



MISSIONS & THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH

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A. Introduction:

Mission is the heartbeat of the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ to us all in Matt.28: 19-20:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The Lord re-emphasized the importance of this commandment in Acts 1: 8 when He said:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

We are then left with no excuse for disobeying this commandment of God especially in the post-pentecost era as we have already been equipped with the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit for the work and the methodology spelt out.

To obey this commandment, it is required not just that we saturate our immediate environment with the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ but also carry His gospel across several cultural boundaries far and near till they accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour and become responsible members of His church. Missions therefore is still relevant to the 21st century church today and remains her great challenge.

This can be further seen in the following facts:

1. Not every nation or people group of the world has been reached with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to our biblical mandate and prophecies in the following passages of Scripture:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." – Matt.28: 19-20

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit." Joel 2: 28-29

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matt.24: 14

And, also because

2. Missions involves more than mere evangelism; it is a discipleship process which involves training the people observe the word of the Lord and requires living with them for an appreciable length of time for meaningful impact.
3. Missions goes beyond concentrating churches in few major cities and towns. It requires sowing the gospel seeds and spreading churches far and wide among the various people groups of the world.

B. The Challenge of Missions in the 21st Century:

1. Widening gaps between cities and rural places due to rapid urbanization.
2. Corruption in government and corresponding neglect of rural places and populace with its attendant poverty, suffering and hardship.
3. Lack of relevant demographic data and general ignorance among Christians about missionaries and mission works.
4. Ever increasing gap between the rich and poor around the world.
5. Teaching on financial and material prosperity and emphasis on good living among 21st century Christians.

6. Wrong perception among city Christians that everywhere has been reached or covered because of the large crowds we see at church meetings and programmes.
7. Over-emphasis on city/mega-churches with its attendant deliberate neglect of rural areas by church leaders in church planting plans/budgets because they are not financially viable or profitable.
8. Fear of losing income by established churches.
9. Lack of definite and well structured moral, spiritual and financial support for practicing missionaries and their families and fear of suffering such neglect by willing brethren.
10. Lack of information due to communication gaps between missionaries on the field and city brethren and church leaders.
11. Too rigid church structures, traditions and programmes.
12. Misplaced priorities of church leaders and lack of sense of urgency.

C. Taking Up The Challenge:

The only way forward for the 21st century church to fully obey the scriptures, fulfill biblical prophecy and hasten the return of the Lord Jesus to earth is to take missions NOT as an optional extra but a task that MUST be done. The church therefore must incorporate missions as an integral part of her overall vision and adopt every post-modern strategy as well as channel all her resources in the same direction to achieve it.

God's word has not changed and neither has the Holy Spirit who directs the affairs of the Church of Christ in the world today changed. To this end, the old strategy of mobilizing members of the church to '**Go**', '**Groan**' and '**Give**' is still relevant. Although, an old strategy, it is bound to achieve great success if re-invigorated with all focus, sense of commitment, seriousness and purpose. It is said that, '**where there is a will, there is a way**'; if only we would see missions as important and urgent, give it all attention and divert as much of our resources as possible toward it, our testimony would change and several unreached people groups would soon be reached with gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

D. Practical Suggestions of Possible Solutions:

- i. **Going for Missions** – Many who are presently idling away in many of our congregations in city churches should be mobilized for missions both on

short-term as well as long-term basis. Calls should be made from time to time and opportunities given for those who want to volunteer as missionaries. Students can participate in mission works during long vacation and workers can also go for short-term missions during their annual leave periods.

Apart from exposing these people to the needs outside their place of abode and providing them first hand experiences on the mission fields, it is also without doubts an opportunity for spiritual service; a way for them to win souls and earn rewards for themselves in heaven. We have been born (again) to serve. So, no child of God should be idle. Efforts should therefore be made to mobilize the church as much as possible in this direction from time to time.

ii. **Groaning for Missions** – The bible clearly teaches that,

"...the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;" (1Cor.10: 4-5).

