

A.B. Simpson:

"Enlarge the place of thy tent." Isa. liv: 2a

About one hundred years ago a humble Baptist preacher stood in an English pulpit and announced this text at the opening of what was perhaps the first Missionary Convention of modern times. He then proposed the two following divisions as the themes of his discourse. 1. Attempt great things for God. 2. Expect great things from God. And then from these two propositions, themselves inspiring enough to impel the whole missionary movement, he proceeded to preach a sermon which became the watchword of the greatest Christian movement, since Apostolic days. That was the birthday of modern missions. Soon he himself was a missionary in Calcutta, and today an army of missionaries is girdling the world and about to multiply more and more every year until the Master comes. The preacher had been one of those whom the Lord delights to use—one of the weak things, and the things that are despised. A humble cobbler, he had supported himself by toiling all day long at his last, but while his hands were busy, his heart was out upon the world, and his eyes were often upon the maps that lined the walls of his workshop, and the calculations and plans for the world's evangelization. Deep down in his heart had grown up a mighty faith for the lost millions of mankind, and his great sermon was but the outbreaking of the pent-up fires that had long been burning in his breast. It was the voice of God to his generation. It is the voice of God to another generation, the generation of today. It is the voice of God to us, beloved. Fresh from the hallowed influences that have so deeply moved our hearts and blessed so many here, God is pointing to a world where a thousand millions still are lost, and saying to us—"Enlarge the place of thy tent, fear not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes, let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations on the right hand and on the left. For thy Maker is thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is His name, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall He be called."

Three thoughts are here suggested.

I. ENLARGEMENT.

God's plan for all His work is to begin in feebleness and expand and develop to maturity. He first makes a perfect sample and then multiplies it. So the work He has done for us is but a sample of what He can do, and wants to do for all the world. The blessing that has filled and thrilled our hearts these past days may be multiplied as many times as there are cities in the world, and reproduced wherever there are hungry hearts to fill and messengers to tell of the grace and the fullness of Jesus. That gospel of the Saviour's fullness that has filled your heart can fill a thousand million hearts. That faith which has brought you deliverance can deliver all the captives of the great oppressor and set the whole world free. That humble work which has grown up out of "a handful of corn on the top of the mountains" can become a mighty forest on all the mountains and "shake like Lebanon, and they of the city flourish like the grass of the field."

God has simply been making samples, but He can multiply them by millions. Will we let Him use us for their reproduction, for they are multiplied by reproduction. They are not made as the machines in yonder factory, but they grow as seeds multiply, as yonder geraniums by culturings, as that oak by the seeds it drops into the ground, or that single grain of wheat that sometimes sends up twenty stalks from a single seed, and each stalk bears half a hundred seeds. God has given us in this blessed work a gospel so full that it needs a world for its field. He is showing us the plan of a Christian church, that is much more than an association of congenial friends to listen once a week to an intellectual and musical entertainment and carry on by proxy a mechanism of Christian work; but rather a church that can be at once the mother and the home of every form of help and blessing which Jesus came to give to lost and suffering men, the birthplace and the home of souls, the fountain of healing and cleansing, the sheltering home for the orphan and distressed, the school for the culture and training of God's children, the armory where they are equipped for the battle of the Lord and the army which fights those battles in His name. Such a centre of life and power Christ wants in every centre of population in this sad and sinful world.

The figure of enlargement is that of a tent; its curtains are to be stretched forth and its cords are to be lengthened. These curtains are surely the promises and provisions of the Gospel, and they will stretch as wide as the needs of human lives and the multitudes that seek their shelter. The cords are cords of prayer, cords of faith, cords of love, cords of holy effort and service. He bids us lengthen the cords of prayer. Let us ask more, but let the strands of faith be as long and strong. Let us believe more fully, more firmly, and for a wider circle than we have dared before. Let the cords of love be lengthened until we shall draw men to Christ with the very cords of our hearts. Let our efforts for His kingdom reach a wider circle. Let each of us make the world our parish, and as the Bride of the Lamb realize that all that concerns our Lord's kingdom concerns our hearts, "For our Maker is our husband, the Lord of Hosts is His name, the God of the whole earth shall He be called."

God has committed to our trust the gospel in its fullness. Let us never rest until in all its fullness it is known in every hamlet of this great land and in every land and tongue.

And we must lengthen the cords of our liberality. The Lord is asking for millions today to spread His gospel in its fullness over the world, and we to whom this full gospel has been such a blessing are especially called to take it as our trust for Him and send it everywhere. The world is open today and the workers are being prepared as never before, men and women full of faith and the Holy Ghost. Never was there a time when a little money would go so far in spreading Christ's Word. Less than ten millions today would evangelize all the world before the close of the century.

