

THE GREAT EVANGELIST ... and the church He could trust  
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(LUKE 10:34)

The stories or parables of the Saviour were always filled with superlative interest, but few can be more intimately related to the problems of modern evangelism than the account of the Good Samaritan. How he went forth on the Jericho road, and there found an unfortunate traveller, is known to all Bible students; but strange to relate, many readers have missed a vital part of the account. When the Samaritan saw his potential convert ". . . he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast "-and then probably asked himself a most important question, "What shall I do with him now?" "And he brought him to an inn."

#### The Church of the Open Road

What would the Good Samaritan have done with his convert if the inn had not existed? The traveller's life was in danger; his physical condition forbade removal either to distant Jerusalem or Jericho. He needed urgent attention. Here was a problem of the first magnitude. "What can be done with my convert? Have I rescued him only to see him die in my arms?" "And he brought him to an inn . . . and said unto the host, Take care of him . . ." And there we have the crux of the problem of modern evangelism. The church has been built alongside the road of life to be a haven for travellers who need succor. Gifted evangelists may go forth seeking the lost, but without the church of the open road, much of their best efforts will be fruitless. To build an inn in such an isolated and dangerous place surely seemed ludicrous, and many readers will wonder why the innkeeper decided to embark on such a hazardous venture. That he was a man of rare vision, none will deny. Possibly he had travelled that way and had first-hand experience of the need for such accommodation. The account teaches that the ministry of the church is of equal importance with that of the man who brings the lost from the highways of life.

#### The Church of the Open Door

It would appear that the Good Samaritan knew the type of reception he would receive at the innkeeper's door. Here was a man whose hospitality was known far and wide. None who came were ever turned away. The innkeeper could not afford to turn people away. This was not a thriving seaside resort, nor a place of majestic scenic beauty. Wealthy citizens did not come here to retire. This inn was on the Jericho road, where robber bands terrorized travellers. If any people were refused admission there would be a possibility of the innkeeper going out of business. And in like manner, the same truth applies to the church. Without the fruits of successful evangelism, the modern church may become an eventide home for the aged. The function of the church is to keep open doors for all people-segregation is a word not found in God's dictionary. The clarion call of the church has always been, "Whosoever will may come; and him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out." Where the church has departed from this ancient standard, she has ceased to be of any spiritual value. The text, "Take care of him," should be mentioned to the assembly each time a new member is received into fellowship.

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The Church of the Open Heart

The dawn was breaking; the Good Samaritan was about to leave. The innkeeper was smiling. " Friend, why not stay longer?" " Mr. Innkeeper, I cannot. Other travellers may be needing help. Yet soon I shall return. Take care of my convert, ' and whatsoever thou spendest . . . when I come again, I will repay thee." ' Thus was a man commissioned to continue the work which the Saviour had commenced. The best possible attention was lavished upon the sufferer; nothing was too much trouble, and at any time of the day or night, the kind host was ready to answer a call for assistance. The care of the convert is the duty and privilege of the church; and thus we arrive back where we started. Evangelism without the church is a flop; the church without evangelism is a social club with a religious flavor. To bring souls into the fellowship of the assembly is the prerogative of evangelism; to prepare wholesome meals enabling souls to grow into a measure of spiritual health, is the task of the church itself. The Lord gave to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers-" for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ " (Eph. 4:11, 12). When the evangelist and the church begin to quarrel, they both commit suicide!

The Problems and Pleasures of Church Life

We have just considered the inn on the Jericho road. We have, I trust, walked through that hospitable abode, examining every corner and interviewing the staff. Surely the home which enjoyed the confidence of the good Samaritan was a fine place indeed. Similarly, the church on the highway of life-my church, your church-should be just as wonderful. Alas, oftentimes this is not the case. Various people have said, " I can be just as good a Christian at home. I have no need to identify myself with any church." This is not true. I have likened the church to a fire; the Christian to an individual coal. Take a tongs and separate the hottest coal from its fellows, and within seconds the living ember will begin to lose its glow. A piece of coal can only burn when it has fellowship with others. Yet the same fire which supplies great satisfaction may, out of its rightful sphere, become a source of tragic disaster. Within the church may be anything from deepest disappointment to thrilling ecstasy: it all depends-on us. I would like to reproduce a strange poem which I found in The Australian Baptist, February 12, 1958.

Ten little churchmen went to church when fine,  
But it started raining, then there were nine;  
Nine little churchmen stayed up very late,  
One overslept himself then there were eight.  
Eight little churchmen on the road to heaven,  
One joined a rambling club, then there were seven;  
Seven little churchmen heard of Sunday " flicks,"  
One thought he'd like to go, then there were six.  
Six little churchmen kept the place alive,  
One bought a television set, and then there were five;  
Five little churchmen seemed loyal to the r-ore,  
The pastor upset one of them, then there were four.  
Four little church men argued heatedly  
over ceremonial, then there were three;  
Three little churchmen sang the service through,  
Got a hymn they didn't know, then there were two.  
Two little churchmen disputed who should run  
The next church concert, and then there was one;

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One faithful churchman, knowing what to do,  
Got a friend to come to church, then there were two.  
Two sincere churchmen each brought in one more,  
So their number doubled, then there were four;  
Four sturdy churchmen simply couldn't wait  
Till they found four others, then there were eight.  
Eight eager churchmen, searching round for souls,  
Working, praying, witnessing, drew others in by shoals;  
Shoals and shoals at every service, cramming every pew,  
O God, supply this grace and zeal in my own parish too.

.....  
Before the Good Samaritan left the inn, "he took out two pence and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." That Christ will return to meet and reward His faithful servants, is the fervent hope of the church. The following illustration from The New Century Leader is most suggestive.

A tourist travelling through the picturesque parts of Northern Italy came to the castle, Villa Asconati. The beautiful grounds were so well kept and attractive that he asked permission to walk through them. The gardener was delighted with the request, and gladly permitted the traveller to do as he desired. The tourist noticed that the castle was closed, and before he left, asked the gardener, "How long since the owner of the castle was here?"

"About twelve years."

"Does he ever write to you?"

"No."

"Then who gives you your instructions?"

"The master has an agent in Milan."

"Does he ever come here?"

"Never."

The tourist smiled appreciatively and added, "You certainly keep these grounds in excellent condition. They look as if you expected your master to come tomorrow."

The gardener almost interrupted his visitor to say, "Today, sir; today."

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