

## Convention Sermon by Rev. Theodore Johnson

Delivered Friday, November 6, 2009, at the Annual Meeting of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania/South Jersey

Preaching Text:

Matthew 24:14: "And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations then the end shall come."

When we think about our convention theme: 'Til the Whole World Knows, it is an awesome and bold statement. The implication of this theme is huge. So huge it begs the question: do we really understand what we are saying?

The theme makes me think of some familiar sayings I recall hearing when I was young:

- "Don't let your mouth write a check your hands can't cash." Meaning, don't start something you can't finish.
- "You're in way over your head." Meaning this thing is too much for you
- "All talk and no action"
- "You're just 'fronting'" meaning you are putting on an appearance that you are not.

I believe these sayings have a correlation to our theme 'Til the Whole World Knows. By choosing this as our theme we are saying that we are in agreement with what this theme infers; it is our desire and passion that the whole world know about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That the world hears the gospel – the good news of Christ:

"That He died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he rose on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared . . . " 2 Corinthians 15:3-4

We have not only chosen this theme, but by our presence here, and by our mutual partnership and collaboration we are saying, I hope, we want to do more than "write a check we can't cash". We want to put our money where our mouth is. We want to finish what has been started. The Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 4:17: "Tell Archippus, See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."

Let's put this theme in context so that we understand what we are saying.

We live in a world where missiologists are saying that within two years there will be seven billion people on the planet. We are further told of the six plus billion people who are now living on the planet 2.7 billion still do not know Christ. "Boy, don't write a check your mouth can't cash."

In addition we are told that there is between 6000 and 8000 plus people groups who are still unreached with the gospel. IMB literature states that 7,200 people die every hour . . . most of them without Christ.

In the light of these daunting challenges, are we really up for the task? As we serious about the mission to "...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, and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

I mentioned that there are some 8000 people groups that are unreached with the gospel. For evangelistic purposes a people group is the largest group within which the gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barrier f understanding or acceptance.

An unreached people group is . . . “A people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to evangelize this group.”

Two questions come to mind as we look at our theme:

1. What are the hindrances to the whole world knowing?
2. What must we do so that the whole world will know?

God’s purpose for his church is that we would make Him known to the ends of the earth (or to all nations).

Matthew 24:14 reads, “And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Our theme points to a goal that has yet to be reached. ‘Til the Whole World Knows, Matthew 24:14 puts our theme in perspective or better yet, gives clarity to what we the body of Christ should be doing.

However, there is a big disconnect between what God commands and what we are actually doing.

If Jesus visited our churches would he be pleased with our missions’ ministry; or would he find a missions ministry that does not resemble the one the Father planned in his word?

Rather than organize around the mission of God (being missional) many of our churches are set up where we insist that God organize around our programs, plans, activities, that we call missions.

David’s psalm of thanks in I Chronicles 16:8-10; 23-24 give clarity to what God has called us to do:

8. Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known among the nations what he has done.
9. Sing to Him, Sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts.
10. Glory in His name; let the hearts of those who seek Him rejoice.
23. Sing to the Lord all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day.
24. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples.

David wrote Simple Church before Thom Rainer.

What we are really talking about here, is the mission of God – not our mission ‘Til the Whole World Knows.

We're speaking about churches being missional "A reproducing community of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His Kingdom in their world."

I like the way NAMB puts it:

1. Heed the Call
2. Tell the Story
3. Change the World

Our Developing Believers brochure has on it:

"Partnering with the churches of Pennsylvania/South Jersey to . . .

1. Connect People to God – 'Reach Up' (evangelism/worship)
2. Connect People to People – 'Reach In' (discipleship/fellowship)
3. Connect People to Ministry – 'Reach Out' (discipleship/service)
4. Connect People to the World – 'Reach Beyond' (missions)

Sometime ago a LifeWay leader said: "The greatest threat to the church . . . is the loss of disciple-building ministries where mature, spiritually, transformed Christians are multiplying themselves through other men and women." Someone else said, "While the world has been multiplying, we have been making additions to the church. Thus, there is no hope of catching up."

Our problem is – we are making church members instead of disciples.

