

FIRST PERSON: It's worth asking for

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Chitwood

In this season when I am meeting with many state conventions and associations, God has directed me to Romans 10:8-15. The Apostle Paul's words are a great reminder of why God still has us on earth and why the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention still has a job to do.

Our mission is to serve Southern Baptists in carrying out the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations.

For 176 years, Southern Baptists have sent missionaries to proclaim the Gospel of hope among the nations through the IMB. While we have work in nearly every country of the world, we prioritize getting the Gospel to those who have yet to hear. In fact, 91% of our IMB missionary teams are engaging the unreached and the overwhelming majority of IMB financial resources are spent among the unreached.

That is especially important right now. Romans 10:14 reminds us of the critical need for our work. Paul asks, "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (ESV).

We live in a world with more lost people alive today that at

any time in human history. More lost people will die today and enter hell than on any day in human history and, unlike at any time in human history, people born in the past 100 years have had the advantage of air travel, meaning there are few peoples and places in the world we cannot reach in a handful of days at most.

Yet, of the 11,946 people groups that have been numbered around the world, 7,317 remain unreached by the common definition of unreached, meaning that less than two percent of the people groups are evangelical Christian. 3,179 of the world's people groups remain unengaged with the Gospel, meaning there was likely no church where a lost man or woman could have gone this past week to hear the Gospel preached and no missionary they might meet in the village.



IMB AT WORK IN AFRICA – Kevin Singerman (left), a missionary with the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention, listens as IMB President Paul Chitwood (second from left) hears a report from Geofrey Ochan (second from right), pastor of Hope Baptist Church in Arua, Uganda, and an unidentified church leader. (Photo credit: IMB)

When John, from his prison cell, was given a vision from God and allowed to peer into heaven, he wrote in Revelation 7:9: “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..." (ESV).

No nation, tribe, people, nor language will be without representation before the throne. Those 3,179 people groups unreached and unengaged? They will be there, but in order for them to get there, we must get to them.

We are yet here in this broken and sinful world where cancer robs our cradles and COVID robs our church roles; where abortion robs the womb; communism robs churches of their pastors as they are imprisoned or simply disappear; racism robs human dignity; and drug addiction robs children of their mommies and daddies.

We are yet here because the great multitude is not yet there, standing before the throne and before the lamb. Until every nation, all tribes, peoples, and languages are represented in that great multitude, the vision of heaven is yet unfulfilled and the mission of the church on earth remains.

"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Romans 10:14 ESV). Why are we still here? John's vision and Paul's letter to the church at Rome echo that our purpose for remaining on earth is to preach the Gospel – and preach the Gospel we must for as Paul makes clear, the Gospel is an exclusive message for an exclusive Kingdom.

While every nation, tribe, people, and language will be represented in the great multitude of heaven, every person from every nation, tribe, people, and language will not be there – only those who have heard and believed the Gospel.

As Paul continues, he asks another question in Romans 10:15, a question that I cannot, as the IMB president, pass over. Paul

asks, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (ESV).

Thank God for those who send missionaries. The prayers and financial partnership of Southern Baptists make possible our work on the front lines of lostness, getting the Gospel to the unreached and the unengaged.

The beautiful feet of our missionaries walk in a prison in Central Asia. Those feet walk in a prison not because they are serving time. Rather, they go there voluntarily to serve women and children through a medical clinic and a preschool in a women's prison.

Why would one need a preschool in a women's prison? Because, in this particular country, women sentenced to prison who have children under the age of six are required to take their children with them to prison and care for those children themselves in prison.

There, in prison, our personnel are showing the love of Jesus as they care for the needs of mothers and children and also sharing about the One who died to give us freedom from the eternal bondage of sin. Beautiful feet bringing Good News.

