

Unreached, But Not Forgotten

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Pentecost Sunday, May 15, 2016

It's good to be with you today and be able to share from God's Word something that is very important that I would like us to see together.

Today is the International Day for the Unreached and, all around the globe, Christians are pausing to consider what needs to be done in order for us to complete the task of reaching people who have yet to hear of the message of Jesus Christ.



There are over 2.3 billion people who have yet to even know that Jesus Christ came to earth. Yet there are so many people who are clueless that there even was a Jesus and these people are actually found in about six thousand people groups throughout the globe.

Now, these numbers may be meaningless to you, so let me put it in a way that is very practical. In a few minutes, you are going to have lunch and when you sit down with your plate, I want you to divide your food into thirds. A third here, a third here and a third here. One third represents those people who don't even know that Jesus came the first time. The other third have heard that Jesus came, but have outright rejected His claims on their life. And the other third is a mixture of those who do believe and those who know that there was a Jesus.

So we want to focus especially on that first third—people who don't even know that there is a Jesus in Whom to believe. We are going to do two things, actually. First, I'd like us to review from Scripture the basis for even having a day for the unreached. Why do we even bother to do that? Secondly, I would like us to consider an unreached people group that we, as a church, will be able to engage with, in order to do our part, so that at least one of these unreached people groups will have someone taking the gospel to them.

1. The Global Dispersion

We are going to start with Genesis 11, with the familiar story of the Tower of Babel. At that time, humanity was all grouped together in one place where they had some kind of comprehensive connectiveness. As we read through the story, we find that they were being very disobedient to God, because God's demand of mankind was to fill the earth; to scatter across the

face of the earth. Yet here we have mankind in complete disobedience, completely together in one cohesive group, building this big megacity with a big tower in the middle.

As we read through the text, there are six things that come through to show this unity that mankind had at the time. They had one language, one location, one city, one central reference point (which happened to be the tower), one name for themselves and they were called one people. So this comprehensive connectedness that they were striving to do shows that humankind, at that time, was in a mono-cultural setting. Everyone had the same culture and language (a mono-lingual setting). Everyone was united and doing their very best to be cohesively together.

This is exactly what God did not want man to do. But you might ask, “What’s the problem with that? After all, isn’t that what globalization today is striving to do once again? Bring everybody together all in one place and all working together.” Well, what was wrong with that interconnectedness was that it was being done completely in defiance of God and not in any way connected to His sovereign rule over them. We see there was this self-centeredness that was evidenced with the phrase, “*Let us make a name for ourselves.*” Their selfish intent is also found in the phrase: “*And nothing that they purpose to do will now be impossible for them.*”

Mankind was living in arrogance, pride, independence from God, human secularism, and basically wanting to carve out for themselves a society that had nothing to do with God or God’s values for them as a people. Therefore, we find them living in defiance of everything that God actually purposed for them.

So God actually had to step in with a gracious judgment intended to disrupt the oneness of humanity at that time. Now I call this a ‘gracious judgment’ because God was going to leave land and things undisturbed, but simply disperse people across the face of the earth, contrary to the way that God judged human beings at the time of Noah, when He destroyed and wiped human beings from the face of the earth and destroyed all that they had.

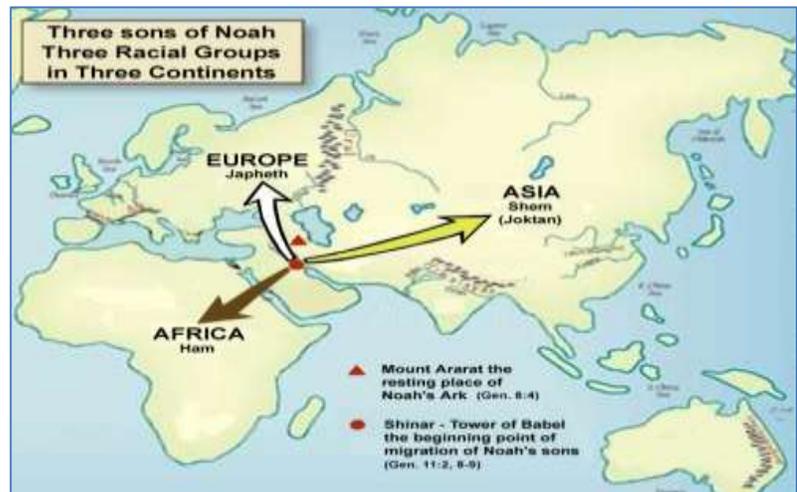
When you read through Genesis 11, you find that word ‘disperse’ several different times. God’s intent in confounding the languages of these people was so they would scatter across the face of the earth as He intended. We read further on “*so the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of the earth.*” But, you know, that dispersion was not a haphazard dispersion where they just went wherever they wanted to go. The apostle Paul tells us that God’s guiding hand superintended where they went. Paul says this:

“...mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.”

