

A vertical red cloth hangs from a wall made of vertical bamboo poles. The cloth is wrinkled and has some dark stains. The bamboo poles are light brown and are held together by black horizontal cords.

# The Call to Extreme Missions



Excerpts taken from Dr. Johnson's sermon to AGTS students during Missions Emphasis on January 21, 2002.

*"Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory" (2 Corinthians 10:15b-16, NIV).*

I recently received an email from a new missionary in Thailand. "I've just bottomed out," she said. "I've felt almost desperate to get out of here. I've felt no spiritual impulse to stay. I've been ashamed to say my attitude toward the very people I should have a burden for has been nothing short of ungodly." Later in the email she admits, "I'm doing better and I've recognized the need for spiritual eyes."

Leadership development among Christian minorities in a hostile environment is a difficult task. We tend to think it is an automatic process. But that's not how it is. There are ups and downs. It is one step forward and two steps back. The process takes years, and there are many failures, drop-outs and disappointments along the way.

Usually, missionary "failures" and frustrations, as expressed in this email, are not highlighted in typical missionary presentations. Ironically, the best "missionary" stories often position us to be the

least prepared for what needs to be done in our world today. Reporting our successes as "mission" successes carries a subtle piece of unintentional misinformation because these events are happening where the church is strongest.

As a result, those back home never get to see the unreached world—the peoples and cultures where there is no church or witness. Our success blinds us to the faces of the lost and deafens us to hear the Spirit's call.

Extreme missions is:

- missions at the periphery of the centers of church power
- the pioneer missionary task of going to a culture that does not have the gospel and establishing the church there
- missions from the perspective of God's plan to reconcile to himself a people from every tribe and tongue

- missions that demands your entire life and taxes your mind, body and spirit to their limits, and in its pursuit you will gain your soul as you pour yourself out for Christ

- worth living and dying for

This mission, and the heart and worldview that power it, need to be at the center of every Christian, church and endeavor.

I cannot sell the idea to you. I cannot convince you. I cannot tell you stories that will move your heart to do it. I cannot make it more palatable. I cannot promise it will make your life easier or more peaceful. It is an unnatural, other-focused endeavor that requires the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. I can promise if you align your life with God's global purpose for extreme missions, you will find joy and you will make forever friends (as Paul called the Philippians "You whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown"). Most important, you will



have the satisfaction of laying your head on your pillow every night knowing you have helped to bring the saving message to those who have never heard.

Extreme missions is driven by extreme vision and extreme passion. The extreme mission of taking the gospel to the least-reached and unreached people of our world can be accomplished only with the apostolic vision and passion that we find in Paul's heart: "Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you" (2 Corinthians 10:15b-16a, NIV).

I am proposing that we need apostolic vision and passion to preach the gospel among the least-reached. The gospel is still God's answer to a broken world.

### **The Gospel Was Paul's Answer**

Paul was passionate because he had been touched personally. He believed the gospel was the power of God unto salvation because he had experienced it personally.

### **The Gospel Is Our Answer**

Paul uses the Greek word *kanon* to speak of the allocation God

had given him. God still is giving specific callings and assigning fields of labor to us.

Does this mean Paul's zeal for proclamation is only for those specially called? No. The abundant testimony of the New Testament is that we are all brought into God's family to be His ambassadors to a lost world (Acts 2:17ff, 1 Peter 2:9,10).

### **The Gospel Is the World's Answer**

Oddly enough, for all our protestations, bumper stickers, billboards, church signs and media proclamations that the gospel of Jesus Christ really is the answer, it seems to me the apostolic passion

to trumpet that message abroad is in danger of fading away.

Part of the reason is the phenomenal success of the Christian mission. Some parts of the world are so Christian we conceive of the task in terms of serving the needs of Christians.

A second reason has to do with our western affluence. We tend to see missions as moving from affluence to poverty—"us" giving "them" something. As a result, subtle shifts that put the priority and power of the message on the back burner to focus on tangible needs are taking place. Thus, "mission" and "missionary" are no longer clear words. Missionaries do a plethora of things.

## **Unreached/Least-Reached People**

Total Number of People Groups .....15,954  
Unreached People Groups (UPGs)....6,775 (42% of Total)

Total World Population.....6.44 billion  
Population in UPGs.....2.51 billion (39% of Total)

UPGs are people groups among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group (less than 2% evangelical Christian and less than 5% Christian adherents). Sociologists have determined that evangelical Christians must make up 2% of a population before they can impact the whole group. (www.JoshuaProject.net)



*“It comes more natural to us to shout the gospel at people from a distance than to involve ourselves deeply in their lives, to think ourselves into their culture and their problems, and to feel with them in their pains.” (John R.W. Stott, Christian Mission in the Modern World, p. 25).*

### **The Unreached and Least-Reached Are Still Waiting for the Gospel**

Paul’s vision was for the “regions beyond”—the least-reached. He was under divine compulsion to proclaim the good news where it had not been heard. We have heard much about renewal, but we greatly need a renewal of the apostolic passion to proclaim the gospel to those who have never heard.

I want to break the bubble around an isolated and protected North American world so we realize there are people living here and around the world who will never hear the gospel until someone is willing to cross into their world and lay his or her life down for them.

We need career cross-cultural missionaries to go to the least-reached peoples of this world. We need pastors and everyday Christians who will purpose in their hearts to reach truly lost people here in North America. We need believers who will live in relentless pursuit

of lost people and be co-seekers with Christ to bring them home to the Father.

This is not a short-term, temporary task. It engages our entire lives. I want this apostolic lens—the heart to proclaim the gospel among the least-reached—to become the guiding framework for every decision that you make. You are going to pursue something, to give your life to something. I pray you will give it to telling this story, participating in God’s redemptive purpose for every people on this planet.

*You can access Dr. Johnson’s exegetical notes on 2 Corinthians 10:12-18 in the online version of Rapport at [www.agts.edu](http://www.agts.edu).*

### **Countries with Highest Unreached Populations**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Population</u>
India (79 UPGs)	924,062,685
China (402)	181,693,470
Pakistan (65)	156,020,905
Bangladesh (32)	140,838,688
Indonesia (77)	136,019,543
Japan (10)	123,148,873
Turkey (29)	72,526,319
Iran (54)	68,743,752
Thailand (28)	54,505,514
Nigeria (34)	45,832,293
Myanmar (26)	40,439,050
Algeria (29)	32,819,294
Morocco (14)	30,716,613
Afghanistan (41)	29,844,754
Iraq (17)	27,306,463