

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM.

A
SERMON

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BY

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THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM.

TEXT—This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.—Matt. 24 : 14.

What is the special adaptation of the doctrine of Christ's kingly authority to missionary work? This is the problem proposed for our consideration on this occasion.

Much has been spoken and written concerning the relation of Christ's prophetic office to the missionary work of the church. As prophet, Christ has placed in our hands the gospel message for all mankind. He is the Prophet for the world. He is the light of the world. His is the true light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. The entrance of his words gives light. He is the Prophet for all nations and generations. His word is good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. The world needs the very message which Christ as Prophet has placed in the hands of his church.

Much has been said also about the relation of Christ's priestly office to the church's missionary work. As Priest he has performed a work meritorious enough to save the world. He satisfied the law and justice of God. He wrought out a perfect righteousness. He broke down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile; between God and man.

"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." Because of these features of the atonement, it is truthfully maintained that we should offer salvation to all men everywhere.

Almost nothing is spoken or written concerning the relationship of Christ's kingly office to the work of the church. By Christ's kingly office we mean his authority as Mediator over all things that were created, both in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers.

We are specially concerned however about this authority as related to this world. Christ is king not only in his church, but also over the world. His authority is not confined to those who are loyally subject to him. He is king of rebels and enemies as well as of loyal subjects and friends. Not only will he be king of all this earth; he is king now. He is king not only *de jure*, but is also king *de facto*.

While there is widespread rebellion in the world against his authority, he has many loyal, obedient subjects. "They that follow him are called, and chosen and faithful." It is necessarily involved in Christ's kingship that his loyal subjects are wholly devoted to him, and wholly separated from all sinful and rebellious associations. If his authority is a reality and not a mere vision, it implies a real relationship between himself and his people, and a real separation from the rebellious world.

The authority of Christ thus defined in its bearing on missionary work we now propose to consider. This is the gospel of the kingdom. It proceeds from the throne of Christ the king and has his kingly authority behind it. It has for its object the subjugation of all rebellious men and associations of men. Its aim is to realize the answer to the prayer, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." It is to be preached for a witness; preaching is witness-bearing.

This gospel is to be preached for a witness in all nations.

I. Our first inquiry is concerning the kingly authority of Christ as related to the command to preach the gospel.

What is the basis on which the great commission rests? We have already stated that there is a relationship between Christ's prophetic office and this commission. The gospel message is needed by all men and is adapted to the wants and conditions of all. But Christ said nothing about this when he gave the Church her commission, nor did he assign this as a reason for preaching the gospel to all.

It has already been stated also that there is a relationship between the great commission and Christ's priestly office. The righteousness wrought out by Christ and offered to sinners is just what is needed by all. But our Lord said nothing of this when he commissioned the church to go into all the world and preach. His words are, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations." Men have attempted to detach the great commission from Christ's claim of universal dominion, and attach it at some other point, and the result is disastrous to the church's work. We must get back to the commission as Christ gave it and study it in its proper connection if we would preach the gospel with power.

Christ sends his servants into all the world because he has authority over all the world. They are to bear witness to all nations because he has authority over all nations. There are two words in the New Testament commonly rendered power, *ἐξουσία* (*exousia*) and

δυναμις (*duanamis*.) The first means "authority," the second power. In the great commission the word meaning "authority" is used "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations." He sends forth his ambassadors, not into territory rightfully belonging to another, but into rebellious provinces of his own dominion. He does not seek to extend the sway of his sceptre over the rightful subjects of another, but to bring down the rebellious thrones erected by his own subjects. We are commissioned to bear witness against men and society because they belong to Christ's kingdom and are in rebellion. Bearing witness is the weapon of war we are to use in putting down this rebellion. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

