**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 11-15-15 PM NOTES**

**THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN’**

**ACTS 1:8**

**GREAT COMMISSION SUNDAY**

1 Chronicles 12:32a (ESV) “Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do…”

In 1900, over 80% of the world’s Christian population was Caucasian and over 70% of those Christians resided in Europe.

“But today when active Christian adherence has become stronger in Africa than in Europe, when the number of practicing Christians in China may be approaching the number in the United States, when live bodies in church are far more numerous in Kenya than in Canada, when more believers worship together in church Sunday by Sunday in Nagaland than in Norway…there is a pressing need for new historical perspectives that explore the new world situation.”

—Mark Noll

“This past Sunday, it is possible that more Christian believers attended church in China than in all of so-called ‘Christian Europe.’ This past Sunday, it is possible that more Anglicans [called Episcopalians in the USA] attended church in each of Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda than did Anglicans in Britain and Canada and Episcopalians in the United States combined…”

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“When the great Edinburgh Missionary Conference was held in 1910, over 80% of the world’s affiliated Christian population lived in Europe and North America. Today, less than 40% of the world’s Christian population lives in Europe and North America…”

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I. The Power (Acts 1:8)

Acts 1:9 (NKJV) “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”

Mark 16:15 (NKJV) “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) “19 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.”

Galatians 5:22-23 (NKJV) “22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

II. The Plan (Acts 1:8b)

A. Jerusalem

B. Judea and Samaria

C. The Ends of the Earth
One of the best known “protest songs” was written by Bob Dylan in 1964. It was entitled, *The Times They Are A Changin*. The first verse says:

- Come gather 'round people wherever you roam
- And admit that the waters around you have grown
- And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone
- If your time to you is worth savin'
- Then you better start swimmin’ or you’ll sink like a stone
- For the times they are a-changin’

When it comes to missions and more generally to the impact of Christianity around the world, the times truly are a-changin’. Now let me be clear that the Gospel is not a-changin’, Jesus Christ is not a-changin’, and the Word of God is not a-changin’, but the world around us is a-changin’, and American culture is a-changin’, and opportunities to share the unchanging Gospel are a-changin’.

In this rapidly changing world, we are not to hide our heads in the sand and keep the same methods and strategy. We must be like the men of Issachar of whom it says in 1 Chronicles 12:32a (ESV) “Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...” If we really believe in the sovereignty of God and that His providential working is causing, or allowing changes in the world, our task is not to moan, groan, complain, and live in the past. But like the men of Issachar, we must seek to understand what is happening and respond in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I bought a book a year or so ago that has helped me understand what is happening with Christianity around the world. It is, *The Shape of World Christianity* by Mark Noll. Let me share some things that most of us will be surprised to hear. In 1900, over 80% of the world’s Christian population was Caucasian and over 70% of those Christians resided in Europe. Noll explains the changes we see today like this:

But today – when active Christian adherence has become stronger in Africa than in Europe, when the number of practicing Christians in China may be approaching the number in the United States, when live bodies in church are far more numerous in Kenya than in Canada, when more believers worship together in church Sunday by Sunday in Nagaland than in Norway...there is a pressing need for new historical perspectives that explore the new world situation.

[Mark Noll, page 10]

Noll goes on to share even more surprising statistics in ways that we can understand them. “

This past Sunday it is possible that more Christian believers attended church in China than in all of so called ‘Christian Europe. [Noll, page 20]

This past Sunday it is possible that more Anglicans [called Episcopalians in the USA] attended church in each of Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda than did Anglicans in Britain and Canada and Episcopalians in the United States combined... [Noll, page 20]

I could go on and on with statistics that show the same thing. Here is a summary. “The Typical late twentieth-century Christian was no longer a European man but a Latin American or African woman.”

