

# 4 CORNERS

Magazine of UFM Worldwide

## CATCHING THE VISION

**C**hristians belong to the most exciting enterprise in the history of the world. No one has ever been given a greater task than Jesus gave to his disciples. He told them, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

The incarnation of God's own Son, his perfect life, powerful ministry, atoning death, triumphant resurrection and ascension to the place of all power and authority prepared the way for the Gospel to conquer the world. Those who knew him best were to spearhead this great work and to be empowered by nothing less than God the Holy Spirit.

From the beginning the obstacles were immense. The political power of the dominant Roman empire, the implacable opposition of the leaders of Judaism and the vested interests of paganism combined to seek to destroy God's Kingdom.

Yet through it all the Gospel bore fruit and grew



January - April 2004

throughout the ancient world. Jesus had told his disciples, *"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

He had also promised to be with them always until that day when they would stand amongst *"a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."*

### **Sharing the Lord's vision**

Does this vision excite and inspire you? Is it the passion of your life and the constant theme of your prayers? Do you fervently pray, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Are you committed to active involvement in world mission?

Has your church caught the vision? Do your church leaders see the work of the local congregation in the context of the big picture? Is prayer for world mission a constant theme in your prayer meetings? Do you pray the Lord of the harvest to thrust out workers into his harvest field? The work is so great and there is still so much to do!

We live and serve between the commands of Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28:20 and the glorious vision of Revelation 7:9.

Our theology must be profoundly missiological and eschatological since our twin points of reference are *"the ends of the earth"* and *"the end of the age"*.

### **Confident in the Spirit's power**

The work of world mission has always been totally beyond mere human resources. The only explanation for the amazing growth and expansion of the church is the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit. What he did on the day of Pentecost he has continued to do throughout history. *Every day* thousands of people are added to the church.

Between 1960 and 2000 the population of the world doubled

from 3 to 6 billion people. Operation World tells us that during that same period the number of evangelicals increased from 84.5 million (2.8%) to 420 million (6.9%). They tell us, "The post-war surge of evangelical missions was an astonishing success story, but most of the subsequent growth came from a new generation of indigenous evangelical movements around the world." Clearly the Holy Spirit has worked very powerfully amongst the nations and in this way the Lord is irresistibly building his church.

### **The local church is the dynamic centre of world mission**

The work of mission is pre-eminently the work of the local church. God calls men and women to serve him in world mission and local churches have the privilege of recognising those called by God and then sending them to the work. Mission agencies serve local churches and work in partnership with them.

### **Developing a "both... and" vision**

Immediately before his ascension Jesus told his disciples, *"you will be my witnesses (both) in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* We are to be fully committed to the work in our 'Jerusalem', the local church, and **at the same time** also be committed to strategic Gospel advance elsewhere, in the UK, in Europe and throughout the world.

The New Testament churches were wonderfully responsive to the advance of the Gospel. Both the leaders and the Christians had caught the vision. When the church leaders at Jerusalem received news of the great blessing at Antioch, immediately they sent Barnabas to Antioch. (Acts 19:22-24) They must have missed him in Jerusalem!

The prophets and teachers in Antioch were sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and "set apart" Saul and Barnabas to pioneer ministry. (Acts 13:1-4) The elders at Lystra recognised the growing maturity and potential of young Timothy and commended him to Paul and he became involved in pioneer ministry. (Acts 16:1-4) The new churches at Berea, Thessalonica and Derbe played their part as they sent men from their churches to become part of Paul's missionary team. (Acts 20:4)

We need to be inspired by their example. Let us pray that in the coming year many Christians and churches will catch the vision in a new way and respond to the challenge of world mission. As we step out in faith and obedience we have the promise of the Lord's presence and the Spirit's power. ■

**Peter Milsom**

