

Missions Conference Opening 2001

By: Andy Crouch

Announcer:

It's my pleasure to announce one of our speakers this morning in our session. We will have two speakers. It's a little different, but just to let you know that our first speaker is Andy Crouch. He comes from Boston, Massachusetts. He's the editor of Regeneration Quarterly, and he's also a featured columnist for Christianity Today. He's a classically trained pianist, and he's also led worship at two Urbanas 1993 and 96. So please welcome Andy with me.

Crouch:

Well, good morning. I was very interested in Catfish's little rule. Since I'm the first speaker, I thought I'd just amended a little bit, if that's okay. Catfish, basically, if you want to leave during my talk, go right ahead. I'll just hunt you down and kill you afterwards. We speakers have very fragile egos. Actually, having been led in worship the way we were by Trey and his group. I personally don't want to leave. I sense and am grateful for the presence of God in this place. I was thinking about the fact that as I learned as I was preparing this event that Biola cancels classes for three days to have this missions conference. I spent nine years of my life working at another university called Harvard University. You might have heard of it. And this is a fairly well-known small school on the East Coast. And I was trying to remember when Harvard had ever canceled classes. They certainly don't do it for snow. Just two weeks ago, we had about 15

inches of snow in Boston and classes went on at Harvard. But Harvard did cancel classes one time in the nine years I was there.

It was September 18, 1998, and they did this to award an honorary degree. They cleaned up the historic yard, the kind of central campus quad at Harvard. Since Harvard has the wealth of approximately ten third world nations. When they clean up, they bring in trucks of sod. They just bring in new lawn, and they just lay it out. So, all the sod trucks were coming in and out. They set up thousands of chairs. They packed 25,000 people into the so called Terse Centenary Theater, which is this sort of open space in Harvard Yard. The gospel choir, which had been invited to sing for a reason, you'll understand in a moment, rehearsed for about 20 hours in a row. They were so excited. And local radio and TV stations showed up, all for a day of canceled classes to award an honorary degree for only the third time in Harvard's history. The first had gone to George Washington after the American Revolution. The second had gone to Winston Churchill at the end of World War II. And this degree, on September 18, 1998, was awarded to Nelson Mandela, the outgoing president of South Africa, a man who had spent 27 years of his life in prison for the cause of freedom.

It was a day unlike any I've ever really seen at a place like Harvard because Harvard is usually pretty self-important and doesn't think there's anything more important than itself. But here was a whole university stopping and saying, here is someone who's worth being honored and who's worth celebrating. Well, here something similar is going on. Classes are canceled for three days. You've brought in famous speakers, actually, speakers you've never heard of, but anyway, brought in somebody. Something important must be happening here. I couldn't resist calculating

the cost of this event. Have you ever done this? It's kind of a good exercise when you're bored in class or something. Not that that ever happens, of course. If you divide up your tuition, room and board and fees by the number of days that you're at school, have you ever figured out how much a day costs you? Well, I looked up on the website, and it says that for the average or for the typical student, all those fees together are \$23,655. There are 246 days in the Biola university academic year. So, if I multiply the cost per student by the 2395 students in the undergraduate population divided by 246 days, I get \$230,300 per day.

So that means that for these three days of suspended classes, someone, maybe your parents or maybe the financial aid office here, or maybe you yourself, either now or later, when those wonderful loans that you just sign, a little paper for when those come due, somebody's paying \$690,900 for our three days. We're enjoying kind of a three quarter of a million-dollar vacation. But who is the honored guest? Who is the visitor? Who's the one for whom all this time and resources are being spent? If someone had walked on to the Harvard campus on September 18, 1998, they would ask, oh, gosh, what is all this activity? Why are all these people here? And they would say, well, Nelson Mandela is coming. But the bizarre thing about what we're doing here this weekend is we're, in a sense, throwing a massive party. If parties have speakers and that sort of thing for an unseen guest. Not only can this guest of honor not be seen this weekend, he's never been seen. Because the reason for this extravagant interruption the normal course of university is none other than the creator of the universe, and no one has ever seen him.

