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**SERMON XXXVI.**

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**ON THE NECESSITY AND DUTY OF PROPAGATING THE GOSPEL.**

**MATTH. 28:19.** *Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations.*

THE evangelizing of the world, is an object which has filled with wonder, those higher orders of intelligent creatures, a little below whom, man in his pristine innocence and glory was placed. It is a subject which occupies, and which is worthy the mind of the "only wise God." It is the glorious result of "that eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The grand design originated in the everlasting love of God, and the greatest missionary was his own Son, his "elect," in whom his "soul delighteth."

When this great Missionary, who came forth from God, had finished, by his obedience, even unto death, the work which his Father had given him to do, when he had not only been "delivered for our offences," but "was raised again for our justification"—and just before he visibly ascended from Mount Olivet to that mediatorial throne, where, at the right hand of God, he now sits exalted "a Prince and a Savior for to give repentance, and forgiveness of sins"—he came and spoke to the eleven disciples, saying, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." After such a preface, asserting a claim so extraordinary, and yet so well founded, it might naturally be expected that the triumphant Redeemer would utter something of unspeakable importance. Accordingly, as "Head over all things to the church," and invested with all possible and rightful authority, he gave to his disciples, and through them to his ministers and their successors, in all succeeding ages, the honorable and important, but arduous and oftentimes dangerous commission, "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."

In the discussion of this subject, it will be my object to *refute some opinions* which oppose the teaching of the gospel to all nations; and to *show the duty of christians*, heartily to engage in the missionary cause.

I. *By showing that all nations stand in perishing need of the gospel.*

II. *By exhibiting its benign influence on nations; and especially, its blessed effects on many individuals of which nations are composed.*

That all nations stand in perishing need of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is a position, which is either directly or virtually denied by too many in our country, who assume the christian name. Nor are there wanting, even in the councils of our nation, those who have lifted up their voice and exerted their influence in direct opposition to the missionary cause, and the command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. By such it has been alleged, that man is so constituted that he is as *infallibly guided by a law of his nature*, in seeking after happiness and God, as are the brutes by a natural instinct, in the pursuit of that which is necessary for the support of animal life. Opinions such as this are usually held and inculcated by men as profligate in their conduct as they are infidel in their sentiments. And, however palpably absurd they may appear to the discerning and reflecting part of mankind, they are, nevertheless, too likely to exert a pernicious influence upon the minds of many, to permit them to pass without animadversion. That all such opinions virtually deny the fall of man and the consequent depravity of human nature, and are in direct opposition to the whole tenor of God's word, and especially, his express declaration, that "none" (by nature) "understand" or "seek after God"—is too plain to need any illustration. We are, however, aware, that the moral perceptions of men of sceptical minds, are so obtuse as to render them insensible to the majesty of divine truth, and incapable of feeling the force of an argument drawn from this sacred source. It is, nevertheless, calculated to excite at least some surprise, that in conspicuous places, there should be found men either so grossly ignorant of the state of the heathen world, or so hardened in bold infidelity, as to maintain their absurd opinions in opposition to the most stubborn facts.

What! Is man so infallibly guided in his researches after God and the way in which he may find acceptance with him? What, then, mean the unnatural austerities which are practised, the voluntary tortures which are endured, the many suicides which are committed, and the multitudes of human sacrifices which are offered by the heathen, with the avowed purpose of gaining the favor of their God, or a happy state of futurity? Why does the deluded ascetic lie upon a bed of spikes? Why the order of men who have the right arm stiff, withered, and raised above the head until it becomes incapable of being removed from that unnatural position? Why do others surround themselves with large wood fires, so near as almost to scorch,

while the vertical sun beats upon their bare heads? and when he has sunk beneath the Western wave, why do these same deluded creatures remain the greater part of the night plunged to the neck in water; thus through a succession of many days and nights, alternately, experiencing the greatest extremes of heat and cold which human nature can endure? Why do none of the Hindoos die with the hope even of temporary happiness, except such as commit suicide by drowning or burning themselves? Why is the languishing Hindoo, who is deterred from seeking a death so horrible, brought to die by the side of the Ganges? and while there, if man is guided as by instinct in his return to God, why is he heard to express his fearful apprehensions not only that he is just about to assume some reptile form, but that he must experience many millions of such like transmigrations before his spirit can again be united to a human body? and in the midst of this distressing perplexity, why is he heard to pray to the Ganges to receive him, and to his idols to have mercy upon him?