God's purpose for His church is that we would make Him known to the ends of the earth (or to all nations). Very quickly what are the hindrances to the whole world knowing?

1. What are the hindrances to the whole world knowing?
  - a. A lack of faith in what God will do. We just do not believe that God can accomplish his purpose through us. Hence churches that lack God's passion and power. Claude King writes in his study, "A Call to Follow Christ":. . . becoming like Christ centers on His work in us and not our work for Him. God desires heart change over religious actions. Without question God does the revealing, the renewing, the empowering, and the recreating. Our part as his disciples is to do the yielding, the submitting, and the obeying. Let God do it in and through us. John 14:12 "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these. . . ." Also, Hebrews 11:6 "Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek Him."
  - b. Disobedience to the clear directives of God's word. John 4:35 "Say not ye..." Jerry Rankin, president of IMB says the problem of not reaching the lost in our "distorted priorities and hearts that are not aligned with our Lord's passion to be glorified among the nations and peoples of the world." I Chronicles 16:24 "Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all people."
  - c. Building our own kingdoms instead of partnering with God in building His Kingdom. Matthew 24:14 "And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a

testimony to the nations . . . “Read I Corinthians 15:24 & Revelations 11:15 ... “The Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.”

Archeologists still sift through the ruins of Kingdoms that have come and gone. Isaac Watts wrote: “Jesus shall reign where’er the sun does it’s successive journeys run; His Kingdome spread from shore to shore, till moons wax and wane no more.

I like Raymond Rasberry’s hymn which says – “You may build great cathedrals large or small, you can build skyscrapers grand and tall . . . you may seek earthly power and fame, the world might be impressed by your great name – soon the glories of this life will all be past, but only what you do for Christ will last . . . “

- d. Our penchant for conflict rather than the ministry of reconciliation. II Corinthians 5:17-20, I Peter 4:8
- e. Relying on our ‘stuff’ rather than the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8: Ye shall receive power . . . the Holy Spirit. Illustration: William Carey, poor, grammar school education. He translated the Bible into dozens of languages and dialects . . . established schools and mission stations all over India. ‘Make the strategy, the money will follow.’
- f. A lack of intentional, prevailing, travailing prayer toward proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the Earth.  
Prayer Illustrations:
  - 1. In 1727, 50 years before William Carey, 100 years of continuous prayer by the Moravians – within 25 years – 100 missionaries sent to the mission field.
  - 2. The Fulton Street Mission – 1857 – three months, 100 meetings, 50,000 praying for 18 months. A million people converted to Jesus Christ.
  - 3. The SBC missionary who prayed for 100 new believers – God gave them 1600 Muslim converts.
- g. Failure to augment spirit filled preaching with sound biblical teaching. “The average church member will forget all of the content and even the subject matter of most sermons within an hour after they were preached. C. Kirk Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles*.
- h. The preponderance of tradition over spiritual transformation (Matthew 15:6 – Pharisees nullified the word of God for the sake of tradition.)
- i. The woeful neglect of discipling our children and youth so that they want to live for and please and serve Jesus Christ. Hence the generation gap found in many of our churches. Fifty percent of our young people, ages 18-21, leave the church.
- j. Lazy, spoiled, self-satisfied Christians who are continually asking “What’s in it for me?”
- k. The “truncated” ministries (cut short) in our churches that diminish the purpose and mission of God. “God’s purpose for His church is that we would make Him known to the ends of the earth (to all nations).” Many of our churches look like mazes, where no one ministry ends up in the same place.

2. The second question: what is needed – what must our churches do so the whole world knows?  
a. Pastors and churches that have a passion for the Kingdom of God.

A Kingdom hearted church is where Christ rules in the heart of Church leaders and members alike.

The Kingdom – ‘a community of people who are living under Christ’s authority. A place of obedient disciple-making fellowships.’ Acts 2:41-47 shows us this kind of community.

The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached . . . ; not the gospel of my denomination; not the gospel of my politics; not the gospel of my tradition. We must preach the gospel of the Kingdom . . . where Jesus reigns and rules, where his word supersedes what many says.

