

LOCAL AND GLOBAL CHURCH

By Austin Holcomb and Ben Stokes

SCRIPTURE

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples 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!" Revelation 7:9-10

OBSERVATION

Christian prejudice, or nearsightedness, is the tendency to focus only on ourselves or our immediate surroundings. Spiritually speaking, it is the inability to see God's plan of redemption from a global or cosmic perspective. Perhaps this is why Jesus began so many parables by saying, "the kingdom of God is like..." The Bible helps us to look beyond ourselves and view the world from God's vantage point. In the verses above, Jesus came to save a people for Himself, and not just people from one nation, but every nation and tongue. This truth has astounding implications.

- Understanding this reality removes us from self-centered Christianity—a shallow Christianity that is simply Jesus loves me, and He died for me and God has big and wonderful plans for my life. These thoughts are true and normal to have, but to remain there is to be spiritually nearsighted. Jesus does not call His people to self-absorbed spirituality but to robust missional love.
- It reminds us of a forever family. The church is more than a building, it's a body. It is not good for man to be alone—we need other brothers and sisters around us in community to obey Christ's commands. That is the purpose of the local church. Jesus does not call His people to isolated discipleship but communal fellowship and exhortation.
- It frees us from ethnocentric prejudices. Church-shopping is a real thing in contemporary western society. We want to be in a group that is just like us—a group that accepts us and suits our preferences or preaching styles. In reality churches look different and smell different on every continent. Jesus does not call His people to one cultural style of worship but to embrace unity and diversity.
- It reveals the scope of God's mission. God's kingdom is much larger than Harmony Hill Baptist Church. The biggest mega-church is only a blip on the radar. Reaching our lost neighbors is great, but are we praying, going, and giving for the sake of the uttermost? Jesus does not call His people to stay put but to be sent out as sheep among wolves. He is the Good Shepherd and desires to bring others into the fold.

OBEDIENCE

Living in days like the present we are tempted to pull back from the world and focus only on ourselves or our immediate surroundings and forget altogether that Jesus saved us to live missionally. God is using the circumstances of this world, including the present coronavirus, to call all people to Himself. The exciting news is that God is wanting us to join Him in this great plan of redemption! From our focus text God is inviting us to obey Him by:

- *Refusing to live in isolation and to continue in communal fellowship and exhortation.* Call members of your life group and ask how you can be praying for them today.
- *Live in this day as being sent out into the world as sheep among wolves.* Look for ways that you can sacrificially serve others.
- *Bring others into the fold.* Don't stop short of simply serving others for the sake of serving others. Sacrificially serve your friends, neighbors, community, and world for the advancement of the gospel.

PRAYER

God, help us to pour out our lives in service to You. Help us to be a people who sacrifice for the sake of Your kingdom, living as sheep among wolves but understanding the Great Shepherd is standing watch over us at every turn. Help us to understand that our love for You is costly, and we cannot hold onto selfish ambition and live for and love You at the same time. Help us then to let go of the things of this world; even things that seem so valuable in this world are nowhere near as valuable as You are. Lord, help us to make sacrifices in our lives. We may not know all that means for our lives, but God, help us to begin to understand. Help us to hold loosely things in this world, to cling tightly to Jesus, and to be selfless. Help us to be faithful to reach out and encourage and pray for our church family and members of our community, understanding the gospel is for all people. Give us boldness as we sacrificially serve others for the advancement of Your gospel. Amen.

Other verses to read: 1 Peter 2:9-10; John 10:16