

THE WORLD'S NEEDS

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on December 30, 1962 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

This is the time of the year when a great many people pause to take inventory. It is the time for analyzing the things that have happened during the year, to see where we are and how we came to be here. It seems to me appropriate that, as a band of Christians, we also ought to do some taking stock, some analyzing of ourselves and of the world in which we find ourselves. Then, perhaps we can do some planning about what we want to do in the new year that is just a few hours away.

We are quite aware of the world that is about us. We have all done a great deal of observing on our own through the years and months that have passed. We have read countless pages of newsprint; we have seen summations in the news magazines; we have listened by television and radio to the events of our world and we are usually well informed concerning the world in which we live. At this juncture I would pose a question: "What do you consider to be the greatest needs of the world. In the few moments that I have at my disposal I would like to suggest to you what I consider to be the world's greatest needs.

The Need for Bread

I would begin with mankind's need for bread. By bread I simply mean all of the necessities of life. I mean food, of course, but along with it shelter and clothing and medical care--all of the basic, fundamental necessities of life. While you and I in the comfort of our homes may not feel this as a very great need, it is a pressing need when we lift our eyes and see the whole world. It was sometime in 1933 that then President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, speaking in Chicago, uttered a sentence that has been quoted over and over again, "I see a third of a nation ill-clothed, ill-housed and ill-fed." That was true of our nation in the depths of the depression. But the tragic part is that when we lift our eyes and see the whole world we can yet say with equal accuracy, "I see a third of mankind ill-clothed, ill-housed and ill-fed."

Within the borders of the United States we have approximately 7% of the world's population, but we have a disproportionately high level of the world's goods. A few years ago George Benson pointed out that our American living standard was twice as high as that of England, three times as high as that of most of the nations on the continent of Europe, and seven times as high as that of Russia, China, India, Korea and Japan. While this may cause us to rejoice in the bounty of God's blessings that have come our way, we must not be unmindful of the millions who go to bed hungry each night, the millions of families that cannot provide even the bare necessities. We must not be unaware that in the streets of China and India, for example, there will be people lying dead almost any day of the year because they did not have enough food. Others will die because they did not have enough clothing to shelter them against the elements about them.

This condition is not likely to be better because of the great population increase taking place throughout the world. Statistics from the United Nations tell us that it took all of the centuries up until 1830 for the population of the world to reach the one billion level. Then it took only a short 105 years, until 1935, to reach the two billion mark. The predictions are that in a short three years, 1965, there will be three billion persons living at the same time in this planet. Then fifteen years later, in 1980, there will be four billion; ten years later, in 1990, there will be five billion; and before the turn of the century, if time goes on that long, there will be six billion people living on the earth. There will be no additional vast areas of land available to feed this doubled population of the world and so there will be hungry mouths and cold bodies and inadequately sheltered families by the thousands as time goes on. One of the world's greatest needs is for bread and for the other necessities of life.

Man's Sin

Much of the reason for these shortages is man's sin. Man's selfishness, greed and hatred of others have often led to destructive wars. These and others of man's sins have prevented the total of mankind from having enough. There is enough of the necessities of life for the population of the world, if all men were Christians. But because so often men have not been willing to share and to help a brother in need, there are these vast shortages and painful inadequacies of the necessities of life.

A few weeks ago in the *National Geographic Magazine* there was an aerial picture of a community in one of the countries in southeast Asia. There were several houses and several barns in this semi-rural community blazing furiously in the open sunlight. I thought, "How many thousands of man hours, how many years, how much money were necessary to build those buildings?" Now an enemy burns them in an hour. It will take many hours to recoup the losses brought about by that warfare. When you think of all the destruction that has happened since the beginning of recorded history, when you think of all the other elements of man's waste, you see a little of why man's sin has caused the shortages in the world. The world's only hope is in a more extensive propagation and practice of the principles of Christ. If we are to survive we must come to believe and practice the principles that Christ brought to the world.

I am thinking of Luke 10, which tells of a man who went down a deserted road and found an unknown brother in need. He took care of him. We refer to him, as the good Samaritan. I am thinking of passages like Galatians 6:10, "So then as we have opportunity let us work that which is good toward all men, especially toward them that are of the household of the faith." One of the world's greatest needs, then, is for bread and for the other necessities of life. Yet this is not man's only need, nor man's greatest need. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone ..." (Matt. 4:4).

### The Need for Education

In addition to the necessities of life man needs education. You see, man is not an animal; man is an intellectual being who is capable of enjoying the finer things of life--music, and literature and art. Man is capable of traveling and benefits from knowing other people in other places. Man is capable of enjoying recreation. Education, in some respects is the hope of lifting the standard of living and of alleviating many of the shortages of the world.