The beautiful feet of our sent ones walk through refugee camps and crowded city streets. They wade through open sewers in the slums. Those same feet wade into the rivers and the ocean surf to baptize those who have heard and believed the Gospel they preach. Those feet trek through the mountains to isolated villages and walk hundreds of jetways as they go where the lost are to be found.

As I think about our mission force, a scenario comes to mind. What if our country cut its military force by 40%? We would go from 1.3 million troops to barely more than 800,000. Can you imagine, in today's world of threats and unrest, the U.S.

cutting its military ranks by nearly half?

Thankfully that is not happening, but let me share another scenario with you. This one, unfortunately, is true. Between the years 2008-2018, Southern Baptists cut our frontline missionary force by 40%.

Those of us who have been in a Southern Baptist church since at least 2008 should be sobered by the fact that Gospel troops have been cut by nearly half on our watch. Unlike at any time in human history, we have the capacity to reach almost anyone anywhere in a matter of days. Yet, on our watch, 40% of our troops have been discharged.

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Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention

Well, I’m asking for it. Thanks to the growing generosity of Southern Baptists and a great year in the financial markets, we just had the best financial year in the history of the IMB. We are still digging out of three decades of financial decline but, thankfully, the IMB is growing again.

We aren’t discharging soldiers; we’re calling up reinforcements. We have a target of seeing the number of frontline missionaries grow by 500 over the next five years, and here’s what we need to do right now: we need to deliver the draft notice. We need to get the word out. We need to call

out the called and encourage every pastor and preacher across the SBC to call out the called. Now is not the time to retreat. The need has never been greater. Now is the time to send more of those beautiful feet to the nations.

We have another task. The IMB did not reduce its force because someone on our research team told past IMB presidents that the most important work in the universe, the work of getting the Gospel to the nations, was almost done and we wouldn't need as many missionaries or stateside staff.

The IMB brought more than 2,000 missionaries home over a ten year period and cut dozens of stateside jobs because we simply could not afford to keep them.

Since the IMB is the missionary sending agency of Southern Baptists, one might conclude that Southern Baptists are broke. Let me assure you, Southern Baptists are not financially broke. Well, maybe Southern Baptists have lost their heart for the nations? I know that's not the case, either.

How do I know Southern Baptists aren't broke and they still have a heart that beats for the nations? I know these things because Southern Baptists spend over \$1 billion every year on work overseas that isn't Baptist work. That's a verifiable number and it is, in fact, a very conservative estimate.

So, what has happened? To be candid, I think the biggest problem was not a Southern Baptist problem. It has been an IMB problem. It is a relationship problem. It is not a problem of churches relating to the IMB. It's been a problem of the IMB failing to relate to churches.

We are working hard every day to fix that problem, which brings me back to that bold statement from a Mississippi Baptist pastor. I'm asking Southern Baptists for more money, the money it will take to support those 500 more missionaries.

We are asking churches that don't give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions to start giving.

We are asking those who do give to give more. We are building relationships with individual donors and looking for more.

Aren't you thankful for Baptist feet? I'm thankful for the Baptist feet of a couple of deacons that climbed the hill and stepped up on the porch of a little rental house at 210 Provins Street and invited a single dad in his late 20s to come to church and bring with him those three boys he was raising on his own.

I'm thankful for the feet of a Baptist pastor who, some years later, stepped up on that same porch and walked into our living room and shared the Gospel with my brothers and me. I'm thankful for that same pair of feet that put on a pair of old wading boots and walked down into a baptistry to baptize my two brothers and me.

You'd have an IMB president regardless, but if not for those feet you wouldn't have this one.

As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" With so many yet to hear, we still have work to do.

God bless you as you do that work today. Thank you for your partnership with the IMB as we, together, send beautiful feet to preach the Good News to every nation, tribe, people, and language!

Chitwood is president of the IMB, which is headquartered in Richmond, Va. Permission is granted for this message or parts of it to be shared, published, and preached, in keeping with the intended purpose. For a downloadable outline of this message, [click here](#).

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