

MASSES OF MANKIND

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on August 30, 1964 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

As a background for the message of this hour, I should like to read to you several key passages from the New Testament. Our Lord said, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:19-20). Earlier our Lord had said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30).

At still another time our Lord said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6). The apostle John added, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sins," (1 John 1:7).

To the Romans Paul wrote, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? (Rom. 10:13-15). Finally, I would read our Lord's words "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16).

There are five words--all beginning with the letter M--which I would like to use in setting the theme of this hour before you. Each of these simple words conveys something of great significance, something that should challenge our thinking deeply.

I. Masses

In Genesis 22:17, we read of our God telling Abraham that his seed will be as numberless "as the sands of the seashore" and "as countless as the stars of heaven." While this has been proved true for Abraham's descendants, it is even truer of the whole of mankind. Imagine standing on the shore of one of the great oceans of the world and holding a single hand-full of sand in one's hand. As the hundreds and thousands of grains of sand slip through the fingers, one is overwhelmed with the total number of grains of sand on the shores of all the oceans and all the seas of the world. Or imagine standing on a summer's night and looking into the starry heavens above and contemplating the limitless expanse of stars. These God-given comparisons help us to realize the vastness of humanity. Truly mankind constitutes a great ocean of lost souls.

Several years ago the United Nations published a booklet on the "Population Explosion," now going on in the world. It was pointed out that all of the centuries from the beginning of time until 1830 were necessary for the world population to reach one billion people living simultaneously. From 1830 to 1935 was required for the population to reach two billion. It was then estimated that from 1935 to 1965 would be sufficient for the population to reach three billion. Actually, this mark has been reached in 1964, even ahead of the estimated schedule. The estimates also indicated that by 1980 there would be four billion people living simultaneously, by 1990 there would be five billion, and before the turn of the century there would be more than six billion people living at the same time. These figures are impressive, but the word billion can be spoken so easily that we often fail to comprehend its vastness.

In an effort to make a billion sound more meaningful, I should like to suggest that we visualize this great unit of mankind in terms of something nearer our own experiences. The auditorium in which we are now assembled, when crowded with extra chairs, can seat 800 people. Let us imagine two hundred additional people standing around the walls, so that the total comes to 1,000. Then let us imagine that beginning at noon today we fill this auditorium with a thousand different people each hour of the day and night, preaching to each group just the barest essentials of Christianity. How long would it take to preach to the total population of the world, preaching a brief hour-long summary of Christianity to a thousand different persons each hour? Obviously, if we should begin at noon today, we would have reached 24,000 people by this same time tomorrow. It would be possible to reach 168,000 people with the gospel by this same time next Sunday. It would take forty-one days to reach our first million people, which milestone would fall on Thursday, October 12, 1964, at four o'clock in the afternoon.

It is when we reach above the million toward the ten million, the fifty million, the hundred million, the five hundred million, and the billion mark that we find ourselves shocked by the necessary expanse of time. At the rate of a thousand people an hour, it would require one hundred fourteen years to preach to a billion people. If we began today, we would not finish the task until the year 2078. If we should then reach for the second and third billions of people now living it would require a total of 342 years and we would not finish the task until the year 2306 A.D.

Immediately someone suggests, "But we will not be here in 2078 or 2306." How true that is. Even more significant is the fact that the billions now living will not be here even at the turn of the century. Most of them will have passed on into the life to come unprepared, even though their places will have been taken by billions of other yet unborn souls. The emphasis is simply upon the vastness of the masses of mankind and the urgency of bringing the gospel to the lost while they live and before they stand before God in judgment.

II. Message

Obviously the only message of any serious significance for eternity is the gospel of Christ. It alone can save men from eternal damnation. As Paul wrote "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Rom. 1:16). The gospel of Christ includes such basic factors as the existence of God, the creation of the world by God, the inspiration of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ's church, how to become a Christian, how to worship God acceptably, and how to live a life of service. All of these elements cannot be preached in an hour, but rather require many hours of careful teaching and explaining of God's plan to man,

The extent of the problem of the communication of the gospel to lost mankind is obvious when we remember that four hundred-thirty million Moslems, three hundred thirty-two million Hindus, three hundred million Confucianists, and a hundred fifty-one million Buddhists are among the three billions of people who urgently need the gospel. In addition there are an estimated billion atheists in the world. The message of Christ is needed by these great masses of mankind even more than they need food for their stomachs, air for their lungs, or clothes for their bodies,

III. Men

Through the apostle Paul the Holy Spirit indicated that it is God's plan to proclaim the message through earthen vessels. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves." (II Cor. 4:7). According to the *Yearbook of American Churches*, there are approximately two and one-quarter million members of the church today. We would like to believe that each member of the church is a messenger, helping to carry the gospel to the lost, though it is a bit unrealistic to assume this to be true. Just how many active proclaimers of the gospel of Christ there are no one knows, for sometimes the most effective teachers may be hardly known outside the immediate circle of their own families and friends.

