

OUR INDEBTEDNESS TO THE WORLD

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Text: I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For 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" (Rom. 1:14-16).

What means this gathering of servants of God? What great ideas has impelled us to this place? Are we here as some great council to formulate, and oracularly pronounce, some new doctrine, or confirmation of the old? Are we here as some solemn court of last resort to try heretics, and cut off from all mercy offenders in the Kingdom of God? Nay, verily, we are simply and purely as a missionary body, to confer together and perfect plans for carrying out the last commission of our great Head, "to preach the gospel to every creature." This is the idea that gathers the Southern Baptist Convention. Believing in the sovereignty of the churches, we claim no power to enforce, but simply to counsel, and exhort, and pray together, if possible, to arouse interest and sympathy, that we may the better carry on the Master's work. What means, then, an annual sermon, if it is not to fall in with this order of things, and contribute its mite to the great end in view? For this purpose I have selected this text to which I invite your most serious attention.

There can be given but one interpretation to the words "Greek and Barbarians," "wise and unwise," "Jews and Greeks." They take in the *whole* of humanity. Paul's obligation was along the line of the Saviour's last

commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," The one is as extensive as the other. It is not simply the world, but "into all the world." It is not simply preach the gospel to all nations, but preach the gospel to every creature. The world; have we even stopped to consider its import? It is simply bewildering, overwhelming, to study the statistics, imperfect though they may be. There are said to be eight hundred and fifty-six millions of the human race classed as heather, more than ten time the population of the United States. There are one hundred and seventy million Mohammedans, eight million Jews, one hundred and ninety million Roman Catholics, eighty-four million Greek Catholics, and one hundred and sixteen million Protestants. A certain religious paper commenting on these statistics has this to say: "The idea of some are very misty and indefinite in regard to the world's spiritual condition. We hear of glorious revival work at home and abroad, of fresh missionary efforts in various directions, of one country after another opening to the gospel, and of large sums being devoted to its spread, and we get the idea that adequate efforts are being made for the evangelization of the nations of the earth. It is estimated today that the world's population is one billion, four hundred and twenty-four million, and by studying the statistics we will see that considerably more than one-half, nearly two-thirds, are still totally heathen, and the remainder are mostly either followers of Mohammed, or members of those great apostate churches whose religion is practically a Christianized idolatry, and who can scarcely be said to hold or teach the gospel of Christ. Even as to the one hundred and sixteen million of Protestants, we must remember how large a proportion in Germany, England, and America have lapsed into infidelity (nominal Christians and infants), a darkness deeper, if possible, than even that of heathenism, and how many are blinded by superstition, or buried in extreme ignorance; So that while eight millions of Jews still reject

Jesus of Nazareth, and while more than three hundred million, who bear his name, have apostatized from his faith, one hundred and seventy million more bow before Mohammed, and the vast remainder of mankind are to this day worshippers of stocks and stones. Of their own ancestors, of dead heroes, or of the devil himself; all in one way or another worshipping and serving the preacher, instead of the Creator, who is God over all blessed forever. Is there not enough here to sadden the heart of all thoughtful Christians? "If all this great mass of human beings are marching down to the starless night of endless gloom, why is it we are not in perfect frenzy of enthusiasm to give them the gospel of life and salvation? They are passing at the rate of one hundred thousand a day into a Christless despair, the wail of which, if it could be heard, would freeze the very blood in our veins. A lost world; do we know what it means? Help me to measure our indebtedness to it.