Inquiries such as this might be multiplied until the face of the infidel opposer of christian missions would, if it were possible, be mantled with shame. But of this we are almost ready to despair. We cannot, however, here forbear the reflection, how multifarious are the works as well as the devices of the "god of this world," whereby he supports his usurped but tottering dominion.

2. But there are many others, who would by no means be ranked among the enemies of the cross, who, nevertheless, seem to think the situation of the heathen nations of the world, if not so favorable as that of those who enjoy the gospel and its privileges, yet that it is far from being so deplorable as the enthusiastic advocates and supporters of missions would represent—that every circumstance considered, they have an *equal chance* for salvation with those who have their dwelling in Zion!

This sentiment seems to savor so much of liberality—of charity—of expansion of mind—that many are ensnared and captivated by its meretricious charms; while those who hold the opposite opinion are often branded with bigotry, with illiberality, with a want of christian charity, and even with malevolence. This, however, is no matter of surpris. They who maintain the truth as it is in Jesus, must expect to bear his reproach. We, therefore, do not hesitate to assert, that this unscriptural sentiment is working a more extensive injury to the missionary cause, than all the direct and avowed opposition of the open enemies of our God and his Christ.

It is not our intention to examine the question, particularly, whether a heathen can possibly be saved without a knowledge of the gospel obtained in the *ordinary* manner. Let the affirmative of this question, if it is desired, be conceded. But still I contend the heathen are in a perishing condition by reason of their lack of knowledge. The word of God expressly declares, that "where there is no vision the people perish." And all the information which we have received of the actual state of the heathen, confirms this awful truth. It establishes the fact, not only that they are wretched in the extreme, but wicked, cruel, impure, abominable: and surely, it need not be shown, that none of all their religious principles, or unclean rites, or murderous sacrifices, can purge their guilty consciences or purify their polluted

hearts, or fit them for the presence and enjoyment of God, who is of "purer eyes than to behold iniquity." Though their sins may not be so heinous, or their guilt so aggravated, as though they had sinned against the clear light and knowledge of the revealed will of God; yet, as they have all sinned against the *light of nature*—as they are by nature corrupt, and by practice guilty—as their hearts "are deceitful" "and desperately wicked"—as their minds are "carnal" and "enmity against God"—as "there is none other name given under heaven among men," whereby any of a fallen race can be saved except the name of Jesus—and as this name is unknown to the heathen world *generally*—it follows, that continuing in this state, (though they will not be judged by the written law of God, or fall under the same aggravated condemnation as those who have known but still neglected their master's will) they must perish in their sins.

Men, therefore, may boast of their liberal views and their freedom from the shackles of superstition—of their philanthropy and enlarged good will towards all men: but what will all this avail the numerous millions of the human race who sit in the region and the shadow of death, unless their opinions excite them to active and unwearied exertion to meliorate the condition of the heathen world. The opinion which I am endeavoring to prove to be false and deceptive, so far as it obtains, necessarily cuts the sinews of exertion and paralyzes the arm which is extended to rescue a world lying in wickedness. Let this principle and its opposite, be tested by their legitimate consequences—"By their fruits ye shall know them."

But this is not all. The natural tendency of this principle, which is "so false and yet so fair," is to dishonor the Son of God, and to degrade his finished and stupendous work. If the heathen nations of the world can as well be saved in their ignorance and impurity and sin, as through the knowledge of Christ crucified and the power of his resurrection—why did He, "who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God," make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant—and why did he become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross? Why this infinite condescension? Why this astonishing humiliation? Why all this waste of labor and of blood!! Would Heaven be thus lavish of its best treasure? Would the Son of God thus shed his own blood to purchase that salvation, which is nevertheless attainable by other means or through some other expedient? What, I ask, means the commission and the solemn charge given by our Lord to his disciples and apostles: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations"—"Go ye, into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"? And, in the execution of this commission, why did they act as under the fullest conviction that all men, by nature, are "children of wrath," and that according to the *ordinary* mode of God's dealing with sinners, there was no possible method whereby they could be rescued from deserved destruction, unless through such a knowledge of the gospel as would render it the power of God unto salvation? Why did they go, with haste, from place to place, from one city unto another, and from one heathen nation unto another, until the apostle of the Gentiles in one of his letters could say, the gospel had come "in all the world"—in all the *then* known world? Their conduct cannot admit of an expla-

nation on any rational principle, if we reject *that* given by the great apostle himself: "That I might by all means save some."

