

The following is an extract from the book, "The Challenge Of Missions" by Oswald J. Smith, written in 1959. As the founding senior pastor of The Peoples Church Toronto, he has been a missionary to over 90 countries. This classic is absolutely life-changing!

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS THE SUPREME TASK OF THE CHURCH?

Turn with me, if you will, to Eze.3:17-19. I am going to change some of the words in this passage in order to bring it up to date. Note carefully the changes. I want to make it applicable to the mission field. Now let us read, beginning at v.17: "Christian worker, I have made you a watchman: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give warning from me. When I say to the heathen, you shall surely die; and you do not warn him, nor speak to warn the heathen from his heathenish way, to save his life, the same heathen shall die in his iniquity; BUT HIS BLOOD WILL I REQUIRE AT YOUR HAND. Yet if you warn the heathen, and he turn not from his iniquity; then you have delivered your soul."

Down through the years my life has been tremendously motivated by great missionary mottoes. May I give you one now that perhaps has meant more to me than any other. It is this, "The supreme task of the Church is the evangelization of the world." I believe that with all my heart. The most important work of the Church of Jesus Christ is world evangelization.

First of all, let me take the last word, the word "world". When God loved, He loved a world. When He gave His Son, He gave His Son for a world. When Jesus Christ died, He died for a world. God's vision is a world vision. That is the vision He wants us to have too. But so many of us are localized in our outlook. We see only our own community, our own village or town, and we never see beyond.

Now let us look at another word in our motto, the word "supreme". We show by our actions that we put missions second. If world evangelization comes first, then we should concentrate on giving to missions and let others who do not have the vision, contribute to other things. If world evangelization is the most important work of the church, then we should put most of our money into this most important area of the church. This leads me to say that every church should spend more on missions than it spends on itself.

Years ago I asked our auditors, through our treasurer, two questions. First, "How much did we spend on our own church last year?" After they had examined the books I got the answer. "Dr. Smith, last year you used \$53,000 on your work at home." Then I asked my second question, "How much did we send to the foreign field? How much was raised for missions?" Again I got the answer. "Last year, you gave \$318,000 to missions." "Fine", I said, "this is the way it always has been and that is the way it should be." And if the time ever comes when the officials of The Peoples Church decide to spend more here at home and less on missions, they will get my resignation without a moment's hesitation. I would not want to be the pastor of a church that would use more here at home than it sends to the regions beyond.

When I moved The Peoples Church to Gerrard Street, many years ago now, I was told everything except one thing, and on the Sunday morning that I was to preach my first sermon, the treasurer approached me with a very grim expression on his countenance, "Dr. Smith," he said, "we have told you everything there is to tell you about this church except one thing." Then he paused. I waited for him to continue with what he was going to say. In a moment he went on. "This church," he said, "is in debt. We have some unpaid bills and we have nothing in the treasury." I turned and went into the pulpit and as I went I prayed, "Lord," I said,

"I have been wanting to find out for a long time whether or not a certain passage in Your Word is true." True, I meant, from a practical standpoint. I referred to that verse, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you." That morning I preached a missionary sermon.

(Dr. Smith went on to preach a whole series of sermons on missions followed by challenging the people to give to missions after each sermon. The people had no idea what he was doing, but the more he preached the more they got interested. More people came to listen and more gave.)

They became so interested, so aroused, so awakened, that they came in ever-increasing numbers. Souls were saved and in a very short time every seat was taken. Before long they had caught the vision and they began to give, to give as they had never given before, and in a few weeks, without having to say hardly anything about the local obligations, every debt was paid, every bill met, and from that day to this we have not known the meaning of the word "debt" in connection with our work. We discovered that when we put first things first, God works.