

✓ Bassett, 1927

THE LURE OF A LOST WORLD

Sermon Preached before the Southern Baptist Convention Meeting in
Louisville, Ky., May 4, 1927.

By
Wallace Bassett, Pastor
CLIFF TEMPLE BAPTIST CHURCH, DALLAS, TEXAS.

Acts 16:9: "Come over into Macedonia and help".

I think the greatest day in the history of the Christian religion since Pentecost was the day Saul of Tarsus was converted, for this event took from the ranks of the enemy one of the most gifted and earnest of men and added him to the forces pledged to carry out the Great Commission of our Lord. The next greatest day in Christian history was the day Paul decided to carry the gospel to the peoples of Europe. Many ships have sailed many seas and made history by their voyages. Ships of exploration have sailed in all the waters of the world, bringing whole continents of land to light, until there is no more land to discover. Ships of colonization have carried settlers to these new lands, and these settlers have proven in many places to be the nucleus of great nations. Battleships have gone from shore to shore, and by their voyages have had much to do with determining the history of the world. Ships of commerce from the day of the early Phoenicians until the present day have gone out in search of trade and added greatly to the wealth of mankind. No one can estimate the influence of such voyages on the history of the human race. But one of the most significant of voyages, as far as later history was concerned, was the one of our text, when a little nameless vessel that loosed from Asia at Troas landed in Europe after two days, not far from the city of Philippi. It was the unheralded beginning of the most significant movement that ever touched Europe. Little heed was paid the missionaries as they hurriedly left Asia, and no special demonstration marked their landing at the coast city of Neapolis; but they carried in their hearts and heads that which was destined to turn the world upside down.

Paul had not included any parts of Europe in his missionary itinerary when he started this, his second journey. By a series of permissions and prohibitions the Holy Spirit had made a funnel of circumstances which brought Paul to a standstill at

Troas, where he was to wait for further light. God has often, by the discipline of closed doors, brought us face to face with new opportunities. While waiting for instructions in this historic city - where once stood ancient Troy, where once stood Alexander the Great at the tomb of Achilles and determined to conquer the world; where Caesar hoped to have his capital after he had conquered the world - while waiting here, I say, another man joined the party. Up to this time the author of the book of Acts had referred to the missionaries as "they". From now on he refers to them as "we". Where did he hail from and who is he? From where he comes we do not know; but we do know that he is Luke, the beloved physician. Is it unreasonable to suppose that Luke, loving his own people, the Greeks, tried to interest Paul in that section of the world, which held the majority of these people? I think these two - this Jew and Greek - must have talked about going to Europe. They must have discussed the great needs of Europe for the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. They must have talked about how Europe would help in the spread of the glad tidings. As a flowing river takes on the color of the soil through which it flows, so would the gospel message receive new impetus from the virile people of Europe. The ancient head-hunters of Boreno believed that every man conquered added his strength to the one conquering him. So Europe would add much to the forces of the new religion when she is conquered by it. For:

"Out of the east they have always come, the cradle that saw the birth
Of all the heart-warm hopes of man, and all the hopes of earth-
For our of the east arose a Christ, and out of the east has gleamed
The dearest dream and the clearest dream that ever a prophet dreamed.

And into the waiting west they go with the dreamchild of the east,
And find the hopes that they dreamed of old, a hundred-fold increased,
For there in the east they dream their dreams, of the things they hope to do,
And here in the west, the crimson west, the dreams of the east come true."

Whether Paul and Luke talked a bout preaching the Gospel in Europe is a matter of speculation; but we do know that in his sleeping moments that memorable night in

Troas he saw a man of Europe urging him to come over and help. A new day for Europe! A new day for the world! A new day for Christianity itself; for, praise God, He heeded the call and went.

When Europe made this call, I think she made a great confession. She seemed to say, "I need help, and such help as I can not supply with what I now possess. My armies, the most skillful the world has ever seen, led by such generals as Caesar, Mark Anthony, and Alexander the Great, cannot supply this need. My poets, whose melodious singing will yet be heard for centuries; my Homer, my Hesiod and my Aeschylus can not meet this need. My oratory, to be admired by coming generations; my Demosthenes and my Cicero, cannot meet this need. My art, the model and despair of all coming artists, my Myron and my Phidias cannot supply this need. My philosophy, with such names as Socrates, Plato, Zeno, Epicurus and Aristotle, cannot meet this need. My civilization with all these things rushing to a swift and sure decay." I do not think that Europe was conscious of these needs, or of her helplessness. The man in Paul's dream was the expression of the unconscious needs, rather than the conscious wants of the people of Europe.

