The Great Pursuit

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Date: 01 December 2024

Preacher: Dr. Daniel Heeringa

[0:00] From the Great Commission in Matthew 28 until the great multitude in Revelation 7, God invites us to join Him in the great pursuit.

In a world filled with diverse cultures, languages, and people, we are unified in this mission, His mission. Since 1845, IMB missionaries have embarked on a journey to share the gospel, make disciples, and plant churches in places where Jesus is not yet known.
But the task is monumental. Billions are still unreached, living without the hope and love of Christ. In 2023, over 879,000 people heard the gospel, 141,000 people believed, and 116,000 were baptized. Yet, so many more still wait for their chance to hear and believe. Lostness is not just a statistic. It's an eternal reality for billions of souls.
But amidst the challenges, there's hope. The Great Pursuit is a faithful journey fueled by love, compassion, and the unwavering belief in the transformative power of the gospel.
[1:20] Stories of redemption, reconciliation, and restoration inspire us to press on. Our vision is rooted in Revelation 7, verse 9.

A multitude from every corner of the world united in worshiping Jesus Christ. You are called to play your part in this vision.
Whether you pray fervently, give generously, go boldly, or send faithfully, your role is vital in the Great Pursuit. Join us in solving the greatest problem in the world, lostness.
Together, we spread the message of hope and salvation to every nation, tribe, and tongue. This is the Great Pursuit.
If you have your Bibles, I want to turn to Matthew 28. Matthew 28, I'm going to be looking at a couple different places, but that's where I'm going to start. It is, as the song says, the most wonderful time of the year.
[2:19] Whether you're ready or not, it's December. And they say it's the most wonderful time of the year. I say somewhat. College football is almost over, so the most wonderful time of the year is leaving us.

But after yesterday, you can go. But anyway. However, this is one of those times. We have a lot going on, and I want to encourage you to pay attention to the calendar in your bulletin and make note of it on your personal calendar.
Next weekend, we have a wonderful opportunity. Our choir and orchestra and drama team have been working together for Merry Christmas Pickens, and it'll be a wonderful presentation of the gospel story.
It'll take place on Saturday night as well as both worship hours on Sunday morning. And I want to encourage you not only to be here but to invite folks. If they have their own church and can't come on Sunday here, then that's what Saturday's for, is to allow folks and encourage folks to come and to be a part of that.
It's a great time together. And then the Sunday preceding Christmas, December the 22nd, please make note that we'll have our two worship hours. We will not have life groups.
[3:37] We'll not be meeting for those two hours for life groups, but we will have our both worship hours on the 22nd. There is no midweek because midweek is Christmas Day.

And then the 29th as well, we'll have one worship hour. We'll all come together for one worship hour, one combined worship hour. No life groups on the 29th, just one hour of worship together. So please make note of that. And we will not be meeting for midweek on January the 1st either. Throughout all of that, however, we are focusing in on one of my favorites.
And that is the Lottie Moon Christmas offering for international missions. And I will say that we have a task before us. The national goal for the International Mission Board in this offering is $205

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million.
And our church goal is $66,000. Admittedly, we brought in more than that last year. And this year's goal is our highest yet.
[4:46] So if you're new to a Southern Baptist church and are not familiar with the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, who is this lady and when are we going to pay her off?

That's what I've heard from children sometimes when they get done hearing somebody talk about Lottie Moon and think, when are we ever going to pay that lady off? Well, hopefully we won't. Lottie Moon was a missionary in China at the turn of the 20th century.
And she had a tremendous burden to see folks come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And she served faithfully. The mission board ran out of money. And they told the missionaries to come home, that they could not afford to keep them on the field.
She refused to come home. She knew that God had called her there and would not come home. And she grew so burdened for that that it affected her health. As well, she deprived herself in order to give to others.
And she dealt with some malnutrition. Her faith became, I mean, her health became poor. And finally, she was forced, because she was going to die if she didn't, to get on a boat and start home.
[5:54] And it was on that boat on the way home that she died. Before she died, she started a special offering because of the great financial need that the International Mission Board had, the Foreign Mission Board at that time, had.