We can look at the creation, we look at the stars, the ocean. Not that any of us are going to get too close to the ocean after our little warning this morning. But we look at the mountains. We

look at small things like DNA and mitochondria and the little things that make yogurts yogurts the active cultures. What are those, anyway? Why am I ingesting them? And we look at all this creation. We say, along with the vast majority of human beings throughout history and across the world, there must be someone or something behind all this. But what is he or she or it like, what does this god love? What does this god hate? Why did she, he or it make the world? And why am I here a part of this? At the same time, we look at war, hunger, the abuse of the weaker by the stronger, and we wonder, does the maker of all this beauty really care what's happening now? Does it matter to him? Or is he just an absentee landlord who, frankly, has kind of forgotten that he ever made it in the first place? The Apostle Paul in act 17 says to a group of Greek listeners that the world is made in such a way that people grope for God.

There's an unknown God loose in the cosmos and people search for God and perhaps grope for him and maybe find him. But no one has ever seen God. And this is the greatest problem for mission. No one has ever seen God. Now, if you wonder how I know that no one has ever seen God, I actually didn't make that up. I'm quoting from the Gospel of John. In the next two days, we're going to be studying John 17 together. It's an amazing passage and I very much appreciate the way that it was performed for us and will be again tomorrow. John 17 is a lot like all the writings of the Apostle John. As a friend of mine put it, it's all so true. You hear it and you're like, oh, yes, Father, glorify me as I have glorified you, that they may glorify that we and me and I in you and you and me may be one in them. And it all sounds very true. But my eyes, at least when I start reading this sort of glaze over a little bit and I start thinking, well, yes, all very religious, all very good.

I'm glad it's in the Bible and then I move on. But when I feel that way, I always know that I actually need to pay closer attention because whenever you run into that incredibly simple language in the Gospel of John, you know that something dramatic and revolutionary is about to be communicated. And so, in order to understand John 17, I went back to John One. And so, if you have Bibles, you're going to have to be flipping back and forth between those two. For those of you who don't have Bibles, you can turn in your hearts to John One, because at the beginning of the Gospel of John, John himself, I suppose, the writer of the Gospel, gives what's called a prologue. It's like an introduction. And this is the part of the Bible that begins, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God in the beginning. John consciously echoes in the first words of his book, the first words of come on, 30 hours of Bible. First words of Genesis. Yes. John says, have you ever wondered about the beginning of the world? And who it was who was creating it at the beginning.

Well, I have something new to tell you. You've got the Book of Genesis, but I have something new to tell you. In the beginning, there was this Word who was in very nature identified with the Creator of the universe. John goes on to say, even more remarkably, that this Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. And then in John 1:18, he ends his introduction to his book about Jesus with this amazing sentence no one has ever seen God. No one has ever seen God. If you want to think of it this way, this is basically God's greatest problem. He's unseen and unseeable because he's transcendent. He's the Creator, not the creation. But what if God wants to communicate Himself to the creation? What if the Creator wants the creation to know about Him? What if he wants to be known? This is God's greatest problem. But John says God has a

solution. Now, this is not a sort of compromised solution, as in, oh, my gosh, I guess, could God say, oh, my God and not take his name in vain?

I don't know. Anyway, I just made the world and I have no way to talk to it. Oh, no. What do I do? I'm sure I can pass something up. No, this is not a compromise kind of solution. I'm a big fan of Apple Computer. I would not touch a PC. And I am indeed speaking from my beloved Power book at this moment. And the founder of Apple, one of the founders, Steve Jobs, has this great phrase. He says, the kind of computers that Apple wants to build are insanely great. Have you heard about this? Whenever Steve Jobs really likes something, he says, that's insanely great. And if you want a title for this talk, you can call it the Two Greatest Problems in Mission and God's two Insanely Great solutions. Because God's solution to the problem of how the Creator can communicate with the creation is insanely great. For it turns out that the Creator is not a lonely deity. You could read Genesis One at least, if you read it quickly. And sort of think, well, there's this Creator and he kind of speaks and the word goes out and it's done. But who's with him?