Any godless civilization has this need whether it recognizes it or not. The confession of Europe in the first century should be the confession of America in the twentieth century. Material progress, large armies and navies, or great commercial strength can not meet the needs of America today. One of your own fellow townsmen, Henry Watterson, thinking of America, said in one of his famous Christmas editorials, that the future was indeed black; but that there was one hope and one only. This hope, he said, was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Our own moral let-down can be remedied in no other way. Neither godless education, nor perfunctory legislation will ever take the place of the principles of Jesus applied to human hearts, lives and institutions. Mere democracy is no panacea for the ills of the world. Great evils can flourish in a democracy as flagrantly as in other forms of government. It takes Jesus and His great saving power to meet our needs. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Who was this man of Macedonia? Some have said that Paul must have been disappointed, as he never met this man. O yes, he did. I think he met him many times in Europe. It was the call of the human heart for Christ, and I think Paul met this man every time he met a need the gospel could supply.

I think he met him in the streets of Athens. As Paul waited in Athens, waited only in body, for his mind kept busy, he saw an altar with this inscription, "To the unknown God." Paul must have said in his heart, "Here is my man in the dream; for how can I better help than by declaring to them the God they ignorantly worship?" He stood on Mars Hill and addressed the people gathered about him. "Ye men of Athens," this is the way Demosthenes began his orations. But the great Athenian never delivered a message of such significance as the one about to fall from the lips of the great apostle. "Ye men of Athens, this God you worship and do not know, I know, and desire to declare to you. Your hearts have been crying, 'Oh, that I might know where I might find Him.' But man by searching can not find out God. If men, by searching could have found Him, you would have been the first to know Him; for your chief occupation has always been searching. I have learned in one moment of revelation what your great searchers have failed to learn in centuries of searching. This I have learned, that he that hath known Jesus Christ hath known the Father. I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. The very fact that you worship a God whom you do not know is proof that there is a God whom you can know."

This world has many and various needs; but its greatest need is to know God. We need to know Him in every phase of our complex life. We need to know Him in the world of learning. Many years ago when the young men stood about a famous teacher of Princeton, who was about to make an experiment in the laboratory, the teacher said, "Hats off, gentlemen. we are about to ask God a question." We need to have God at the very center of our learning or it will be sounding brass and tinkling symbal. Cortland Myers says that more than fifty years ago a memorable dinner was held in London. Men of world fame were there. Dean Stanley presided. He proposed

for discussion. "Who will dominate the future?" Professor Huxley spoke first and concluded by saying, "That nation will dominate the future which sticks most closely to facts." Of course, he was speaking for the dominance of physical science. Mr. Edward Miall was then called on to speak and this is what he said, "I have been listening to the last speaker with profound interest, and agree with him that the future will be dominated by the nation that sticks most closely to the facts; but I would like to add one word, ALL the facts. The greatest fact is history is God." Lord Kelvin said to the British Association when the learned men were trying to explain some theories, "Gentlemen, you need God to explain your theories."

We need God in our inner life. The need of God in our spiritual life is just as real as hunger and thirst are for the body. Dr. Snowden said, "We do not prove the existence of God and then believe in Him, but we first believe in Him, and then construct arguments to prove our beliefs in Him. Destroy intellectual arguments for God and we would believe in Him still." Other interests for a time may dim the interests of the soul; but the greatest and age-old concern of the human race is God.

Christianity's chief concern is to make God known. When John languished in prison, he sent messengers to Jesus to inquire if He were the one to come, or if another should be looked for. Christ sent back a list of his works which included making the deaf hear, the dumb to speak, the blind to see, the lame to walk, cleansing lepers and raising the dead. He climaxed His list by saying, "The poor have the gospel preached unto them." This last work of Christ was the most important of all, for what is preaching the gospel but the making of God known, as Paul knew Him through Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Our highest service is not to feed the hungry, or clothe the needy, though these things are good in their place. Regardless of how good it is to heal bodies, and erect schools of learning, the chief business of the Christian is to make God known. E. Stanley Jones in "The Christ of the Indian Road," tells how He was asked the question, how he could preach the gospel to India when what she needed most was bread. His answer was that while India needed bread, she needed Christ more, and that the way to make India free economically, socially and politically was to give her Christ.