And she started asking for churches to give a Christmas offering for International Missions. And after she died, some years later, that offering was named after her, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.
Now, so why do we bother to spend so much money on International Missions? I will tell you that if we reach our goal this year, if you combine that with our cooperative program giving and the portion of our cooperative program giving, because when you give a tithe to this church, a portion of that in 2024, 10% of that will go toward the cooperative program.
Of that that goes to the cooperative program, about a quarter of that goes directly to International Missions. If you put all those formulas together, between us reaching our goal for Lottie Moon and between our cooperative program giving that goes to International Missions, we'll give over $100,000 to International Missions as a church.
Why in the world would we put that much money into that? Well, I'm glad you asked. Matthew 28, verse 18 says this, And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
[7:26] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

That is known as the Great Commission. It is the last words that Jesus spoke before he ascended into heaven, and those words say that he has empowered us and sent us out to reach the world for the gospel of Jesus Christ.
We are to share Christ. We are to make disciples by nurturing them in his word. Now, our schedule changes about this time of year, but if you typically look at a worship bulletin and look at the schedule of the week, you'll notice that on Sundays, not only do we have corporate worship together, but we also have life groups.
In addition to that, on Sunday evenings, we have sessions for children and for youth, as well as for adults. You'll notice as well on Tuesday mornings that we have Bible studies that take place across this campus.
On Wednesday morning, we have a Bible study on Wednesday evening. We have opportunities for all ages as well. All of those things are about making disciples.
[8:44] Why do we meet on Sunday? Why do we meet on Tuesday? Why do we meet on Wednesday? Why are we available throughout the week and challenging you often to make disciples? That means not only do we have the responsibility to lead people to Christ and be a part of Christ saving them, but also we have a responsibility once they are saved to grow them up in the Lord.

It's what we're called to do. He also tells us to baptize. To baptize, folks, is to lead people, to take a private committal faith and to make it public in a way that by Christ's commission and by his

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example, he's told us to do.
Your faith, if it's in Christ, is not a private matter. I want to be clear. I've heard people say that before. Well, my faith is a private matter.
Well, it's not a gospel faith then, friend, because the reality is Jesus told us to tell. He told us to go and to tell and to make disciples.
He told us to share our faith. And so our faith is not a private matter. We are to win the world of Christ. He assures us that he will be with us all the way. And I want you to notice something.
[9:56] When it says making disciples, it says make disciples of all nations. Why are we always going places? Or why should I go anywhere?

Because God's called us to go. And so I want to challenge you as you look toward 2025, go get your passport. Let's go somewhere. Let's do something for the Lord Jesus.
Let's get after it. Because he guides us all the way, and that's a big deal. I want us to be a part. I want us to influence the great multitude.
I hate the misuse of the book of Revelation so much. The point of that book was to give a future hope to a persecuted church in Asia Minor.
There were seven churches, central locations where many, many small churches met around those areas. And John, while on the island of Patmos, received a vision from the Lord of a message that he was to share to those seven groups of people.
[11:08] He gives individual messages to those seven regions. And then the rest of that book is to give them hope in the midst of their circumstances.

The point of the book is to give them hope by proclaiming not only a future victory by the Lord, but sharing that God has already been victorious.
He is victorious. And we will celebrate that around his throne. It's going to be much better and more obvious in the future. That's after it gets worse.
But I want you to notice something, a beautiful scene in the book of Revelation. I happen to love Revelation 1. That's not our text for the day. You don't have to look there.
But I'm just telling you, while I'm here, I'm just going to camp out a minute. Revelation 1 I absolutely love because it's an amazing description of Christ walking among the churches that were hurting.
[12:06] He's addressing seven churches that are hurting. And it says that Christ, and it's a powerful image of Christ, is walking among the candlesticks.

