

EVANGELISM THE SUPREME SERVICE

By E. Y. MULLINS

To know Christ and to make him real, to tell the story that shall mean good news to a worried world, is the supreme task of the hour. It is a task unlike any other committed to us. We cannot proclaim it as we can a paragraph of civic news. The latter is an intellectual process; the other is more than that. The Gospel has within it a potentiality that we cannot define; we can simply know.

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Beloved brethren, I need not say that it is a very great joy to accept this invitation and that I had a very great desire to accept it in former years when the invitation came. As Doctor Stilwell has said, I am heart and soul for evangelism. I have felt during these two days in my attendance upon these sessions as if I were just getting into the center of the current of a great river of the coming kingdom of God, for whenever I get into an atmosphere where people are discussing this great theme, I always seem to draw very near to the heart of Christ and to the great and throbbing dynamo of spiritual power that we so much need.

I believe in evangelism, and by evangelism I mean the quest for the individual. I believe in all the great social ideals of the time, please understand me; I will refer to them in a few moments again, but I believe in the search for the individual as the fundamental task before us. Civilization is searching for the individual. The science of economics is groping around in the shadows to find the individual. Government is hunting for the individual, and his rights, and his place in society. All human progress is realized through the proper adjustment of the individual to the

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corporate life, and the one is as necessary as the other. Now, men and women who look for the individual, and sometimes grope for the individual in these three spheres, forget that Jesus Christ showed us the way to find the individual a long, long time ago, and Paul and the other evangelists took up the word and went forth to find the individual. I wish sometimes I were a dramatist. I would like to write a drama. It would be a drama of the World War, and the climax of it would be a little scene that was enacted on the shores of the English Channel last fall, when the remains of an unknown British soldier had been brought from its burying-place in France to lie in state for a little while before being carried across the Channel to Westminster Abbey where it was to be given a conspicuous place—the remains of an unknown soldier lying there in state until respect could be paid to it. One day, Marshal Foch, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies that won the great war, came from his home in France, and after paying his respects to a group of officers, walked down to the bier on which rested the remains of the unknown soldier, took off his hat, and saluted. That was the climax of the World War. If the World War meant anything it meant this—a blinded, selfish, autocratic world trying to find the individual and place him right in civilization.

Of course, our quest for the individual here is wholly different, but it is at the root of all the other quests. My subject is “Evangelism the Supreme Service.” If I were to take a text, it would be the

sixteenth verse of the first chapter of Romans: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." I wish to give a few reasons why I believe evangelism of the right kind is the supreme service, and I agree with all your definitions of evangelism, that it ought to be ethical in its outcome and in its appeal and in its motive, but also an evangelism that relates the individual to Jesus Christ by faith and that results first of all in the regeneration of his soul. I agree with all these things, but I believe in the kind of evangelism that that text sets forth.

A few reasons why I believe evangelism to be the supreme service, are:

First, because it supplies the supreme need of the world. What is the supreme need of the world? I am going to give you the answer of three men who are detached from the ministry but who are interested in it and in Christianity, and especially are they interested in the outward forms of civilization. First of all, I will give you the answer of the statistical expert, Mr. Babson, who has said, "The greatest need in the world today is a revival of religion." Next I give you the answer of the editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, who, looking out upon society and seeing the unrest and the chaotic conditions and the selfish greed and grasping of men, and the irrepressible conflicts between the classes of men, said, "The greatest need in the world today is a revival of old-fashioned, spiritual

religion." I give you also the answer of Mr. Richard H. Edmonds, editor of the *Manufacturers' Record*, who, looking out upon the same weltering world, distressed and casting about for rest out of its troublous times, said, "The supreme need in the world today is a revival of genuine spiritual religion." I might go on and quote many others, but these are three representative men. None of them are ministers; I presume all of them are Christians. I give you these quotations and suggest to you what I believe to be the truth, that the supreme need of the world today is a revival of genuine spiritual religion. Evangelism supplies the need at that point.

All of these men evidently recognize two or three things. For one thing, they all recognize the vital connection between economic and business stability with morals. Every man of them realizes that morality is the foundation of economic stability and a social order that shall remain. Every one of them recognizes also the vital connection between morality and religion itself, because without religion it is impossible to have the morality upon which it is necessary properly to base economic principles. All of them recognize also that if you are going to deal successfully with human society you must deal with personal causes rather than with effects. And these business men and writers were evidently men who were able to see down into the heart of things and discover that the formative principles of all civilization is religion, and the way to secure the progress

we need in all these realms is to get the root of it all in religion itself. So I give that as the first argument to prove the proposition that evangelism is the supreme service, because it supplies the supreme need in successfully accomplishing a revival of religion in the world.