I. LET ME FIX IT IN YOUR MINDS, AND MAY IT BURN INTO YOUR VERY
SOULS ALL THIS VAST WORLD ARE IN NEED OF SALVATION

If this be not true, a fearful mistake has been, and is now being made, somewhere. This mistake has been made by Christ, our teacher, or it has been made by those who misinterpret his teachings. Is not this a serious matter? Is there any way of settling this fearful charge? Either horn or this dilemma will impale us. If Christ did not teach that the whole world was lost without the gospel, then it is the miracle of the ages that so many thousands of good and capable men, in so many parts of the world, without any collusion, should persist so confidently in teaching that he did. Is it to be credited that so many men, capable of understanding the same language with reference to any other subject, should so persistently fail to understand the language on this subject? Is it not true that wherever the teaching of Christ has found a believing ear this has been the interpretation put upon it? True, there are those who

discount Christ and his teachings, and thus make short work of the whole matter, but can we, in face of New Testament teaching, follow them? There may be others who admit that Christ taught that the whole world was lost without the gospel, but that he made a mistake. If so, then he is an unsafe teacher, and is unworthy of our following. If this be true then let us disband our churches, our organizations, and cease our efforts to evangelize the world, for we are working upon a mythical hypothesis, and our zeal is unfounded. Perish the thought. We come back to our original statement, that all this vast world are in need of salvation. Do you doubt it? Then let us see what it is that creates this need. The coming of Christ into the world did not create this need, but the need made his coming a necessity. Jesus would never have died for the world if there had been no need of salvation. To suppose otherwise would be to charge God with the uttermost cruelty toward his Son. The whole world was a lost world, and Christ came to seek and save the lost. Some seem to think that it is only those who have been brought within the radius of gospel teaching that are lost. This makes the gospel create the need, when the truth is, it is the need that made it possible to have a gospel at all. Some seem to think that because the heathen have never heard of God, and know nothing of Christ, that, therefore, because of their ignorance they are safe. If this be true, it is a great pity that God did not have wisdom enough to keep his Son to himself, and permit us all to be saved because of our ignorance. Alas, His coming has only jeopardized our safety. If it ~~is~~ was needful for Jesus to come to save the Jew, it was certainly necessary for him to come and save the heathen. The need of one was the need of the other. That which created the need of salvation in the case of both Jew and Gentile alike, was the moral depravity of the human heart. How anyone can read the first three chapters of Paul's epistle to the Romans and deny that both Jew and Gentile, the world over need the gospel of salvation,

is a mystery past finding out. The only difference between the two, Paul notes. It is not the difference of need, but a difference of rendered judgment: "There is no respect of persons with God, for as many as have sinned without law, shall perish without law." "For when the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these, not having the law, are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thought, the meanwhile, accusing or else excusing one another." "What then are we better than they? No; in nowise, for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are under sin, as it is written there is none righteous, No, not one." This depraved heart is the heritage of every son and daughter of Adam which makes salvation a need of every human being, wherever there is an evil heart, there is need of salvation.

It is not a question of enlightenment, it is a question of purity: ignorance cannot save, where impurity has stained. Glance over the whole heathen world, and its history is one of sin and impurity, each individual life is an impure life. Mere sentimental religion about God's bounteous love and mercy cannot set aside the divine declaration that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Of each individual of the race it is true "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This is a statement of a fact, it is not a command. No man can born himself, then shall the heathen get holiness? Not within themselves, for the impure cannot make the impure pure. Let it be borne in upon our souls that all this vast world are in need of salvation. And it is a pressing need. Time does not wait upon the caprice of those whom may have the means of saving. The stream of human souls that pass the boundaries of help is ever flowing on, and hundreds of thousands are dropping into the abyss beyond the covenant mercies of God every day. O,

if we believe there is need, why do we linger? A crucified Christ is standing challenge to the world of its great need of salvation.

II. THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S POWER UNTO SALVATION

It is sometimes called the "gospel of God." Sometimes the "gospel of grace of God," and sometimes the "gospel of salvation," and sometimes "the gospel of Christ," but, however, it may be designated, it is first and last, God's efficient remedy for the world's need; it is a medium through which the divine efficiency is exerted for the salvation of the race. In all our efforts to evangelize the world, it is well for us to bear in mind the fact that God is the prime factor in the work to be done. The farther away from this idea we get, the more powerless we become. As far as we know, the gospel is the only way of saving men. It is a word used to epitomize the whole of the redemptive work of Christ. In its simplest acceptation, it is good news, but all good news is not the gospel. It is good news to the sick to learn of health; it is good news to the poor to learn of wealth; it is good news to the condemned to learn of pardon, but no one would say that such news is the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. The gospel we preach is good news to a lost world, because it tells of salvation through Jesus Christ: and spiritually it is health and wealth and pardon and everlasting life. All this gospel alone is said to be the power of God to produce these results. All human methods are valueless, because they have not the power with which to meet the emergency. I fear the tendency of this age of restless materialism is away from the divine power. We are looking to the power of the human intellect, to the power of oratory, to the power of wealth, to the power of organization, to the power of the artistic and beautiful, to the power of society, and the one thing most need, the divine power, is overshadowed and forgotten. Human eloquence may charm and win, but it cannot save the soul; the stoutest argument of the strongest intellect, the

wonderful resources of wealth, the stirring enthusiasm of large gatherings, the most entrancing music, and the most elaborate, and the most exquisite furnishings of the most costly churches, cannot redeem a single soul. If God be not with us all these things are against us. I mean to decry these things for if wielded by the spirit, their power is irresistible. They are dangerous only when they turn us away from God.

Paul tells the Corinthians to covet the best gifts, but they coveted gifts to minister to their own pride and selfishness. The element of danger in all human attainment is, they are apt to seduce us to trust in them and not in God. Brethren, in our earnestness for an educated and intelligent ministry, is there no danger that we leave God out of our work? How easy for the man of eloquence to feel, "I am the whole thing in this work?" How easy for the educated man to feel that his education is the winning card, and thus forget the source of their strength. God needs education, he needs eloquence, but the weakness of human nature should make us afraid. If the gospel is the divine power unto salvation, have we any assurance of divine power, if we preach not the gospel? We have been called and sent to preach the gospel, and in preaching the gospel we are preaching the divine method of salvation. Is it not true that of far too much of Christian teaching and preaching of the present day, it may be said, as Mary said unto the gardener, "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him." We are told that any artist was once employed to paint the Last Supper. He determined to throw all the magnificence of his art into the figure of Christ, but he put on the table some beautiful ornaments which exquisitely decorated. When people came to see the picture, they all said, "What beautiful ornaments!" and noticed not the figure of Christ. "Ah," he said, "I have made a mistake, these ornaments turn the eyes from Christ whom I wish to be most prominent." He took his brush and blotted them from the canvass that

the figure of Christ might be the chief object of attraction. If our sermons were subjected to the same test, how much of them would be blotted out as so much useless rubbish because Christ, who is the power of God, was so little seen in them. [¶] Bernard one day preached a very scholarly sermon, and the learned praised him, but not the godly. The next day he preached a plain, oving sermon and the good people thanked him and blessed God for him and this the learned wondered. "Ah," said he, "yes-terday I preached Bernard, but today I preached Christ."

The effect is to be accounted for in this way: God's power was with him when he preached Christ. And he was not with him when he preached Bernard. It is a doubtful compliment to have people say to us, "You preached us a beautiful sermon today, but have many of roll it as a sweet morsel under out tongue.?" We are not sent to preach beautiful sermons, but we are sent to preach Christ and in so doing we may expect the power of God to be displayed in saving. Paul said, "We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus alone and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake."

O, if I could get the eary of every theological student in the land, how I would plead with them to forget themselves, not to try to preach great sermons, eloquent sermons, but out of their own experience to preach Christ and thus become the vehicle of God's saving power to me. If we have lost the power it is because we have lost the Christ. Brethren, bear with me in saving it, but in our own revival services God seems to be the smallest factor in the work. Great preparations are made, much advertisement is done, great gatherings are held, great evangelists are employed, great choirs are trained, great things are trumpeted abroad, but where is there any great wrestling with God that he would be present with his mighty power for the conversion of the people? The whole thing smacks of human power ~~for the conversion of~~ and at last the people are

are not saved. If this whole business were surcharged with the power of God, the devil could be routed, a wail of despair would issue from the dens of iniquity, the peans of victory would be shouted in the churches. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. A revival that leaves the church unspiritual and worldly as before it began, savors not the work of God. Such revivals are the result of mere human means and ends in miserable failure. What we need is waiting from God, more confession of sin, more penitence, more humiliation and less of show and the spectacular. If the gospel is the power of God unto salvation then it is the gospel we must preach to obtain the power.

