

Global Gospel

Engage the Lost

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November 8, 2009



ENGAGE THE LOST 1 Chronicles 16:24-25

I need to confess something to you this morning. I am slow. I'm really, really slow, so slow. And all my study in the Word, even in all our talk about mission here in this church. There is a fundamental reality, a fundamental truth, a fundamental picture that I've seen and read and heard over and over and over again. But I've missed it, I just haven't gotten it.

And over the last few months as I've been studying and preparing for Secret Church this past Friday, an incredible evening looking at angels and demons and spiritual warfare. This truth in scripture came alive in my heart in a way it's never had before, and this is truth with huge implications for us a church. And so I want to – want to share that truth from God's Word with you this morning.

We talk about the Great Commission, turn there, Matthew 28. We know this text. We talk about it all the time. We should talk about it all the time because God has left us in this world for a reason. It's not just to sit back and wait for Heaven. We're here to keep people from going to Hell.

So Jesus says, before he leaves the earth he tells his disciples one thing, we know what he says; we talk about it all the time. "Make disciples of all nations." This is what you're supposed to do. And again, I've seen, heard, read this before, but it just hasn't clicked. When Jesus says this my thought has been, "Okay, he's saying make disciples in the whole world, go to everybody." And in a sense that is true. In a sense, yes, we're supposed to make disciples among as many people as possible, but that is not specifically what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is saying something much more pointed.

"*Make disciples*" – verse 19 – "*of all nations*" (Matt. 28:19). Now what does that mean? Word he says literally, "panta ta ethnē," all the nations, "Make disciples of all the nations." So what does that mean? What does nations mean here? We – we don't have time this morning to go all over Scripture, but I want us to realize that the picture of nations in New Testament, Old Testament is pretty different from what we think of when we think of nations. When you and I think of nations we think of geopolitical boundaries, we think of the United States of America, Canada, Mexico, Iraq, China. These are nations. But that's not how Scripture talks about nations.

When Scripture talks about nations we see pictures like families and tribes, peoples and languages. It's literally "ethnē," like ethnicities, ethno-linguistic groups of people. People who have in common a language or cultures or customs, religions, practices. People groups, and we see all kinds of different peoples all over Scripture. Peoples, people groups, ethnē.

And so what Jesus says here in the Great Commission, He says, "Make disciples among all the groups of people in the earth." Every group of people, make disciples among them.

This is what we've seen when we study Genesis 12. God said He's going to bless His people so that all peoples, his family so that all the families of the earth will be blessed. It's what we see in the Psalmist, "Peoples praise you, oh, God, may all the peoples, may all the groups of people, praise you. May all the nations, may God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us so that your ways may be done on earth and your salvation among all nations." All the groups of people, that's what we see in the Prophets, it's what we hear from Christ here, it's all over. God wants all the people groups to know His glory.

Now where it really hit home with me, where it clicked, was actually four – a few chapters before this. Go back to the left to Matthew 24. In Matthew 24 Jesus is talking about when He's going to come back, and He's telling His people – you look at verse 9 – that it's going to be difficult. His disciples. "*You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me*" (Matt. 24:9). And then you get down to verse 12. It says, "*Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved*" (Matt. 24:12-13). And then, this is what He says, verse 14 – underline it – Matthew 24:14, "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations,*" there it is again, –"*panta ta ethnē,*" all nations, "*and then the end will come.*" You catch that?

This verse does not say that this gospel's going to be preached to every individual in the world. Neither does it say this gospel's just going to go kind of generically out into the world, the whole world. No, it says, "The gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to the whole world as a testimony to every group of people, and then the end will come." The end, when Christ comes to consummate it, assert his reign and rule of King of Kings and Lord over all creation.

And this is what we see – go to Revelation. We've – we've looked at these passages before. Go to Revelation, last book in the Bible, Revelation 5. Let me show you what the end is about. That's what the revelation is; it's a picture of the end. Look at Revelation 5; it's a vision of Heaven. This is definitive text in Revelation. Look at this glimpse into Heaven. Revelation 5:6 talks about a Lamb looking as if it had been slain. The Lamb is Christ at the center of the throne.