In the second place, evangelism is the supreme service because it is the method of the divine power in Christianity. Now, I hope that you will get just what I am trying to say here. I had the privilege last year of spending six months touring Europe. I spent a number of weeks in the British Isles, and I had interviews with many pastors in the city of London and elsewhere. I shall never forget an interview I had with one of the leading Baptist pastors in London. He told me of conditions in England—and they are not confined to England—I use them as illustrations merely because they are convenient for the purpose in hand. He said the Non-Conformist churches in England were losing ground, and that their membership today is smaller than it was ten years ago. I asked him to give me a diagnosis of the situation and tell me what it is that has brought about this state of affairs. He said: “If I were to sum it all up in one word, I should say it was this: The pastors and the churches in this country have somehow or other lost the power to convert people. What we need, and what we must get, is the divine power to change the human heart.” “Well,” I said, “that sounds very familiar to me. That is unquestionably the situation

all over the world today, wherever evangelical Christianity is going backward rather than forward." That set me to thinking on the power of God and how it functions in the world. I believe that Christianity, if it is understood properly, will have to be defined in terms of its power. Europe has had Christianity in form. Many of the countries of Europe had beautiful outward forms of Christianity, but they are not Christianity with the power of Christianity. "A gold piece is worth more than a brass piece, but an imitation gold piece is not worth more than an imitation brass piece. Fire is warmer than an iceberg, but a picture of a fire is not warmer than a picture of an iceberg." Now, what many European countries have is not the fire that burned in the heart of the apostle Paul or the heart of Jesus, but the picture of it. What then is the hiding of the power in Christianity? What is there in Christianity, for example, that corresponds to affinity in the science of chemistry, without which the science of chemistry could not exist? Or that corresponds to the principle of gravitation in the science of astronomy, without which the science of astronomy could not exist? Or, if you wish to simplify it, that corresponds to the place of the alphabet in literature, without which literature could not exist? What is the ultimate thing in the Christian religion and the ultimate form of power? Where will you find it? Let Paul answer, let Jesus answer, let Peter answer. All of them could, but I take but one statement from the apostle Paul, setting forth what I believe is the true

principle at the heart of the Christian religion: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God, *it is the power of God* unto salvation to every one that believeth." Undertake, if you will, to construct your religion around that conception, and it will lead you at every point to the fact that the hiding of the power of Christianity is set forth in the aim to preach the gospel to the man out of Christ so that he feels the power of God in his soul transforming him into a new man. The promise of power that Jesus gave to his disciples was a promise connected with the evangelization of the world. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

What was the program of power in the New Testament? Just before the Ascension, the disciples said to him, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The answer of Jesus was: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The program of power is not a schedule of events to take place at any time, whatever that schedule may be. In God's

plan the program for disciples is the program of witnessing, proclaiming, calling men to him and his salvation. In the actual bestowment of power, what do we witness? On the day of Pentecost the Spirit came with mighty power, and the result was the conversion of three thousand and their baptism in one day. So also this power of the gospel became manifest in Asia Minor and Europe under Paul's preaching in the salvation of individual men and women and the founding of churches. The power was lost at a later period.

Where do we find the loss of power in these countries? Loring Brace says, "The greatest calamity which ever befell Europe was in those early days of the Christian Era when those little spiritual democracies called churches, which were planted by the apostle Paul on the shores of the Mediterranean, were taken over by Emperor Constantine and others, and merged into one great State Church." Up to that time those "little spiritual democracies" had been like lumps of leaven, leavening the social order of that day; they had been like points of light, illuminating the darkness; but after that they became the instrumentality in the hands of kings, potentates, and politicians for working out their aims and purposes, which finally culminated in the World War in 1914.