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph.6: 12).

If missions must be successful, we must appreciate the spiritual warfare dimension of the work; the fact that Satan and his host are our arch-enemy who would oppose the work with all weapons at their disposal to make it impossible. This calls for effectual fervent prayers so that battles over kingdoms and nations can be won in the heavenlies first before such victories are realized physically as souls are won and people are set free from all kinds of satanic bondages and oppression.

No soldier goes to war at his own charge. The Lord of hosts and Lord of harvest Himself has also said, ***"...without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15: 5b)***. And it is only ***"through God that we shall do valiantly" (Ps.60: 12)***. Prayer therefore is inevitable in missions. It is a practical way by which we demonstrate our total dependence on God. While missionaries on the field should always be fervent in prayers as they battle various principalities and

powers. The church also must raise an army of prayer warriors who would always back up and support these missionaries in prayers. These groaning brethren must be provided with regular updates and prayer points from the happenings on the mission fields from time to time to guide their prayers. This way, victory is sure.

iii. Giving to Missions – Almost everything now is denominated in monetary terms. The bible also says: **"...money is a defense." (Eccle.7: 12)** And, **"...money answereth all things." (Eccle.10: 19)**. The role of money in evangelism generally and missions in particular therefore cannot be over-emphasized. The bible teaches giving generally as a way of testing our faithfulness to God (Lk.16: 10-13). We cannot therefore continue to pay mere lip service to missions without giving to missions.

Since a lot of money circulates in cities and urban centres, mission works around the world can only be sustained by the abundant and cheerful financial contributions of faithful children of God majorly living in the cities. This should not be difficult if only we see ourselves as partners together with missionaries labouring on the field and we know that we shall be rewarded by God in the end also.

Every missionary should network and relate with city churches from where they can draw funds or financial support from time to time. City churches should see it as an obligation and also identify missionaries and mission agencies they will support financially. Efforts must be made to raise missions funds periodically. However, these funds should be well managed in an open and transparent manner, ensuring that they are sent to the right places and people as at when due. Missionaries and mission organizations should always sensitize the churches also about the needs on the fields. Apart from giving money, some members of the church may also find it easier to contribute material things.

E. The Need for Communication and Cooperation:

There still exists as at now a wide communication gap between city churches and missionaries on the field. Whereas church leaders should organize missions awareness programmes from time to time and invite missionaries home to brief the brethren about their exploits on the missions fields, missionaries also must improve

in their efforts to regularly communicate with home and be in touch with their brethren so they would not be *'forgotten'*.

Missionaries should employ modern technological devices and mass media communication gadgets (e.g. film shows, Public Address Systems, etc) in their efforts. They should adopt use of the same (e.g photographic and video cameras and projectors, laptops, etc) to record and report their activities on the missions field both to inform the church and document such for history and posterity. There are still some sizeable numbers of brethren in the church who will not believe unless they 'see'. Audiovisuals and multi-media presentations come in handy in this regard to bridge the communication gap and stimulate such brethren.

F. Conclusion:

Mission work should no longer be seen as the work of a select few but must involve the concerted effort of all of us the church. All hands then must be on deck so that we can carry out our Lord's mandate, fulfill biblical prophecies and hasten the return of the King of Glory to usher in His kingdom. Overall, no effort should be spared in reaching the lost especially among the unreached nations and people groups around the world. If we are ready to re-commit ourselves to the challenges of modern missions, the Lord also is more than ready to help us bring in the already ripe bounteous end-time harvest of souls around the globe.

Not much can be done really if pastors and church leaders generally don't identify with missions and even own the vision as they are the decision makers in the church. To this end, it is recommended that more missions seminars, workshops and conferences like this one should be organized for pastors and church leaders. We would no doubts see a definite change and rapid results in mission works once these pastors and church leaders catch the vision. Thank you and God bless.