

## A Minister's Obstacles

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### Chapter 13 -

#### THE BARTER OF VISION

*"If one would be Christ-minded he must be missionary-minded, and one who is not this has no justification for calling himself a disciple of CHRIST. ARE YOU MISSIONARY-MINDED?" - W. Graham Scroggie.*

**"The field is the world."**

*As CHRIST is universal, it will take a universe to interpret Him.*

**"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go . . ."**

**"As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."** - John 20:21.

**"Go ye therefore, and teach (disciple) all nations."** - Matthew 28:19.

"The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open oceans, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it." (R. L. Stevenson.)

ONE OF THE TRAGEDIES of present-day church life is the professing follower of CHRIST whose horizon of interest and service is bounded by local and parochial points of view. **"Where there is no vision, the people perish"** (Proverbs 29:18), and the individual is lost to the larger usefulness in the Kingdom of GOD if vision of world need is bartered away. JESUS CHRIST is the universal Saviour and any conception of discipleship which does not march in step with that universal ideal is defective and dull.

The Bible is replete with the story of one life warning us against this temptation of bartering vision. Esau's experience is recorded for our warning and instruction. This man, attractive in bearing, physically strong, energetic in spirit, readily responsive to need, is given the epitaph of a **"profane person"** (Hebrews 12:16). Profanity is not careless, crude speech, but the spirit which is accessible and easily trodden under foot by the things which are near at the expense of the things which are far away. The desecration of the inner sanctuary is accomplished by bartering and selling spiritual vision. In Esau's case it took 'a mess of pottage'. A simple meal, a moment's indulgence - and he was lost. Privilege, priesthood, princeliness, blessing, birthright - these were the things he despised when he set aside the universal and spiritual things for the present and temporal things.

The whole Church is impoverished by the loss of the point of view of our Captain and File Leader, who "**saw the multitudes... as sheep having no shepherd**" (Matthew 9). There is a divine law in the ministry that we are channels of grace to men in the measure that we see and work from GOD's vantage ground. The servant of GOD is given a ministry for the whole Church and he is sent to the whole world. John Wesley was right when he echoed Augustine's conviction:

"I must have a whole CHRIST for my salvation:  
I must have a whole Bible for my staff:  
I must have a whole Church for my fellowship;  
I must have the whole world for my parish."

The last line should be engraved upon the conscience of every preacher, lest he become parochial and insular in outlook and service. Isaiah's experience (chapter 6) is that of the true missionary of the Evangel: first, the vision of GOD, then the vision of himself, and, finally, the vision of the world. Not as a visionary, but as a missionary is the best service given.

The world to be possessed by our Lord is a world not bounded by race, nationality, colour, or tongue. He saw the world as a harvest field from which He would gather in redeemed lives. His command and commission is to go into all the world and evangelize. The missionary enterprise, therefore, is the heart and life of the Church. Without it the Church would cease to be. And any local body called "church" is digging its own sepulchre if it lacks this vision of the unfinished task. It is here that the minister is in deadly peril. He may be engrossed with the round of committees, organizations, and the other necessary things, but if he has not the spell of the world vision in his heart, how can he lead his people to the heights? "**As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone**" (1 Kings 20:40). This text from the story of Ahab and Ben-hadad depicts the undoing of a man who was committed to a certain task, but who was so busy doing many things that the one thing was not done. It is to be feared that there are many "Mister Fritterdays" in the ministry. But it is not only in the ministry that the day is frittered away with non-essentials. We need to sift the relation of many things competing for our time and strength. The Church calendar is sometimes our condemnation. The Church is cursed with parasite growths, drawing us away from our supreme task. The business of the Church is to exercise a redemptive-missionary ministry. We must test everything we do by this one standard laid down by our Master.

When H. M. Stanley sought and found David Livingstone in Central Africa, the latter said, "Tell me how the world is getting on." He laboured within the confines of a dark Continent, but his vision was unlimited. Livingstone had the true Christian imperialism. So has Dr. John R. Mott of our generation. His biographer relates that the top of his desk in New York is covered with a plate of glass under which is spread a map of the world. It is renewed periodically to keep it up to date. In this Greatheart we have a man with a great idea incessantly at work on a world scale. Not every one is permitted to travel the globe as can this missionary pastor, but the pastor of a flock may do so with map and Bible in hand, and with informed and instructive surveys of literature keep pace with the world-wide movements of the Church of GOD.

