

HE PASSED BY

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on March 11, 1962 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

There are many people in the world today who are in great need, and their needs are of many kinds. Let us notice some of the areas of man's greatest needs.

HUNGRY. Many of the earth's population go to bed hungry each night. Recently our radios carried an appeal for the hungry of foreign lands, pointing out that the average yield of foodstuffs in the Middle East is only twenty bushels per acre, while here in the United States our yield of foodstuffs is fifty bushels per acre. Then the statement was made, "We cannot eat all of our fifty and they cannot live on their twenty." We who have been blessed by being born in America, a land of vast natural resources, have a great responsibility in caring for those who are less fortunate. However, even in this land there are those who are hungry, To all of these, and especially to the children, we owe our concern.

SICK. Throughout the land today there are hundreds of hospitals and multiplied thousands of people who are ill. Beyond the hospitals there are millions more who are in need of physical help which is not available. What must it be like to be seriously ill, or to have some member of one's family seriously ill, and yet live beyond the reach of medical care? I think of a guide who showed us some of the great temples in Luxor in Middle Egypt a dozen years ago. At the age of forty-six he appeared to be an old man, and he told us that of the eleven children that had been born into his family only four still survived. His teeth were almost gone and he gave the impression of being more than a score of years older than his actual age.

MENTALLY ILL. One of the most difficult of all problems is the problem of mental illness. Perhaps it is because so many of us do not properly understand. Perhaps it is even because the mentally ill and their loved ones feel some stigma attached to this particular kind of illness, and consequently are ashamed to ask for competent professional help. No problem is more difficult for a family to face than the problem of mental illness. These, need our help.

DISTRESSED. There are others who face problems and difficult situations which are almost beyond their ability to bear. What must it be like for a mother, who has brought several children into the world, to have a husband who comes home drunk night after night? This creates financial and emotional problems, and has a devastating effect upon the proper upbringing of the children. There are many problems faced in the home and in daily work that place a burden upon those involved. Often, these also need help.

JOBLESS. What must it be like to have a family who are in need of food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life, and to be able and willing to work, yet have no job? This situation, known to millions, would destroy a man's confidence in himself and make him feel that he was a failure in providing for his family. Those who are willing and able to work certainly need our help.

ORPHANS. Still others in need are the children whose parents are gone. In our land no orphan will permanently go without some kind of home. Often it is provided by governmental agencies and has the limitations of professional, impersonal care, however, every child will ultimately be taken care of by some kind of home. This is not true in many other sections of the world. The orphans in Korea, products of American soldier fathers and Korean prostitute mothers, often have to prowl the streets, sleeping where they can and finding food wherever they can steal or beg. I watched as a little orphan boy walked into an alley in Haifa, Israel, took the lid off a garbage can and then found some food and ate it. He was not the first nor the last such orphan to have to provide for himself. Surely these are in need of help.

PRISONERS. In the prisons throughout the land there are some men who see the error of past mistakes and who want to turn toward a higher and better way of life. These men need our encouragement and help. Think of a boy who in his late teens or early twenties commits a crime in an irresponsible and reckless moment. After he has spent years in prison, he realizes that his life is not what he wants it to be and genuinely desires to change its direction. Think of how much it would mean for some Christian friend to provide for him the reading that he needs to learn new principles and new goals in life, and then when he is released from prison to give him some help in finding a job where he can begin to earn his living. I have known the difficulty that some have faced in earning an honest living after coming back into free society. Surely this is a place where Christians can render help that is needed.

AGED. As we grow older and our physical faculties fail, we inevitably face discouragement, so far as this world is concerned. Not to be able to do the things that we once did with ease is disturbing. Think how much more disturbing it must be for those who reach the end of their earning period of life, yet have inadequate funds to provide for themselves in old age, and have no children to care for them. Surely these need our encouragement, our attention and our financial help.

UNGUIDED YOUTH. In the March 10, 1962, issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, there is an article entitled, "We Waste a Million Kids a Year." This article tells of the many teen-agers across the land who become disinterested in school and drop out. They then drift around, seeking employment, joining gangs, and failing generally to establish solid beginnings for productive lives. Many of

them come from homes where they have been taught few of the basic principles which must undergird a successful life and where they may have been discouraged by family disintegration and other problems. These young people need the help of Christians. Think what it would mean for a boy who has dropped out of high school, has been unable to find a job, and has come in desperation to consider a life of crime, if he could be transported into another area and be made a part of a Christian family. The adjustment at first would be difficult, but in the course of the months and the years think what a different life he would live and how both God and our country would be blessed by this help to a boy in need.

