

## Preach The Gospel

Our passage today contains the verse that launched a thousand ships, and a thousand missionary endeavours. Jesus said, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature'. These words from the Saviour have challenged generations of men and women to lash themselves to the mast of the good ship evangelism and carry the gospel message of Christ's death and resurrection to the ends of the earth. Isaiah says, 'Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far'.

### **The earth shall be filled**

Matthew records the Lord's instruction in a parallel passage and refers to 'teaching all nations'. Luke, in Acts, recounts the Lord as saying, 'ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth'. Today we call this passage, 'The Great Commission'. It is what Habakkuk is referring to when he writes, 'For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' (2:14).

### **The redeemed shall return**

It should never cease to amaze us how small were the beginnings of the immense work of the apostles in the spread of the gospel, and how great has been the result. From a few disheartened and confused fishermen and tax-collectors the message of grace has travelled around the world and, we are told in the book of Revelation, gathered a people redeemed to God by the blood of Jesus Christ, 'out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation'.

### **He shall send forth His angels**

This world-wide task was always at the forefront of the Lord's purpose for His disciples. His teaching and example was their preparation for their ministry. From the beginning the Lord called the disciples to be 'fishers of men' and after three years of intimate, thorough and exemplary instruction these men were now entering upon their great calling. Soon the Holy Spirit would fall on them and they would 'be endued with power from on high'.

### **To be believed upon**

We note, too, the Lord Jesus appointed these men to preach the gospel. They were chosen to that end. John tells us, they were ordained, that they 'should go and bring forth fruit, and that ... fruit should remain'. The Lord Jesus Christ, having died, risen and accomplished the putting away of sin by His death now would have this message declared to the whole world, to be believed upon, that faith and salvation be granted to, and experienced by, all for whom the Saviour laid down His life.

### **For the obedience of faith**

The apostles' principle role was preaching the gospel and this continues to be the prime task of the church. By preaching the gospel of free and sovereign grace Christ's kingdom is established, God's elect gathered in, and the church built up in the faith. Salvation comes to those who believe and are baptised, that is to say, those who receive and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ with the obedience of faith.

### **Believe and be baptised**

It is not believing that saves a sinner, nor does baptism confirm our salvation, but these two experiences reveal the effect of the new birth and the transforming knowledge of divine grace in a sinner's life. The elect of God have faith unto salvation, not for salvation, and in believing they are possessed with a desire to honour, serve and follow their Lord Jesus Christ in newness of life. This is represented by believer's baptism. It is neither our believing, nor our baptism that saves, but both reflect the work of conversion in a heart and soul touched by grace.

### **Signs shall follow them**

The signs following these conversions are typical of the divine power at work in gathering the elect, particularly in the experience of the apostles themselves, and gospel preachers. Casting out devils pictures the entrance of Christ into a soul and the expulsion of Satan at the new birth. 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' which is the preaching of the gospel. This message would be heard and understood in the real languages of the hearers, so on the day

of Pentecost the people cried in amazement at the Apostles' preaching, 'we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God'.

**Lo, I am with you alway**

Taking up serpents and drinking deadly potions without harm were never intended as tricks to impress natural men and women but are reassurances that the God who sends forth His ministers also controls and protects their every step and provides their every need. Signs and healing reveal the power of the Holy Spirit in those who are converted and those who bring the message of grace. Within a few weeks of giving these words to His disciples thousands would be saved on the Day of Pentecost, and the great latter-day ingathering of Christ's Kingdom begun.

Amen

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