

*David Platt's Convention Message***THE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MISSIONARY PROBLEM**

Convention Sermon – 2011 Southern Baptist Convention

Matthew 24:14

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**Matthew 24:14:** *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

I come to you with trepidation this morning. I am the least deserving pastor in this room to be standing here right now, and I know that. So let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Cause Your name to be known as holy in this room. Grant Your weight to Your Word for Your glory in and through our lives and our churches and our Convention as we are overwhelmed by Your love for us. Give us a sense, a feeling of Your love for them, particularly those who at this moment have never even heard that God loves them. Grant us Your heart for them, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

I have a single, unilateral—I believe biblical—aim this morning. I want to call every pastor in this room to lead your local church to engage unreached people groups with the gospel. Over a hundred years ago, George Pentecost said, “To the pastor belongs the privilege and responsibility of the missionary problem.” He maintained that mission boards could and should do what they will: organizing methods, devising movements, and raising money. But it is the responsibility and privilege of pastors to feel the weight of the nations and to fan a flame for the global glory of God in every local church. I believe he is right. There are 6,750 people groups unreached with the gospel. This is not a problem for the International Mission Board (IMB) to address. This is a problem for every pastor and every local church in this Convention to address.

Now I want to be clear from the start. I would like to disarm you a bit from objections that I know might arise in your mind, or maybe are already rising in your mind and your heart. I want to be clear about what I am not saying today. I am not saying, nor am I advocating at any moment, that we neglect local ministry, ministry to the people God has entrusted to our care in our local churches. I know there are people in your church and in my church who are hurting, whose marriages are struggling, whose children are rebelling, who are walking through cancer and tumors and all sorts of other things. We should not neglect local ministry to the body.

Nor should we neglect local mission in our communities or in our cities. We have been commanded to make disciples, that command will most naturally and most consistently play out right where we live, in the context of our communities. There are thousands and thousands of people in Birmingham, Alabama, where I pastor, who do not know Christ. They need to hear and believe the gospel. I want the church that I lead to be zealous for the glory of God's name in Birmingham. I want every member in the church that I have the privilege of pastoring to see where they live and work and play, and say, “With the unique gifts God has given me and the Spirit of God who lives in me, how can I make disciples here?” Every one of our small groups is designed to have focus on a local ministry in Birmingham. Some of our people are packing their bags, selling their homes in comfortable suburbia, and moving into low-income, high-crime areas in Birmingham for the sake of the gospel. We are sending out church planting teams to the Northwest, Midwest, and Northeast. I say none of that to boast in any way, but simply to say, “Yes. Local mission is totally necessary.” And I praise God for it. We praise God for what we heard and saw from the North American Mission Board last night. Local mission is totally necessary.

At the same time, global mission is tragically neglected.

I was near Yemen two weeks ago. Northern Yemen has approximately eight million people. Do you know how many believers there are in northern Yemen? Twenty or thirty. Out of eight million people. That's the populations of Alabama and Mississippi combined. There are more believers in your Sunday School class than there are in all of northern Yemen. That is a problem. That is masses of people groups. That is millions upon millions upon millions of people who don't have access to the gospel. And it's not the job of the IMB to change that. It is the job of every pastor in this room to lead every local church in this room to change that. To love the people in our local churches, to do local ministry, to love the people in our communities, to do local mission, to the end (what I'm after here is the end) that the name of Christ is praised among every people group on the planet. That's what we want. That's what we live and lead for.

With that said, I want to read one verse from Matthew 24, which I hesitate to do because I know that even across this room there are a whole host of interpretations when it comes to Matthew 24 and 25, and there is all kinds of room for disagreement here. Yet nestled in the middle of Matthew 24 is one verse that rings crystal clear. George Ladd, fifty years ago, called Matthew 24:14 “perhaps the single most important verse in the Word of God for God's people.” He identified the message, mission, and motive that are contained therein, and I am convinced that in our day, fifty years later, even across this room, there is significant misunderstanding about all three of these things. What is our message? What is our mission? What is our motive? I am convinced we're confused on all three.