As Dean Inge says, "Christ came not only to bring religion, but to be religion." Of all God's gifts to mankind, His greatest gift was the gift of Himself. Nothing can come before this. We believe in schools, in literature, in deliverance from tyranny, in social improvement; but all these must be the spontaneous outgrowth of something deeper and more radical - the life of the Holy Ghost in the souls of men. The tree must be planted before the fruits can be eaten.

I am very anxious not to be misunderstood here. I would have no one think I do not whole-heartedly endorse the erection and maintenance of our institutions of learning and healing, in both the homeland and on our mission fields. I can tell you in one sentence what I think is the matter with our schools. They have too much criticism and too little support. They are as necessary for the proper proclamation of the gospel as the road is necessary to reach the city into which it extends. What I am saying is, let us not stop in the road, but go on to the city; and make sure the road goes into the city. Let us not mistake the means toward the end for the end itself. The purpose of all our institutions is to put us in a better position to make God known; and they are valuable or worthless in proportion as they do this main thing for which they have been founded. This old world is saying, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." We must be ready with the word of life, with home and church, with school and hospital to answer, "He that hath seen Jesus Christ hath seen the Father."

Again, I think Paul met this man of the dream when he saw the needs of the social life of Europe. He saw evil rampant everywhere. He saw conditions existing in Philippi that permitted covetous men to capitalize the insanity of a poor demented slave girl. There was nothing in Roman society that interfered with this nefarious business. No guilds of Roman matrons were organized to rid the streets of such disgusting sights. Little has a godless civilization at any time cared for human beings. Through all the ages, "man's inhumanity to man has made countless millions mourn"; but not until the Christ of mercy lived and taught, was any serious effort put forth to do away with this inhumanity. Pagan civilization then, as now, cared little for human beings. There were no hospitals for the incurables in the days

of "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome". This message of Paul in Europe touched every phase of life as lived by the people. As he gave right conceptions of God, he voiced protest against the wrongs of man. The impact of the Christian ideals upon a situation will always create a conscience in regard to the wrongs in that situation. As Bishop McConnell said, "If we could get men to a nobler idea of God, a nobler idea of man would follow." All the wrongs of the world, which have been outlawed, from the cruelty of the Roman arena to the debauchery of the liquor traffic, have met their doom by the proclamation of the Christian message. Henry Drummond said he would give up Christianity if any one could show him ten square miles of territory where the purity of a woman and the worth of a man were recognized without the sentiments of the Christian gospel. No social reconstruction can be abiding and permanently constructive except it be founded upon Christ and His truth. The only gospel that can stand the test is the one that works from the inside out, and not from the outside in. An artist fashioned a shield, and so engraved his name on it, that the name could not be removed without destroying the shield; so the betterment of the social order and Jesus. His name is stamped indelibly on worthwhile things in life.

The one remaining evil that has not yet been outlawed is war. It should have been done away with centuries ago, and would have been had the Christian ideal been accepted. War is suicide of love, and murderer of youth, and the most destructive, absurd and ruinous institution left in the world today. There is only one way to do away with it, and that is to evangelize the nations. International finance can not prevent war, nor can international labor organizations. Since war comes from the heart of man, it takes God's love in the heart to do away with it. You may disagree with what I am about to say, but as a gospel minister, I declare to you: I have blessed my last war. If we expend but a fraction of the money and effort to Christianize the world we put forth to win this last war, there will be no more war. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, especially when the proposed cure leaves multiplied germs of future trouble. Genuine Christianity will remove hate and curb ambition and these things removed will do away with war.

The most helpful thing we can do for any one, here or elsewhere, is to bring him to a saving faith in Christ. A few years ago in the city of Indianapolis, a young man was struggling with the matter of salvation. A prominent layman heard about it and secured his address. He went to his boarding house, had a long talk with him, and ended his interview with a prayer. The young man surrendered to Jesus. This layman told his pastor that this was the most thrilling and worthwhile experience of his life. Who was this layman? It was Benjamin Harrison, ex-president of the United States. Robert E. Lee said in becoming president of a college in Virginia, "I shall be disappointed in taking the presidency of this school if these young men do not become real Christians." Well might such great men speak thus of such work, for it is the greatest work that ever engaged the attention of mankind.

