

Let's Evangelize the World Now!

And he said unto them, Thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And Ye are witnesses of these things.

Luke 24:46-48

Recently in Kansas City, Missouri, a small boy, Timothy Adams, 6 years of age was loitering on his way home from kindergarten. The time had reached 5 p.m. His mother, Mrs. Paul Adams, called the police 90 minutes after kindergarten had let out. Suddenly there was a booming thundering voice from the heavens that shouted, "Timothy Adams, go home. Timothy Adams, go home." Within minutes policemen, William Dycus and James Treece, in a police helicopter saw a boy streaking for home. By 5:15 p.m. Mrs. Adams called the police again and reported the safe arrival of her 6 year old who had run into the house, wide-eyed and excited, announcing, "A big voice in the sky just told me to come home." Mrs. Adams told the police that she did nothing to clear up for her son the mystery of the origin of that great voice in the sky. The story of Timothy is so

typical of a 6 year old boy! Knowing little boys, Timothy probably became so involved with playing with his friends that he had forgotten all that his mother and daddy had said about coming straight home from kindergarten. It's not that he had forgotten that anything had been said, it's just that he had gotten involved in things with friends and had temporarily forgotten. Isn't this just as typical with the adult world? We get so involved with things and friends that we forget about the teachings of Almighty God. There is only one basic difference between Timothy's big voice in the sky and ours. Timothy heard the voice, remembered, obeyed and went home. We hear God's voice and we remember and we continue to ignore it. Our Lord Jesus Christ who has all authority, both in heaven, and on earth, has commanded us to evangelize the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16). This command is repeated in our text (Luke 24:46-48). The thrust of my message today is to appeal to you to heed the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ, just as urgently as Timothy Adams heeded the command of the "big voice in the sky."

According to the latest issue of the Horizons Magazine we now have nearly 2000 missionaries of the Christian Church and Churches of Christ — more than we have ever had before. But there were 210 foreign countries in the world and our almost 2000 missionaries of the Christian Churches are serving in 50 countries of the world. This means we need missionaries in 160 more countries.

We are rich here in America — we are 7% of the world's population, but we own 51% of its wealth. We have 74% of the telephones; 71% of the trucks; 57% of the world's automobiles; 46% of the world's electrical energy; we have 30% of all the Christian preachers in the world. But this is not good, dear friends, it's bad. We are in the same danger as the rich young ruler that Christ advised to "Go thy way and sell what you have and give to the poor" (Mark 10:21).

It is so sad that having all of these riches we are not using

them to evangelize the world as Christ commanded us to.

“Let’s Evangelize the World Now” — how much more timely could this subject be? The population explosion, threatened nuclear destruction, emergent nations, racial turmoil, moral and theological revolution — all of these cry out for the living Christ.

I. Why Evangelize? In Christian obedience, the word of the Master is binding. Nothing has happened in this space age to alter in the slightest the command of Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to the whole world. But what about the realization of this subject?

Is it not absurd to think that the globe with its 4 billion human beings, multiplying at about 2% a year can be evangelized within this generation?

Moreover, the growth of the church in the recent decades has been terribly slow. At the turn of the century Christians were estimated at 35% of the world’s population. Now, seven decades later, the proportion has fallen to about 30%. If the rate of decline continues by the year 2000 Christians will only be 20% of mankind. And yet, friends, I believe that we can achieve what the title of this message suggests — **LET’S EVANGELIZE THE WORLD NOW**. I believe that we can realize this worthy goal because, for one reason, of the kind of age that we are living in and the kind of a commission that we are laboring under. For the first time in human history the majority of mankind can now be reached almost instantly. No part of the earth is more than 48 hours travel time from any other part. Modern means of communication and travel make the evangelization of the world in a single generation more possible now than ever before. And consider the kind of a commission we Christians have — Jesus Christ never promised His followers that the whole world would be converted through their efforts, but He ordered them to take His message to the whole world and to do it in the power of the Spirit. The greatest single factor inhibiting the evangelization of the world is the narrow concept of Christian witness that per-

vades practically all churches. The basic reason why Christianity is being out-distanced by the population is that most church members consider evangelism the business of professionals rather than the responsibility of every believer.

We must evangelize the world of this generation because there may not be another generation.

