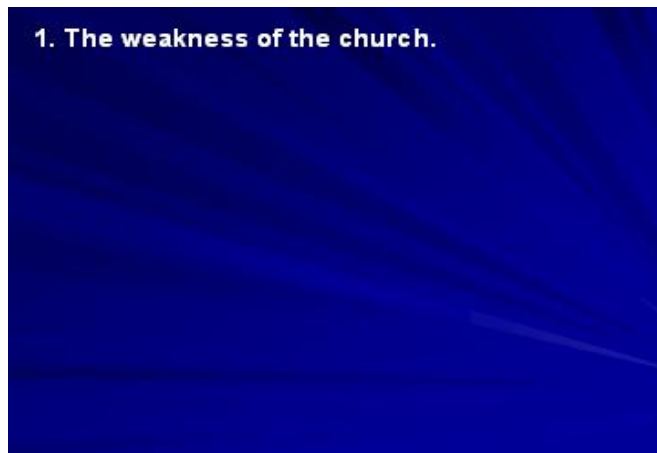


MOTIVATED BY THE CROSS

(Hebrews 12:1-3 June 3, 2007)

Statistics can be twisted to say almost anything. But one statistic that is hard to twist is that in Australian churches the number of missionaries sent out has dropped markedly and the percentage of church giving directed to missions has dropped markedly.

Over the past few years – I have read a number of books looking at this phenomenon and they list a number of reasons for this:



1. The weakness of the church.

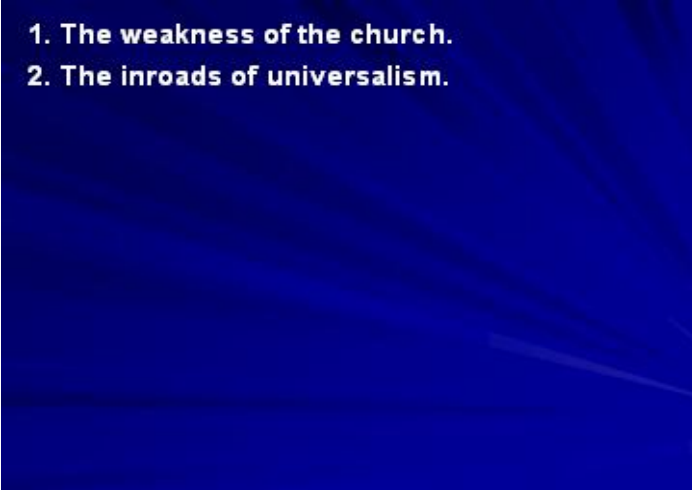
Perhaps the greatest reason for the missionary downturn is the generalised weakness of the church.

We are losing our evangelical roots. We are losing the vision of seeing the Gospel triumph in distant lands. We are taking our eyes off Jesus and becoming more concerned with our superannuation than with eternity.

Our commitment to Scripture is waning. We are putting too many roots into the world and not enough into heaven.

To send missionaries is an expensive, dangerous, arduous effort. Unless a church is strong – they won't commit their best people, a large chunk of money and the effort to pray and support.

While this is probably the main reason for the downturn in missionaries – there are other contributing reasons.

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1. The weakness of the church.
 2. The inroads of universalism.

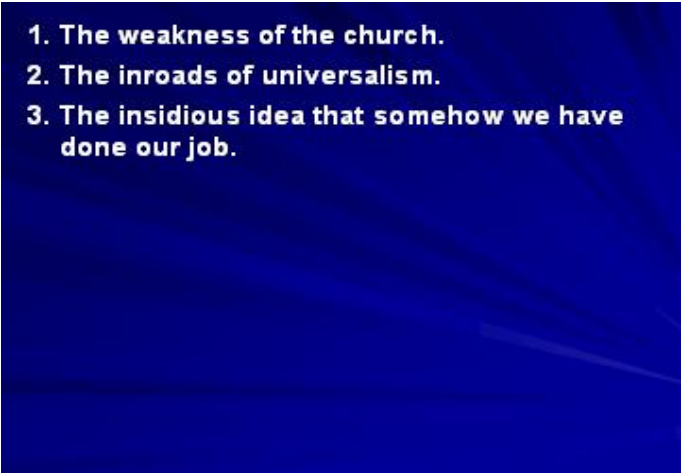
2. The inroads of universalism.

