

The Last Command: Missions in “the Great Century”

I will comment later on the fact that the nineteenth century is the Great Century when we come to the study of the expansion of Christianity. The prayer I will begin with is from a woman by the name of Betty Scott Stam. Betty Scott was the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries to China. She went to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. There she met and married John Stam. The two of them went as missionaries to China with the China Inland Mission. They were both executed by the communists when the communists took over China. They were martyred in 1934. Betty Stam was 28 years old at the time. I want to begin with a prayer from Betty Stam for two reasons. The first reason is to illustrate the importance of women in the foreign missions movement. By the time we come to 1934, the year of the death of this missionary, at least half of all Protestant foreign missionaries were women—perhaps more than half. As the mission movement unfolded, pious, godly, Christian women were moved to go and serve God overseas. In some cases, opportunities presented themselves for service in missionary contexts that would not have been available to women at home. The other reason I begin with a prayer from Betty Stam is simply to point out the great sacrifice that so many missionaries—men and women—paid through the years. Hundreds of missionaries were martyred, and thousands gave their lives in being stricken with disease and death overseas. Betty Stam’s prayer is a serious prayer. As I pray it I will ask you, as far as you are able, to pray these words along as I read them. I am not asking you to pray anything you cannot pray, but listen to the words of the prayer from Betty Stam. May God enable us to respond in some measure in the way that she responded to His call to serve the Lord in the great task of taking the Gospel into all the world. Let us pray.

“I give up all my plans and purposes, all my own desires and hopes, and accept Thy will for my life. I give myself, my life, my all, utterly to Thee to be Thine forever. Fill me with Thy Holy Spirit. Use me as Thou will. Send me where Thou will. Work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost now and forever. Amen.”

This lesson is going to focus specifically on foreign missions. That means we will have to go back and pick up some events that took place chronologically earlier than the point at which we are in the sequence of lessons we are following. I will say just a word about Catholic missions. The Catholics began missionary activity quite early. Their work can be traced all the way back to the sixteenth century when Francis Xavier, one of the great Jesuit missionaries of the sixteenth century, went to India and Japan. He was trying to enter China when he died. Other Jesuits went to South America. Missionaries from the different Catholic orders quickly began to circle the globe with the message of Christianity as taught by the Catholic Church. When we think of missions in America, it is important to remember that the first meeting between Native Americans, or Indians, and Europeans was not in Jamestown in 1607 but when Franciscan missionaries pushed up from the south in Mexico into what is present-day New Mexico in the year 1580.

I want to focus primarily on Protestant missions. At first, there was little Protestant missionary effort. I think there are some good reasons for that. The Protestant church was simply using its energies to organize itself. Opportunities arose to conduct home missions such as Calvin did from Geneva. Young men would come from France to be trained. Then they would go back into France at a great cost (often their lives) to preach the Reformed faith in Catholic France. Early on, the countries that became Protestant had very little overseas contact. They did not have colonies like Spain, Portugal, and later France. Only later did the Netherlands and Great Britain become great colonizing powers, which then opened the doors for foreign missionaries to go from Protestant countries. Despite those limitations, there is evidence that, quite early, Protestants began to think about overseas missions. The first

Protestant mission that we know anything about is the Huguenot mission to Brazil when the church in Geneva responded to a call for pastors to go with French colonists to settle in Brazil. Pastors were needed not only to preach to those colonists but also to reach the Indians of Brazil with the Gospel. That mission was short-lived because the colony soon failed, but you see something of an effort early on to respond to needs overseas.

