like!"

Now, you don't know what's coming after that, but you know it's not going to be a compliment. He says, "Nik, I can get you in that camp, but I want you to stay there for two weeks and keep your mouth shut." Who has he been talking to about me? He said, "I just want you to listen and get a sense of what the Holy Spirit is saying. You just be quiet. This is not something to play around with. You need to be sure this is what God is saying."

So, I got a plane. I went to Mombasa. I got me a taxi and I went to this brand-new refugee camp. Do y'all want to know something? Somebody got there before I did. How dare they? Some volunteers got there before I did. They thought what the 10,000 Somali refugees needed the most was 10,000 Somali Bibles.

Well, the Somalis were so grateful to receive those, because it was the rainy season and they made sidewalks out of them so they wouldn't have to walk in the mud. They saved cases of them so they would have enough toilet paper. That is not a Spirit-based Bible distribution program. I'm as serious as a heart attack.

So, I realize, "Okay, this is not like the responsive places we've been for the last 10-11 years." I soon meet a young man named Abdi Bashir, who's out of the university, whose English is so much better than mine. He takes me around and he's introducing me to leaders in the university, the military, and the police force. Doors just seem to be opening everywhere.

I am so arrogant. After three days, I say to him, "Abdi, I'd like to ask you a really important question." He said, "What is it, Dr. Nik?" I say, "I want to know something. I just really want to know. Think about your answer before you answer. Do you know my friend Jesus?" Oh my, did we have the space shuttle go up and blow up. We had liftoff.

He began yelling and waving his arms, and men began running toward us. Within 10 minutes, I'm surrounded by 50-75 hostile Muslim Somali men. My back is pushed into that chain-link fence. I am as far away as I can be from the one big gate where the relief trucks can bring the food in, at the very front of the camp, and there are 10,000 hostile Muslims between me and that gate.

I was absolutely certain I was not going to get out of there alive. They were pushing on me. I can feel the chain-link fence pressing, almost cutting into my back. For almost 30 minutes (it felt like three days), all I can hear is Somalis yelling, "Nik," "Ripken," and "Jesus" here and there. They're pulling each other's beards, grabbing each other by their shirtfronts, and getting in each other's faces. The anger is building and my chest is just pounding.

I just prayed, "Lord, my wife and kids don't even know I'm here. Lord, somehow, find a way that somewhere in the future they can come over here and pray on this spot where I was torn apart and killed." It would probably be better to be killed and then torn apart, but it wasn't going to end well. I was 100 percent certain I was not going to live. They argued and argued, and then the circle opened up around me and they pushed me against the fence. Abdi came up to me and everything in his body language just screamed anger and attack.

Sub-Saharan Africans are some of the most kind, responsive, generous, gentle people on the planet. They're like my wife's family. She's a pastor's kid. Somalis, if they're not spitting on you, they're not talking to you. They're loud, in your face, and in your business. They're like my family. Ruth and I are both PKs. She's a pastor's kid and I'm a pagan's kid. I'm sure that doesn't surprise you.

I am just terrified. Abdi comes up to me and gets right in my face and he says, "Dr. Ripken, we don't know your friend Jesus..." I thought, "Here it comes." He stood up and relaxed a little bit. He said, "...but Mahmoud thinks he has heard about him and thinks he lives in the refugee camp down the road, so if you'll go out the gate, turn left, go about one mile, stop at the next gate, at

the refugee camp, and ask at the gate, we think your friend Jesus lives in that next refugee camp."

I said, "Thank you so much!" I went out that gate and I went to the right. I got me a taxi and I went to Mombasa. I got a plane and went to Nairobi. I got another plane back to South Africa and I said to God, "You want these people? You can have them!" See, I was years ahead of most of you. That's not funny.

As I'm riding that plane at 2:00 in the morning, all I could think of since the moment my backside hit the back seat of that taxi was that I was so thankful that my redneck daddy was not there, because he never raised any of his kids to run away. The first time my faith ever cost me anything, I ran away like coward. I remember, on that airplane, however you think you might do this, saying to John the Baptist, "I'm sorry for what I said about you."

At 2:00 in the morning, "What am I going to tell Ruth? What am I going to tell my three sons about why we're now not going to Somalia? How am I going to tell them the first time faith cost their father something he ran away? How can I tell that to my wife and my children? Oh, I'm so glad my brothers and my father did not see me run away the first time my faith has ever cost me anything."

