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WORLD MISSION

1. THE MESSAGE

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"The Protestant Faith"

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The International Congress on World Evangelisation assembles in a week or so at Lausanne in Switzerland. There will be almost 3,000 delegates present as well as a large number of observers. A conference of this size is a significant event in the Christian world and if this conference is to be fruitful it is a matter of great importance that it should be based on a clear and accurate Biblical theological foundation. In particular there are three points that must be absolutely Biblical if Christian missionary activity is to be fruitful. The first is the message, the second is the apprehension of the situation, and the third is the objective.

The New Testament message is a message about the judgement of God on every individual and over every human institution. Thus, when St. Peter preached the gospel for the first time to the Gentiles in the sermon to Cornelius, a Roman centurion - Acts 10:42,43 - his words reach their climax when he concluded: "Jesus charged us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one ordained of God to be the judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that every one who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."

Similarly, St. Paul in his sermon preached to the Athenians (Acts 17) reached the climax of his sermon on the same note. "God commands men everywhere to repent in as much as He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained whereof He has given assurance unto all men in that He has raised Him from the dead." The message of God's judgement is the message which Christians are commissioned to proclaim. It is a very practical and a very pressing message but within this message there is a word of grace and hope, for the judge is also the Saviour. All those who call on His name (that is, who pray to Him for rescue from their guilt) will receive forgiveness, so that they no longer fear the judgement but are assured of God's approval on that day. There are many other passages which confirm this message. For example, Revelation 14:6,7. In this vision an angel is seen "flying in mid heaven having an eternal gospel to proclaim to all who dwell on the earth and to every nation, tribe, tongue and people; and he said with a great voice 'fear God, and give Him glory; for the hour of His judgement is come: and worship Him that made the heaven and the earth and the fountains of waters.'"

The message of God's judgement is a very relevant message. It is the ~~point of contact~~ with the hearer, for whatever the culture barrier between the messenger and hearer, both have this common ground; they know the guilt of sin. This is a universal human experience and it is at this point that the Gospel message becomes relevant, for within the message of judgement there is also the message of the victory that Christ has won over sin so that all who call upon His name as their Lord receive remission of sin and are no longer under judgement but have passed out of death into life. They are accepted by God as His sons and daughters and stand before Him in His favour.

What I am saying about the Christian message is confirmed by what is recorded of the apostle Paul when he preached to Felix the Roman governor of Caesarea. Here was his grand opportunity to preach the whole gospel of God in Jesus Christ before Felix and the Roman Provincial Court, and we may be sure that he took this opportunity to the full; but St. Luke summed up St. Paul's sermon in a sentence (Acts 24:25) "He reasoned of righteousness and self-control and the judgement to come". It is this message of God's righteous judgement that reaches the conscience, as St. Luke records in this instance: "Felix was terrified".

Jesus has promised that this message will indeed bring conviction through the work of the Holy Spirit giving the preacher's words power. Before His death and ascension Jesus promised the disciples "if I go, I will send the Comforter (that is the Holy Spirit) to you and He, when He is come, will convict the world in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgement. Of sin because they believe not in me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father and you behold me no more; of judgement, because the prince of this world has been judged." (John 16:11).

Other examples of Paul's preaching confirm what I am saying. Thus in Romans 2:16 Paul said that the gospel he preached had within it the message that there would be a day in which God would judge the world by Jesus Christ, and he reminded the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:10) that they had turned to God to await the coming of Jesus who delivers them from the wrath to come.

Our concept of salvation depends on our concept of our predicament. If we are to preach the biblical doctrine of salvation,

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we must accept the biblical assessment of our predicament.

The coming wrath of God against unrepentant sinners is a reality and the judgement of God is a certainty and salvation from this is the central thrust of the gospel, for the Christian message of God's grace receives its point from the truth of God's judgement. Throughout the Scripture from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New the same truth is reiterated, that God is a righteous judge who will judge everyone according to his works. But judgement has already begun in so far as Satan has been judged at Calvary and completely vanquished. The judgement is continuing, and there is a note of urgency for men and women to repent while it is still the day of salvation, for if they repent and call upon the name of the Lord they will be saved. This message of salvation from judgement through the remission of sins in Jesus Christ is the message which we have been commissioned by the Lord to proclaim. It is often blurred over these days. But unless we get our message clearly biblically based our missionary activities will be unproductive.

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