

THE MISSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matthew 28:18-20.

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8.

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you; as my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." John 20:21.

Members of the first church in Jerusalem were scattered by persecution. They had to leave loved ones and their homes in order to live. As they fled for their lives, we read: "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." It is illuminating to note that this does not refer to the apostles, but to the church members.

What, then, is the mission of the New Testament church?

I. To Make Christ Known to Lost Sinners.

Evangelism is not the only task of the church. A balanced, scriptural ministry properly includes, along with evangelism, instruction in Christian ethics, civic righteousness, stewardship, and numerous other legitimate subjects. But this is not evangelism, and when we preach on these commendable themes, we are not preaching the gospel. Evangelism is the proclamation of the "good news," concerning the redemptive love of God as revealed in the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. While making Christ known to lost sinners is not the only task of the church, it is nevertheless the primary task of the church. It was primary in the purpose of the Founder of the church.

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered upon a mountain in Galilee; likewise, the Great Commission. The first sermon on the mount sets forth the essentials of Christian behavior; the second sermon on the mount sets forth the marching orders of the church.

The focus of all the ministering of the apostles is fixed in that burning apostolic appeal: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Paul said, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Woe is also unto the church which preaches not the gospel. Let it be our first concern that the unsaved may know Christ. May we become increasingly like John the Baptist who said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Then follows that most significant scriptural comment: "When they heard John, they followed Jesus." That is the ultimate test of evangelism, the primary task of the church.

Every New Testament church in our generation needs a minister who will stand up in the pulpit and open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel; a minister whose message concerning God and Christ and man and sin and salvation will carry home to the hearts and minds of his hearers, because that message is based upon the Word of God and has been found true in his own experience. But every church needs more than this. It needs men and women in its membership who have never been ordained and set apart by the laying on of any human hands, but who have been born again, who are the children of God in Christ, and who by God's grace are willing to live the Christian life, bear the Christian witness, and do the Christian work. The true evangelistic value of

any church is the sum total of the daily life of its individual members, together with their collective effort in presenting Christian teachings.

A church without a passion for souls, a church whose supreme object is not to bring men and women out of darkness into spiritual light, is valueless in God's sight. One of the great weaknesses of our present-day churches is that they have delegated the soul-winning work to the preachers and a few missionaries. In the early church of Jerusalem every member was a soul winner. The church members did not wait for the unsaved to come to church, but they carried the message of the church to them. The record tells us that they went from house to house. Daily, people were saved because of the witnessing of the Christians in the homes and at the places of work. Any church that uses this method will succeed. A well-known evangelist said, "We do not need a brighter light in the pulpit, but a steadier glow in the pew."

II. To Win the Lost to Christ.

Christ instituted the church for the specific purpose of winning the lost to a saving knowledge in Him. He tells us that His mission in the world was "To seek and to save that which was lost." The true mission of every New Testament church, then, is that of winning lost souls to Christ. Every Christian should work with all his might for the salvation of the lost. There is something seriously wrong with any professed Christian who is not constantly working to get men to forsake sin and to accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour. If we love others we will strive to win them to Christ. If we love Christ we will strive to please Him, but we cannot please Him unless we win lost souls to Him. We need a new concern for the lost around us. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Certainly something is wrong with any professed Christian who does try to win lost souls to Christ. Soul-winning was the primary business of the Saviour. He lived and suffered and died to save the lost. He said, "Follow Me." He has the right to command, and we must not ignore His command. It is serious business to disobey His commands. If we love Him, we shall strive to please Him.

When you win others to Christ, you experience the joy of helping others. There is no joy this side of heaven comparable to the joy of bringing souls to the Lord Jesus. Then, you will win the gratitude and affection of those whom you influence to accept Christ. Also, you have the assurance of the fellowship of additional persons in heaven. Above all, you will experience the bliss of pleasing and glorifying the Lord. A soul-winning church is a joyous church. It thrills with joy. Those who have had a taste of what it means to be used of God in turning a lost soul to Him do not need any description of the joy that accompanies such an experience. Indeed, such a joy passes all description. It must be experienced to be realized. A joyless church utterly misrepresents Christ. A joyful one magnifies the power and glory of His grace.

It does not need to be argued that a soul-saving Church must be spiritual. The exponents of Christianity must possess a character in keeping with their profession. God does not use mightily the careless and worldly Christian. His people must be consistent, separated from the world and devoted unto Him. This kind of living calls for genuine prayer, faithful study of the Word of God, and reliance upon His Spirit for wisdom and power. A church without the Holy Spirit is like a tree without sap; a watch without a spring; an automobile without a motor. The church which honors Christ is the one whose members have been saved and who are busily engaged in winning souls to Christ because they have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

III. To Baptize Those Who Have Been Saved.

IV. To Teach the Saved.

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Whenever any

church neglects educational methods the cause of Christ suffers. Jesus taught and trained the twelve apostles. The more training our people have the better work they can do.

V. To Enlist the Saved in Doing God's Will.

VI. To Glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Unto Him be the glory in the church." Ephesians 3:21. It was a noble and true reply that William Burns, the Chinese missionary, gave to the lady who wanted to know how many souls had been saved through his ministry in China. "Madam," he said, "God did not send me to China to save souls. He sent me to bring glory to His name." To glorify God is the noblest occupation in the world.

No one can read through the epistles and ponder the words "His glory," without being convinced that all the church has, does, is, and will be is for His glory. It is to the "glory of His grace" that we are accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6); it is "according to the riches of His glory, (that we are strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16); It is before the presence of His glory we are to be presented faultless (Jude 24). Therefore, since all God's acts in the past, and all His promises for the future, tell out His worth and wealth, should we not in all we do bring glory to His name? "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." I Corinthians 10:31.