

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 11-4-12 AM NOTES
"WHEN THE MISSION IS IMPOSSIBLE"
2 CHRONICLES 20:1-25

Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Mark 16:15 (NKJV) "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'"

Luke 24:46-47 (NKJV) "Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'"

John 20:21 (NKJV) "So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'"

Luke 19:10 (NKJV) "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Acts 1:8 (NKJV) "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The mission of the church is to tell all seven billion people on planet earth about Jesus Christ and His Gospel and make disciples of every people group.

2 Peter 1:4 (NKJV) "by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust."

John 13:35 (NKJV) "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Psalms 127:4-5a (NKJV) "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so *are* the children of one's youth. ⁵ Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them..."

I. The Task That Is Impossible (vv. 1-2)

1. Churches are becoming more ingrown and less interested in reaching out to others.
2. Members want "practical" formulas rather than profound spiritual truth.
3. The postmodern insistence on tolerance is gaining ground quickly among Christians.
4. Christianity is having near-zero impact on the surrounding culture.

—George Barna

- World Population—7 billion.
- Those who have heard a biblical presentation of the Gospel and believed—750 million (11 of every 100 people).
- 3.5 billion people have no realistic opportunity to hear the Gospel at this moment.
- 11,646 people (ethnic) groups.
- 6,734 people groups are less than 2% evangelical Christian.
- Many of these people groups have no missions organizations or individual missionaries targeting them.
- 584 unreached people groups have people from that group living in America.
- According to the North American Mission Board, 233 million of America's 305 million people do not have a saving relationship with Christ.
- In 9 Northeastern states, 83% of the population has never savingly believed on Jesus.

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"WHEN THE MISSION IS IMPOSSIBLE"
2 CHRONICLES 20:1-25

I think that one of the key passages in this amazing account is **2 Chronicles 20:12b (NKJV)** "...nor do we know what to do, but our eyes *are* upon You." King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah were facing an impossible mission. While none of the nations gathered against Judah could have defeated them by themselves, when the three nations formed an alliance, they became an impossible foe to defeat. Like the people of Judah, we have been given an impossible mission. As we see how Jehoshaphat led the people of Judah to deal with this impossible mission and actually saw the mission accomplished, we will see how we can accomplish our "impossible" mission.

Our impossible mission is given to us in the five commissions of Christ. A mission is an order, a directive, or an assignment. The prefix "co" means together. A commission is a mission shared together. The best known of the commissions is in **Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV)** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Mark's version of the commission is found in **Mark 16:15 (NKJV)** "And He [Jesus] said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'" That is rather hard to misinterpret. Luke's version of the commission is found in **Luke 24:46-47 (NKJV)** "Then He [Jesus] said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'" John's version of the commission is the most succinct: **John 20:21 (NKJV)** "So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'" We are told why the Father sent the Son in **Luke 19:10 (NKJV)** "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." In the same way, we have been sent to seek and save the lost. As the early church was about to set off on this mission, Jesus stated the commission in a fifth way just before He ascended back to the Father. **Acts 1:8 (NKJV)** "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." If we had to put all of that together and boil it down to one concise statement, it would be this: "The mission of the church is to tell all seven billion people on planet earth about Jesus Christ and His Gospel and make disciples of every people group." That seems to me to qualify as an impossible mission! Some of these seven billion people are in extremely remote places; some don't want to hear the gospel and may bring bodily harm to the messenger of the good news. There are cultural barriers, language barriers, distance barriers, literacy barriers, and a host of other barriers that we don't even find out about until we set about obeying this command. Can you relate to Jehoshaphat's prayer to the Lord in **2 Chronicles 20:12 (NKJV)** "...nor do we know what to do..." Whatever we do, we must not do what most churches have done and say, "This is such an overwhelming mission that we aren't going to take it seriously. We'll give a little lip service to the mission, take up an offering every year and mention the mission in prayer as we think about those who have gone full time to fulfill it." No, we will not do that! That is not an option to stop with that. We will not focus on ourselves and our needs and just caring for our own people and ignore the mission. God will not allow that as an option. This mission is given to every church and every member of that church and we will not give it lip service and then proceed to take an offering and then go back to focusing on ourselves.

My purpose this morning is not to lay guilt on you, but to encourage you in the fulfilling of this impossible mission. Everything we do as a church and the focus of each family in this church is to be aimed at fulfilling this mission. Our worship becomes the fuel for mission's flame; it becomes the motive for which we go – that our great God may receive from former rebels the glory and worship that He is due. Our loving one another is not an end in itself. Biblical love is the natural response to needs in others because we have become a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and God is love. We love one another so that the world might have an example of what a disciple of Christ looks like (**John 13:35**