What do we mean by evangelize? The late Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who died in 1944 gave this definition of evangelize — "To evangelize is to so present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Savior and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church." During the years that I taught personal evangelism at Atlanta Christian College in East Point, Georgia, I used to give the students in my classes this definition of evangelize — "To evangelize is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unconverted everywhere according to the Will of God."

At this moment in history the world of men is drastically divided; language against language; nation against nation; color against color. In the midst of all of these divisions the church must sound the clear note that God sees all men as a single race. Racism is wrong, precisely, because all men must own Adam as their father, even as all believers must recognize that God fashions the new man created in Christ Jesus, the second Adam from above with utter indifference to race. Through the incarnation God has intervened for the salvation of lost men and to His Church He has committed the proclamation of the one gospel to the whole human race. The gospel is God's good news to men — the message of the cross. It proclaims that men "who all have sinned and come short of God's glory" need the Savior. At its heart is the truth that God's only Son lived a life of perfect obedience in the flesh for the penalty of man's sin in his body on the cross through His atoning death and resurrection freely offers reconciliation with God to the world of sinners — this is God's only gospel. Evangelism is the single task of the

church — everywhere and always we are to preach the one gospel whose relevance to the whole human race is assured by our Lord's great commission.

II. How shall we, then, evangelize the world now? Here we get into the realm of methods. An apology could be offered for nearly all the methods of evangelism used today, but the fact that we are losing ground exposes them as relative failure. Nearly any method will achieve some success. Some would argue that Christian literature is the way to do it; others would argue for radio; many would argue for television; many would argue for institutional evangelism and of course, there are those who would say church building evangelism is the only way to do it. Brethren, I may not prefer your method and you may not prefer my method, but the one thing that we must do is to use whatever method we personally believe in and get the gospel to the people. Let's not argue and debate and cause divisions over what method shall be used in evangelizing the world — let's use all of the methods, but let's do it now. Some can use the radio, some can use television, some can use an airplane, some can use an automobile, some can use a bicycle, some can use tracts and books, some can use the Bible college, some can use a Christian hospital, some can use a Christian school, some can use the evangelistic meeting in the church building, in a tent or in the city hall. There are many methods of reaching people. As far as I am concerned all of these methods are good as long as by some method we get the life-saving gospel to the dying world. After Pentecost, a handful of men, most of them uneducated, went out to preach and in a few generations the world was turned upside down for Christ. What did they have that we do not have? Why was their witness so effective? They were a tiny minority confronted by the hostility of the Jews and the ridicule of the pagan Gentiles, but men were converted — the church was established and Christians helped bring about the tremendous social changes. Did these uneducated and ordinary men have something we have lost or perhaps have failed to use? It is true

that these men had been with Jesus and they in their hearts and on their faces revealed the sign of redeemed men — men who had a personal experience with the risen Savior. They had had the privilege of seeing, talking with and even touching the One they knew had been crucified and buried. But through simple faith we can have this same experience. Christ can be just as real to us as he was to them and Christ can transform our lives as He transformed their lives. We have the same God these men had — He may be dead for some, but we know Him personally and we are aware of His promise to be with us. He is the God of whom the psalmist said, “From everlasting to everlasting thou are God” (Psalm 90:2). He is the One of Whom Isaiah wrote, “The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:28). We have the same risen Lord.

The resurrection was an ever recurring theme in the preaching of the disciples — Christ had risen from the dead and His resurrection was the crowning proof of the validity of the cross. How much do we stress this fact? Have we permitted the scientific approach of our day to blunt supernatural religion, that naturally has supernatural manifestations? Is our God so small that we look at Him through a test tube or seek answers about Him from a computer? We have the same gospel which the apostle said “is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who has faith” (Romans 1:16). It is this same gospel that Paul summed up in this wonderfully simple and clear statement, “That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that he was buried and was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3,4). It is the same gospel that today brings conviction, conversion and redemption whenever and wherever it is preached — not to all men (nor did it in our Lord’s time) but to all who heed the Spirit’s call. We have the same Holy Spirit; the one who was the power behind the apostles’ preaching and who is able and willing to make our preaching and teaching effective if only we will place programs,

organizations, personalities, activities and methods in their rightful secondary place. The disciples were commanded to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them and they were baptized with His power. This was the equipment necessary for fulfilling the Lord's command to make disciples of all nations. Our failures today may stem largely from our forgetting that "it is not by might nor by power but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). We have the same Holy Scriptures which continue to be the sword of the spirit wherever used and believed. The difference today is that we have the complete revelation of the divine truth; the early disciples only had the Old Testament and to this they referred for authority and for what they knew to be divine truth. We have the Old and the New Testament in which is revealed the Christ. We have the same privilege and power of prayer — direct communication with the throne of grace where there is help and guidance and blessings for all who seek it.