One of the tragedies of the ministry is the small-souled man who labours for a small group or

thinks in terms of his sect or party. Too readily do we settle down with a minimum of outlook and a maximum of work. We need the range and horizon of the world-view to give ourselves effectively to service here. There is a spur and stimulus in the sweep of that far-flung horizon. Looking back over a generation we observe that the Church in America and Great Britain has sent missionaries to the so-called heathen lands, to Africa, India, China, and Japan, but the millions of Europe near at hand have not been evangelized (except for a few small sporadic efforts). Why? Is it that the pastors and leaders of the denominations have been limited in vision and lacking in venture? Sometimes it is agreed that the Church is committed to this and that, until it is not able to attempt work in any new field. But individuals and small groups have attempted this work with certain successes.

A bold, forwarding, marching policy would arouse the Church and challenge the highest and best of our youth to dare and achieve in this service. Meantime, a small expeditionary force has laboured in Europe, whose history needs no elucidation. If only the Church had seized the initiative before days of revolution and war came to close the doors! We seem to have missed the opportunity of an allied strategy and continent-planning on a scale commensurate with the resources of the whole Church. This short-sighted policy is but an example of the local church in many instances. The ministry of our service struggles within the confines of a small radius known as "our parish," and often misses the universal sweep.

It is a striking phenomenon that those churches whose pastors have been baptised into the missionary spirit and whose people have been led thus are alive with spiritual passion and power. Names and places might be given, but that would make for invidious distinction and comparison. "Facts are chieftains that winna ding, and duma be disputed," is our Scottish epigram. Go to the missionary church whose pastor has led the congregation in the knowledge and need of the whole world, and you will find that from there have gone out men and money and prayer, until the blessing overseas has been reflected in the work at the home base. Giving does not impoverish. At first, we do not read of the Church forming a missionary society: there was but one Missionary Church! Every member found a place and an opportunity for service. The regions beyond and the cry from Macedonia did not pass unheeded, and the Church missionary became the Church with a vision!

Truly, the bane of our day is a ministry devoid of this vision. When the Church is more concerned with the round of the secular and easy-going, knowing nothing of sacrifice for the world, and a pastor is unable to lead his people in this way, how can we justify the name "Christian"? Not that a missionary-minded man neglects the home base: then, and only then, does he lose the consciousness of "home" and "foreign" missions to serve here with there. The missionary is not one who goes across the seas: he must first cross the street in his neighbourhood and approach personally someone for his Lord. There are lost lives in Chicago as well as in China, in Toronto as well as in Tokyo, in Birmingham as well as in Bombay, in New York as well as in New Guinea, in Amsterdam as well as in Africa. It is not geography but Christology which makes the missionary pastor.

"The winds of the world make answer,  
They are whispering to and fro;  
What do they know of England,  
Who only England know?"

Nothing is more stimulating to a would-be preacher than to travel. We question the wisdom of a college and seminary course pursued in the same city or under the same control. Change is good (if the purse permits!); the medieval student had an advantage over us in travelling from place to place to hear the outstanding scholar in each subject. Alas! that is not always possible to-day. But some travel is possible, necessary, if we are to be saved from isolationism, parochialism, denominationalism, even nationalism, run riot, in order to mix with others in different places and so learn human need through other lives and points of view. This broadens and widens the horizon of the mind and spirit, and it is in agreement with the Biblical revelation of the whole world waiting to hear the Gospel. Insularity is a deadly peril to the preacher, whereas vision is his salvation.