When Robert Moffatt was asked to write in a young lady's album he wrote:

"My album is a savage breast,
Where tempests brood and shadows rest,
Without one ray of light;
To write the name of Jesus there,
And see that savage bow in prayer,
And point to worlds more bright and fair,
This is my soul's delight."

The reason Christianity succeeded so phenomenally in the first century was because faith in Jesus met the needs and all the needs of the human heart. This alone was able then, and only the same thing is able today to meet these needs. God is the same God today He was when He sent Paul with His message of healing to the western world. We have the same commission he had, and the same promise of the divine presence and power.

There are two great words in the missionary motive - the word "go", and the word, "come". The word "go" is the marching order of God in the Great Commission. The word "come" is the appeal of the needs of the world for the gospel message. The one word is back of us urging us on. The other is in front of us creating situations which must be met. Christianity had reached a crisis in its history when Paul received his vision to come over and help, but thank God there was a man to meet this crisis,

and a new day dawned. It seems to me we have come to a very similar day at the present time. We certainly have reached the place when the tide in the affairs of men must be taken at its flood. The world sits hungry, asking for the bread of life. Its lips are parched with thirst, begging for the water of life. It has tried to quench this thirst from other places and failed. World situations as well as individual needs make these demands upon us. Hundreds of our young people, prepared for their task, are begging us to send them. As a denomination we have come to the place where we must speak now, or else forever afterwards be crippled and embarrassed by holding our peace. Shall we go? There can be but one answer. Bright dreams must be interpreted in instant duty. It is God's to give the visions, and it is ours to translate them into tasks.

But how can we answer the call? I think the first step towards getting an answer is to see the need as urgent - so urgent as to be literally distressing. The call is for help, and it must get on our hearts as the cry of a drowning man. In the frozen regions of the north a city was threatened with scourge of diphtheria. There was not enough anti-toxin in that city to save its inhabitants from death. A distress cry, "Come help" was heard, and men with dog teams trudged through deep snow with unspeakable suffering to carry the needed remedy to the threatened city. A few miles south of this city a man's body was fastened in a narrow opening of a wave. They sent out the call and men from this city and other places rushed to the relief of the stricken man. A ship was sinking in mid-ocean, and the call broadcast for aid. Ships from every section of the ocean abandoned their charted courses and rushed with aid to the sinking vessel. We must see out mission fields in a similar way if we would rescue the perishing and care for the dying.

Not only would I have you see the distress, but I would have you see this work as one that demands cooperation to the last degree. The text says, "Immediately WE endeavor to go." It was a task for all. During the World War we tried to impress on the people that the task before our country was one for all the people, and not one for just the soldiers. We sang "Heek the Home Fires Burning" and Rupert Brooke

warned us not to break faith with those who died in Flanders Field. But have we seen this task of world evangelization as OUR task? Have we not already broken faith with those spiritually heroic souls we sent forth with our prayers and tears?

Again, we must not only see the need as distressing, and the task as our task, but we must be willing to pay the price. It cost Paul and Silas blood to answer this call to Europe; but they never complained. If we would have apostolic power, we must pay the apostolic price. American Christianity is clothed in fine linen and faring sumptuously every day while our mission work is begging for the crumbs that fall from our overloaded tables. Members of our churches intelligent above the average on many things, remain embarrassingly ignorant on our mission work; and, as has been said by another, "Men are usually down on what they are not up on." Watkinson tells of a lily-bound ship off the coast of South America. The growth of vegetation was so rapid in that climate, that during a few warm days the vessel became the center of a floating island of beautiful lilies. But the beauty was soon forgotten in the danger, for it was with great difficulty the ship was released. America is lily-bound with her gold and her pleasure; but if we fulfill our mission as a people we must pay the price. Our failure to do so will prove our doom. Like the bird that flies through the air there is no danger of falling down as long as it goes on; but go on it must or die.

"Can we whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Can we to men benighted
The Lamp of Life deny?
Salvation, O salvation,
The joyful sound proclaim,
Till earth's remotest station
Has learned Messiah's name!"

"God help us today to hear that call and go on-
Ye Christian heralds, go proclaim,
Salvation through Immanuel's name
To every land the tidings bear,
And plant the Rose of Sharon there."