

# Christian Evangelism

## in the Early Church

By DR. PETER WISEMAN\*

Christian evangelism is a spirit, a fellowship, an attitude, a passion. It should therefore be distinguished from periods of special efforts or methods of conducting such efforts. It should also be distinguished from the many and varied agencies at work in the upbuilding of the kingdom of God upon earth, such as the Sunday school, religious education, preaching, worship services, missionary society activities, and such like. Evangelism is a spirit and a passion that should permeate all such activities, a passion that should be constant in all and through all.

If a church, for instance, is blessed with a spirit of evangelism, a revival is sure to come; indeed, a true revival already is there, for the spirit and passion that are characteristic of Christian evangelism mean life from the dead. That is a revival! The special efforts known as "revival meetings" or "revival efforts" will break out into a revival, if the true spirit of evangelism is in the church. The results will be an ingathering of souls. What we need more than anything else in Christian activity, and in all its phases, is this glorious spirit, this attitude, this fellowship, this passion, known as Christian evangelism.

Christian evangelism was seen in the early church even before the Day of Pentecost. The apostles and early disciples had a good degree of this glorious spirit as they marched in obedience to the command of Christ to the Upper Room to tarry for the Holy Ghost. "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen" (Lu. 24: 49-53).

Christian evangelism broke loose in a mighty flame of holy fire with the coming of the Holy Ghost. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began . . ." They "began to speak with other tongues," it is true, but they began to do more than speak. (Some of them perhaps began to hold their tongue a little better than formerly.) There began a mighty wave of Christian evangelism, Holy Ghost evangelism. One has only to read the record found in the Acts of the Apostles to realize this. Whatever came to them with the purpose of defeating them in their mission, failed. God was on them, and in them, and victory was sure.

Christian evangelism in the early church was carried on chiefly by laymen. Why not? The scattering of the early laymen meant the furtherance of the kingdom of God. "And Saul was consenting unto his (Stephen's) death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:1, 3, 4).

The scattering of the Holy Ghost-filled laymen (note "except the apostles") meant the spreading of the holy fire in Christian evangelism. It blazed across the country. We often have wondered about many of our present-day laymen who, on having to move to a place where there is no deep spiritual life, dry up or backslide. The early church laymen did differently; they had a revival.

Christian evangelism is a life, a holy life, at least a holy life issuing into a glorious spirit of evangelism. This is true both in ministry and laity, for there is no double standard. "Ye are . . . that ye might show forth," a condition of being; and coming out of that condition, an issue of evangelistic activity—experience and then expression. Out of the many times the word "preach" is used in the New Testament, in very few times does it mean what we attach to it, namely, to give a message in public worship. In the majority of cases it means a talking about the things of God. Our life should be a sermon, "known and read of all men . . . the epistle of Christ." Someone said to Sir Walter Scott, "I want to write a book." He replied, "Be a book. That is better."

Christian evangelism, then, was more than organization, special meetings, methods, and such like; it was God in His fullness upon His Church and people, producing a holy disposition on fire with the Holy Ghost; a divine fellowship, a sacred attitude, a holy passion, a holy dynamic, inflamed by the "spirit of burning" for the lost and dying, and for the extension of the kingdom of God upon earth. It is specifically that today. The job of the laymen, then, as well as the ministry, is this very work performed in this very way. Christian evangelism is the work of all and the work of every department of the Church of Jesus Christ. When this is the order of the day in a church, holy revivals will come from the presence of the Lord.

\*Nyack, N. Y.

## Do We Take Missions Seriously?

By Rev. Bob Cook

Whether this comment is true or not, you judge: The average congregation does not want to be presented with the deep spiritual truths that drive a person to acceptance of the missionary call, but prefers, rather, to be entertained with a recital of adventures the missionary has had on foreign soil. Again and again, missionaries have complained to your writer that "people don't want missionary messages—they want travelogues!"

We tend to think of missionaries as rather adventuresome individuals who are interesting talkers, and of the whole missionary enterprise as a vaguely foreign project, to which we contribute occasionally—when we can spare it.

To be honest, one has to admit that the basic reason for this fault is that we are not winning souls at home. The person who has won a soul here today will be winning a soul there tomorrow. Expansion in the Jerusalem-Judea-Samaria-uttermost parts manner is inevitable when one is really evangelizing as he should. The passion for souls simply cannot be localized! If I am truly concerned for the salvation of a man at my side, I shall also be concerned for his brother ten thousand miles away.

Closely related to lack in soul winning is our tendency to think of the Lord's work in terms of our local set-up. We became so engrossed in the trees that we miss the forest entirely. Surely God is not limited to your church, your denomination, your idea of the way He should work! He is the God who "so loved the world" and His purpose and passion takes in all peoples that on earth do dwell. Paul Rood said some years ago, "God forgive me! I had been thinking in terms of hundreds and thousands, but here comes a man from Japan who says he is on his first million! I am praying God to give me a heart and a vision big enough to take in the whole world!"

If you take missions seriously, it will drive you to do more than the little perfunctory service most of us render. It will break your heart. It will make you pray. It will send you out to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ to folk who have not yet heard His blessed Name. — Selected.

The Founder of Christianity urged his people to pray for a peculiar object. "The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest." Oh! isn't it strange, that the only special subject of prayer that He named is so seldom heard in our pulpits?—I. A. Broadus.

### THE AVAILABLE POWER

If you are Christ's you have the Holy Spirit. But there is a difference between having the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit. It is a difference, not of kind but of degree, and the reason of our stunted development is that we have not been willing to let God come into our lives and do in us that which we could never do for ourselves.—J. Russell Howden.

### "GO YE"

"There's an urge upon my spirit  
That compels my feet to go  
To the world's teeming millions,  
And God's great salvation show.  
As God called the great Apostle,  
So He chooses men today;  
I am one whom He has chosen,  
And I dare not disobey."—Anon.

### FELLOWSHIP IN SUFFERING

Our very union with Christ exposes us to sufferings. If we have anything of His infinite compassion, of His keen sensitiveness to sin, of His divine abhorrence of evil, we cannot pass through this sinful world without sharing the burden which made Jesus Christ to be pre-eminently "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."—F. S. Webster.