In this connection I remember the words of Jesus. In John 8:32 he said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." This applies in every realm. It applies in agriculture, so to the backward countries of the world we need to send people who know how to enrich soil and then to cultivate it and bring forth a doubled or trebled harvest for an underfed people. It is true in the realm of medicine and many lives can be saved when the truth, known in some quarters of the world, is shared with other quarters. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," is applicable in the rearing of families, in the conducting of business, and especially in the realm of science. Education is one of man's great needs.

### The Need for Love

I would hasten to say that beyond the necessities of life and beyond education there is another great need. It is the need for love. Deeper even than man's need for physical food and clothing and shelter and deeper than his need for education is man's need to love and to be loved. A man can be well educated and well fed and still he miserably unhappy. We are so made that we have to be loved by someone, and have to return our love to someone in order to be happy. That is why a mother is so happy. She is giving so unstintingly of herself to that baby in her arms. It is why a father is happy as he works, perhaps even at two jobs, to provide for his children. When we give our love we find the deepest kind of food for our being.

It was Henry Drummond who wrote the little book, *The Greatest Thing in the World*. As he puts it, "Love is the greatest thing in the world." One of our favorite songs is "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life." It comes to its climax in the line, "Tis love, and love alone, the world is seeking ..." Then I remember in the scriptures that great poem of tribute to love, written by the apostle Paul. "We have it in 1 Cor. 13, where the last line reads, "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, and the greatest of these is love."

The central principle of the Christian religion is love. It is the most important principle in the world. It all began with God's love for man. Like the sun warming the universe, God's love warms us. It was carried further in the love of Christ. Finally, the circle is complete when we love God in return and love our fellowmen as a sign of our love of God. There is no really full life without love. So the world's need includes love within families and within neighborhoods, and all across nations. The love that we are speaking of is the antidote to the wars that plague our world. Love is the means of reaching the peace for which we so often pray--peace within ourselves, peace within families, the absence of strife and struggle in businesses or other institutions, and the absence of struggles among nations. This is to be found only when men deeply concern themselves for the good of others. That is love.

I think again of passages of scripture like Matthew 7:12, "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them, for this is the law and the prophets." In addition to that passage, there is Romans 12:10, "In honor preferring one another." Love is the greatest thing among men, and it is the tie that binds God to us and us to God. How foolish men are to live their lives with their backs turned toward love. But even these are still not all of man's needs.

### The Need for Purpose

Great as are the needs for the necessities of life, for education, and for love there is still a greater need. The greatest of all man's needs is for purpose. By purpose I simply mean that man needs above everything else to realize who he is and why he is here and where he is going. In short, he needs to realize that he is made in the image of God, as we read in Genesis 1:27. He is a spiritual being. He will live for a little while in a physical body in a physical world, but the eternal part of him is spirit. When man's stomach is hungry and man's body is cold, the need is impressing, but it is not the main need, because he is not primarily a body. Man's greatest need is a spiritual need to realize that he is God's child and that someday he will spend eternity with God. Man's greatest need is for Christ.

The importance of man's coming to Christ for cleansing is shown by Christ's having come to the earth in order to redeem man. Surely he would not have left heaven, surely he would not have endured the privations of an earthly existence for a third of a century and surely he would not have given his life on the cross, if man's need for his coming were not imperative. The apostle's preaching also shows the urgency of man's need for Christ and the salvation that Christ brings.

Listen again to the appeal which Christ brings to man, "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 if light." (Matt. 11:28-30). In Rev. 3:20, Jesus again speaks, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The greatest tragedy of our world is that many people never hear the gospel of Christ and that many others who hear it never heed the Lord's invitation to come to salvation.

### Conclusion

These, then, are the great needs of the world today: bread, education, love, and purpose. Let each one of us consider carefully what he can do in the new year that is about to come to alleviate these needs. Surely each of us can do something to provide the necessities of life to at least a few who suffer without them. Surely each of us can do something to help provide the good wholesome education that will lead others to the full rich kind of life that we have been privileged to know. Surely each of us can do something to foster love, friendship, and brotherhood in the areas where we live and work. And finally, surely each of us can do something to proclaim the good news of Christ by word and by life to those about us.

We have been greatly blessed in more ways than we have the ability to describe. It is a great privilege to receive the manifold blessings which God has showered upon us. It is also a great privilege to share these blessings with others who are in need. There is no deeper satisfaction than that which comes from sharing blessings with others. In sharing with others and in blessing others we prove the truth which our Lord uttered so long ago, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35).