

**!THEY CAN'T STOP IT, CAN THEY!@**

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Rom.10:12-15

Near the summit of Mount Pilatus, the imposing 12,400 foot peak which dominates the city of Lucern, Switzerland, is a spot where the geographic and atmospheric conditions are so arranged as to produce an almost perfect echo.

One day, a young father and his little daughter went with a group of tourists to the top of Mount Pilatus to experience this phenomenal echo. After a demonstration, the guide invited the various tourists to try the echo for themselves. One after another, the people stepped forward and called out some meaningless phrase or silly statement.

Finally, realizing this was an opportunity to teach his little girl an important lesson, the young father stepped to the edge of the precipice and, holding tightly to his tiny daughter's hand, cried, **A**Jesus Christ! The same yesterday, today and forever.@ And the echo responded, **A**Jesus Christ! The same yesterday, today and forever.@

The little girl listened breathlessly as the echo responded: forever, forever, forever, forever. Finally, overcome by it all, she said, **A**Daddy! They can't stop it, can they?@ Knowing she had learned the lesson he wanted to teach, the father smiled and said, **A**No, daughter, they can't stop it!@

It's priceless, isn't it? How it gladdens our hearts to know we are associated with One who cannot be stopped. And yet, as we reflect on the past glories of Christ and his Kingdom, we cannot help but wonder if the continuing progress of the cause of Christ has been made, not *because* of us, but in spite of us.

To be sure, we have heard the voice of that One who thunders across the universe to whisper in

our ears, AThe gates of hell shall not prevail against (you).@ Unfortunately, most of us never get anywhere near the gates of hell. Somewhere along the line we stub our toe on the status quo. Instead of busying ourselves mastering the art of effectively communicating our faith, we become involved in a multiplicity of lesser interests. We've become captive to a set of second-rate loyalties.

There is no greater need than that which confronts us tonight. As men who long to be mighty for God, we need to learn the importance of committing ourselves with an unsophisticated singleness of purpose to the task of reaching a perishing world for the Savior. With the apostle Paul we must learn to say, Athis one thing I do.@

I'm not a prophet of doom. I realize things are not always as bad as they can be made to appear. My brother-in-law is a successful physician. His income has allowed him the opportunity to collect art. His tastes turn toward the surrealistic. One of his more recent additions is a painting which features a splash of bright color in the upper left-hand corner with some black and white streaks descending across the canvas to what looks like a disintegrating orange in the lower right-hand corner. The painting is entitled, AMan Playing the Piano.@ When Lucille and I first viewed this painting, I asked her what she thought. She said, AWell, it only goes to show things are never quite so bad as they can be painted!@

No, I am not a prophet of doom. But so much has happened so fast, most of us are suffering from something which can only be described as Athe spiritual/cultural bends.@ And it's critically important that we face the fact that we will not have a new generation in the world tomorrow, unless we have a regeneration in the church today.

The most common characteristic of our age is confusion. Political confusion. Economic confusion. Cultural confusion. Sociological confusion. A famous politician was visiting a defense plant. He stopped to talk to one of the machinists. Pointing to a young person with cropped hair and baggy trousers standing at the next machine the politician said, AThat's the

trouble with young people today. You can't tell whether one's a boy or a girl.@ To which the machinist answered, AWell it's a girl, and she's my daughter.@ AOh,@the politician said apologetically, AI didn't realize you were her father.@ To which the worker replied, AI am not her father, I am her mother!@

Well, if the world is in a state of confusion it's because the church is. And, if the church is in a state of confusion, it's because its members are. You see, men, Christians like us make churches like ours, and I have an uneasy feeling that churches like ours are inadequate for a world like ours. As Samuel Shoemaker says in his valuable book Revive Thy Church Beginning With Me, AUntil something happens in us and to us, it will never happen through us.@ If we go on being what we have been, we will go on doing what we have done, and what we have done is not enough.

It's not that evangelism has been tried and found wanting. It's been found difficult and not tried. Shoemaker says that when we begin talking about evangelism in many of our churches, we are reminded of a bachelor who married a widow with a baby. She goes out of the house, leaving the baby on his lap. There sits this critter, and this recently domesticated Aman about town@doesn't quite know what to do with it! AWell,@says Shoemaker, AHe can learn! And so can we.@

That's what Project Winsome is all about -- helping Christian men *learn* to more effectively communicate their faith. Among other things, that means being ready with an answer to the questions people are asking today. And, all about us -- in the streets, shops, offices and schools where we work and live -- people *are* asking questions.