Power is connected with the preaching of the gospel to the individual. It anchors the Christian program to the person of Jesus Christ. The very fact that you are preaching the gospel to the individual for his salva-

tion implies the presence of Christ in the world. He is a spiritual Christ, a present Christ, a Christ who is able to work with mighty power in the hearts and lives of men. We heard here yesterday morning, beautifully stated, the meaning of the appearances of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. One thought was that the manifestation of Jesus to his disciples served to connect him with the past—that Jesus, now after the crucifixion, after the burial, after the failure of his cause, the Jesus who now lives and appears before his disciples, is the same Jesus who lived in Galilean days and Judean days. The other meaning was that those appearances were to bridge the chasm between the present and the future. The glorified Christ, the Christ of mighty power to change the human heart, is the same Christ who is going to abide with the preacher and the individual in all the ages.

Again, evangelism is the supreme service because it is the creative force for a spiritual church. Have you ever connected the evangelistic message, motive, and method with the thought of the spiritual church? You see at once how it guarantees the spiritual church if it be carried out consistently.

First of all then, the church that arises out of evangelism must be a spiritual church because all its members are believers. It will inevitably be a democratic church, because all believers enjoy the same privilege of direct access to God, all can hear the voice of God, and all can speak the mind of God as revealed to them.

The church that arises out of evangelism will be a nonsacramental church, because the grace of God, operating through evangelism, does not operate through sacraments; it operates directly on the soul.

The church that arises out of evangelism will be a nonsacerdotal church, because it is unthinkable that there should be an exclusive group of men called priests, custodians of the divine grace. No, the plan and ideal of New Testament evangelism is the voicing of God's direct invitation to every man. "Whosoever will may come, and drink of the water of life freely."

The church that arises out of evangelism will be a nonhierarchical church. It is unthinkable that there should be grades and degrees of authority in a group of people, all of whom have come under the dominion of God's Holy Spirit and with whom God deals directly.

I maintain that evangelism is the creative force for a spiritual church in the world, and therefore we may claim it to be the supreme service.

Again, a New Testament evangelism is the true social dynamic. I spoke at the beginning with reference to the social side of Christianity. I recognize the value of this, and I advocate the propagation of the social ideals of the gospel. But the supreme service is to socialize the social unit, which is the individual, and the only way the individual can be socialized is to make him over again in the image of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to build a social order that will abide without regeneration, just as truly as it is impossible in a climate like this to build a brick house out of

unburned bricks. They do say you can build adobe houses, but you have to select the right place for them or they won't last. You may build an adobe social order with unregenerated material, but it will not endure the storm and stress of climate and the ages. The supreme social service is to socialize the social unit, the individual, and then you have prepared the way for every good thing that may come. A missionary said that when a soul is converted among the Zulus the first thing he wants is a pair of duck trousers and a calico shirt to hide his nakedness. He had no sense of being naked up to that time. After regeneration he has a new sense of self-respect, a new sense of his social relations. Then he wants a three-legged stool to sit on so he will not soil the duck trousers. When the soul reaches that place he is ten thousand miles above the heads of the heathen souls around him, because the springs of eternal progress have been opened in his soul. He goes on after that and wants all the other appointments of civilization, because regeneration, the evangelistic message which the missionary gives when he goes to the foreign field, is bound to plant new wants and new desires in the human soul. The Blue Books of Europe appraise the missionary commercially, and say that every missionary is worth to commerce fifty thousand dollars a year. The preaching of the gospel to regenerate the individual is the planting of a host of new wants in the hearts of that individual. In imagination I can see a great procession following the missionary. Right

on his heels comes the doctor, just behind the doctor the teacher, just behind the teacher the merchant, just behind the merchant the banker, just behind the banker the blacksmith, just behind the blacksmith the farmer, just behind the farmer the engineer, and so on and on. The missionary is the forerunner of a great procession of civilizers. Because when God takes the human soul and breaks it open by his divine grace, and plants the seeds of divine truth in it, all things are possible to the individual and to society. It is the true social dynamic because of what it does to the individual.