(Acts 17:26)

So Indonesians were sent to the islands of Indonesia, because God directed them there. Ethiopians to Ethiopia, because God directed them there. Your ancestors to wherever they happened to be, because God directed them there. And God directed you here, because God's guiding hand has set the times and locations where everyone would live. So if you live in Geneva, Batavia, St. Charles, Elgin, South Elgin, wherever it happens to be, guess what? You are where you are because God has directed that to be. So what we see is that God was directing these people around the globe.

This map represents the way these enclaves of people were dispersed, according to the way they fell in relation to the sons of Abram, to Asia, Europe and Africa. God was superintending so that they would spread across the face of the earth. He wanted to put them in various locales, so they would enjoy the world He created for them and actually honor Him in all that they did.



If we were to see what the people groups of earth before the Tower of Babel, we could compare them to a pancake. You know how when you spread syrup on a pancake, it just flows undisturbed and unhindered all across the pancake. You've probably heard the saying, "That's as flat as a pancake." Well, before the judgment that came at the Tower of Babel, communication was able to flow right across the pancake without any problems. But since that time, humanity actually more looks like a waffle with individual squares. When you pour syrup on a waffle, you have to take the time to pour it into every single square humanity looks more like a waffle than a pancake ever since the Tower of Babel.

Now when you take a look at humanity, you can see four barriers for every people group:

- geography
- language
- culture
- worldview

All these barriers need to be addressed in order for us to reach into a people group today. As Americans, we live in a country of migrants and are pretty far removed from the square that our ancestors came from years ago. But when you stop and look outside of North America to the

rest of the world, it helps to look at everyone else like the squares of the waffle and understand these barriers that need to be crossed.

So what happened as mankind traveled further and further away from Babel? Their culture and standards of following after God deteriorated. Over time, human beings began to go their own way when it came to their behavior, ethical beliefs, customs and values. As a result, cultures, religions and political systems began to validate many vile practices that are very much against what God wanted for humanity. This is just a partial list of what we find going on in cultures around the world:

Degenerate Religious/Cultural Practices:

1. abortion	12. foot binding	22. polygamy
2. black magic	13. forced child labor	23. punishment by amputation
3. body mutilation	14. genocide	24. slavery
4. child brides	15. homosexuality	25. suttee (burning a living wife at husband's funeral)
5. co-habitation	16. honor killing	26. temple prostitution
6. creation abuse	17. human sacrifice	27. voodoo
7. creature worship	18. incest	28. white magic
8. evil eye	19. infanticide	29. wife swapping
9. exploitation	20. injustice	
10. female circumcision	21. polyandry (one wife, several husbands)	
11. female suppression		

Mankind has fallen deeper and deeper into these customs and practices that they thought were good for them, but are so contrary to the way God wants man to live.

2. The Gracious Plan

So God stepped in with a gracious plan to bring mankind back to Himself. This gracious plan centered around choosing a particular person—Abraham and his descendants—to bring a blessing and redemption to the thousands of cultures around the world. You see, God had a strategy to renew every single one of these cultures. Even as man's way of life eroded, God was orchestrating a strategy to bring newness back to humanity.

The central message of Genesis 12:1-3 is that the loving God had a plan to bring blessing to the various ethnicities that would develop. This is an amazing thing when you stop to think about it. How can one man who has no children be promised that he would be a blessing to every

single one of these ethnic squares on the waffle that are found across the face of the earth? One man would be that blessing to all of these people? Yet that is what God promised to Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3 is often referred to as the Call of Abraham, but its more than that. I like to look at it as the hope of the nations, because only by this grand plan that God had through this man would hope and life come back to the various cultures of the world.

Before we look at Genesis 12, there is a simple principle of Biblical interpretation that I would like us to be reminded of because we are going to see this several times as we continue. This principle is: “What is important in Scripture is frequent and what is frequent is important.” So just remember that. What is important is frequent and what is frequent is important. Now why do I say that?