Questions about the authority of our witness as they ask, ASays who?@

Questions about the relativity of our witness as they ask, ASo what?@

Questions about the fidelity of our witness as they ask, AWhat's it to you?@

Allow me, please, to offer some answers to those questions so, when you leave this mountain top and go back into the valley, you'll be better equipped to share your faith. The first question seeking people are asking is **B**

**Says who?**

Here they are making an appeal for authority. Modern people harassed by the twentieth century version of the four horsemen of the apocalypse: fear, frustration, frenzy and futility wants something that has the sound of certainty in it. They want no placid, half-hearted, pseudo-intellectual presentation of the gospel. AHave you any word from the Lord?@is the question seeking souls are asking today.

And men, this is no time for you, as sons of God, to be soft-pedaling your witness. No time to watering down the radical and challenging content of the gospel to fit the faithless few who stumble on the supernatural. To be effective as a witness for Christ you must dare to speak with quiet, unruffled, authority rooted in the person of Jesus Christ. And believe it or not, that's what your compatriots out there in the world of industry and commerce and education want today. They are not much interested in religion, but they are positively fascinated with Jesus.

During an evangelistic tour of Europe under the sponsorship of the Baptist World Alliance, I preached 147 times in 127 days in 10 different countries. It was a grand experience for Lucille and me. Our eyes and hearts were opened in a new way to the needs of a lost and dying world. One of our opportunities was to hold a week of meetings in Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh, Scotland. This is one of the great churches of Europe. Its current pastor, J. Sidlow Baxter, has been invited to preach all over the world and he graciously agreed to set up our itinerary on the British Isles.

After we had been introduced, Lucille stood and sang a beautiful song she had picked to explain the reason for our presence.

I am a stranger here within a foreign land,  
My home is far away upon a distant strand,  
Ambassador to thee from realms beyond the sea,  
I'm here on business for my King.

This is the message that I bring,  
A message angels fain would sing,  
Oh, be ye reconciled, thus saith our God and King,  
Oh, be ye reconciled to God.@

When she sat down there was a sweet sense of the Spirit's presence. The man who was in charge of the service stood and said, ANow that we know why these young people have come to Scotland, let us sing back to them our word of welcome.@ And, oh, how they sang! It must be as the angels in heaven sing. I will never forget it.

ATell me the story of Jesus,  
Write on my heart every word,  
Tell me the story most blessed,  
Sweetest that ever was heard.@

There was a time in history when there was only one man in the whole world who was preaching Christ. Suppose he had fallen prey to the temptation which has snared so many of us and had snuffed out his witness. Suppose he had stopped telling what he knew about Jesus. Well, thank God, he didn't. John the Baptist made it his specialty to become an authority on the one person who could save a lost and dying world. ABehold the lamb of God,@was his only theme. And, oh, how he told it. There was certainty in what he said.

People will respond to that kind of witnessing today. They are sick and tired of being sick and tired! They are weary of man-made philosophies and ideologies. They want to hear someone who has a ring of authority in what he says. Someone who knows who he is, why he's here, and where he's going. Someone who believes God is doing business on his corner. Someone who can say, AThis one thing I know. Once I was blind, but now I see.@

In answer to the seeker's question, Says who?-- thus saith the Lord, is still the only adequate

answer. It is still the message people want, people need and to which people will respond.

AThey tell me the story of Jesus is old,  
They ask that I preach something new.  
The babe in a manger, who became the man on a cross,  
For the wise of this world will not do.  
But the story is old as the sunlight is old,  
It is new, every morn, all the same.  
It will never grow old. It will never grow old  
While sin lives unvanquished and death rules the world.  
The story of Jesus will never grow old.@

### So What?

The second question people are asking today is, So what? Here they are searching for a sense of relativity in your witness as if to say, AWhat's this got to do with *me*?@

I love the story about the guy who went to see a psychiatrist. He was wearing a yellow jacket with one green sleeve and one blue sleeve. His slacks were purple, his shoes were red and he had a parrot sitting on his head. When the doctor asked, AWhat can I do for you?@ The parrot said, AHow do I get this thing off my feet!@

As a witnessing layman you must include a note of relativity in what you say. You must make it clear that God's love revealed in Jesus is the only thing that can lift people out of the miry clay in which they are stuck. You must learn to share how Jesus did that for you, personally.

You see, laymen like you have a distinct advantage in witnessing over preachers like me. You can sit down with another businessman, teacher, office clerk or factory worker and gain almost immediate rapport. Why? You are one of them! You, too, have been engaged, along with them, in hand to hand combat with stern reality. Sometimes we preachers forget that.

