

For Release after 12:00 noon, Wednesday, June 4

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## President's Address: Good News For Today's World

By H. Franklin Paschall

News, good or bad, carries a tremendous impact. Fantastic sums of money and energy are spent every day by radio, television, newspapers, and magazines to gather news from all quarters of the world. People are more interested in news than in anything else. Communications media recognize this fact and give priority to news. Television programs in gorgeous colors and of dramatic appeal often are interrupted to let a black and white news release break through. When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, all network programs were interrupted for three days that the nation might see and hear this dreadful news in every detail.

There is an avalanche of bad news in the world today. The monster of war stalks across the earth with plans to camp in Vietnam for a while. The cost of the present war in terms of dollars and human life is mounting at a frightening rate. The bad news of war is exceeded by the bad news of the failure of military, political and diplomatic efforts to end the war.

Crime is on the rampage throughout the world. In our own country crime is increasing five or six times faster than the population growth. We have learned to walk safely in space but not on our streets. Recently on a Sunday evening at the LaGuardia Airport in New York City, I had to wait several minutes for a taxi. Finally when it came, the driver apologized for delaying me. Then he explained why I had to wait. He said that drivers had been robbed and murdered and that many were afraid to work at night. Drug addicts, mostly young people, committed these crimes because they knew that each driver was good for twenty to twenty-five dollars which was enough to buy more dope.

Not long ago a crime committee of the United States Government observed that the place where one is most likely to be murdered is in his own house, in his own bed at 4 o'clock in the morning. It would seem in these frightening times there is no place to hide.

Then there is the bad news of racial strife and hatred, rioting and looting, alcoholism and drug addiction, hunger and poverty, unemployment and injustice, inhumanity and indignity, sin and shame.

Furthermore bad news has invaded churches and denominations. Who can fail to see heartless and opportunistic professionalism, dominating and deadening institutionalism, cold and meaningless formalism, frantic and frustrating activism, hopeless and despairing existentialism.

There are many prophets of gloom and doom in our day. They say the churches have failed and that Christianity has no future. Recently, a Lutheran layman, Dr. Peter L. Borger, in an address at

Vanderbilt University, said that by the 21st century religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a world-wide secular culture. He said they would be treated like a Tibetan astrologer on a prolonged visit to an American university. "The astrologer will be treated very politely but listened to only as an eccentric, exotic diversion. For basic psychological reasons, if he stays any length of time, and particularly because he has been treated so kindly, he is going to believe that maybe the stars don't control reality after all." In an aside, Dr. Borger said the ecumenical movement is "simply price-fixing" among similar religious packagers competing for a shrinking market.

Bad news gets better coverage than good news. The impact of bad news tends to make people negative and pessimistic. There is an extreme negativism in our day which could destroy us. Evil is in the world and even in the church. Paul said, "When I would do good evil is present with me." But there is also the good. When Elijah was under the juniper tree thinking he was the only one left of God's true servants, God told him he was 7,000 times wrong. Jeremiah's extreme negativism almost caused him to lose his prophetic credentials. God commanded Jeremiah to repent or get out of the ministry. Today a pastor is in serious trouble when he gets a briar in his tongue and knows nothing, sees nothing, and preaches nothing but the negative. A husband and wife, even though they love each other and have much good between them, can destroy their home by constant nagging and nit-picking. Even so our nation and denomination, in which there is much good, can be destroyed by the pious mouthings of immature, frustrated and emotionally exhausted leaders.

Bad news is a reality. It will not go away by our ignoring it or pretending it does not exist. Let us face it honestly and confess that we as Christians have been responsible at least for some of the bad news in the world. It will be good for us to admit our mistakes, failures, sins and guilt. Only then can God help us out of our troubles. But let us refuse to be drowned in the sea of existential despair. We have good news for today's world.

The good news is that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. God and man meet in Jesus Christ, the Mediator, and by him the middle wall of partition separating man from God, and man from man, is broken down bringing peace. The world today desperately needs to hear this word of reconciling grace.

There is a great cry today to break out beyond the church to witness in the world. I have joined in this cry. But we must distinguish between breaking out beyond the church and breaking away from the church. The church is in the world but the world is not the church. The church and government are mutually helpful but government is not the church. The Holy Spirit came unto the church in order that He through the church may convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

And as we break out beyond ourselves we go with the gospel. Some have broken out beyond the church in order to minister in the world and have forgotten their responsibility and privilege to communicate the gospel to the poor and to all men. They feel that meeting the physical needs of man is the whole gospel, that social action is evangelism. Social action is good as the appropriate expression of the Christian faith and life and it may be an effective means to reach people for Christ but alone it is not evangelism. New Testament evangelism is the communication of God's good news in Jesus Christ—how He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, how He was buried and how He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures and how this gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes in Him.