Do you know what I couldn't do in that refugee camp that I can do here? Do you know what I can't do? One of the things I ran away from was that the first time in my life I was at a place where I could not say to all of the people there, "The altar of God is open. Respond to him." Try that on in a Somali refugee camp. See how that works out for you.

I had so let down God in my own heart that on airplanes, sitting with my wife and kids, we created a space for God to be on that airplane, but my cowardice had taken that place of altar before God away from me. I felt so alone and so outside of the kingdom of God. Later on, we would discover... We went to Somalia. There were 150 believers in Christ there when we left. We were kicked out violently eight years later.

Only four believers were left alive. They killed four of my best friends in 45 minutes on one day. They stalked them, walked up behind them, put a gun to the backs of their heads, blew their brains out, and then threw their bodies in latrines, toilets, and rubbish piles. We went for 25 years among the Somali people, and for every time a Somali believer died we never had their bodies at their own funerals. That's what we call the Old Testament.

That's what we're calling you to today. Unless you can create it, you don't go to those places and say, as we can say this morning to you without fear of being arrested, losing our jobs, having our children taken from us, going to jail, going to prison, being tortured, and losing our lives... We can say to each one of you, with joy, power, confidence, and assurance that nothing bad is going to happen, "The altar of God is open. The Holy Spirit is waiting to receive a level of commitment from you that perhaps you have never offered God before."

You see, that's what this thing called *missions* is about. I was sitting in between services and I wrote down some things I want to read to you. When I say to you what it means that the altar of God is open, when you respond to the altar of God, what we've learned from believers in persecution is that then your prison cell can become your altar before God.

When you respond before God's people in obedience, when the altar of God is open, then when you go out from here, the schools you teach in, the businesses you work in, and the offices you inhabit can become altars for God because you are the presence of the living Christ in that place. Today, we say to you that the altar of God is open and we want to send it, the presence of the living God, and you to places where they have never been able to say that. Then your home will become an altar for God.

Then, guys, that girlfriend you have, and ladies, that boyfriend you have, and that physical relationship that takes over all sense of spirituality... When you understand that the altar of God is open and available to you and you can stand here before God's people and say, "Wherever you lead, I'll go," and Jesus commands us to go to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and into the ends of the earth, this is not a debate with the Holy Spirit.

What we're saying today when we say the altar of God is open to the people of God is, "Come. We will, in prayer and fasting, talk with you, pray with you, and decide with you which part of this commandment you are to fill." It would be marvelous to see 300-400 of you come to this altar today and say to the people of God and the throne of God, "God has commanded me and I am answering his command. I am called to take the gospel to Seattle and I want all of you to know I am testifying to that altar this morning."

Well, what I want to say to you is that on the border of two Central Asian countries, where if there's a hell on earth, it's about the closest you can get, Ruth and I met a young Muslim lady there. She was 25 years of age. I can't tell you (we don't have time) about all the miraculous ways where there was not a single woman believer, she miraculously found Jesus. In a place controlled by the evil of the Taliban itself, she had already led almost 30 Muslim women to Christ, gathering them in groups as baptized people.

She has a fatwa, a death warrant, against her by the Taliban because she's a believer in Jesus, she's leading other women from Islam to believe in Jesus, and she's representing Muslim women who have been sexually molested by the Taliban in courts of law, trying to get the Taliban thrown into prison. Ladies, go do that and see how that works out for you. They're after her to kill her and the United Nations is trying to send her to St. Louis, Missouri. I, on your behalf...

You might say after the service, "Nik, you don't have my permission to do this," but I said to her, "Please don't leave. This might cost you your life, but I think perhaps the salvation, especially of all the women in your people group, is contingent and based upon you staying here and doing what you're doing for the kingdom of God. We will help you do what Jesus said to do. When persecution comes upon you, flee to the next place, the next place, and the next city, but Jesus never took a single person out of their persecution or out of their people group."

She made it to St. Louis before I got home to Kentucky to my wife. My wife brought her to be with us for a week in Kentucky with the college students. Wow, what she did on that college campus in a week! On a Saturday night, we took her to our church. I probably wouldn't do that now that I've learned more, but we wanted her to see what our church looked like so that on Sunday morning she would not be surprised that we are a mixed audience and even unmarried men sat by unmarried women.

She went to church for the first time in her life with Ruth and me, and the service was unusual. In that church, it started off with a baptism of a whole family: a father, a wife and mother, two teenage daughters, and a younger brother/son. Ruth and I are watching that and our sister from Central Asia is sitting between us. She starts to have what I thought was a panic attack. She starts moving around and I thought, "Well, the mixed audience is getting to her."

