I. INTRODUCTION

A. In the last generation, the church has focused in on the assignment the Lord has given to reach every tribe and tongue. The phrase “tribe and tongue” ultimately refers to what we would call a people group, which is a group of people with a common language and culture. The phrase is used biblically to describe God’s zeal for a holy remnant from every people group on the earth.

B. The church’s mission to every tribe and tongue is usually presented in terms of evangelism, but there is much more to reaching every tribe and tongue. When we look carefully at the verses in the New Testament that describe the church in every tribe and tongue, we can more a robust view of the mission of the church in the nations.

II. THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

A. First we should look at what Jesus says about the mission to every tribe and tongue. In the book of Matthew Jesus gives instructions to the disciple two different times that summarize the mission of the church in the nations of the earth.

B. Matthew 24:14 is one of the best known verses on missions because it contains Jesus’ prediction that He will not return until there is a proclamation of the gospel that reaches all the nations. When we look at this verse closely, we can see that the proclamation is far more than evangelism.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 NKJV)

1. Jesus is careful to say that there must be a declaration of the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus wants to make sure we include the proclamation of Him as King, and therefore also Judge, over all the nations. Contextually, this verse exists within a greater context in Matthew 21-25 that focuses on the question of when Jesus will rule over Israel and therefore also over the nations of the earth.

2. This proclamation is a witness to all the nations. This means that everyone in the nations will not receive it, but everything in the nations must hear the proclamation of Jesus as a coming King before Jesus will return to judge the nations.

3. Matthew 24:15, the verse after Matthew 24:14, tells us that the witness of Matthew 24:14 is actually preparatory to the coming of the Antichrist. God will not allow the Antichrist to come until Matthew 24:14 prepares the nations.

15 Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), (Matthew 24:15 NKJV)

a. The gospel of the kingdom actually prepares the globe for the crisis that comes at the end of the age.
b. This means that witness of Matthew 24:14 is intended, not only for evangelism, but also to be a warning for the nations of the darkness that is coming and a means to maturity in the church. Matthew 24:14 must encapsulate a preparation for the church that brings the church to the place of maturity necessary to stand in the most difficult hour of human history.

C. Matthew closes his gospel with a second admonition from Jesus regarding the nations. Again, Jesus gives us instructions that go beyond evangelism.

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Matthew 28:18–20 NKJV)

1. Jesus tells the disciples to go make disciples in all the nations, teaching them to observe all Jesus' commandments. Discipleship in all of Jesus' teachings is a part of the mission that must reach every tribe and tongue. Evangelism is important, but it is only the first step. It must be followed be leading believers into all that Jesus instructed. Jesus cares that we teach them all His commandments, because the goal we are to labor for is a mature church.

2. A mature church is not just a body of believers who have received salvation. A mature church is walking in everything Jesus commanded. This means walking in the fullness of holiness and obedience to Jesus that is possible in this age. It means experiencing the fullness of our inheritance through the Holy Spirit. For example, Jesus predicted that the church would experience a season of power greater than His own earthly ministry (John 14:12). He told the disciples it would be better for them if He left because they would experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit when He was physically taken away from them (John 16:7).

3. All of these things are part of what it means to observe or obey all that Jesus commanded. A generation must come into everything that Jesus commanded, which includes experiencing all His promises, before the mission of God is over. This means the conclusion of the mission to every tribe and tongue will also be the time the church comes into full maturity, expressed by Jesus as obeying and experiencing all that He said.

4. Notice that Jesus again connects the mission of the church to the end of the age. Just as He did in Matthew 24:14-15, Jesus connects the maturity of the church to the end of the age by finishing His instruction with the promise that He will be with His church in the end of the age. In light of Matthew 24's promise that the church will come into maturity before the end of the age, Jesus expects us to understand that the labor of Matthew 28 will lead the church into a maturity that must come before God allows the reign of the Antichrist.
5. God will not end the age until the church comes into maturity. Therefore, when the church comes into maturity in every tribe and tongue through the labor of Matthew 28, it removes one of the key barriers to the end of the age. This is why Jesus promises the church that He will be with us especially in the end of the age. It is a promise to the church in every generation, but Jesus specifically emphasized the promise to the final generation of the church because He knew that their obedience to His command would bring the church to maturity and that the church that comes into maturity will be God’s witness on the earth during the reign of the Antichrist.

