

The State of the Unfinished Task

I. INTRODUCTION

We are living in one of the most exciting times in all of human history. If I could choose any time to be alive, I would choose right now because I believe that we may well be living in the generation that will see the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached as a witness to all of the nations, and then the end will come.”

We have been hearing great reports of what God is doing throughout the world. The numbers of people hearing the Gospel are unprecedented. Let me give you just three examples:

- A. Example: Jos, Nigeria - In the midst of great persecution there are some great victories. A friend of mine in Jos has spent the last five years sharing Christ with Muslim scholars, imams, mullahs, and sheikhs. He has shared the Gospel with over 4,000 of these scholars and seen 1,430 indicate decisions to receive Christ. In the recent uprisings there one of his staff members was hacked to death with a machete and another one was shot in the head. Despite the dangers, he believes that Muslim leaders are open if someone will just share with them.
- B. Example: Iringa, Tanzania - We have to stop making decisions about who is open and who is not open to the gospel. My wife Kathy and I went to Tanzania for the premier of The JESUS film in the Kihehe language. At the end of the showing one of the young film workers got on the microphone and asked the crowd of about 900 people how many wanted to receive Christ as their Savior. A man in the crowd shouted out, “We all want to receive Christ!” They all prayed out loud as he led all 900 in a prayer of repentance.
- C. Example: Global Media Outreach - Some of you are doing things on the internet. Global Media Outreach is having a million people every month indicate a decision to receive Christ. 15% are leaving all of their contact information so they can be followed-up by 4,000 e-missionaries.

There is much to report about what God is doing in the world. But our focus this morning is “The Unfinished Task.” What is it that Jesus wants us to do? His last words all center on taking the Gospel to the whole world. He was very definite about it. In fact, He talked about it five times in the first five books of the New Testament. You know the scriptures but let me remind you again what He says about the Great Commission.

II. THE SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS

A. The Great Commission: Tells us what we are to do and where.

1. Matthew 28:18-19 defines the depth of the Great Commission, “... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
2. Mark 16:15 emphasizes the breadth and quantity of the sowing. “...Go into the entire world and preach the good news to all creation.”
3. Luke 24:46-47 says that as surely as Christ rose from the dead so will repentance be preached to all the Nations. That’s the surety of the Great Commission.

4. In John 20:21, we see Jesus as the model of the Great Commission. "...As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. So should we.

5. Acts 1:8 speaks of the extent of the Great Commission that begins in Jerusalem and stretches to the ends of the earth. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

B. The Great Commandment: Tells us who we are to love and how.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." The second one was like it, "to love your neighbor as yourself." He also gave us a clear command as to the people we were to love:

Love God (John 14:15)

Love your neighbor (John 13:34)

Love strangers (Matthew 25:35,36)

Love your enemies (Luke 6:27)

III. THE PRESENT SITUATION

The centerpiece of all of these priorities is the Matthew 28 passage "making disciples of every nation." In the 1970's, Dr. Ralph Winter introduced us to the truth that nations are not really the countries of the world but the people groups of the world -- the panta ta ethne. He also spoke of the idea of missiological "closure," or finishing. His idea was that the irreducible, essential mission task of making disciples in every people group was a completable task. In fact, it was one of the only tasks given to God's people that has a completable dimension to it.

It's hard to keep track of our progress of evangelizing every person. But the idea of "making disciples of every people", or raising up a church within every people, is a good approximation of what fulfilling the Great Commission could mean.

So how are we doing in getting the Gospel to every people group? We want to look more closely at the actual list of groups later on in our session. But there are still groups who have no access to the gospel. The scriptures speak continually of reaching "all" and "every." I believe it is at the heart of God to care about one lost sheep, one lost coin and one lost son.

