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THE BAPTIST HOUR

Text: Matthew 28:20

Only a while ago I had a private interview with a Christian statesman, evangelist and scholar who has been around the world more than once and who is known wherever Christianity is preached. I asked him what he thought of the outlook for the vital truths of the gospel. He replied: "That rests largely in the hands of Southern Baptists. If they remain true, the outlook is glorious, if they give up the fight is practically lost." More recently a Southern Methodist Bishop remarked to a company of his denominational leaders gathered in our Nation's Capitol City, that the only people on the earth who could stem the tide of present day tendencies were Southern Baptists; "because," said he, "all the rest of us have compromised ourselves in one way or another." A bishop of the Episcopal church said in San Antonio not long ago that there should only be three denominations in this country, namely, Roman Catholics, Baptists, and a union of all the others in between; "because the difference between them are only as tweedledee and tweedledum." Dr. James M. Gray, Dean of the Moody Bible Institute says in a current issue of the Christian Worker's Magazine, "I am not a Baptist but I am here to say that the insistent testimony of courageous Baptists to the holy ordinance which gives them their name has been a potent factor in restraining the apostasy of the church to this day. What if it had been successfully frowned upon by an inter-church movement?"

None of these distinguished and honored brethren are Baptists, but they themselves being witnesses, we Baptist people stand today at the most crucial

and responsible moment of our history. Others having given this great testimony, we ourselves shall certainly be pardoned for emphasizing among ourselves our tasks and opportunities.

For this purpose I have chosen for my text the Saviour's good promise in the great commission as given by Matthew, "Lo I am with you alway."

We have arrived at the moment in our history for which our forefathers toiled and sacrificed and prayed; for which they suffered and bled and died. The Baptist hour of all the centuries has sounded. To waver now would be traitorous; to give up here would be a crime against all the martyred blood of the heroes of the past. Napoleon once said, "Conquest has made me what I am and conquest must sustain me." The conquest of ideas is the triumph of Baptists and further conquests must sustain these victories already won.

We have seen in the tragic and trying times through which we have just passed the utter failure of imperialism; we have seen the total collapse of militarism; and we have seen furthermore the absolute failure of mere intellectualism, divested of the Christian redemptive principles, in its efforts to bear humanity onward to its highest hopes. And what is more we have seen extra church organizations calling themselves Christian fall down at the most vital and fundamental point, namely, religious.

But in the midst of this wreckage, we see the Chrystal Christ standing unchanged and unchangable. Symbolized by many a cross at the battle front which stood untouched by shot or shell amid the desolation and destruction of war's relentless guns, there He stands declaring "Lo I am with you alway."

"In the cross of Christ I glory
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime."

And the churches to which He promised His personal presence likewise stand undaunted, unmarred and unscarred. Now if the churches fail to whom shall hungry hearted humanity go for the words of eternal life?

Two ideas have been in mortal conflict, one of them is the materialistic philosophy of life and the material view of living as represented by German Kultur and the other is the spiritual philosophy of life and the spiritual view of living represented by the highest type of Christian culture expressed in this text of such tremendous spiritual import, "Lo, I am with you alway."

One of these ideas says that nothing is real nor vital nor valuable which cannot be touched with the hands of flesh or seen with the eyes of flesh. The other says that the most potential realities of life are those which are to be seen only with the eyes of faith; realized only by a heart of hope; and experienced only in a soul of love. It has been a contest as to whether or not the proud child of Corsica representative of militarized materialism should rule or whether the humble Man of Galilee. At this present it seems that the latter has won and a holy idealism has triumphed. The New Testament democratic ideas prevail, in part at least, and personal and political freedom is the heritage of the world. But unless democracy has as her handmaiden a spiritual religion which demands first of all personal regeneration of each individual it is a question whether the political victory will be a blessing or a curse. If the tyranny of autocracy is to be supplanted by a more terrible tyranny of mobocracy, then we have lost.

There will never be a perfectly successful democracy until each democrat is an aristocrat, born from above with royal blood from heaven's highest in his heart. At exactly this point is the imperativeness of the Baptist message for this day, "Ye must be born again."