D. By surveying Jesus’ references to the church’s mission to every tribe and tongue we find that evangelism is only one of the key purposes of the mission to every tribe and tongue. We can summarize the mission as having three key objectives.

1. **Enlarge the Church by Evangelism** – The gospel is intended to bring a remnant to salvation among every people group.

2. **Bring the Church to Maturity through Discipleship** – The maturity of the church includes all that Jesus spoke. This means obedience to Jesus’ commands as well as a church functioning in all the promises Jesus gave to the church.

3. **Be a Witness Warning the Nations** – The mature church is intended to warn all the nations to submit to Jesus’ leadership as King. God will not allow the Antichrist to emerge in history before this happens.

III. THE BOOK OF REVELATION

A. The book of Revelation is the other key book in the New Testament where we find specific references to every tribe and tongue. The book makes a reference to every tribe and tongue 5 times (Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6), and because Revelation describes the church in the end times, it provides a glimpse into what the church will like when it reaches maturity in every tribe and tongue.

B. When we look at the book of Revelation, we find that it confirms Jesus’ predictions in Matthew and gives more shape and definition to how the church in maturity will function among the nations. To see what Revelation tells us about the church in maturity, we can look at it through the lens of the three objective of the church’s mission that Matthew highlighted: enlarging the church by evangelism, bringing the church to maturity through discipleship, and being a witness to the nations.

C. **Enlarging the church by Evangelism** – The book of Revelation both presents and confirms the work of evangelism in the nations. Interestingly, evangelism is the least emphasized activity in the book of Revelation, but the evidence of evangelism is evident.

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1. In Revelation 7:9 John sees a great multitude that no man can number from every tribe and tongue before the throne. The angel tells John that these are the believers who lost their lives in the great tribulation for their testimony of Jesus. The fact that just the martyrs of the great tribulation compose an innumerable multitude from every tribe and tongue reveals that the gospel has incredible evangelistic success in the nations. This isn't even counting the believers who survived and were not martyred. All of this points to incredible harvest and evangelism in the nations.

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands… 14 …So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9, 14 NKJV)

2. Revelation 14 also describes the proclamation of the gospel at the end of the age. John sees an angel proclaiming an everlasting gospel from a heavenly perspective, and this heavenly perspective is connected to what is happening on the earth. This means the angel’s proclamation is also being delivered to the nations by human vessels. The message to be declared is more than a message of salvation, it is an everlasting gospel, meaning everlasting “good news.” The everlasting good news to the nations is that God’s King is coming and that He will rule. In other words, this is the gospel of the kingdom that Matthew 24:14 also declares must be delivered. Revelation 14 is from a heavenly perspective and Matthew 24:14 is from an earthly perspective, but they both describe the same event.

6 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people— 7 saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” (Revelation 14:6–7 NKJV)

D. Bring the Church to Maturity through Discipleship – The book of Revelation is one of the best sources of information on what the maturity of the church looks like because it describes the church in the final moments of this age. In other words, the church in Revelation describes what the mission of God will produce in the nations before the return of Jesus. It is God’s finish line for missions in this age. In the book of Revelation, we find both the depth of the maturity of the church and a description of how the church in maturity functions. Revelation 5:9; 7:9; and 13:9 tell us what a discipled church looks like. It is what the church looks like when Matthew 28 is obeyed.

1. The book of Revelation predicts that the church at the end of the age is an overcoming church that is faithful to Jesus and overcomes the most wicked man in history. The battle at the end of the age affects every tribe and tongue and God has a faithful witness in every tribe and tongue who is faithful to Jesus even at the point of death. This means that the church will be brought to an unprecedented place of maturity to provide a global witness of their love for Jesus.

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a. In Revelation 7, John sees a multitude so great he cannot number who are martyred for their loyalty to Jesus. They are from every tribe and tongue, and they refused to bow to the most evil man in history.

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands. These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9, 14 NKJV)"

b. Revelation 13 describes the terror of the Antichrist and the temporary suffering that the saints endure at his hands. He “overcomes” them by taking their lives. Verse 8 tells us that all those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life will worship the beast (the Antichrist), but the key to the verse is that to recognize that those whose names are written in the book do not worship. This means that the Antichrist may “overcome” the saints by taking their lives, but they overcome him by refusing to worship. This will happen in every tribe and tongue and it is an unprecedented moment of maturity for the global church. Across the earth the entire church will be faithful unto death.

