

SO HO NO GO LO WOE

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Rom. 1:16

Shortly after Dr. T. Z. Koo, the brilliant Chinese Christian scholar arrived in America some years ago, he was attending a banquet given in his honor. Sitting next to him at dinner was a rather inane individual who had never met Dr. Koo and, in a brash, brusque manner, typical of far too many Americans, he turned to this outstanding Chinese statesman and said, ALikee soupeee?@

Dr. Koo smiled graciously, nodded his head and shortly thereafter was introduced as the guest of honor and main speaker for the evening. For 50 minutes he stood and, in flawless Oxford English, thrilled the great crowd with his magnificent flights of oratory. When he concluded, there was a veritable avalanche of applause as the audience gave him a standing ovation. After he sat down again, he turned quietly to his dinner partner and said, ALikee speechee?@

I like that story because there are times when we Americans need to be put in our place. We are so proud of our own accomplishments, we tend to forget how deeply indebted we are to some of our Christian friends from across the seas. These people of different colors and cultures have contributed much to the color and culture of our own country and yet sometimes we hesitate to give credit where credit is due. I want to avoid that mistake this morning by acknowledging my debt to one of my Christian brothers from over the waters for both the idea and outline of today's sermon.

I have never met Dr. Leland Wong, nor have I read any of his writings. I *do* know his marvelous insights into the meaning of scripture have earned for him the title of AThe D. L. Moody of China.@ Several years ago, while having dinner with a fellow pastor, my friend mentioned a sermon he had heard Dr. Wong preach. The title was so unique and the idea so intriguing I decided, then and there, that sometime I must preach a sermon using Dr. Wong's title and that's what I'm doing today. The sermon is mine; the title is his. ASO HO NO GO LO WOE@.

The gospel of Christ is a wondrous thing. It is so magnificent the greatest minds this world has ever known have yet been able to comprehend it. They have set sail in their intellectual craft and have gone north, south, east and west and, like the great prophets of old, have turned back saying: AIt is past finding out.@"

And yet, while it is so magnificent it causes wise men to wonder, it is so simple the smallest child among us, knowing the difference between right and wrong, can understand enough about it to be saved.

This morning I want you to see *that* side of the gospel. I want you to see the sheer simplicity of it all. I want you to consider the gospel in single syllables. The gospel as revealed in six short words, words which can change your life and mine and, through us, can literally change the world:

So Ho No Go Lo Woe

Listen as they speak to the heart need of all of us.

AFor God...so...loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...@" (John 3:16).

AHo...everyone who thirsts come to the waters and drink...@" (Isa. 55:1).

AThere is therefore now...no...condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus...@" (Rom. 8:1).

AGo...therefore into all the world and preach the gospel...@" (Mark 16:15).

ALo...I am with you always, even to the end...@" (Matt. 28:20).

And, AWoe...to me if I preach not...@" (I Cor. 6:19).

So Ho No Go Lo Woe. Let's take a look at them one by one.

So

For God...so...loved the world that He gave His Son...@" (John 3:16). The word Alove@" has been put to some strange uses in recent years. We toss it off so lightly, we bandy it about with very little thought for its real meaning, so there is a sense in which the real meaning is lost.

We say, AI just love this dress.@" Or, AI love this house.@" Or, AI love my car.@" And of course, we

do have a form of affection and appreciation for these things. But, to say that we Alove@ them is, at best, a slight exaggeration.

Indeed, we toss the word Alove@ about as if it didn't mean a thing...applying it to everything from ice cream cones to sport cars...until finally, when someone says AGod loves you@, it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't really stun us as it should, for the word has been stripped of so much of its real significance.

Perhaps that's why the writer of the fourth gospel saw fit to add this little word, ASo@.

AFor God **so** loved the world.@"

That single syllable lifts love from the confines of the common place and puts it on a new and lofty plane. It changes love from a kind of Atickle under the fifth ribs@ into a Amany splended thing@. For, coupled to this simple statement AGod **so** loved the world...@ is this stupendous statement *Athat He gave His Son!@*

Henry Ward Becher has said:

AWe never know how much someone loves us until we know how much he is willing to suffer for us. It is the suffering element which measures love.@"

If you want to know how much God loves you, just look at Calvary. And, as you contemplate the sacrifice of His Son, you will begin to understand, at least in part, what love really is and what the bible really means when it says: AGod **so** loved the world.@"

Oh, I know this single syllable seems like a terribly inadequate description of God's love and, of course, it is! It's something like the answer a little baby gives when its mother asks: AHow much do you love Mommy?@" And the little tyke stretches out his tiny arms and answers: ASo-o-o-much.@" From finger tip to finger tip...so-o-o-much...and yet, when a child has said that, she has not even begun to scratch the surface of her love for the mother who gave her life.

And to say AGod **so** loved the world@ is to leave us with that same helpless feeling. And yet, how else can we say it? I doubt that even the angels could do better.

