

Heaven's Mandate to Win the Lost

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The book of Acts is commonly called the fifth Gospel because it is a continuation of that which our Lord began both to do and teach in the days of His flesh upon the earth.

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."—Acts 5:29.

Dearly beloved, when we obey God, something will happen in America. When Christian preachers and laymen alike come to the place where we are willing to say we will obey God no matter what anybody else does or says or thinks, God will send a revival to America. I read in the next verses:

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

"Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

"When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

"Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gama-liel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

"And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

"For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

"After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

"And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

"But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

"And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."—Acts 5:30—42.

I fear for America today because of the sin, the corruption and the degradation that characterize our people. We are, in the words of Isaiah, a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers."

The foundation of our great nation is being undermined by forces that are detrimental to our spiritual progress and destructive to our democratic way of life. America is on the edge of a national nervous breakdown. The only hope, as I see it, is an old-fashioned, Heaven-sent, Holy Ghost revival. And I believe God can and will and wants to use independent, fundamental believers like us to bring about this revival that our country so badly needs.

The moral structure of our nation is being corroded by the cancer of sin.

The political structure of America is being diminished by an indecisive and immoral administration that unwittingly caters to our enemies more than it cares for our friends.

The social structure of our nation is being poisoned by the varmints of crime, violence, homosexuality, drugs and alcohol.

The educational structure of our nation is being threatened by the proponents of progressive education who teach our children the damnable, destructive, deceptive philosophy of humanism.

The question arises, What can we do about it all? I recommend that we rise up and declare ourselves independent of any and all forces, influences, agencies, philosophies, groups, principles, systems and ideologies that attempt in any way to degrade our spiritual heritage, to diminish our Christian Faith, to destroy our God-given freedoms, to desecrate our holy ambitions, to dilute our sacred Book or defy our scriptural principles.

In order to have a revival of soul winning, we must have a divinely oriented vision, a vision that nothing can blot or blur or blight. I refer to the Acts 20:20 kind where there is no stigmatism, no sty and no fooling. I submit to you that such a vision is threefold.

I. THE VISION OF THE LOST

First, let us consider the vision of the lost. The most disturbing, devastating, demoralizing and disastrous statement that could fall from human lips is this: He is lost.

Tuesday noon my telephone rang. One of my men said, "Pastor, my sister was shot to death last night." I said, "Mike, that is a tragedy." He replied, "Pastor, you don't really know the tragedy of it all. She was lost."

What does it mean to be lost? The rich man in Hell can tell us; for this man could hear, he could feel, he could talk, he could taste, he could smell and he could see. And he could remember—"Son, remember."

Hell might not be so bad if men couldn't remember.

The brain is a tremendous machine, with over eleven million cells. And not one single thought, not one single idea that has ever passed through your brain will ever be abolished or obliterated. It is there to stay forever.

It appears to me that even in Hell men are going to remember those things that were done, those opportunities that were missed to come to know Christ as personal Saviour.

The life, the ministry, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was dedicated to one thing—keeping men out of Hell.

The last act that our Lord Jesus performed was the winning of a soul. The last command He gave was to win souls. The

last prayer He prayed was for the forgiveness of a soul. It is written in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Why should we in this sophisticated, educated, complicated generation go after the lost?

I submit three reasons why: (1) it is a great privilege to win men to Jesus Christ; (2) Jesus Christ said, "Go"; (3) men are dying everywhere every day.

Every time you draw a breath, four people go into eternity who have never heard the name of Christ. That is almost two hundred thousand people a day. God help us to become concerned and to tell men everywhere that the only way they can be saved is through Jesus Christ.

It is written in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world...." I understand from the Greek scholars that the word is kosmos, which means the whole inhabited earth. 'For God so loved the whole inhabited earth, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

I read in John 3:18, "He that believeth...is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

It is written in John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

It is written in John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Acts 4:12 says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Without His way, there is no going. Without His life, there is no living. Without His truth, there is no knowing.

Paul says in Romans 10:8—10:

"But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Salvation is in a Person and only in a Person and only in one Person—Jesus Christ, God's Son.

Of the almost six billion people on this earth, how many of them are lost? There are over 280 million people in the United States of America. How many of them are lost? I don't know. I suppose there must be some 500,000 people here in this city alone. How many of them are lost? And who cares? A hymn in many of our hymnbooks is, "If Men Go to Hell, Who Cares?" I haven't heard that sung in a long time.

