

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

NOW THEREFORE PERFORM

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As we gather in this first session of our centennial convention, hearts are aglow with holy emotions and sincere gratitude to Almighty God for his continued manifold blessings upon us.

In the seven years since Southern Baptist last trekked to Chicago for their annual meeting, over one and one-half million members have been added to our churches, and our total gifts to all causes have increased from \$200,000,000 to over \$372,000,000.

Apart from many other indications of progress which will be noted in the various reports to be made to this convention, we rejoice that we can assemble in an atmosphere where war clouds have somewhat lifted, where disturbing tensions have been eased in an encouraging degree, and when there are evidences that the world is on the verge of one of the greatest religious awakenings in history. These and many other manifestations of divine favor should quicken our determination as never before to do our deadlevel best to carry out the great world-girdling task committed to us.

In view of what Southern Baptists have set their hands to do during the decade through which we are now passing, plus the fact that two years of this period have already elapsed, I have chosen as our subject for these few minutes three words which the apostle wrote to the church at Corinth, recorded in 2 Corinthians 8:11, "Now Therefore Perform."

Southern Baptists, like the Corinthians, have indicated their willingness to join in a great and worthy undertaking. As it was in their case, so it is with us. The time for accelerated action has come, and God seems to be saying to us in unmistakable and clarion tones, "Now therefore perform."

The Task Before Us

This first implication of this theme is that the Corinthian church had been made aware of a dire need and that it was their particular responsibility and opportunity to meet it.

In the good providence of God we believe that Southern Baptists have been especially blessed, organized, trained, and equipped to meet a special kingdom need as never before. Ours is not a task of ministering to a comparatively small segment of humanity but a task which includes the whole wide world. It is not a task of providing material needs for a few but spiritual needs for all.

OUR WORLD IS LOST

Our world is lost, without God and without hope. History seems to be repeating itself in that paganism is running its course, and countless millions cry in desperation for a better way of life. Militarism, political treaties, Marshall Planning, and the best efforts of the wisest among us have not provided the answer to the yearning of human hearts. Even materialism is taking its place among man's fruitless efforts for peace. Bishop Kennedy, at a recent meeting of Methodist bishops in Los Angeles, said, "The resurgence of interest in religion in the United States is indicative of the fact that our people have found no satisfaction in materialism. God help us if all we have to offer them is a subnormal, watered-down type of Christianity."

Time and again men have committed the ultimate folly that has required divine intervention to forestall annihilation. Only God knows just how near we are now to this fatal abyss.

THE HOPE OF THIS LOST WORLD IS TO BE FOUND ONLY IN SPIRITUAL REGENERATION.

Jesus clearly enunciated this principle when he said to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." Man must be born again or he will die of his own knowledge. Unless the Holy Spirit of God can find an earthly habitat in the hearts of men, he has no way of directing their steps to the brighter day which our hearts long for. The one institution which towers o'er the wrecks of time is the New Testament church. The good news of salvation and the gospel blessings, vouchsafed to humanity through the church, constitutes our one and only hope.

THE CHURCH-BUILDING TASK THEREFORE IS OUR MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY

A New Testament church is the greatest medium on earth for the establishment of the kingdom of God. The Great Commission which Christ gave to those who constituted the nucleus of the early church is our commission still.

A few days ago as the accounting time drew near, familiarly known to us as the income tax deadline, a significant and interesting cartoon appeared in many of our daily papers. It was a picture of an elderly man wearing rather prominent horn-rimmed glasses. On the right eye was written, "April," on the left, "the 15th." The title underneath read, "The eyes of taxes are upon you." In an even more striking fashion I wish that I could deeply impress upon you the fact that the eyes of the world are upon Southern Baptists. They are longing eyes. Never before in the history of the world have so many people looked so longingly to Southern Baptists. Some are skeptical eyes because we who are called Christians bask in sunshine of luxury and leave them in distress. Others are expectant eyes which look to us for spiritual leadership. If we fail them their outlook is hopeless.