I said, "Listen. If you go out, Ruth will go out with you." She's just really looking like she's having a panic attack. I ask her, "What's wrong?" She said, "I can't believe it. I can't believe it! You're telling me a whole family...a father, a mother...a wife, a husband, and their children...is being baptized publicly and nobody is going to be beaten? He's not going to have his children taken from him? He will not have his wife forcibly divorced and married to a Muslim man?"

He's not going to go to prison, nobody's going to be beaten, and nobody's going to be killed? You're telling me there's such a miracle like this on the planet? If I was to go back and tell this to my country, I would lose my entire witness because they could never believe such a miracle ever existed on this planet. I think I'm going to stand up and shout!"

I said, "Girl, shout. If they kick you out, we'll go with you!" The service was long, anyway. I'm sorry. I don't know where that comes from, but I know it's not from your side of the family. She said, "I think I'm going to shout," and she looked around. She says, "Why is everybody just sitting here? Why aren't they up and dancing? Why aren't they shouting? Don't they see that this is a miracle from the throne of God that is not experienced almost anywhere else in the world?"

Oh, we could talk for hours about Hindus being healed, about Muslims having dreams and visions pointing them toward Jesus, and about all the things God is doing among the nations, but what I want to say to you in closing this morning is that the altar of God is open. I don't care that much if you believe God is sending Muslims dreams and visions.

I don't care that much whether you believe that in India the blind are seeing, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed, the dead are being raised, the gospel is being poured out and preached to the poor, and we are watching people being baptized by 10,000-30,000 a month. We've seen it. We've touched it. We've tasted it. We have brought you a first-hand report, but almost in no place in that country can we say what we're saying to you right now. The altar of God is open.

What do you call this today, this thing called *church*? You call this common? You call this normal? We call this what we deserve, when 80 percent of the believers on this planet see what

we are experiencing, having this morning at this place, as an overt miracle from the throne of God like they will never experience in their lifetime?

Your pastor is going to come and pray over you, and he has a challenge for you. I say to you, church, are you going to claim your miracle this morning, a miracle unlike any you might experience anywhere else on this planet, that I can say here what I can't say? We've been to 84 countries, and I can't say this in probably 80 of them. The altar of God is open. Stand with me in reverence of his altar.

Steve Walker: I'm so moved this morning to be reminded that this isn't normal in most of the world. For Canyon Hills Community Church, this Sunday every year is sometimes the most frightening as well as the most exciting Sunday we have all year, because every year God opens the hearts of more and more of us to say, "God, we don't know where or when, but we sense that you're wanting us to be open to follow you somewhere else."

In the last two years, we've had three families just like you leave us and go somewhere else in the world for at least one year. In the last two years, we've had two families get up and go somewhere else in the world for two years. They're gone. We have six families in our church right now being coached to try to discern what God might be saying to them.

It may be that you're sitting here right now and your heart is just racing and you're thinking, "I don't know what God might want me to do yet, but I get this sense that God just wants me to trust him. He wants my heart. He wants me to be open." If that is you, before you leave this room this morning, we want to give you something to go home with. We want to give you something to just simply say, "Is that you, God, speaking to me?" We want to help you take some steps.

We have a couple of meetings coming up in a few weeks that will help you just listen and say, "How do I know this might be God trying to get my attention?" We're going to invite you to that meeting. We're not going to give you a one-way plane ticket to go somewhere and wave at you at the airport. We're just saying, "Hey, this is how God works. Sometimes it starts little. Sometimes he just overwhelms, and we just want to help each other discern what God is saying."

So, I'm going to pray for you, and then when we're done we're going to have a whole team of people who are going to be right over there and they have that little devotional for you and a little information card, and we want to give it to you to go home with and consider. What might God be saying to you? Let's bow our heads.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we are just overwhelmed with the miracle that is America, that is Canyon Hills, that is Bothell, that you have called us, saved us, and put us together, and now you're just opening our hearts to be a part of the great movement of the gospel around the world.

I pray, God, for hundreds in this room who might just say, "God, speak to me. Show me." God, just like you did in the last service, I pray that many in this room would have the courage to trust

you for the next step. Maybe for not down the road yet, but just for the next step. God, would you move in this place? We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Again, as you leave here, I want to invite any of you who have that sense to just make your way right over there. They have something they want to give you and they want to get some information from you. We want to hand you one of those DVDs on the way out. Please, please just take one per family. I hope and encourage you to watch it before next Sunday. We'll look forward to seeing you then. God bless you.