Jesus Christ was the world's wisest teacher and never did He more exemplify heavenly wisdom than when He established the world's first and purest democracy in the form of His church and at the same time required that its members should consist only of regenerated individuals. Personal political freedom apart from personal spiritual religion as the life's motive power, is a dangerous weapon in the hands of bad men. Democracy can only be made safe for the world by its experience of Christ's imperative, "Ye must be born again." This may be trite but it is true; it may be platitudinous but it is altitudinous. Herein is the imperativeness of the great commission from which the text is taken.

This text is the fourth "all" of the Great Commission and the realization of this "Lo I am with you alway" is conditional upon the previous three "alls," namely, "all authority," "all things," and "all nations."

That is to say: we are conscious of the presence of a powerful personality with us when we recognize the supreme authority of Christ. We realize the tenderness of a personal friendship when we are loyal in teaching "all things," and we enjoy the comfort of a loving companion when we go to "all nations."

We have in this text;

THE INSPIRATION OF A DYNAMIC PERSONALITY;
THE INTIMACY OF A TENDER FRIENDSHIP;
THE COMFORT OF A LOVING COMPANION.

1. By all that Christ is in His Holy character; by all that He did in sublime sacrifice; by all that he is doing in human redemption He is supremely authoritative. The Lordship of Jesus Christ was the highest note of Peter at Pentacost and the deepest basso of Paul in Athens.

"We must obey God rather than man" was their unswerving answer; therefore could they proclaim the truthfulness of Christ's promise, "Lo I am with you"

and say: "there stood by me this night the angel of God whose I am and whom I serve."

For the authoritative voice of Christ sounding above that of priests and prelates, councils or consistories, kings or governments, our people have always stood although for this stand they have been hunted and hounded to their death.

It looks now as though we must fight out again in these days the same battle. We Baptists are again called upon to bear testimony to our faith in the Lordship of Jesus. As great and powerful a government as our own gives heed to the voice of those who have always been the enemies of free religion, of a free church and of a free state and issues a mandate that all except Catholic priests and uniformed unionizers shall be denied the privileges of administering religion to the four million soldiers of a free republic.

The very Constitution of our Government guarantees freedom of religion to all peoples and yet an official spokesman of the government said: "It is our purpose to break down denominationalism as far as possible."

Are we going to waver and yield and capitulate and thus forfeit a claim to Christ's inspiring presence or shall we stand again for freedom of conscience and the right to worship as conscience enlightened by the Scriptures dictates?

There come times in the life of individuals, denominations and nations, when they must decide whether to go with the multitude to do evil or whether they shall stand alone for the right. Such a time now faces our people. Shall we go with the federated throngs of the day by compromising our spiritual message and adopting a half materialistic philosophy, or shall we stand alone for the absolute and supreme Lordship of Jesus Christ in the sustaining truth that He is fulfilling His promise, "Lo I am with you alway"?

For my part I prefer the assurance of Christ's presence to the approval of all unholy combinations of church and state, and under the inspiring consciousness of that dynamic presence we shall undertake any task and conquer any foe.

On one occasion General Wellington ordered one of his officers to take a certain objective. The officer cringed and cowed before the task. But looking up into the general's face said: "Sir, if you will give me one of your hearty handshakes I will do it," and with the thrill of that handshake stirring his blood he did do it:

"There are days so dark that I seek in vain
For the face of my Friend Divine;
But tho' darkness hide,
He is there to guide
By the touch of His hand on mine.

"Oh, the touch of his hand on mine!
Oh, the touch of his hand on mine!
There is grace and power in the trying hour,
By the touch of His hand on mine."

It is said that Napoleon's personality was so vibrant that just his presence would stir his soldiers to the wildest enthusiasm. Passing through the hospitals among the sick and wounded he radiated such influence that they would leap from their beds; some of them standing on the one foot left them, and asking for the privilege of fighting again for their emperor. In a much higher and holier sense the presence of Christ will inspire the soldiers of the cross to heroic and self-sacrificing service such as nothing else will do.

