



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Missiology

### Lesson 25 – The Mission of a Missionary

In some of the preceding lessons we have emphasized the difficulties and problems of a missionary, especially the persecution that Christian leaders may face from unbelievers. In this chapter we emphasize the joys of bringing the Gospel of Christ to those who do not know Him. For this purpose, we begin by quoting the writings of an American missionary who worked in Nigeria, Ghana, and Central Africa from 1937 to 1968. The missionary is Bill Schweppe, and his book is called *Ibibio*.

May 3, 1937: “Well, here we are in Africa. Life will not be impossible here.”

June 4, 1937: “We like it here and are very glad and thankful for this opportunity in our life. ... The work here is tremendous, and the responsibility is a heavy one. I really tremble when I think of it.”

June 14, 1937: “What a great door of opportunity and what a great challenge the Lord has placed before our church. Here God has placed hundreds of souls into our care and bids us bring them to the knowledge of the truth and to feed them with His Word. ... There were churches in Nigeria before our church took up the work there. But there never was real Christian instruction in any of the 31 churches which we took over. ... People were simply herded together, taught to repeat two sentences: ‘Jesus is the Son of God’ and ‘Jesus died for me.’ They were then organized as churches and then led to believe that all was well with them, that they were good Christians. As for the law of God, they never once heard of such a thing. ... We find people hardened in their sins, living on in their old heathen ways, in all their old heathen superstitions, consoling themselves with the one thought, ‘Jesus died for me. I can now do as I wish. The Lord has prepared a covering for everything.’ ... God has chosen us to bring the true Gospel of His grace for sinners to these poor souls so greatly in need. We dare not fail!”

July 5, 1937: “This work, although hard at times and discouraging, surely has its satisfactions and its rewards. This outside of the fact that it is the greatest work in the world, I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

October 2, 1937: “One dare not think too much about the responsibility resting upon us. When Dr. Nau leaves later on this month, we shall have 6,000 souls in our following. ... I just looked in my record book and since the first Sunday in September I had 328 baptisms, 220 of these adults, 51 marriages, and 308 confirmations. All must

be examined first. You see, there is not much time to loaf! But see what a harvest field!”

November 27, 1938: “I have been busy enough in the past months. There seems to be no prospect of relief. ... The work is getting harder right along and we are without even hope of more men. It surely is a grind for the nerves. One would think the Lord would make somebody willing to come! ... In spite of it all my health has been perfect.”

The editor of this book adds the following note: “From July 1938 until June 1939 Schweppe held the fort, so to speak, as the lone American missionary with 6,000 souls and 39 congregations under his care.” It is no wonder that Leola (his wife) wrote home: “If some action isn’t taken to send a replacement and another man soon, I’m going to write to the Board myself. Bill can’t keep up like this very long!”

The Lord blessed the work in Nigeria. On December 31, 1960, there were 194 congregations, 33 preaching stations, 33,343 baptized members, and 13,645 communicants, served by 18 African pastors and 18 missionaries. How sad that the work did not continue to follow the sound doctrinal basis on which it began! The Lutheran church body in America which began this work in Nigeria later began to move away from sound Lutheran doctrine and practice and began to tolerate false teaching. By this time Missionary Schweppe had lost his life through an accident in Africa.

What can be more wonderful and more meaningful than to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit in bringing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to persons who were on their way to eternal damnation, which is what we all deserve because of our sins! The only remedy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and faith in that Gospel created by the Holy Spirit through the use of the Word of God and the Gospel Sacraments. It is certainly a special privilege to bring the Gospel to other people, even to other nations and tribes and peoples in the world.

The apostle Paul certainly regarded it as a special privilege to be God’s chosen missionary to bring the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. He wrote to the Ephesians: **“I became a minister (a servant of the Gospel of Christ) according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of God”** (Ephesians 3:7-8). Paul had been a rabid Pharisee who persecuted the Church of Jesus, but now he was a special ambassador for Christ through the grace of God. He wrote to the Corinthians: **“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”** (1 Corinthians 15:10).

By grace Paul was called to faith in his Savior Jesus Christ. By grace he and Barnabas were commissioned by the Christians in Antioch of Syria to be God’s chosen instruments to proclaim the name and work of Jesus among the heathen. Paul never forgot that his mission

was by grace alone. In this humble spirit he carried out his work. It was God's grace in Christ that motivated him to do all he could through the strength and abilities God gave him.