If we preachers spent more time praying and less time primping; if we spent more time agonizing and less time arguing; if we spent more time foot-shaking rather than handshaking, we could win to Christ much of the population of the unsaved in America.

Jesus tells the story of three lost things: a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. Notice the percentages. With the lost sheep, it was one out of one hundred—one percent. With the lost coin, it was one out of ten—ten percent. With the lost son, it was one of two—fifty percent.

Great, great, great is the premium that our Lord puts on humankind. There is nothing more heartbreaking than a lost son. The merchant calls him a customer. The airline calls him a passenger. The doctor calls him a patient. The lawyer calls him a client. But Daddy calls him Son.

A man said to his neighbor whose son was always and forever in trouble, "If he were my son, I'd give him up," to which the man replied, "But, my friend, he is not your son."

Don't give up your son or your neighbor's, for God loves both, and Jesus died for both, and both are precious, eternal, never-dying souls.

The outcome of the Prodigal's program is very interesting. Notice that the father did not go to the hogpen. Jesus did not come to get men out of the slums. Jesus came to get the slums out of men.

The father didn't reprimand him. I have an idea that the son had already had enough of that. Nor does Jesus reprimand the penitent sinner. Rather, He extends His saving arms in tender compassion and mercy as He exclaims, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Something happened with the story of the Prodigal. The father staged a celebration when the boy came home.

Can you imagine the celebration that must take place in Heaven when one lost sinner comes home? I give you the words of Jesus: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repent-eth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

The Prodigal Son was sick of home; the Prodigal Son was homesick; but then, the Prodigal Son was home.

Who is lost? All men without Christ. It is written in Ecclesiastes 7:20, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."

In Isaiah 53:6 we read, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him [that is, on Christ] the iniquity of us all."

Romans 3:10 declares, "There is none righteous, no, not one."

Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Who then can be saved? According to II Peter 3:9, "The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Romans 10:13 says, "For whosoever [whosoever!] shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

In Revelation 22:17 we read, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him

that is athirst come. And whosoever will [not 'whosoever is rich,' not 'who-soever is powerful,' not 'whosoever is chosen,' but 'whosoever will'], let him take the water of life freely."

This, my friend, is the vision of the lost.

II. THE VISION OF THE LEGACY

There must be a vision of the legacy. Winning souls is not our hobby; it is our vocation. Winning souls is not a choice; it is a commission. Winning souls is not a convenience; it is a compulsion. Winning souls is not a coincidence; it is a commandment. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

I know somebody is asking, "But what about the elect?" The elect are the "whosoever will's." The only ones who are elected to be lost are those who refuse to be saved. And besides, if you get the wrong man saved, God will forgive you!

Psalm 126:6 is packed with action verbs, verbs like going, weeping, bearing, coming, rejoicing, bringing.

If there is no going, there will be no coming. If there is no weeping, there will be no rejoicing. If there is no bearing, there will be no bringing.

It is incumbent upon us to tell the story of Jesus Christ, then to tell it again and again.

Where shall we tell the story? Tell it here. Tell it now. Tell it everywhere—from the oil fields of Texas to the wheat fields of Kansas; from the cornfields of Nebraska to the cotton fields of Alabama; from the citrus groves of California to the tidelands of Virginia; from the shores of the Atlantic to the islands of the Pacific; from the heartland of America to the far land of Africa; from Birmingham to Rotterdam; from Baltimore to Singapore.

Tell it again! Tell it again!

Salvation's story repeat o'er and o'er,

Till none can say of the children of men,

"Nobody ever has told me before."

How shall we tell it? Una-shamedly, unapologetically, uncompromisingly, unhesitatingly, unceasingly tell it, then tell it again!

When are we going to tell it? Tomorrow? Next week? Next spring? In the fall campaign? "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Tell the story now. Tell it as dying men to dying men. Tell it as though you may never tell it again.

The Gospel is the best kept secret on earth. We have quietly, carefully, cradled Jesus Christ among the golden candlesticks long enough. We ceremoniously, sanctimoniously, ritually and oftentimes hypocritically bow at the shrine that we built for the Saviour on Sunday and then go out and conduct our lives as though He had never lived or died.

The time has come to take Jesus Christ out of the velvet chancels of our stained-glass sanctuaries into the sin-filled streets of our slum-infested cities where men are dying and swearing and cursing and going to Hell by the multitudes.

Tell it, my friend!

