Speeding up the coming of the Day of God

(Written in 2010 so statistics are not up-to-date)

Introduction

"You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the Day of God and speed its coming." 2 Peter 3:11-12 (NIV)

As Christians we are longing for the great Day of God when the Lord Jesus will come back again in great power and glory. Peter urges us to speed up the coming of that Day. How are we to do this? How can we speed up its coming? In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said:

"This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations and then the end will come."

Surely to speed up the coming of the Day of God is to speed up world evangelisation, for when the Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached in all the world, then the great Day of God will begin.

How are we doing? Which areas of the world have not yet heard the Gospel of the Kingdom? Where should we be focussing our prayers? Where should we be sending our workers? Clearly a passion needs to grip our churches – the passion to speed up the coming of the Day of God. Passivity slows down the coming of that Day.

There is much to encourage us. One example would be the growth of the church in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and many parts of Asia. We can also rejoice that countries such as Albania and Mongolia that were long-closed to Christian workers are now open and the church there is growing rapidly. However, approximately 40% of the population of the world remains unreached with the Gospel. If we are to speed up the coming of the Day of God we must specially focus on these people.

Where are we now?

The map below shows where the least evangelised people live. It incorporates Northern Africa (including Somalia), the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, much of South Asia, East Asia, Western China (including Tibet) and Mongolia. These are the heartlands of the three great rival belief systems to Christian truth – the Muslim World, the Hindu World and the Buddhist World. They encompass two billion people.



The State of The Church

If we are to speed up the coming of the Day of God then there needs to be a massive refocusing of our resources and people-power into the least evangelised world. Yet in the last fifty years there has been a steady withdrawal of workers from this area of the world. To understand the reasons for this we need to understand trends in modern missions.

The Last 50 Years of Missions

Five factors that have changed

1. Access to many countries is increasingly restricted

Very few of the least evangelised countries allow access to those with a missionary visa. Fifty years ago there were many western workers in China, India, Iran and the Middle East. The trend has been to restrict missionary visas. Muslim countries increasingly deny Christians the religious liberty enjoyed by Muslims in western countries.

2. Developing countries have developed

In many of these least evangelised countries past mission strategy was built around Christian institutions – hospitals, schools, orphanages etc.Many of these have been closed, handed over to the government or nationalised. The days of the few remaining Christian institutions are clearly numbered in the least evangelised countries. Many third world countries have trained their own nurses, doctors and teachers and do not want large numbers of expatriates working in these professions in their country causing unemployment for their own people.

3. Cheap air travel

Easy cheap access to most parts of the least evangelised world has totally changed the pattern of mission. A journey of months to Central Asia 50 years ago now takes a few hours. This has opened up the opportunity for short-term visits to this part of the world.

4. The international and multi-racial nature of mission

In the last 30 years we have seen one of the most thrilling phenomena in the history of missions. This is the rapid growth of third world missions. The churches of South America, sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia are sending out Christian workers in increasing numbers. This is transforming the Christian work force into a visibly multi-racial team – a compelling testimony to the cross-cultural nature of the Christian message.

5. Growth of the cities

In the 50s and 60s there was a call to the unreached tribes. This was powerfully presented through books such as **Through Gates of Splendour** by Elisabeth Elliot, **Ascent to the Tribes** by Isobel Kuhn and **Peace Child** by Don Richardson. Today we need a call to urban evangelism. Rapid urbanization is one of the characteristics of the last 50 years. If we are to make a significant contribution to the evangelisation of the least evangelised, it means concentrating in the cities of this region.

Four factors that have remained the same

It is equally true that many factors have remained the same over the past 50 years. Here are some examples:

1. The vast human need – especially the need of the children

The population of the world increases at the rate of 8 million per month. This increase is greatest in the least evangelised nations of the world. There are huge populations (more than a billion) of unreached Muslims. Living in Britain it is hard to understand the effects of rapid population growth.

	Nigeria	Ethiopia	Brazil	Philippines
1948	20m	7m	46m	16m
1993	140m	57m	157m	77m

One of the results of this is the huge number of children. One third of the world's population is under the age of 15 and 85% of these children live in the Third World. This means that 80% of the children in the world are growing up ignorant of the Gospel! Sadly exploitation of children, especially in the least evangelised countries, is growing – slavery, exploitation for labour or sex, neglect, abuse and oppression.

2. The need for Christian workers

We must see a re-direction of workers into the least evangelised areas. We have already seen that in most of these areas missionary visas are unobtainable. This means that churches need to send workers to North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and other parts of the least evangelised world using their profession. We need to look again at why Paul, in his strategy to fully proclaim the Gospel to whole nations, chose to make a deliberate part of that strategy working with his hands. The reasons he made this choice are far more than to circumvent the problem of getting a missionary visa! I pray that there will be a surge of workers using their professions and moving into these least evangelised nations as we speed up the coming of the Day of God.