Every missionary today is likewise a product of God's grace. No one deserves to be a Christian, and no one deserves to be a Christian missionary. Our faith in Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. Our training to serve as a missionary is a gift from God. Our call into the mission field is a gift from God. We do not make ourselves missionaries. God makes missionaries by bringing people to faith in Christ, by giving them the desire to share this faith with others, by training them in the Word of God, and finally by calling them to proclaim the Gospel in a certain area. At the conclusion of their first mission journey, Paul and Barnabas **"reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles"** (Acts 14:27). Not only had God brought them to faith, trained them in the Word of God, and called them into mission work, but He had worked through them and their preaching to bring faith to Gentiles.

There are many problems in the world today. Problems are found in every country and in every culture – such problems as war, poverty, racism, addiction to alcohol or various drugs, the fear of terrorists and criminal gangs, the prevalence of immorality, as well as corruption in government and church bodies. You can probably add many other things to this list. But the basic problem in this world is the same as it has always been since Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden: the problem is sin. This is true for the rich and the poor, for those living in one continent as well as for those who live in another continent. The apostle John wrote: **"The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"** (1 John 5:19). It is the Christian's task, and thus the missionary's task, **"to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me"** (Acts 26:18).

As one missionary has written:

"To experience what it can mean to people who have come out of the darkness of sin into the light of Christ's radiance is the most rewarding experience in all the world. Sometimes it seems that the odds are all against us. Heathen traditions are so deep-rooted. Human nature is so hard-hearted and obstinate. What hope does a foreigner have, he who can hardly speak the language and who comes with nothing but a Word which proclaims an unknown God as the only true God and a crucified Savior as the only hope of everlasting life? And yet we proclaim that Word – first to a handful here and there, in the most primitive of circumstances. The handful grows into a group of baptized believers, and perhaps after considerable trial and tribulation into a Christian congregation. One scarcely knows how it happens, yet it does, and as one sees this congregation come together to worship the Lord one can sense a difference. There is hope where once there was nothing but hopelessness, life where there once

was nothing but death, joy where there once was nothing but despair. The change has been gradual, almost imperceptible, yet nothing short of miraculous.

“What has brought about this miracle? Nothing else but the power of God’s Spirit working through the gospel. He has brought people out of a tradition so totally different that any human explanation is out of the question. He has nurtured the tiny embryo of faith, caused it to grow into a fellowship of believers known as the Body of Christ. The devil will try to destroy this handiwork of God. One can think of a thousand ways in which this might happen. Only the power of God working through Word and Sacrament can stop Satan’s treachery and bring success to this body of believers as they grow in the fruits of the Spirit.

“And they do grow! The Lord does open hearts. People are found who are willing to serve the Lord. Students are trained to become evangelists, and then pastors. Laymen are there who help preach and teach Sunday after Sunday. Choirs are organized which sing with joy in their hearts. Children – ill clad, unkempt children – come together who can sing like the angels. And people die and are buried in the hope of a risen Lord and Savior” (E. Wendland).

Some may say that mission work today should improve the living conditions of people, raise their educational level, and work to reduce corruption in government, but this is not what Christian mission work is. The work that Christ assigned to His Church is to preach the Gospel based on Holy Scripture, and to trust that the Holy Spirit will work through that Word to bring about the results He desires: the creation of Christians who know that their sins are forgiven and that Christ has defeated death by His death and resurrection, Christians in whom the Holy Spirit brings forth the fruits of faith in their lives.

A Christian missionary has God’s command to preach the Gospel of Christ. He has the means to convert unbelievers to faith in Christ, for the Gospel is that means. And he has God’s promise that this Gospel will bring forth results. It will indeed accomplish what God desires. Therefore, as Christians, as Christian pastors and teachers, and as Christian missionaries we should not be discouraged. In the words of the apostle Paul: **“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ... For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. ... But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. ... Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal”** (2 Corinthians 4:1, 5, 7-9, 16-18).

## Questions

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1. Why is the task of telling others about Christ a joyful experience?
2. What great opportunity was given to Missionary Schweppe from 1937 to 1968?
3. Why was Schweppe unwilling to trade his calling for another?
4. What great lack did Schweppe find at first in the congregations he served?
5. How did the Lord bless the preaching of the Gospel in Nigeria?
6. Why must we say that a missionary is a product of God's grace?
7. Why must the conversion of an unbeliever be considered a true miracle?
8. What are the eternal benefits of the preaching of the Gospel?
9. Give a definition of true Christian mission work.