

THE CRY OF A LOST WORLD

"Sir, we would see Jesus." John 12:21.

There is no escaping the grim and terrible fact that this is a lost world. All humanity is afflicted with the malignant disease of sin. "All we like sheep have gone astray." "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

There is no mistaking the gravity of this condition. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "The wages of sin is death."

Of the more than 2,600,000,000 souls who people the earth, approximately ninety-two per cent are ignorant of Christ. From these perishing souls there comes a cry of distress. It is voiced in the words of Jeremiah, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" From a lost world there comes a cry of despair, "No man cared for my soul." Millions passing from time into eternity must say, "As far as we can see no man cared for us."

Millions have lived their lives borne down by distresses they could not alleviate, burdens they could not lift and injustices they could not right. Many have gone through life stigmatized by race, nationality, class or conditions for which they had no personal responsibility. Millions have never known the tenderness of loving care or the joy that comes from resting in the grace of a loving Saviour. For many no word can be more descriptive than that of the Apostle Paul, "Without hope, without Christ and without God in the world."

Many a person cries out, "I have labored for others in their fields, toiled in their mines, wrought with my hands to bear their loads and to build their cities, but no man cared for my soul. No man turned aside to tell me of the way of life. No one paused to point the way to heaven. No one ever told me that God loves us all. No man cared for my soul."

From this perishing world there comes a cry of deep longing, expressed in the words of the Greeks to Philip, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Who those Greeks were we do not know. They appeared out of the mists of obscurity, stood for a few minutes in the light of the gospel stage, and then disappeared into the mists again. But all the tides of time cannot drown the memory of them, for they are immortalized by the words, "We would see Jesus." They were not moved simply by curiosity to see the One with whose name the Jewish world was ringing, and about whom such strange stories were flying. With a reverent interest in Him about whom they had heard so much, they wanted to have a personal interview with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what we mean when we say that we want to see somebody.

In spite of all the present-day culture and civilization, one of the deepest cries of the human heart is still the cry for a mighty Saviour. The human race has not outgrown its need of a Redeemer. Mankind needs Christ. This quest for Him is coming up unconsciously, it may be, out of the depths of necessity in human life.

The longing of man for some light in his present darkness is one of the greatest tragedies of our world. Being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish his own, man fails to attain unto the righteousness of God. With labor and at tremendous cost men build their temples and place therein idols made of wood and stone. They afflict their bodies with long pilgrimages and wearying fasts.

Amid this longing we hear the words of the Bible, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how can they call upon him whom they have not believed, and how can they believe in him whom they have not heard, and how can they hear without a preacher, and how can they preach except they be sent?"

It is for Christ that the world is crying out today. Beneath all of the indifference to religious concerns; beneath all of the absorbing bustle and excitement of our modern life; this cry becomes louder and louder as the years pass by. This cry for Christ is not always clear and articulate, but it frequently finds expression in a voiceless discontent and a restless craving which cannot be put into words. In spite of the blatant materialism and

the supposed indifference to religious matters, there is a growing desire on the part of many to see Christ, to know Him and to enjoy the power which He wields. We are encouraged by the fact that many who have been seeking for a long time to find what they need apart from Christ are finding what an impossible task is theirs.

In the cry of a lost world we hear the call of our Lord. It is a call to look afresh at His command. Never has an army marched out to battle with orders quite so clear as those given by our Lord to His followers. He said, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." He also said, "As the Father hath sent me, even so, send I you." Therefore, it is not our business to debate and question the command of our Lord. It is not our business to speculate about those who have never heard. It is our business to arise and give the gospel to all mankind.

How dare we call ourselves Christians and disobey the command of our Lord and Master? "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" The Scriptures say, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

The time has come for us to examine afresh the great command of our Lord to give His gospel to the whole wide world. No New Testament church can function properly that disregards the world commission of Christ. No ministry can meet our Lord's expectations that disregards His world-wide command.

There are some world-inescapables in the teachings of Christ. One of them is, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," (John 3:16). Another is, "The field is the world," (Matthew 13:18). "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," (Mark 16:15). Still another is, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth," (Acts 1:8).

