

(The Challenge of Missions) 5. OUR TRUST

by A.B. Simpson

Transcript

"A dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me" (1 Cor. 9: 17). This is an age of specialists. Modern science and all our secular and industrial lines of activity are running more and more into particular departments and men are becoming experts not in some general branch of knowledge or industry, but in some particular detail. Medical science has its numerous subdivisions and specialists. The business world has its great financiers, its railroad kings, its mechanical experts, and the extraordinary progress of our time in material wealth and enterprise is chiefly due to the genius of these "Captains of Industry."

And so in Christian work the Lord gives "to every man his work" and each of us has some divine calling if we have but the discernment of the Spirit to recognize it and the faithfulness to fulfill it. Peter is the Apostle of the Dispersion; James of the Jews in Jerusalem; Paul of the Gentiles; Timothy and Priscilla are helpers in Christ Jesus; Athanasius is the champion of the divinity of Christ, and Augustine the father of the doctrine of grace. Wycliffe is commissioned to give the English Bible to his nation and Luther to restore the doctrines of the cross. Wesley is sent to teach a formal age the necessity of regeneration and Christian experience, and Calvin in a time when the Pope was usurping the throne of human consciences was raised up to impress upon the world the great doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. Pastor Blumhardt comes as the discoverer of the old doctrine of Divine Healing. George Muller teaches an unbelieving age to have faith in God, and Hudson Taylor summons a faithless church to the great pioneer work of giving the Gospel to the unevangelized nations. The Plymouth Brethren rise up as the exponents of justification and assurance of faith, and the blessed hope of the Lord's coming, and when they become too rigid and narrow and substitute a mere state for a living experience, the Holiness Movement is brought to the front to emphasize the indispensable necessity not only of our standing right with God, but our having all that we stand for made living, real and experimental in a purified heart and a victorious life. The Salvation Army is raised up by the great Head of the Church to emphasize the Gospel of Salvation for the poor and outcast, and the Alliance has its place and calling to lead the people of God farther on into all the heights and depths of the life of Christ and farther out into all the aggressive work which the children of God have so long neglected. We must not think of any of these men or movements as having a monopoly of truth or grace or service. It takes more than one color to make a rainbow, more than one finger to make a body, more than one feature to make a face, more than one saint or company of saints to make the whole body and bride of the Lamb. And so we must learn to recognize Christ in all His members and see the good in all the movements of His providence and grace without becoming bigoted or narrow in our exclusive attachment to any single one. At the same time along with this larger charity, we need to know the standard under which we fight, recognize "our own company," and be true to the special trust which God has assigned to us. While we belong to the army as a whole, we must belong still more to our own

regiment. While we cherish our common citizenship, yet we must still more value our own family circle and the hearthstone of our home.

What is the special calling of this work for which the present gathering stands? What is the trust committed to the Christian and Missionary Alliance? Briefly let us note a few of the things which this question suggests and then dwell particularly on the last.

OUR TRUST

1. This movement stands primarily as a witness to the supernatural, to the living God, to a religion which is wholly divine, a book which is wholly divine, a life that is wholly divine, and a church which is supernatural in its nature, power and ministry.

2. It stands for a living and indwelling Christ and the power of His resurrection to make and keep us holy, to heal our bodies, and to satisfy every need of our being.

3. It stands for the blessed hope of the Lord's coming as the goal of the Christian age and the remedy for all earth's wrongs.

4. It stands for emergency work in preparation for the Lord's coming, and especially the neglected work of the Church and the world today.

5. It stands particularly for the great work of world-wide evangelization. That was the dispensation particularly committed to Paul, and that is our supreme trust. Let us look at it in some of its special features.

1. It is the work of publishing the Gospel as a witness to all nations. This is something quite different from the ordinary idea of missions as an attempt to convert the world. We are not attempting to convert the world, for if we were we should fail as completely as the Church has failed to convert America, Great Britain or any so-called Christian land. The best we are doing in Great Britain and America is to give to all the people the opportunity of hearing the Gospel and succeed in bringing a small proportion of perhaps one in ten to really accept it with all their heart. It would be a great deal to say that one in ten of the millions of America are out-and-out followers of Jesus. And it is doubtful if any larger proportion of them are true Christians than a hundred years ago. We are making no progress in converting America. We are simply continuing to give them the offer of the Gospel, and some believe and some believe not, as in the days of old. Therefore, our mission in heathen lands is not to aim at their conversion as nations, but to endeavor to give to every one of their people the Gospel as a witness, that is, the offer and opportunity of eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a very different thing from attempting the conversion of whole communities and mighty nations. Our business is to evangelize them, to make known to them the way of salvation through the name of Jesus. This is a possible, reasonable, practicable proposition and in no way beyond the ability of the Christian Church today.