(NKJV) “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”). Our loving one another is a visual aid to assist in carrying out the mission. Our fellowship is not an end in itself. As partners in a common cause (the meaning of fellowship) we encourage one another, we build up one another as we continue to fulfill the mission which is our common cause. We minister to those who are wounded by sickness, sin, or other tribulation so that they can gain back their strength and get on with accomplishing the mission. We practice loving church discipline on those who refuse to deal with sin so that they turn from their sin, are restored and then get back to the mission. We build buildings not to provide nice places to worship, go to classes, or for recreation opportunities, but so that people may be equipped to get in on their part in the mission. We do not have a Christian School to provide a place of protection for our children so that they are not polluted by the world. We have a Christian School so that we can come alongside parents to teach children a biblical worldview and equip them to penetrate all levels of society to proclaim the Gospel, demonstrate the effects of the Gospel and thus fulfill the mission. A branch of First Baptist Academy is opening in Salama, Kenya next year, and we have plans as soon as God provides the resources to have satellite campuses in the Knoxville inner-city and close to the government subsidized housing projects as a part of the accomplishment of the mission God has given us. We seek to equip families in our church to raise their children to be like arrows in the hand of a warrior to go into places with the gospel where the parents could not go that the mission might be accomplished. **Psalms 127:4-5a (NKJV)** “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so *are* the children of one's youth. ⁵ Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them...” We don't raise them to be materially prosperous and fulfill the American dream and be materially wealthy and worldly successful.

I wonder what God could do with a church that became consumed with the fact that it is all about glorifying God by dying to self, taking up our cross and doing all that we do fulfill this impossible mission. Let's draw some principles from this Old Testament account that we can apply to the mission.

I. The Task That Is Impossible (V1-2)

The magnitude of this problem that King Jehoshaphat faced must not escape us. This three member coalition outnumbered Judah and when Judah found out they were coming, they were only about 25 miles or so away! There was the sheer number of the enemy and also the urgency they faced. What an illustration this is of our impossible mission. Let me restate the mission in its simplicity as I did earlier. “The mission of the church is to tell all seven billion people on planet earth about Jesus Christ and His Gospel and make disciples of every people group.” One reason this is an impossible mission is because of the shape the church is in. Is the church in America in any shape to accomplish such an impossible mission? Not long ago the Barna organization conducted 5,000 interviews and came up with a summary of the state of the church in America today. Here are a few of their conclusions.

1. Churches are becoming more ingrown and less interested in reaching out to others.
2. Members want “practical” formulas rather than profound spiritual truth.
3. The postmodern insistence on tolerance is gaining ground quickly among Christians.
4. Christianity is having near-zero impact on the surrounding culture.

- Quoted in Ronnie Floyd, *Our Last Great Hope*, Page 32

The state of the church makes the mission seem to be impossible. But let me also give you some of the latest statistics that show how impossible the mission is. World population recently crossed over the 7 billion mark. Experts estimate that about 750 million of those 7 billion people have clearly heard an accurate biblical presentation of the Gospel and have believed. This means that about 11 out of every 100 people in the world confess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior. Some statistics present a lot more than 750 million (some up to 33% of the world's population), but their numbers include that vast number of people who simply list “Christian” as their religious preference without really having heard the Gospel and savingly believed in Jesus Christ. At present, it seems that more than 6 billion people alive right now face the prospect of spending eternity in Hell. Just over 50% of the world's population (3.5 billion people) has no realistic opportunity to hear the Gospel at this moment.

Let's move from population to people (ethnic) groups. This is what is meant by the Greek word translated "nations" in the New Testament. There are 11,646 people groups in the world. Of these, 6,734 people groups are less than 2% evangelical Christian. Many of these people groups have no mission organizations or even individual missionaries targeting them. There are no churches being planted among them. They have virtually no access to the Gospel. It may surprise you to know that there are people from 584 unreached people groups living in the USA! The NAMB estimates that 233 million out of 305 million people in the USA do not have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In 9 northeastern states 83% of the population has no saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In 2013 we are partnering with a church plant in Boston and the lostness there is astounding. Tom Clegg and Warren Bird wrote a book called *Lost in America* and said that if the unchurched population in this country were extracted and put down in another land as a nation of its own, it would be the 5th largest nation in the world!

The situation right around us is not a lot better. Lostness pervades Knox County. Go with some of our TELL teams into the mobile home parks and into the inner-city projects and you will be convinced of the lostness that is all around us.

The task that we face is indeed an impossible task! Yet, we don't have the option of just shrugging our shoulders and going on with life. We have a mission from the Lord and we cannot, and we cannot ignore it. What did Jehoshaphat do when he faced his impossible situation? He prayed.

II. The Prayer That Brings Perspective (V3-18)

This prayer of Jehoshaphat was a desperate prayer. Remember that he recognized and confessed his ignorance. **2 Chronicles 20:12 (NKJV)** "...nor do we know what to do, but our eyes *are* upon You." Let's examine this desperate prayer.

A. It Focuses on the Person of God (V6)

When our task is seemingly impossible, focusing on God pulls it down to size. As we look at the barriers to getting the gospel to the world, we need to be reminded that He rules over the kingdoms of the world. We need to rest in and trust in the fact that in His hand is power and might and no one is able to withstand Him. In **Psalms 2:8 (NKJV)** the Father says to the Son, "Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the nations *for* Your inheritance..." Do we not have the use of the Son's name in prayer? Can we not, in Jesus' Name, ask the Father for the nations where He has sent us? When we focus on the barriers and the immensity of the task, we become fearful and discouraged; when we focus on God, we become bold and encouraged! Before we strategize, we need to prioritize praise. Before we plan we need to pray. The key to seeing God accomplish the impossible is to get God's people on their knees not worrying with their eyes closed but worshipping and praising God for who He is. The atmosphere for hearing from God and experiencing His power is the atmosphere of worship and praise.