In commissioning his church to engage in this work Christ shares his authority with his people. The church represents Christ in his three-fold office. As prophets we bear witness to the truth. As priests we take up the cross and endure suffering for the sake of others, and have access into the holiest of all as intercessors in behalf of others. As kings we have authority over the nations. "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father hath appointed unto me." "Ye shall sit on twelve thrones." "Ye are a royal priesthood." The kingdom and the dominion under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. There is an actual exercise of kingly authority over the nations through the church. A generation ago the church was on its knees before God asking him as Lord of all to open the door for missionary work. In answer to these prayers the door has been opened into every nation. This authority is also exercised in breaking the power of those who rise up to do his people harm. "In the year 1839 there came a crisis to Turkish missions. Persecution bared her red right arm. The bitter hostility of the Armenian Church broke out in a storm. The despotic head of the Turkish government, Sultan Mahmoud, united his civil with their ecclesiastical power, to extirpate the Christians. The work of years seemed about to fall with a crash into ruins. Pious Christians were arrested, imprisoned or banished without ever knowing of what they were accused. It was determined that all missionaries should be banished. An order was issued to this effect. In that darkest hour of Turkish missions, the pioneer missionary Goodell said, the Great Sultan of the universe can change all this." The missionaries took refuge in the 91st Psalm. They besought the Lord to come down as in the days of old, and make the mountains flow down at his presence. While their hands were lifted in prayer, on July 1, 1839, *Sultan Mahmoud died*. The Turkish forces six days before were defeated near Aleppo. On August 9th, a fearful conflagration visited Constantinople and from 3,000 to 4,000 houses were reduced to ashes. So plain were the marks of a divine interposition that it was a common saying that God was taking the side of

the persecuted. A council was held and the exiles recalled and all rigorous measures suspended. The leaders of the persecution were awed, though unchanged in spirit. They saw the uplifted hand of the Great King and dared not go forward." (Divine Enterprise of Missions, by A. T. Pierson.) By fearful works God gave an answer to their prayers. They reigned as kings on the earth.

When Christ claims all authority in heaven and in earth, he claims authority over those whom he sends as witnesses. He commissions his church to bear witness because they are already his subjects. They are called out of the world and then commissioned to bear glad tidings to the world. This is one aspect of the doctrine of election often overlooked. Election does not mean election to everlasting life only, but election to the high calling of witness-bearers to the ungodly world. Israel was an elect nation. But Israel was elected, not only to the enjoyment of peculiar privileges but also to the performing of an important service. "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Christ said to His disciples: "I have called you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth much fruit." All the elect are elected to service as well as to everlasting life. The commission itself bears witness to this truth. Many of the most profound Bible students are convinced that the gathering on the mountain in Galilee was the occasion when Christ was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. That was the occasion too when the great commission was given. This commission was therefore given not to the Apostles alone, but to the whole church. And in those days it was obeyed by the whole church. The persecution which arose about Stephen scattered the whole church except the Apostles, and these scattered believers "went everywhere preaching the gospel." While it is certain that this commission was obeyed by the whole church then, it is just as certain that it is not obeyed by the whole church now. In the whole foreign field there are but 6,000 laborers exclusive of native workers. To support these there is a force of nearly 40,000,000 church members. This means that it requires a force of nearly 7,000 Christians to support one missionary. These millions of Christians contribute for the support of foreign missionaries about \$11,000,000. - Is this obeying the command of Christ? When we consider the immense wealth in the hands of professing Christians, the large sums expended by them for purely worldly ends, and the shamefully small amount given for the spread of the gospel, we are constrained to believe that notwithstanding the fact that this is called the century of missions the great commission is not yet understood, nor its authoritative words obeyed.

If the church felt the full force of the words which our Lord places as a preface to the great commission, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth," if church members felt that they and their money belong to Christ and are subject to his orders, instead of one missionary for six or seven thousand Christians, we would have one for every five hundred. Instead of a force of 6,000