III. SALVATION IS REALIZED BY THOSE ONLY WHO BELIEVE

This is not a mere arbitrary arrangement, but it is the only way salvation can become a personal possession according to the constitution of the human mind. It is the only power in man that matches the power of God and makes the salvation complete: it is the opened door in the mind and heart through which God's power enters to accomplish its work. There is no special virtue in faith as in medicine; it has no inherent power to work the saving health of the soul; it is the appropriating power in men. It is not the something created by religion, but is a something which lays hold of religion. The saving efficacy is not in the faith, but in that which the faith appropriates. Faith is natural to all men; it is found wherever there is a mind to think, feel and act; it is as natural as grief or joy; every human being is born with it and, hence, every human being has within him the possibilities of salvation. Every man has a grip, but if a man is on a raging flood and his grip will not save him. He may grip a straw and flow on with the tide; he may grip a floating spar and it ~~sinks~~ sinks under him; he may grasp a twig and it snaps and leaves him helpless, but if perchance he is borne along by the root of a great tree that has anchored itself deep in the earth and he grips

that he is saved. His grip did not save him else he would have been saved when he gripped a straw; it was the root, and yet if he had not gripped the root he would have been a doomed man. He had in his grip the possibility of salvation. So it is with salvation through Jesus Christ. Every man has faith but it is not the faith that saves, but the Christ that faith grips. A man's grip may fail him because it is weak, or because it is overborne, but not so his faith in Christ, however weak that may be, it holds because it grips an omnipotent hand that has gripped his hand. What a merciful position is this, because all are not capable of exercising the same strength of faith. The weakest faith joins itself to omnipotent strength. It is not the quantity of faith that saves, it is the quality. "A drop of water is as true water as the whole ocean, so a little faith is as true faith as the greatest.

A child eight days old is as really a man as one of sixty years; a spark of fire is as true fire as a great flame; a sickly man is as truly living as a well man. So it is not the measure of faith that saves, it is the blood that it grips." It is a matter of everlasting thanks that God made salvation to depend on our faith. If he had made it to depend on wealth, the great mass of humanity could never reach it; if he had made it to depend on fame, only a few could have been the favored ones; if he had made it to depend on education, multitudes would be doomed; but he has made it to depend on faith, thus giving every man, woman and child the possibility of salvation. The faith of the human heart among all peoples has laid hold of some method of salvation. With some it is Mohammed; with some it is Confucius; with some it is Zoroaster; with some it is Buddha; with some it is the great Spirit; with some it is beasts and reptiles and gods of their own workmanship; but these are all like a drowning man gripping a straw in which there is no help. Only those who believe in Jesus Christ are the saved ones. The great work of

the church is to turn this faith towards Christ. To do this it is necessary to carry or send them the gospel. "For the Scriptures saith whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed; for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him: For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." "How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be set?" "So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." This is the foundation of all missionary enterprise. There is no supreme reason for preaching Christ to the world other than to have the world believe on him. The Christian religion is the greatest of civilizing forces, and if for no other reason than to greatly and quickly augment the temporal welfare of the nations, it would be a good thing to send them the Gospel, and worth all it would cost, but to insure their eternal salvation it is absolutely necessary that they should believe on Christ, and nothing can answer for this but the Gospel. The Gospel is God's power unto salvation, but the Gospel of Christ becomes the power of God unto salvation to those only who believe on him. "Neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

IV. THIS, THEN, BRINGS US TO OUR INDEBTEDNESS TO THE WORLD

We are debtors as was Paul; the same obligation that rested on him rests on us. This obligation grows out of the command of the Master. We have acknowledged Him as our Lord and Saviour. We have professed unhesitatingly allegiance to Him, and we claim to be subjects of His kingdom. All this, if it means anything, means that we are under the most solemn obligation to heed His commands.