"It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:7–8 NKJV)"

2. The book of Revelation not only describes the depth of maturity of the church, it also describes one of the key ways it functions as a corporate body. There are two key passages where we see the church in every tribe and tongue and each time they are functioning the exact same way.

"Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.” Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:8–12 NKJV)"

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to
the Lamb!” 11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.” (Revelation 7:9–12 NKJV)

a. These two passages are the only specific glimpse we get of the church in every tribe and tongue functioning together. That is why both these scenes are so important. When John sees the mature church functioning across all people groups, he sees them gathered in corporate worship and intercession declaring the glory of Jesus. Biblically, this is part of the maturity of the church. One of the ways the mature church will express its life together is being joined in worship and prayer.

b. While both scenes that John observed are set in a heavenly context, this is simply because the book of Revelation is primarily written from a heavenly perspective. However, the heavenly perspective throughout the book is also directly connected to events on the earth. If the church in every tribe and tongue is in corporate worship and intercession before the throne in heaven, then the corporate church on earth is in the same posture as well. Every tribe and tongue is before the throne in intercession after their martyrdom in Revelation 7, but they were in that same posture on earth before their martyrdom.

c. In the book of Revelation “bowls” of prayer in heaven are the catalyst for God’s activity on the earth (Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4) and these prayers are not only the prayers of the saints in heaven. They are also the prayers of the saints on earth. The fact that John sees bowls being filled means something is happening to bring intercession on the earth into fullness to complete or fill the intercession necessary to bring God’s work in the nations to completion. What John sees happening in his heavenly perspective is a direct result of what is happening in the church on the earth.

d. Not only does the evidence in the book of Revelation point to the fact that the heavenly intercession of every tribe and tongue is mirrored on the earth, Jesus also asked us to pray for it. In Luke 11:2 when Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, one of the first prayer requests He gives them is that it should be on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus gives us a glimpse into how the church functions in heaven in Revelation 5 and 7 and He’s asking us to pray that it would be just like that on the earth. This means that the unified expression of prayer and worship among every people group that is present in heaven should also be present on the earth. To be obedient to Jesus we should pray for it and we should also labor to see the church formed according to the pattern He gave us. Moses did this when he put night and day worship in the middle of the people of Israel. David did it when he established an order of worship and prayer. The apostles did it (Acts 6; 13). The book of Revelation predicts that it will happen on the earth globally among every tribe and tongue.

E. A Witness Warning the Nations – The book of Revelation, like Matthew 24:14, also describes the mature church functioning as a witness to the nations.
1. Revelation 11 describes the ministry of two unusually anointed witnesses who are given unusual power to back up their testimony of God’s plan. Their message to the nations is so intense that they are eventually executed and when they are killed, there are those in every tribe and tongue who celebrate the demise of the witnesses because they reject and refuse the message of these witnesses. The message spoken by these witnesses affect every tribe and tongue and while their ministry is very unique, the implication is that the global church is giving a witness and a warning about God’s plan to the nations.

3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”…7 When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them…9 Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. 10 And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. (Revelation 11:3, 7, 9–10 NKJV)

2. In Revelation 14, John sees an angel carrying the everlasting gospel. The angel proclaims a loud warning over the nations to fear God and give Him glory. His proclamation contains a warning for the nations that the hour of judgment has come. The nations are being warned of the urgent need to respond to God before time runs out. This loud proclamation will be delivered to the nations through human messengers who will warn the nations to respond wisely before the day of God’s judgment. Every tribe and tongue will need to hear this warning to respond rightly to God.

6 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—7 saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” (Revelation 14:6–7 NKJV)

IV. CONCLUSION

A. God’s plan to exalt His Son goes far beyond saving Israel or even saying a remnant of the gentiles. He intentionally plans to save a remnant in every tribe and tongue because God wants to give Jesus the gift of the adoration of every group of people on the earth. Jesus has invited the church into God’s great mission of seeing every tribe and tongue loving Jesus.

B. This mission is often expressed as the evangelization of the nations, but when we look at the Scriptures, the church’s mission in the nations goes far beyond evangelism. Evangelism is a key component of finishing the mission, but it is not enough to finish the mission. To finish the mission there is a maturity in the discipled church that God wants to see produced. There is an expression of night and day intercession and worship that God desires from every tribe and tongue. There is also a warning that must prepare the nations to respond in wisdom to God’s judgments. All of these elements are part of what it means to reach every tribe and tongue.