

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Mark 16

This is the beginning of our annual *Faith Promise Mission Conference* – and as we begin to focus on the subject of missions, there are a couple of points that I would like to mention by way of introduction:

I. Our challenge.

The challenge that we face is well described in our text – notice it in ...

Verse 15 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Certainly this is a great challenge because of the numbers involved – *i.e.* the population of our world today is more than 7.2 billion people! And it is our responsibility to carry the message of the Gospel to ALL of them! But it is also a great challenge because of three factors:

A. The spiritual factor.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 “... if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Men are blinded to God’s truth by Satan – and the reason is simply because he does NOT want them to know/understand/experience the saving power of God’s truth. In other words, we are in a spiritual battle!

We know from the clear statements of Scripture that:

1. Jesus Christ died for all men (*cf.* **1 John 2:2**).
2. The salvation of all men is the will of God (*cf.* **2 Peter 2:9**).

Therefore, it is no surprise that Satan – who hates God and hates every person that God loves – desires the damnation of all men!

In fact, listen to the words of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians in ...

1 Thessalonians 2:18 “... we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.”

When we strive to take the Gospel into all the world as our Lord and Savior has commanded, we are entering the domain of the wicked one – and he will certainly do every thing he can to discourage/hinder/stop us.

B. The political factor.

Through history, the political landscape has changed in many ways ...

1. When the Apostle Paul was a missionary, he did not have to worry about passports and visas. Since Rome ruled the known world, the doors to just about any nation/province/territory were opened to him.
2. When the old Roman Empire passed off the scene – in 476 AD – the pope tried to maintain his authority over kings and kingdoms. However, in spite of all his threatening, kings and kingdoms began to slowly grow in power and independence.
3. But with the protestant reformation – especially the break between the pope and King Henry VIII (1534 AD) – nationalism became a growing force that would not be contained.
4. As a result, England became the super power of the world – *i.e.* her power and influence began to spread. It is interesting to notice that this was:
 - a. Not accomplished so much with military power.
 - b. Rather, it was accomplished with money!

In fact, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the influence of the *East India Company* – and thereby the English crown – had extended across most of India, Burma, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

As a result – around 1920 AD – the British Empire covered one-fourth of the world's land area, and one-fifth of the world's population was under her rule.

5. But here is the amazing thing – those ships that carried British wealth to the world also carried the early missionaries of this missionary age.

Sadly, because of the cruelty and dishonesty of those early traders who were said to be from “*Christian*” nations, people naturally came to view Christianity with suspicion and wanted nothing to do with it.

However, in spite of the hindrances – it cannot be denied – the English trading companies played a vital part in transporting the early missionaries and the Gospel of Jesus Christ to foreign lands.

But today we live in a totally different world! You see:

1. In 1900, there were only 57 independent nations in the world.
2. Today, there are 192 members in the United Nations.

However, since the Vatican and Kosovo have never joined the UN, most people say there are actually 194 independent nations in the world.

And herein is the challenge – *i.e.* each of those nations have their own laws and restrictions in regard to missionary activities. And there are nations today, which have:

1. Totally closed their doors to Christian missionaries.
2. Greatly restricted the working of Christian missionaries.

A great example of this is found in what we call the “10/40 Window” – this is a term that was coined in 1990.

1. It refers to those 67 nations that are found in that rectangle on the map:
 - a. Reaching from 10° latitude to 40° latitude on the map.
 - b. Reaching from North Africa to the Far East.
2. Within those 67 nations, you will find nearly 60% of the world’s population – *i.e.* some 4 billion people. And of the 67 nations found in this “10/40 Window”:
 - a. There are 34 Islamic nations.
 - b. There are 2 Hindu nations.
 - c. There are 7 Buddhist nations.
 - d. There are 3 Marxist – *i.e.* communist – nations.

So, because of the religious demographic in those nations, the ruling governments – as we said – have stopped, or have greatly restricted, the work of Christian missionaries. And because of that, this area is now recognized as “*the least evangelized part of the world*”.