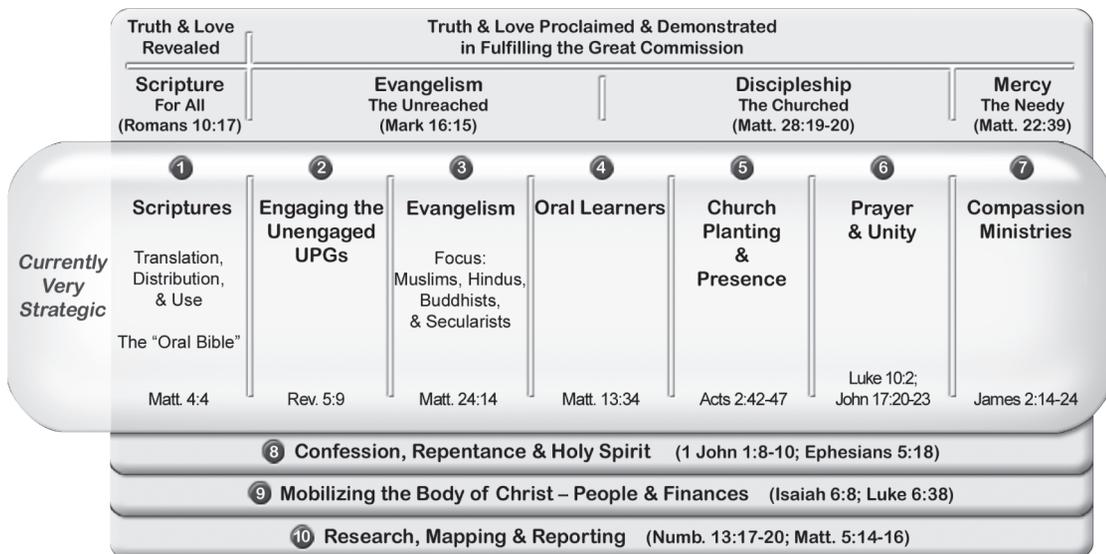
IV. WHAT IS THE UNFINISHED TASK?

In the video we began with we saw the incredible needs of the world. John Piper talked about the pioneer missionaries who are opening up new territories to the gospel, but he also spoke of the huge numbers of people that still have not heard the message. In the Old Testament we read about the men of Issachar who "understood the times and knew what Israel should do." That is our subject this morning. What should the Church be doing? What should the priorities be in terms of evangelization in our generation? I want to talk to you today about ten elements which I think outline the global evangelization priorities for the Church. As leaders, we need to know where the Great Commission is not being fulfilled. First, let me give you five assumptions behind these priorities.

V. THE ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND THE TEN ELEMENTS

- A. First of all, the focus of these priorities will be towards seeing a disciple-making breakthrough in every people group of the world. Evangelism is not enough. “Teaching others to observe all that Jesus has commanded” must be an ongoing process.
- B. Secondly, these priorities concentrate on where the Church is NOT. They don’t try to address every mission that the Church is called to do. The purpose of addressing these priorities is to accelerate the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel where it has not yet been proclaimed, i.e. those people groups, language groups and geographic locations that have not yet heard the message, where the Church has not yet been established.
- C. Thirdly, this presentation assumes that every part of the world is called to go to every part of the world. No country is exempt from sending and no country is exempt from receiving. There is no room for triumphalism. Our lives should be characterized by obedience to God, servanthood to one another and humility with grace. No sanctified business plans or entrepreneurial ventures can replace the supreme importance of His blessing.
- D. Assumption #4: We have not lived out our faith as we should. Every believer should be a humble reflection of Jesus. Our message is hollow if our lives do not back up the words we speak. The Holy Spirit is still the source of our power. And we need to be sure we are living lives that are holy and pure.
- E. Finally, we haven’t loved one another and worked together enough. God has given each person and organization unique gifts and callings. We should honor those callings. But I believe all of us can give some percentage of our time and resources to help with the priorities of the whole body of Christ. If we know what the priorities are, we can “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” -- to do what hasn’t been done thus far. Let’s look at these ten elements.

VI. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION



VII. THE TEN ELEMENTS

Over the last several years, I have been meeting with a number of groups to talk about Global Evangelization Priorities. We believe that these ten priorities are currently the most strategic. You may add some or delete some. But, in light of the times we are living in, we believe these are some of our highest priorities in terms of what the Church should be doing.

I think the primary reason for the unanimity around these themes is that they are based on Scripture. Most of our failings in world evangelization can be traced to our failure to do what God has told us to do. In 2 Peter 1, we have the promise that God has given everything we need for life and Godliness. Therefore the Scriptures ought to be the basis of our strategies. We don't need slicker methods. We just need to be more obedient followers of the Word.

I want to address these needs starting with Number 10. We will go quickly through those at the bottom and then spend the majority of our time on the first five priorities.

A. Number 10 – Research, Mapping and Reporting

Researchers are helping us to see who the most neglected people are on the Earth. We need them to tell us where the Church is not. Do you know who the least-reached people are in the areas where you serve? What enemies are not being loved? Which people haven't seen a demonstration of the Gospel?