2. In the next place our aim is to publish this Gospel to the whole of the present generation. The generation that is gone and the generation that is coming are both beyond our reach. But a whole world of more than a thousand millions of people are living today and accessible to us today, and in a generation they will all be gone. This is our trust, our task, our high and holy calling for the Christians of this generation to give to the non-Christians of this generation the message of salvation and the chance of eternal life. This is a solemn trust. This is an urgent trust. This is an immediate responsibility.

They are passing, passing, fast away, A hundred thousand souls a day In Christless guilt and gloom. O Church of God, what wilt thou say, When in that awful judgment day They charge thee with their doom? 3. Still further our purpose and aim is to gather out of the nations of this world a "people for His name." As the New Testament explains the precise purpose of the Gospel ministry it is this: To reach the people of every race and clime who are to form the bride of the Lamb, and the one great millennial host who are to welcome Jesus at His coming and share with Him the dominion of the new age which His advent is to bring. The standpoint of this great missionary movement is what is known as pre-millennialism. That is to say, we do not expect the world to be transformed by the present forces at work even on Christian lines, but the same conditions of good and evil to go on together as the Lord has taught us in the parable of the tares and the fishing net, until the final separation when Jesus comes. There will still be the same mingled condition of good and evil, of saints and sinners, of light and darkness. Indeed, the evil will grow worse as the days go by and the good will grow better. The wheat will ripen for the garner of the Lord, and the vintage will ripen for the winepress of His wrath. The call of the Gospel is intended to feel after and find and gather out and bring to God the people of every race and clime who are to form that new redeemed race, who will share with Jesus Christ the dominion of the millennial earth. We know not who these people are. God only knows. But there are some of them in every land and of them the Lord is saying as He said to Paul of old, "I have much people in this place." He knows who they are and where they are, and sends us to seek and find them and bring them home. We are not discouraged, therefore, if multitudes refuse our message any more than Paul was discouraged because Agrippa, Felix and Nero refused to accept his message. We know that as many as are disposed to eternal life will believe and that when the last of this glorious company shall have been gathered home, the age will close and the Lord will come.

4. In thus gathering out this chosen people for the Lord we are primarily preparing for the Lord's return. This, and not the conversion of the world, is the one definite goal and glorious hope of the Christian age. We are not looking forward to a golden age;

"When the war drum throbs no longer, and the battle flag is furled In the parliament of nations and federation of the world." But we are looking for Him to come and bring His kingdom with Him and put down all authority and power and reign on earth a thousand years. And the Lord has told us when this shall come to pass, "When this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, then shall the end come." How very clear is our perspective. How very explicit are our marching orders. How very practical is our program. How inspiring and glorious is our outlook.

5. It aims to reach the most neglected fields, to avoid the beaten tracks of other laborers, to press on to the regions beyond and instead of building upon another man's foundation to preach the Gospel where Christ has not been named. Therefore, it has been our privilege and high honor to plant the Gospel in two of the unoccupied provinces of China, to carry it across the borders of neglected Tibet, to be the first witness for Christ in our Philippine field, to the dark Soudan and the down-trodden Congo, to have a mission field far removed from all competition by other workers and to have a field almost entirely our own in India, in Argentine, in Chile, and in Ecuador. Had this movement never gone forward there are many regions today shining in the light of the Gospel which would have still been in deepest heathen darkness. Where can you find in the homeland a field so inviting and a need so intensely moving?

II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE SHOULD MEET THIS TRUST. HOW VERY FINELY PAUL EXPRESSES THIS IN THE LAST VERSES OF THIS CHAPTER.

