

COME OVER AND HELP US

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on November 9, 1958 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee.

The church has three main functions, or works, which it is to carry on. The first of these is evangelism; the second is edification; and the third is benevolence. Benevolence means caring for those who are in need. It includes the orphans and the aged, the hungry and the naked, and those who are sick or in prison. Think of James 1:27, "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, (which means take care of them) and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

The second work is edification. It is a wonderful thing when a person becomes a Christian. From this beginning there should be growth so that the babe in Christ eventually becomes a full-grown man or woman in Christ. This is edification. It is done through worship; it is done through teaching; it is done through the nurturing that elders provide for those who make up a congregation. It was this of which the apostle Paul was speaking when he wrote to the Ephesians, chapter 4:11-12, "And he gave some to be apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ." This is the great work of nurturing new or weak Christians into old and strong and active Christians

Evangelism

Now, we come back to the first of these three, evangelism which means the carrying of the gospel to the world, because the world without the gospel is lost. John 3:16 has been singled out by millions of people as the golden text of the Bible and not without reason, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Those who do not hear of him, those who do not believe in him, and who do not obey him have no promise, no hope of eternal life. When Jesus was not yet born the angel spoke to Joseph and said concerning Mary, "She shall bring forth a son; and thou shall call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from, their sins." (Matt. 1:21). Salvation from sin is bound up with the believing in him and in the obeying of Jesus our Lord. The man who has not heard of him does not yet have a chance. In Romans 1:16, Paul said, "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." Notice that it is those who hear the gospel and those who believe it who have the hope of salvation.

In Romans 10:13-15, the same writer added, "Whosoever shall call on 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." Every one of these questions points us directly to the obligation of helping evangelize the world. There are many, many other passages that emphasize this same important work of the church--carrying the gospel to the lost. Perhaps the most impressive of all is that passage in Matt. 28:19-20 that records the final thing that Jesus said to his disciples. There they were on the mount of Olives a few moments before he was to be lifted up from the earth, never to set foot on this earth again. The last recorded words are "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 will be with you always, even unto the end of the world."

I want now to read a passage in the story of Paul's second missionary journey. The apostle Paul had planned to go into Bithynia and the Holy Spirit had said no. He did not understand why. He planned to go toward the south and again the Holy Spirit said no, and he did not understand why. He had done the only thing he was permitted to do--he had gone to Troas and was waiting for further instructions. "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There was a man of Macedonia standing, beseeching him, and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. And when he had seen the vision, straightway we sought to go forth into Macedonia." (Acts 16:9-10). No longer was there any indecision. Now they were on their way. Luke then tells about moving on across to the continent of Europe, the first recorded time in the Bible that the gospel was preached on Europe.

Only Fifty-two Nations

The *Rand-McNally World Atlas* lists 135 nations in the world. Some of these are very small, like the little nation of Monaco with just a few thousand citizens; some are very large like India and China with hundreds of millions of people. There are, so far as we are able to know, congregations of the New Testament church, congregations patterned after the plan of which you read in the Bible, in only 52 of these 135 nations. So far as we are able to know, there are 83 nations of the world today where there is no church of Christ.

I wonder how we would feel if we had been born and were now living in a country where the pure gospel was not now being preached. Let's just imagine that we live off in some land where there is no congregation of the New Testament church and no preacher of the gospel. How would we feel? What would we think? Knowing what you and I know now, how would we feel? The answer is very obvious. We Would feel that the Christians throughout the world ought to get busy and send somebody to preach to us about Christ.

We have sent out in these last few years a good many men who are preachers of the gospel. Several of them have gone from middle Tennessee and from Texas into areas of our own nation where the cause of Christ and the New Testament restoration movement is weak, and a few have gone beyond our national borders into foreign lands. But it is only a few. There are approximately 100 preachers of the gospel outside the borders of our own land today. There are more than two and one-half billion souls on earth, Ninety-three percent of them live outside the borders of the United States. Seven percent of the people of the world live within our borders, yet ninety-nine percent of the preaching of the New Testament gospel is being spent on seven percent of the world's people. How would I feel, or how would you feel, if we were out there in the ninety-three percent and only one percent of the gospel preachers came to preach to us?

Only one hundred men (this does not count their wives and children) are in foreign lands preaching the gospel to the ninety-three percent of the world's population. If we can believe the figures in the latest *Yearbook of American Churches*, there are 1,700,000 of us who make up the New Testament church, restoring the gospel plan of salvation, speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where it is silent. It does not take much of a mathematician to sit down and discover that for every man who goes into the mission field, 17,000 of us stay home. For every gospel preacher in Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Africa, Europe, and Asia there are 17,000 of us who stayed at home.

#### Others More Active

I read in the August 18 issue of *Time Magazine* that the Mormons have a million and a half members, 5,000 of whom are missionaries throughout the world. There are also 1,700 native preachers. And that number again for the churches of Christ is a flat 100 or less. I read recently an article in one of the religious papers by one of our American brethren about the fact that we have one man now in Tokyo, a city of nine million, one man now in Osaka, a city of three million. To make that real, let us imagine that we are over in England and two brethren sit down to talk about America. One says, "Have you heard? We now have a missionary in New York." The other says, "Wonderful, isn't it wonderful." And then the first says, "Yes, and that is not all, we have another down in the province of Texas. Even that is not all, we have another out in the province of California." The other man replies, "Grand! Isn't it wonderful. Look how the church is marching, a missionary in New York City, one in Texas and one in California." Yet that ratio is better than we have in the Orient and about as good as we have in Europe.

