

LORD, SPEAK THROUGH ME TO DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE

Acts 18:1-17

Of the three areas of concern, New Orleans was one that led the messengers to the organization of the Southern Baptist Convention to establish the Home Mission Board. From this early work in New Orleans has grown the work of Baptists in the cities. Out of the work in cities has grown entire Christian Social Ministries work of the Home Mission Board.

The program of Christian Social Ministries assists churches, associations, and state conventions in Christian ministries, employing sound social work techniques. Emphasis is given to Baptist Centers and church community weekday ministries. Rehabilitation ministries to youth and families in crises are performed in cooperation with court personnel, welfare workers, and government officials. More than two hundred churches were assisted with materials in beginning church community weekday ministries in 1968, and twenty-two centers were started which received some financial assistance.

Perhaps more than any other work of the Home Mission Board, this program of Christian Social Ministries depends upon the personal involvement of individual Christians. Disadvantaged persons can be ministered to, can receive the message of salvation, only when concerned individuals in communities where they live become involved in meeting needs.

There are pockets of poverty across the nation. Men, women, and children live at economic levels beneath those necessary to provide for human decency. Approximately one-fifth of the citizens of the United States live at the poverty level. The social, industrial, and mechanical revolutions in the United States since World War II have left many victims of the changes brought about. A few men with mechanized equipment can mine more coal than multiplied hundreds did a few years ago. Automation is abolishing some one million five hundred thousand factory jobs each year. In the nineteenth century the farm, the lifeline of the nation, supported more laborers and consequently more families than any other occupation. Fifty years ago one farmer was necessary to provide food and fiber for seven people. Today, with mechanization, he can provide for the needs of twenty-four people. This has sent surplus farmers to the cities where their problems have been compounded.

In the ghettos of the cities low-income families are crowded into inadequate housing, surrounded by others who are as bewildered and uncertain as they.

Numerous problems are faced by the economically disadvantaged. Illiteracy is one of the most prevalent. Added to this is the lack of training in a skill. Boredom, poor health, and family disunity add to the picture of despair. Added to these problems are lack of care for the aged and handicapped, confusion, and social values which leads to promiscuity, illegitimacy, and crime.

Some people are at a disadvantage in society because of their racial or cultural background. Frustration and tension characterize racial relationships.

Working primarily in the inner city or transitional community where human wreckage, poverty, and crime seem to be the most acute, missionaries build

personal relationships that build self-confidence and give hope to the hopeless. When one comes to know Christ he finds a sense of well-being and worth. Baptist Centers have provided an effective witness in the inner city.

Some associations, cooperating with state conventions and the Home Mission Board, have employed directors of Christian Social Ministries. These directors seek to involve individual Christian in meeting needs. Working through churches, the director makes an effort to help people to have a redemptive experience with Christ. Various churches and numerous individuals share in this work in different ways.

As a missionary, Paul spent much of his time in the cities where trade routes crossed and where a cosmopolitan population could be found. When the gospel was preached in the major cities it was carried by the new converts returning home to the villages and the remote areas of the world.

Projecting a missions thrust toward Athens, an important city of Greece, Paul met with indifference from the Jews in the synagogue. When he preached on Mars Hill, he was mocked and scorned. Large numbers did not respond to his message, but some were saved.

Paul left Athens for Corinth, a key city in Greece. Its location made it the center of east and west trade as well as north and south travel. In addition to being a great trade center, it was also a sports center. Most significant was the extreme wickedness of the Corinthians. In English the word Corinthian was used to describe a man in a life of reckless debauchery. In this wicked city Paul remained and preached for more than a year, and won many to the Saviour. Among his converts were Jews and Gentiles. When the Jewish leaders began to oppose him, he again turned his full attention to the Gentiles (Acts 18:4-8).

No doubt Paul was disappointed and discouraged on various occasions, but the thing that kept him working faithfully was his genuine sense of a call from God. He lived in the consciousness that the God Who had called him would also sustain him. When Jewish opposition at Corinth made Paul need strength and reassurance, God spoke to him (Acts 18:9-11). Paul took new courage and remained in the wicked city of Corinth.

Finally opposition from the Jewish resulted in Paul's being brought before the judgment seat of Gallio (Acts 18:12-17). This Roman ruler refused to judge the case and the Jews were driven from his presence. Again Paul had made the only unanswerable argument for Christianity — the Christian life that he lived. Gallio knew that Paul was not guilty of misbehavior or crime.