And I want you to look down at verse 9 and listen to what Heaven is singing, what Heaven looks like. "*And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain...*"—singing to Jesus, they cry—"*...with your blood, you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*" (Rev. 5:9). Revelation 5 tells us every group of people is going to be represented there. There are going to be men, women from God from every single people group singing His praises.

Go over two chapters to Revelation 7:9 says the same thing. Again, we've looked at these verses; I've looked at these verses. Verse 9, "*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from,*" representing, "*every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'*" (Rev. 7:9-10).

Somebody from every nation, tribe, people and language, somebody from every group of people in the world is going to be, on that day, singing, "Salvation belongs to our God." Giving him praise for the gospel that has saved them.

It's the same thing, go to Revelation 14; it's just over and over again. Revelation 14:6, *"I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth..."*—here it is, verse 6—*"...to every nation, tribe, language and people."*

Next chapter, chapter 15:4, *"Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations..."*—all groups of people—*"...will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

And so this is the picture that Revelation is giving us of the end. That there is going to be a day when somebody from every group of people in the world, every people group, is going to be singing His praises for His salvation.

Now come back to Matthew 24 and just put this together and stop and let it click. The gospel of the Kingdom is going to be preached to every people group. And then the end is going to come. And the end is all about somebody from every people group singing His praise. Now think about Matthew 24:14 from the perspective of Satan. This is where it hit me. Satan knows... I am convinced, Matthew 24:14 has got to be plastered all over the walls of Hell. Because he knows that when the gospel of the Kingdom reaches all the groups of people in the world, all the people groups, what's going to happen? End is going to come, and if you're Satan that's really, really bad news. Because for Satan the end is final destruction and eternal doom. Thrown into the lake of fire forever and ever. Not a good day for him.

And so – and so Satan is committed in this world to doing everything he can to keep this gospel of the Kingdom from going to all the groups of people in the world, all the people groups, because he knows that when it happens... This task is finishable. There's a day when it happens and he knows when it happens the end will come and he doesn't want the end to come.

And so the question I want to ask you this morning is: do we want the end to come? Do we want to see Christ, the Lamb, high and exalted in the middle of that throne with praises ringing out from every nation, language, tribe and people? Do we want to see that? Then take the gospel of the Kingdom to all the people groups.

I want to make this as simple as possible that this would lodge in our hearts and minds. So I want to make it as simple as possible because I know that I'm really slow. So I want to – I want to give you three P's for you to remember. I just want you to let this lodge in your hearts and minds and I pray, lodge in the heart of this church.

The Purpose...

The gospel Preached to all People Groups

First, purpose, purpose: the gospel preached to all people groups. That's the purpose. The gospel preached to all people groups. That's the purpose of the Great Commission, Matthew 28. It's the purpose of Matthew 24:14, it's the purpose of all of scripture. The gospel and the glory of God being declared to all people groups.

It's what was quoted earlier, beginning Psalm 96 – Psalm 96, Chronicles, "Declare His glory among all nations, his marvelous seat among all peoples, all people groups." They need to know His glory, that's the purpose, the gospel, the glory of God preached to all people

groups. We're not just going after the world in general; we're going after people groups. Groups of people in the world.

Now obviously, we don't know exactly how that is defined. People groups. We've got some evidences in scripture that help us when we think about families or clans or nations or peoples, languages. We don't know exactly what the Bible means, what Jesus means, when it says "ethnē" – all the people groups.

Now there's a variety of mission strategists, biblical scholars who have spent a lot of time over a lot of years trying to identify, as best as we can, guess at how many people groups there are in the world today. Because it's not, again, it's not nations like we think of. You think about India, over a billion citizens in India, one nation, so many different people groups in India. So many different languages and cultures and customs and religions and ways of living. So many different groups of people. Many times so isolated and disconnected from one another, sometimes right next to each other, but different people groups.