This leads us,

II. *To exhibit the benign influence of the gospel upon nations; and especially, its blessed effects on individuals, of which nations are composed, as incentives to its universal propagation.*

1. There are effects of the gospel which are *visible*, palpable, and undeniable, which when duly considered, ought to induce all men in every christian country to engage in this great work. What is it, that causes the amazing contrast between that portion of the world usually termed christendom, (especially those parts of it where the principles of the reformation from popery have obtained,) and every other country or region which has not partaken of the illumination of the gospel? Why is it that we, in this new and western world, are so far elevated above the numerous nations and unnumbered millions of some parts of the old world, with all their natural advantages? Why is it that we have made, and still continue to make, such rapid advances in literature and the arts? What has so raised the tone of morals in most of our states? Why do we enjoy such excellent civil institutions? Why are not only "the rights of man," but the rights of woman too, so well understood and so securely guarded? Why is it that the cruel and wicked effects of superstition and idol-worship are not experienced here as they are in some parts of the old world? Why is it that many infants are not, as soon as they are born, slain by the hands of their own parents? Why are not others every month cast into our rivers as an acceptable sacrifice to devils? Why are not our widows seen to ascend the funeral pile of their deceased husbands, willing victims to the devouring flame? Why do we not behold our citizens collected in vast numbers, and from distant parts of our country, to celebrate the rights of idol-worship, ever marked by obscenity, and cruelty, and blood? Why do we not see here and there a Golgotha, strewed with the skulls of those who devoted themselves to death, by falling prostrate before the creaking wheels of the massy car of some abominable idol? Why is not our highly favored country a moral waste? Why are not its inhabitants, and why are not we enveloped in a thick veil of ignorance? But *one* answer, consistently with *reason* and *truth*, can be given. "Through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us," and glorious streaks of light emanating from the "Sun of Righteousness," have, in a good measure, dispelled the shades of night.

And although it accords with the method of God's dealing with his servants and people, to try their faith and patience, as well as all their christian graces, the success which has eventually crowned almost every effort to extend the boundaries of the Redeemer's kingdom in other parts of the earth, clearly shows, the Lord is not unfaithful or slack in the performance of his promises. In taking a view of the state of the world, we cannot turn our eyes eastward, or westward, or northward, or southward, but we behold the wondrous success of missionary labors, and the triumphs of the cross over idolatry and pagan superstition. Surely God is now saying to the north give up, and to

the south keep not back. Surely this is at least the dawn of the day when it was foretold, men should cast their idols which they had made, each one for himself to worship, to the moles and the bats. Surely the day is not far distant, when all kings shall fall down before Him, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and when all nations shall serve him.

2. These effects may be said to be both *visible* and *invisible*. The force of one (and that which is the most important) branch of this argument, cannot be perceived or felt by those who have not, after the manner of his true disciples, "learned Christ," or have not by him been taught the truth "as it is in Jesus." We allude to the effects of the gospel upon the hearts, and hopes, and characters of men, when it is "made the power of God unto salvation." The power which it then exerts, or rather the power which God himself thereby exerts, as well as the effects of that power, are truly wonderful. Thereby a fellow-sinner is raised from his state of misery and degradation, pollution and condemnation, to the image as well as the favor of God. His relation to God is altogether changed, so that he is no longer a condemned rebel, but a child.

There is produced in his soul, that spiritual life, which "is hid with Christ in God"—that life which shall never have an end—that life which enables the subject of it to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." However unintelligible these things may be to some, we doubt not, there are many who feel with thankfulness to God, the force of this part of our argument, and are ready to say, "The love of Christ constraineth us."

From this brief view of this subject, we come to a conclusion which ought to be highly interesting to every citizen of this federate republic, viz., that *only the influence of the gospel, with the blessing of God, can preserve this nation in possession of its present blessings.*

What else can possibly support this mighty fabric, which has never had its parallel from the foundation of the world? What has *hitherto* preserved, and more especially, what can in time to come preserve, *the union* of these states, so essential to our happiness and freedom, notwithstanding the great increase of their numbers and our vast acquisitions of territorial limits? Under this view of the future prospects of our country, what is it that can give *energy* to our laws or *stability* to our civil governments?

