

Christianity Spreading Faster Outside than In?

Doesn't it seem that Christianity is spreading faster in other parts of the world than here in North America? If so, why is that?

As a preamble to the answer, we must remember and keep in mind that according to Revelation 7 God is bringing people to faith from every tribe and nation; so we shouldn't be surprised to see it happening all over the world!

It is a fact that many people are being brought to faith in Jesus in what's been called the "Global South." In some of those countries the Christian faith is forbidden. We learned that when we heard our new T.I.M partner back on June 7th of this year. In Africa, many parts of Asia, and the Middle East, many areas of Central and South America, we are seeing a rapid increase in the number of believers.

What accounts for that increase and why are we not seeing that same kind of activity in the U. S. and Canada, I believe, is that just as in the United States, there are people coming to faith in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God to transform their hearts and lives. People in the Global South are hungering and thirsting for an eternal hope that the risen Savior Jesus gives, perhaps more so than in North America, because in many of those places people are facing oppression, violence, and suffering of all kinds. That can create an openness to the hope and help of the Savior Jesus. There is something about desperation in the face of tribulation that causes people to cry out to God for help. And God calls out to them in Hebrews 4; it says **"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"** (Hebrews 4:16).

I believe a really important question is this: *Are we crying out to God for help?* We have immense challenges in our nation. But it is important to know that even here, even now, God is still mightily at work and there are many who are still turning to God for answers. I know the studies and statistics have been painting a bleak picture of the Christian Church in the United States and Canada, but the same Spirit of God is alive and well.

Make no mistake however; each nation, region, and community has its own obstacles to overcome. I believe that in the West, we're struggling with a long list of challenges: **materialism** distracts us from what is important, giving people a false feeling of contentment; **post-modern philosophy** causes people to doubt truth and so they become cynical about everything. And then, of course, with all the stuff we have there is a **narcissistic individualism** that leads people to focus selfishly on themselves and not even consider the things of God. So, I find that people feel more overwhelmed today with everything, causing a hopelessness amidst abundant blessings. Once you miss that purpose of life that's found in Christ, it's easy to become apathetic and complacent. Some of the worst tendencies of people come out when they have all that they want and they still aren't satisfied. In reality, that can even affect us forgiven sinners.

For example, the church sometimes becomes embroiled in infighting at the very brink of the harvest of souls for the Kingdom. Or, our faithful confession as Christians can become tainted by immorality, racism, and meanness. We all must be on our guard not to get in God's way even among us and through us. We always need to remember that we too are forgiven sinners, even broken healers, and we are bearers of Christ's news alone!

I believe that's why the church seems to be developing more slowly here. In fact, our wealth and prosperity, which are blessings from God, can be a distraction to His eternal riches of grace in Christ. And, I also believe there are times and seasons for the movement of the Holy Spirit.

So, let's prayerfully realize that these challenges exist everywhere, and certain challenges arise at certain times in every nation's life, but, amidst it all, our calling is clear in all those places. With love for our neighbors, we preach "Christ Crucified" the power of God for all who believe. Today's opportunity is tomorrow's harvest; today's harvest brings unique challenges too.

Nevertheless, let's rejoice in all that our faithful God is doing all around the world. With that joyful spirit, let's see what God can still do with us here in this place too. Let's learn to be ourselves ... graced people in Jesus, for others, people who strive to live graciously where God has planted us!

That's the View from Here

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