Suppose you could climb a ladder to heaven...mount the embattlements of glory...push aside the gates of pearl...stride down the streets of gold...and say to Gabriel and the angels:

AHow much did God love the world?@

Do you know what I think would happen? I think Gabriel would fold his wings and the angels would bow their heads in wonder and they would answer in awe: AGod...**so**...loved the world that He gave His son.@ Not the cattle on a thousand hills, for that would cost God nothing. Not the silver or the gold which are His, for that would cost Him less. But God **so** loved the world that He gave His son - and that cost Him everything.

Do you begin to see how precious you are to Him? Do you begin to understand what it means to be loved by God? *Now* can you see the importance of one little word? For the glory of the gospel is *not* that God loved the world, but that God **so** loved the world He gave His son. How simple and yet how sublime. But the wonder of the gospel is that it can be captured within the confined of a single syllable: A**So**.@

There is a second word suggested by Dr. Wong and it is found in Isaiah 55:1. It is the word --

HO

A**Ho**...everyone that thirsts come to the waters and drink.@ There is nothing nonchalant... lackadaisical...or indifferent about this offer of salvation. It is earnest. It is compassionate. It is full of zeal. And, in this verse, it seems to me God stoops down out of His great heaven and, stretching forth a hand of summons He says: A**Ho**! Stop! Wait! Look! Listen! *Everyone* that thirsts, come to the waters and drink@.

There are no reservations in it. There are no conditions to be met. It means exactly what it says:

A**Ho**...listen...*everyone*...come...drink.@

And then, as if that were not clear enough, God repeats the invitation again and again throughout scripture. 642 times God issues the invitation Acome@. 642 times we find the gracious summons of the Savior. Binding each word of each verse of each page of each chapter of each book of the bible so closely together, no one can mistake the fact that God=s love is for all people in all ages and in all attitudes of circumstance and sin.

From the most prestigious penthouse to the cheapest hovel. From the executive=s conference room to the murderer=s death cell. From the Queen=s boudoir to the harlot=s hotel. People everywhere are invited to come and find peace in their souls and a satisfying sense of security that banishes the fear of both life and death.

AHo...everyone that thirsts come to the waters and drink.@"

My friend, have you ever felt left out? Have you every wondered if you were really wanted and loved? If so, be done with doubt, for here is the unmistakable, inescapable evidence of the fact that the God who *so* loved the *world* that He gave His son. That includes you! For here is a word that speaks to the last and the least of the lost. **AHo**...*everyone* that thirsts come to the waters and drink.@" And what would be the result of your coming? It is revealed in a third word as recorded in Romans 8:1.

NO

AThere is therefore now...**no**...condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. A moment ago I said there is no limit to God=s love. I want to go on and say there is no limit to God=s forgiveness. When you heed His invitation...when you accept His son...when you receive the gift of His salvation...your sins are forgiven. But, more than that, they are forgotten!

They are tossed into the depths of the sea. They are taken as far from you as the east is from the west. They are blotted out like a thick cloud. They are put behind His back. They are lost forever in the abyss of God=s eternal forgetfulness to be remembered against you no more. You are given the righteousness of Christ and are made to stand before God as if you had never

sinned. You are made spotless and pure, even as Christ is spotless and pure.

Oh, I wish you would write that down upon the tablet of your memory in living letters of fire this morning. You are forgiven! You are forgiven by *God*! And, when *God* forgives, He forgets!

So many of the people I talk with are plagued by guilt. They feel they have failed God so miserably in the past. They look down the corridor of yesteryear and remember the faults and failures which constantly trouble them. They remember the sin that did so easily beset them. They remembered the thoughts and words and deeds which left raw scars upon their lives and the lives of others and they are overcome by an awful sense of shame. And they wonder: Can God go on forgiving me when I seem to fail Him over and over again?

Oh, my friend, listen. The dimensions of God's forgiveness are set forth in a single syllable, for the bible says:

AThere is therefore now...**no...n...o...no** condemnation to them who are in Christ
Jesus.@"

For as the bible also says:

AThough your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red
as crimson, they shall be as wool.@"

AHow many, many things He will forget!
Our every sin, both great and small, and yet

He will remember and reward
The smallest service done for our dear Lord!
Divine forgetfulness, unfathomed grace
And love which knows no bounds of time or space.@"

GO

But there is still another word in this list of single syllables and it is found in Mark 16:15 where

Jesus says to His disciples:

AGo...into all the world and preach the gospel...@ If the second word, AHo@ is the Saviors=s invitation, then this fourth word AGo@ is the Christian=s obligation. We cannot divorce the two. For if we are willing to come, then we must be willing to go.

Now, I=am not just talking about full-time Christian service. I am not just talking about becoming a missionary to the foreign field - although that is very important. When Jesus said AGo ye into all the world@, He meant *all* the world. Not just the far-off, distant places. Not just the jungle lands across the seas. Not just the bleak, black corners of the earth. He meant *all* the world. Your world and mine. The world of home and job and school. The world of friendships and associations and neighbors. That=s the world Jesus sent us out to reach. That=s the world we have been commissioned to win for Him and that=s the world to which each of us must preach.