It is not a mere matter of convenience; a mere matter of our own pleasure. We must do what he tells us and just as he tells us, and simply because he tells us, else we are rebellious subjects, undutiful children, and will surely suffer in his estimation. He has given us many command, but outside of commands for personal exercises in repentance and faith for our own salvation, this is the supremest command to his churches. He had lived, and suffered, and died, and risen again, for the redemption of the world, and now He is going back to the Father. Before he goes he marks out the work he would have us do in his absence. They are like the dying words of a loved one. Hear them, ye servants of the Lord. They are the solemn words of your Master: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The duty here enjoined is above every other consideration, every other consideration must give place to it. There is no reason for the existence of any church, if it is not fulfilling this command. This command obligates us to this one duty, so easy for us to understand, so important to fulfill. The merest child that has learned the meaning of words need not mistake its meaning. There are many controversies at the present day in the churches about many things in the Bible, but I know not that there is any controversy about the meaning of this command. It is reasonable to suppose that He made it plain so that it could not be misunderstood. It is this command that brings us in debt to the world, and our loyalty to him obligates us to pay that debt. He has put into this command the Spirit that moved Him in this work, as if to say, "This is what I have commenced, now you carry it out." Are we not under the most solemn obligation to do it? Can we afford to disobey our divine order? O, how grieved He must be to see us hesitating or setting aside His command for something else.

This obligation is expressive of our gratitude to God. He spare not

himself, but freely gave himself for us. It would be the basest ingratitude for us to refuse to give ourselves for an object so dear to his heart. Our indebtedness to Him is but another expression of our indebtedness to the world. A certain man had an undutiful son. At his father's funeral his son was present. He could look upon his father's dead face unmoved. After the family had buried him and they returned to the home, the father's will was produced and read. In the will was the name of his undutiful son, bequeating to him rich gifts. At the mention of his name he burst into tears and said, "I did not think that my father would have remembered me so kindly in his will." In the family of Christ some of us in reading his testament and thinking upon his great love and marvelous gifts are filled with contrition and gratitude. If we love Christ, we must love what he loved; we want work for what he worked for. Of course, he does not ask that our love equal his, but resemble it, not that it should be the same strength, but of the same kind. A diamond may not hold the sun, but it may hold a ray of its light. Underneath all of the toils and sacrifices of Paul's missionary labor was this, "the love of Christ constrained me." Christ died for all, but there are so many in this world who do not know it, and grateful ~~because~~ for his surpassing love to me, I must let them know it. If I did not surely my own heart would brand me with basest ingratitude. If my own salvation means so much to me, will it not mean just the same to those who must forever die if they are not told of a possible salvation for them. We are not worthy of our salvation and it would be impossible to convince the world that we have any appreciation of it, if we are unwilling to carry or send the good news of salvation to the whole world. Let us not sing "fly away gospel" unless we are willing to give it wings with which to fly. This obligation is the strongest impulse of every redeemed soul. I would doubt my own conversion if I was not willing to give to spread the gospel over the whole world.

Home Missions are a good thing, but for man to refuse to give to Foreign Missions under the plea that we have enough to do at home, or that we have the heathen at our own doors, he is simply providing a cloak to cover a parsimonious spirit, or he has wilfully hoodwinked himself. Such an excuse would have confined the Gospel to the country from whence it emanated and we ourselves would have never heard of salvation. Paul should have never left Judea to go into the regions beyond. What does this mean, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem, "and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Our obligation is to tell the story, their responsibility is to receive the story. It is not our duty to remain in one field preaching and pleading until every one there has received the gospel. We are to preach the Gospel to one and to another, always going and always telling, until every one has heard the glad tidings. Suppose a deadly disease was carrying off the people of this city. A remedy is provided. Is it the duty of the physician to remain in one household until every one in that household has been persuaded to take the remedy? Some refuse, some are stubborn, some will not believe they are in danger. Must he stay until all are convinced or persuaded? Rather, should he not go into one home, leave the remedy and instructions and apprise of the danger and then hasten to another and another until all know of the remedy and have a chance for life? If a man dies, he must die because of his own perverseness and not because of a want of knowledge of the remedy. Unutterable curses would be upon the head of the physician who would dare to linger. He who uses the "stay at home" argument, if he be indeed a converted man, is stifling and silencing the most blessed impulse of his redeemed soul. Such would condemn Paul for yielding to the