Universalists tell us that Muslims and Jews and Hindus are actually our spiritual brothers – they are on a parallel path to heaven and we don't need to evangelise them.

I am fairly certain that the appeal of universalism doesn't resonate well in this church. But the reality is that it is finding fertile ground in many churches.

Go to Koorong and there you will see many books validating universalism as a theology where twenty years ago there were none.

If they are already going to heaven – why send missionaries?

- 
1. The weakness of the church.
 2. The inroads of universalism.
 3. The insidious idea that somehow we have done our job.

3. The insidious idea that somehow we have done our job.

I have divided this point into two parts.

1. The weakness of the church.
2. The inroads of universalism.
3. The insidious idea that somehow we have done our job.
 - a. *The task of missions is nearly done.*

a. *The concept that the task of missions is nearly done.*

For years we have sent out missionaries. And it is true that the church in many of these countries where we have sent missionaries is doing well – better than the church in Australia.

As we heard from the Langham Partnership this morning – many of the majority world churches are more evangelical, growing faster and stronger than many of the churches in the West.

I am going to give you a few statistics. I am sure you have heard many of them before:

At this time in world history – more Christians live in Asia, Africa and Latin America – than in western lands.

According to Bryant L. Meyers, over half the Christians in the world live in the two-thirds World and **nearly 70% of the all evangelicals** live in the non-Western world.

The Church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, alone now contribute about 89% of the individuals who become Christians within a twenty-four hour period around the world.

In Africa there are ten countries which have very large Christian majorities ranging from 69% to 92% of their countries' populations. This area is experiencing the fastest church growth of any region in the world.

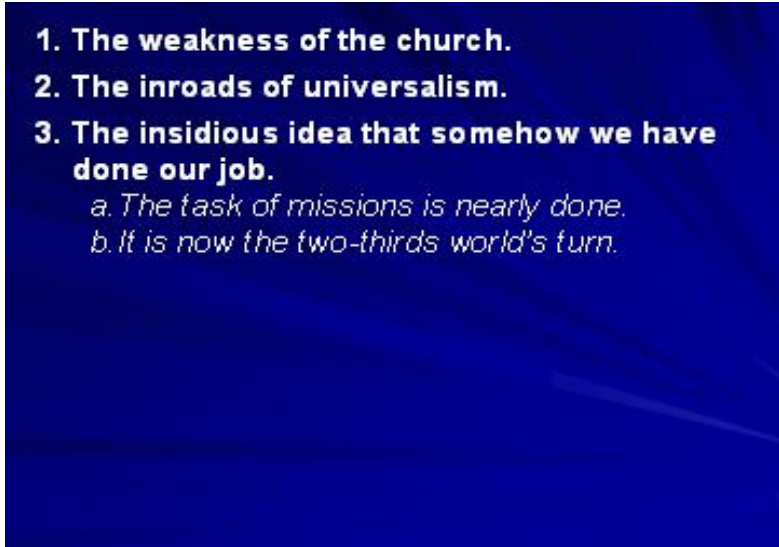
For example, the Evangelical Church in Ethiopia is among the fastest growing in the world. Believers have doubled to eight million between 1984 and 2000.

Then there is Latin America – the only region in the world where the number of evangelical Christians is growing *three* times as fast as the population. Evangelical Churches here are currently growing at an average of 15 per cent per year. Seventy million evangelicals make up around 14 percent of the region's population of 500 million.

And in South Korea we know that by 1996 there were 40,000 local congregations with over 80,000 clergymen. The total membership of the churches in South Korea at that time was 10 million, i.e. 22% of the total population of South Korea.¹

Praise God for this! The Kingdom of God is advancing with power. But, the danger is that when you hear figures like this – some are tempted to say – the time when aggressive missionary work was needed has passed. It is time for the churches in each country to focus on building up its own strength.

Allied with this is a second thought.

- 
1. **The weakness of the church.**
 2. **The inroads of universalism.**
 3. **The insidious idea that somehow we have done our job.**
 - a. *The task of missions is nearly done.*
 - b. *It is now the two-thirds world's turn.*

b. The concept that it is now the two-thirds world's turn.