To be sure, we need more missionaries who will live out their lives in the jungles for Jesus. To be sure, we need more Christians who possess such a passion for souls they will leave family, home and loved ones to serve in the front line trenches across the seas. But believe me, we also need husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.who will serve and sacrifice in the front-line trenches here at home.

The lost are not all out there somewhere. There are many of them right here. On our very door steps. Within our very homes. And, as Christians, it is our high and holy task to go into our little world and preach the gospel. Not only with our lips, but with our lives.

How do we do that? I think the answer is found in a lovely story about St. Francis of Assisi. One day he said to a young monk,

ACome, my brother, let us go down to the town to preach.@

The young priest was thrilled to be the chosen companion of St. Francis on a preaching expedition and he set out with great exuberance to observe the master preacher at his work.

They passed through all the principle streets and down the back alleys...out into the suburbs...until finally they were back at the gates of the monastery. As they turned to go in, the young monk said,

AYou have forgotten, Father, we went down into the town to preach.@"

St. Francis replied,

AMy son, we *have* preached. We were preaching as we walked. We have been seen by many. Our behavior has been closely watched. It was thus we preached our morning sermon. For you see, my son, it is no use walking anywhere to preach unless we preach as we walk.@"

AGo...into *all* the world,@" said Jesus. Your world of home and school and job. Your world of friends and family and neighbors. Go into *that* world and preach as you walk, remembering another admonition of St. Francis:

APreach Christ always! If necessary, use words!@"

And, as you do, have this assurance from Matt. 28:20.

ALo...I am with you always.@"

LO

Someone has said there are 32,000 promises in the bible. I=ve never counted them, but I=ll tell you this: all of them put together could not provide more power, more strength, more assurance, more courage or comfort than this one verse:

ALo, I am with you always.@"

Here is the promise of a divine companionship which never fails. Here is the assurance of a divine assistance which never falters. No matter how dark the night...how heavy the burden...how rugged the road...here is One to walk beside us saying, **ALo**, I am with you always -- *even to the end.*@"

Many years ago, a man had taken the overnight steamer from Boston to Nova Scotia. Early the

next morning, as he watched the captain bring the ship into the safety of the narrow harbor, he said,

AHow were you able to navigate throughout the night when nearly all of the trip you were out of sight of land?@

The captain answered,

AOh, we may have been out of sight of land...but we were never out of sight of heaven.@

That's a parable of life. No matter what happens to you in the course of your day, you are never out of sight of heaven. For Christ has promised, ALo, I am with you always.@

WOE

If that be true, then must we not agree with Paul's powerful proclamation in I Cor. 9:16 --

AWoe...is me if I preach not?@

If by definition we mean that Ato preach@ is to walk...if by definition we mean that *all* the world includes our little world of home, school and work...and, if it is true, that all of us are included in His great commission, then indeed A**Woe** to us if we preach not.@

As Christians we are to be to the world what Christ would be if He were here Himself. We are little Christs. We are His ambassadors. His representatives. His disciples. He has set before us an open door through which we are challenged to walk, being assured He will walk with us. He has promised that where we are weak, He will make us strong. Where we are foolish, He will make us wise. Where we are in doubt, He will give us faith. Where we are afraid, He will give us courage. Where we are distressed, He will give us peace. For Jesus said: AI have overcome the world@ *and so can you!*

He has given us everything we need to witness and to win. Then **woe** to us if we preach not. What a dreadful responsibility is ours if we do not see to it that the Good News of God's love,

acceptance and forgiveness is taken to the whole, wide world.

This morning, God is not calling you to win *everyone* to Christ, but He is calling you to win *someone* to Christ. And there *is* someone who is looking to you for a piece of Good News. That person may be your son or daughter, your husband or wife, your father or mother, your neighbor or friend. But, whomever it is, it is someone for whom you are especially responsible and if you do not win them, they may never be one.

This morning, God is *not* calling you to go to the foreign field, but He *is* calling you to go into all the world! There is a world which awaits the gospel. It is your world. The world of your home, family and loved ones. The world of your neighbors, community and jobs. It is into *that* world that Jesus has commissioned you to go.

This need not be a solo flight. It need not be a task you attempt alone, by yourself. It may very well be a task we undertake together as we shore each other up on our weak side.

I love the story of two converts on one of our mission fields in Burma. They were so grateful for what God had done for them through Christ, so on fire for the gospel they wanted all of their friends in the neighboring villages scattered through the hills in which they lived to, hear the Good News.

But one of them was blind and could not see. The other was crippled and could not walk. It seemed impossible that they could fulfill the desire of their heart to take the gospel to their friends. *Until they decided to team up!* The lame man would be carried by the blind man. One would be eyes for his friend who could not see, and the other would be legs for his friend who could not walk.

So. Ho. No. Go. Lo. Woe. The gospel in single syllables. So very simple and yet so

wonderfully sublime, for they speak with clarity to the hearts of us all.

For God...**so**...loved the world that He gave His Son.

Ho...everyone that thirsts come to the water and drink.

There is therefore now...**no**...condemnation to them who are in Christ.

Go...therefore into all the world and preach.

Lo...I am with you always, even to the end.

And **woe**...to me if I do not preach.