Is he just by himself? Is he sort of in splendid isolation? No, says John One. There's another who's present at the creation called the Word. And in these passages that I was just referring to, John One, he's called twice this Greek word, monogeneses, that means the one and only, the absolutely unique Son. Now go back to John 1:18. No one has ever seen God but the one and only Son who is close to the Father's heart or the NIV says at the father's side. It's actually an even more interesting phrase than that. Some of your Bibles may say something like literally, it's in the Father's bosom. I wonder if the word bosom has ever been spoken from a pulpit at Biola University before. The image here is of what would happen at an ancient Near Eastern dinner

where you didn't sit at table, you lay at table, you reclined at table, around a table on the floor.

And we see this in the supper that Jesus has with his friends at the end of his life. And the closest friend of the host, the closest friend or family member would actually lie with his head on the host's chest in the host's bosom.

And John says, this is what the one and only Son was like with the Father. That's close and God's insanely great solution to the question, how am I going to make myself known is to send this son. John says to make known the Father. Now, when we say make known, that can mean a lot of different things. I mean, what does it mean that the Son, the one and only Son, made the Father known? Maybe the Son just sort of introduced the Father. If you come up afterwards and someone introduces us hi, this is Mindy, this is Andy. I'm from the East Coast where we shake hands when we meet each other. I found in California sometimes people are like, dude, relax, don't shake my hand. But anyway, we shake hands and you don't really know me all that well. We've just been introduced. You know my name. Maybe you know something about me. Is that all the Son does when he makes known the Father? Or maybe the son just sorts of taught about the Father kind of summary lessons. Well, I think these are the three crucial things you need to know about dad.

Or maybe the son just gives an academic kind of introduction, sort of theology 101. What does it mean that the son who's in the bosom of the Father came to make the Father known? So sometimes you just got to go to the Greek. I hate to tell you this, but you haven't escaped learning entirely today because you're all going to learn a Greek word and it's a messy one. It's not like one of these easy Greek words like agape that everybody can say, but it's an important

word. It's the key to John 1:18 and in some ways the key to the whole Gospel of John. So, I'm going to teach it to you. The word is Exegeomai I told you it was messy. For those of you taking notes at home, exegeomai. And it's pronounced exegeomai now let's all try that. Ready? One, two, three. X. Very good. I like that. Now, I could give you the dictionary definition. Of course, you know that your Bible probably translates it make known in this place. But the way they come up with dictionary definitions as they look to see how the word is used. So, let's look at the four other places where this word comes up in the New Testament.

Not a very long list, only four other times as this word used. The first one is in Luke 24 35. Don't have to turn to it if you don't want to, but two disciples on Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection, are walking on the road to a town called Emmaus and they meet Jesus, but they don't know that it's Him. I'm sure you are familiar with this story. He ends up explaining the Scriptures to them, having dinner with them, and as he breaks bread, he vanishes from their sight. And they're so excited when they finally realize, oh, this was Jesus, that they, even though it's dinnertime, run back to Jerusalem. And here's what they do in Jerusalem. They Exegeomai, their friends, what happened on the road. Now, your Bible probably translates this Luke 24 35 as they told them what happened on the road. But what do you think they did? Do you think they just said they run back, they run into the house, they're all sweaty? It's like halfway through the night, they're like, oh, well, we met Jesus, he broke the bread. We realized it was Him. That's about it. Good night.

Do you think that's what they did? No. They're like, let me tell you what it was like. We met this guy. At first, we didn't realize who it was. They go through all the details of what he looked like, what he said, the things he said about the Scriptures. And then we went into the house and he sat

here and Cleopas was here, and I was here, and he broke the bread. And suddenly we realized, and you have to realize that on the day of the Lord's resurrection, which nobody was really expecting, they probably told this story four or five times that night before they could even bring themselves to go to sleep, they exegeomai'ed this story. They went through the whole story. Look at the next time this comes up. It's in acts ten eight. A centurion named Cornelius has just had a really amazing vision of an angel telling him to send for a man named Peter. He calls his servants in. He's going to send them to find Peter. And here's what he does. He you know, the word is exegeomi. And Luke even says he exegeomaized everything to them. Acts 15 12 and 14, two for the price of one.