missionaries, there would be not less than 60,000. Forgetting that Christ gave the great commission as King, his command is not obeyed, for "where the word of a king is there is power." Dr. Pierson has often spoken of the energy and celerity with which, in the days of Ahasuerus, three times the whole empire, that extended from the Golden Horn to the Ganges, was reached with a royal decree; and the third decree was carried in less than ten months from the palace at Shushan to the limits of the Persian Empire. But here is a world 25,000 miles in circumference not yet evangelized although nearly 2,000 years have elapsed since the command was given to preach the gospel in all lands. Why is this command not obeyed? Largely because the church does not realize that the commission is the word of the king. The members of the church are too deeply absorbed in worldly cares. There is too close a contact between the church and the world. Dr. Pierson in speaking of this contact says, that as a result, the church does permeate the world and make it more churchly, and outwardly perhaps more godly; but by the same intimate contact, the world permeates the church, and makes it more worldly and even ungodly, till neither remains what it was and still would be in separation. Instead of what is decidedly "hot," and decidedly "cold," there is what is "neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm"—and it is that which God hates. "*I would thou wert hot or cold.*" "The law of SEPARATION," says Dr. Pierson, "is written as in huge capitals, all over the word of God, inscribed as in flaming letters upon the altars of tabernacle and temple, typified in the separation of clean and unclean in the Levitical law, and then whispered from Calvary with a still small voice as impressively and imperatively as when thundered from Sinai's summit: "Come out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, etc.""

(The Divine Enterprise of Missions, p. 75.)

The doctrine of the mediatorial authority of Christ, involving the duty of SEPARATION from the world, in a fuller sense perhaps than Dr. Pierson intends, is that which is needed to-day to awake the church to a sense of its unfulfilled mission, and to urge it forward in its work.

II. We must now inquire what place shall be assigned to the doctrine of Christ's authority while we are preaching the gospel to all nations? It is evident from what has been said that Christ's authority is the basis of our right to go everywhere and preach; and if any man denies our right we may answer with the Apostles, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to obey men rather than God, judge ye." But is this all the practical use we can make of this sublime truth? Is it never to be brought to the front except when it becomes necessary to vindicate our right to preach at all? Or is this truth to form an essential part of our testimony as witnesses? Is the authority of Christ as King any part of the gospel of the kingdom? It is a prevalent belief among Christians to-day that the great mission of the church is to save souls; and as there are a few

truths, such as faith and repentance, popularly known as saving truths, these, it is maintained, are to be preached to the exclusion of such doctrines as the kingly authority of Christ. These so-called saving truths are called the gospel; the authority of Christ, as related to business and politics, is outside the gospel.

No doubt the saving of souls is a great work. "He that shall convert a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." "I am made all things to all men that I may by all means save some." Neither is there any doubt but that the saving of souls is a part of the work which Christ means to accomplish by the church in carrying out the great commission. But nowhere in the word of God is there any warrant for the theory that saving souls is the mission of the church. This is not the language of the great commission. Our mission is to preach, bear witness, and "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" but we are told just as plainly that "he that believeth not shall be damned." It is our mission to preach whether men will hear or forbear, whether souls are saved or not. But we have this consolation, that if we are faithful witnesses we need not fear for the salvation of souls. Indeed, we may say that this result is the first in order. But separation from the world is included as an essential part of their salvation. "God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name." What is God's purpose with reference to the mass of the Gentile world out of which this people are taken? What has the gospel of the kingdom to say to the world at large? What is the message of the kingdom of heaven to the kingdoms of the world? The popular belief is that it was no message whatever; that the only object of the gospel is to gather out a people to be saved while the world of mankind is lost. Over against this idea we place this recent utterance of Prof. Robert Ellis Thompson: "I believe the Master is forcing us to go back to the primitive gospel, the proclamation of a kingdom of heaven, of repentance as a preparation for it, of the new birth as the entrance into it. The *ordo salutis* which John Wesley learned from the Moravians and the Pietists of Germany, repentance and faith as an escape merely from the wrath to come, is being found too narrow, too individual, too spiritually selfish. 'Preach the gospel, but preach no truncated gospel. Preach the Christ who died to save sinners, but preach him also as turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, of the ruled to the rulers, of the rich to the poor and the poor to the rich, that he may gather into one grand fellowship all that are in heaven, and all that are on earth.'"—(Divine Order of Human Society, pp. 11, 12.)