B. Number 9 – Mobilize the Body of Christ: People and Finances

There is a crying need for every leader to challenge people for the Harvest. I hope you will leave this conference ready to recruit people and finances toward one or more of these priorities -- especially the top three or four.

C. Number 8 – Confession, Repentance and the Holy Spirit

We in the Church have a lot of things we need to confess and repent about. We need to be people of humility who realize that the power to see lives changed does not come from better methods but cleaner vessels. World evangelization is an empty enterprise without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Bill Bright often said that if he had only one message to give, he would talk to Christians about the power of the Holy Spirit and the necessity to be filled with the Holy Spirit every moment of every day.

D. Number 7 – Demonstration of the Gospel

Equally as important as the Great Commission is our Lord's Great Commandment in Matthew 22- to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

1. This is an area where we need a lot of work. Though we agree we need to do both proclamation and demonstration we don't have enough models of doing them together effectively.
2. 86 % of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists don't personally know a believer.
 - a. Example: I asked a lady from Iran who was cutting my hair how many people had invited her to their home for a meal since she arrived in the United States. She said, "No one has ever invited me." I asked her how long she has been here and she said, "Twenty years."
 - b. Example: Campus Crusade for Christ took 10,000 students to help rebuild homes after Hurricane Katrina hit the U.S. Over 1,000 of those students were non-believers. Many of them came to faith when they saw the Christians caring for both the physical and spiritual needs of life.
3. Some of you have been doing an outstanding job of caring for the poor and bringing justice to the oppressed. I know I personally need to do more. We can all do more where we live and serve locally. But there are some countries where the need is so great and the Church is so small we really need to work together on our projects. I am thinking of countries such as Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and North Korea.

E. Number 6 – Prayer and Unity

The foundation of prayer and unity is critical to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. When you search the Scripture for the words of Jesus on evangelization strategy, He says in Luke 10:2, “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field.”

1. There are more people praying for world evangelization than ever before in history. During the Global Days of Prayer over the last decade as many as 200 million people have been meeting simultaneously across the world in repentance and prayer. There are international houses of prayer around the world where people are praying 24 hours a day seven days a week.
2. Another critical part of Our Lord’s plan is the unity of the believers. In John 17:23, He tells us the world will know about His love and deity as we love one another. We use the resurrection as our apologetic for the deity of Christ. Jesus says it is believers loving one another. So how are we doing loving one another?

Let’s move now to the top five priorities.

F. Number 5 – Church Planting and Presence

Number 5 on our list is Church Planting and Presence. It has always been the plan of God that people would be brought to maturity in Christ through the fellowship of a local church. If 1 billion people come into the Kingdom during the next decade, we will need millions of new house churches to care for these converts.

However, we have a problem. Throughout the world we have only a few countries with updated information on where the Church is NOT located today. Certainly there are security issues, but we all need to know every village, barrio or ward of a city that has no church.

The country of Thailand did a survey last year. They have over 80,000 villages. They found 59,000 villages with no church. Haryana state in India did a survey; in various districts they found blocks of villages – a hundred at a time – that had no church, no missionary and no one planning to go to start a church.

Some surveys have been done in other countries, but I want to call us to do the research together in each country to know which villages, barrios and wards currently have no church. We need several ministries who will mobilize leadership to see a survey taken of where local churches do not exist, in every part of the World.

G. Number 4 – Reaching Oral Learners

I believe the subject of Orality, or reaching oral learners, is one of the break-through ideas in mission strategy that is just starting to gain momentum. Two-thirds of the people throughout the world are oral learners. That is, they prefer to learn through proverbs, music, poetry and especially stories. It’s the way we learned before we went to school.

As mission leaders we must rethink how we are delivering our evangelism, discipleship, and church planting strategies. We need to follow the pattern of Jesus from Mark 4:33-34, which records that ... “he did not say anything to them without using a parable (or a story).”

There are 41,000 denominations throughout the world and 4,700 mission agencies. We need to begin training them in how to teach the scriptures using stories from the Bible. When people are trained effectively they will see every person involved in a Bible Study able to repeat the story without error to their family and friends. One of the best ways to effectively build pastors for the millions of house churches will be to teach them how to tell stories from the Scripture.

The staggering thing is that even in media-sophisticated countries the majority of people want to get

their information through media: films, radio, television and the internet. We call this “secondary orality.” 58% of high school graduates in the United States say they will never read a book voluntarily after they graduate. 42% of university graduates say the same thing.

