The Root of our Problems

We find it easy list our problems: lack of workers, lack of compatible workers (!), lack of money, poor methodology, the hardness of people's hearts, antagonistic governments etc. These are very real problems and many more could be added to the list.

But when we have pushed past all secondary considerations and pressed home to the root of the matter I believe that in the last analysis we shall find that **the real issue is a problem of love – a personal love for the Lord Jesus**. Why? Because the soul of missions is sacrifice and love is the supreme and **only** motive that can impel us to the sacrifice involved.

The spirit of mission is just the Spirit of Jesus. His was essentially a spirit of supreme sacrifice. Those words, ***"He saved others, Himself He cannot save"*** flung derisively at Jesus as He hung on the Cross were the expression of a profound truth! If He had come down from the Cross at that mocking jeer, our salvation would never have been accomplished. He saved us, but it cost Him His life to do it.

This spirit of sacrifice wasn't confined to His death. It marked His whole life from the manger to the grave. ***"For you know the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor so that you through His poverty might be rich."*** (2 Cor. 8:9)

Jesus was poor, literally poor. He chose to be so. He was born in a poor borrowed home where the animals stayed overnight with the family. He wore coarse clothes. He ate common food. His home, while He had one, was that of a poor village peasant. Later on He often had 'nowhere to lay His head'. Finally He was buried in a borrowed grave. This literal poverty was part of the price He paid for the spiritual riches He has purchased for us.

His ministry involved physical weakness, weariness, hunger and privation as well as the still greater suffering of mind and heart. As He ***"went about doing good"*** – bringing physical, emotional, social and spiritual healing to thousands, it meant the pouring out, little by little, of His own life and strength. In life and in death He saved men and women at great cost to Himself.

Listen to His own words, ***"Unless a corn of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Whoever loves his life will lose it while whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life".*** (Jn. 12:24-25)
This is a major principle in the Kingdom of God. It is also a principle of the life and work of those of us God has brought to this part of His world.

The Baptist Missionary Society adopted as its logo an ox standing between a plough and an altar. Underneath were the words, '**Ready for either or both**'. Speaking of Christians in North Africa, Tertullian said, **"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."** This is no mere statement. It is a fact. Recently in Malawi, my son and I went to a place where there were a lot of graves. Many of them were of doctors. These men had had years of training a few months as workers and then death. But they passionately believed that by their life and death they were contributing to the coming of the Kingdom of God in Central Africa.

I believe there is a need today, when we talk so much about strategy and methodology, to re-emphasize this principle of sacrifice in mission as one that is fundamental, essential and vital. We live in a culture that views self-sacrifice with horror. The aim and effort in life is to eliminate sacrifice and indulge in ease and comfort. This spirit has invaded the body of believers and produced a spirit of complacency instead of passion. If we could save the lost by passing resolutions in meetings over our cups of coffee without any sacrifice, without it costing us anything, we would!

But the hard fact is that we can't. Our manpower and resources are insufficient. We are unable to meet the needs and take up the opportunities. The reason for this is obvious.

The Divine Principle is the law of sacrifice, ***"He saved others, Himself He cannot save."*** We can't violate this law. God never intended that we should. If we break the law we miss out on the very essence and glory of our calling. God laid the foundation of the work of world redemption in **sacrifice** when it cost Him His only Son **and He will finish it by no less worthy a spirit and no less costly a means!**

Believers all over the world profess allegiance to Jesus, yet we are denying billions of lost people the opportunity of salvation by simply refusing to live on the basis of self-sacrifice. In the light of the world's unsupplied need and our unproffered resources, the evidence is that we are only 'playing' at evangelism and discipleship as a sort of diversion instead of making it our supreme business.

As believers we often say that our energy has three outlets: praying, giving and going. These are very impressively illustrated by three stories Jesus told. In each story the essential factor of **sacrifice** stands out.

Prayer

Our 'task' is not primarily a matter of workers, or money or method. It is a matter of the mighty work of the Holy Spirit convicting the world of sin and of righteousness and judgement. Such mighty work is always the result of prayer. Prayer is the greatest power in the Kingdom of God. The appeal for prayer should always be placed before appeals for workers and money. The vital truth about intercession is the cost. Remember Tozer's book **Born After Midnight** showing that revivals are born out of prayer after midnight.

Jesus told a story about a persistent friend at midnight who was so concerned to feed a weary traveller that he sacrificed his own comfort and convenience and even risked his reputation in the neighbourhood. He got out of his bed, groped his way in the dark to his neighbour's house and there persisted in pleading for the needed bread until he got it. His persistence overcame the reluctance of his neighbour. He was so impressed by the lengths to which this man was prepared to go on behalf of someone in need that he got up and gave him all he asked for. (Luke 11:5-10)

Of course God is never reluctant to respond to us. He is always eager to hear and answer our prayers – especially on behalf of the lost. But He waits to see how much in earnest we are. How much of the element of sacrifice is to be found in our prayers? Are we praying earnestly? Are we labouring fervently in prayer? How much is prayer costing us in time, in strength and in self-denial? If our prayers cost little they will avail little. God is looking for intercessors.