Since we, like those men who went out to shake the world for Jesus Christ, have all these assets, why has the cause of world evangelization lagged? The inevitable conclusion is that we are not making use of what God has provided — weak in faith, distracted by world conditions, sophisticated to the point of disdaining the simplicity of the first century approach. (Sometimes even feeling, perhaps, that we need not heed our Lord's command to preach the gospel to all nations because maybe the people are already saved.) We are guilty of disobedience or of unwillingness to give our all to Christ and go as He commanded to tell all men that Christ has the answer to personal needs as well as those of the entire world. It can be done. The world can be evangelized now with assets we have from God, it can be done.

It is not an impossible task. Constantly we hear the cry — it is impossible to evangelize the entire world. A dramatic increase in the number of babies born throughout the world does threaten to engulf those of us who are seeking to bring men to

the new birth through faith in Jesus Christ. A frightening population explosion is upon us. By A.D. 2000 there will be between six and seven billion people on the earth. The size of this increase alone is one of evangelism's greatest challenges. Possibly the increase will be modified by such things as birth control, war, and extensive epidemics. In any event, the percentage of Christians to the total population is going to decrease unless some new evangelistic impulse is felt. Formerly it took four to five hundred years for the world population to double. Now it will only take thirty-five years. But in the face of all of this, I still maintain that we do not have an impossible task, we simply have an untried task. Those of us who call ourselves Christians have not really tried with our whole heart to evangelize the world now. Suppose we would resolve to spread the story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as rapidly as we can spread gossip. Most people can spread the juiciest morsel of gossip that you have ever heard in less than fifteen minutes. Suppose we started telling the story of Jesus — one person telling it to another person, taking fifteen minutes to tell the story; then suppose those two people told the story to two others in the next fifteen minute segment and all who were told the story of Jesus would continue telling it. Do you realize that in just eight hours time this entire world of more than 4 billion persons could be told the story of Jesus Christ? This is why I say it is not an impossible task — it is just simply an untried task.

In his book, *Journey to Eternity*, M.F. McKnight tells the story of a former member of the Church of Christ who was persuaded two years ago to become a Jehovah's Witness by two of their workers who knocked on his door and taught him their doctrine. While talking with him about the differences between his present beliefs and the Bible, the man said, "Do you mean to tell me, after I was in the Church of Christ for 16 years and know better, that you are obeying Jehovah God's command to preach the gospel to the whole world? I know approximately how many workers you have in the foreign countries. Further-

more, I know the attitude which many members of the Church of Christ have, relative to preaching the gospel to the entire world. That attitude can be summed up in these words — 'let someone else do it, we are too busy to be very much concerned.' You know what I am saying is the truth. During all my years in the Church of Christ, I seldom heard of members going from house to house like the early church did and like Jehovah's Witnesses do, I can tell you right now of people I know who live within a half a block of Churches of Christ who have never once been told what the Church of Christ stands for. A typical member of the Church of Christ whom I knew said, 'Let's put up a building, hire a preacher, have one or two meetings a year and all those who really want to hear the truth will come to our services and be taught.' I will admit that the picture has changed somewhat since I stopped attending the Church of Christ, but you know that what I am saying is still true to a great extent. Jehovah's Witnesses do not own many meeting places; those we do own usually are very plain and inexpensive. The fact is, that less than 5% of the total money collected is used for housing expense. The major portion of it is used in publication of what we believe to be the good news of Christ's Kingdom. While you in the Church of Christ are at ease in Zion, meeting several times a week in your luxurious buildings we are going from house to house throughout the earth telling people of Jehovah God. We are the only ones preaching in every nation under heaven, including Russia. Even if, as you say, the Church of Christ is the one true church, I will still take my chances on the outside because you are not obeying the first commandment of the One Whose name you hypocritically wear."