[Dana Robert quoted in Noll, page 21-23]
Allow me to give you one more quote that I believe sums it up. “When the great Edinburgh Missionary Conference was held in 1910, over 80% of the world’s affiliated Christian population lived in Europe and North America. Today, less than 40% of the world’s Christian population lives in Europe and North America...” [Noll, page 89]

Do you see what I meant when I opened the message with the song title, The Times, They Are A Changin’? If we would be like the men of Issachar who had an understanding of the times and knew what Israel should do, what would we do today? Hopefully the things laid out in this short message will answer that question. We are going to refuse discouragement and a defeatist attitude, and look at one of the key mission verses in the Bible, then build our strategy for 2016, and the years following, around this verse.

I. The Power (Acts 1:8a)

Last words are very important. Look what happened just after Jesus spoke these words in verse 8. Acts 1:9 (NKJV): “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” The words of Acts 1:8 were the last words that Jesus spoke before ascending up to heaven to be seated at the Father’s right hand. What encouraging words they were. He had earlier told His disciples in Mark 16:15 (NKJV): "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” 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, 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." What a daunting task for this little band of nobodies, as the world saw them. They were not the elite of society – not did they have material means or influence. They were a part of a generally hated people group (Jews), and they actually had nothing that would be impressive to the world that would cause the world to want to listen to what they had to say. It is this dilemma that verse 8a addresses.

They (and indeed every true disciple of Jesus Christ) were promised that the very Spirit of Christ Himself, the Holy Spirit, would come to dwell in them and that all the power of God was at their disposal to accomplish the task He had given them to do. The Holy Spirit did come, just as Jesus promised on the day of Pentecost. Today every true disciple of Jesus Christ has the Spirit of Christ living in them. The Spirit was not given primarily so that we would feel better about ourselves. He was not given primarily so that we could experience the fruit that only He can produce (“…the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23). The primary reason that we were given the Holy Spirit was that we might glorify God by being His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Let me share a principle that is illustrated in Acts 1:8. Our God never gives us a task to accomplish, a command to obey, or a sin to forsake, apart from giving us the enabling grace to do it. That grace comes through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The means to fulfill the commands in Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19-20, and in Acts 1:8 is the enabling grace of God given through the indwelling Holy Spirit. That means that no excuse is accepted for not being involved in making disciples. As we face the seemingly impossible task of getting the Gospel to every creature, we must see the command in light of the power He has already given us to obey the command.

II. The Plan (V8b)

To be witnesses is not a suggestion or one option among many; this is a command. The option is to be a witness to Him, or be disobedient. A witness is one who has seen and/or heard something and then tells others. Those who have heard the Gospel and have seen Christ change their lives – they are to tell others what they have seen and heard.

Let’s look at the context of verse 8b and see how it applies to us. Initially, Jerusalem was the home base for the first century church. Judea would be similar to our state. Jerusalem was a part of Judea. Samaria was the surrounding area to the North. Of course, the end of the earth is the whole world beyond
Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. Jesus is not telling them to evangelize Jerusalem, and when everyone has heard the Gospel, move out to Judea, etc. It was that some would focus on Jerusalem, while some would be called to Judea and Samaria, and some would rather quickly move out to the ends of the earth. We have combined Judea and Samaria, and here is how we organize our mission mandate to be witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Jerusalem is the immediate surrounding area – basically Knox County. Judea and Samaria is our North America. The “ends of the earth” is everything outside North America.

My purpose in this message is not to give you a detailed description of our strategy, mission trips with dates and costs. My purpose is to share general priorities and some changes, and to motivate and encourage you to plug in somewhere. If you would be obedient, then doing nothing is not an option.

**A. Jerusalem (Powell area, Fountain City area, Western Heights, and Knox County)**

The plan in our Jerusalem is twofold: Expand the base and reach out in revitalization. A theme we used years ago was – “Expand the base and reach the world.” We are resurrecting that theme. Let me be clear that as we talk about a greater emphasis on local and North America, we are not abandoning the ends of the earth. We are going to narrow our focus some, but I will deal with that in a moment.