The candlesticks represent the churches that are to keep their flame lit and are to light the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're like a candlestick here in the midst of the darkness.
And he is walking among the candlesticks. You know what that means? That means that no matter how you're hurting, no matter what's going on, no matter what the world's doing around you, the Lord Jesus loves this church and is walking in the midst of us.
He is there with us, walking with us. And then there's an amazing description of heaven at the end. And there's a beautiful image of heaven in Revelation 7.
And when God allowed John to see a vision into heaven, the scene is amazing. And I want you to get this scene. It's in Revelation 7, verse 9. It says this, After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.
[13:28] And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever.

Amen. What a scene. What a scene. Can you imagine? It says there that there will be people from all nations and there will be more than we could count from all tribes, all peoples, all languages around the throne of God together.
Can you imagine that? Well, I want to let you in on something. Not only can we be a part of that through Christ Jesus, we can influence that.
We can influence that. The reality is that most people that die today will not get there. Most people that die today will not be in heaven.

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There will be more than we can count from around the world throughout all generations there, but the reality is most will not be there. And so I'm saying let's play a part and let's make it bigger. [14:47] Let's make the crowd bigger. We don't have the ability to save. Don't misunderstand me. We don't have that ability. We have the ability to point people to a Christ that will save, that wants to save them.

God has instructed us to share and promised us that he would bless us and Jesus saves eternally. Yes, he can save them without us, but why in the world should he?
Why would we want him to? Don't you want to be a part of that cause? Which leads to the great pursuit. In Acts chapter 1 verse 8, Jesus said, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit's come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.
Now Jesus ascended from Jerusalem. So let's get the context of this passage. He ascended from Jerusalem. When he tells them that they are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, he means that they are to be witnesses right where they are.
Folks, we have a responsibility to be witnesses right where we are.
[16:13] Your neighbor, God may have strategically placed that neighbor beside you so that they can have a relationship with you and can possibly hear the gospel.

You're not responsible for their response. You are responsible that they have a personal invitation to come to Christ.
In the middle of football yesterday, I sent out a message in anticipation of the day to over 700 people and said, pray, invite, anticipate.
And the reason why I sent that was because I believe God's placed us here in our Jerusalem where we live to make a difference in the lives of people that are around us.
He goes beyond that. He speaks of Judea. How does that relate to us? That's the wider region. That's the South Carolina for us. That's the North America for us.
[17:25] He goes on to talk about Samaria. You may be familiar that I didn't like people in Samaria. It's the further reaches.

It's the people around the world. It's the people that you may not have a burden for. It's the people that you may not want to have much to do with.
The reality is that we have a responsibility to those that would go unnoticed unless we respond if we don't do our part.
So what is our part? Well, for one, it's to pray. We have 3,600 missionaries with the International Mission Board on the field serving throughout the world.
In September, I flew to Richmond, Virginia to go to what was called an International Mission Board Senders Summit. They said they wanted to talk about building a pipeline.
[18:29] I didn't really know what they were building a pipeline to and I wasn't really sure what the conference was about. But quite honestly, the reason I went to the conference is because it was held at a training center for the IMB missionaries.

When they are called and commissioned to go, they go to this training center for six weeks to be trained. And I wanted to smell it and taste it a little bit and see what we were talking about.
I'll go far reaches for a sermon illustration. And so I wanted to be a part of that. But as well, I wanted to be a part of meeting some of my heroes, which are missionaries, those that God has called to go to other places to serve the world, pick up their families and move them to other places.
It was quite amazing to be a part of that because the week that I was there, the few days, it wasn't a week, the few days that I was there, they had more international missionaries on that campus than they had had in over a decade.
There were over 100 folks there doing the training before they went overseas to serve the world.
Now, our conference was not interacting with missionaries.
[19:42] I was interacting with IMB personnel and some churches that play a major part in helping new missionaries go to the field and they were sharing their stories with us and those type things.

