

Introduction:

- *Do you know...*
 - ... that an estimated 70% of all Bible-believing Christians live in the Majority World?
 - ... that recent books on Global Christianity include titles like *The New Faces of Christianity* (Jenkins) or *The New Shape Of World Christianity* (Noll) or *The Changing Face of World Missions* (Moreau)?
 - ... that the Redeemed Christian Church of God (Nigeria) has planted over 500 churches through their missionary efforts – **in the USA?**
- As we examine the Changing Face of Modern Mission, consider with me **two observations** and three challenges facing the Global Church

OBSERVATION #1: The Great Transition

- Sometime in the 1980s statisticians reported the fact that from the best they could tell, the worldwide church of Jesus Christ was for the first time – maybe since the first century – predominately non-western.
- In other words, most of our Christian brothers and sisters live in the Southern Hemisphere and the Eastern Hemisphere.
- Bottom line: Christianity is predominantly a non-white, non-Western, non-wealthy religion.
 - Philip Jenkins in his book *The Next Christendom* writes that if you want to imagine a typical Christian in the world, think of a poor woman in a slum in San Paulo, Brazil or a poor woman in a village in Nigeria.¹
 - Our Christian brothers and sisters are fundamentally from other places.
- Africa will be the most Christian continent on earth by 2025 if the growth continues.
- This great transition also includes the connectivity of our world. Globalization is connecting the world in a way it's never been before. In that process, more and more churches from more and more countries own the vision to be part of the global Christian missionary enterprise.
- We hear it in the phrase that the church is going *from every nation to every nation* or *the whole church taking the whole Gospel to the whole world*.
- The global church now owns the message as never before: we're all part of that commandment from Jesus to go and preach the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the

¹ The Next Christendom, pp. 1-2 (2011)

earth. And, as a colleague from Fiji reminded me, "Your Jerusalem is my ends of the earth." In other words, the "ends of the earth" mandate varies depending on your starting point.

- Dr. Bill Dyrness of Fuller Theological Seminary observes: "Missions is now mutual exchange among multiple centers of influence and learning and resources traveling all directions, not only from here to there."²

OBSERVATION #2: The Great Migration

- The great migration has to do with the vast movement of peoples from nation to nation. It happens for reasons related to politics, personal freedoms, and largely related to economics. It occurs legally and illegally, documented and undocumented. And it is occurring in many places beyond just the United States and Canada. It is transforming Europe, and creating major sub-cultures in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East.
- Todd Johnson, global statistics expert and co-author of the *Atlas of World Christianity* writes: "Migration is increasing religious and ethnic diversity around the world. 200 million people are on the move today, carrying with them their cultural and religious backgrounds. At least 720 million have now settled permanently outside of their culture's main country. Almost half of these are Christians, representing about 16% of all Christians. There are also Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists living in large numbers outside of their homelands."³
- The great migration has implications too for our own efforts at reaching our own cultures. Many of the people coming from other countries to North America are already Christians, and these newcomers often come with a great zeal to preach the Gospel. A leader in a church in Illinois told me that their church's commitment to evangelism had been resurrected when a Ugandan family joined the church. He stated, "They put us to shame with their boldness in proclaiming Jesus, and God used their example to awaken in us a greater burden for the non-believing people in our own communities."

CHALLENGE #1: The Great Commission

² Personal email correspondence July 22, 2011.

³ Todd Johnson, *Religious Demography and Global Christian Education*, presented to the Trustees of Wheaton College, 10 Feb 2012. Todd also cites Ian Goldin's, et. al., book *Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped our World and Will Define the Future* (Princeton University Press, 2011). The authors point out that never have so many people been on the move, and never have they been so unwelcome!

- The first challenge is summarized in that phrase associated with Jesus' last words in Matthew 28:18-20:⁴ *All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe everything I've commanded you and I am with you always to the end of the age.*
- The reason I bring up the Great Commission as a global issue facing the church is Jesus' command to "make disciples."
- In the last century, the global mission of the church has excelled in making converts and fostering decisions. Evangelistic sermons, literature and films have introduced millions to the Gospel story. Many have made an initial response.
- However, we have not done a great job of making disciples – whether in North America or in the Majority World. The person who raises his or her hand at the end of a presentation might be a convert, but might not be a disciple. Jesus didn't say go into all the world and make *converts*. He said go into all the world and make disciples.
- Becoming a disciple and making disciples is tough work. It means digging deep into our lives – which will show us a lot of things needing to be remade. Becoming and making disciples takes time. Converts can be pretty fast; disciples can take a lifetime. Through this Great Commission Jesus reminds us that the issue is not to make the church broader but deeper.
- In the United States and around the world leaders will say "Our greatest problem here [in this country] is that the church is miles wide and inches deep." Obedience to the Great Commission suffers because nominal Christians who have been momentarily 'converted' do not grow in integrity or character or biblical knowledge or Christian living.
- These superficial "decisions" are not trained to integrate their faith into the way they live; into the way they treat their spouses; into the way they treat the community; into the way they do business or into the way they do politics. We need disciples.
 - *Who reaffirm the fact that we go into this pluralistic world under the "All Authority" of the victorious-over-death Savior Jesus.* You don't need to go into the world afraid about proclaiming absolute truth. I've conquered death to tell you I am that truth. You don't have to be afraid of how you're going to get treated, all authority belongs to me. Nothing is going to happen to you that I'm not going to allow. We go out into the world in His authority.

