



God Commands Us to Evangelize the World

“Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city”

— Acts 18:9, 10

God has done something so wonderful for this world that He wants everyone to know about it. No one is to be left out and allowed to miss the good news that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). We are thinking now about every home in every hamlet, town, and city in every land. It does not matter what religion or political creed holds sway in any country. Ideally, every single human being should possess at least a portion of Scripture—preferably a complete Bible—in his mother tongue and have easy access to the faithful preaching of the gospel. No small task!

God has been sending out missionaries for a long time now. No longer is the message of pardon largely limited to the people of Israel as in Old Testament times. Jesus said: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Within a few weeks of the Saviour’s ascension the gospel penetrated far away countries as the foreigners who were converted on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) returned home with the message of salvation.

Later, the persecuted Christians who fled Jerusalem (Acts 8) went everywhere preaching the gospel. As a result, a great missionary church was established in Antioch where the Holy Spirit separated Saul and Barnabas (Acts 13) and sent them to the “regions beyond” (2 Corinthians 10:16).

During the last two millennia, Christians have suffered greatly as they have obeyed the Saviour’s command to evangelize. Some lost their health and had to lie in beds of sickness in circumstances of abject poverty and loneliness. Some lost their loved ones and buried them in rude graves in foreign lands. Some lost their lives, dying as martyrs of Christ. Far from deterring others, their stories have served only to inspire succeeding generations of Christians to go farther and work harder to push back the barriers of ignorance and superstition.

After two thousand years of gospel witness we are well placed to review the whole issue of missionary work. It would be very easy to reduce it to a matter of cold statistics or to view it as a monument to human bravery and endeavour. We need to remind ourselves that Christianity has no monopoly on these things. All religions have their martyrs. Other creeds—religious and political—have their ease-denying devotees who sacrifice themselves to spread their dogma. Why then are Christian missionaries and their message different? The difference lies in the nature of the gospel. God has given us the greatest message in the world, a message that demands to be preached to men deceived by every other creed.

First of all, *other messages ultimately deny God; the gospel message alone exalts Him*. We should not think that a God-denying message is necessarily some brand of atheism. On the contrary, it may be most religious in content. Any doctrine that involves a human contribution to the saving work of Christ—whether it is propounded by cultists like Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons or by professed evangelicals—ultimately rejects God’s way of salvation. The gospel alone truly exalts Almighty God. He cannot disown what He Himself has originated. That would be paramount to denying Himself. But He must reject what man has concocted or perverted. Only the missionary of the true gospel will hear God say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

Second, *other messages ultimately deceive; only the gospel message enlightens*. The gospel message alone gives the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. All other messages introduce an element of error and therefore of deception. Paul said, “We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ”

(2 Corinthians 2:17). Later he said, “[We] have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:2-4).

Third, *other messages ultimately take; only the gospel message gives*. Although false gossellers contradict each other at a thousand points, they have one thing in common: they teach that their listeners must give something or do something towards their salvation. According to them, salvation cannot be by free grace alone, without the deeds of the law. It cannot be solely on the basis of the finished and all-sufficient work of Christ upon the cross. Essentially, they replace one brand of paganism with another. Their gospel takes away all that is precious from a sinner because it takes from him the word of free grace.

By contrast, the gospel is a message that offers sinners pardon for sin and peace with God. Gospel salvation freely confers the gift of righteousness and of the indwelling Spirit of God. It gives the power to live in victory over sin and enriches the soul with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). As Peter said, God’s “divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3).

Fourth, *other messages ultimately fail; the gospel message succeeds*. Only the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). Christ’s

purpose in commissioning Paul to His work holds good for every missionary: “I send thee to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:17-18).

We must lament that there are many languages into which no Scripture portion has been translated and that entire communities still have no effective gospel witness. Yet we know that soon God will gather in all His elect. He will bring them from the four corners of the earth. John could say, “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

Between the present need and that future fulness of the church lies the missionary mandate Christ gave us to evangelize the world. It is a work that must succeed. It cannot fail. Not one soul for whom Christ made atonement can perish. Thus, we may labour in confidence wherever God has placed us to reach the lost for Christ. However dark or difficult the situation we face, we hear the voice of our Lord assuring us as it did Paul when he was facing the daunting prospect of preaching in Corinth: “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:9, 10).

With such an assurance how can we fail to do our part to take the gospel to every man, woman, and child in the world? ■

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