In the same connection Prof. Thompson declares Calvinism in its heroic days to be a social as well as a theological faith. "It was theocratic to the core. And let us not misunderstand that word 'theocratic.' Theocracy, the rule of God in all human affairs, has been too often confounded with hierocracy, the rule of a priesthood or a clergy. No man ever hated hierocracy with more vehemence

than did our fathers, because they regarded it as the great enemy of theocracy, the rule of God. It was their faith in his direct rule over all human spirits and all social relations which made them the strong men they were, and weighted them—as Emerson says of them—with the weight of the universe. The sovereignty of God was to them no mere abstraction. It was the ground of all other sovereignty and of all authority. The divine will was the basis of all human relations in family, State and church, as it was the basis of all righteousness in man and of all freedom in society."

According to this author the great object of the gospel as defined by the Calvinistic theology is the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. Canon H. W. Fremantle, in his lectures entitled, "The World as the Subject of Redemption," expresses similar views. He represents the church as having for its object "to imbue all human relations with the spirit of Christ's self-renouncing love, and thus to change the world into the kingdom of God." We can set no bounds to the purposes of our Lord and the functions of his church. We must take in a simple and literal sense his claim to universal dominion. The task then of the society which Christ founded is to bring about his universal dominion. It is to make the kingdoms of the world to be kingdoms which are not of *this* world. "The present evil condition of the world, in which force and fraud reign, is to be replaced by the newer and better state in which it will be no longer *this* world, but the world of God and of righteousness."

Prof. Henry Drummond maintains that the first thing that Christ did in the accomplishment of his purpose was the founding of a society. "His immediate work was to enlist men in his enterprise, to rally them into a great company or society for the carrying out of his plans. The name by which this society was known was the kingdom of God." "Christ's great word was the kingdom of God. Of all the words of his that have come down to us this is by far the commonest. One hundred times it occurs in the gospel. When he preached he had this almost always for his text."—(Programme of Christianity, p. 19).

When Prof. Drummond and others were in this country a few years ago they told us that "it was this truth of a divine kingdom, of religion as a thing of social relations which had taken hold of the Edinburgh students and awakened such an interest in missions."

President Northrup, in an address before the seventy-seventh anniversary of the American Baptist Union, held in Cincinnati, May 25, 1891, spoke of some of the hindrances to the work of foreign missions. The first hindrance he mentioned was "departure from the method of Christ." He said "the chief stress is laid not on salvation here and now, the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, but upon salvation in a narrow sense of the term as escape from the retributions of hell." He condemned the habit of Christian people in looking upon the heathen world, not as a kingdom to be conquered for Jesus Christ, but rather as a scething sea of drowning men, a few

consider the proper attitude of Christ's disciples to the kingdoms of the world.

At the first there was no formal separation between the people of God and the world. The sons of God chose wives from among the daughters of men. The result was moral decadence until the world was too corrupt to be saved but its corruption must be washed away by the flood. Noah and his family, composing all the church there was, were separated for the preservation of true religion and the world destroyed. After this, immorality soon began to prevail again, until Abraham was called and separated from the world. Here is sufficient historical evidence that true religion cannot exist except in a state of separation from the world. The gospel of the kingdom requires testimony to be borne against the kingdoms of the world; it demands just as clearly that God's people occupy a position of *separation* from the kingdoms of the world. This position is demanded by the principles of consistent and uncompromising loyalty to the King of kings. The gospel of the kingdom finds the world in rebellion against Christ. The nations and governments of the world have said concerning God, and his Son, "Let us break asunder their bands and cast their cords from us." The scriptures often speak of a conflict between Christ and Satan. They uniformly speak of the nations of the world as taking the side of Satan. "These shall make war with the Lamb." There are some nations not as hostile to Christ as others. But it is a great mistake to suppose that because a government grants toleration to Christianity and absorbs certain moral principles into its laws, that it is therefore Christian. In the sense of being on the side of Christ in this conflict, there are no Christian governments. When the gospel of the kingdom is preached the first result is to gather out a people for the name of God. Here then we have these peculiar phenomena; the kingdoms of the world still standing, and still hostile to the kingdom of Christ; the kingdom of Christ not yet set up in the full sense of taking actual possession of the world; a people called out of the world, no longer of the world, but citizens of the kingdom of heaven yet to come in its fullness of glory and power. Loyalty to Christ, while this peculiar state of affairs lasts, demands separation from the kingdoms of the world. This question is met by every foreign mission. In thoroughly heathen, in Mohammedan, in Roman Catholic countries, the same problem is constantly arising. Sometimes it is said that this problem is so abstruse and difficult to be understood even by advanced Christians, that no practical use can be made of it in evangelistic work. So far from this being true, there can be no evangelistic work done without it. It is one of the fundamental truths of Christianity. When converts to Christianity are made in heathen lands where heathen customs shape the character and life of the State, there is but one thing for the loyal disciple to do; he must separate from heathenism both in his politics and in his religion. When converts are made in Mohammedan countries, they must renounce the Koran, and Mohammed, and dissent