Years ago, when I was a very young preacher, I met a wonderful layman whom I came to love.

He was so very real. One evening he buttonholed me and said, AJohn, I had a great victory today. I didn't say damn once!@

Even though I was just a few years away from the secular world where I did a number of things to put myself through school, in jobs where I rubbed shoulders with the raw realities of life, I had already forgotten that it might be a real victory for a layman to go through a whole day without saying damn, once.

I think that's why, when Jesus set out to build his Kingdom, he didn't go into the temple and sign up a bunch of priests to lead his cause. Nor did he seek the services of the best theological minds of his day. Whom did he seek? Common people. Fishermen. Laborers. Tax collectors and the like. Plain people who would know how to build the Kingdom of God on Plain Street, because they lived there!

Called into Kingdom service were rough-hewn, two-fisted men like Peter and Andrew, James and John. Jesus knew *these* guys would not allow the gospel to get lost in the clouds. They would see to it that it remained relevant to everyday life. They would tell people what Jesus had done for them, *personally*, and what he could do for the people to whom they would be talking.

Simon and Andrew, James and John would carry out a ministry on Plain Street which would make fishermen into Christians, while they fished! And, if you capitalize on your distinct advantage as a layman, if you learn to couch your witness in the second person, present tense -- Ayou need Christ, now!@- you will begin to enjoy the thrill of witnessing in a winsome way which wins someone to the Savior. I am not suggesting you put on an air of spiritual superiority. To the contrary, you must never forget you are nothing more than a sinner saved by grace. As Richard Baxter put it, we must always remember, AWe speak as a dying man, to dying men.@

Every Sunday, before I open the door which leads to my pulpit, I pause and pray, AGod, be merciful to me a sinner.@ If you want to be effective in your witnessing, I recommend you do the same. If, as you talk to others about their need for Christ, you reflect upon that from which you

yourself have been saved, there will be a note of relativity about what you say, as well as a ring of authority in how you say it.

### **What's It To You?**

And then, allow me to suggest an answer to the third, and most penetrating, question, AWhat's it to you?@ It's a question about the fidelity of your witness. AWhy do you care about me and my problems?@ And men, there's only one place to find the answer to that question. It's down on your knees. For it's not until you come face-to-face with the worth of a soul, it's not until you see what God sees in every sinner--the possibility of a saint--it's not until then that you will be able to convince people you are sincerely, and not just superficially, concerned about them and their needs.

A Skid Row bum who had been hit by a car, was taken to the county hospital. As they washed him up to Aprep@him for surgery, a young intern looked at him and said, AJust another worthless bum.@ The man stirred when he heard those words and said, AI may be a bum, Doc, but I am not worthless. Jesus died for me, too.@"

Oh, how we need to regain that sense of joy and zeal which were ours when we first gave our heart to Jesus. When we felt as though we would burst unless we told others what Jesus had done for us. When we wanted to shout from the rooftops the wonderful news that AJesus saves.@"

One of the principles we teach in Project Winsome is a concern for persons. We try to help men to stop thinking of evangelism as a spiritual scalp hunt. We try to help them see the pitiful plight of those outside of Christ, ABound who should conquer, Slaves who should be kings.@ And men, you will never know the real thrill and romance of Christian living until, through *your* poor stammering tongue, you share what Jesus Christ has done for you and you see God at his best, meeting man at his worst.

It won't be easy. There will be many rebuffs. There will be times you are misunderstood. But

that's ok. Great living always comes at a great price. But,

It is great to be out where the fight is strong,

Out where the heaviest troops belong,

In this fight with God for man.

Oh, it sears the body and wracks the brain,

It pierces the heart till man's friend is pain,

Does this fight with God for man.

But it's great to be out where the fight is strong

Out where the heaviest troops belong

In this fight with God for man.@"

When God had a job to do, the Bible says, AThe word became flesh.@ And, if we are to do the job to which *we* have been called, the word must become flesh again -- in us. Wesley said,

AGive me two-hundred men who fear nothing but sin, love nothing but God, are filled with nothing but the Holy Spirit, and I will set this empire on fire.@"

There are many more than two-hundred of us here tonight! The question is, ADo we fear nothing but sin? Do we love nothing but God? Are we filled with nothing but the Holy Spirit?@" If so, there's enough power in this room to change the course of history and win this generation for Jesus. God grant that, by his grace, we shall do just that.