Oh, how Satan has deceived us on the subject of evangelism. Many preachers say *sit and listen*, "Be still and know that I am God," meditate and read your Bible. Dear friends, I believe in meditation as much as anyone. I know that we as Christians must study the Bible; but on the subject of evangelism Jesus said, "go" — not sit and meditate. Satan deceives us and says

build church buildings — if people want to be saved, let them come to the building and hear the gospel of Christ. Now I believe in having nice church buildings. It was my privilege while minister at Catlin, Illinois to work with our congregation in building what I consider to be one of the loveliest church buildings in America today. But on the subject of evangelism Jesus said “go.” Recently I was holding a revival meeting and a minister from another country who is serving in the United States spoke after we had made several personal calls and had obtained some decisions for Christ. “I never had this idea of evangelism before. In the country where I came from we always just invited people to attend the services, but we never spoke to them about their personal need of Christ, we never tried to win their soul, we thought that we would be too much pressure.” This man said, “I can see that we have not been going about it in the right way and perhaps this is one of the reasons why we have so few Christians in the country where I am from. Perhaps this is why there are so many more Christians in America because you are willing to go and ask people to commit their lives to Christ.”

III. When evangelize? Let’s do it now — today there is only one missionary to slightly more than 700,000 people. If we divide the missionaries between the world’s population, but the distribution of this total force of missionaries is very uneven. There are no missionaries in China with seven hundred million to possibly a billion people. The missionary force is increasing but not fast enough to fulfill the great commission. North America has become the key sending base and this situation is likely to continue indefinitely. In the last hundred years the number of non-Christians in the world has more than doubled, although Protestants in growth have more than kept pace with population, they are still a minority of the world’s population. Christians in the United States face a great evangelistic opportunity since this country will have approximately one hundred fifty million more people by A.D. 2000. However, the rate of

growth for 1965 was the lowest since the United States is among those nations most inclined toward birth control, the net increase by A.D. 2000 may be smaller than the estimate based on recent birth figures.

In a recent issue of the U.S. News and World Report the striking and thought-provoking question was asked, "Whose Century — will it be Russia's; will it be Europe's; will it be America's?" The magazine's conclusion seemed to think that it would be America's Century. Of course, they were looking at this question from a material point of view. Who will produce the most commodities and goods, who will have the highest standard of living? Whose century will it be from an ideological point of view? There are three great ideologies in the world in this century — Christianity, Catholicism, and Communism — each beginning with the letter C — each fighting desperately to defeat the others — each wanting the people of the world to accept its terms and yield to its philosophies. As far as numbers in worldly power are concerned, Communism and Catholicism are far out in front. The Communists control some one billion people. There are only about five million Christians without the taint of denominationalism. This is a ration of 750 to 1. The Catholics have some 500 million and that's a ratio of approximately 350 to 1. These odds look overwhelming, but they are far from it. In 1901, the Communist Party was born with 17 supporters. In 1917, this party had grown to a membership of 40,000 and with this comparatively small number, it conquered the vast country of Russia and now effectively controls the lives and property of over a billion people. How did the Communist Party make such a phenomenal growth without God and truth. There is only one answer — dedication. The supporters of the Communist Party were so dedicated to the purpose and aims of their ideology that they let nothing stand in the way of success. When duty called to their party they were willing to give up pleasure, vacations, jobs and even homes and many gave up life itself for the cause they espoused. We admire such complete

dedication.

When Christ ascended into heaven at Mt Olivet, he left twelve dedicated men to carry on His work and spread the Word to every nation. We love to read about, tell about — the dedication and self-sacrifice of these twelve dedicated men. They were hated by the world, ridiculed by scorners, imprisoned by officials, beaten and disowned by society. Oh, how we love to tell it! Yes, we admire their dedication, but we do not follow them. We choose rather beds of ease. We dedicate ourselves to pleasure and comfort instead of self-sacrifice. If we Christians who have the truth of God's and the power of His grace became as dedicated as the Christians of the first century and the Communists of the 20th Century, there will be no doubt whose century this will be. Let us not withdraw like beaten dogs from the arena where we must fight against ideologies of men. Cease your whimperings and complainings about the tremendous advances of Communism and Catholicism. "Put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6). "Be steadfast, unmovable with a fervent faith that will not be quenched by the icy waters of adversity, and our faith like the faith of our fathers, will overcome the world."