So I want to read this verse and consider those three questions. He was on the Mount of Olives when Jesus' disciples asked Him about the end of the age and He responded by saying, *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

**What Is Our Message?**

The good news, this gospel of the kingdom, is that our God is king. He reigns. He rules over all. Psalm 103:19 says, *“The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.”* Our God is sovereign over all nature. The wind blows at His bidding. The sun radiates with heat from His hands. Every single night our God brings out the stars one by one and He calls them each by name. Bob. Mary. Z14369-er. I don't know what their names are, but our God does. By His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. There is not a speck of dust that exists apart from the sovereignty of God our King. He is sovereign over nature and He is sovereign over nations. He charts the course of countries. Our God holds the rulers of the earth in the palm of His hand. He is sovereign over all of them. And that is good news. It's good news to know that Kim Jong-il in North Korea is not sovereign over all. And Ahmadinejad in Iran is not sovereign over all. Neither is Gaddafi, Karzai, or Netanyahu. Ladies and gentlemen, Barak Obama is not sovereign over all. Our God is sovereign over all of them.

He is King, but even that reality only leaves us in the Old Testament. The good news of the New Testament is that the King has come. He's here. Jesus says, *“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* Repent and believe in Christ the King. And to all who believe in Him, to all who trust in His name, He gives the right to be called children of God. And not just children but heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, sharing in a kingdom where we are assured that one day we will enjoy Him as King and reign in His kingdom forever and ever and ever. That's good news.

We have so minimized and maligned that good news in our day, even in the church. We have minimized our King. We have reduced Jesus, the King, to a poor, puny savior who is just begging people to accept Him into their hearts, or invite Him into their lives—phrases that are never used in the Word of God. We have reduced the gospel of the King to a shrink-wrapped presentation that if we can get people to say and pray the right things back to us, we

will pronounce them "fit for heaven" and free to live their life on earth however they desire. Not true. Our King is not a savior who is begging for anyone's casual approval. Our King is a sovereign who deserves everyone's eternal praise. God, forgive us for minimizing the King. For taking the gospel—the lifeblood of the kingdom—out of our churches and putting Kool-Aid in its place so it tastes better, and in the process maligning the gospel of the kingdom.

I don't have a lot of time here, but I believe this needs mentioning in a day when the sinfulness of man is being softened and the wrath of God is being questioned like it is. People are asking, "Is hell real? Is hell forever?" Did God really say that sinners would perish in eternal torment forever and ever? Oh, readers of Rob Bell and others like him, listen very carefully. Be very cautious when anyone says, "Did God really say this? Would God really do that?" This is the question that ushered sin into the world in Genesis 3. The very idea that God's ways are subject to our judgment. On the contrary, our ways are subject to His judgment, and He has appointed a day when every man and woman will die and face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Some, Jesus says in Matthew 25, will go to eternal life and others will go to eternal punishment—which is why we must make this good news of the kingdom known. Because you go anywhere in the world—to the richest community in America or the most impoverished in West Africa—and you will see the sting of sin and the effects of Satan. You will see that the reign of death comes to all.

You and I can go to any of those places and share the exact same message. We can say to anyone and everyone: there was a man who sinned, and from his sin, condemnation has come to all men. All of us have sinned against our Creator King, and eternal death is our inevitable due. But there has come a second man, like the first in every way, yet without sin. And He was the Creator King in the flesh. He had sovereignty over nature—He lifted his hands, and the storms were still. He had sovereignty over disease—the lame walking, the blind seeing, and the deaf hearing. He had sovereignty over sin—the righteous One who had no guile in Him at all. And He had sovereignty over death—people who were in their tombs heard His voice and came to life. He himself was raised from the dead. Death no longer has mastery over Him (Romans 6). The Creator King has come to bring a kingdom to all who believe on His name as the One who has overcome sin and conquered Satan and crushed death. To all who believe on His name, you can share in His kingdom, now and forever and ever and ever. That's really, really good news. And it works anywhere in the world.

Go to India and meet Rajesh, a pastor at the end of his rope, living in the most spiritually, physically desolate place in India, home to the poorest of the poor. Evangelicals only make up 0.01% of the population. The death rate in Rajesh's area is about 5,000 people per day, which means that every single day about 4,950 people plunge into hell. For generations the spiritual ground has been hard and the physical poverty has been harrowing. In his words, Rajesh was ready to quit. But he found himself in training, supported and made possible through the International Mission Board, and Rajesh learned about disciple-making and church planting. He was encouraged at this training to find an unreached village, walk into the village, and say to the first person who comes up to him, "I come here in the name of Jesus, and I would like to pray for your home and others in this community." Rajesh thought it was ridiculous; it would never work. But he was at the end of his rope, so he decided to try it.