The post-Reformation period saw mission efforts beginning with the Dutch Calvinists. The seventeenth century was the golden age for the Netherlands. The Dutch people were spreading around the world, creating colonies in various places. With the Dutch colonists went Dutch missionaries. In fact, the Dutch Reformed Church coined the term “church planting” during the seventeenth century for missionary work in Indonesia. That effort, as one writer said, was hardly glorious. It was slight in the beginning, but not too much happened during that period. However, we do have some high-level, mythological thinking coming from one of the Dutch Protestant theologians, Boethius, a man whom we have met several times already. This man was far ahead of his time in thinking of the implications of the Gospel for the church in overseas missions. Earlier, the idea was that Christ gave the Great Commission to the apostles and the apostles were sent into all the world but we are not. We are supposed to stay where we are and do the work of God at home. Even John Calvin seems to have had the view that the Great Commission was for the apostles only. Gradually, through the writings of people like Boethius and then the Puritans, there was an understanding that the Great Commission, or the last command of Christ on earth, is for all the church and for every period in the history of the church. English Puritans began to think more in terms of missions. We know that a number of members of the Westminster Assembly were strong supporters of missions.

The first successful Protestant missionary effort took place in New England among the Puritans. At about the same time, missions were being conducted by the Moravians. (We have already talked about those pious Moravian missions.) Perhaps I should say that one of the first successful missionary efforts took place among the New England Puritans. The seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony showed an Algonquin Indian with the words from Acts 16:9, “Come over and help us.” I suppose we cannot really say that the Indians were saying that. At least, they were not aware that they were saying that. The settlers of Massachusetts put in their seal and in their charter something of their responsibility to evangelize the Native Americans.

One of the great missionaries to the Indians was John Elliot. He came to Massachusetts in 1631. He was a pastor in Roxbury. For years and years during his long life, he went out to reach and teach the Indians. John Elliot translated the Bible into Algonquin. Last fall, it was my privilege to go up to the Scriptorium in Grand Haven, Michigan to see the collection of Bibles there. There are some wonderful Bibles dating back to the early years of the Bible. There are copies of Wycliffe’s Bibles. But the Bible that thrilled me the most there was to see the little, fat version of the translation from John Elliot into Algonquin. Nobody on earth can read that Bible today because there are no Indians who still speak the Algonquin language. That Bible showed some of the dedication of this missionary. It was the first Bible printed in America. Not only did John Elliot translate the Bible into the language of the Indians, but he also had to produce a grammar to teach the Indians to read their own language so they could read the Bible. This is certainly a symbol of the Protestant commitment to the importance of Scripture. Elliot produced the Indian grammar. You can imagine what a task that was for John Elliot to produce a grammar, translate the Bible, and then teach those people to read it. In his Indian grammar he put the words, “Prayer and pains through faith in Jesus Christ will do anything.” Not only do we have John Elliot, but we also have Thomas Mayhew. For five generations the Mayhew family preached to the Indians on Martha’s Vineyard until there were no more Indians there.

The most famous of the New England missionaries to the Indians was probably David Brainerd. He was a missionary for only five years. The astounding influence of David Brainerd does not come from great success among the Indians, although, right at the end of his life, there was a revival among the Indians. It was a great movement of God's Spirit in Cranbury, New Jersey, where he was living and working with a small group of Indians at that time. The importance and influence of David Brainerd came from his journal. It was a journal that he left in the hands of his friend, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards published that journal. It does not tell us much about missionary strategy, but it tells us a great deal about David Brainerd's own heart, his love for God, and his concern to see the Gospel taken to the Indians. You can find statements like this over and over again in the journal: "Sanctification in myself and the ingathering of God's elect was all my desire and the hope of its accomplishment, all my joy." David's brother, John Brainerd, was also a missionary to the Indians. There is an historical marker in the town of Haddam, Connecticut, where they were born. It is a tribute to David and John Brainerd.