Shall we, whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Shall we to men benighted,
The lamp of life deny?
Salvation! Oh Salvation!
The joyful sound proclaim
Till earth's remotest nation,
Has learned Messiah's name.

The Challenge We Have Accepted

In view of this task, we have accepted the greatest challenge that has ever been presented to us. We are on the march, but the rank and file of our people have not yet grasped the magnitude of what we have undertaken.

For a few moments let us take a backward glance and check up on what we have gotten into, and what we are doing about it.

Two years ago in Miami, this Convention unanimously adopted the report of its Committee on World Evangelization, calling for the "all-out" mobilization of our resources for a total mission program to advance in foreign missions, on the home front, through state conventions, and through the local churches. Our boards, institutions, commissions, and committees are giving this great program of advance the central place in their planning.

Our observance of World Mission Year will soon be a matter of history. This observance is serving in a glorious fashion to acquaint our people with the greater task which lies before us. We are lifting up our eyes on the fields that are white already unto harvest.

Seeking to implement the convention's instruction with regard to "Advance on the home front," your Executive Committee has wrought well in joining hands with other Baptist bodies in a great continental movement known as the Baptist Jubilee Advance, a five-year program (1959-1964) designed to commemorate worthily the 150th Anniversary of the organization of Baptist work in America on a national level.

For the purpose of sponsoring the Southern Baptist Convention's part in this great program, it is contemplated that this convention will approve a recommendation from its Executive Committee that 25 of our most capable leaders constitute the Southern Baptist Convention's Jubilee Advance Committee.

Last year at Kansas City we accepted the challenge to double the number of our preaching and teaching stations by 1964. To better co-ordinate our total program of advance, it is being recommended that The 30,000 Committee, intact, be made a part of the Southern Baptist Convention's Jubilee Advance Committee.

As the various aspects of this great program were being considered, naturally the question arose concerning a great Baptist Jubilee Offering. The first suggestion of an "over and above" love offering of five hundred million dollars seemed unrealistic and beyond the range of our wildest imagination, but after months of prayerful consideration, pastors, state secretaries, Executive Committeemen, and others in a promotional conference, realized the wisdom of undergirding our total work through the Cooperative Program and adopted financial goals for 1957-1964, inclusive, which if reached, will provide approximately \$553,600,000 over and above our present level of giving.

In addition to the above mentioned not the least part of this tremendous challenge which we have accepted consists in providing spiritual leadership for the greatest advance in the history of Christianity.

I ask the question frankly, "Is the average Southern Baptist aware of the tremendous challenge which we have accepted?" We have apparently been willing to "Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God," but the crucial test which confronts us now is not in our readiness to will but in our willingness to perform—Now therefore Perform.

The Imperatives For Victory

In the light of the tremendous challenge which we have accepted, there are certain things which fall very definitely in the category of "musts" if we are to be victorious

1. *First of all, we must follow the gleam of divine guidance and rely upon the unlimited power of Almighty God.*—"Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, sayeth the Lord of Hosts," should be our constant watchword. He who "went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light; to go by day and night," will lead us in definite and unmistakable fashion if we will let him. What we have undertaken is impossible with men, but with God all things are possible.

In the first century Christianity met a pagan civilization and turned it upside down, or as we might say, right side up. Men are asking today, "Can Christianity do it again?" My answer is that the same God who took a dozen plain, ordinary fishermen, farmers, tax collectors, apostles of a crucified Messiah and saved and changed a civilization can do it again, and again, and again.

2. *Secondly, we must see the lost multitudes and feel afresh the impact of our Lord's command to win them.*—When Jesus saw the multitudes he suffered with them and sent forth men to give the "good news" to them. If we can see them and suffer with them, we, too, will swing into action.

Our preliminary survey committee reports that in 25 states and 15 cities, 19,170 places have been actually pinpointed where Baptist churches are sorely needed. The goals, already accepted by the states for the coming year, indicated that we can and will establish more than 10,000 churches by 1964. Incidentally, in so doing, I may say that I do not believe it is the policy of Southern Baptists to go anywhere as invaders. I want to say to all who love the Lord and lost souls, "Brethren, we want to be regarded as your allies, but where there are a large number of unsaved and unchurched people we feel compelled to go to the limit of our ability in getting the message of salvation to them. This is our commission and we have no other alternative."