Going

There is a rather comical Victorian hymn that contains the lines:

'Waft, waft ye winds His story and roll ye waters roll
Till like a sea of glory it spreads from pole to pole.

How nice and comfortable if the winds and the waters would do the job for us! But they won't! We can't stay in our comfortable homes and see the lost saved as they hear the story of redeeming love brought to them by the wind and the waves!

Sankey wrote another great Victorian hymn based on the story Jesus told of the Good Shepherd. One verse reads:

'Lord whence are those blood drops all the way
That mark out the mountain's track?
They were shed for one who had gone astray
'Ere the shepherd could bring him back.
Lord whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?
They're pierced tonight by many a thorn.'

Our Shepherd trod a hard path. It is this same path that we must tread – a life and a task that demand sacrifice. The sacrifice is in three areas:

Those going: They are cheerfully leaving home, family and familiar surroundings. Perhaps they are giving up bright employment prospects prized by others in the family. They may have to cope with hard climates, difficult languages and new cultures. They face the challenge of relating to people in new ways. Working with them will take much patience. They will need to persevere in the face of hardships and suspicion. This is what will be needed if the 'other sheep' are ever to be brought in.

Letting others go: Parents find it hard to sacrifice their children and grandchildren to work in 'dangerous' places. This sacrifice is real. Watch the parents, family and friends of the military presently serving in Iraq. But it is true that believing family members of those who go to these parts of the world are those best equipped to 'hold the ropes' by prayer, sympathy and sacrificial gifts.

Helping others go: Churches and friends also need to play their part if workers are to be sent and sustained. Who should be sent? Those who are misfits at home? Those who can easily be spared because of their perceived lack of gifting/abilities? In sending out Barnabas and Paul, the church in Antioch sent out their best and most experienced leaders. It is sacrificial for churches to live out the principle of Proverbs 11:24, ***"One gives freely yet grows all the richer, another withholds what he should give and only suffers want."*** Oh that churches would send out their best! Is this the reason for so many struggling, shrinking churches?

Giving

The third story I want to remind you of is Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan. The unfortunate victim of highway robbery lay wounded, helpless, unconscious and dying by the roadside. This is an accurate picture of the lost who bear the fatal wounds of Satan's attack for he is a robber and a murderer.

We see in the high priest and the Levite the leaders of religion. They expound things of which they are ignorant – especially our relationship with God. Despite their pious faces they don't have a concern or a remedy for the woes of humanity. They 'pass by on the other side'.

The Good Samaritan is first a picture of our Saviour, Jesus. But he also represents us who are constrained by love to give unstintingly of what we have to relieve and rescue the victims of Satan and sin. The Good Samaritan saved the dying man by giving. He gave his time. He gave his oil and wine. He gave his animal for the man to ride on. He gave his money to the inn keeper for the man's further care. He gave generously. It cost him something to save the life of another. The same is true for us. It costs us our gifts to sustain the work God has called us to. A gift has value to the Lord Jesus according to the sacrifice it entails.

You remember how Jesus sat in the temple treasury one day watching the people as they brought their gifts. Remember His startling words, ***"Truly I say to you this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. They all contributed out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had to live on".*** (Mk. 12:43-44).

Jesus' estimation of our giving is very different to ours! The question is not, 'How much did you give?' but 'How much did you keep back for yourself?' It is this second question that touches this vital point, 'What did it cost you to give?

How much have we really given? Have we given out of our abundance or out of our poverty? Are we trying to serve God and satisfy our conscience by saving the lost and by giving our 'pin money'? Are we measuring up to, ***"Freely, freely you have received, freely give"?*** (Mt. 10:3)

Conclusion

Have I demonstrated that 'sacrifice is the soul of mission'? Have I shown that by prayer, by going and by giving our task demands self-sacrifice? If you understand this then you will see that the heart of our problem is love – pure, passionate love for the Lord Jesus and His love through us because, ***"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit…."*** (Rom. 5:5)

Only a love that is greater than the sacrifice can sustain us! Love is the supreme motive of true sacrifice. It was love that sent the friend out at midnight. It was love that motivated the Good Shepherd and the Good Samaritan. ***"Love never fails."*** (1 Cor. 13:8) Nothing else will do!

Conversely, sacrifice is the supreme test of love. ***"By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in Him?"*** (1 Jn. 3:16-17)