The making of an evangelist

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Where in the world are we?

(The place of evangelism in a confusing world)

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, and if God wills, enter into the twenty-first century, we need to take stock of things and ask ourselves, 'Where in the world are we?'.

The question needs answering, for across the last forty years or so, there has been rapid change in attitudes and circumstances making it essential to assess the place of evangelism and techniques in the future.

We have seen rapid population increase; ecological disasters; political upsets in many countries; rapid increase in knowledge and education; something like the upset caused by the Industrial Revolution years ago, we now have such an advance in technology that it is almost impossible to keep up with it.

To some extent computers are replacing humans in the work place. There has been a moral landslide with gutter language and toilet-block talk openly used in the media both by men and women. People seem more 'hell bent' now than ever before. Morals have slumped and in some cases resemble alley cat morals. Great upsets have been seen among the nations when the Berlin wall fell, and places previously anti-Christian and anti-Bible are crying out for God's word. Because of the rapid disintegration of communism, some nations have lost their identity and are striving desperately to find their feet in the swirling waters of change.

This is the space-age with such advance and one cannot help wondering where it will end. There are moral and ethical problems to be faced in the areas of medical science.

As I wrote this chapter, many parts of the world are plagued by recession, with high unemployment rates, famine, and vast disease problems such as AIDS.

Sometimes when we look at these problems, we are tempted to be like the man who was overcome by it all and said, 'Stop the world, I want to get off!', or we at least say, 'Where in the world are we?'.

We can look at this world's picture with sombre eyes and say, 'You see, we can be Ú Ú"under• the circumstances or Ú Ú"over• the circumstances'. There is an old saying which has a bearing on our day and as we look at it, that is, a crisis or an opportunity. The saying goes like this:

Two men looked through prison bars,
One saw mud and one saw stars.

You see, Iron Curtains (or any other curtains) and Berlin Walls are no problem to Almighty God. He answers much prayer and knocks barriers down when He is good and ready.
In Romans 8:31 it says, 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'. Also, the Bible doesn't say this converse statement as such, but implies it. What statement? This, 'If God be against them, who can be for them?'.

As we approach the next century, we need to ask some questions.

1. Is evangelism still important or just something extra?

Christ, the evangelist, started it all when He came into the world to save sinners, and He is and always will be in the soul-saving business. George Muller of Bristol, that great 'apostle of prayer', as he was called, said in reply to the statement 'But Mr Muller, look at the circumstances', replied 'My eye is not on the circumstances, my eye is on the Lord'.

This gospel of salvation should never change, but we can seek to use the discoveries and rapid changes of our age to get the Gospel out wider and faster. We can only do this as we prayerfully study the situation, believe in the magnificent power of Almighty God; keep our eye on God and not the circumstances, and ask God to do a great and life-changing thing in the history of the world, as we go and spread His Word.

2. It seems to me that we should seek out God's strategy in any age, and get in behind it with all our hearts and resources.

For example, God is getting Bibles into unheard of places as far as Bible distribution is concerned. Places like Russia, former East Germany, Chile, communist China.

I am inclined to think that sometimes we spend so much time on building programs, some of which do not appear to be necessary, when we should concentrate our efforts on getting the Gospel message out.

Only as we world in God's strategy and plans will we receive God's blessing.

3. Another opportunity for the future years seems to be an audacious prayer life and an audacious attack on the power of evil.

Somebody said once, 'We preachers are experts in turning wine into water'. It seems to be sometimes our preaching is such that it will never even stir the congregation from apathy, let alone raise the dead in trespasses and sins. My dear brother and sister evangelists, these may seem harsh words I am saying, but we live in times when nothing short of a 'dynamic blast' from the Holy Spirit will cause some people to listen. We should say about sin, what God says about sin in His Word. Satan is bringing in his heavy artillery and we need to bring in God's heavy guns to blast his front line attack, and neutralise his grip on the captives of his warfare.

4. To others who are hurting in this confused world, and who long to be loved, what a wonderful opportunity we have to tell the greatest love story that has ever been told. By presenting the loving and forgiving Christ, we can soothe their sorrows, heal their wounds and wipe away their tears. Of course, I mean that Christ does it through us.
5. We can reverse things if we plan God's way. In Acts 17:6 it says, 'These that have turned the world upside down are come here also'.

Actually, they didn't do that at all, they really turned the world right-side up. They did all this without mass media, computers, satellites, videos, special training schemes. They did it by the power of God - the breaker of the Berlin Wall, the piercer of Iron Curtains, who hasn't changed His power, or is He limited to His ability. Actually, what he did in the says of the first century, he can do in the twenty-first century. That will be no problem at all.

Some years ago, a circuit rider of the USA, a simple, but powerful Christian, because very concerned about the damage illicit stills were doing in families and homes. The circuit rider, Sheffey, went to a still owner and said to him that he felt because of the damage being done to people in the area, he should not supply liquor to the people and he ought to close the still down. The owner wasn't at all pleased and said 'No!' to Sheffey's request. Sheffey told him he was going to ask God to destroy the still by letting a big tree fall on it. The owner was very skeptical and said that the nearest tree was 300 yards away. Sheffey asked God for it to happen, and to destroy this work of the devil, and then Sheffey went on his way.

Sometime later, on the same road, as he was travelling, ahead of him was a cart packed with furniture and children. there were two adults - a man and a woman. Sheffey recognised the man and said so. 'I know you too', said the man. 'I was the owner of the still you asked God to close. That big tree was uprooted in a strong wind and landed on my still and put me out of business. Yes, I've good reason to know you all right'.

This story is a good illustration of what I am trying to say in this chapter. God can do much more than we give Him credit for if we have a child-like faith. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil and in 1 John 5:14-15 it says, 'And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us, and if we know that He heareth us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him'.

In closing of this chapter, I am trying to say that whatever the twenty-first century will bring, God will be the same as always, and His power does not change. We need to remember that methods are useful, but we should not put our trust in men, methods or materials before God. For all our abilities in the twentieth century, the Berlin Wall stood, until God took charge.

By the way, He was not phased by the yearly parade of arms in Moscow or any any communist country. God still rules supreme.

Please don't forget that when Sodom and Gomorrah were unthinkably wicked, God took charge and that was that.

Be like old George Muller of Bristol, 'My eye is not on the circumstances, my eye is on the Lord'. That should be a good motto for Christians in the twenty-first century.

Proverbs 21:1 tells us that the King's heart is in the hands of the Lord, and like the streams and rivers of water, He can turn it wherever
He wants to. In 1 John 4:4 we are reminded too, that greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world'. Satan is a defeated foe and whatever we do as evangelists we should never forget that Satan doesn't stand a chance against God.

Please give this chapter your prayerful thought. Also, do something about the state of our world. Seek the power of God to be your 'heavy guns' to destroy the works of the Devil in people's lives. Help to make the church so powerful that people will have to take into account the direct action of God, as in Sheffey's story. We may be amazed what God can do with a man or woman of real, vital faith.

Many people are worrying about the ecological problems of this world and - and so we ought. But a great number are not concerned about the moral and spiritual pollution which is prevalent in our world today. My brothers and sisters, let us tackle Satan head on in these areas.

Seek God's face, and help to change the world by His power working through us for Christ's glory.