

## WHY MISSIONS?

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Massachusetts  
February 21, 1965

Scripture – Luke 4:16-30

### Introduction:

I wonder what passes through your minds when you present the America for Christ Offering every February or the World Fellowship Offering every November. These are our two major special contributions for the support of missions on the North American continent and in the rest of the world. Do you consider these offerings a burden, or are they a material manifestation of deep convictions about Christ and his church? For the collection of these offerings raises the whole question of the nature of missions. Why do we support the missionary effort of the church? What is the mission the church anyway? Are missions optional? Can we cut out our missionary concern and still call ourselves the church of Christ?

The question of the nature of the mission of the church is important in the context of the churches in New England. This my fourth year here. During this time it has been my privilege to visit close to 50 churches, most of them Baptist, in order to participate in their missionary programs, the so-called “schools of missions”. What I have found in these meetings is instructive for the topic before us.

Usually in the churches that I have visited, there is a small group of dedicated laymen and laywomen, who are concerned with what they conceive as the “missionary” task of the church. A chairman with the help of the pastor or other members of the congregation sets up a program whose purpose is to inform the church about the progress of the Christian mission in the four corners of the world. Usually, the assumption of these meetings is that the mission is out there and the church is here. The church as a whole is not involved in the missionary task. Mission, according to this pattern of organization and procedure, is the task of a small missionary group within the church. We ask: Why is this?

Another constituent element of the missionary groups in our churches is that they are mainly composed of women. Where are the men? Why aren't the men head-over-heels concerned with the missionary task of the church? Is it because they are less sensitive than women to the injunctions of the Gospel, or is it because the missionary program as conceived and executed fails to grasp their imagination? I am raising these questions just to provoke you into considering the question: “Why missions?”

The other day, one of our missionaries was telling me that the pastor of one of the Boston area Baptist churches is quite concerned about the fact that a group of young adults in his church are simply not concerned with missions. And we ask: Why is this? Along the same line, Paul Clasper, in the December issue of *Crusader*, reports that he visited one of what we would consider “better ABC churches”. The pastor is a very capable man. But he told Clasper that

the Young Adults would be absent that night from the missionary meeting. They are a very active and dynamic group, but they simply do not believe in “missions”.

Why is this? Paul Clasper himself gives us an insight into the situation. Says he: “Very likely the Young Adults (whom I did not meet) had been influenced by the same currents of thought as most of the people of our day. Those people are largely followers of ‘the American religion’, which emphasizes the value of being fairly respectable and letting every man choose his own faith and worship in his own way. They are cultural relativists, believing that religion is a part of culture in such a way that, while we may be traditional Baptists, it is surely a sign of fanaticism or imperialism to try to make Baptists out of Burmese Buddhists. Furthermore,” he continues, “these people have been cooled, not excited, by such impressions of ‘missions’ as they may have picked up. Their impressions may be superficial or unfair; but they react on the basis of such contacts as they have, or such stereotypes as dominate (or clog) their minds.”  
[end of quote]

This is a serious situation, and it is not limited to any specific church. I am sure that we, also, form part of this picture. For this reason, I shall dedicate the next three Sundays to a consideration of this matter. Today:

“Why missions?”

February 28: “The End of an Era?”

March 7: “Whither from Here?”

Today let us consider what missions are.

## I. Missions begin in the heart of God

John 3:16 – *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

2 Cor. 5:19-20 – *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”*

Emphasis on God’s initiative and action:

God loved	-	sent Son
God was in Christ	-	reconciling

The message of the Gospel is a call from God through his Son. Because of his action in Jesus, there is “Good News”, or a message.

## II. The Gospel is not just another religion.

Men are called to live in a new dimension of existence in which their strivings cease and they accept life as a gift.

Religion, even of the Baptist type, can be a serious obstacle to the understanding of the new

The worship and prayer life of the church are just formal manifestations of the central apprehension of faith, namely, God's reconciling act in Christ.

### III. Man's response is faith.

This response is given in freedom and can also be rejection or unbelief. The response is always a risky business, as one is called to take responsibility toward his life and the life of his fellow-men. At the same time, the believer is aware that this call is an invitation to a journey, and that the call is not a matter of moral perfection, but of obedience to the imperative of God's love.

### IV. The new life is life-in-community.

- A. There is no individualistic or private Christianity if the N.T. Private Christianity is a myth produced in the Christian Church under the impact of modern democracy.
- B. It is within the community and from the community that we are ambassadors.

### Conclusion:

Mission originates in the heart of God. The Gospel is not just another religion. Man responds in faith. The new life is life-in-community.

- A. The mission of the church is the same here as abroad. There is only one mission – God's coming in Christ and His sending of his church into the world as his ambassadors.
- B. The mission is the church's central task and demands boldness.

*(Luke 4:18,21) – "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. ... Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears."*

Do we have the boldness to proclaim that God's salvation has been revealed in Jesus?

- C. The mission provokes acceptance or rejection.
- D. This church here is in a missionary situation as surely as any church in any other country. We also need to be confronted by the claims of Christ. We also are in the mission. Let us not think of the mission merely as out there, but specially as right here. The stronger the mission at home, the stronger will be the concern for the missions abroad.