A few years ago my wife and I were visiting in preparation for a revival meeting in Virginia. We went to a home and knocked on the door of a big two-story building. No answer. We knocked again. No answer. The time was getting late. We had tracts in our hands. The Devil said, "Why don't you just slip a tract under the door?" (That is going to figure very prominently in the story, so remember it.) But instead of sticking the tract under the door, we knocked again.

Finally, we heard someone coming down the stairs. A dear woman opened the door. I introduced us and said, "We are here to talk to you about a very important matter."

"Oh? What is it?"

"About being saved."

"Oh," she said, "you must be a preacher."

"That is right."

"Well, I'm sorry, sir; I cannot be saved."

"What?"

"I cannot be saved."

"What do you mean?"

She said, "I attended a revival meeting last night, and I was told that if I had ever been married more than once, I could never be saved." Then she said, "Preacher, I've been married five times."

I said, "Well, let me show you a case in the Bible just like you!" And I opened the Bible to John's Gospel. "Here, I want you to read with me."

"Preacher, I can't read."

"All right, I will read it," and I read it.

She said, "Will you read that again?" I read it the second time. She said, "But will you read it again?" I read it the third time. By that time she was weeping. And there, though she had been married five times, though she had the scars of sin, the stain of sin, we knelt on the carpet and prayed, and she was gloriously saved.

Before that revival meeting was over, fifteen people came to know Christ by that woman! That was the nearest thing to the Samaritan woman I ever saw in my life!

Tell it again, my friend! Tell it again!

The pattern for building great soul-winning, evangelistic churches is not found in a manual published by some so-called, self-styled expert. Rather, it is found in God's Handbook. And you don't get the message nor the power to preach it in the bookstore. You get it in the closet! And what is that pattern? It is in the book of Acts.

The prayers went up; the power came down; the people went out, and the prospects came in; the preaching went on, and the persecution broke loose! Then the pattern started over again. When the persecution broke loose, the prayers

started back up, and the power came down, and the people kept going out.

That is where the breakdown comes. The people, for the most part, are not going out! We ought to obey God rather than men! If this thing that we are doing is of men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God, no one can destroy it.

We have to go out. Most Christians are sitting in easy chairs memorizing Acts 5:42. Now, I have nothing against that, but put it into operation.

I read a story about a woman in Michigan. Her church was having a revival meeting. The pastor assigned visits for every member to make day by day. He gave this dear woman the name of a family. She had no car. She could not drive. But because she wanted to be a soul winner, she hired a taxi and went to the house and talked to the people, then left and went on to church. Boy! She just knew they would be there the very first night of the revival.

The time came for the service. No show. They didn't make it. The second day she hired the same taxi with the same driver, went to the same home, told the same story. The second night she just knew they would be there. No show. They didn't come.

The third day she hired the same taxi with the same driver, went to the same home, told the same story and expected them to be there. They didn't show up.

The fourth night, the fifth night, she did the same thing: hired the same taxi with the same driver, went to the same address with the same message and the same expectation. At church that night the taxi driver got saved!

I repeat: the breakdown comes when we fail to go out! God did not save us to sit down and sit. God saved us to get up and get. I repeat: it is incumbent upon us. It is not a choice. It is not whether we want to or not. We are under Heaven's mandate to win the lost to Christ at any cost.

By the way, one of the best outlines on soul winning is in the concordance of your Bible.

Turn in your concordance to word. The next word under that is work. And the next word is workman. And the next word is world. The only thing between the Word and the world is in the work of the workman. And if we add the word witness, we can say, When workmen do the work of witnessing, the Word will go into all the world.

My friends, this kind does not go out by tantalizing, patronizing and fantasizing, but by analyzing, agonizing and advertising.

A vision of the legacy: the early church spread all over Jerusalem because its members went out and were willing to go, even when they didn't know where they were going.

Can you imagine in the fellowship hall of the First Baptist Church of Jerusalem a scene like this? The visitation board is all in place—zip code, area code, social security number, telephone number, employment number, marriage number and burial number—yes, every number. Can you imagine that? And somebody comes in and picks up a few cards and says, "Why, that one doesn't even have a zip code on it. This one says you have to see them only in the daytime. This one doesn't even have a full address; I know that neighborhood."

They went out all over Jerusalem, not even knowing where they were going. And when they arrived, they knew they were at the right place.

