

GOD And Missions Today

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2. GOD'S GOAL FOR MISSIONS

THE THOUGHT OF GOD in missions, as we have already seen, is this: a Gospel message, received by faith in the heart and proclaimed, by the mouth. of every believer, in the ear of every other human being.

The Plan of GOD is akin to His thought, though not identical with it. The English word *plan* (from the Latin *planus*, flat) originally refers to a representation of any object or conception drawn upon a flat surface, like the map of a country, or the plan of a building. We can all readily distinguish between the conception of a cathedral as it lay in the brain of Brunelleschi and the draught of Santa Maria's Cupola as put upon paper. Now GOD has an idea of missions: He projects His thought upon the pages of His Word and still more clearly defines it by the pencil of History. His idea and ideal become real in the practical plane of action; and that is His Plan.

The importance of studying and understanding His plan cannot be overestimated. It has been said, "Find out the plan of GOD in your day; and then beware that you do not cross it, but fall into your own place in that plan." Perhaps nothing is more fundamental to a truly serviceable life than to know what GOD's plan is, and knowing it, come into right relation to it. When His mind guides, no mistake is possible; no failure is conceivable when His will controls.

There are two ways of finding out GOD's plan, and they are to be pursued along parallel lines.

One is to study His Word and the other, to study His work; on the one hand to *search the Scriptures*, and on the other, to *watch that march of GOD in history* which is His perceptive teaching wrought into the form of acts and facts. We say these two methods should be pursued side by side, for they complement and correct each other; or rather, our understanding of both.

Scripture and history are the two books of GOD on missions, and each throws light upon the pages of the other; but one may read both and still be blind to their real meaning.

Looking first at GOD's Word, one book in the Bible seems entitled to a special rank as GOD's own commentary on missions. The Acts of the Apostles is the *Missionary Encyclopedia of the Ages*. Here if anywhere will be found in full both the Divine idea and the Divine plan.

This book opens with the repetition of the Great Commission, and the prediction of the Great

Anointing.

It briefly outlines the whole scheme of missions, as Giotto drew a perfect circle at one stroke: **"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 it proceeds to trace the history of the witnessing Church through the first age, the lifetime of one generation, showing how GOD went before to open doors of access wide and effectual; and how the Church, following His lead, gave her witness, in the exact order which our LORD had indicated - in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria; then in the uttermost part of the earth, Rome, Greece, and the regions beyond.

Surely this is no accident. The New Testament opens with four Gospel narratives, all of which end with the Great Commission presented in four various aspects, like a building viewed from as many sides.

Then immediately follows this fifth book in which GOD's leadership of His witnessing Church by His providence and grace, during one entire generation, serves this double end:

first, it stands as a permanent illustration of His purpose and of the duty of every successive generation of believers toward those who live on the earth;

secondly, it furnishes us a practical example of the general results which we are to expect to follow faithful witness.

This book is the typical history of the first age of missions and is a key to all future ages of Church history.

Seven grand features are here plainly marked in GOD's plan; the ruling idea and word is still *witness*, but this witnessing is qualified by certain definitions and limitations:

1. Its purpose - the evangelization of the world
2. Its result - the out-gathering of an elect Church
3. Its order - to the Jew first and then to the Gentile
4. Its scope - a whole Church, witnessing to a whole world
5. Its method - a division of the field and a distribution of the force
6. Its stress - service rendered to the existing generation
7. Its power - essentially superhuman and supernatural

Within these seven landmarks is the whole duty of the Church, with all details for her complete guidance in carrying out the Great Commission.

It is our design to survey these seven features in course of these chapters.

One of them, the duty of the whole Church to witness to the whole world, has been already touched upon. Just now we may confine ourselves to these great questions:

What is the purpose which GOD has in view?
What are the results which we may expect?

We seek to answer these in the double light of the Scripture and of history. We find it to be GOD's declared purpose to have the Gospel preached throughout the world and thereby to gather out from the world a believing people, the Church or Bride of CHRIST. If this be so, then our true aim is divinely defined and our reasonable hope is suggested, which need not be disappointed.

Our LORD Himself defines the bounds of our work; the purpose of this world-wide witnessing is a world's evangelization.