Along with the phenomenal growth of Christianity in the countries that were once targets for missions – has come the growth of missionaries sent out from these lands.

Another statistic:

It is estimated that the number of Protestant missionaries from Africa, Asia and Latin America in the year 2000 was about 170,000 – accounting for **over 70%** of the total world's Protestant missionaries.

We hear this and the unspoken thought is this. Once, we sent missionaries to those lands. The seed was planted – the baton passed. Now it is *their* turn. We've done our bit. If there is still missions work to do – these young vibrant growing churches can handle it.

And along with this comes a fourth deterrent to missions.

¹ Cited in <http://www.ad2000.org/celebrate/ezemandu.htm>

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At the same time we keep hearing how well the two-thirds church is going we keep hearing how poorly Australian churches are doing.

Attendance at churches drops year by year. The number of conversions decreases.

So a number of churches have said – our focus should be **here** – our missionfield is **here**.

Money that was poured into overseas missions should now be poured into local efforts.

Our kids should be called to be pastors and chaplains and evangelists and musicians – rarely missionaries.

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Islamic Fundamentalism is on the rise. There is no doubt that many Moslem fundamentalists see it as their sworn duty to kill those who would seek to divert Moslems from the truth. We heard this from Barnabas Fund this morning.

And let us not forget that fundamentalism of many varieties is on the rise – Militant Hinduism, Sheikh nationalism and fundamentalist ideologies of every stripe are on the rise.

The world is a dangerous place. With so much need at home – why send our best young men and women into the jaws of the lion?

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- 6. The missionfield has become very hard.**

6. The missionfield has become very hard.

Catholicism is digging in.

Atheism is getting aggressive in its ideology.

Governments are limiting the inflow of missionaries.

It is getting so hard. With so much need at home – why send our best young men and women to labour for such little reward?

The cumulative result is that the number of missionaries sent out has dropped markedly and the percentage of church giving directed to missions has dropped.

So what do we think of this?

We should feel *ashamed* if any of these reasons ever dampen our missionary zeal.

1. The weakness of the church.

I would love to spend a lot of time talking about this. The church in the west *is* weak – and it *does* rob us of our missionary zeal.

The answer is of course stronger churches. A passion to make the name and glories of Christ known here and throughout the world.

We need to focus on Christ and His Word. We need to make sure we are living for eternity.

2. The inroads of universalism.

I don't think I have to spend too much time talking about this.

There is one way to heaven and it is through Christ and Christ alone.

I doubt this would impact us here.

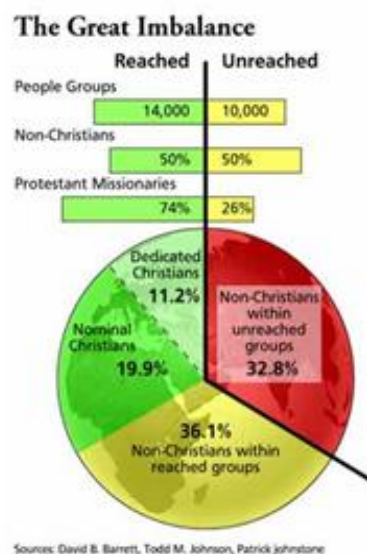
3. The insidious idea that somehow we have done our job.

I do want to talk about this.

Brothers and sisters. It is true that in the 20th century there were more conversions than in all the 19 previous centuries combined.

But the task still **far** from done and is not done till every tribe and tongue and nation have heard the gospel.

I want to show you a chart.



I am sure you have seen charts like this before. But I hope you understand what they are saying.

I want you to look at the top line.

According to Barrett, Johnson and Johnstone – there are 14,000 reached people groups in the world and still 10,000 unreached people groups.

What is a people group? A people groups refer to groups of individuals, families and clans who share a common language and ethnic identity.

More specifically, Scott Holste, director of the IMB's Global Research Department says, "a people group is the largest group through which the gospel can flow without encountering a significant barrier of understanding or acceptance."

What can happen is that we can look at this chart and say – wonderful – we have "reached" 14,000 people groups.

But what does it mean to "reach" a people group?