3. The need for church planting

There is a need for Christian media and Bible correspondence courses, but there is no substitute for people with the gifts of personal evangelism and church planting. There are hundreds of cities in the least evangelised countries where there are no churches. Modern technology – Christian satellite TV etc. – helps a great deal in reaching the masses with information about Jesus. But speeding up the coming of the great Day of God will only be a reality as we plant self-reproducing churches in every major city of the least evangelised nations.

4. The need to reach out to those from least reached nations in the UK and other countries of the world where the church is strong and has a vision to reach out with the Gospel to those who can come to know Jesus and take the message of the Gospel back to their own countries. They may be working or studying or they may be immigrants. Many of these people are living right on the streets where we live!

5. The need of salvation

Most countries in the least evangelised region are unstable. War is sadly frequent. There is every probability that this whole region will remain very volatile. Men, women and children need the forgiveness of sins and the power to live transformed lives free from bondage. They need to know Jesus Christ as Saviour. God longs for their salvation. As Christian people, we need to be gripped with a renewed conviction that it is **only the power of God** that can effect radical change in the lives of people! People need food. They need human rights and stable democratic government, but they need salvation more! The only hope for a better future in this world and the next is salvation.

God is at work in The Least Evangelised Nations

Let us look at just one of these least evangelised nations – Iraq. Today Iraq has 18 million people. It isn't homogeneous. It has Kurds and Lurs, Sunni Muslims and Shi'a Muslims. It is a mixture of different cultures and different languages. Before the Gulf War not much was happening in Iraq from a Christian point of view. All missionary personnel had to withdraw in 1968. Shortly after this the Bible Society was closed down. There were only about four evangelical churches. They were rather timid and small (the largest only about 30 members). They were very much cut off from the world-wide church.

Since the Gulf War the difference is dramatic! Hundreds of thousands of Bibles and New Testaments have been allowed by the government to be imported into Iraq. The **Jesus Film** has been shown on Iraqi TV and also several times in the Kurdish areas. There is a huge demand for Scriptures. The evangelical churches have grown – in one case 30-fold! Christian workers are doing relief and development work in northern Iraq. Kurds are coming to faith.
What has made the difference? I believe that during the Gulf War the church around the world began to focus prayer on Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They earnestly prayed that God would intervene. They prayed for the church and the people of these lands. God wonderfully answered these prayers! Sadly, most of those who prayed don't know the amazing answers in the spiritual climate of the Gulf States and Iraq. The lesson for us is clear. Prayer speed ups the coming of the Day of God! Prayer creates a hunger for God's Word. Prayer emboldens the church. Prayer opens doors. Prayer sends out Christian workers. Prayer releases finances for the purchase of Scriptures.

From Senegal and Mauritania in the west to China in the east, new opportunities for Christian workers are opening up. This surely is the work of God. Christian workers are urgently needed. One opportunity is for teachers of English as a foreign language (TEFL). Please pray that the Lord would send TEFL teachers. Please challenge young people to train as TEFL teachers.

Another great need is for development workers. Other than the oil-rich Gulf States, most least evangelised nations are poor. The poor are lost and the lost are poor. So from Senegal and the Sahel region across much of the desert lands of the Middle East, central and south Asia, there is a need for agricultural workers as well as community and primary health care workers, engineers (civil, mechanical, electrical) managers and administrators, as well as computer specialists, to get involved in co-operative Christian development projects. We could start many more projects if we had more people. There is a particular need for projects that create employment for young urban dwellers.

What should we do?

If we are to take advantage of these many new opportunities the Lord has given us to reach the least evangelised countries, we need to break out of the mould of traditional missionary work that has become familiar to us over the past 150 years. Here are three ways we can take advantage of these great opportunities.

1. Take advantage of cheap air travel!

Go and visit these countries for a month or less. While you are there you can pray. You can visit some Christian workers.You can act as a courier carrying mail and other materials for them. You can do evangelism. You can gain a vision for the people.

2. Take advantage of short-term missions of one or two years.

We need to develop short-term missions sending out Christian workers into the least evangelised nations. These short-term missions need to minimize pre-field generic training and maximize mid term, in-field training. The best way to learn is on the job.

3. Form teams of professionals working in the major cities of the least evangelised nations.

The goal of these teams would be to see churches planted among the local people. As far as possible these teams should be multi-national. Much of this is happening, but on far too small a scale! However we do sense the blessing of the Lord on what is already happening. Progress is being made.

To us, as Christians, the call is to speed up the coming of the Day of God by speeding up world evangelisation. The part of the world especially needing our focus is the least evangelised part – the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist world as well as the Balkans. God is opening doors into this area. We need the prayers of God's people and we need workers. All of us can have a part. As we pray and commit ourselves to God for the task He will show each one of us the part He wants us to play.

By the Grace of God may we speed up the coming of the Day of God in this generation.