We have talked about the mission of the Pietists and the Moravians, so I will not repeat that. The first, consistent denominational missionary effort from the Protestant side of things goes back to the eighteenth century and the Moravian movement. By the end of the eighteenth century at least half of all the Protestant missionaries serving overseas were Moravians. However, it was not the eighteenth century but the nineteenth century that became the Great Century. That is the description of Kenneth Scott Latourette, the Yale professor who is the most important historian of the expansion of Christianity. Latourette wrote a seven-volume set called *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*. It is a study of church history from the standpoint of its missionary expansion. He wrote seven volumes from the early church down to the present. Three of those seven volumes are given to the nineteenth century alone. So it is the nineteenth century that is the Great Century. I suppose Protestants like to think of the sixteenth century as the Great Century as far as theology is concerned. It was the century of Calvin, Luther, John Knox, and others. But the nineteenth century is the Great Century in terms of the worldwide expansion of Christianity.

The great name among many great names is William Carey, a man with a vision. He was a Baptist shoemaker and lay preacher in the midlands of England. He worked with a globe in front of him while he was at his desk or at his table where he repaired shoes. The world was always before him. He persisted in his concern to see the English church energized and active in worldwide evangelization despite some real discouragement. There is a story of the Baptist deacon who told William Carey to sit down. He said, "Sit down, young man. When it is God's time and will to save the heathen, He will do it without your help and mine." There is some question as to whether or not that story actually happened the way I have just reported it. However, Carey had few encouragements as he tried to persuade his brethren to embrace the task of worldwide missions. Carey's answer to the deacon's discouraging comment was a book titled *Inquiry into the Obligation of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, a book he wrote in 1792. In the book, Carey sets forth the importance of missions for every single Christian and not just to pray but to become active in taking the Gospel into all the world.

That same year, in 1792, which is an important year in mission history for Great Britain, Carey preached a sermon from the text in Isaiah 54:2-3, which says, "Enlarge the place of thy tent..." The sermon is better remembered for the statement that Carey made in it. He said, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." That quotation is demonstrated in a modern drawing showing a man pushing against a large mountain. Certainly William Carey had to push against many obstacles as he attempted to become a missionary and cause others to see the need for taking the Gospel worldwide. If Carey pushed against a mighty mountain, he, at the same time, trusted in an almighty God. The Mission Board was begun in that same year of 1792. The Particular or Calvinistic Baptists began a mission board to send William Carey to India. The next year, he departed for India, where he spent the next 40 years of

his life. He was joined by a number of colleagues. The Serampore Trio was a Danish colony where they first lived. It was made up of William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward. From that Baptist beginning, other churches began to be inspired to do the same thing. The London Missionary Society began in 1795. It was an Interdenominational mission board, although it became British Congregational. There was a succession of great missionaries, particularly in Africa, including David Livingstone, the Scottish missionary explorer who, as he put it, was always drawn on by the smoke of a thousand villages.

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) began in 1799. It was organized by evangelicals within the Anglican Church in order to send out Anglican missionaries. One of the early Anglicans who went out under the CMS was Henry Martin, a young man who was inspired by David Brainerd's journal. During his brief missionary career, Martin wrote his own journal, which became one of the great devotional and missionary books of the nineteenth century as Brainerd's journal was in the eighteenth century.

The first American Board of Missions was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (the ABCFM, as we call it). It was founded in 1810 by American Congregationalists and some Presbyterians. That Board arose because of the zeal of some students at Williams College in Massachusetts. Students who had been converted through the Second Great Awakening began to feel God's call to them to go overseas. Until that time, no American had gone out as a foreign missionary. These young men at Williams College prayed that God would send them forth, that He would provide support for them, that He would create a board, and that He would bring a missionary vision to the American church. They prayed and prayed for those important needs. On one occasion, they were outside walking along the banks of the river when a thunderstorm started. It began to rain, and these students took refuge on the backside of a haystack. There they prayed very definitely and earnestly that God would do what they asked Him to do. That is known as the "Haystack Prayer Meeting." If you go to the campus of Williams College today, there is a monument in Mission Park (adjacent to the college) that is a statue of a haystack. Perhaps it is the only monument to a haystack (and more importantly, to a prayer meeting) in the world. Historians have described that monument as the Antioch of our Western world because it was from that place that the first American missionaries felt the call of God to go abroad. These students began student societies called "The Brethren" and "The Society of Inquiry on Missions." Soon, the American colleges and seminaries had groups of students meeting to pray about missions. They encouraged one another to become active in the missionary work of the church. My Ph.D. dissertation at Princeton was on the Princeton Society of Inquiry.