GROSS SINNERS. There are still others who need our help. They are physically healthy and financially prosperous, but they are living their lives in the grossest kind of sin. I am thinking of the Las Vegas crowd, they brazenly advertise their sin to the nation. This is the night club crowd; these are the prostitutes; these are like the people of ancient Sodom. Although Christians have a tendency to turn away from such people, these also need help, for each is an eternal soul and each is made in the image of God.

When Christ came to the earth he came for the purpose of saving the souls of men. "It is he that shall save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21). He also was concerned to help men in whatever difficulty they faced. He fed the multitudes because they were hungry and might faint before they could reach their homes. He healed the lepers; he cast out demons; he lifted up sinners. Over and over again the scripture says of him, "He had compassion ..." he went about doing good for those in need. If we, Christians, are to follow in his steps, we must also be concerned to help those who are in need. Let us listen to these scriptures which our Lord has provided to guide us.

"He Passed By"

"And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and made trial of him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor? Jesus made answer and said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down that way: and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed came where he was: and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine; and he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow he took out two shillings, and gave them to the host, and said, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee. Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. And Jesus said unto him. Go, and do thou likewise." (Luke 10:25-37).

This story happened 1900 years ago on a different continent and among people of another race. However, it is written in the Bible for us. The respectable religious leaders passed by on the other side. It was left for a foreigner, an outcast, to take care of the man who was left beaten and half dead. The religious are sometimes so sure of their own goodness and so preoccupied with their own activities that they fail to see or hear the call of those who are in need.

To Preach -- to the Poor

Let us look next at a passage earlier in the life of Jesus, where he stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth to read the scriptures. He read, from Isa. 61, a prophecy concerning himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovering of sight to the blind. To set at liberty them that are bruised. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19).

Very similar to the story that we read a moment ago concerning the good Samaritan is the story that we find in Matthew, in which Jesus was asked by a rich young ruler, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" After Jesus had asked concerning the teaching of Moses' law and had received the right answer, he told the young man, "Go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come follow me." (Matt. 19:21).

One of the most disturbing passages in all the New Testament in regard to this matter of using our material goods to help those who are in real need, is found in the gospel according to Luke. "And he said to him also that had bidden him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor rich neighbors; lest haply they also bid thee again, and a recompense he made thee. But when thou makest a feast, bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; because they have not wherewith to recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just. (Luke 14:12-14).

A Repeated Emphasis

As we let our minds range through the remainder of the New Testament, there are many passages that emphasize the Christian's need to take care of the poor and others who need his help. For example, the apostle Paul tells us of his visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas to

ask about the doctrinal matter of whether circumcision should be bound upon Gentiles. The verdict was no, "Only they would that we should remember the poor; which very thing I was also zealous to do." (Gal. 2:10). Over and over again throughout the pages of the New Testament we are admonished to remember the poor and care for those in financial need.

Still another passage along this line in unmistakable emphasis is that found in the writings of James, "My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect to persons. For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing; and ye have regard to him that weareth the fine clothing, and say, Sit thou here in a good place; and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool; do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren; did not God choose them that were poor as to the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him? But ye have dishonored the poor man." (James 2:1-6).

The most impressive passage of all, however, is the final judgment scene, as described by the Lord near the end of his life. If there were no other passages in all the New Testament teaching our responsibility to care for the needy, this would be enough. Let each of us listen to this reading, with the realization that we will be in this crowd, and that these words in one way or the other will be spoken unto us.

"But the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee: or athirst, and gave thee drink? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even the least, ye did it unto me." (Matt. 25:31-40).

CONCLUSION

Christ is our example of unselfish service. In Matt. 20:26-28, he said, "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever shall be first among you shall be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Surely, if we are Christians, we must follow in the Lord's steps, emphasizing that it is more important to render service to others who are in need than to receive services from others.

We in this land have been greatly blessed with every kind of physical blessing. We have food enough and to spare. We have abundance of clothing, so that we can change when we wish to change because of style or because of the seasons. This is often not true of people in other parts of the world. We have luxurious homes, fabulous cars, and abundance of every kind. In medical care, education, freedom to travel, entertainment facilities, rest and recreation time, and in other ways we have an abundance that the rest of the world does not know. In addition we also have the Bible and an encouraging climate in which to be Christians. With all of these tremendous blessings we have a great responsibility to those who are in need.

It is not possible to tell each Christian just where and just how he is to carry out the admonitions of the Lord to be concerned for those who are in need. He must use his own ingenuity in finding the times and the places where he can serve his fellowmen best. However, it is imperative that he have a deep abiding concern for the needs of those who are less fortunate than himself and that he dedicate himself in youth, in middle age, and in age to the great work of helping those in need. If there is this dedication and this concern he will find a way.

Salvation begins with our giving ourselves to the Lord and then in living lives of service to God and to our fellowmen. Let us become Christians and then let us live so that we may someday hear the Lord's wonderful announcement, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. 25:23).