But we were on the same campus and we ate in the same cafeteria as all those missionaries and their families. And so I always made a point with every meal to sit down and sit with another missionary's family to get to know them and to meet them and to find out what their story is and where they were going.

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I met guys that had just graduated, were about to graduate from college that were going to serve as what's called journeymen. It's a two-year mission overseas where they were, one of them was going to be a trekker.
He was simply going to take people hiking and while he took them hiking, share the gospel with them and build relationships with them. There were all kinds of different aspects that they would do and it was fascinating to see these who had been touched by the Lord and called by the Lord to go. It was amazing to see. It's a training center that's on the countryside outside of Richmond on I think about 140 acres. I might have just made that figure up but you know most statistics are made up on the spot anyway but I was able to spend time with them and I learned that the strategy that we have as Southern Baptists to reach the world is through eight different strategic areas called affinities. [21:15] One is Europe. The second one is North Africa and the Middle East. The third is Sub-Saharan Africa. The fourth is Central Asia.

The fifth is South Asia. The sixth is the Pacific Rim. Seven is the Americas and I don't know if you can see that or not but when it says number eight it's sitting over South America but it's got a little asterisk beside it and that asterisk speaks of not just South America but the rest of the world. That's the deaf community. One of our affinities are the deaf community throughout the world and how desperately folks need to know the Lord.
I want you to understand how desperate the need is. For instance, the United Kingdom which we have had a missionary here a couple of times since I've been here from England.
Kenny is over a large number of missionaries in the UK and I grew up with him. He's a dear friend of mine and because of his position with the International Mission Board he had the opportunity to move to other parts of the UK and he has recently moved to Ireland.
[22:30] He had planned to move earlier than this to Ireland to Dublin area and there was a hold up that kind of delayed not only his move but our participation with his new ministry there in Ireland but in the UK only 1.46% of people are Christian and have a personal relationship professing relationship with Christ 1.46% in Russia only 1 in 500 people are Christian and I got to thinking about 1 in 500 how does that range?

So if you if that was the case in Pickens County if only 1 in 500 knew the Lord those in attendance here today between our two worship hours would almost double the amount of believers in our county that would be the entirety of those that would be saved in our county on those kind of representations in other words people need the Lord and we need to pray for that to happen now to give more guided prayer during this particular week there is available in a foyer a little booklet it looks just like this on both those black tables I put them out there myself just right before the first service and it's the Week of Prayer for International Missions 2024 Prayer Guide and it'll give you somebody to pray for you can go online and get more information about them but they give you somebody to pray for every day starting today through next Sunday it's the Week of Prayer for International Missions today's guy is named Moses
Moses grew up in West Africa and Moses was saved while he was in West Africa and God led him to come to America and become a Bible college student and he came over here and went to Bible college and he and his wife also felt led to go to seminary and they went to seminary and then God called them back to Africa and he serves in Senegal actually he serves in islands outside of Senegal now I went to Guinea in 2000 April of 2017 on a vision trip it was a partnership that the state of Mississippi had and I lived there at the time and I went over and went to Guinea and some of the missionaries that I dealt with there because again I tell you they're my heroes now I mean there was a family that moved from Arkansas that I ate in their home they had about four kids and they moved from Arkansas to the biggest city in Guinea sent their kids to a primarily French speaking school their kids did not speak French and nobody spoke English except them they had a wall around their house with a gate and on top of that wall there were pieces of glass that had been cemented into the top to keep people from coming over the top of that wall and they were walking their kids to school it was an amazing sacrifice that these folks successful people in Arkansas picked up and left and went
I'm telling you because of the gospel and because of what God's placed upon their life those are my heroes man to be able to do that and move your family and all that stuff I've never felt led to do that I prayed about that and asked God what would you have me do and hey y'all are it but I mean I've never felt led to do that but I'm telling you the people who are led to do that they're my heroes man I can't help but bump elbows with them and appreciate them and one of the reasons why I love to go