A man went out one morning and found a little four-year-old boy on his doorstep. He had probably been there most of the night. His little feet were bleeding, and he was tired and weary and crying. The only thing he would say was "Tony."

The man asked him his name.

"Tony."

"Where do you live?"

"Tony."

"What is your daddy's name?"

"Tony."

"Are you hurting anywhere?"

"Tony."

Finally the man said, "Tony, how are we going to find your house?"

The boy answered, "I don't know, Mister, but just start walking, and when we find it, I'll tell you."

Just get out and claim your city for Christ, conquer your city for Christ; go after the lost, and you will know you are in the right place.

The ministry gets a little discouraging at times, doesn't it? Here are ten simple rules to cure your blues: number one, go out and win a soul to Christ; now repeat it nine times!

A vision of the lost—men dying without Christ. A vision of the legacy—the commandment or mandate, the commission to evangelize the world.

Beloved, if Jesus expected it of the early church with no means of modern communication, no means of modern transportation, no buildings, no money, none of the things we have today, how much more incumbent it is upon us to take a city for Christ!

III. THE VISION OF THE LORD

Moses saw Him as a Prophet greater than His brethren.

Joshua saw Him as the Captain of the Lord's host.

Isaiah saw Him as the Lamb before the shearers.

Jeremiah saw Him as the Righteous Branch from David's vineyard.

Daniel saw Him as the Stone hewn out of the mountain without hands.

The shepherds saw Him as a Babe in a manger.

The scribes saw Him as a Teacher in the temple.

The Roman soldiers saw Him as another Martyr from Galilee.

But today we have a vision of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Saviour who lived, died and lives again.

Who else but Jesus could say, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never [never, never, never, NEVER] die"?

Who else could say, "I am he that liveth, and was dead"? Don't speak about Christ's death in the present tense. He was dead. He dies no more. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore...and have the keys of hell and of death."

The Queen of Sheba made a visit to King Solomon. He showed her all of his riches. (By the way, did you know his income was twenty billion dollars a year only on his gold investments, to say nothing of tariffs?) He showed her all of his great navies and armies, all his vast storehouse of wealth, stockpiles of ammunition, chariots and horses and all the rest.

She said, 'King Solomon, when I was a little girl, I heard about you. They tried to tell me of all the riches, all the wealth, all the power, all the chariots and horses that you have, but, King Solomon, the half was never told.'

I declare unto you, we have heard about Solomon's wisdom, but "a greater than Solomon is here," and the half has never been told.

He is greater in His proclamation. Solomon said, 'I increased in Jerusalem more than anybody before me.' Jesus said, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending."

He is greater in His power. In Solomon's power he conquered Egypt, Tyre and Sidon. In the power of our Lord Jesus in the days of His kingdom, He will conquer every nation on earth and rule them with a rod of iron.

He was greater in His preaching. Solomon preached a dedication sermon at the temple, but Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount.

He is greater in His provision. Solomon provided food, clothing and shelter. Our Lord Jesus provides rest for the weary, help for the helpless, hope for the hopeless, health for those who are sick, life for those who are dead and Heaven for all who believe in Him.

Jesus is greater than Solomon in His promise. Solomon promised social security. Jesus promises eternal security.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

"My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."—John 10:27—29.

Jesus is greater in His peace. Solomon promised peace to Israel from all the warring nations round about. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Jesus is greater in His philosophy. The philosophy of Solomon was "get." Get wealth, get wisdom, get all you can, sit on the can and dare anybody to touch it. The philosophy of Jesus begins with "give." "Give, and it shall be given unto you." Oh, what a difference! Solomon was the wise, witty, wealthy son of David. Jesus is the pure, perfect, powerful Son of God.

What a vision we need today!

A communist who had been indoctrinated in the philosophy of Marx was visiting with some of his friends in Scotland. He agreed to attend some of their meetings at church. Night after night he heard the singing and the message of the Gospel.

One night along toward the end of the week, all of a sudden the communist blurted out where everybody could hear it, "You people have it, if you only knew that you had it, and if you only got out and did something about it."

I submit to you fundamental, independent, Bible-believing Bap-tists all over this nation: we have it! We have it—if we only knew that we had it and if we only got out and shared it!

This is America's hope. This is the only way of survival: soul winning—aggressive, Christ-honoring, Bible-believing, Gospel-preaching churches winning the lost at home and around the world.

If this generation does not win this generation to Jesus Christ, this generation will be forever lost.