It behooves us carefully to notice our instructions, for they not only define our duty, but they limit our responsibility.

If we closely examine the entire commission entrusted to the Church by our LORD we shall be struck by the peculiar words which He used: "**Go ye . . . Preach the Gospel . . . Make disciples . . . Witness.**" There is another word, translated teach, that evidently refers also to an after-training of those who have been first evangelized and made disciples. No unbiased reader can examine the Lord's instructions given to the Early Church without observing that, first of all, He meant that there should be a simple heralding of good tidings, accompanied by personal witness to their truth and power and a consequent making of disciples; then that these converts should be gathered into churches, baptized, and further trained in fuller knowledge of divine truth and preparation for service.

To confound preaching and teaching, evangelization and indoctrination, is a mistake that is fundamental and initial. The didactic process is secondary and subordinate.

Men are asleep, dead in sin: they must be aroused, awakened, quickened. When a house is on fire, a ship is on a rock, a pestilence is raging, or an avalanche is falling, one does not wait to give minute instructions, but peals out the trumpet note, "Escape for thy life!" So our LORD saw this world lying in sin and its millions going down to the death of the grave and the second death of Hell with fearful rapidity; and He urged a correspondingly rapid proclamation of the Gospel.

He urged His heralds on - He bade them not wait for others to come to them - but to "go" to every creature, sweep round the globe and trumpet forth the warning and the invitation until "every creature" shall have heard.

Is "witnessing" then so superficial, so artificial a process, that we are to picture to ourselves some flying courier galloping on horseback through village after village, announcing the good news and then hastening away?

To bear testimony to all nations is no such hasty, inadequate proclamation of the Gospel message. However important the mere work of the herald, other forms of testimony are needful to confirm and establish this witness. The whole witness for CHRIST includes

- the *conversion of souls* - which witnesses that this Gospel is the power of GOD unto salvation;
- The *out gathering of converts from the world and their ingathering into the Church* - which witnesses both against the world by separation and unto God by consecration;

- The *erection of the Christian home* - which witnesses to what CHRIST can do not for man only, but for woman and children;

making the wife man's equal companion, instead of his slave and victim;

making the mother the radiant center of a happy household;

- the *setting-up of Christian school, college, printing press and medical mission* - these trees of life whose fruit is food and whose leaves are healing.

The whole array of Christian institutions which are the peculiar product of the faith which works by love - all these belong to that "witness" for CHRIST which helps one to judge whether indeed **"he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."**

This is the testimony which vindicates His claim to universal homage and world-wide dominion.

We are not jealous for any human theory, nor are we warring about words. But something is wrong. Our LORD urged an immediate and world-wide proclamation of the Gospel to every creature. And yet, in this century, at least one-half of the population of this globe remain as entirely strangers even to the fact that JESUS died for them as though they were inhabitants of another planet!

We have been going about this work leisurely; we have gone to nations here and there, set up the cross as a rallying point, sought to convert the nations and subdue whole empires for CHRIST. We have waited to complete this work while the regions beyond have remained in the unbroken shadow of death. All this seems, in some respects, directly opposed to our Lord's orders.

We lay stress on this, simply to maintain a Scriptural principle.

So long as we labor or hope for a Christianizing and spiritualizing of the kingdoms of this world our work is in vain and our hope is without fruition. Nothing can be further from my thought than to belittle the triumphs of the Gospel, or dishearten the heart of any hopeful disciple. But, if we would avert a disappointment which is almost suicidal to Christian effort we must hold up no unscriptural expectation.

In every community where the Gospel has been preached, however grand its triumphs, it is still true, from the days of Paul until the days of the modern Paul, the saintly Duff at Calcutta, that "some" there have been **"who believed not"** (Acts 28:24). If we do our work of witnessing, expecting nothing more than the Scriptures warrant, we shall not be so likely to give up in despair when only the common discouragements of all Christian work confront and baffle us.

The great snare of our day is the mad passion for numbers.

