

THE UNFINISHED TASK

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."
Mark 16:15.

These are the words of the risen Christ. He had just upbraided His disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe them who had seen Him after He was risen, and now they see Him face to face. Can it be that the same spirit of unbelief prevails in the hearts of His people even until this hour? If those who call themselves Christians believed what our Lord has spoken about the condition of lost souls, there would be whole-hearted obedience to this commission. The fact that multiplied millions have not so much as heard of the gospel indicates that this commission is unfinished.

The spirit of missions pervades every phase of Christianity; the warp and woof of it is the spread of the gospel to the uttermost parts of the world. No one who is familiar with the Bible can deny the fact that Christianity is fundamentally missionary in character. The missionary ingredient is a major element in its composition.

The nature of God Himself is characteristically missionary, for of Him we read that He "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Jesus Christ Himself was missionary in essence in that He turned His back upon the ivory palaces of glory and journeyed to this earth in behalf of the world's redemption. His whole life was given to making God known to the sons of men. His was an itinerant ministry going from one part of Palestine to the other, and never sparing Himself in order to do so. The whitened harvest was ever before His eyes, and He cast it before the gaze of His disciples. He did not leave the world until He had made provision for the furtherance of His saving message.

God's Word is missionary in its message. It is not geographical, but universal. It is not addressed to class or caste, but to all men everywhere. It is suitable for everyone, everywhere.

Moreover, the missionary impulse is imparted to every soul that has been regenerated. The first impulse of one who has received Christ into his heart is to tell others. When the missionary spirit does not prevail, the professing Christian is backslidden and needs to repent of his selfishness. It took a trip to the whale's belly to make a missionary out of Jonah and a trip to Hades to give the rich man a missionary spirit. Those who really see the Lord Jesus in the full sweep of His redemptive work realize that missions begin at the foot of the cross. It was the sight of a crucified Saviour which caused Paul to write, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

I. A World Verse.

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." This is the will of the Lord for every Christian, and a command from Him to make a world tour with a definite object in view. He has commissioned His churches to carry His message to the uttermost parts of the world. The followers of our Lord need to go because not all have heard and not all have heeded the gospel. Our responsibility is not to argue the propriety or the wisdom of missions but to accept the commission which has been given us. The question of missions is not debatable. With the clear, specific, and explicit command of our Lord before us, there is nothing for us but obedience.

It is not hard to discover from our text that God's program embraces the whole world. It starts with Jerusalem and sweeps on until the uttermost parts are reached. "God

so loved the world." His ideas take in an universe, and His love includes all. God is testing us continually--testing the measure of our faith in Him, of our love for Him and of our devotion to Him by the presence in the world of over a billion lost souls. It is a tremendous test.

Christianity is largely a matter of giving. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." The first recorded gift in the Bible was not to the angels, nor to any other heavenly being, but to man, thus manifesting God's missionary spirit. Gifts which cost no personal denial are not proof of any devotion. The imperative aspect of this great commission cannot be met with an indifferent heart. It demands open ears and a readiness to give our all to the end that the commission might be completed.

II. A World Vision.

Christ reminded His disciples that the field is the world, nothing less and nothing more. God has challenged all of His people and called upon them to leap over the geographical boundaries and to catch the vision of what is involved in the words of Jesus when He said, "The field is the world."

I am wondering if that word "world" has really dawned upon us in its fulness? It hasn't hit many a Christian as God intends that it should, for they have no world vision. Their world is their own little sphere. The directions of the compass reach out but a short distance from them. Somehow that little word "my" is a miserable blanket in which multitudes of God's children have wrapped themselves in so far as the missionary cause is concerned.

Churches cannot survive without a missionary program. The promise of the presence of Jesus Christ was given only to a missionary church, "Go ye into all the world, and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age."

With God there are no distinctions in missions, and the divisions which we make are merely for the sake of convenience. When our risen Saviour said, "The world," He meant the world which included all classes and conditions of man. He sees all men in the same condition irrespective of the color of their skin. All men everywhere and in every age need exactly the same salvation and the same crucified and risen Saviour.

Do you have a world vision? Do you see things as God has revealed them? Or are you wearing the dark glasses of selfishness or the blinders of prejudice? According to God's Word, Christians are out of fellowship with God who are not concerned about the salvation of lost souls and the propagation of His Word to the most remote parts of the earth. How can a man expect to get much of personal blessing out of Christianity when he is indifferent to the greatest object and grandest cause of Christianity?

For most Christians their missionary map is too small. It is confined to those sections which appeal to their fancy or excludes those areas toward which there may be prejudice.

III. A World Vocation.

"Go ye into all the world, and preach." I like that word preach. It is at the very heart of the commission. Jesus came and preached. He sends forth His disciples to preach, also. People are won to Christ through preaching.

The word preach can no more be eliminated from His command than any other word. It is not optional, but commanded. It is not merely a Divine suggestion, but a Divine injunction.

The New Testament church was born in the great and unselfish heart of Christ and called to an unselfish ministry to the world. And its business is to preach the gospel of Christ and to lift high the blood-stained banner of King Immanuel.

In many places civilization is being substituted for evangelization simply because our missionaries feel sorry for the backward circumstances of the heathen. Paul faced a pagan world with a simple gospel and was not ashamed to proclaim it because he knew something of its effectiveness. He said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

This gospel was utterly foreign to unregenerate men and one which aroused the antagonism of the world, the flesh and the devil. Nevertheless Paul received it by revelation from God and he was determined to declare it until all men every where had heard it. To this end he traveled back and forth on the highways of the ancient world, urging men to believe it to the salvation of their souls.

IV. A World Victory.

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." None are excluded. God wants to save every creature and bring all into a living and vital relationship with Himself.

A gracious victory will come into the heart of any man who accepts Christ as his personal Saviour. His gospel is a wonder-working power and is able to transform any life and conform it to the image of the Son of God. It does the work supernaturally and immediately. Salvation is not a long-drawn-out process, but a marvelous change wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The greatest day in the history of any nation is when the gospel of Christ comes to its shores and is preached by faithful servants of Christ. What could be more wonderful than the entrance of Christian missionaries on the shores of a nation, unfurling the glorious gospel banner and lifting high the Word of life?

In the light of European history, no day was more significant than when Paul set foot on the shores of Macedonia rather than turning eastward to preach in Asia. It was a great hour in English history when Augustine set foot on her soil and proclaimed the gospel of Christ. The beginning of a new era for the dark continent of Africa took place when David Livingstone started to sail up the Nile River for the purpose of penetrating heathen darkness with the light of the gospel. It was so for Burma when Judson landed with a heart of love for the salvation of her millions; and the same applies to India when a cobbler for England named Carey carried the Word of God under his arm and started to preach it to her citizens.

Countries held in the grip of heathen religious systems have never advanced, but when Christianity enters, immediately changes take place socially, intellectually, morally, physically and spiritually. When the heart gets right with God, other things always change for the better.

God grant that every one of us, who are His children, may become zealous for the progress of His Word unto the uttermost parts of the world. It is not optional, but it is vital and imperative. Since He is our Master, He has the right to command, so we must not ignore it. This command has the ring of challenge, the fire of compassion, the spirit of conquest, the call of sacrifice, the forgetfulness of self, the vision of a world and the abandon of devotion.