

## THE END OF AN ERA

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Massachusetts  
February 28, 1965

Scripture: Isaiah 55

### Introduction:

Last week we spoke about the reasons behind the Christian missionary activity. We concluded that mission is the central task of the church, that it starts with God and is the same at home and abroad.

In obedience to Christ's command, we have sent into many parts of the world missionaries, for we have heard from St. Paul: *"Because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is the Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. ... For 'everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.' But how are men to call upon him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!'"*

Or, as we have heard from Matt. 28:18ff. – *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."*

In obedience, then, to the imperatives of the gospel, we have sent people out to carry the message to many other countries.

### I. The Baptists and modern missions

We Baptists, in all humility, have had an outstanding participation in the modern missionary movement.

- A. William Carey, 1792, departs from England for India. The cobbler became one of the great missionaries of the modern church. After many and grave difficulties, the modern missionary enterprise was launched in India. Today the number of Christians in India is small – close to half a million Baptists – but the work is firmly established.
- B. Adoniram Judson and Burma. Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice, who were originally appointed as Congregationalist missionaries to India, on their way over decided to become Baptists because of their convictions regarding baptism. They came to the conclusion that baptism should be administered only to believers and not to children. They did not work in India, but moved to Burma. There are close to a quarter of a million Baptists in Burma today. The work is firmly established and in the hands of the nationals.

C. From this small beginning, we have work in the following countries:

	<u>Founded</u>	<u>Church members</u>
Burma	1814	212,000
India		438,000
Bengal Orissa	1836	
South India	1836	
Assam	1836	
East Asia		
Japan	1872	23,000
Okinawa	1960	1,014
Hong Kong	1954	18,000
China		123,000
South China	1836	
East China	1843	
West China	1890	
Thailand	1952	3,460
Republic of Congo	1884	95,000
Europe		
Germany		
Belgium		
Holland		
Latin America		104,000
Cuba		17,888
El Salvador		3,306
Haiti		50,000
Nicaragua		4,182
Puerto Rico		8,000

The numbers are not too large. Of the 25 million Baptists in the world, only 3,000,000 are outside the U.S. We should be thankful that many other denominational groups are realizing missionary work. The task is too big for any one group. At least we have become a world-wide fellowship.

II. The Christian church is not as free today as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to proclaim the gospel, to distribute literature, to build temples. The era of free movement has come to an end.

A. The rise of nationalism and the revival of long dormant religions. Rightly or wrongly, the Christian church has been identified with the imperial powers of the recent past. As a consequence, there has been a reaction against missionaries' activities. They have been considered as agents of imperialistic conquest. Examples:

(1) Nowhere has the reaction been so strong as in China. "The American Bible Society reports that in 1961, the China Bible Society was expelled from its premises and is conducting its limited work from a room in the Moore Memorial Church in Shanghai. Anyone wishing to purchase a copy of the Scriptures must formally

register his intention. This requirement has greatly curtailed the role and distribution of the Scriptures.”

This is just an isolated instance to illustrate a point. The missionaries have been retired from China mainly for political and cultural reasons. Also, their religion is considered Western. The Christian church is on its own. It is under the control of the state.

- (2) Burma. In 1961, Burma adopted Buddhism as a state religion. However, an amendment to the constitution has been passed, which would assure for everyone the right to profess, practice and teach religion. There was a strong Buddhist objection to such an amendment, especially on the part of Buddhist priests, but it was passed by the parliament and became the law of the land.
- (3) The Viet Nam situation. The Buddhists have gained religious consciousness and are out to gain political power, as well. The Catholic minority is in danger of suffering persecution.
- (4) In Japan, an interesting confrontation with Buddhism. It is interesting to note that in October, 1962, about 200 men and women teachers of the Rissho-Kisei-Kai, a sect of Buddhism, who had come to Tokyo for their annual all-Japan teachers' conference, made an observation tour of several Christian churches and schools in Tokyo. This sect of Buddhism founded in 1938 with 30 members, now claims as its followers 345,000 households. An official of the sect states that they believe the Buddha Shakamuni and the Christian God are one and the same. In various ways they link Christianity to the teachings of their sect, saying that chapter 16 of Lotus Sutra and chapters 12 and 15 of St. John's Gospel explain the same teaching, linking Christ and Shakamuni as being the one sent by the eternal Buddha or God to save mankind. This group states that the new members of their sect wish to join hands, for the sake of world peace, with good religions which do not rely on magical means to solve the sufferings in our environment and among ourselves, this being the task of religion. The Christian group which met with them answered questions and presented 50 New Testaments to those requesting them.

Conclusion:

Thus, in the missionary situation of the church today, we have to deal with:

- the rise of nationalism
- the spread of communism
- the revival of long-dormant religions

With these problems and the challenge they present, an era has come to an end in the history of missions. The old approaches are no longer valid. Yet still today we trust in God: *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater. So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and prosper in the things for which I sent it.”*

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