The Diana of the modern Ephesians is the statistical table, and many are the makers and venders of these shrines of our great goddess. We have fallen upon a mathematical age. To report so many converts in one year is the Devil's bait to catch the superficial winner of souls. We measure the prosperity of our churches not by the spiritual strength of the members, but by the numerical

length of the roll. Evangelists are too often caught in the same snare of numbers, and continually tempted to parade mere numerical results as a test of success.

This insane clamor for "numbering the people" is one of the main foes to missions. As in David's case, it leads to spiritual famine, pestilence, or defeat - and sometimes to all three. There was a year in the little church in Blantyre, Scotland, when only one convert was welcomed to the Lord's Table; but that lad was David Livingstone. Converts are to be weighed, not counted. One Cilician Saul is worth ten thousand like the Samaritan Simon.

There are some who seem more concerned about getting everybody into Heaven than about making anybody fit for Heaven. In GOD's eyes it is of far more consequence that the Heavenly City should be clean than that it should be crowded. And we must learn, in our work for souls, that salvation is measured more by the depth to which it penetrates than by the surface over which it spreads; and that it is for duty, not for results, that we are to be held accountable.

Conscious that in presenting these views I represent a small minority, I take courage from the depth of my conviction that this is GOD's truth; and from the remembrance that historically the truth has never yet been on the side of the majority. Both GOD's Word and GOD's working, even in this missionary age, teach us that during the present dispensation our watchword is evangelization. We are not to look for a world's conversion, which, after all these centuries, seems perhaps no nearer than at the accession of Constantine.

We are to evangelize the world. If the result proves to be, not the world's conversion, but the out-gathering of the Church (n ekkinoia, the called-out assembly) is it not exactly the scriptural goal of this age?

This is the only hope warranted either by the Scripture or the history of missions; therefore it is the only hope which cannot be disappointed. To some believers this truth is so clear that it is a marvel that any reader of the Word or observer of history can doubt it. In Acts 15:14-17, the apostle James outlined at that first Church council the whole plan of the Divine Architect and Builder, and furnished a key to all evangelical history and a kind of miniature chart of the whole missionary age.

Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the LORD, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the LORD, who doeth all these things.

And the apostle significantly adds, as though to assure disheartened disciples that GOD's plans steadily advance toward completion, **"known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."**

Here is plainly an election and out gathering of the Church from the world. The discerning student of the Bible and Biblical history sees a manifest progress in the dispensations, but this elective principle is always present.

As in this age there is a widening of the elect body to embrace converts from all nations, so there is a corresponding widening of the Spirit's work. He is now bestowed on all believers. But in all the New Testament, we search in vain for any promise that during this age the Church will be co-extensive with the world. There are glimpses of a coming age, sometimes mistakenly called the "**world to come**," when GOD's plan shall still broaden out; when the world-wide proclamation of the Gospel shall be followed by a worldwide knowledge of CHRIST; when the HOLY SPIRIT shall again, and still more plentifully, be poured out from on high; not on elect individuals in an elect nation, nor on all believers in an elect Church gathered out of every nation, but, in a peculiar sense, "**upon all flesh**."

And so Joel's words, which found their foretaste in the Pentecost, shall have their fulfillment - their "fill-full-ment."

Then, and not till then, is the family of GOD to become coextensive with the family of man. And yet, even in that millennial age, the revolt at the end hints that there will still be those who persistently reject the Gospel and refuse to have this King JESUS to reign over them; they will be dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel. It would seem that until the very end of that millennial age, sin is not to be exterminated. The Gospel is to triumph more and more widely, but to the end there will be some who believe not.

We repeat the caution: "We must beware how we measure our work or our success in this world field by the apparent harvest. If, by the ingathering of a large number of converts, GOD is pleased to set His seal on mission work as being of a godly sort, yet this is not the infallible criterion either of fidelity or of success. Many a devoted servant of GOD has, like Enoch and Noah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and even JESUS Himself, met with what to human eyes is not only rejection but failure."

The most honest and earnest witness-bearing seems sometimes not so much to deliver man from as to the just judgment of GOD. Instead of the hearers being justified by faith, the preacher is justified in his fidelity to souls, and GOD is justified in their judicial abandonment. In such case is the prophet or the preacher any less faithful, or is GOD's true servant any less rewarded because the hearer is faithless?