Macedonian cry. But Paul was impelled, the impulse with him was irresistible. He must be going, heralding, the good news to every one, whether they would hearken or not. With no intention of discrediting the work of Home Missions in the least, for with all my heart do I believe in it, but so far as our homeland is concerned, the commission of our Master has been fulfilled as to hasten on to other peoples. At our peril do we linger.

Now, what about the extent of our indebtedness? Paul says, "So as much as in me, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also." The duty of preaching the gospel to every creature is binding alike on every Christian. The measure of ability is the measure of responsibility. While the duty of preaching the gospel is binding alike on all Christians, the manner of performing the duty may vary. Some feel called to go as missionaries. They give themselves, their time, their talent, their physical strength, their health, all is given to the measure "as much as in me is." The great bulk of Christians feel no call to go themselves. Still the duty must be met. They are to meet it by giving of their substance to send others. Those who go are generally poor and must be supported. Their supporting is to be met by the giving of those who remain at home. Thus they are discharging their own obligation, and affording us an opportunity of discharging ours. The giving must be decided by the measure "as much as in me is." If the responsibility of giving is to be decided by this divine measure, "as much as in me is", what a caricature is our missionary efforts as at present conducted. The number of missionaries in the field at present is almost farcical when compared to the number that ought to be there, if the divine measure was met "as much as in me is." If Christians were striving in any appreciable degree to meet the divine measure, in ten years from date there would be scarcely a corner of the earth where the Gospel would not have been preached and every one would have been permitted to hear at least the glad tidings. Of course, we

should be grateful for what has been done and is now being done, and more especially when the question of preaching the Gospel to every creature is more and more forging itself to the front as the main question of the Christian churches. God grant that it may become a wide sweeping epidemic, inoculating every man, and woman and child the world over. Alas in the meantime, what humiliation is ours. Instead of one thousand or fifteen hundred missionaries, the Baptists of our country alone are able to put eight or then thousand in the field and amply support them, if they meet their responsibility according the divine measure "As much as in me is." According to this measure, the Southern Baptist Convention itself is able to put at least four thousand missionaries in the field and amply support them. There is one Baptist man who, if reports of his wealth are true, is able to take all the missionaries sent out by both the Northern and Southern Boards and support them out of his annual income and then have millions left for his own pleasure. If the Baptists of America alone would give for preaching the Gospel to every creature what they spend on useless extravagances and pleasures, verily the Gospel would have wings to fly into every corner of the earth. We have never awakened to the solemn responsibility in this matter. We are Samson asleep in the lap of the worldly Delilah and she has bound us wit her withes to our undoing. If Christians would give to let the world know of a redeemer souls would sing their praises through out eternity. I believe in education, I have no ^{objection} ~~objection~~ fine churches, I have no objection to fine, palatial homes after the Gospel shall have been preached to every carature. But in the light of the life of Him who died upon the cross to redeem a perishing world, it is a sin against God to spend so much money on education and fine churches and palatial homes when the object for which He lived and died remains yet to be accomplished.

Brethren, I am not your accuser, I sit not in the judgment upon your duty. I simply speak of things as I see them and before these facts I

myself stand condemned. If to preach the Gospel to every creature is not to be the one aim of every Christian life, the main effort of every Christian church, I have failed to apprehend the extent of our indebtedness to the world given in the measure "as much as in me is."

A vision of glory rises before me, down throughout the vista of years, I see the coming hosts of a redeemed earth; from every mountain top rises acclamations of joy, re-echoed by every vale, while over the whole are hovering the angels singing as once they sung, not in anticipation but in fulfilment, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men."