And so – so a lot of people have done a lot of work to try to say, "Okay, what's our best guess at taking the picture we have of people's languages, families, nations and scripture and how many people groups there are in the world today?" And I want you to write this down, what they've come up with is basically a list down to the detail of 11,690 people groups in the world—best guess. 11,690 people groups in the world. And then, follow this, what they did is they studied the extent to which each of these people groups, now a people group is identified by different characteristics, whether it's language or culture, custom.

They – they studied to say, "What is the extent to which each of these people groups has heard the gospel?" And what they found is, next number, 6,400 people groups were unreached with the gospel.

Now unreached means less than 2% Evangelical Christian, 6,400, less than 2% Evangelical Christian. If there's less than 2% Christian in a people group that means the likelihood, if you're in that people group, the likelihood is you are going to be born, and live, and die without ever hearing the gospel. You will be the exception, not the rule, if you hear the gospel there. Little to no knowledge of gospel. They're unreached, 6,400 of them.

But then even further than that, one more number. They said, "What kind of work is being done is being done among those 6,400 to get the gospel into those people groups?" And what they found was 5,845 people groups were not only – are not today – not only unreached, but they are unengaged with the gospel. Unreached, unengaged, 5,845, and what that means is not only is there less than 2% Evangelical Christian, but there is not a church, or a Christian mission agency that is doing anything about spreading the gospel in that people group.

So there's over five – let this soak in – over 5,000 people groups with little to no knowledge of the gospel and no Christians doing anything about it. In fact, opposite is almost true. You know what they found? Listen to this, "Today, more than 90% of the personnel and resources in North American missions goes to ministry among reached people groups."

Over 90% of our personnel and resources in missions work in North America goes to peoples who already have the gospel. Now obviously that does not mean that somebody's going to reach people, that doesn't mean they've received the gospel, and this certainly doesn't mean that it's bad to do ministry among peoples that are reached with the gospel. It's good to do ministry among reached peoples who are reached with the gospel. Let me circumvent a rumor before a rumor starts. It does not mean, "Okay, Brook Hills, we only

work among unreached peoples and if people have been reached by the gospel then we forget about them.”

But here’s what hit me: in all of our talk about missions and going to nations and impacting the world, for the most part, we have put all of our energy and resources into reached peoples—people who have the gospel. And again, that’s not in and of itself a bad thing, because people need the gospel in Birmingham. Birmingham is reached with the gospel. That doesn’t mean everybody in Birmingham knows the gospel, but people in Birmingham had – have access to the gospel through radio, TV, churches everywhere, Christians everywhere. And a lot of people around the world, Africa, parts of Asia, South America, have access to the gospel and yes, it’s right to do ministry among them, it’s good.

But, if we do not pour a significant amount of our time and energy and resources into people groups that have not heard the gospel, that don’t have the gospel, then we, even in all of our talk about missions and impacting the world, will actually end up ignoring the ultimate biblical mandate and mission.

No, don’t want to do that. We don’t want a missed point. The biblical mandate is, Jesus said it, “Take the gospel to all groups of people in the world, and then the end will come.” So get the gospel to them, that’s the purpose, the gospel preached to all people groups.

The Price...

Taking the Gospel to all People Groups will be Costly

Second P – price. Taking the gospel to all people groups will be costly. Taking the gospel to all people groups will be costly. “You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death and you will be hated by all nations because of me.” How’s that for a pep talk?

And it makes sense, doesn’t it? If Satan knows that his end and final destruction comes when all the people groups have heard the gospel of the Kingdom, then is he going to sit back comfortably and watch the Church take the gospel to those people groups? Absolutely not. Any one, any church that sets their face toward taking the gospel to the unreached people groups in the world will be met with the strongest forces of Hell.

I’m convinced that this is part of why, in some senses, Satan is more than fine with the picture of church and Christianity we have created in the West. Because as long as we are spending our lives and our resources and our millions on ourselves and our pursuits of a Christian spin on the American Dream, we are no threat to his destruction at all. No matter how successful we look to each other and our church culture, we are no threat to the end coming for Satan.

But when we rise up and say we’re going to throw aside the ways of this world and we’re going to pursue the biblical mandate of God, we will be met by the devil Satan and all the demons of Hell head on. The price will be high.