So evangelism and ethics go together. It is mandatory that man be personally converted, changed and that this changed man work for righteousness and social progress in all of his relationships. We must not be so committed to social action as to think that personal conversion is unimportant. And we must not be so committed to personal conversion as to forget the importance of good works in the



Christian life and social action for the good of all people. Through the years Christians have greatly blessed mankind in such areas as social justice, education, hospitalization, and child care. It would be a tragedy for us to forget the gospel source of these and many other blessings. So let us draw inspiration from the past as we continue in the Christian ministry of meeting human needs today.

Our primary responsibility is to communicate the good news and our ultimate objective is to make people better. Our ministry is redemptive. Whatever we do or say should help man to know God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. We should be involved in many ministries but we have only one ministry—"this ministry" of reconciliation. God does not need to be reconciled (changed) but man does and he can be.

The good news we preach is the everlasting gospel. It is good news that never becomes bad news. It is good news that never becomes old news. No other news is like that. The discovery of America in 1492 was news then but not now. Today it is only a fact of history. The gospel is forever new.

The good news is unconditional. It is applicable to the rich and the poor, to the literate and the illiterate, to the well and to the sick. If it is not applicable to any one in any condition then it is not good news. We do not have to wait until the sinner is good before we preach the gospel to him. Likewise we do not have to wait until society is reformed by social action before we preach the gospel to the people. We must preach the everlasting gospel always beginning now.

The gospel is relevant to the problems of human relations. It says that God loves everyone; that He is concerned about all human beings; that He has a plan for every life; that everybody is somebody—more than an animal, a number, or a name—and that Christ tasted death for every man. The gospel gives dignity and worth to the individual. It can save him from loneliness, fear, frustration and hate.

When one believes in this gospel, he has a high view of man. The gospel is good news to me and about me and to you and about you. So if one takes seriously this good news concerning himself he must take it seriously concerning all others. How then can one believe in this gospel and hold any human being in contempt or seek evil for any man? Furthermore the gospel is good news for the world. The redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ is social and cosmic. The writer of Ephesians said that God will "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Ephesians 1:10).

Many of our critical problems today stem from the age old problem of racial enmity. The tragic events in recent days surely convince us of the frightening proportions of the race problem in our country. In Biblical times there was cruel enmity between Jews and gentiles, and between Jews and Samaritans. Hatred of the Jews has continued throughout history. Today there is enmity between whites and blacks.

Man is a social being and needs other people to make his life complete and yet he has not learned to live in peace with his neighbor. His history is marred by envy, strife and division. Human relations compound man's sins. What kind of a sinner would one be if he were the only human being in the world? The problem of human relations must be seen in all of its enormity and ugliness.

In the current racial conflict our problem is not primarily legal or economic but spiritual. Many inside and outside the church are recognizing this fact. Good laws make a significant contribution to man's welfare but they cannot solve his basic problem. Economic reforms should be applauded. Big business is helping greatly as it moves into the Watts Community and other troubled spots to pro-

vide employment for despairing people. But economic reforms cannot meet man's greatest need.

The basic problem is spiritual. There are ghettos of the mind and heart before there are ghettos in our cities. This inner darkness must be eliminated before there can be light.

A patronizing hand-out will not solve the problem of inner darkness. It demoralizes and degrades man when he is allowed or forced to live on charity. Every person needs to feel that he is somebody and that he is doing something worthwhile, that he is making a contribution to the world.

The inner darkness of despair, frustration and rebellion can be dispelled by the love of God as demonstrated and proved in the cross of Christ and lived out by Christians. The writer of Ephesians said, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity—; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

The enmity between the circumcision and the uncircumcision, between Jew and gentile, between white and black was slain on the cross. Christ is the only hope for the brotherhood of man, for peace among men.

Christians may differ on many subjects but they must agree that the enmity has been abolished in Christ. Christianity and racism are incompatible.

So, committed to this good news in Jesus Christ we can meet human needs where we find them and demonstrate convincingly that we genuinely love all men and respect them as persons under God.