Before we get carried away patting ourselves on the back – let me remind you of what we mean by a 'reached' or 'unreached' people group.

An unreached people group, Holste says, is a "people group in which the number of evangelical Christians totals *less than 2 percent of the population.*"

The *Joshua Project* defines an unreached people group as:

A people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group.

They too set the figure at 2% of the population as Christian.

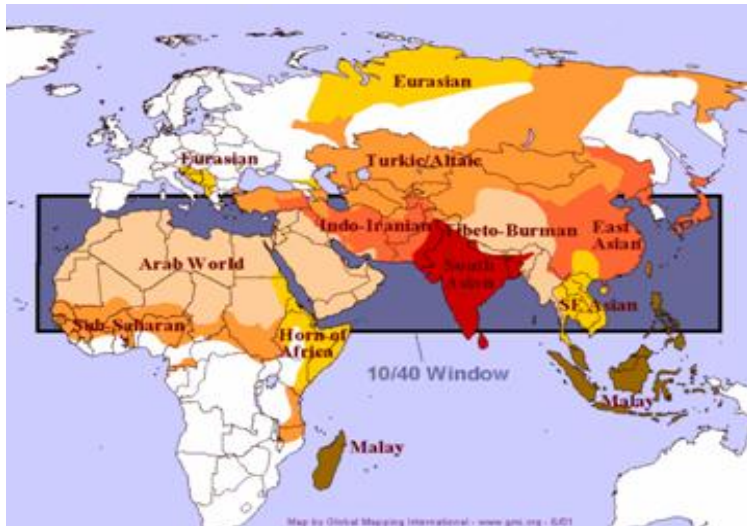
In other words – if a people group has 2 or 3 % Christians – then missiologists class them as reached. There are enough Christians to **begin** to reach their own people with the gospel.

My point is that not only are there 10,000 'unreached' people groups still needing the gospel – but the truth is that many of the so-called reached groups have very small percentages of Christians.

They are called reached in that there are enough Christians there if they mobilised – they could start having an impact.

We still have a lot to do!

A number of missions strategists have further refined this world view.



Most of the people groups still unreached by the gospel live in places stretching across the northern Africa and Asia. Luis Bush started calling this area: “**the 10/40 window**” because it describes the areas of Africa and Asia from 10 degrees latitude North of the equator to 40 degrees latitude North of the equator.

- Two-thirds of the world’s population -- more than 3.2 billion people -- live in the 10/40 Window.
- 95% of the people living in the 10/40 Window are **unevangelised**. Many have never heard the Gospel message even once. Of the 55 *least* evangelized countries, 97% of their population lives within the 10/40 Window.
- Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism are centred within the 10/40 Window.
- Half of the world’s least evangelized cities are in this window.

The task is far from done.

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5. **The missionfield has become very dangerous.**
6. **The missionfield has become very hard.**

4. The main task now is to focus on Australia.

Don’t get me wrong, we do have to focus on Australia as well as the world.

We are to reach our Jerusalem as well as the outermost parts of the world.

But we still have to be reaching the world.

Reach Brisbane – Yes. But don't decrease the missions budget – increase the evangelism one.

I was talking to a godly saint a while ago who had been a missionary for many years about what was happening in their church in Brisbane.

Their church was going down the church growth path. Of course this meant – a bigger building – once which will cost mega-bucks.

They saw the local budget keep increasing – buildings – programs – staff – but no increase – in fact a decrease in missions giving.

We can't just focus on Brisbane – believe me – Islam won't stay so still.

Bob Sjogren and Bill and Amy Stearns write that:

In north Africa, the governments of Muslim countries in one recent year spent more to promote missionary activity in *eight* north African countries than the total Western missionary expenditure for the entire world.

Our task is far from done!

5. The missionfield has become very dangerous.

The missionfield has always been dangerous.