Paul and Barnabas are speaking to the Jerusalem church about what God's been doing among the Gentiles. And it says the whole assembly listen to Barnabas and Paul as they exegeomaied what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. Again, do you think Paul and Barnabas just put up, like, a PowerPoint slide, like, bullet point one signs, bullet .2 wonders, bullet .3 conversions and that was it. No, they told the whole story. They're like, you have to hear all these amazing things that God is doing among the Gentiles. The next time Paul comes back to Jerusalem, acts 21:18, after greeting James and all the others, he yes, one by one, it says he exegeomized one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. That's it for the word exegeomai. Not a very useful word, really, but it's useful when it comes up. All these occurrences have in common an extraordinary supernatural encounter, and the person who has had this experience wants to tell other people, and the person doesn't just want to summarize it or give a little sort of brief version.

They want to tell the whole story because it was so amazing. That is what John says the one and only Son has done for us with the Father. This is God's insanely great solution to the first great problem of mission. No one has ever seen God, but we have seen Jesus, or at least some folks did see Jesus, and he told the whole story of God to those who followed Him. You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. What does God love? What does God hate? Look at Jesus. Everything, in fact, that can be said of the Father can be said of the Son. John says, we've seen his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son. And the glory of Jesus is to reveal to the world completely and uniquely what the invisible creator is like. So back to John 17. It's the end of Jesus' life now, he spent three years, or however long it was exactly exegeomaiing god telling the whole story, living really incarnating we'd say the whole story of God, everything about God. And in John 17, he sort of stops to reflect on how it's gone, because he knows that the next day he is going to be crucified.

And he begins, John 17, by celebrating this insanely great plan. Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you. Verse four. I glorified you on Earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. What was that work? I would say it was to exegeomai God. Father, I've been here. I've been living who you are, who I know you to be from when I was in your bosom. I'm now here living it out on Earth. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had in Your presence before the world existed. It's worth stopping here to ask about this word, glory. It comes up a lot in John 17, and we use this word a lot in Christian settings. We use it in the song we sang a few minutes ago. What does it mean? What is glory? What does it mean to glorify? Well, Jesus defines it here. He says, I glorified you by finishing

the work you gave me to do. And what was this word? To exegeomai the Father, to make known the Father, to tell the Father's whole story, to glorify.

When you're dealing with a glorious person like God, of course, if you're glorifying an inglorious person, that doesn't apply. But suppose you actually do have a glorifiable person, a glorious person like the Father, to glorify is simply to make known who this person is. And Jesus says, I have done this for you, God. Now, Father, I'm asking you to do it for me because I'm about to be shamed. In other words, Jesus is about to go into the opposite of a glorifying experience. He's about to be put to death in the most shameful way that Romans could cook up, and he won't be able to do anything about his reputation or people's impressions of him, because he'll be dead. And so, he says, God, I'm trusting you just as I've been glorifying you to glorify me. So, Jesus says as he reflects on coming to the end of his mission, he says, Father, this plan has worked really well so far. There's only one problem left. I said there were two great problems of mission here's number two, and maybe you figured out what this is. What happens once Jesus is gone. God's insanely great solution to the first problem of mission was only good for a limited amount of time, and for that matter, for a limited group of people, the people who happen to be in the same place where Jesus was.

And so today, the problem for mission is not just that no one has ever seen God. No one's ever seen Jesus. Think about it. God's plan, his insanely great plan, or let's call it plan A. Even if it goes off absolutely perfectly, which we would say it did in Jesus, absolutely requires a plan B. There's got to be some kind of follow up here. And this is what prompts Jesus' prayer in John 17 on the last night of his life. And here's where it gets really kind of freaky. That's a technical

theological term, it sounds like, from what Jesus says in John 17, that God's insanely great solution to the second problem of mission. The problem that after Jesus dies in a sense [inaudible 00:25:34] see Him, is that his followers exegeomai tell the whole story of Jesus. God's insanely great plan is that everything Jesus was for his moment in time, his followers become for the world in every moment in time as we live in Him and are filled by His Spirit. Let me say this again, because it's one of those religious things that you probably didn't realize what I was saying.