from the civil State, if they would be loyal to Christ. In Roman Catholic countries allegiance means the recognition of the Pope as Christ's vice-gerent, and of his infallibility. Converts to Protestantism can do nothing less than separate from such civil powers. This question, we say, is thus met by missionaries in all lands. The author of the article on "Methods" in the Encyclopedia of Missions discusses it. He says that "it is of special importance where Church and State are united and political privileges depend upon ceremonial observances. In some cases practically new States have been formed with their entire paraphernalia of offices and officers. When this has not been the case, still the new Christian community has invariably had distinct if not a corporate existence which has come to be recognized as an important element in rendering the position of the church complete and permanent. Here the missionary meets the question of accord to unjust laws and the demands of un-Christian governments. Each case cannot be settled merely upon its own merits; the very idea of a Christian's relations to the powers that be must be thoroughly thought out and clearly stated." "The Christian State, not so much as an accomplished fact but as an ideal, is a most practical and important element in the methods by which Christianity is to be ultimately established."

Separation from the kingdoms of the world is to be insisted on in all missionary work in the name of Christian morality. Evidently this is so where political alliances and governmental service involve infractions of the moral law. This question was met by the early church when it came into contact with the Roman Empire. "Just because public life was wholly interwoven with heathenism, were Christians compelled to withdraw from it." "While the State was thoroughly pagan their relation to it could only be a negative one." The council at Jerusalem, called to consider the question whether Gentile converts should be required to observe Jewish customs, not only decided this question in the negative, but they also decided that they must cease the observance of certain Gentile customs. In obedience to this decree "they avoided military service and public offices, for the soldier was obliged to assist at sacrifices, and civil officers to superintend the performance of religious rites." Such was the policy of the Christian church at the first. In the course of time it was considered too difficult longer to refuse military service and public offices; new ties were formed with the world which resulted in the corruption of the church. Like Israel, church members were mingled with the heathen and learned their way. In her policy toward the nations of the world to-day the church does not follow the example set in the earliest Christian ages, but that of later times.

In the great missionary conference in London in 1888, no problem received more attention than that of social customs in missionary lands. No social problem received so much attention as polygamy. Some defended the practice of baptizing converted polygamists without requiring them to break off these unscriptural marriages, while