Garibaldi was addressing a band of Italian patriots during the days when their liberties were at stake. He said to them: "Comrades and countrymen; I have no lands to offer you, I offer you no home, I cannot guarantee you food or health or clothing; all I can offer you is long marches, dusty roads, sweltering sunshine; I offer you hunger and sickness and wounds and disease and death; but

if you love your country better than you love your life follow me." They followed him and Italy became free.

So says our Lord: "I come not to offer peace but a sword, not flowery beds of ease but a thorny path and suffering; but if you will put me first I will stand by you all the way and the whole world shall be free."

2. The text presents the Tenderness of an Intimate Friendship. He is "a friend who sticketh closer than a brother" who promises upon condition of faithfulness in teaching "all things," "Lo I am with you always."

The world has never seen a day when the whole rounded gospel was so much needed nor when it had the chance that it has now. At the same time it was never so imperiled, not by persecution but by a sickly, inveterate, sentimentalism.

The gospel of the grace of God; salvation by faith in Christ alone; the blood that cleanses from all sin; regeneration by the Holy Ghost; the equality of all believers; believer's baptism; a church spiritual in character, democratic in constitution, and serviceable in conduct; all these are vital and imperative truths among the "all things" commanded by our Lord which we cannot upon any consideration, sacrifice or compromise. Moreover, they give heart and hope to hungry humanity everywhere and have an access unequalled in any day since Jesus declared them.

But in spite of this we are told by some that it is not faith but food that counts; not cleansing but clothes, not blood but boots. The spiritual religion of Jesus would be abandoned for the material philosophy of Nietzsche. They would neutralize and naturalize the gospel by grafting it on to the native life of the pagan, calling their product "indigenous Christianity."

In this, the Roman Catholic process of past centuries is followed to the letter and we would have over again, what Rome has produced in Mexico, and other countries, where forms of godliness without the power thereof have been grafted on to heathen customs and where only a paganized Christianity is the result.

What China and Japan and Russia and all the rest of the world needs is not some little idea of the gospel grafted on to their already established systems; but it is the whole gospel, vitally and vigorously grown into their whole life with all of its transforming and uplifting power given a chance to work.

To organize by unionizing is more popular now than to agonize, and to federalize is said to be more important than to evangelize. Christ's evangelical message would be laughed out of court on the ground that to call a man to personal salvation is an appeal to gross selfishness. The all things that Jesus commended to be taught must be given up for all things that just anybody wants to believe. Nothing must be stated with certainty or assurance. Everybody must be willing to give up anything or everything for the sake of nothing. Surely the testing hour of all the centuries for our people has arrived.

Those who would promulgate such a program seem utterly ignorant of the fact that in so doing they play down and devitalize all religion. Once create the notion that one has no distinct message nor special mission and you have destroyed all motive to serve and sacrifice. A conquering missionary program will never be put afield by benumbed consciences or lolling laxity on the great truths of the Scriptures. We will not win by surrendering certain definite ideas but by contending for them the more. If they be true why should we wish to surrender them, if untrue why not give them up without seeking compromise? One who tries to stand for

everything in general and nothing in particular will find himself doomed to non-entity.

Again I ask, shall we go with the multitude for the sake of sentiment or shall we stand in conscience clear and conviction unwavering for the Christ of Calvary.

For my part, I choose the latter alternative. The world shall not crucify our convictions upon a cross of unionism nor will we sell our principles for thirty pieces of popular praise. Let the unionists go on with their program if they will, let us go on with ours. We have a great work, why should we leave it to go down to them? Unionism at any price, like peace at any price, is not worth its cost and there are some things worse than war. Unionism at the cost of character or the price of principle comes too dear.

Besides all this; mechanical union without spiritual unity is a hypocritical farce.

It is moreover, strikingly significant that the two denominations which have piddled away the most time with the union movement are those which have lost the most; one reporting in two years a loss of 150,000 members and the other reporting this year a large deficit in their missionary offerings. While on the other hand Southern Baptists who have thus far kept their skirts clear from all entangling alliances, have gone forward by leaps and bounds until their membership is now the largest of any in the South and their mission offerings have passed the million dollar mark for each of the general boards. Surely the Saviour has kept His promise, "Lo I am with you alway."