What is democracy? Here are one or two definitions. All the liberty consistent with the common good and all the restraint necessary to protect the common rights. I maintain that the only way to bring this about is to have man so remade in the image of Christ that he will have respect for the common good and will be so submissive to government that he will respect the common rights. The only way that European civilization can ever be made over again is by the preaching of the gospel. My tour of Europe has convinced me beyond anything I had ever dreamed of before, that the one supreme need there today is the simple evangelistic gospel that will change the individual. They had a form of Christianity there which impressed upon all Europe the appearance of Christianity, and its failure. During the World War the question was frequently asked, "Does not this war prove that Christianity is a failure?" My reply then

has been confirmed by a close-at-hand study of European conditions, and I say that it did not prove that Christianity was a failure, but it did prove that everything else under heaven was a failure, except Christianity. Europe had everything else. It had the greatest science the world ever knew. It had philosophy. A German can excogitate a philosophy from the depth of his consciousness before breakfast any morning. The German takes a great philosophic idea and tries to base the world upon it. It has been said that philosophy is the search of a blind man in a dark room for a black cat that isn't there. Now, do not misunderstand me. I think philosophy has its place in human culture, but Europe had philosophy and did not succeed with it. It had the greatest art in the world. Most of the masterpieces of painting, sculpture, and architecture are there. Europe had the greatest technical scholarship in the world. But all these things that we say constitute culture and civilization combined, could not do the deed, could not change the human heart into the image and likeness of Christ and make it over again into a new heart. And that is why I maintain that the World War proves, not that Christianity is a failure, but that everything else is a failure. The only thing that can ever reconstruct Europe is this same gospel.

The appeal of Europe to a Baptist is startling, absolutely thrilling. A few years ago there was held in the city of Paris a Free-Thinkers' Congress, to which atheists, infidels, and materialists came from

all parts of Europe. When they came to the end of this congress they put out a platform. Here was a group of men opposed to the Bible, to God, to the Church, and to everything that you and I hold dear in the realm of religion. At the end of this conference this anti-religious body of men put forth a platform that every Baptist would accept, every Christian would accept, and that you and I would promulgate. We would have supplemented and completed it, but as far as they went those men, against God, against the Bible, and against religion, put forth this platform:

1. No Church interference with the State—a demand that must be met in European life.
2. No State interference with the Church.
3. The right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience; or not to worship him.
4. The right of every man to have a voice in the government under which he lives.

What is that but democracy, but self-determination, the principle that Woodrow Wilson propounded in so many of his addresses? Lincoln could not have improved on that as a statement of the principle of self-government. Here were atheists, infidels, and materialists, against God, against the Bible, against religion, putting forth a platform that comes right out of the heart of this gospel, that lies at the very soul of the religion that they rejected. There is just one explanation of it. That is that the only thing they knew as the Christian religion was the State Church,

of which I spoke a moment ago, sacramental, sacerdotal, hierarchical, but not the religion that had in it the power of Jesus Christ and his Spirit. Not the religion that you and I know and which we preach in our evangelism. No, it was vaccination against Christianity, inoculation against it. But oh, as sure as you and I live, the greatest open door that ever came to Baptists in their history is open to us today.

I was going to add a word about the relation of evangelism to internationalism. The cynical politician today sometimes speaks with sarcasm about the brotherhood of nations and a better League of Nations. But if it be not true that we are approaching toward the goal of brotherhood between the nations of the world, then it seems to me that all these ideals of ours are of no value and God is not overruling the affairs of the world.

But I firmly believe that the nations are going to deal with each other on other terms. There is no political force at work today which gives very great promise of destroying militarism. The League of Nations may do something, but so long as America stays out of it there is no very great promise. I'll tell you a vision that came to me the other day. Somehow, as I listened to a man from Japan address our students—an able man, a prophetic man who stood in our chapel and addressed our student body a few weeks ago and made a plea for fair play in dealing with Japan, a plea for a just estimate on the part of Americans of the Japanese people and methods, he a

missionary loving his own country and loving Japan, and trying to weave the affections of these great countries together in an indissoluble bond, telling us how it was unthinkable that these two nations should come to any clash, and how it was impossible if we were Christians that we could think of such a thing—suddenly a vision came to me that the missionary is going to destroy militarism. He is the only hope today for the uprooting, casting out, and destruction of the impulse to war. He is the only hopeful factor. I do not say he is the only factor, there are others, but the supreme factor today in bringing the nations together is that group of men and women who have gone to the ends of the earth with this evangelistic message. They understand America and they understand the nations of the world, and they are going to unite in the bonds of brotherhood these nations. Politicians do not seem to be able to do it, but the missionaries are going to do it, thank God!