Abraham and his immediate descendants were given this “commission” five different times:

- Genesis 12:1-3. *“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”* Abraham was 75 years old when he was given this commission.
- Then 25 years later, in Genesis 18:17-19, we find that Abraham was visited by an angel from God he hears, *“The LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.’”* Abraham heard that he was blessed to become a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. But it doesn’t stop there.
- About fifteen years later, after he took Isaac and almost sacrificed him on the altar, God speaks with him and He says in Genesis 22:16-18, *“By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”* But it doesn’t stop there.
- The next generation heard the same call in Genesis 26:4. Some fifty years later, Isaac was met by God Who said to him, *“I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...”* So, Isaac was part of this plan, but not just Isaac. His son Jacob, Abraham’s grandson.
- Fifty years later, Jacob—Isaac’s son and Abraham’s grandson—was promised in Genesis 28:14, *“Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall*

spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

Five times we hear this promise. “What is important is frequent and what is frequent is important.” God does not want us to lose the significance of this call to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God wants us to understand that there was a universal purpose for the calling of this one family and the universal purpose was to bless all the families of the earth. They were set apart in order to bring betterment and hope to all the world’s peoples, so that every one of those squares of the waffle would have the possibility of being blessed because of them. Every culture could be renewed because of the blessing of Abraham.

In Galatians 3:7-9, Paul uses a specific word when he quotes this verse from Genesis 12.

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”

(Galatians 3:7-9)

When Paul wrote these words—‘all the nations —he used a Greek word that was very specific. It’s the word “*ephne*” which is where we get the word ethnic. Ethnic peoples, we call them. People who are different from us. “All the ethnic peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.” So what we see here is that Abraham was called to be a blessing to all of these different ethnic groups scattered around the world.

Now I imagine all of you went to the grocery store this week, at least the moms did. Maybe even some of the dads. When you go to the grocery store, you have all these aisles that are labeled in different ways and usually you see a sign for ethnic foods. Have you ever stopped in the ethnic food aisle? You probably have. When you go down the ethnic foods aisle, you find various sights and smells, things that are different from what you are used to because it is ethnic foods. They have food there from Africa, Asia, Latin America, even some from specific parts of Europe. You’ll notice different wrapping, labels and words but everything is of some other ethnicity.

So “*ephne*” is the word Paul uses to explain that through Abraham, all the ethnic peoples from around the world would be blessed. But take a look at that last word from that sentence. All the nations, all the ethnics, would be blessed. What is that blessing? That’s the big question. What is the blessing? Well here it is: some descendant of theirs would be the blessing and, of course, we know that to be Jesus Himself. Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah and Paul says

it very plainly: “...so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

Now stop and think about all the blessings that have come to us through Jesus Christ. The blessings of redemption. Forgiveness of sins. Peace with God and with others. A path to sanctification. The removal of shame. The giving of honor. And ultimately, the promise of eternal life. These are some of the blessings that come from the seed of Abraham through Jesus Christ to those who believe. So what we see here is that believing in Jesus Christ promotes peace, harmony and prosperity, not just in the life of the individual who believes, but also in the greater community in which those believers happen to be. God is out to redeem the cultures of the world through the blessing of Abraham which is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

I like the way John Piper puts it:

What we may conclude from the wording of Genesis 12:3 and its use in the New Testament is that God’s purpose for the world is that the blessing of Abraham, namely, the salvation achieved through Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, would reach to all the ethnic people groups of the world. This would happen as people in each group put their faith in Christ and thus become ‘sons of Abraham.’

3. The Great Commission

Well, fast-forward two thousand years after Abraham to the time of Jesus Christ. We know that Jesus lived a sinless life, died on the cross and rose from the grave. This was the focal point of history and the most important event that took place in man’s relationship to God because now we have a way to have peace with God through Jesus Christ. But after Jesus rose from the grave, He didn’t immediately ascend into heaven.

He spent forty days on earth, educating His disciples in kind of school of missions as far as their responsibility from there on out. Five different times, Jesus meets with them in five different ways and gives five different emphases of their mission to the world. He didn’t want all of this momentum that was started with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be lost, since He had now paid the penalty of sin and now the story of His redemption needed to be heralded to the world. The disciples needed to hear this five different times.

Now remember the principle we reviewed earlier? “What important is frequent and what is frequent is important.” There wasn’t just one great commission as we usually think of in Matthew 28. Rather, Jesus gave the Great Commission many different times to the disciples and notice why He did so in two of these commission statements.