3. The Comfort of a Loving Companion is assured to those who go to the "all nations." All sense of sacrifice, loss and homesickness upon the part of

those who go is atoned for in the conscious nearness of Jesus who is alongside to help.

Missionary opportunities unparalleled in twenty centuries of Christian history stand before us today with doors wide open and with an insistent invitation to come in. It was never so glorious a thing to be a Christian and a Baptist as it is just now. This is indeed an age on ages telling and to be living is literally sublime. It were better to live the next ten years than to have lived any fifty years of past history.

Revolution torn Russia is an outstanding challenge of Baptist missionary opportunity. Three things make it so. They are white people whose mental constitution and native elements are more responsive to a spiritual religion than others. They are not wholly without a knowledge of God as the pagans are. They present the same sort of opportunity that Paul found among the synagogue Gentiles who already had the substance, into which the seed of gospel truth could be planted at once. And thirdly they have been suddenly set free from political tyranny. They are revolting also against spiritual tyranny. So the proclamation of a free religion for a free church in a free state will find ready response.

Middle Europe with 80,000,000 Poles, Slovaks and Slaves, descendants of such as John Huss and Jerome of Prague, high strung and emotional, look to America as their godfather and would receive with gratitude the American message of freedom of conscience, which is our fundamental Baptist message.

France has seen a new light from America in addition to our traditional friendship. The French people, not those of the Parisian boulevards, but those of the country places, villages and small towns have seen and admired our clean and brave soldiers and have said that if these be the product of a non-Catholic country surely a free religion is not so bad and we should like to know more about it.

Furthermore, they know of the relationship between the head of their church and the Austrian enemy and in indignation declared they would be done with "the Church." Thirty millions of them are said to have turned, in disgust, away from Catholicism to unbelief and agnosticism. Pastor Blocher of the Lille Street Baptist Church, Paris, said to me in deep emotion that ten years of aggressive spiritual work by colporters and missionaries, preachers and Christian workers would save his beloved France.

I have mentioned only these fields where, at the present we have no work, in order to say, that our greatest need at home is the inspiration of a new appeal and the challenge of a new opportunity which will hearten and help in the old places. "An attack is the best defense" was the principle upon which Marshal Foch operated. When he was called from the command of the 20th French Army at Nancy to head the 9th Army on the Marne for the defense of Paris he found a distressingly discouraging situation. The French were in wild retreat from the onslaught of the pick of the Prussian guard under Von Buelow. He took charge and his forces continued to back up until they reached the Aube. There the command was given that the army must allow itself to be slain where it stood rather than retreat further. It was at this time, September, 1914, that he sent his famous message to general headquarters, "My right has given away, my center wavers, the situation is excellent, I shall attack." This spirit and the attack saved Paris. In this same spirit he assumed the allied command four years later and in that same spirit our American soldiers at his word hurled themselves against the Hun at Chateau Thiery and San Mihiel and in the Argonne Woods and saved civilization.

We will save our Baptist principles and ourselves not by whining and fretting over the impending dangers and difficulties but by a vigorous and aggressive attack

on a colossal scale. A stupendous program of didactic evangelism at home and of missionary propaganda abroad is the only thing that will meet the systematic and organized attack from without.

Jesus said, "all nations" and we Baptists of all people will sin against twenty centuries of preparation for this hour if we think or plan or pray in any smaller forms. A beautiful Syriac rendering of Isaiah 9;7 is "and of his empire there shall be no frontier." To allow ourselves to be shoved into a corner and limited in our operations would be to acknowledge a human authority superior to that of Christ and would forfeit our claim to His companionship. If the partitioning of territory means the confinement of Baptists to certain prescribed areas then we protest with all our souls. If it means that others will leave us alone to work out our own program unhindered then we shall rejoice.

Twenty million allied and associated soldiers have been fighting on the world's battlefield and a thousand million people have been backing them up in that fight for what Prime Minister Loyd George said, have always been Baptist principles. These principles have become popular throughout the whole world, even the enemy acknowledging them to be proper.