If we read anything in the New Testament it is that Christians, in order to be saved, must be working to save others. Remember those words about our Lord, "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:36-38).

#### Better Days Ahead

Are we discouraged? Yes. But there are some bright spots. There are more young people being trained to go into mission work than last year or five years ago. There is more spirit for sending them than there was a few years ago. We are going to do better than we have done. I am encouraged most of all, however, because there are coming to be some congregations like this one. In the life of a church there are three stages. First of all, there is a stage when the church has to call on others for help. It is a mission point. That was thirty-one years ago when this congregation began. After a short time the Hillsboro church advanced to stage two--becoming self-supporting. They could provide a place to meet; they could provide the preaching; they could provide the literature, and the other necessary things for the carrying on of the work. Then, and this is the glorious part, there comes stage three. That is when a congregation begins to reach out and help others. The Hillsboro church reached stage three a long time ago. The part that is tremendously encouraging to me is that we are at the threshold of really reaching out and doing more for others than we have ever done before. Contributions last year were almost \$125,000. They were almost the same the year before that. We have reason to believe that they will not be much different this year. What have we done with this money? Well, we have built the educational building and have paid for it. We have also put inside balconies and redecorated the auditorium. We have bought two houses at the rear of this building for parking area. We owe approximately \$60,000 at the present time.

#### Our Expenditures

Last year, the best I can estimate quickly from the annual report, we put between \$30,000 and \$35,000 into mission work. That is about twenty-five percent of our annual budget. We put between \$50,000 and \$60,000 into building payments. That is approximately forty-five to fifty percent of our budget. Benevolence accounted for about \$9,000 or seven percent of our budget. We have the parking lots; we have the balconies; we have the educational building; and within a year or eighteen month, we are going to be ready to preach the gospel throughout the world. I dream of that \$30,000 to \$35,000 in mission work for others beyond our own borders becoming \$50,000 almost before you know it, and then \$75,000 or even \$100,000. We are really getting down to the work for which we began. No church ever existed primarily to build its own building. That is an incidental, and should be gotten out of the way as soon as possible. Churches exist in God's sight in order to be launching pads to send out the gospel to places that it has not yet gone. I do not know of any more encouraging place in the world than right here in the Hillsboro church.

Our elders reached a decision of major importance some months ago. Their decision is that we will go on as emergencies arise, giving \$300 to this church, and \$500 to that one, but that we are going to begin in earnest taking over the full work of certain areas. We will select a field; then we will select a man who has the qualifications we think are needed in that field. We will send him into the field, support him fully and supervise the work. We will supply him with the tools that he will need for the work. We will advise with him and help him work out the problems. They began this plan back in June when it was announced that Wil and Lee Goodheer would be going to Holland. They sailed on October 2. They are already in the work, and in our bulletin you have their first report.

### The Challenge of England

Where can we go next? Brother Otis Gatewood and others have talked with some of us about England. In the southern area around London there are more than 15,000,000 people. How many New Testament Christians are there? Less than 100. The little church in London is over 100 years old, yet today they have only twenty members. Something is obviously wrong. There are two other small churches in the London area. Forty miles out in the little town of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, there are fifty members, twelve of whom are service men. Leonard Channing, supported by the Hillsboro church, has been preaching there for several years. Fifty members make this the largest church in southern England, with a \$300 a month contribution. They have bought some property, but they need \$13,000 to put an auditorium on it. The other congregation in southern England has only twenty members, and is down forty or fifty miles in the other direction from London.

Mission work in the British Isles has great advantages. First of all you know the language the day you step off the boat. In the second place, the American dollar goes a long way in England. In the third place we are ideologically and 'historically connected with those people. Our grandparents came from over there. Their history is our history; their ideas are our ideas. Not so when you go to Japan or Korea. England is a prime field. The need is very urgent. Brother Channing writes, "When you consider the entire population of England, the actively religious people now number between five and six percent." England has largely become a secular society, passing religion by. Ninety-four or five percent of the people are not active in religion.

The elders in a meeting last July made the original decision which they confirmed in a meeting in October of this year, after investigation and further study, that we begin to think of mission work in England. The plans are that Brother Goodpasture and I shall go over in June of next year, hold some meetings, and visit with Christians there. We shall spend five or six weeks and be home by the first of August, to tell you what we have found. It may be that the following summer we will go over with a group of thirty or forty others for a concentrated campaign covering several months. That may be the best approach, or it may not be. We want to study the situation before we make any final plans.

### Conclusion

The mission fields of the world are white unto harvest. And, this is the good news, there are churches like Hillsboro that are ready, willing and able to do some of the harvesting. Think of our responsibility in this matter. Feel free to make your suggestions. Pray that the right decisions will be made. Our own salvation and the salvation of many others depends upon what we are about to do.