About two weeks after His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples on a mountain in Galilee and there He used that special word (*ephne*) that Paul used. Jesus said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations [ethnic groups], baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19).

Two weeks after that, on the day of His ascension into glory, He has His disciples once again in Jerusalem. Just before going out to the mountain where He was going to ascend, He said, “*...that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations [ethnic groups]*” (Luke 24:47).

So we see that God, through Christ, wants to redeem all 16,600 ethnic groups that are on the face of the earth. The United Nations is a group of over 238 nations on earth, but that is not representative of what these verses mean. Some nations have 20, 30, 40 ethnic groups within them, so Jesus is saying that a nation is not won for Christ until every ethnic group has an opportunity to hear the gospel as well.

So thinking of our waffle illustration, there are 16,600 little squares into which the sweetness of the gospel needs to be poured. We need to make the effort to pour the gospel into every single square. The church has been on mission ever since the commission was given. Ever since the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down upon the church and empowered them to do it, believers throughout all time have been taking the gospel message around the world to as many places as possible and encountering these people groups. Praise God that there has been a lot of progress. Of the 16,600 people groups, around 10,000 of them are considered reached. But that still leaves the other 6,000 who still do not have a clear presentation of the gospel.

4. The Grand Gathering

Let's fast-forward from now to a vision in glory, a great gathering that is going to take place at the end of time. We have a picture in Revelation 7:9-12 of all these peoples who are gathered together and John uses some descriptive words that are very helpful to us. He says, “*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...*” These four words are saying that there is a cohesive universality of all these people who are coming from all the different ethnic groups on the face of the earth.

Now, one last time, do you remember our principle? “Whatever is important is frequent and whatever is frequent is important. I'll bet you remember that the rest of the week if nothing else.

In the book of Revelation, John puts these four words together six different times in six different passages, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to help us realize that there is a big connection from Genesis 12 to Revelation 9. All the people groups on earth will hear the gospel of Jesus Christ in some way. They are going to be represented at this throne above us and it's our responsibility, our obligation, to make sure that all of these groups are reached.

What a contrast this is from Genesis 12 when all the nations were together, defying what God designed for them in unity. Now in Revelation we see a doxology, with all the peoples together on earth, worshipping God.

There are four characteristics that come out of this gathering in heaven that are absolutely wonderful for humanity.

- First, it shows equality. The peoples gathered around the throne are all on equal footing. No one is more important than the other and no discrimination is evident at the foot of the cross, as well as at the foot of the throne. All peoples are equal in value and personhood. So we see this egalitarianism in perfection, being practiced by all the peoples on the earth. It will be a classless, fair and impartial gathering of people before the throne of God.
- Secondly, it's going to have harmony. The multitudes are so numerous that no one can number them, it says, and all are harmoniously worshipping God the Father and His Son. No one is out of step—and probably no one is out of tune—as they worship God together.
- Thirdly we see that there is unity. There is no separation among the peoples. There is no hint of segregation here. No enclave over here with all the Africans and all the Asians over there and so forth. They are all mixed together. I like to think of it as people worshipping in a way that is absolutely blind to any kind of ethnicity, even though they themselves are still within their ethnic identity. In front of a shouting Asmat is an adoring Aztec. Behind a bowing Chinese is an exalting Su. Beside a worshipping German is a praising Jew. Next to a hand-raising Saudi is a jumping Sulu. Everyone is mixed together in unity. That is unthinkable as we are living now, but we will be worshipping God in this perfect unity.
- Then lastly they are in worship. All are crying with a loud voice and shouting, "Salvation belongs to our God Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." But it doesn't stop there. The angels join this multi-cultural gathering and together they say, "*Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen* " (Revelation 7:12).

What we see in this passage is that there is representation of all the ethnic groups, praising God and filled with awe, joyously worshipping God spontaneously as they blurt out the seven doxological themes that relate solely to God. What a difference between the defiance that we saw way back in Genesis 11 and the doxology that we see here in Revelation 9.

This glorious display of worship will be the fulfillment of a verse we see in Psalm 86:9, “*All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.*” The honor of God will be recognized and praised. The unadulterated fellowship between God and man, lost in the Garden of Eden and promoted at the Tower of Babel, will be restored. All humanity will be living and worshipping together because they will have become people who have believed in Jesus Christ.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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