Most of the people in the world have never had enough to eat; cannot read or write; live under the weight of grinding poverty; have never seen a doctor; have never known civil liberties; believe that anything that is different would be above what they have and are determined to get it; are colored and distrust people with white skins; are determined not to be ruled by foreigners again; have never seen a church; have never heard a gospel sermon; would not recognize a New Testament if they saw one.

The remarkable growth of Southern Baptists, and the marked success which they have enjoyed in their fields of labor, have been due to the blessings of God upon us. These things have been due to the fact that our people have tried to be true to the teachings of the New Testament as they have witnessed throughout the world to the transforming power of our Lord's marvelous and matchless grace. I rejoice in the fact that we have been a Christ-centered people. We have looked to Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world. We have adhered to the teaching of the Scriptures relative to salvation and to Christian service. We have believed the Bible and have preached it. Knowing that people are lost in sin, and that they are doomed eternally unless they exercise repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have possessed and been influenced by an evangelistic zeal. We have sought to obey the Great Commission, with a genuine conviction that Christ is depending on us to proclaim the gospel to the lost everywhere. Our witness as a people has been effective under the blessing of the Lord.

This world stands in dire need of our message of salvation by grace through faith, and of absolute religious liberty for all men. We are under obligation to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with a lost world. We must heed the call of our Lord to expand our witness by dedicating our lives and our possessions to Him. While our Southern Baptist mission work is more widely extended than at any period in history, it is not what it will be under the Lord's guidance and blessing. We are aspiring, planning, praying and striving to render a far greater service for Him. Many of us are hoping and praying that our people will accept joyfully and heartily the challenge of our world in need of our Saviour, and then seize the opportunity and mobilize for the task of evangelizing the lost.

Our missionary work must be done in a world of gigantic contradictions. For example, it is a world in which science has made the nations neighbors without making them friends. A century ago nations wanted to communicate with each other, but found it hard because the means were so limited and so slow. Today, with the means at hand for almost lightning-like communication, half of them do not want to communicate. So we have "curtains" hung between us--the "iron curtain," the "bamboo curtain," and so on.

Our workers must cope with the aroused aggressiveness of non-Christian movements and faiths. There is a training school in Egypt, which is maintained by the Mohammedans, where for several years 2,000 young zealots of Islam have taken short courses each year, and then gone out as doctors, nurses, traders, shopkeepers, and the like, to spread the faith of Mohammed. Now this school is expanding its facilities so as to turn out 2,500 per year. It is doubtful if that sort of thing can be matched anywhere in Christendom. The very mention of Communism brings before one's eyes the dark specter of more than half of the earth's population now under the domination of the "hammer and sickle." Missionaries are facing an aroused and aggressive anti-Christianity.

Southern Baptists are now facing the greatest missionary opportunity and obligation they have ever had. There is a growing desire to do more to evangelize the lost. A period of special world mission emphasis has been set from October 1, 1956 through December 31, 1957. The world needs preachers, teachers, doctors, nurses, etc. In Indonesia there is one doctor for every 50,000 people, and one nurse for every 150,000 people. The Foreign Mission Board has urgent requests for more than 500 missionaries to serve in the 35 countries where we already have a mission program.

Observations of religious situation in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Israel, Rome, Zurich, etc. When one visits the churches, schools, seminaries, orphanages, hospitals, publication agencies and relief undertakings sponsored by Southern Baptists throughout the world, it makes him feel that he has made an investment in the most fruitful enterprise to be found. This world is going fast. We will have to move rapidly or be run over. A plane went over. What kind was it? A jet fighter making over 500 miles per hour. Another went over very slowly. What kind was it? A life saving plane going to rescue people who had fallen into the ocean. It was making 150 miles per hour. What a difference! Over 500 miles per hour on a mission of destruction, but only 150 miles an hour on a mission of mercy. God is certainly calling upon us to expand our witness where we have work, and to enter vast areas where our voice has never been heard.