He walks in to the first village, and a man comes walking by. Rajesh meets him, looks at the man, and says, "I come here in the name of Jesus," and before Rajesh can say anything else, the man stops in his tracks and says, "Jesus? I have heard a little bit about Him. Can you tell me more about Him?" Rajesh, wide-eyed, says, "Okay." Rajesh is now invited into this man's home where he sits for a while. The man goes and brings all of his friends and family to his home. They sit down, and Rajesh now has an audience. The host says, "Will you now, sir, please tell us all about Jesus?" Within two weeks, 25 people in that village trusted in Christ as King. Now it gets better, those 25 people start doing the same thing that Rajesh was doing. Through

this movement that was started through that one village, there are now churches in 115 different villages in that area. This gospel is good.

Take Punja, a Hindu woman. She and her husband are invited to a worship service on Christmas. They go and they leave. A few weeks later they decide to go back on a Sunday morning. That Sunday afternoon, the pastor has planned evangelism training for a few people at his church. Well, Punja says, "I want to stay around and listen." The pastor says, "Are you sure?" She says, "Yes." So she sits and listens to the evangelism training. During the training, she hears the gospel and trusts in Christ. Then she leaves, goes back home and actually thinks she's supposed to share this gospel now! So she goes, shares the gospel with everybody in her family and close friends—24 different people. Within a week, seven of them have come to Christ. So a week later there's a new church meeting in Punja's home.

You can't stop the gospel of the kingdom when it's being proclaimed in the power of the Spirit. Don't minimize this one. Don't malign this one. Trust the gospel of the kingdom, and it will do the work. That's our message.

### What Is Our Mission?

Matthew 24:14 says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." Oh, there's so much here. What I want you to see is the *where* and the *how* of our mission.

Let's start with the *where*: *throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations*. "Panta ta ethne." This phrase is used in Matthew 28:19 in the Great Commission. This is so key because I think we miss this—even in all our talk about missions, we miss this. *Nations* here is not geo-political entities and countries like we think of nations today. There are around 200 nations recognized in the world today. These are not the nations that Jesus is talking about here. The United States of America did not exist in Matthew 24. This is *ethne*—tribes, clans, families, peoples; they're commonly called people groups today. This is where biblical, anthropological, and missiological scholars have looked at the world and identified groups of people who share common languages and common cultural characteristics. There are far more than 200 such people groups. The IMB tells us there are approximately 11,627 different people groups in the world. And it makes sense.

You go to India, for example. One nation with diverse peoples everywhere: different languages, different cultural characteristics, different ways of life. If you look, it's all over Scripture and the world. Peoples, clans, tribes, families. Amorites, Hittites, Hivites, Jebusites, Canaanites, Baluch (in Iran), Berber (in North Africa), Han (in China), and so on and so on. So many people groups and in the Great Commission, Jesus is commanding us to make disciples among every single people group. That is our task.

That begs the question then, "How are we doing?" I mentioned earlier that 6,750 people groups are still classified as *unreached*, meaning less than two percent are Evangelical Christian. Now follow this; I think this is a huge misconception. When we say *unreached*, we're not just talking about lostness, we're talking about access. You say, "Well, there's unreached people right around me," meaning unsaved people. But that's not what *unreached* means. *Unreached* means that they don't even have access to hear the gospel. There's no church, no Christian, no Bible available nor anywhere around you. To live among an unreached people group practically means you would be born, you would live, and you would die without ever hearing the gospel. Out of those 6,750 unreached people groups, 3,800 are still classified as *unengaged*. Meaning, not only do they not have access, but no one is presently and intentionally working to make the gospel accessible to them.

This is where I want to say to us as pastors, based on the authority of God's Word, that if we in our lives and our churches are not intentionally going after unreached people groups with the gospel, then we are disobeying the Great Commission. Allow me to be a little more

pointed. Pastor, if you in your life and your church are not intentionally going after unreached people groups with the gospel, then you are disobedient to the Great Commission. God has not just commanded us to make the gospel known among as many people as possible. He has commanded us to make the gospel known among all the peoples. Period. That's what the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19, is saying. And it's what Jesus said here in Matthew 24:14.