The gospel of the Kingdom is Christ prevailing over evil, liberating people so that they can live obediently and freely under his Lordship and blessing.

“Neither is there salvation in any other for there is no other name given under heaven, among men whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

In John 12:32 Jesus said . . . But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” The church that is passionate about the Kingdom of God places heavy emphasis on the “Mission of God”, and discipleship is at the core of all they do.

Our Lord demonstrated this for us:

- Disciples were his method
- He required obedience
- He showed them how to live
- He expected results

Robert Coleman says in his classic, “The Master Plan of Salvation” that the process Jesus used was:

1. Selection – Jesus chose the twelve people in his ministry – Relationships
2. Association – Jesus stayed with them
3. Consecration – He required obedience
4. Impartation – Jesus gave himself away
5. Demonstration – He showed them how
6. Delegation – He assigned them work
7. Supervision – He kept a check on them
8. Reproduction – He expected them to reproduce

Matthey 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Be ye fishers of men, be ye steadfast . . . always abounding in the work.

Having a passion for the kingdom of God means that our primary agenda is advancing God's Kingdom.

- b. Make sure our purpose for being lines up with what God says it is. Psalm 86:11-12; "Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name  
William Carey in his Journal . . . wrote "O what is there in all this world worth living for but the presence and service of God – I feel a burning desire that all the world may know this God I serve."
- c. Make sure our purpose for doing lines up with what God says it is. Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." This perhaps means re-evaluating the ministries of our churches. Our mission and vision. Do we exist to preach the gospel of the kingdom to all nations?

Are we carrying out an Acts 1:8 mandate:

"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."

I personally believe that every one of our churches should be/doing:

1. Acts 1:8 churches, where churches make a commitment to be more comprehensive and intentional about their mission efforts. (Sending Missionaries Team)
2. Discipling churches – where there is an intentional – comprehensive – church wide strategy so that every member is delivered, developed and deployed a missional Christians. (Developing Believers Team)
3. Church Planting centers – where the churches goal is to plant or network with other churches in planting churches – preferably where there is no gospel witness. (Multiplying Churches Team)
4. Adopt an "un-reached people group" – begin praying for and strategizing how to help reach this group with the gospel. (Sending Missionaries Team)
5. Begin to seriously support the cooperative program by trusting God to give a certain percentage of the church budget to support missions. (Associational Missionaries/Regional Team Leaders)
6. Get your church involved in God's Plan For Sharing (GSP) so that members get a taste of prayer walking, sharing the gospel and praying for souls. (Reaching People Team)
7. Get in touch with Dr. Gail Hallman to get materials and training on how to become a "missional church". (Sending Missionaries Team)
8. Begin planning and praying to develop short term mission trips in your church. (Sending Missionaries Team)

In June of 1987 President Ronald Reagan stood before the "Berlin Wall", which separated East Berlin from West Berlin; which stood as a symbol of communism and the repression of people's liberty and freedom. On that day, President Reagan gave a speech that became famous worldwide. In his speech he challenged Russian Premier Gorbachev to open the "Brandenburg

Gate” and tear down the wall. President Reagan put it this way: “General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity and freedom for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe . . . Come here to this gate, Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate, Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”

This speech played an important part in the “Berlin Wall” being torn down so that the people behind the wall could experience true freedom.

As I close this message I believe there are some walls that need to be torn down, some walls God wants down so the unsaved peoples of the world can hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved. We are challenged to tear down those walls that hinder us from being and doing all that God wants to be and do – we need to tear down the wall of:

1. Denominationalism – one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and father of all.
2. Slothfulness – be fervent in spirit, always serving the Lord
3. Self-aggrandizement – I must decrease that he increase
4. Antagonism and dissension and jealousy – above all things have fervent love one for another
5. Skepticism and doubt – He that hath begun a good work in you shall perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ
6. Vacillation – Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding
7. Racism and Pride – God is no respecter of persons, humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will lift us up.

Tear down these walls so that the many who are in bondage, living in the darkness of sin, can experience the freedom that is in Christ.

Tear down these walls so that the nations can hear of the glory and wonderful works of our God.

Matthew 24:14 “And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations then the end will come.”