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Evangelism, The Great Urgency

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By Evangelism I mean soul winning, both personal soul winning and protracted services such as revivals and Bible conferences.

To me, the urgency of soul winning lies first of all in the lateness of the hour in this day of grace. The day of atomic power and space travel is upon us. So far as I know, the only assurance of human survival is a revival. It is necessary that more than a few score people turn to the Lord. There must be a large scale revival if there is to be a resalting of our earth.

The urgency of soul winning lies also in the near-coming of the Lord Jesus. Whether Jesus comes soon or not, this generation needs salvation and can only be reached by those of the same generation. But there is a special urgency to arouse every believer to examine whether he has oil in his own vessel, an urgency to warn the ungodly to escape the terrors of an impending tribulation. Israel is once again a nation; the fig tree has budded. Once again, the prophetic screen reflects the coming conflict in Palestine. Jerusalem is about to become "a burdensome stone for all people; all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it" (Zech. 12: 3). The trend toward world government may be viewed as another preparation for the rise and rule of anti-Christ. However, the creation of an international state and police force cannot establish a reign of peace. As a matter of fact, it is while the world is crying "Peace and safety" that sudden destruction will come upon them.

Furthermore, the enlarging ministry of our denomination—indeed, its survival—depends upon how urgent soul winning is with us. I love the Wesleyan Methodist Church and believe she has a sound doctrine and a workable church polity. But there are so few of us! Taking the total membership of our church in America as 45,000 and the population of our nation as 175,000,000, we gather that about one of every 4000 persons in the United States is a Wesleyan Methodist. That means that about one forty-fourth of one percent of our population are Wesleyan Methodists. This means that we are simply not large enough to do all the work God needs to get done. While we thank God for every church of ours that is evangelizing the lost, we ought to fervently praise God for other churches and denominations reaching folk with the saving gospel of Christ. "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will . . . What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1: 15, 18).

Sometimes the question is asked as to why Wesleyan Methodism is so small. Let me say first of all that a denomination is not to be despised because it is small. It can do a work of much greater significance than its mere size indicates. However, no one will deny that a sound organization must grow. It may be remembered that

Wesleyan Methodism began as a protest against slavery as well as the Episcopal system of the Methodist Church which denied the right of debate over the slavery issue. We have continued to be a "protest" movement. We protest over the neglect by some to emphasize the doctrine of the second work of grace; we protest against membership in secret societies; we protest against the use of tobacco and alcoholic liquors; we protest against immodesty of dress and extravagance in spending money for temporal things. I want to go on record as allying myself with those who believe in protesting against the evils of the age. When the voice of protest is finally hushed, then the voice of Bible prophecy will be silenced. "Cry aloud, spare not" is needed for this age as much as for any other age.

Thinking historically rather than hysterically, one must remember that the great protestant movement under Martin Luther gave birth to the modern evangelical movement. It was not long, however, before the "protest" movement against the dogma and tradition of the Roman church had spent its force. The initial strength of the Reformation had accomplished the purpose of breaking the chains of ecclesiastical ostracism and excommunication, and had shown that such Christian disciples could flourish on the Word of God alone. But in that same century an era of controversy arose, a fight over orthodoxy gathered momentum under Zwingli and Calvin. Within two centuries, by the time of John Wesley, much of the spiritual fervor of the Lutheran movement and the Calvinist movement had spent its force. There was great urgency for the raising up of a strong evangelical evangelistic church and then—"there was a man sent from God whose name was John"—Wesley!"

With the doctrinal background of the mild Calvinism of the Church of England and the discipline of a holy and persistent mother, John Wesley early took his religion seriously. At Oxford his interest was not in debate or in athletics but in the "Holy Club" organized to study the Scriptures. His heart and life needed the chastening of the experience in Georgia, of the storm on board ship returning to England, and of other fruitless quests for personal holiness. Then one day the light shined, the fire burned, and his heart was "strangely warmed." He so desired to tell men of a know-so salvation that when pulpits closed to him he hesitated not to preach on the streets, from tombstones and in homes. He taught that the Holy Spirit would personally witness to a person's salvation, and went about preaching deliverance from all sin. God raised up witnesses by the thousands, and the greatest modern evangelical evangelistic awakening was the result.

John Wesley cried out against the evils of his day—the oppression of the poor, gambling, drinking, slavery—in no uncertain voice. However, we remember Wesley

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