We know, indeed, that senators and statesmen, and, indeed, too many of all that class of the community who are famed for their political wisdom, are prone to lay great stress, and to rest their confident hopes upon the admirable structure of our government, the justice of its principles, and the wisdom and equity of its laws and institutions; as well as upon their adaptation to the wants, the views, the feelings and even the wishes of the people. But whatever may be said (and we, with pleasure, admit that much may with truth be said) in praise of our government and laws, still, they must largely partake of the imperfection which characterizes man in his fallen estate. Did not the ties, therefore, which bind these states together, derive their chief strength from a sense of the *obligations imposed by the gospel*, they would long ere now have been broken, as the green withes which bound the mighty Danite. And were there not principles, more efficient

than any which can be derived from the nature of our government, and the wisdom of its institutions, to counteract the corrupt propensities and to control the evil passions of men, to deter them from the commission of crimes and to induce a ready obedience to the laws, our rulers might as soon guide the tempest, or gather the wind in their fists, as to render those laws efficacious for the safety and happiness of our citizens, or the stability of our civil institutions. It cannot be too deeply lamented, that "the wisdom of this world (which) is foolishness with God," is so generally prone to undervalue or overlook the real source of all that is truly valuable in this life, or that which is to come. And especially, that those who are called to hold the reins of government so frequently seem to be in a great measure ignorant, how absolutely necessary is the gospel in its purity to support a free government, especially such as ours, and to give efficacy to laws enacted by freemen. Was it not for the continued and repeated instruction which the due administration of the gospel imparts, the duties which it inculcates, and the performance of which it strictly enjoins, the hopes and the fears which it inspires; did not the gospel require men "to submit themselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake;" did it not enjoin every "soul to be subject to the higher powers" as ordained of God—and did it not teach, that "whosoever resisteth rightful power, resisteth the ordinance; and that they that resist receive to themselves damnation," our *written statutes* would prove totally inoperative. They would furnish no redress to the injured, no shelter to the oppressed. It is ever the *sanction* of a law, that prevents it from being a nullity. Our laws derive their chief support from the word and gospel of God. And what must be the state of morals! What the extreme wretchedness and degradation! What the awful wickedness and profanation! What the ignorance of all that is desirable to be known, by all classes in our community? And especially, what, at last, what must become of their immortal souls, unless the progress of the gospel be in some good measure commensurate with the progress of the settlement of the extensive wilds of our country, and the increase of its population!!

But, brethren, we would not dissemble here, or conceal from you the absolute defect of your motives, if you are actuated by no higher principle, than that general philanthropy which is common to most men, or even the purest love of country, and zeal for its best interests. This is considered, nevertheless, by many, as the standard of human perfection, and indeed it may be termed the *ne plus ultra* or extent of our nature. To principles higher than these, our unrenewed nature can advance no claim. But, believe me, much more is required to render our services an offering of a sweet smelling savor to God. *They must proceed from a principle of supreme love and regard to God, and love to men, for HIS SAKE who "gave himself for us."*

Lastly; we conclude, that an increase of a genuine missionary spirit needs to be diffused throughout the church of God in all its branches, so that all nations may be taught. You know, it matters not what is the physical power, and what are the resources of a nation—in vain do its rulers declare war, unless a corresponding spirit be excited and kept up in the great mass of its population. So, also, unless the church at large partake of the spirit of missions, which is no other

than the spirit of the Lord Jesus, unless they have the same mind that was in Christ, which led him to *do* and *suffer* all that was necessary to accomplish the redemption of this ruined world, this great work *must languish*. The hands of those who are engaged in it must "hang down," and their knees must prove "feeble,"—and the conquests which have already been achieved, will not prove what they are intended to be, the pledges of more enlarged and glorious victories. This spirit is all we want. Means and resources there are in abundance. The Lord has been pleased to endow many of his true followers with a large portion of this world's goods. Besides, the gold and the silver, although it be in the hand of the wicked and the covetous, is the Lord's. The beasts of the forest are his, and "the cattle upon a thousand hills." Yea, "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." Resources, therefore, are not wanting. Besides, the Lord is daily raising up men, who, when they shall hear the voice of the Lord saying, "whom shall I send, and who will go for us," will be ready each one to respond, "here am I, send me." But **WE WANT THE SPIRIT OF MISSIONS** to bring these resources, and these men into active operation. Until this is obtained, even christians themselves, will be prone to content themselves with detached, limited, and interrupted efforts, and contributions; and, with a few cold and heartless prayers, all which will avail but little.