The first American foreign missionaries were ordained in a service in New England in 1812. These five young men were soon en route to India. As they left New England, all five of the men were Congregationalists. (This is a story our Baptist friends like to tell.) When they got to India, two of them had become Baptists. Having studied their Greek New Testament en route, they decided that infant baptism was something they could not find in the Bible. It was important back then for the Baptists back home to organize a board to support these two Baptists. So, the Baptist Mission Board began in 1814. One of the two missionaries who became Baptist was Adoniram Judson, who became a great missionary to Burma.

Meanwhile, sentiment for missions was beginning to stir in the Church of Scotland. There was a General Assembly debate in 1796 that produced no action because the Moderates blocked it despite John Erskine's impassioned plea, which began with the words, "Mr. Moderator, racks me that Bible!" There is always a Bible before the moderator in the General Assembly. The word "racks" means "Hand me over that Bible." For a while, this old Scottish minister turned to passage after passage in the Bible that called for missionary obedience. It was not until 1824 that the Church of Scotland gave its formal

support to foreign missions. That was largely through the evangelical influence of Thomas Chalmers, a professor at Saint Andrews, and a number of students usually called “the Saint Andrews seven.” These seven were stimulated to obedience to Christ’s Great Commission through the ministry of Thomas Chalmers. One of the Saint Andrews seven was Alexander Duff, the first foreign missionary of the Church of Scotland. The Free Church of Scotland formed in 1843. Chalmers was the leader of the new church. This led to the establishment of the most missionary-minded denomination in Great Britain. Another Scottish denomination that formed in 1847 was the United Presbyterian Church. This church also sent out missionaries including Mary Slessor, who went to Africa where she lived like a poor African. The Africans called her “the mother of all living.” Mary Slessor became a very important woman as Vice Counsel of the British Empire. She was, perhaps, the most knowledgeable of African law in all the world, but she was always a dedicated missionary and humble servant of God. The Reformed Presbyterian Church sent John G. Patton, who went to the South Pacific where God blessed his ministry in evangelizing many of the native peoples of that part of the world.

The first specifically American Presbyterian Mission Board was formed by the Old-School Presbyterian Church in 1837. When the Southern Presbyterian Church broke away from the church in the North in 1861, its missionary leader was a South Carolinian, John Layton Wilson, who had served for a number of years in West Africa. One of the greatest missionaries of the old Southern Presbyterian Church was William Henry Sheppard. Sheppard was born in 1865 in Virginia. He was the son of people who had just been freed from slavery. After serving a Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Sheppard was sent by the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1890 to Central Africa (what is called the Congo, formerly Zaire). He preached and evangelized in the Kasai region of Zaire. Lucy Gant, who was a teacher from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, soon went over to become a missionary in the same region and also became Mrs. Sheppard. Today, there are a half a million Presbyterians in the Kasai of Zaire, and that work is traced back to the life and ministry of this wonderful missionary from the South.

As these denominations were becoming active in missions, God also raised up what we call “Faith Missions”—Interdenominational boards that lacked the official sponsorship of denominations. They depended on God’s people to provide the needs for the missionaries. The first of these was the China Inland Mission (CIM), begun in 1865 by Hudson Taylor. Hudson Taylor’s way of explaining how to do and support missionary work was simply this: “God’s work, done in God’s way, will never lack God’s supply.” Soon, hundreds of missionaries went to inland China. The coastal region of China was being reached but not the great inland provinces of China. Hudson Taylor went to China dressed like a Chinese teacher, a Mandarin. It scandalized the Europeans that he would adopt the Chinese hairstyle and dress, but he wanted to identify with the Chinese people. The great CIM followed him in many ways. The missionaries of the CIM included the Cambridge seven and John and Betty Stam. By the end of the nineteenth century, the CIM had half the Protestant missionary force in China. It was Hudson Taylor and the example of the CIM that has inspired many other faith-works through the years, including the ministry of Amy Carmichael, who founded the Dohnavur Fellowship in India, and Edith and Francis Schaeffer, who founded L’Abri in Switzerland.