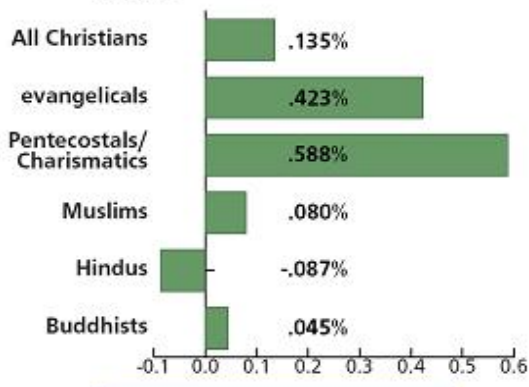
They killed Jesus. They killed eleven of the twelve Apostles. They killed Paul.

It is dangerous. But to live is Christ and to die is gain.

6. The missionfield has become very hard.

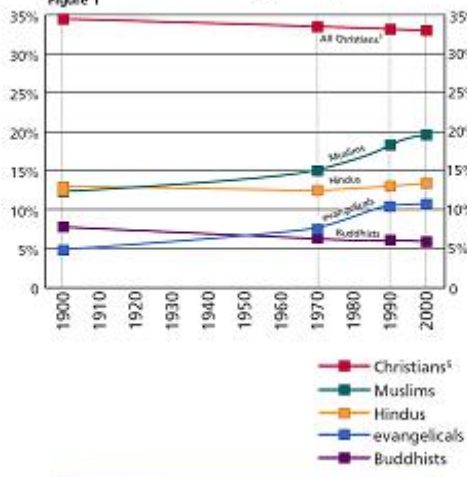
It has always been hard. But let me remind you that by the power of the Holy Spirit the Gospel **is** bringing more into the Kingdom than at any time in history.

**Annual Conversion Growth in
The Largest World Religions
Avg. Annual %, 1990-2000**
Figure 3



It is the Kingdom of Christ which is advancing. Jesus is building His church. He is gathering in the saints of all ages.

**Adherents of the Major World Religions
as a Percent of World Population; 1900-2000**
Figure 1



The percentage of those calling themselves Christian may be dropping – but **not** the true Christians. The evangelicals – those who have trusted in Christ alone – they are on the move.

The question is not – is Jesus building His kingdom? The question is – are **we** a part of what He is doing?

So let me close by reminding us of the one true spur to missions. What is it that will spur us on to be part of the army of Christ reaching a lost world?

Turn with me to look briefly at Hebrews 12. Look at Hebrews 12 verses 1 and 2:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us **run** with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us **fix** our eyes on Jesus,

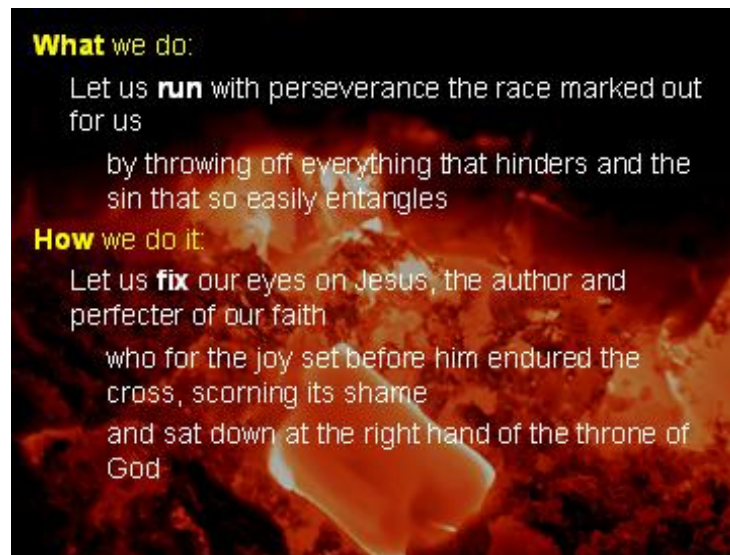
the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

One of the difficulties about English translations is that our verbs work a little bit differently to Greek verbs.

There are actually only two main verbs here:

Running with perseverance *and* **fixing** our eyes on Jesus.

So to give the intended sense of this passage I want to translate it like this.



What we do:

Let us **run** with perseverance the race marked out for us

by throwing off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles

How we do it:

Let us **fix** our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith

who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame
and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God

Here is **what** we have to do:

Run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

The race we are in is to see the kingdom of God advance. To see the glory of the Lord Jesus shine throughout this world.

Jesus left us here for a purpose. To make disciples of the nations. To let His light shine through us.

