"Not for ours only"

Sir Henry Holland worked for many years among the Pushtuns in the North West Frontier Province. He used to tell how God called him while a student in Edinburgh. Some of his friends had decided to become medical missionaries and Henry was gradually moving in the same direction although he said later that he was still kicking against the pricks. He wrote,

"One evening I was asked to team with two of the leading members of Edinburgh University Christian Union. They were both going out to China as medical missionaries. I was sitting before the fire making toast when I looked up and saw above the mantelpiece words that puzzled me – 'Not for ours only' – I read. 'What on earth does it mean? Where do the words come from?' I asked. 'Don't you know?' was the answer. 'It is one of the greatest missionary texts in the Bible':

He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world". (1 Jn. 2:2)

Henry wrote, **"The words hit me fair and square and I left that room feeling unsettled and miserable; for at that time I didn't want to give up everything I loved and go abroad…But the thought persisted… Finally I made that choice. I joined the Student Volunteer Missionary Union and signed the declaration: "It is my purpose, God willing, to become a foreign missionary."**

Henry Holland did indeed serve the Lord working for several decades among Muslims in the NWFP of India and in Afghanistan, tending the sick in Jesus' name.

1 Jn. 2:2 always lay at the heart of his commitment to share the Gospel with Muslims.

Propitiation speaks of the great love of Jesus in giving His life as a sacrifice for us

For our sins speaks of the personal application of that great love to ourselves – just as Henry has responded to it as a university student.

Not for ours only turns our eyes, and eventually our feet, away from ourselves and to the unreached millions who have yet to hear of the love of God. This is where our commitment lies – a deep commitment to love both Jesus and His world.

If this verse is indeed one of the greatest missionary verses in the Bible, it is also probably one of the most neglected. Contained in these four words is the amazing heartbeat of God that pulses through the whole Bible. I would like to share with you three thoughts:

It is a word for our ears

The church in our home countries is not hearing very well. We are not hearing well if we keep on saying, 'ours only'. They hear of fighting in Iraq, war in Afghanistan, famine in Niger, the tsunami in Aceh, bombs in London and then they say to themselves, "Thank God, there is no place in the world like 'ours only'.

We are vitally interested in local politics and demand that attention is given to our affairs and 'ours only'. We want to insist on strict immigration controls lest unwanted 'foreign hordes' enter our land and deflate our values that are so precious to us and 'ours only'. We spend large sums re-modelling our churches. We move about comfortably in 'our fellowship' seeking to promote 'our growth' and 'our Christian life' as if the heart of the Gospel stopped with us and 'ours only'.

Thinking and feeling like this implies we haven't heard God's Word. Notice the movement in 1 Jn. 2:2. It starts with the love of God in the Cross where Jesus effectively dealt with the problem of our sin and rebellion – that is propitiation. It moves to us and our sins that, for

Jesus' sake, the Father no longer holds against us. Then it moves out to the whole world – to all peoples – in forgiveness, blessing and salvation. So, God – us – the world.

This movement is found throughout the whole Bible. It is a dominating theme. God called Abraham and through him nations came into being. But God's purpose was that through one of these nations (Israel) all the families of people would be blessed. Later the prophets recalled Israel to this task of being a light to the nations of the world. Later when Jesus came, His last will and testament to His disciples was, ***"Go and make disciples of all nations."***

The tragedy of the Old Testament People of God was not that they didn't know God's love or that they didn't receive His blessings. It was that they thought that it all stopped with them.

The tragedy with us, The New Testament people of God, is not that we don't know the love of God in Jesus or that we have not received His salvation. It is that we have thought it all stopped with us and 'ours only'. How can we be so deaf? Have the news media bombarded us with so much news of starvation, war, refugees, violence, devastation and suffering that we can no longer hear God's voice? Have we read and heard so many reports from around the world about the billions of people who have never heard the Gospel that we have ceased to listen? Have the comforts, luxuries and securities of our land numbed us to the needs and claims of any but 'ours only'?

There is an appalling deafness abroad in the church! A self-centredness that hugs to itself the benefits of the Gospel, hears just what it wants to hear and fails to take seriously what sounds so loudly from the Bible, ***"Not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world".***

It is a word for our eyes

Never before have Christians been able to see so much of the world. Affluence, cheap airfares, retirement benefits and student travel have combined to enable huge numbers of Christians to be involved in sight seeing. In addition, television enables us to see the world in all its poverty, injustice, sickness and war. In spite of all this, we Christians remain myopic – short-sighted. We see, but we don't see far.

Thousands of opportunities have opened up in the International job market. There are less than a handful of countries that are "closed". There are hundreds of thousands of Christians that are sent abroad by their businesses. But only a few apply for jobs with the motive of being a witness to the Lord Jesus in another culture and are sent out by their home churches.

So we see many possible opportunities but we don't respond. We don't really see these people as sinful, lost and heading for hell. So often we are told that our home town is a mission field and there are unsaved people on our streets. Sadly, this is true, but the potential task force at home is huge compared to many parts of the world. The text we are considering simply tells us that God wants our eyes on something far bigger and more demanding that our home country alone. He wants us focussed on the whole world!

May God grant His people healing from their myopia! May they put up their telescopes and see that Jesus is ***"the propitiation not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world"***.

It is a word for our feet

We need to put springs in our feet! What are we planning for our lives? A nice comfortable home? Two cars in the garage? International holidays in the sun? Promotion? A comfortable retirement?

Francis Xavier, the Catholic missionary to China and Japan, wrote home to university students in Paris who were ambitiously planning their life's careers. He urged them, **"To give up their**

small ambitions" and for Jesus' sake to go out to East Asia to proclaim the Gospel. Later Michael Griffiths wrote a great book with this title. Francis Xavier put springs in his feet and in the light of the demands of the Gospel of Jesus, he saw no reason why many others shouldn't do the same. Perhaps Xavier's thought was that many had not got beyond planning to put springs in their beds! We might be forgiven for having the same thought today.

Have we understood the urgency of the situation? Confronting us we have the command of the Lord Jesus to go into the world with the only comprehensive, effective message for its healing and salvation. Are we thinking more about our comfortable beds? God wants springs in our feet. He wants men and women who will cut ties with their selfish ambitions and material security and go to the world in His name.

Sacrifice, risk and danger will be involved. Francis Xavier himself died on a remote beach in Japan. But this is no more than Jesus promised to His disciples when He said to them, ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*** (Mt. 16:24) The same Lord Jesus also said that all who so follow Him:

- Share in the greatest enterprise on earth
- Operate under the greatest authority on earth
- Experience joys and rewards far greater than any earth can give

Borden of Yale was called of God to reach Muslims in China. He went to Egypt to learn Arabic and he died there in his early thirties. He often described why he got into missions to Muslims. It was all simple logic. He said, '**Suppose you see ten men carrying a log of wood along the road. Nine men are on one end of the log and one man is on the other end. If you want to help, which end of the log will you go to?**' There was only one answer Bordon could give to that. The springs in his feet led him to Egypt.

Ears, eyes and feet – We must hear ***"Not for ours only"*** and understand that word correctly. We must go urgently to the world in the name of Jesus. This is the simple, logical, if somewhat shattering, response that Jesus demands. It is a response to His equally shattering love for us in laying down His life ***"as a propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world"***.