

Take Australia for Christ?

— you've got to be kidding!

Let us never doubt that the church is [destined to succeed](#) . Jesus himself guaranteed that we cannot finally fail in our missionary enterprise (Mt 16:18; Jn 15:16; etc). So we should preach with every expectation of success. The church of Jesus must eventually accomplish all that he has ordained for it. Nothing that is a true part of his plan and purpose can possibly fail.

But what is that purpose? Our mandate is to “*make disciples*” and to plant churches, not to “convert nations”, or even cities (He 13:14).

Our present task is no more than to “*call out of the nations a people for his name*” (Ac 15:14). Prior to the resurrection, the church will remain a “*remnant*” (Ro 11:5, plus many other references to the “*remnant*”).

We are the light on a hill, but not the hill; we are the yeast in the dough, but not the dough; we are the salt of the earth, but not the earth.

CLAIM THE CITY FOR CHRIST?

We cannot claim our city, state, or nation for Christ. They do not belong to *him*, but to *Satan*. Indeed, “*the whole world lies in the grip of the Wicked One*” (1 Jn 5:19), and will continue to do so until Christ comes again (Re 19:11-16). In the meantime, Satan has power over the kingdoms of this world, and over their power and glory, and can give them to whomever he will (Lu 4:5-7).

Mark how Jesus himself anticipated a scarcity of faith on earth on the day of his return (Lu 18:8), and stated bluntly that “*only a few will find the way to eternal life*” (Mt 7:13-14; Lu 13:24). Plainly, he had no expectation of entire nations, cities, or even vast multitudes flocking into the kingdom. And if they should happen to do so, he would be suspicious of the genuineness of their conversions.

NO STRATEGY FOR CONQUEST

Christ gave his disciples no sure strategy for capturing a city. On the contrary, if a community should prove stubborn, they were simply to “*shake its dust off their feet*” and go on to another town (Lu 10:10-12. cp. also Pr 17:24). He had nothing to say about driving away some ruling demon. Nor did he suggest that we might “break through” the barriers and take the town in his name, if only we would put enough effort into extended prayer and fasting. He offered no infallible plan for a city-wide revival, nor for reaping a plentiful harvest of souls, except that we should be practical and sensible about where and how we labour. Would God answer the prayers, no matter how passionate, of a farmer who stubbornly insisted upon trying to plant his seed in an unploughed and hopelessly rocky field? Farmers have to obey the laws of the harvest, and so do we preachers.

Indeed, scripture shows that we may just as easily suffer violent persecution and death as see a great “revival” (Lu 6:26; 21:12; Mt 10:22-23; 24:9-10; Jn 15:20; etc). Time and chance are more likely determinants of statistical success than some clever evangelistic strategy or even divine visitation (Ec 7:14-15; 9:11-12). Thus, a preacher who “succeeds” in one place may dismally “fail” in another, except that God has a different measure of success and failure. We are focussed on statistics. He is focussed on character and faithfulness. Steadfastness and truth rate more highly with him than mere accomplishment. Thus a believer who suffers brutal life-imprisonment for Christ, and does nothing for the kingdom except to reflect unfalteringly the beauty of Jesus, may gain higher honour than a person whose name is known worldwide but whose fidelity is shallow (1 Co 13:1-3).

Note, too, that the *Apocalypse* contains no picture of the church overcoming nations and empires, at least not until after the Second Advent. In the meantime,

the church must be willing to labour in adverse circumstances, to endure suffering bravely or to handle prosperity humbly, and to look forward to its future final triumph.

Furthermore, material success in church-planting and building, is just as dependent upon personal abilities, temperament, and style as it is in building a business enterprise. For every Sam Walton* (in the USA) or Frank Lowy* (in Oz) there are ten thousand shopkeepers with small businesses who will never grow any bigger. For every mega-church there are ten thousand small churches that have at best limited prospects for growth, and not all the prayer, fasting, or strategising in the world will change that state of affairs, either for the average grocer or the average pastor.

AN UNQUENCHABLE OPTIMISM

Should these things lead to a state of gloomy pessimism? Of course not! God does not make losers! He has made us to succeed, not to despair; to win, not to fail, to triumph, not to be defeated. There is no room in the kingdom for fearful defeatists (Re 21:8a). Christians above all people should be boundless optimists! But success in biblical terms cannot always be measured in statistics, but rather in faithfulness to Christ, no matter what our circumstances may be.

Nonetheless, whatever may be true for the present, or in particular situations, the ultimate and absolute victory of the church is ensured by the promise of Christ's return (read the last few chapters of the Bible!) Whether they were leaders or members of a large or small church on earth, all true Christians are promised a place in Paradise, enthroned at the side of Christ. Beside that supernal splendour all earthly matters crumble into dust.

In the meantime, while we joyfully wait for that great day, let us not succumb to glib promises of capturing the nation, nor even the city, for Christ. Neither should we allow ourselves to fall under an absurd and ultimately ruinous pressure to achieve such unrealistic goals. No nation nor city has ever been truly Christian, nor will be this side of the resurrection.

But we can all remain faithful to the end in fulfilling the mandate given us by Christ, which is to go out and preach, make disciples, plant churches, as many as we can, and, through apparent success or failure, gladly hold fast until he comes!

* In 1952 [Sam Walton](#) opened his first independent variety store in Fayetteville, Arkansas, but did not open his first true Wal-Mart until 1962, in Rogers, Arkansas. He soon began to expand into other places until by 2004 Wal-Mart had become the world's largest retailer, employing more than 1.5 million people. In 1959 [Frank Lowy](#) opened a delicatessen in Sydney. It prospered and he began to expand until today his Westfield Group "has interests in total assets worth \$Aus 41 billion, representing 121 shopping centers in four countries. It is the world's largest retail property group by equity market capitalization, yet it is still chaired by Frank Lowy." (Wikipedia, articles [Sam Walton](#) and [The Westfield Group](#))

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