others contended that none should be baptized till all but one wife should be put away. All agreed, however, that no baptized convert should afterwards be allowed to contract polygamous marriages. This is one branch of the great problem of separation from the world. Why is not carry the principle into politics as well as into social relations? It is sometimes answered, "Because civil government is a divine institution." But is not marriage a divine institution? And when this relation is entered into contrary to the moral law regulating it, is it not null and void? If a convert from heathenism should afterwards take more than one wife, and should defend himself on the ground that marriage is a divine institution, the church would doubtless answer, "Though marriage is a divine institution, yours is not." Why may we not say, too, that while civil government is a divine institution there are many that are not? Our missions in Syria and Asia Minor proceed on this principle, and their success justifies the practice. Even if the salvation of souls is the exclusive work of the church, separation from the world is necessary for their salvation. In truth, salvation is often expressed in the Bible by such terms as "called out," "gathered out," "separated." They are no longer citizens of the kingdoms of the world which are claimed by Satan, but of the kingdom of heaven. The law of the kingdom of heaven is their rule of conduct. We are taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Rev. Hugh Price Hughes says: "Perhaps the most fatal delusion that ever took possession of the Christian church was the delusion that the will of God cannot be done on earth, that the Christian ideal is too high for attainment here, that the programme which God has given us must somehow or other be explained away." "Most men live double lives, and this duplicity is summed up in two leading particulars. First of all, how often do we hear sincerely religious men say that 'religion is religion, and business is business?'" "We can never be said to do the will of our Father on earth as angels do it in heaven if we do that will only at certain times and in certain places. Ruskin is quite right in stating that if our religion is good for anything it is good for everything.

The second way in which some very imperfectly instructed Christians contradict the Lord's prayer, is by asserting that religion has nothing to do with politics. A profound instinct has taught the masses of the people that if Christianity is not applicable to politics, Christianity is an antiquated delusion." Another fatal delusion is that the church will progress most rapidly in carrying out the great commission by lowering the standard of morality and church membership. Look at the standard that prevails to-day. England not only forced the opium trade on China, but England manufactures most of the idols used in India. Christians are responsible for these things. Church members own and publish "Sunday" newspapers; Christians read them; and when newsdealers are tried for a breach of the Sabbath law, Christian lawyers defend the lawbreakers and

denounce the law. Christians own and operate railroads and street car lines on the Sabbath for gain. Christians make the license laws, and elect their representatives to enforce them. Over on Federal street to-night there is a "grand temperance rally." The subject for discussion is, "Can a judge be a Christian and grant a license for a saloon?" After solving this problem, it might be in place to discuss the question, "Can a man be a Christian and vote for an officer who is required to enforce a license law," and this, "Can a man be a Christian and identify himself with a government that upholds such abominations?" We do not maintain that it is impossible for a man to be a Christian and do these things but we do maintain that no one can do these things and be consistently loyal to Christ. Suppose the world were converted to Christ, and that all men everywhere were admitted to church membership on the moral level of the average church member of to-day, we would not yet hear the heavenly voices proclaiming "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ." Rome conquered Greece, but Greece in her turn conquered her conqueror. The church conquered Pagan Rome, but Pagan Rome in turn conquered the church. The church to-day is gaining a victory over the world, but the world is also gaining a victory over the church.

This principle of separation is necessary not only for the sake of consistency but also to lead the church to act up to the divine plan. We have seen that that plan contemplates the transforming of the kingdoms of the world into the kingdom of Christ. Worldly kingdoms are to be destroyed. The little stone cut out of the mountain without hands, smites the image, and reduces it to powder, the wind carries it away, and the little stone rolls on and fills the earth. Should not Christ's people be separated from that which is to be destroyed? And what will Christians do to overturn the great world powers so long as they are identified with them?

We believe that God is bringing this great question to the front in this crisis of missions for a purpose. The end of the present order of things is near. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom of Satan will soon fall. The doctrine of the kingly authority of Christ involving the principle of separation by his people from the kingdoms of the world is seen to be specially adapted to missionary work:

1. Because it shows the authoritative character of the great commission.

2. Its adaptation is seen in that it makes clear the work to be done, namely, the making the kingdoms of the world the kingdom of Christ.

3. Its adaptation is seen in that it makes manifest the proper attitude of Christ's people while this work is going forward. Let this principle be ignored and endless confusion arises as to what is proper and what is improper, what is right and what is wrong. Let

this principle be clearly understood and its authority recognized, and all questions as to morals can be easily settled. This is the gospel of the kingdom which must be preached for a witness in all nations; and when it is preached the end of Satan's rule over the kingdoms of the world will come, and the reign of Christ will be recognized.