Certainly the political factor is a great challenge to our ability to fulfill the Great Commission – but then, there is also the challenge that we face because of ...

- C. The economic factor.

Bottom line – it is becoming more and more expensive to put missionaries on the foreign field and keep them there.

1. We face inflation at home.

Bottom line, it is costing more and more to continue our ministry here at home – but we must also remember that ...

2. Our missionaries face inflation on the field – as well as, fluctuations in their exchange rates. In other words, the \$1 that we send them this year will probably NOT have the buying power it had last year.

Certainly, when it comes to fulfilling the Great Commission, we must understand the challenge that is presented by economic factors!

However, in spite of these great factors that are working against us – *i.e.* the spiritual, the political and the economic – the Great Commission has NOT been changed or cancelled!

Therefore, I want us to notice ...

II. Our opportunity.

There are three things that I want to mention here – *i.e.* during this time of mission's emphasis, we will have the opportunity to do three things:

- A. To exercise our faith.

During this week, we will talk about faith in two key areas:

1. The faith to go.

Please understand that this does NOT only apply to those who are called of God to foreign lands – the fact is:

- a. God calls ALL of us to represent Him in a lost/dying world.
- b. God simply allows some of us to go further.

But here is the point: Whether God leads you to cross an ocean or cross the street, EVERY born again child of God – *cf.* **2 Corinthians 5:20** – is an ambassador for Jesus Christ who is to be diligently working so that others might be reconciled to God.

So my prayer is that during this mission's conference, all of us will see our faith growing so that we might be actively sharing the story of Christ no matter where we are!

But not only is there the faith to go, there is ...

2. The faith to give.

Romans 10:14-15 “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? ...”

Remember the teaching of the Apostle Paul in ...

1 Corinthians 9:14 “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”

- a. Those who have fully dedicated their lives to the work of the ministry here at home are to be supported by the ministry.
- b. Those whom God has called to leave their jobs, their homes and their families for the cause of the Gospel, are to be supported and maintained by the financial gifts of the church.

But here is the point – both the going and the giving requires faith. And during this mission's conference, it is my prayer that we will all exercise our faith in a greater way, understanding that ...

Hebrews 11:6 “... without faith it is impossible to please him ...”

- B. To rearrange our priorities.

As we consider the passages dealing with our Great Commission – *cf.* **Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8** – it is very clear that this business of evangelizing our world:

1. Is NOT something that our Lord suggested or recommended – *i.e.* it is not something that we are to do *if* we:
 - a. Don't have anything more important to do.
 - b. Find it to be convenient or it fits in our schedule.
2. Is something He commanded us to do – and the reason is simply because the salvation of men's eternal souls is His top priority!

Since God gave His only Son to die for the sins of the world so that all the world might be saved, don't you think He wants all the world to hear about it? Sure – therefore, it *IS* His top priority!

In 1896, the Coke-Cola Company was founded with a vision. Their vision was simply that their product should be made known and enjoyed in every corner of the earth – since that day, it is said that:

1. Some 97% of the world has heard of Coke.
2. Some 72% of the world has seen a Coke.
3. Some 51% of the world has tasted a Coke.

If God had given the task of world evangelism to the Coke-Cola company, the job would have been about done by now – but He gave it to us!

So it is my prayer that, during this missions conference, we will all determine to rearrange our priorities so that we will value the things that matter to God.

C. To glorify God.

This one is actually automatic – *i.e.* if we will exercise our faith and begin to operate according to God's priorities, the natural result is that we will see more people coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

And remember what Jesus said in ...

John 15:8 “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ...”

Conclusion

There is much that God desires to do through our church. But in order for His desires to be fulfilled, each one of us must take advantage of the opportunities that we are going to have given to us during this week ...

1. To exercise our faith.
2. To rearrange our priorities.
3. To glorify our God.

May it be true in each of our lives!