*"Let us grasp that supremacy of the moral issue for history and that finality of its settlement by CHRIST's death which makes Christianity 'Christian' [says Dr. P. T. Forsyth, one of the prophets of the last generation]. We are failing to mission the world because of a failure in the only faith that overcame the world, the failure of a real living faith that the world has been overcome. There is no man great enough to force the missionary societies to realize that such failure in the Church is the source of all their difficulties, which are but symptoms, and beyond Boards. We have much religion in the churches which the pulpit reflects rather than leads. Our one lack at present is moral weight amid all our humane and ethical interest. And the deification of sacrifice (per se) will not give it: for sacrifice (as mere sacrifice) is morally neuter."*

That is a noble thing, nobly said. Passion is the proof of compassion and the evangelization of the whole world is our task. It is not enough for us to live in a little world of our own: to the man of vision there is but one world, as there is but one imperative and one Gospel.

One of the snares of modern church life is the emphasis upon philanthropy and amelioration in the social life at the expense of the evangelical emphasis upon the redemption of the individual. It was this latter view which gave zeal and passion to the great missionary movements of an earlier generation. No one decries the social expression of the Gospel in those places of need, but primarily the missionary compassion for other races is the chief thing. Missionary apathy is caused by a number of things, but the chief cause is the loss of vision on the part of the Christian leader. The newer knowledge, and fuller knowledge about other religions; the contraction of the world, the interaction of scientific and educational advance, have combined to lessen the idea of the urgency and exclusiveness of our message. But unless this exclusiveness of CHRIST is believed, how can we have vision? From revelation of the divine standard, through experience of our own need, we proceed to service for others. Not by "dragging in" "foreign" missions, but by having the world-wide programme "in" all the time. I recall in one theological seminary that instead of having one professor who lectured on this subject (worth while, for there is a place for the specialist), every professor was expected to devote part of his instruction to Missions. Thus the professor of church history treated the subject in part, rather than the whole of the developing Church in history. The professor of theology expounded the development of creed and formula as it reflected the growing life and mission of the Church. Missions is not an extra, but the heart of all theological study, and the end of the exposition is the beginning of action.

In this connection, the annual sermon on Missions or the annual missionary deputation should be done away with if the pastor has not bartered vision. Sunday by Sunday, week by week, in sermon, address, prayer, and hymn, reference to the divine enterprise will become the warp and woof of the ministry. The congregation will learn that this is the settled conviction of the

preacher. But what of giving? The gospel of giving should find practical leadership and demonstration. Here also the support of missionaries should not be left to a special offering or day, but be the settled habit week by week. Where this has been adopted (one church gives 10 per cent, another 12 per cent of the regular offerings) use is made of a special weekly envelope marked "Missions," or the percentage is deducted from the regular offering to the church, so that every offering has the world need in mind.

Again, a wise pastor will see to it that any missionary leaving for another field does not go out by the "back door." Give the outgoing representative the largest of the Sunday congregations (not a week-night) as an occasion of valedictory. Let there be a whole service given to this task, with missionary testimony and challenge and the commissioning of the individual by the pastor in the name of the whole Church. Otherwise, the missionary leaves without the whole-hearted support of the congregation, and the church misses an occasion of enrichment to vision. The pastor, too, might well lead his people week by week in the knowledge of missionary work through sifted reports of the world enterprise. This is the fuel and stimulus to pray. The death knell of missionary interest is sounded when everything depends upon an annual reference to the need. The eucharistic church is the one where this subject is the very pulse of the ministry and worship. And the preacher whose vision is not dim will have the joy of helping young lives in preparation and direction for service in the harvest fields of the world.

One outstanding example of a minister who did not barter vision is William Carey (1761-1832), whose thirty-two English years must be reckoned heroic and romantic alongside of the forty Indian years. That was a period of English history when there was a concern for the dearth in the churches. The prayers of the churches were answered by GOD challenging the people - "If you want the Kingdom speeded, go out and speed it yourselves: only obedience rationalizes prayer; only missions can redeem your intercessions from insincerity." The master interest of Carey's life as pastor in Leicester was the evangelization of the world. His biographer says:

*"Nothing could cool this passion - not the busyness of his crowded days, nor the widening range of his town ministry; not the urgencies of English programmes of reform, nor the growing prosperity of his church. In Leicester, as in little Moulton, the cry of the heathen continents and islands haunted his spirit. Indeed, Leicester's thirteen thousand made more vivid and poignant the distress of the world's hundred of millions."*