My chief concern at present, however, is not that we may fail to organize 10,000 churches but the possibility of our overlooking literally millions of people where there is no immediate prospect of organizing a church. If we could see the multitudes and feel the heart throb of the Master for them, we would not wait until we could buy lots or build buildings; we would go to 20,000 other places and conduct services with no thought of organizing a church. Countless multitudes wait in penal institutions, homes for the aging, homes for the poor, homes for boys and girls, trailer camps, etc. These, too, are our responsibility, and we must carry the message to them.

3. *Again we must re-activate, re-organize, or bring up to full strength our churches, our associational and our state organizations.*—In the movement to establish 30,000 new churches and missions, no new or additional organization has been contemplated. We decided from the beginning that where a church, association, or state is properly organized, we have all the organization necessary to accomplish our purpose. But unless more effective organization can be realized in our states, in our 1,071 associations, and in our 30,824 churches we'll miss the opportunity of our lives to accomplish what God is calling us to do.

4. *In the fourth place, we must all get on the offensive.*—A business-as-usual philosophy simply will not get this job done. The resolution calling for the appointment of the Committee on World Evangelization was interlaced with words such as, "Appalling Crises"—"Time is incredibly short"—"Iron and Bambo Curtains"—"Step up the tempo", etc. Consequently we felt the imperative necessity of doubling our efforts as we spoke of the "adequacy of the gospel." We ought to feel it even more so now.

In suggesting the celebration of the Sesqui-centennial of the Triennial Convention we definitely meant to do something extra, something noteworthy, something big, as an expression of gratitude to God for his blessings upon our work across a period of 150 years.

With due respect, love, and appreciation for those who have dared to launch movements among us in the past, we have not forgotten that many of them have been extraordinarily difficult and have fallen far short of the goal. For example, following World War II, we launched a mighty effort to win a million souls to Christ in 1945, but sad and exceedingly disappointing was the final report which indicated that we had won not a million, not 500,000, not 50,000 but only a few thousand more than the average we had been winning from year to year.

We reported last year the organization of only 457 churches. If we do not take this program seriously and get on the offensive, we will wind up in 1964, 60 per cent short of our goal, and history may record concerning this effort that Southern Baptists had a readiness to will but were lacking in willingness to perform. With the acceptance of a goal of 2,537 new churches and missions for the coming year by our state organizations, however, we had reason to believe that our people are really going to get on the offensive.

5. *Finally, we must march together while maintaining faith in the ultimate triumph of our Lord's cause.*—In an undertaking of such magnitude a multiplicity of ideas and diverse opinions concerning programs, procedures, methods, etc., are to be expected. We are still in the experimental stage, but with the love of God in our hearts and the humble desire to do his will, the Holy Spirit, still the administrator in every New Testament church, will lead us through every difficulty.

Let us not be dismayed by those who fail to join wholeheartedly in this program, because the overwhelming majority of our people believe it is of God and that we have come to the kingdom for such a time and for such a task as this.

Let us not be afraid of bigness. We live in a big world; we live in a big country; we have been given a big task and we have a big God—one who has the whole world in his hands. So, with the sublime confidence of Paul, let us confront our world and say with him, "That is what I want, as far as my ability will carry me, to preach the gospel to you who live in Rome [Chicago, St. Louis, Denver, Los Angeles or New York] for I am not ashamed of the gospel, as it is the power of God working for the salvation of everyone who believes it."

Our task is clear. May God help us to grasp the magnitude and importance of what he has called us to do . . . and as there was a readiness to will, so may there be a performance also out of that which we have.

We shall then not be reservoirs of the manifold blessings of God poured into the life stream of our great denomination during these one hundred years past, but living channels through which the blessings of God's kingdom may reach to people at the end of the earth through all the centuries to come.