For us to withhold now the spiritual interpretation and application of these principles would be worse than stupidity, it would be crime. Our Baptist forces are reported to have multiplied 8000 per cent during the past 125 years. They should grow 10,000 per cent the next ten years. And nothing but a spirit of inertia or a craven cowardice or a cringing compromise can prevent them from doing it.

Our nation's soldiers fought and won, because, as President Wilson said, they knew for what they were fighting. They may not have been able to state the principles in clear terms but when they heard them clearly stated they unhesitatingly

gave hearty and unanimous assent. Those brave boys of ours counted not their lives dear unto themselves and went not out on a picnic frolic nor summer excursion; but went as holy crusaders in a noble cause loving the principles for which they fought better than life itself. Going thus, victory was bound to come. So shall the soldiers of the cross win when with a conviction deeper than the streams of life they shall see the need for their principles to prevail throughout the world and shall be willing to put all upon the altar that they may win. But we will never win upon a pink tea policy nor a picnic program. The cross is still Christianity's undying symbol, and by that alone we shall conquer. A bloodless gospel is a powerless gospel and there will be no blessing where there is no bleeding.

But in the closing moment of this hour let us hold our minds upon the one thought of the graciousness of Christ's holy presence experienced and enjoyed as a spiritual fact and force, in contrast to a gross and crass materialism, and in proportion to our loyalty to His "all authority," His "all things," and His "all nations."

In the midst of shot and shell on bloody battlefield I tried to be both father and mother to the wounded and dying. I found one thing and one alone of supreme and inestimable value in those tragic moments; that was the consciousness of a divine and holy presence. I shall remember to life's last breath the beautiful face of a noble nineteen year old boy who was dying from gas on the Metz front. I knelt down by him and asked him what I could do. "Nothing, sir, except pray for my poor mother," he said. He was his mother's only child and all he wished in this moment was that she might be with him. I sought to comfort him by asking if he knew Jesus and if he remembered how Jesus had promised to be with him all the way. He replied that when he was 13 he and Jesus had become fast friends and that

he realized just then as never before how near and precious the Saviour was. Then he opened wide his large, soft brown eyes and looking clear into my own soul said "Oh, sir, if He were not here I could not die like this." Then his soul went away and we put his body in a crude box and consigned it to the sacred soil of France.

A soldier writing out of the deepest experience of the trenches has put it thus:

"As we ebbed with the battle tide,
Fingers of red hot steel
Suddenly closed on my side.
I fell and began to pray

* * * *

In torture I prayed for the dark
And the stealthy step of my friend
Who, staunch to the very end,
Would creep to the danger zone
And offer his life as a mark
To save my own.

* * * *

Then in the bursting shell's dimmed light
I saw He was clad in white.
For a moment I thought that I saw the smock
Of a shepherd in search of his flock.
Alert were the enemy, too,
And their bullets flew
Straight at a mark no bullet could fail;
For the seeker was tall and His robe was bright;
But He did not fear nor quail.
Instead, with unhurrying strides
He came,
And gathering my tall frame,
Like a child, in His arms.

* * * *

Again I swooned,
And awoke
From a blissful dream
In a cave by a stream.
My silent Comrade had bound my side.
No pain now was mine, but a wish that I spoke,--
A mastering wish to serve this Man
Who had ventured through hell my doom to revoke
As only the truest of comrades can.
I begged him to tell me how best I might aid Him,
And urgently prayed Him
Never to leave me, whatever betide:

When I saw He was hurt--
 Shot through the hands that were clasped in prayer!
 Then, as the dark drops gathered there
 And fell in the dirt,
 The wounds of my friend
 Seemed to me such as no man might bear.
 Those bullet holes in the patient hand
 Seemed to transcend
 All horrors that ever the war-drenched lands
 Had known or would know to the mad world's end. "

In this, the Baptist missionary hour of all the centuries, the Lord help us
 to be big enough for His "all nations"; true enough to His "all things"; and loyal
 enough to His "all authority" to merit the fulfillment of His all sufficient promise,
 "Lo I am with you alway. "