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is to encourage them to let them know we love you we care about you we're praying for you and if there's something we can do to help you please tell me because these folks will step up when they need to step up and let us know what we can do sometimes it's very simple things and sometimes it's not but it's a wonderful blessing to do that but those people had served previously in Senegal and Senegal was like the nice place to stay versus Guinea Guinea is not the nice place to stay I promise you but anyway so Senegal was a nicer area it had presentable beaches instead of trash all over the beaches and all that kind of stuff well Moses went to Senegal not the Moses of the Bible the Moses of the missionary that I'm talking about

Moses went to Senegal and he serves in the islands off of Senegal Moses can't swim and he's very afraid of water and God in his sense of humor called him to be an island missionary and so he put on a life jacket got in a boat and went over to an island and showed the Jesus film the Jesus film is a film that tells the story of Jesus I think it's translated in over a hundred languages and he showed them that movie 25 people that movie in their language and 15 of them got saved in that session when he first got there and he's been ministering to them ever since pray for Moses that God would work and move in his life life you know what I found out when I was in Guinea when I was in Guinea was so many of them animism is big over there which is a cultic kind of naturalistic spiritual world that they believe in that is that is demonic quite honestly but also the Muslim faith is very strong there and there are people who have committed their lives to Christ but have yet to be baptized because if they're baptized they'll lose their job they'll lose their family they'll be completely ostracized and so for somebody to get baptized over there and make a public confession of faith it is a life change and so so many of the people that I met along the way were Christians that were still struggling with that whole deal of what to do about that because young people give their heart and life to the Lord Jesus and if they get baptized their family will disown them they'll have nothing and so they struggle with that

[29:05] I was on a college campus over there meeting with with the college students and went rode in 120 miles over 8 hours into the bush and went into a small village there where people over there need desperately to hear the gospel and I went over there with a medical doctor who treats folks in a hospital and by treating them in a hospital he also shares Christ with them Dr. Robert Pepper wonderful but anyway God's doing wonderful things over there and he's doing it through people like Moses and we need to pray for him not only that to pray but we also need to go it is my prayer that God would call people out of this congregation to reach the world for Christ he's done it before and I pray he does it again have you ever considered it I mean let's think about this have you ever even dared to pray about it it is the greatest pursuit for the gospel and I want you to get a taste of it we have put purposely put more money for 2025 toward getting involved in missions and going on mission than we've had previously we have a team that's going to Toronto this summer last summer that team went and did back our Bible clubs they plan to do something very similar there as well how about Peru we've had an ongoing relationship with Peru for a long time and Jeff Rafferty and Jim Gilstrap train pastors online since COVID they've done

Zoom calls online where they'll meet with as many as 100 pastors on a Friday night late Friday night teaching them doctrine in order for them to get training that they can't get otherwise we support a missionary over there that's going into the jungles he's native from there but he's going into the jungles and sharing faith and there's trips that go into the jungles there we also are teaching children and want to expand that there's some light construction that we're looking at doing and so Jeff is already in the planning stages of planning a trip to Peru next year what about Europe Kenny has shared with me my missionary in Ireland has shared with me that he'd love for a small team to come in September and help in a church that he is working in there and supporting to just get the word out and to just be a help on the ground so we plan to do that and what about a community rebuild we got communities around us ravaged by floods we found out after Helene came through we didn't have to go very far to help people rebuild their lives and so we have mission teams that are planning on going to do a community rebuild we don't have to go far to be productive in ministry my question is what would God have you do and are you even open to do it if he leads you to do it I just encourage you to pray about it encourage you to pray what would God have you do and then prepare yourself for it as I told you earlier go get a passport be ready in case God leads you to go go and to share however this time I also ask you to give I ask you to give 10% of our all undesignated money that's given to Pickens First Baptist Church in 2024 goes through the cooperative program more than half of that money stays in the state of South Carolina to provide