There was a decline in American missionary activity during and after the Civil War. It was a disruption of missionary work for many reasons. But it was not long before the D. L. Moody-inspired, student-volunteer movement began in 1886 with its motto, “The evangelization of the world in this generation.” Almost 100 years later, the Mission to the World of the Presbyterian Church in America began, and in just 25 years has become the largest Presbyterian mission board in the world.

Let me end the lesson with some reflections on the results of the Great Century in missions. Of course there were many failures and disappointments. There is a book written by an English bishop about

Protestant missions. The first half of that book is about what the missionaries did wrong, and the missionaries did many things wrong. But the second half of the book is about what the missionaries did right. In the few minutes left in this lesson, I want to focus not on what the missionaries did wrong but on what they did right. The going out of hundreds of missionaries to all the lands of the earth was a demonstration of the love of Christ for people. Missionaries are human like other people, and they often failed in this, but people all over the world were able to see something of Christ's love through the godly lives and sacrificial service of men and women like John and Betty Stam.

Let us talk about the establishment of the worldwide church. Until the nineteenth century, the history of the church was largely restricted. We could study Asian and African church history, and those are important aspects of church history. However, so much of church history is in Eastern Orthodoxy in the Roman Catholic Church in the West and Protestantism. By the end of the nineteenth century, the church was everywhere. To study church history from this point on, we would have to study the history of the church in almost every single nation of the earth. We are not going to do that because we are having enough trouble trying to hit the high spots of a more limited version of church history. I do want to stress, though, that from this point on church history is global Christianity. Andrew Walls, the Scottish professor of history, says, "At this point, we move from age number three, which is basically Christian Europe and European colonies elsewhere including the United States, to age number four, which is the age of global Christianity." Today, the majority of the world's Christians live outside of Europe and North America. Considering the rate of church growth in Africa, if God continues to do what He is doing there, that continent will be the most Christianized continent in this world. That is a tribute to the missionaries as well as to the Africans and to people from other lands who have been converted and who have worked to plant churches in their own countries.

I want to end with a prayer from an African, Tiyo Soga, who was a Calvinist. Tiyo, the son of Soga, was the first tribal South African whom we know about to receive Protestant ordination. This man lived in the nineteenth century and died in 1871. Scottish missionaries of the Glasgow Missionary Society went out to South Africa. Tiyo Soga was converted. He was ordained as a minister of the United Presbyterian Church in Glasgow in 1856. He was a minister, a hymn writer, and a Bible translator in his native land in Africa. He was ordained in 1856 and returned to Africa in 1857. His prayer that he wrote and prayed as he went back to Africa is the following:

"God, Lord of truth, fulfill now Your promise and let all nations of the world obtain salvation. Rule, Lord Jesus, rule, for peace comes only through You. Because of our confusion, the country is being destroyed. Look in mercy on our land and forgive our sins. Amen."

Bruce Wanamaker served as a missionary in Malawi with the African Bible College. He developed an interest in David Livingstone, one of the missionaries whom I have been talking about today. So I want Bruce to tell us a little about David Livingstone.

I knew nothing about David Livingstone before going to Africa. I became interested mainly because he is so well known there. He is still revered. He is not known in the West very much, but his name is still there. You can fly to Africa and go to Blantyre, Malawi. Blantyre is the city in which Livingstone was born in Scotland. So, the black Africans revere and respect him. So I was really interested in why that is. My interest is really trying to figure out why he was successful as a missionary. There are a lot of negatives about his family life. Some of the things are not things you think about in terms of a missionary. He went to Africa three times. He spent 30 of his 60 years there. But it was only his first term that he was actually a missionary sent by a mission board. Of his 30 years, about 10 of them were spent as a missionary at a mission station.