As the year of grace 1942 marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of the Modern Missionary Movement, let us recall Carey's experience. For eight years he had brooded, prayed, studied, written, to produce *An Enquiry*. This marks a distinct point of departure in the history of Christianity. It laid the foundations of Missions in accurate information, careful consideration, and wise use of means, as well as in the obligation of Christian duty. At the meeting of ministers there was a solemnity and concern as Carey spoke with his brethren. In eighty-seven pages his heart pleads for the needs of the whole world. Here was *The Enquiry: Arguments, Review, Survey, Challenge, and Programme to the MINISTRY*. To plan, plod, pay, and pray he called them. Followed by the deathless sermon,

"Lengthen the cords, and  
Strengthen the stakes,"

he gave the watchword:

"Expect great things from GOD:  
Attempt great things for GOD."

Wherever a pastor has had the missionary vision there is a reflex blessing upon the local church. Let the conviction take root concerning the universal Gospel for the whole world, and this fire will bring a "refiner's fire" to the preacher. He will be challenged himself about service in the uttermost parts, he will face a new sense of stewardship of money and family and time. But such an experience will stimulate his ministry to reach others.

A luminous instance of this is found in the life of Dr. A. T. Pierson. As vision made him a missionary-minded pastor, so he shared his passion with others. Testimonies abound from Dr. H. W. Frost, Director of the China Inland Mission; Dr. Samuel M. Zwemer, of Arabia and leader of missionary work among Moslems, and Dr. Robert E. Speer, Secretary of Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, that it was Pierson's ministry and witness which thrust them out into missionary service. Likewise, Dr. D. M. Stearns, Philadelphia, was turned into a missionary and Bible teacher through a conversation with Pierson, who said:

*"My brother, remember that your parish is not your field. The **'field is the world.'** Your parish contains a force committed to you by GOD to train for Him, that through them. He may reach the whole field."*

An indirect result of this was the turning of \$650,000 into missionary channels - gifts sent through Dr. Stearns' church and classes.

A similar experience is related of Dr. A. J. Gordon, of Boston. His life as pastor was revolutionized by the missionary vision. His church was permeated by the same spirit, and caught the holy fire, until the burden of the whole world lay upon the church. Our temptation is to shelve responsibility upon a missionary society or a group of officials instead of leading the local church as a missionary body. Is not this ideal possible? Witness the Moravian Church of Germany when the pastor leads the way! Their record is one out of every sixty members as missionaries and supported by the church. Pastor Harmes led his own congregation to become a missionary society when others had no sympathy. His poor church caught the vision and at the end of forty years put into the field more than 350 missionaries, and supported them. This is the secret of the advancing church.

In the midst of true vision the word of Paul needs to be kept in mind. He speaks of a bishop being vigilant, ruling well the house of GOD: one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (1 Timothy 3). Did Paul have in mind the story of Eli and his family (I Samuel 2) when he wrote this? When the minister who has children sees afar off, let him not forget and neglect the family at home. Let him plan his work so that he has time to spend with them. We have a responsibility to them as well as to the congregation and the outer world: the vision should include those who are overlooked more easily than any others.

As we reflect upon the danger of lost vision and bartered opportunities, we dare not become "profane" persons when trafficking in the sacred. Nothing of emotional, scientific, or humanistic interests should lead us to barter the vision of the essential and basic needs of the world. When

all restraint is cast off and lawlessness abounds (as it does to-day) it is because people have lost or repudiated the vision of GOD. This is the real world of our contemporary life. The corrective and antidote is the Christian vision. "**Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields . . . white already to harvest**" (John 4:35). To barter that vision is to be guilty of sin, sin which thwarts the divine plan and its fulfilment. The furtherance of the Gospel is our supreme task, and not visionary but missionary is the status of the preacher who is gripped by the vision of GOD and the vision of the unfinished task. Well may Abraham Lincoln's immortal words at Gettysburg be applied in this new context: "It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work . . . It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us . . ."

Such dedication leaves no room for the profanity which makes accessible any or all kinds of other interests crossing the threshold of our heart. No barter, then, for birthright and blessing, which are the inalienable rights of the man of GOD who has caught the vision and shares his Lord's secrets.

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