But Jesus also knows that the moment His Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the truth and shows us the path we are to take – we have to deal with the encumbrances of the world and the devil; *and* the entanglements of sin.

That is why we have to run with perseverance. In 2 Timothy – Paul speaks of persevering like a soldier, a farmer and an athlete.

For me, this is a daily battle. I struggle to run the race well. I fail, I get distracted, I take my eyes off the goal, I forget why Jesus put me here, I sin.

So to help me – to help all of us – the author of Hebrews tells us **how** to run the race with perseverance.

He says we do it:

by throwing off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

In the Christian life – what are the things that can hinder us from persevering to the end?

What are the encumbrances of the world and the devil?

Hindrances such as the love of money, lack of discipline, fear, deception, the darts of the evil one.

I am not sure what they are with you. What actually hinders us varies from person to person.

Some of us get so wrapped up in career, mortgage, school fees – that the race of our life is just like our non-Christian neighbours. Our time and energy are monopolised by the world – so there is no time for the kingdom. And we excuse ourselves – by saying – I just don't have time.

Make time. If these things are hindering you – throw them off.

Maybe it is fear or despair that hinders you. You won't share your faith or lead worship – because of fear. Then turn to God in faith – throw off these things.

Maybe you just don't believe that God can use you to His glory.

And as well as these hindrances, we have the entanglements of sin.

We are to:

Throw off the sin that so easily entangles.

Again the metaphor is a runner in a race. You can't run if your feet are entangled in branches or rubbish – you have to throw them off.

This word is often used of being shackled.

Sin shackles us. You can't run the kingdom race if you are shackled by sin.

Your light is dulled, your mind is distracted, your conscience crushes you.

I don't have to run through the list of sins that might ensnare your life. You know whether there are sins – open sins or those hidden from men – sins that impede you.

While those sins are there you can't run the race. Ask Jesus to help you throw those sins off.

But, the author of Hebrews knows that we can't run the race in our own strength. So he tells us:

How we do it:

Let us **fix** our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith

who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame
and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God

Our only hope is Jesus.

The runner in a race has his eyes fixed on one thing – the finish line.

Crowds, scenery, children – nothing distracts him.

So too for us – the world wants to distract us. Our sin wants to distract us. And the answer is to fix our eyes on Jesus who is **the author and perfecter of our faith**.

Here is where the whole context of chapter 11 comes in.

Noah does not find the faith in himself to spend 120 years building an ark.

Abraham does not suck up the faith to leave Ur and to sacrifice Isaac.

Gideon does not move from a man who threshes wheat in hiding and a man who refuses to attack the Midianites with 22,000 men to a man who trusts God and attacks with 300 men by finding this faith in himself.

These men and women were given impossible tasks:

Trust that God can give a child to a couple past the age of childbearing

Get Israel out from under the might of Pharaoh

Take on the giant Goliath while you are still a boy

But Jesus was the author and perfecter of their faith. They trusted the promise of God concerning the Messiah to come and God used that faith in mighty ways.

We have our own impossible task. Live faithfully in a world that is beset by the distractions and troubles of our own sin and the temptations that assail us. Give to missions. Pray for missionaries. Go as missionaries.

How can we do this?

Fix your eyes on the cross. Jesus – God Himself – died on that cross – to free you from sin, to empower you, to enable you to spread His glory throughout this land.

I know the church is weak.

I know that false teachers tell us we don't have to share our faith.

I know Satan whispers that the job is done.

I know our hearts want to stay here.

I know the missionfield is dangerous and hard.

But as verse 3 of Hebrews 12 says:

[It is when we] consider him [Jesus] who endured such opposition from sinful men, [it is then] that we do not grow weary and lose heart.

When we focus on the cross – we know that Jesus has sent His Spirit to empower us.

We know that Jesus is with us to the end of the age.

We know that only Jesus can save – so we have to proclaim His message.

And we know that through the power of Jesus – the Kingdom will advance.

When we look at ourselves – our missionary zeal wanes. When we look at Jesus – our hearts are enflamed to spread the gospel of the One who died that we may live.

So brothers and sisters – my prayer is that we would fix our eyes on Jesus – and there find the power and strength to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us.