1. We all need to learn how to share the Gospel through stories. This afternoon you will learn how to craft a Bible story so that it sounds natural and people won't forget it. And, in the orality process you will learn to begin by asking what the story tells us about God. In the West, we don't spend enough time on that question, and move much too rapidly toward application. But the truth is, what a person believes about God is the biggest factor in his spiritual growth.
2. Post Falls is a small town of about 25,000 in Idaho in the United States. Real Life Church has 8,500 people attending each week and 7,000 lay people in small groups - all teaching the Bible through storytelling.

Now we get to the top three evangelization priorities that I believe we have in the Church today.

H. Number 3 – Increasing Evangelization

Focus On Muslims, Buddhists & Hindus

1. Keep evangelism a priority. In many of our ministries we have stopped asking people to receive Christ. Jesus was very clear when He said, “Except you repent you will perish.” Our post-modern generation doesn't like being asked to make a decision.
2. Secondly, increase translation of tools of evangelism. Example: JESUS Film is looking for partners to help translate the picture into 865 more languages.
3. Thirdly, we need to deliver the Message the way people want to receive it – i.e., the right platform.
 - a. Internet – If it is available, internet strategies are extremely cost effective.
Example – we talked about Global Media Outreach earlier. They want to expand to 30 more language groups. Some of you should get involved.
 - b. Cell Phones - Large numbers of people are now responding to evangelistic messages through twitter and other phone technologies. Tech companies are getting ready to launch 16 geosynchronous satelTOKYO lites so that there is no place on Earth that is not covered. It's called the O3B Plan and stands for the Other 3 Billion people not currently connected to the internet.
 - c. iPads, iPods, laptops and all the rest.
4. We need more intentional demonstration of love and prayer for the largest religious blocs throughout the world: Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. If you add in the folk Chinese of China, the total population of the three groups is 3.5 billion people -- over half of the world's population. In Habakkuk 1:5, the Scripture says, “Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days - You would not believe if you were told.”
5. We need to believe that people will respond to the message if we are faithful to go and tell them. Let me tell you a little of what's happening through a media outreach to Muslims:
 - a. Seven television stations are broadcasting across the Middle East. People are calling in to receive Christ.
 - 1) A man called in and said, “I want to know how to receive Christ.” The host started to tell him. The man interrupted him and said, “Wait, let me put you on speaker phone. There are 175 sheikhs here with me that also want to know.”
 - 2) Germany – A man called in and said, “We are 1,000 Muslims here in Germany who would like to follow Jesus.”
 - 3) Saudi Arabia – A man called to say, “There are 50,000 of us here in Saudi who are now following Isa. We come from the villages of Isa along the border.”
 - b. Let me share with you a brief excerpt of a conversation with a man named Abadi from Saudi Arabia calling into one of these programs:

“We take a call now from Mr. Abadi, from Saudi Arabia - Good evening.

(Mr. Abadi):

The truth is that I read the Holy Bible in spite of the fact that it was very difficult and dangerous to get one. I was really touched by it. I compared its teaching to the teachings of the prophet, and I found great differences between the teaching of Christ and the teaching of Mohammad. In one you have mercy and forgiveness, and in the other you have killing and violence. I'm very convinced with the teachings of Jesus Christ, even more than what you think. But my problem is that I have not been praying since the death of my dad. Because he used to force me to pray, and I did not want to upset him because he was an old man. I used to pretend to fast and sometimes I did fast. Also, as you know, rules are enforced here and you can be whipped, imprisoned or severely punished if you do not fast. I want to be truthful to you, I pray sometimes while watching some of the Christian channels, and I listen to their prayers, and I try to do them and I feel great joy when I do so. But, I have great internal struggle because of all the things I inherited, I need to get rid of this inheritance, what is the best way to do so? What is the best way to call upon Christ, if He exists, and if He is God?

I want Him to reveal Himself to me, to talk to me and to touch my heart.

Please explain this to me I'm tired because of it.”

Would you like us to pray for you on this live show?

“I would be very grateful to you, if it will help me and lead me, I will be very grateful.”

Would you like to give your life to Jesus Christ, and give Him your heart and seek Him with all your might?

“Yes. I'm taking a risk calling for this reason.”

Brother Abadi, join me during this prayer and repeat after me. Dear Lord, I surrender my life into your hands. (Caller repeats) Dear Lord, I give you my heart, I give you my life.

O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, I give you my heart, I give you my life, O Lord.