⁴ Other "great commission" passages associated with Jesus' last commands to his disciples include Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24: 45-49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8

- *Who reassert the imperative of Jesus to make disciples of “all nations.”* If you've taken any kind of mission course like "Perspectives" you know that this means not just all the geo-political units, but also all the ethnic-specific units (*ethne* = “nations”). So Jesus is not just telling us to go to China, but to the Han people and the Miao people and the Uyгур people all the other diverse ethnic groups. We're to go to all the ethnicities of the world.
- *Who commit themselves to teaching the ‘whole counsel of God’ – the phrase that Jesus refers to as “Teaching them to observe (or obey) all things that I have commanded you.”* Not just the happy things; not just the user-friendly, seeker-friendly, I-feel-fulfilled-with-Jesus things but things like taking up the Cross daily, laying down our lives, putting other people first. In other words, even the uncomfortable things. And the goal is not just teaching all things; the dissemination of Christian truths and theologies is not the end goal. The end goal is obedience – “teaching them **to observe** all things I've commanded.”
- *And who live with the assurance that Jesus goes before us - "I am with you *always*."* Wherever you're going, I'm there with you.
- In summary, the Great Commission challenge comes in the form of four superlatives; Jesus says, “I have all authority to send you to all the world's ethnic groups, to teach them to obey all the things that I've commanded you, and brothers and sisters, if you didn't get it the first time – I'm with you always.
- How many of us grow fearful when we think about what God might call us to in this world of global Christianity? What if He calls me to stay single? Or go to the Muslim world? Or sacrifice financially?
- A Nigerian brother told me that this command – Don't be afraid/ fear not/don't be anxious – appears 365 times in the Bible, once for every day of the year. “Don't fear” doesn't mean that we'll never be afraid. It simply means don't be ruled by your fears. Psalm 56:3 says “when I am afraid, I will trust in you.”

Challenge #2: The Great Compassion

- Challenge #2 actually precedes the Great Commission in the Bible, in Matthew 25:31-46
- Peter Kuzmic says it this way: "We need to preach out of Matthew – not just the Great Commission out of Matthew 28 but **the Great Compassion** out of Matthew 25."

- Kuzmic's point is this: when Jesus says "teaching them to observe all things," He is including His teaching from Matthew 25. In the story of the judgment of all nations (Matthew 25:32), Jesus has told us that the way we treat the poor, the way we treat the marginalized, the way we treat the hungry, the naked, the prisoner, the refugee and the homeless, etc is the way we treated Him.
- How we treated the people needing compassion and justice and care and advocacy is the criteria of our judgment. They are fully part of our mission in the world. One of the challenges of the church around the world is not just to proclaim Jesus a la the Great Commission, but to proclaim Jesus by our deed as well. There's no room for a one-sided gospel. We preach Jesus by our words and by our deeds.
- The Great Compassion takes on different shapes. Some might choose to go live in an intentional community committed to Incarnational ministry with the urban poor. Others might become legal aids that can influence a Senator or a Member of Parliament to make a decision that can empower many poor people.
- Who knows? But we need to think in terms of eyes of compassion towards our world. It's one of the biggest challenges facing the global church.

Challenge #3: The Great Celebration

- A vision of the great celebration will help us stay faithful. This globalized world is not simply about challenges. It's about celebrating.
- Paul celebrates with the Colossian believers when he writes, *"All over the world the gospel is bearing fruit and growing"* (Colossians 1:6).
- In Revelation 5:9 and Revelation 7:9 – the biblical description of the ultimate great celebration – John the apostle sees crowds of worshippers and these worshippers....
... sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. (Revelation 5:9)

Again,

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before 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."

(Revelation 7:9-10)

- There's going to be a great celebration someday where people from every tribe and tongue and nation are going to be worshipping Jesus.
- We're part of something bigger. When we go out into the world, we might suffer and incur hardship but we're part of God's winning team. A Great Celebration day is coming when an uncountable group speaking thousands of languages from tens of thousands of ethnic backgrounds will gather to sing praise to the Lamb of God, Jesus, because we're all redeemed by His precious blood.
- Read Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 for a vision that will keep you going. When you're struggling to reach out to that Muslim neighbor; or you're struggling to reach out to some Buddhist guy in a Thai restaurant and you say "I'm not making any headway at all." Remember there's a day coming when people from every tribe and tongue and nation are going to be worshipping Jesus. And we have the privilege of enlarging that worship service through our lives, our compassion, and our testimony to others.

WE ARE PART OF SOMETHING GREAT: A NEW DAY IS HERE

- ***AFFIRM & PARTNER WITH THE GREAT TRANSITION***
- ***AWAKEN TO & PARTICIPATE WITH THE GREAT MIGRATION***
- ***OBEY AND TEACH THE DYNAMICS OF GREAT COMMISSION DISCIPLESHIP***
- ***LIVE AND DEMONSTRATE THE GREAT COMPASSION***
- ***AND STAY ENCOURAGED BY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE GREAT CELEBRATION***