The word "evangelist" is used three times in the New Testament. The word "Gospel" meaning Good News, is used 76 times. "To preach the Gospel" is used 24 times; "to give Good Tidings" is in 5 references; "to preach" in 19 references (and usually it means preaching Christ). Now this means that there are 127 references in the New Testament to the sounding forth of the saving grace of Christ to a dying humanity. This is the inescapable duty of the living church to the world at this hour. Preach the GOSPEL!!!

Today there are many people who spend all of their time on peripheral areas. They may be important, but the primary mission of the church is evangelism, winning others to Jesus Christ. There are five million Christians in the world. That is not very many in a world population of three billion. But we have a far

greater percentage today than the early church had at Pentecost. They had only 120 Christians to go out and win the world. They didn't have automobiles; they didn't have airplanes; they didn't have the printing press; they didn't have even Bibles. They had no churches, no seminaries, no schools. They didn't even have a well-trained clergy. These men had spent just three years with Jesus. Of course, that is plenty, but they did not have university degrees before they went to Jesus' seminary. They were just ordinary businessmen and fishermen and laborers, but they had something that we seem to be missing. They had the power of the Holy Spirit. They had disciplined lives. They had commitment and dedication. They were willing to deny themselves and take up the Cross, and they were willing to die in Roman arenas. They died. They were torn asunder. They were cut apart. But they kept on preaching this Gospel. No wonder they turned their world upside down!

We need to get back to where we are willing to be fools for Jesus' sake. We have become too sophisticated, too respectable. The men who followed Jesus were in the jails and in the prisons. They were on the streets and among the people working, sitting where they sat.

Lloyd Douglas called it "a magnificent obsession." The people of Jesus' day accused Him of being beside Himself. They called Paul mad.

It seems strange that we can get all worked up over sports and pleasure and drink. We can scream like a tribe of wild Indians over the Beatles. But we must not show any fervor or enthusiasm to win others to Jesus Christ.

Let us reaffirm our determination to evangelize the world in our generation. We could do it — energized and filled by the Holy Spirit, with a holy conviction that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that there is no other way.

In 1968 my family and I went to Africa to evangelize in the nations of Rhodesia and Zambia. We often heard the name of David Livingstone. All of my life I have heard of David Liv-

ingston — the great missionary, the explorer, the adventurer — the man who walked over 29,000 miles opening up the interior of the dark continent of Africa to missionary work. During our tour of Rhodesia as we were progressing to the Batonga people, where Jack and Peggy Pennington lived such a lonely life working among some of the most primitive people that are left on the earth today. We came to Victoria Falls — this spectacular sight — twice as large as Niagara Falls in our country, was discovered by the famous missionary explorer, David Livingston who came down the Zambezi River in 1855. As we stood there at Victoria Falls absolutely overawed by the sight, by the roar of the water falls, we saw this huge, imposing statue of David Livingston and it was here that Jack Pennington told us the story of the death of this famous missionary. It was David Livingston's practice to kneel by his bedside each night before retiring and pray to God. On the night of his death he was so ill that he could hardly move. His faithful servants never knew how he managed to do it, but somehow he got out of bed, knelt by his bedside and started praying to God, and in the morning the servants found him in this position — he had actually died in prayer. David Livingston's faithful servants cut out his heart and they buried his heart in Africa. The reason they did this was that they loved the man and David Livingston loved them and they reasoned, "It is only fitting that the heart of a man should be buried in Africa because his heart belongs to Africa." They, then, reverently picked up his body and carried it over a thousand miles to the ocean where they put it on a ship and the body of David Livingston was then taken back to London, England where it was buried in Westminster Abbey — the only person ever to be buried in Westminster without a heart. As we stood there at Victoria Falls and heard this touching story, I thought to myself, when I come to the end of my life and my body is buried, where will people say my heart was. Oh, I pray that I might live my life in such a way that people say my heart is in evangelism. I want to see the world evangelized *now!*

LET'S EVANGELIZE THE WORLD NOW!

A LOVE FOR SOULS

Lord, give to me thy love for souls
For lost and wandering sheep,
That I may see the multitude
And weep as Thou didst weep.
Help me to see the tragic plight
Of Souls far off in sin
Help me to love, to give, to go,
To bring the wandering in.
From off the altars of thine heart
Take Thou some flaming coals,
And touch my life, and give me
A heart on fire for Souls.
O fire of love, O flame divine,
Make thy abode in me,
Burn in my heart, Burn evermore,
Till I burn out for thee.

—Unknown

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