B. It Focuses on the Past Works of God (V7-9)

Look at God's record; it is flawless. The foundation of our faith is the faithfulness of God to keep his word. Every command of God carries with it the promise of God to give us the grace and power to obey the command. As you study Old Testament prayers they often rehearse the faithfulness of God in the past. Jehoshaphat goes back to when Joshua took the Promised Land. The mission to take the Promised Land was an impossible mission, but they took the land! There were giants and there were fortified cities, but they fell and Israel won. Actually Joshua faced a 5 nation confederacy and won. Judah here only faced a 3 nation confederacy. Look at the first century church. They obeyed **Mark 16:15 (NKJV)** "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'". They didn't have any of the resources we have as far as technology and education. But they prayed and believed that God would provide, and He did. Look to the past; God is batting 1.000 and he has never failed.

C. It Focuses on the Power of God (V10-12)

I love his humility! What a great prayer. The task of carrying out the mission that God has given us is impossible. We, like Jehoshaphat confess that we don't know what to do but we look to the one who has all wisdom and all power. Sometimes we get this arrogant view that we do our best using our plans and our technology and then God will fill in the gaps. No! It's all God. He must give and guide and empower

our strategy; He must open doors and hearts. We are to simply confess our total dependence upon Him and obediently follow His guidance.

D. It Focuses on the Plan of God (V13-18)

The key is V15b “for the battle is not [ours] but the Lord’s.” Sometimes there will be a great strategy that God gives us to overcome the barriers in His strength and sometimes He just supernaturally works to remove the barriers totally apart from us. God here told Jehoshaphat to put the choir in front of the army and just watch what God will do. Sometimes when we follow God’s guidance, there is a clear strategy that makes sense to us and we just trust God to carry it out through us. At other times His plan doesn’t make a lot of common sense. When we seek Him in prayer on how to accomplish the mission, He will guide us.

III. The Obedience That Is Essential (V19-21)

Though God’s plan didn’t make common sense, the people obeyed. Several years ago God led us to join a movement of churches in our denomination to go to unreached people groups or cities that had no career missionaries, no mission organizations working with them and send in teams to share the Gospel and plant churches. To be honest, that plan makes no sense! How do you plant churches with no career missionaries on the ground? How do you start a church planting movement when the missionaries are so far away? We didn’t know, but we believed that this is what God had led us to do. If we had a theme verse it would be **2 Chronicles 20:12 (NKJV)** “...nor do we know what to do, but our eyes *are* upon You.” Over the years that we have been in East Asia, South Asia (2 places), East Africa, and West Africa, we have seen God do some amazing things and I believe that the harvest is just beginning.

IV. The Work That God Does (V22-25)

Look how easily God accomplished the mission! God can do more in a day than all of our strategies can accomplish in five lifetimes. I believe that it is very possible to accomplish the mission – “The mission of the church is to tell all seven billion people on planet earth about Jesus Christ and His Gospel and make disciples of every people group.” What seems impossible to us is gloriously possible for God! He defeated an army superior to the army of His people by having the choir lead the way and just worship the Lord.

CONCLUSION

I want to leave you with a sense of urgency that we have to accomplish the mission. This is not the time to take it easy. Hudson Taylor said, “The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.” This impossible mission is for every believer. You may not be able to go to South Asia or West Africa, but you could go to one of the 5 mobile home park churches, one of the inner city housing developments, to Idaho that we are renewing a partnership with this year, teach children here a biblical worldview in Sunday School or Awana on Wednesday nights. You don’t have the option to do nothing. You can give [Lottie Moon offering for international missions is \$120,000 this year]. You must recognize the urgency!

In the WMC beginning Friday night you will catch a vision of what God is doing and how you can plug in to His plan. Don’t choose the “comfortable life”, the “safe life”, the “risk free” life. Don’t put off getting involved until a more convenient time. Take TELL, Missions Boot camp, get a passport – as God where He wants you to plug in. Give sacrificially, pray diligently and let’s see God accomplish this impossible task. Oswald J. Smith said, “Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist.” May God give us an urgency to fulfill the mission for which we exist.

II. The Prayer That Brings Perspective (vv. 3-18)

A. It Focuses on the Person of God (v. 6)

Psalms 2:8 (NKJV) “Ask of Me, and I will give *You* The nations *for* Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.”

B. It Focuses on the Past Works of God (vv. 7-9)

Mark 16:15 (NKJV) “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’”

C. It Focuses on the Power of God (vv. 10-12)

D. It Focuses on the Plan of God (vv. 13-18)

III. The Obedience That Is Essential (vv. 19-21)

IV. The Work That God Does (vv. 22-25)

“The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.”

—Hudson Taylor

“Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist.”

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