I surrender my thoughts, my mind, and my conscience and everything else to You.

I surrender my thoughts, my mind, and my conscience and everything else to You.

Dear Lord, remove all the bad things and the hindrances. All the dark things that are stuck inside me, O Lord. Wash all my sins, O Lord, and purify me. Dear Lord, we thank you for our brother and for all the viewers who are watching this program.”

c. Afghanistan - A mullah tried to give the call to prayer. Every time he spoke, he quoted Jesus saying, “Come unto Me all you who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

d. Iraq - Two imams met weekly to eat lunch together. One led a mosque; the other led a madrasa. In the same week, they each had a vision of Jesus appearing to them. Both men have turned to Jesus and are following Him as new disciples.

e. The Challenge: What Do We Need to Do?

Reach out to leaders, show love by inviting Muslims to our home.

1) Will you commit to the Lord to go to visit a Muslim mullah, Buddhist monk, or Hindu priest? Go in friendship. Pray a blessing on them. Demonstrate love to them.

2) Will you invite a Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu into your home sometime in the coming year?

I. Number 2 – Engaging The Unreached People Groups

As of a few years ago there were 639 unengaged, unreached ethno-linguistic people groups with populations over 100,000 that were still beyond the reach of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They numbered 535,000,000 people. In recent years, over 470 of these groups have been engaged by over

4,000 full and part time workers. At present, there remain about 3,500 people groups that are still unengaged. The total population of these groups is over 350 million.

These groups don't represent the largest percentage of the world's population, but they have been waiting 2,000 years for the gospel. The most pressing need is to recruit at least one full-time worker for every 50,000 people in the group.

1. Look at the Unengaged Unreached People Group List. Read the column headings on the front page with me from left to right just above Afghanistan. The first column shows the Finishing the Task number (FTT), then Country, People Group Name, Population, Language, Primary Religion, and then seven resources—Written Scriptures, Oral Scriptures, JESUS film, Christian Radio Programming available, Gospel Recordings, Churches, and Believers. Finally, the last two columns show the number of workers needed in order to have one full-time worker per 50,000 populations (WN) and the number of workers confirmed (WC).

I want to challenge you to pray about making a tentative commitment to send some workers to one or more of these groups. It's like a faith promise offering. If God provides the workers you will send them. This afternoon and tomorrow we will have a workshop where we will talk about the first steps in moving someone to one of these groups. Before you leave the Congress we will be distributing an interest form where you can indicate those groups you might want to consider sending some workers to during the next three years.

Go to www.finishingthetask.com to find out which Unengaged People Groups are in your areas of ministry.

J. Number 1 – Scripture Translation

Scripture translation is the number one needed priority throughout the world because it's impossible to do ministry without a Biblical foundation.

Here are a few facts about the 8,000 languages in the world:

1. Only 448 languages have a complete Bible.
2. Another 1,185 groups have a New Testament.
3. 843 language groups have only a portion of Scripture.

It is estimated that there are 2 billion people in these 2,000 language groups without any Old Testament. It is extremely difficult to make disciples without the Old Testament Scriptures explaining the character of God.

4. 2,000 language translations have begun work but, as yet, do not have one complete book.

BUT HERE IS THE TRAGEDY:

5. 2,252 language groups do not have one verse of Scripture and no one is working on them.
6. So what are we going to do to change this? Launch the OralStory Bible.

Pioneer missionaries in these oral people groups are going back to the methods of communicating Scripture as they existed before the invention of the printing press. At that point, people remembered perhaps 50-60 stories they heard as the Scriptures were read from hand-copied scrolls. Since most people could not read, stained-glass windows reminded them of the key tenets of the faith. With this

understanding, they made their decisions to follow Christ.

The same thing is happening today through story-telling the Scriptures. It is a breakthrough strategy that makes the Scripture available to all. Every Christian leader should be recruiting OralStory Bible teams. As people become more literate they can look forward to a written Bible.

7. We need to recruit and send out 4,000 teams immediately. You can use the same interest form to indicate whether or not you might be able to sponsor one or more teams which could be deployed for two years to produce an OralStory Bible for one of these groups that as yet has no Scripture.

VIII. CLOSE

This has been a very fast introduction this morning. This afternoon there will be a Finishing The Task track beginning at 1:30 p.m. We will have 45 minute sessions on each of the top four priorities where we will have a chance to hear from people who are involved in these priorities.

May God bless you as you consider these priorities for the decade ahead.