Now, it's at this point when we begin thinking, "Well, what about *reached* places where they do have access? Whether it's my community or other reached places in the world, is it wrong to do ministry among those who are classified as *reached*?" No. No, it's not wrong. As I mentioned earlier, local ministry is good. Local mission and even mission in other places around the world where they're reached with the gospel are good.

Let me give you an illustration. A couple of months ago, tornadoes ravaged Birmingham and northern Alabama, and our city immediately went into rescue mode. (On a side note here, just real briefly, I praise God for Southern Baptist Disaster Relief. What an amazing ministry.) So here's a hypothetical. I want you to imagine that the commander who is overseeing rescue operations puts you in charge of rescue teams. Imagine that you take all the teams you have and you come upon the first community you find, and it is in dire need. People everywhere are dying, needing to be rescued from the rubble. There is more work in one community than you and your teams could even begin to handle. Now I want you to imagine that you also know there are other communities, five, fifty, a hundred, two hundred miles away, who also need rescue teams, but you're overloaded right where you are. So would you send some of your teams elsewhere? Think about it. Would you divide your resources knowing that if you did, because of travel, those teams would probably lose a lot of time when they could be saving someone right here? Knowing these other communities are hard to get to, and you might not even know how to get to those communities. It's going to take a lot of resources even to get there, resources that you would be pulling away from saving people right here. And what if you even hear that in some of those other communities the people are actually resisting help? They'll oppose you if you go to them.

Contemporary wisdom and compassion would say that we should stay here and help as many people as we can. That's our best use of resources. We'll lose time and resources; it's greater risk to go to those other places. There are people here to be saved; we know we can save them. Let's stay here where we can help. The only thing that would cause you to do anything different is if your commanding officer said to you, "I don't want you to just rescue as many people as possible. I want you to rescue people from every single one of these communities." If the commander said to you, "Rescue people from every community"—if that is the command and it is clear—then you would use the resources at your disposal to make sure people from every community are rescued.

Brothers and sisters, this is our command, and it is clear. We have not been given a general command just to make disciples among as many people as possible, as natural as that might sound to us. Our God has said to us, "Make disciples among every single people group." Our Commanding Officer has said, "I mean to rescue a people from every tribe, tongue, language, nation for King Jesus." Therefore, obedience to the Great Commission necessarily involves commitment of resources to get the gospel to unreached people groups.

This is not an option for us biblically. God has told us from the very beginning that this is how He has always defined mission. All the way back to the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12, and all the way forward to the heavenly chorus in Revelation 7:9-10 where a people, not just as many people as possible, but a specific people comprised of every tongue, tribe, and nation will gather around the throne of Christ and sing, "Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb who sits on the throne." Revelation 5:9 says, "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'" Our King deserves the

praise of more than just 5,000 people groups. Our King deserves the praise of all 11,750 people groups on the planet.

So, how do we get it to them?

That's the *where*, and here's the *what*. You proclaim it.

We are living in a day when there is a trend to say that if we don't go, certainly God will make the gospel known through another way—through dreams, visions, some other means. Many, I'd say most, of the people in our pews believe that. But there is no biblical foundation for that. Look in the book of Acts and you will not see one verse where the gospel moves forward apart from a human instrument. Not one verse in the New Testament. There is only one time we see a dream or vision. What does God do? He lets down a sheet in front of Peter and He says, "Peter. Go."

Could it be that God is letting down sheets at this moment all across this room? We need to open our eyes to see the nations—the peoples—like we've never seen them before. To put aside our nationalistic biases and our cultural preferences and our secure lives and our safe churches and say, "We're going to make the gospel known among them. We're going to go to every single one of them."

Oh to think of this: that God has not entrusted this mission to angels for them to accomplish it in dreams and visions. What was He thinking to entrust it to us? What mercy, what love that He—the King of the universe—would invite you and me to be part of fulfilling His grand, global redemptive plan in all the ages! That you and I have been invited by the King to be a part of this. What mercy, what grace! Why would we not give our lives and our churches to accomplishing this mission? And that's the point of Matthew 24:14. This can be accomplished. This will be accomplished. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." Believe that. Believe that the King is coming back when the mission is complete, and this is our motive.