To measure success in missions in India, China, Africa, or even in transformed Western Polynesia, by numerical results, would be a fatal mistake. No; the true criterion everywhere is the wide diffusion of the Gospel. It is a question of extensity rather than intensity; and hence the true, divine principle of missions is not concentration, but diffusion.

The field is the world; the seed is of two sorts the Word of GOD and the children of the kingdom; and both of these sorts of seed must be sown, and sown broadcast over the whole field. Depth is important, but breadth is of first consequence. It will in time be seen that GOD's policy of diffusion was far better than man's policy of comparative exclusion and seclusion.

Ultimately it will appear that the abundance of individual conversions will be in exact proportion to the widespread scattering of the seed of the kingdom. The Gospel message is characterized by two universal terms - *the world*, which is collective; *whosoever*, which is distributive.

But the great collective term, all the world, precedes the distributive term, every creature. Let us learn that our duty is to the world, and we must leave to GOD the whosoever.

We have sought to find what is GOD's purpose concerning the Church and the world.

Certain we are that He wills the largest and promptest proclamation of the Gospel, the presence of witnessing believers and a witnessing Church everywhere, even to the uttermost part of the earth. Beyond that we are sure of nothing save this: ***that His Word will not return to Him void and that our labor will not be in vain in the LORD.***

To all believers the divine command is that we outgrow our babyhood; that we cease to be mere objects of care, and become caretakers; that we enter into that divine plan which takes in the whole Church, the whole world, and the whole age.

We must be satisfied with the hope that has its anchorage in Scripture promises, do our duty, and leave the results with God; undertake a world's evangelization and not be disheartened if we find that to the end of the age there is only an out gathering of the Church; and that, as in the Apostolic Age, some believe the things which are spoken and some believe not. The stress of the command is on occupation, evangelization.

A loyal servant or soldier simply obeys, implicitly, orders which are explicit. Here are our marching orders; to follow them is to win what is better even than apparent victory, the approval of Him who will say, "**Well done, good and faithful servant.**"

Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum:

Every saved soul is called to be a herald and a witness.

We are to aim at nothing less than this: to make every nation, and every creature in every nation, acquainted with the Gospel tidings.

This is the first and ever-present duty of the Church; it is the heart of the whole missionary plan. God will give us souls as our hire and crown; large results in conversion of individuals and the transformation of whole communities will follow, as they always have followed, a godly testimony. But we are not to wait for results; we are to regard our duty as never done, while any region beyond is without the Gospel.

Let all men have a hearing of the Gospel at least; then, when evangelization is world-wide, we may bend our energies to deepening the impression which a first hearing of the Gospel has made. But, again, let it peal out, as with a voice of thunder, to be heard wherever there are believers the first need of the world is to hear the Gospel, and the first duty of the Church is to go everywhere and tell every human being of CHRIST, the world's Saviour.

We must push this work; let men call us fools, fanatics, madmen - we can afford to bear it for the sake of doing the will of GOD. When Judson had buried himself in Burma, and ten years' work could show only eighteen converts, he was asked, "What of the prospect?" His heroic answer

was, "Bright as the promises of GOD!"

When John Wesley proposed to go to Georgia as a missionary to the Indians, an unbeliever ridiculed him: "What is this? Are you one of the knights errant? How, pray, got you this Quixotism into your head? You want nothing, have a good provision for life, and a prospect of preferment; and must you leave all this to fight windmills - to convert American savages?" Wesley calmly replied, "If the Bible be not true, I am as a very fool and madman, as you can conceive. But if the Bible is of GOD, I am sober-minded. For He has declared, **"There is no man who hath left house, or friend, or brethren, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and, in the world to come, life everlasting!"**

With such heroic missionaries as Adoniram Judson and John Wesley, we are content to follow our Lord's leading without regard to apparent results. The command is plain: **"Go ye also into the vineyard,"** and the promise is sufficient: **"Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive."**

GOD is a liberal rewarder, and He always exceeds His own promise. That workman is surest of blessing who does his Lord's work without the misgivings of unbelief or the exactions of a carnal spirit. The path of the missionary is the way to Calvary, but beyond the cross shines the crown.

~ end of chapter 2 ~