First, we will focus on expanding the base. By the end of 2016, the Fountain City Campus will be an autonomous church, and most all of 2016 they will be moving in that direction. I am calling both campuses to a concentrated effort to expand the base. If we do nothing but send people out, soon we will be a church that needs revitalizing. The design is that we are constantly leading people to Christ, bringing people into the church, equipping and discipling them. Our aim is that they then become active in making disciples here, or go to a church that we will be seeking to be God’s means of revitalizing. To expand the base, we are going to do some of the following: We will continue EMT (Everyday Missionary Training), Building Bridges for the Gospel (a strategy of building relationships to share the Gospel), and other opportunities to learn how to lead people to Christ. In our Lifegroups we will be emphasizing inviting people (I-6). The Family ministry has lots of activities that will minister to families and be front doors to the church for unchurched families. We will be improving our new member process to make it easier to immediately get involved in ministry. In addition, we will be ramping up our international ministry to international families right around us. We will offer the “Any 3” training that is especially helpful in witnessing to Muslims. We will continue with LOVE FC on the Fountain City Campus, and bring back LOVE LOUD on the Powell Campus. That is just scratching the surface – so much more as the year progresses.

Second will be the emphasis on revitalization of hurting and/or dying churches. With Fountain City becoming an autonomous church, here on this campus, we will continue to seek the Lord for the right opportunity to invest in another revitalization project. Our Associational Director of Missions has been working and has some possibilities that we are looking at. Our desire is to have a revitalization process started by the end of 2016 (possibly much earlier in 2016). The aim is that several families from this campus pull up roots and plant themselves in a dying church to see God bring life.

There is so much more, but that gives you an idea of what is coming in our Jerusalem in 2016. We are aware, however, that often God has something in mind that is way better than our plans and we are surrendered to Him, and willing to follow Him wherever He leads.

**B. Judea and Samaria**

In the introduction to the message, I shared many quotes from Mark Noll about the changing shape of world Christianity. Here is a scary truth. The United States of America is heading down the path that Western Europe headed down that has turned many of their churches into museums and the unchurched percentage of the population growing at an alarming rate. We must not allow that to happen to our nation. The North American Mission Board (NAMB) has identified thirty-two cities in North America that are designated as “Send Cities.” These are the most lost cities in North America. They are scattered all over
the USA and several in Canada. One of our members has moved his family to Denver, one of those thirty-two cities, and we are supporting him in this effort. The plan now is to send a team to help with the new church plant this summer. We have another couple in our church family that has been accepted by NAMB as a church planter and could go to one of the Send cities in 2016 or 2017. That will give us more ways to invest our time, and money, to turn around the spiritual slide of our nation.

I want to tell you about another mission activity that I am so pleased with. We now have a great intern program. There are two interns right now – one planning to go to one of the Send Cities, and the other to one of the revitalizations. We have a waiting list on the intern program. We also have several men who have expressed a call into ministry and are longing to plant a church in a Send City, or help in a revitalization.

We must not, we cannot, lose our own nation. The United States of America is third, behind only China and India, in lost souls. Unless we saturate this nation with gospel preaching, Jesus loving churches, America will go the way of Western Europe.

**C. The Ends of the Earth**

We are not turning our backs on the unreached people groups (UPG) in the world. We are, however, having to adjust because so many doors have closed. We are very limited in what we can do with our UPG in West Africa, our efforts in south Asia, and our UPG in Asia. This is causing great grief on the part of so many who have much invested in these areas. However, in West Africa, believers from a church that we have invested much in, are going into the villages of our UPG and making disciples. In 2016 we plan to travel into our UPG in south Asia, return to Macau, possibly go into West Africa to hopefully plant churches in another UPG we have chosen as the one that we believe God has led us to. There is also the possibility of a new UPG in a remote area of South America we are praying about.

**Conclusion**

I can’t wait to see what God is going to do for us in 2016! I hope you will join us in praying for our great nation and our home base. Pray that we expand the base and then send out people by the hundreds. What is your kingdom involvement in 2016?