1. It is a spirit of solemn responsibility. "Necessity is laid on me, yea, woe be unto me if I preach not the Gospel." This great trust of missions is not an optional matter. It is an imperative obligation, and to neglect it is to bring upon us a dreadful woe. This alone is the true starting point for every missionary appeal. God is not addressing the sympathy and compassion of His people chiefly, but their consciences. The obligation to give the Gospel to the heathen world in the present generation is absolute and irresistible. Every Christian owes it as a debt of common honesty that he shall give at least to one of the present generation of Christless men and women one chance for eternal life. The woe Paul felt may not be felt by you, but it is none the less real. It is a very awful thing to neglect this trust and you cannot do it without bringing upon yourselves the displeasure and judgment of God. Multitudes have suffered that woe without knowing its cause. This is why perhaps your work has not been prospered, your children have not been saved, your church has not been blessed, your life has been a disappointment, because your hand is stained with the blood of souls and your ears are deaf to the cry of the perishing and the last commandment of your Lord.

2. A Willing Response. "If I do this thing willingly, I have a reward, but if not, necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." The obligation was the same whether he accepted it or not, but he joyfully accepted it and willingly gave up his life to fulfill a sacred trust. God counts duty doubly done when it is seconded by love. While He bids us to go He waits for us to volunteer. He loves the services of devoted hearts and surrendered hands. Shall He have our willing offerings, our yielded lives and our glad response, "Here am I, send me," "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God"?

3. A Spirit of Independence and Self-Sacrifice. Not only did Paul willingly respond to this call and take up this trust, but he went farther. He asked the privilege, as the highest proof of his love, to do it without charge and in a spirit of complete self-sacrifice. In the mere preaching of the Gospel he says there is no glory and no place for special reward. That is merely duty. If there is to be any glory there must be suffering, self-denial and sacrifice. Therefore, he asked the privilege of sacrificing that regular support to which he was entitled as a minister of the Gospel, and giving his whole life in unrequited labor at his own charges for God and men. In this he throws no reflection upon missionaries who accept the support of their brethren. Indeed, he argues for their right to such support. But as a matter of personal liberty he claims permission for himself to stand on a higher plane and to labor without earthly recompense. This may not be literally possible in all our lives, but surely it may represent any other form of sacrifice which we choose to gladly offer to the Lord. The Lord does not want it if it is not freely offered. It is no sin for you to enjoy in a moderate way the comfort and even luxuries which God may have given you in your station. You are the steward of your own means and He leaves you free to use them as you choose. But if God puts in your heart a love so great that it is a joy to give up comfort, ease and luxury and to endure toil, privation and even poverty, or at least to stoop to the simple necessities of life, that you may have more to give to send others unto the heathen fields, it is a very beautiful and acceptable offering and it will bring a distinct and eternal reward. Salvation is God's free gift, but glory is the reward of sacrifice and suffering. And so God gives opportunities for these higher planes of sacrificial service and only accepts them when the heart of His servants is constrained by the love that considers it a luxury to count all things but loss for Christ. Abraham's sacrifice on Mount Moriah was dear to God because it meant the giving up of all, and He forever signalized that spot. The poor widow's mite won the public and loving recognition of Jesus because it had in it this element of sacrifice and was her all. Mary's broken vase of precious ointment had something in it of infinitely more value than its intrinsic worth. It was colored by the crimson touch of sacrificial love. And so God is waiting today not only for the tithes, but for the offerings. The tithes represent the standard of duty, but the offering the overflow of love.

4. It is the spirit of adjustment, adaption and single-hearted love for souls. "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without the law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. We see here a spirit so possessed with one supreme object to gain men for Christ that it sweeps over every other consideration in its overmastering purpose of love. If it can better reach the slaves of Jamaica by stooping to their level, it leads the early missionaries of Jamaica to become slaves that it may win them. If it can better reach China by wearing Chinese dress and living in Chinese houses, it gives up the customs and comforts of civilization that it may gain some. If it can awaken confidence by eating Tibetan food, as one of our missionaries lately told us, it claims a miracle of grace and digestion and swallows the whole mixture with a smile of triumphant love. If it can reach the heart of the suspicious Chinese by kissing their dirty babies, it learns this lesson also. It goes with Livingstone to the hearts and homes of degraded Africa; with Paton and Hunt to the cannibals of Tana and Fiji. Or if the door must be slowly opened, the worker must learn to wait as well as work, it sits down with Morrison in a factory in Canton, or with Carey at a printing press at Serampore, until the walls of Jericho fall down. It does not stand for mere doctrinal creeds, or church forms. It does not waste its strength in planting a dozen denominational churches in every little town while whole nations are without a single missionary. But it counts the minor questions nothing compared with the sending of the Gospel and the saving of the lost. And here in the homeland it has that holy tact that seeks to make all classes, all ages, all activities bend toward the one great business of evangelizing the world.

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