He spent most of his time exploring central and southern Africa and opening it up for other missionaries. So, his influence is indirect in terms of being a missionary. He is not known for the number of converts he brought to Christ or for the churches he established. In Malawi, which is in southeast Africa, the country I lived in, the largest denomination in 1998 was Presbyterian. The Central Church of Africa Presbyterian has its roots in the Dutch and Scottish church—the Presbyterian, Calvinist churches. It is the largest denomination, and it has the largest amount of people associated with Christianity. Christianity has only been introduced within the past 100 years. Much of that region now has more Christians than animals. There has been a tremendous transformation in that part of the world.

Livingstone is known for three things, and he talked about those. He said, “I come to bring Christianity, commerce, and civilization.”—The three C’s. There are some negatives about that. He is known not only as a missionary but also as an explorer and an abolitionist. So, if you read church history, you will read about him. Also, if you ever read about secular, African history, he is mentioned because one of his great influences was in helping abolish slavery, which is still going on at this time. Slavery was not abolished that long ago. It was an abysmal practice, which was throughout all of the southern regions. It was practiced in the country I lived in.

So, his influence is still revered. He is still greatly loved in black Africa because he identified very strongly with the Africans. He was a missionary who treated Africans as brothers and not as subservient. It was not like colonial westerners who went to Africa. I do not want to carry on much longer. If you are interested in reading more about him or if you have a test question about David Livingstone, the best source is *Christian History*. There is a whole issue on David Livingstone. It gives a good background on him and his influence in Africa. Southern and central Africa are still divided in “before and after Livingstone” because of his tremendous effect not only in the church but also in social issues, particularly the abolition of slavery.

There is a statue of David Livingstone in Edinburgh at the Royal Mile, which shows him as the missionary breaking the shackles of slavery. He is buried at Westminster Abby. As you go in the central nave of the church, next to the burial place of Winston Churchill is the burial place of David Livingstone.

John 10:16 says, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

I have been asked, “What was John Layton Wilson’s attitude toward slavery?” That is a very interesting question because Wilson, who grew up in low country in South Carolina, freed his own slaves at a certain point in his life. This would have been in the 1830s. He married a young woman (a relative of Charles Hodges) from Savannah, Georgia who also had slaves. Apparently, one of those slaves did not want to be free. That happened from time to time when there was a household servant who was very close to the family. To be free meant to have nothing; whereas, to be part of the family meant having security. So, Wilson went to Africa although this black woman remained part of his estate, you might say. In Africa, he harangued the British Parliament. The British Parliament had blockaded the coast to prevent the slave trade. The Parliament was losing its resolve. This was costly and difficult. It was really the letters of Wilson to the British Parliament that kept the British ships there. Wilson’s owning of this one slave produced a lot of concern with the ABCFM. (He was first with that mission board.) He was viewed as a slaveholder, which he was—technically. So, the agitation about that caused him to resign from the ABCFM. This is an interesting situation because in the North he was viewed as a slave-owner. By many southerners, he was viewed as a vile abolitionist. He was caught between the two sides.

He did come back to the South and became the missionary conscience of the Southern Presbyterian Church. He never really zealously opposed slavery in the South. He, like many southerners, accepted it. Many Old School people did. There were Moderates, like Charles Hodge, on this question, who said, "As soon as we can we will get rid of it." But apparently it was not felt that the time was right yet.

John Layton Wilson was a great man. David Livingstone said that Layton Wilson's book on West Africa was the best book written. Another thing about John Layton Wilson is that he wrote books in which he stressed the intelligence of the Africans far earlier than other people in that culture were willing to admit that Africans had the same intelligence as anybody else and, given the same opportunities, could learn just as well as anybody else. So, Wilson's writings are still reprinted by black publishing companies who want to show that back in the 1830s there was a white South Carolinian who said that Africans are very intelligent people.