We can know with some degree of certainty the number of those who preach in pulpits in a public way. Counting men who earn their living in other work and preach part-time as well as those who give full-time to the work of public preaching, we have less than 7,500 gospel preachers. Actually no list has more than 5,000 names, so it is optimistic to speak of the possibility of 7500 preachers in our day. Approximately 1200 young men are enrolled in our Christian colleges, preparing themselves to become gospel preachers. In many respects these are encouraging figures, though when compared with the need for Christian manpower in bringing the gospel to the lost billions of mankind the number is discouraging. Truly there is and will be for a long, long time a preacher shortage.

IV. Means

In our generation for the first time in the history of the world Christians have at their disposal media that are adequate for the reaching of the masses of mankind. I refer primarily to radio, which came into use in America in 1920, and television, which came into use in America shortly after the second world war in the late 1940's. Printing is still another medium that can bring the gospel to the masses. Printing has been in use for several centuries and has had great effect in bringing ideas to the minds of great segments of the world's population. Radio and television are new in our generation.

Approximately six hundred million of the world's three billion people have English as their native tongue. Millions more understand English well, as a second language. For example, in the Philippines, because the natives of the various sections of the Philippine Islands cannot understand each other's dialect, English is being taught in the public schools. It serves as a common-denominator, so that the Philippine natives can understand each other. In Nigeria it is not uncommon to see natives standing at a street-corner stand, listening to a broadcast from America in English. All over Western Europe, English is understood by those who have had even an average education.

Within the past thirteen years the Herald of Truth radio and television program, directed by the elders of the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, has made a great beginning in the proclaiming of the gospel to the lost millions of our own nation and limitedly to the peoples of foreign lands. Currently the Herald of Truth radio program is being carried by approximately 390 radio stations with the television message being carried by another 97 stations. These are high marks in the use of these mass-communication media and are most encouraging.

However, within the United States alone there are some 1600 communities of 5,000 population or more. At the present time 1100 of these 1600 communities do not have the gospel being preached either by radio or television. Some of these communities are great metropolitan centers like New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., Miami, Atlanta, and Indianapolis. The radio tapes are available and a number of television programs are in hand for extending the coverage to these additional 1100 communities of our

own nation. Beyond our borders there are 128 foreign stations throughout the world that operate by the use of the English language. These also are available for the gospel in our times.

V. Money

In 1963 several thousand congregations and many interested individuals contributed approximately \$650,000 to the preaching of the gospel by means of radio and television in the United States. In 1964 it is estimated that the total contribution will exceed \$700,000. The elders of the Highland church, visualizing the great masses of mankind who need the gospel and seeing the possibilities of bringing the gospel to these great masses, are calling upon all of us to triple present contributions during the next twelve months. They have set a goal of \$1,932,000 which will be sufficient to place radio and television on the 1600 available stations in the United States, thus serving every community with a population of 5,000 or more. This figure will also include the placing of the gospel on 128 foreign English-speaking radio stations. It will also include funds for the making of fifty-two television films, thus enabling the church to use vast amounts of free television time.

The Highland church is leading the way by continuing to contribute \$30,000 per year for this effort alone. This is all the more impressive when one realizes that they are currently paying something like \$100,000 a year to remove their building and construction indebtedness. A number of other congregations are contributing \$5,000 per year and still other congregations are contributing lesser amounts. The possibility of bring the message to the masses by the means of radio and television depends upon greater contributions of money.

Conclusion

When Jesus came into the world he came, as the scriptures suggest, "in the fullness of time." The Greek language, the language of perfection, was then able to bring the message of Christ to mankind in the permanent form of the Holy Scriptures. The Roman Empire had broken down national barriers so that it was possible for gospel preachers to travel more widely than it would have been able in earlier days. The Roman legions had built a great network of roads over which the gospel could be brought. Surely Jesus did come in the fullness of time. In another sense we live in the fullness of time. Never before has the gospel been so needed as in our day because the masses of mankind have never been so large. Never before has there been such a possibility of bringing the gospel to masses of lost souls as in our day through the means of radio and television. The billions now living have only this generation in which to hear the gospel and be saved. The responsibility is heavy and that responsibility rests on us.