Again, evangelism is the supreme service, because evangelism produces a ministry of power. I think I need only go back to the first statement I made about the hiding of the power of Christianity to show it. The ministry that preaches this gospel to every one that believes, is the ministry that will have the pledge and guaranty of divine power. Jesus Christ does two or three things for a man. His authority is shown in two or three ways. It is shown, first of all, by making us free. Secondly, his authority is shown by refusing to impose upon us his own authority, but

letting us discover it, letting us accept it. There is nothing of coercion in Christianity. Doctor Truett said to a group of officers in France: "If we in America could convert millions of men to the Baptist faith by the pressure of the end of my little finger, we would not exert that pressure, because we do not believe Christianity can come in that way." The method of Christ is that his authority simply stands before men and they discover him. Thirdly, Christ transfers his authority to his ministers and to his churches. I do not mean any outward, formal authority, I mean the power, the spiritual impetus, the spiritual activities that we call authority. Brethren, I was a pastor for fifteen years and how my soul longs for the privilege of the evangelistic appeal and the evangelistic effort. I will warrant that every secretary here and every administrative officer in charge of a school, and every man who was ever a pastor and knew the joy of evangelizing and baptizing, has a hungering and thirsting and a yearning to be able to go and deal with the individual souls and lead them into the kingdom. There is no joy like it in the world.

Jesus Christ transfers his power and authority to those men who give themselves to this distinctive task that he has laid down here. I would that we might have that authority so that it might be felt in every community where we labor. Preachers have their moods. Sometimes they are in the optative mood and wish for things. Sometimes in the conditional

mood and long for better conditions. But the true mood for the preacher and worker is the imperative. Then comes action, accomplishment.

Imperative mood! When the preacher is in the imperative mood, Christ is formed in him and his will is under the sway of Christ's will, and in every sermon, every prayer, every contact with his congregation there is felt the urgency and the immediacy of decision for Christ and the oncoming of his kingdom in the world.

Shall an evangelistic ministry be exclusively evangelistic? Do you mean to tell me that a pastor or an evangelist shall never preach on anything except the few things that appeal to sinners? God forbid! That is not what I mean, but, beloved, I mean this: An evangelistic ministry will never lose that note; an evangelistic ministry will make that the dominant note in all the preaching. Surely a man is going to preach with a patriotic note at times. There may come a time when there will be an economic note, a civic note, a social note. A man's range of preaching will be up and down the whole gamut of the moral kingdom of God, but, mark you, the original tune will never be lost. Did you ever hear a man play a tune on the piano with one finger? I have. That is the only way I could ever play a tune. I remember playing "Home, Sweet Home" with one finger. You could tell what I was playing, too; you would recognize the tune. And then I have heard Paderewski play it with ten fingers with variations. You never lost the tune, but how

wonderful it was in its elaboration, in its richness, in its breadth, and in its mighty power.

Now, there is the one-finger evangelist. I have heard him. All he knew was just one tune, picked out with one finger on the keyboard. I tell you, God bless him if he knows that tune and can play it. They say that one of the Karen converts did not know anything but the doctrine of justification by faith. It went deep into his soul and he never learned anything else, and he used to go about preaching that. It was the one-finger evangelism playing the tune. But that is not all that a pastor ought to do. What he wants to do is to use ten fingers and give the social note, the civic note, the patriotic note, the economic note, and all the other things that go in a great, full, rich gospel message, and the tune will always be there, the dominant note will be there, that passion for saving souls, for saving lives, will be there, and the passion for saving society. It will begin with that great passion that burned in the heart of the apostle Paul.

I am truly sorry for the preacher who has not the vision of the evangelistic ministry. Beloved, you are missing the great show if you have not that. You have heard of the boy who went to see a tableau, a great and marvelous exhibition of heavenly scenes. The boy had eaten a hearty supper, and as he sat there looking at the drop-curtain with its painted scenery, he went to sleep and he slept through the show. The drop-curtain was raised, tableaux were exhibited, and wonderful things were done. When the drop-curtain was lowered

at the end it awakened him, and he went away and told some friends what a marvelous show he had seen. His friends who had been with him asked, "What have you seen?" He proceeded to describe the lake and the trees beyond the lake on the drop-curtain. That was all he had seen. He thought he had seen the show. He had slept through the show and he had not seen it at all.

The ministry without the evangelistic vision is sleeping through the show. You do not see anything but the drop-curtain, but oh, beloved friends, if you have the great vision of the tableau of the divine purpose and the divine salvation, God's wonderful grace toward man, your ministry is going to have a thrill in it that it could not have otherwise. God help us to give ourselves to an evangelistic ministry.

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