I am convinced, church, if we were to, again, to put this picture, this purpose, full force into practice there will be divisions among us, distractions around us, temptations, disease, death. I don’t know what it all looks like, but the price will be high and the question we have to ask is: are we willing to pay it?

The Promise...

Jesus is Coming Back for His People

Third P – promise. This is the best “P”—Promise. Jesus is coming back for His people. The gospel of the Kingdom’s going to go to all peoples and then the end will come. The end is coming. The day is coming when Christ is going to come back for a church. A ransomed and redeemed church – not made up of Americans, Africans, white and black, Asian and Hispanic. A church made up of every single people group on the planet, united in a chorus of praise from every nation, tribe, language and people singing of His glory for all of eternity. That’s where the end is headed.

And this is the point, church at Brook Hills, this is the point. Do we believe that Jesus is worthy of glory from more than just Americans? Do we really, in the depths of our hearts, believe that Jesus is worthy of the glory, not of 1000 or 2000 or 3000 or 4000 or 5000 people groups. Do the brothers and sisters in this faith family believe that Jesus is worthy of the glory of all 11,690 people groups on the planet? And when we believe He’s worthy of that kind of glory, we will live like it. We’ll live like it, and no price will be too high because His glory will be worth it. It’s a radical way to live.

Jonathan would you join me up here? I wanted – I told you a couple of weeks ago that God has shown us great grace in leading this brother to us. And I’m telling you, I’m slow as a pastor, to get things. Jonathan gets it. So, give us just a little bit of a picture of how Christ opened your eyes to this reality, this biblical mandate in Scripture.

Jonathan: The Truth is I didn’t get it. It didn’t click for me. I grew up in a family – my parents were missionaries in Latin America. I went for a couple of years as a missionary and I still didn’t understand that the purpose was that the gospel would be proclaimed to each and every people group.

Went on a trip around the world, spent about a year just backpacking around the world. Didn’t realize it, but I ended up going through this part of the world where there are very few believers. We were backpacking way up in the mountains of Northern Vietnam and we came to a small village on the side of a muddy river. And the people there didn’t even speak Vietnamese; they spoke another language completely different and unrelated to all the other languages in that area. But through several levels of translation we were able to communicate.

And we began to ask them about what they believed. And so I asked, “Do you believe in the Buddha?” They said, “No, we don’t believe in the Buddha.” “Well do you believe in spirits in the forest?” thinking maybe animism. They said “No, we don’t believe in spirits in the forest.” “Well do you worship your ancestors?” They said “No, we just bury them.”

I got a little – I got stumped and I said, “Well, what makes the crops grow?” They looked at me and said, “The rain.” I said, “So what makes the rains come?” “We just hope.” “What makes the sun come up?” “We just hope.” And out of frustrations I said, “So you don’t believe anything about what happens to you after you die?” And the man looked back at me and said, “No, no one has come and told us about that yet. No one has come and told us about that yet.”

And that’s when this all began to click for me. And I understood that we have to give our lives to this mission to see the gospel proclaimed to all the “panta ta ethnē,” each and every people group.

David: Obviously, people are equally lost without Christ, and equally going to Hell without Christ. But there is a radical un-equalness to gospel knowledge today. And that story's replicated over so many... So God began to lead you and your wife to unreached peoples and He used the local church in that?

Jonathan: Yeah. You know, this was made even more, if I can just say this, made even more profound. We went deeper into the jungle three days later, got in a little dugout canoe and went all the way up. Got in this little village, you couldn't even, they were past an eight hours' trek even to get to where we were before.

We come to – into the village and there's this little – there's a man selling soap and basic things there in the village. And he sees me as a foreigner and he looks at me and says, "Coca-Cola." Coke executives in Atlanta, Georgia have done a better job selling sugar water to the nations than we as the Church being faithful to proclaim His name to all the peoples of the earth.

We came back and began to prepare to go and plant our lives to see churches planted among unreached people groups. That's about all we knew, we didn't know more beyond that. We came into contact with two other couples that were talking about the same thing, so we began to pray together and explore where God might be leading us.