#### What Is Our Motive?

We want our King to come back and receive the praise that He is due.

People have said to me, "Aren't you just guilt-tripping people into going overseas? Aren't you guilt-tripping people into going to unreached people groups?" No. What drives passion for unreached peoples is not guilt. Not, "We feel bad and so we'll go." No. What drives passion for unreached peoples is not guilt.

It's glory.

Glory for a King who deserves the praise of every people group on the planet.

But realize this. To all who want to be part of accomplishing this Great Commission, it will cost. We would be fools to think we can embrace unengaged, unreached people groups around the world and it would be easy. If you look right before Matthew 24:14, you see Jesus say to His disciples, "You go to these nations and these peoples, and they will kill you. They will hate you." It will cost to go them, and it makes sense when you think about it? Satan must have Matthew 24:14 plastered all over the walls of hell. Because this verse is a reminder to the devil and all his minions that once every people group on the planet has been reached with the gospel, the end will come. And the end is not good news for them. The end is bad news for them. What that means is that Satan is dead set against the people of God reaching the peoples of the world with the gospel. I'm convinced there is a sense in which Satan is just fine with us focusing even on those who are lost right around us. There is a sense in which Satan is just fine with us devising church strategies and church programs with us spending millions and millions and millions of dollars on buildings and programs to meet needs right around us while we give leftovers to the spread of the gospel around the world.

But pastor, mark it down. When we decide to intentionally engage unreached people groups with the gospel, we can expect to be met with the might of hell. Divisions within us, distractions

around us, deceptions tempting us, disease and death threatening us. Satan doesn't want the end to come. The question is, do we? Are we willing to pay the price? Are we willing to reexamine everything we're doing in our churches, all of our budgets and ask how can we make disciples here in a way that is intentionally engaging and making disciples there? Are we willing to pay the price?

You say, "Well, aren't there other Christians who can do this better than us? Local Christians who can do this in those places around the world? Why don't we just support them financially and let the locals do it?" That's the point! There are no locals! There are no local Christians. There is no local church; that's what it means to be unreached. God's design is not for us just to send our money while we sit back, watch TV, get fat, and let them lose their lives. No. We pay the price, and brothers and sisters, we receive the reward. See it, the reward: the end will come.

Do you want the end to come? Do you want the King to come? Do you want to see His face? Could it be that we might see the completion of the Great Commission in our day? We have the resources. God has given them to us. He gives money, but more importantly and above and over all that, we have the very Holy Spirit of God in us. You say, "I don't know if my church can really engage unreached people groups or embrace an unreached people group. I don't know if we're big enough or have enough resources to do that." How big is your God? He wants the praise of that people group more than we do, and He has committed the divine resources of heaven to those who are abandoned to accomplishing this Commission. Abandoned to finishing this Commission.

Brothers and sisters, by the grace of God and with the power of God, let's finish this thing. Some people say, "Wait a second. How do we know our definition of people groups is right? How do we know when they're officially reached? Are you saying that Jesus couldn't come back today?" There's no question that we don't know for sure that our definition of terms is right, and so absolutely Jesus could come back today. He could come back any moment now. But this is where I can't improve on George Ladd's words. He said, "God alone knows the definition of terms. I cannot precisely define who all the nations are. But I do not need to know. I know only one thing: Christ has not yet returned. Therefore the task is not yet done. When it is done, Christ will come. Our responsibility is not to insist on defining the terms, our responsibility is to complete the task. So long as Christ does not return our work is undone. Let us get busy and complete our mission."

With this message, this mission, and this motive, let us leverage this Convention. Let us lead our churches, let us give our lives—let's lose them if necessary—for the advancement of Christ's kingdom and the accomplishment of Christ's Commission. And let's do it all with our eyes fixed on the sky, where one day the Son of Man is going to come on clouds of glory and power and His angels are going to gather the elect from the four winds, from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. And we will see His face. We will see our King, and we will reign with Him forever and ever and ever and ever.

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

— *from the office of David Platt*

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

## Part 3

### Ministry Reports to the Southern Baptist Convention

Continued