The good news is relevant to the problems of the intellectual world where there are confusion and uncertainty. The knowledge explosion may be the most significant explosion of our time. The available information in the day of Jesus did not double until 1900. The available information of 1900 doubled by 1950. It doubled again by 1960. By 1966 it had doubled again. Books cannot be published fast enough and libraries cannot be enlarged quickly enough to compile and house the mounting data. The obviously inadequate memory recall system has given way to computers and other electronic devices. Radio and television has become a major factor in education and in shaping the lives of people. As Baptists we must make better and greater use of these media or lose a great God-given opportunity to communicate the gospel.

A mass of information has hit modern man and broken him. He is bemused and bewildered, fragmented and frustrated. Knowledge today is without organization or meaning.

Educators have recognized the need for some organizing principles and concepts. We have information without ideas and ideas are essential for meaning in the intellectual world.

Ours is an anti-intellectual age. We have made ideas secondary to appetites, passions, prejudices and habits. This persuasion gained momentum with Darwin if it did not begin with him. He recognized the validity of man's intellect but gave priority to physical prowess. He put instinct above intellect, passions above purity, might above morals.

Freud joined in the apostasy. He contended that man's actions are automatic responses to his unconscious or subconscious needs. To Freud life seemed to be more of an emotional fluttering than a rational action.

Existentialism also shares in the blame. It puts primary emphasis on the present. In doing so it tends to damn the past, deify the

present and deny the future. This philosophy has helped to produce the "now generation". The gospel promises something for now but not everything. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be", said John. The present is not all that matters for it is not total reality. My parents, my childhood, my early training, my boyhood church matter. I am a part of all I have met. And the future matters. I am linked inescapably with the past and with the future.

Modern man may think he needs a new car, a new house or some other gift of our affluent society, but his greatest need is a reason for his existence.

The gospel is the grandest idea ever to dawn on man's mind. It tells man that he came from God, that he was made in the image of God and that though ruined by sin he can be redeemed by the grace of God and receive forgiveness and begin a new life in Christ. The gospel as God's good news is concerned with man's past, present, and future. It has to do with his origin and destiny and it gives meaning to life in the midst of the "ambiguous present."

Margaret Mead writes of horizontal and vertical learning. She says horizontal learning consists of factual information that goes out of date and pleads for vertical learning which will magnetize the fragments of knowledge and polarize them into meaningful patterns.

The gospel is vertical learning. It is an organizing, integrating, magnetizing center without which life breaks up. The gospel gives meaning to life.

The gospel is relevant to the problems of sex. In America there is a frightening trend toward sex clubs, wife swapping, sex orgies, drug addiction and sexually deviated behavior. Many want free love and unlimited freedom in sexual gratification. They are seeking happiness. Dr. Eric Fromm, famed psychiatrist, in an article entitled "Our Way of Life Makes Us Miserable" said our sexual freedoms in no way contribute to a sense of "aliveness" or "richness of experience."

The gospel is good news concerning happy, abundant, interesting, meaningful life. Jesus came to earth not to make us miserable, but

to give happiness, blessedness. He said, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly."

Jesus offers forgiveness to those who have misused and abused their bodies and promises true happiness and freedom to those who will trust him. He said, "If the son shall make you free you shall be free indeed." It is not freedom without responsibility or love without law. It is freedom and love to fulfill the law of God. A wonderful thing about the man in Christ is that he delights in the law of God. His greatest pleasure is in pleasing God. Jesus said, "take my yoke upon you". There are disciplines, but he also said, "My yoke is easy" (it fits well). The Christian is really happy and free in Christ, following and obeying him.

The gospel is relevant to the problems of nuclear power. The atomic explosion is an awesome thing. It has struck all nations with fear. There is a very real possibility that man may turn nuclear power into the destruction of the human race. The whole world could blow up any time. For several years the United States and Russia have had the nuclear capability of mass suicide and murder. Red China now has the bomb. In a few more years other nations will have it. The question is not, "Do we have the power to destroy ourselves?" but "Will we use it to destroy ourselves?" Do the people of the world have the character not to use nuclear power for wholesale destruction? At this point it seems that this character is lacking.

The gospel is the answer. All of man's problems are not solved instantaneously and automatically when he believes the good news, but his basic problem of sin is solved and he can go on from there to solve other problems. There is much more hope of eliminating enmity between races in areas where the gospel is taken seriously. It is imperative that we proclaim and live this gospel with confidence and hope. If the time ever comes when the gospel inspires the world's thinking and mobilizes the world's power, a new day of peace with justice will dawn for all men. If such a day does not come and the judgment of God falls on us and we die, the gospel is still relevant. We shall all die one way or another, sooner or later. The gospel is our only hope for light and life here and hereafter.