

O All Ye Nations, Praise the Lord

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

O all ye nations, praise the Lord,
Each with a different tongue:
In every language learn his word,
And let his name be sung.

His mercy reigns thro' every land;
Proclaim his grace abroad;
For ever firm his truth shall stand,
Praise ye the faithful God.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Not How It Used to Be

Kevin T. Bauder

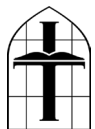
The first two days of March were mild, with temperatures into the 50s Fahrenheit but strong winds. The next day brought changes, and then on Tuesday the snow began to fall. Snow was still coming down Wednesday morning, and the winds had picked up to blizzard velocity. The total snowfall was not great, but it drifted enough to make travel difficult. When the time came for me to go to work, the streets around my home were still impassible.

In the old days, this kind of weather would have closed the seminary or at least made us start late. Knowing about it would have kept some potential students from even considering Central Seminary as an option. Who would want to endure ice and snow when they could have the sunny beaches of Virginia or the Carolinas?

But things have changed. Virtually everything we do, we now do virtually. All our classes meet on Zoom, though local students are still welcome to sit in classrooms. Even our chapel service meets on Zoom (again, faculty and some students attend the physical chapel in Minnesota).

For me, our online presence was great news today. All semester I've been scheduled to preach in chapel. I've been looking forward to it. And the snow today didn't slow me down one bit.

I have a little studio in my basement. I use it for teaching online. Today, I used it for preaching the chapel service. I believe that this is the first time I've preached a sermon over Zoom. It felt a little odd, and the pacing was difficult, but I was able to complete the sermon.



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Usually, I'm sitting in the physical chapel with the faculty. The distance education students are not visible to me. I only see the other professors and a couple of students who are present in the room. It always feels a bit empty.

Today, I preached to a screen full of faces. In fact, I'm pretty sure that all the faces didn't fit on my screen. What I could see, though, represented a crowd. There was a student in Michigan. There was another in New England. Then several from African nations. At least one from South America—maybe more. And some from Asia. For the first time, I found myself ministering the Word of God by preaching to an audience that spanned the globe.

This is the glory of the brave new world in which we find ourselves. As recently as ten years ago, some of these students would have opted to attend a seminary in a warmer place. Many of them could not have enrolled at any credible seminary because none was available locally. Now the temperature doesn't matter. God has opened our doors and enlarged our borders in amazing ways.

Twenty years ago, Central Seminary operated a campus in Arad, Romania. We spent years there, eventually training about twenty percent of all the Baptist pastors in that country. We also trained a generation of Romanian professors. That ministry cost us much in terms of time, labor, and treasure. When we had to leave Romania, the experience was wrenching. For me, it was like abandoning a cherished friend.

Now our span goes far beyond one nation. We reach into Zambia, Kenya, and the Congo. We are in South Africa, Brazil, India, and Peru. We visit those places without leaving our own campus and homes. More importantly, our students gain an education without leaving their ministries or countries of residence.

Of course, we do give up some things. Our relationships with our students tend to be less close than they once were. Our ability to respond to hallway conversations or lunch-table questions has shrunk dramatically. These things are a genuine loss. We cannot disciple

students in the way we once did.

Yet, our students also gain something. They stay in their home churches, where they are already being nourished and fostered spiritually. If they are pastors, they have an ongoing laboratory in which to implement their classroom learnings. If they are not pastors, then their discipleship comes from the shepherds of their flocks. This is something to rejoice in, because the local church is the center and focus of God's program on earth.

As a seminary, we have always said that we exist to help local churches. Never has that kind of local-church centered ministry been more important to us than it is now. We happily grant that making disciples is the business of the church, and we rejoice in the subordinate role that God permits us to play.

God has given us around 150 students to equip at different levels. Some are preparing for academic ministry. Some aim to do biblical counseling. Some just want to be better church members, deacons, and Sunday School teachers. But the heart of what we do is still training Christian leaders. We rejoice that God is still sending us pastors and missionaries who are doing His work. We are doing our best to assist their churches in equipping spiritual leaders for Christ-exalting, biblical ministry. We wish—we hope—to keep doing that until Jesus returns.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