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support for planning churches and for raising up missionaries and supporting our own county RA camp at Camp McCall it supports that however when you give to the cooperative program and when you give your tithe to First Baptist you give the cooperative program a quarter of what goes to the cooperative program goes directly to international missions that total that comes from the cooperative program that goes to international missions that nationwide total is about half of what they need the other half of what they need to keep personnel on the field comes from the Lottie Moon
Christmas offering and it takes an average of $77,000 to keep a missionary on the field now in some places in the world it's more expensive than that in some places in the world that's impoverished it's a lot cheaper than that but on the average what it takes to keep a missionary on the field is $77,000 however I promise you that if we don't support the Lottie Moon Christmas offering we will not have the personnel in place in those hard to reach areas missionaries will come home and what we run into is a real situation in real time now missionaries are retiring and we need part of that conference that I went to is to make sure that we do everything we can to prepare the next generation to take their place that we call the called out that we support the cooperative program to make our seminaries strong so that they get the proper training in order to go so that we give through the cooperative program to help with international missions but also that we give through Lottie Moon because the difference in giving to Lottie Moon versus these other things is when you give a dollar to Lottie Moon that dollar goes directly to international missions it actually goes to pay the salaries of the missionaries on the field that's what it's for they may raise some support for ministry activities that they do or special projects along the way and all that stuff but they are guaranteed through the Lottie Moon
Christmas offering and through the cooperative program that they will be covered if they'll go and as missionaries retire we need to keep to create and keep pipeline clear to pipe missionaries to the field to keep them going our goal this year as a church is $66,000 last year our goal was $1,000 less than that but our goal and I want you to hear me this morning but our goal last year was reached during the month of December I went back and looked this week to see and we reached it during the month of December my friend that's the way you do it when God puts a goal before you and we have a responsibility to fulfill it and it's an aggressive goal but we get it done as God allows us to do I think you ought to set a goal for the glory of God and then get it done and as the little kid said pay the lady off you know get it done and give faithfully to Lottie Moon now to be honest with you this church has faithfully given to Lottie Moon for many many years
[36:30] I'm thankful that that is just growing quite honestly and I feel sure that we'll be faithful to do that there's envelopes that look like this with the blue markings around them you can pick one of those up as you leave and always mark that Lottie Moon and you can give that way you can give online you can give any way God leads you to give I encourage you to give to that but more importantly than all of that while we try to go throughout the world to share the gospel my question is do you know the Lord Jesus Christ have you ever surrendered your life to follow the Lord Jesus because I'm thankful that the gospel is that if you confess that you've done wrong and that you're a sinner that he'll meet you where you are and he'll forgive you of your sins and he'll come into your life and he'll save you and change you if you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ the greatest decision you'll ever make is to surrender your life to Christ maybe you've done that and it's a private faith you've done it privately but you've never done it publicly you've never let anybody else know what God has done in your life

I want to encourage you to take that private faith and be obedient to God and make it public the way we do that by his example and by his commission is through baptism baptism is a public way of confessing what Christ has done in your life privately and if you've never done that I encourage you to be obedient to that maybe God's leading you to be a part of Pickens First Baptist Church I'm thankful we have several guests here today some of you have been with us for some time and I'm thankful for that God's doing a wonderful work in Pickens First Baptist Church and if God's leading you to be a part of this church you come we'd love to guide you in that process but listen I don't have a clue what God's telling you in your heart and life I just want you to be obedient you'll never be satisfied until you follow what his will is for your life and so you be obedient if I can help in that process that's exactly what this time is for stand together if you will
I'm going to pray and we're going to sing Heavenly Father I love you and I thank you Lord for your love for us and I ask right now that you will lead and guide us help us to simply be obedient as you

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speak to our hearts and lives Father in Jesus precious name Amen

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