Everything Jesus was for his moment in time. He prays for his followers to be for future times and places. I'm not going to go quite in order through the passage and I hope you'll study it on your own at some point in the next day. But think about all this. Jesus is not of the world, John one says he came into the world, but the world was made through him. He prays that his followers would not be of the world. And yet Jesus is for the world. He came that the world would be saved and he prays that the Church will be for the world. In the world, Jesus has the joy of knowing his Father and he prays that his followers, the church will have his joy made complete in themselves. It gets even weirder. Jesus and the Father are one. Well, yes, we know that from our theology courses or whatever, but he prays that his followers would be one, as he and the Father are one. Again, I invoke the theological term freaky that his followers would be one as he and the Father are one. Jesus glorified the Father. He prays that the Church will glorify him.

The Father gave Jesus the words to tell the story, to tell the whole story. He says I have given them the words you gave to me. The Father gave glory to Jesus. Jesus says he's going to give that

glory to the Church. Jesus prays that the Church will be with him where he is. And where did we learn he is, in the bosom of the Father, close to the Father's heart. And as the Father sent Jesus to tell his whole story, to exegeomai him, so Jesus sends the Church. This is really crazy. It is insane. Whether it's insanely great is another question. But it's clearly insane that we just as Jesus is God's one and only that we are Jesus' one and only plan for communicating Himself to the world. We are the ones who are to exegeomai to tell the whole story of Jesus to the world. Now this isn't just communicating a few facts about Jesus. The summary well Jesus, let's see what's the important things you need to know. He was God. He was a good man. Crucified under Pontius Pilate rose on the third day here I have a little tract.

It's not just introducing people to Jesus. Jesus, meet Fred. Fred Jesus. Have a great talk. Jesus' plan is that we would tell his whole story, would exegeomai him by living his life in such a way that he receives glory just as the Father received glory from his life. Why does God need to do this? Why couldn't he have done another way? I mean, he could have hired a skywriter plane or something. I am gone. Or he could have dropped pamphlets or he could have arranged for Jesus to come in an age of mass media when Jesus could just go on TV and say hi everybody, I'm Jesus. Here's what I'm like. Why does he rely on this insanely? Well, let's just say insane maybe insanely great approach to communicating himself. I think it's because of who he is. No one has ever seen God and so no one could know. No one hardly ever imagined that the creator of the universe was not a lonely creator but a loving society, a holy trinity whose very essence is like the love of a father and a son. No one would ever figure that out. And that's not just a fact.

People need to know. It is reality. It is a reality they have to experience and touch and taste, as we've sang. And so, the only way the world will ever know the world that hasn't ever seen God and hasn't even ever seen His Son is if they see the church exegeomaing telling the whole story of the Father and the Son living that kind of love, demonstrating everything about who Jesus was. And is that's why we're here. I think that's worth three quarter of a million dollars. Let's make the most of these three days and learn together how to tell Jesus' whole story. [applause]

Announcer:

Thank you, Andy. I just wanted to make a quick announcement to let you guys know how it's going to work tonight. Trey is going to lead us in some more worship. And then after following Trey, we're going to have another speaker Viv Greg to remind you guys it's a two-hour session that will be over at eleven and it's worth two credits.

New Speaker (probably Sheppard): See you guys later please. Stoke to hear what Andy right. Sorry, Andrew. Andy. I feel a bit prepared to come back up because I still am quiet. There's something so powerful about realizing again the thing that the world is longing for is not more incredible mission strategies. Although I believe that we're on the brink of seeing more incredible mission strategies. The world is not longing for more cool Christian ideas or great evangelical cool programs. The world is longing to see people who look like Jesus. That is what they long for. Man, I think you nailed it right on the head. And I think the most powerful thing that can happen in these three days is if as we draw together in this theme of unity. Looking at this thing of missions and we draw nearer and nearer to the Lord Jesus and our lives are

transformed as we come into his presence and we look more like Him. The mission's ways that will come out of Biola really will bear lasting fruit. Why? Because it has done so again and again and again throughout history. Why?

Because it works.

And number two, because it's exactly what Jesus planned for. Does that make sense? Our lives are transformed as we draw nearer to Him and we become more like Him. And the world is longing to see a generation of people who look like Jesus. They've seen so many programs, so many plans that they longed for that thing that Andy talked about this morning so man, as we just worship him shall we just reflect and reflect to him how wonderful he is? As we sing as we lift our lives to begin shall we stand? Yeah.