And we came to a specific city among an unreached people group in Central Asia. So we said, "Okay, now we got to get prepared and we've got to go out to this city." And we heard that there was a small, rural church in Tennessee that had been out to that city. And so we gave them a call.

On the other end of the line when we told them that we were a church planting team going to go plant our lives in this city in Central Asia, we heard shouts and weeping on the other end. Unbeknownst to us, years before, they had – it had clicked for them – they got it. And they had begun to pray about where to adopt, and they had adopted that specific city in that people group in Central Asia. And they'd started to go and they started to pray and figure out how they could see that those people not remain unreached but have an opportunity to respond to the gospel.

They started fasting and praying for 40 days. They began asking each other, "Which of us is it? Is it you, Bill? Is it me?" The pastor said, "Maybe I just need to go." And they were on their knees for forty days praying that God would raise up a team to go plant their lives in Central Asia. We called on the 40th day.

This is God's heart, church. This is God's mission. He wants to be glorified by each and every people group around the world. This what He wants us as a church to be a part of.

David: So if God can take a small rural church and open their eyes to the biblical mandate for mission and begin to make a dent in bringing about the gospel of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth, what could He do?

What does he desire to do in this body with all the people and the resources and the gifts and skills and passions that are represented in this room, if we were to believe Him on this?

So, we've been praying, elders and leaders for months. And again, I've been slow. We've been talking about what this could look like. Just maybe give us a glimpse into some of the fruit of what God has been saying.

Jonathan: We have to own some specifics. You talk about 1.5 to 2 billion people, close to a third of the world's population, that's just a number. I can't count that high, I don't understand that. It may – may make me feel a little guilty to drop some money in an offering plate so that somebody else can go do something about it, but it's radically different, church, for us to say, "What are we going to do about it?" and to say, "If the people in that city, if the people in that state or among that unreached people group, if they remain unreached, woe to us, church." We're going to make sure they hear.

That's radically different. That's what we have to do. We have to take leaders, we have to begin a journey, we got to get on our knees and pray and fast and say, "God, what do you want us to do? What is the specific part of this task that you've asked us to accomplish?"

And then we need to commit our lives and our resources and go and accomplish this mission. That's what we have to do.

David: This affects the way we pray. Again, over 5,000 people groups unengaged, well we're going to engage somebody. God who? You've entrusted certain gifts, skills, passions. Jonathan was overseas with his family and others in a business platform, in context, where he couldn't be there as a Christian missionary. "Hi, I'm Jonathan, Christian missionary to you." That's not kind of... But it's letting the gifts of the people of God unleash in businessmen, businesswomen and teachers and doctors and lawyers, retired brothers and sisters and stay-at-home moms, just altogether, when we all being to see, "Okay, we can play a part in this thing." We pray, "God, where?" And we begin to adjust our giving to focus... Yes, still on ministry among reached peoples, but to begin to pour more resources into sending out... They were a part of church planting teams into unreached people groups, teams made up of businessmen or women, college students, retired folks working together, doing disciple-making here and then saying, "Okay, we've got to get the gospel of the Kingdom to people groups who haven't heard, so let's go and do that together there." The possibilities are endless.

The main question, and just so you know, in the next couple of weeks, I want to shepherd us, next two Sundays to think through, next week as individuals and our families, "What can we do here, as we're living in Birmingham, in light of this biblical mandate?"

And then the next week I want to share with you some exciting things God has been doing with the elders and leaders as we've been thinking about how to multiply the church around the world.

But before we even get there, we've really got to stop, and as a body of people, we've got to look. We've got to look at Christ and ask the question in

this room. "Do we believe He is worthy?" Businessmen and businesswomen, engineers and teachers and contractors, lawyers and doctors and stay-at-home moms, retired brothers and sisters, college students, youth, kids—we've got to ask the question, "Do we believe He is worthy of the worship of every people group?" Because it's only when we're convinced of His worth that we will be willing to pay the price and look forward to this promise.

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