When I think of the opportunity of using money for God today, I could almost envy the men who have the opportunities of successful business. God is going to send very large amounts into the treasuries of consecrated work, and if we are but true to this trust we shall yet see tens of millions spent in sending the fourfold gospel to every corner of the globe.

II. CONSOLIDATION.

But the wider our work the stronger it must be at the centre. And therefore as the cords are lengthened the stakes must also be strengthened. What are these stakes?

Surely God's Word is the first. The more widespread the work God gives us to do the more important is it that we be true to the great standard of truth, the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the day of new theologies and loose views of evangelical truth. More sacredly than ever does the Master require us to stand faithful to the cross of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of man's sin and ruin, the great atonement, the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the person and work of the Holy Ghost and the certainties of future retribution and reward. Thank God we do not have to resort to the novelties of rationalism to attract the multitudes. Give them the Living Bread, the atoning blood, the old and ever new story of Jesus and His love.

Personal holiness. This is the next safeguard of the Lord's work. God cannot trust an unsanctified people or an unconsecrated man with much service for Him. Poor Jonah is sure to mar his most successful work with a touch of himself. The more God entrusts to our hands the more humbly let us lie at His feet and the more faithfully use our trust for His glory. This is one of the wise things the Salvation Army has done. It has required all its officers to be sanctified men and women. Such a work can afford to be successful. God grant us wisdom to see to it that all who bear the vessels of the Lord are clean. So shall He give us the world itself for our inheritance.

The spirit of self-sacrifice. No work can ever be glorious without the martyr spirit. Luxury is killing the churches today, and the only remedy for it is the red blood of sacrifice. Great faith and great sacrifice will always be found together. This must be the spirit of this work if it is to cover the world. We must be willing to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. We must be indifferent to popularity, and human praise or blame, we must be willing to live with great simplicity and rigid economy, we must be willing to be misunderstood and persecuted, we must be glad to be the companions of the lowly and despised, we must gladly face toil, hardship and even death, and count all things but loss for Christ and His kingdom. Such a people only can possess the world for Christ, and such soldiers shall march to world-wide victory while the splendid brigades of rank and luxury shall fail in the day of battle and prove but a splendid pageant and a dress parade.

God give us the spirit of Scriptural faith, personal consecration and true self-sacrifice, and then He can give us the world for Christ.

The figure of the tent suggests the idea of constant vicissitudes and humility. This is no proud architectural pile but a simple tent, ever changing and oft taken down and moved forward. It is the figure of the changing wilderness, the pilgrim life and constant movement. This is not our rest. This is no place for great cathedrals and splendid establishments and ecclesiastical states but continual advance and ceaseless aggression. It is to be feared that splendid churches have been the greatest curse of the church. As long as the early Christians met in humble upper rooms, they had the power of God and godliness, but when they began to imitate the splendor of the world and vie with the architecture of imperial palaces and heathen temples, the Holy Spirit took His flight, and the world and the devil became paramount. The days of the Jewish tabernacle were better days than those of Solomon's temple. The beginning of this work was in a humble tent; let us never forget the tent spirit or lose the pilgrim spirit. "Enlarge the place of thy tent." He does not say get a temple, but a bigger tent. Lord, help us to enlarge but never leave our tents.

III. DIVINE RESOURCES.

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This is the secret of it all. We have back of us one who has infinite resources, and He is not only our King and our Friend, He is our Husband. He has given us all His heart and all His glory, and He will surely give us all the world for our dowry and our inheritance. This is the secret of successful work, to know Christ in this blissful and intimate relation, and to receive our work, by virtue of our union with Him, as the very fruit of our marriage with the King of Kings. So may He reveal Himself to us all, and then, as His very bride, standing at the threshold of His home and inviting in His lost and wandering children, it shall be true of us, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come," and the world will come to Him.

"How knowest thou whether thou be come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Like Esther on Ahasuerus' throne, we have been called to the kingdom that we might use our place of right and power to save a world. God help us so to win them back to our beloved Husband, so to bear them for Him as His very children and ours, that "the God of the whole earth shall He be called."

It has been the experience of some of God's children, and it was mine, to be called by His Spirit, in years of loneliness and sorrow, to learn very deeply the Song of Solomon in its true spiritual significance, and then, in this deep, sweet love-life with Christ, to be led into precious service for Him, and to find the life filled with most gracious fruitfulness and blessing. O beloved, He is calling you to His bosom and then to His work, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, forget also thy kindred and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." And then, "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth."

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