

"INTO ALL THE WORLD"

The Great Commission:
A Vindication and an Interpretation

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE APOSTOLIC DYNAMIC

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and 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).

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives~ and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

“And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

A recent book on missions makes the astonishing statement that "it was at Madras the Christian Church for the first time really came to grips with the great social, racial, economic and political problems with which the world is confronted. The Christian Church seemed almost ready to attempt its task of world-redemption. The old day of the Prince Albert coat on the cannibal islands was done; the new day of the Christian engineer of human affairs was about to begin."
[1]

The new missionary program advocated in this book is that of the Social Gospel. It is indeed a revolution of missions that is here proposed. But is it wise to discard the mainspring to repair a watch? What we need today is not more technique, more machinery, but more power.

The more elaborate the organization of missions the more indispensable is the presence of the Spirit of GOD.

At times one feels, with a veteran missionary in India, that we are in dreadful peril of being dominated by the machinery we have created and sometimes the temptation arises to smash the machinery in order to save our souls! We spend more time at councils and committees than we do in prayer. We survey every department and every province and publish the statistics, when what we most need is to "survey the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died."

The Apostolic Church began with a baptism of power. For this they were told to tarry in the upper room. **"Ye shall receive power (dynamic), after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."** That upper room became the powerhouse for the apostolic company as **"they continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren"** (Acts 1:14).

The baptism of the spirit came after CHRIST's resurrection and ascension and it transformed and transfigured the eleven apostles. The divine gift was power; the human instrumentality was prayer. But these two are closely linked together in the New Testament.

"True prayer is GOD the Holy Spirit talking to GOD the Father in the Name of GOD the Son, and the believer's heart is the prayer-room."

"For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself. maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26, 27).

It all began with the resurrection.

There is a wonderful painting by Eugene Burnand, entitled *Le Samedi Saint* ("*Holy Saturday*").

It represents the eleven disciples gathered together with the doors shut for fear of the Jews, but there is no light of gladness, no smile of hope on their faces. It is the evening of the darkest day of their lives. JESUS lies in the tomb. Their hopes lie buried with Him. **"We trusted,"** they are saying, **"that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel.** We trusted - but now our trust is gone. In Galilee, beside the lake, we saw His power and His glory. On Golgotha we heard His bitter cry and saw His dying agony. Then Joseph of Arimathea took His body and we laid it in the tomb. Now JESUS is dead."

Peter sits with his head in his hands, and John, his face a study of conflicting emotions, is trying to comfort him but can find no words. Disappointed, discouraged, perplexed, baffled, bewildered as they think of the future, each face in the group is an individual expression of their common experience. JESUS is dead. **"We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel . . . "**

Thanks be to GOD! the Gospel story does not end with the death of CHRIST. It does not close with His triumphant cry, "**It is finished.**" Nor does the apostolic message. CHRIST's death was followed by His glorious resurrection.

The faith of the apostles in the actual resurrection of JESUS CHRIST, therefore, was not a blind faith but open-eyed and built on accumulative and irresistible evidence.

"He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days," and the number of those who thus saw Him alive and recognized Him was more than five hundred (Acts 1:3; I Corinthians 15:6). None of the apostolic band had the shadow of doubt left after CHRIST's ascension and the great Day of Pentecost. They were changed men because CHRIST was alive forevermore. His resurrection was their living hope. It was the dynamic of their message not only, but of their daily experience. [2]

The picture we have of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles is of a fellowship animated and motivated by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

- He guides in their decisions.
- He leads into new fields of work.
- He reveals the will of GOD.
- He works miracles of healing.
- He opens and closes doors for the Gospel.

It is the Holy Spirit that confers the gift of languages, that bursts the barriers of prejudice, that opens prison doors, that confers boldness in testimony, patience in trial, steadfastness in suffering, vision in martyrdom.

In the Apostle's Creed we have a full statement of faith in GOD the Father, and ten statements regarding our Lord JESUS CHRIST, while the article on the Holy Spirit consists of six words. But all that follows in the Creed relates to the work of the Spirit in the believer and in the body of CHRIST.

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate basis of revelation and the divine agent in our redemption. The Holy Spirit is the executive of the Godhead. He receives equal honor with the Father and the Son in baptism and in the apostolic benediction. His are all the attributes of deity: eternity (Hebrews 9:14), omniscience (I Corinthians 2:10) omnipotence (Psalm 139:7), creative power (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4). He it is who teaches (John 14:26), testifies of CHRIST (John 15:26), intercedes (Romans 8:26), reveals the future (I Timothy 4:1), confers spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 12:11); and the sin against Him can never be forgiven. Those who speak of the Spirit as an influence or attribute would, therefore, make a sin against an attribute greater than a sin against GOD Himself.

The apostles were conscious of His personality. He was the Comforter sent by CHRIST Himself. When a group of disciples in Ephesus expressed their ignorance of the person and power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7), Paul baptized them into the thrice holy Name, laid hands on them and they immediately received the Holy Spirit, spake with tongues and prophesied.

So, the twelve disciples of Ephesus received the same Pentecostal gift as did the eleven in Jerusalem.

"So close was grandeur to the dust
So near was GOD to man,"

that the apostles and elders actually wrote to the church at Antioch, "**It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us**" (Acts 15:28).

Moreover such was not the language of mere pietism or spiritual conceit but of everyday experience. The strangeness of the phrase to modern ears marks our distance from apostolic dynamic Christianity.

The Spirit fell on the early Church in direct answer to prayer (Acts 1:24; 4:24, 31). The Anglicans are striving to bring together the branches of the Church on the basis of the Lambeth Quadrilateral. But the apostolic quadrilateral is broader and more basic for the reunion of Christendom (Acts 2:42). We read that they "**continued stedfastly in (I) the apostles' doctrine and (II) fellowship, (III) in breaking of bread, and (IV) in prayers.**"

Would that today all missionaries were continuing stedfastly in Paul's doctrine, Paul's fellowship of love (I Corinthians 13), Paul's interpretation of the ordinances, and Paul's power of intercessory prayer.

Since the beginning of the missionary enterprise in the upper room, prayer has been the secret of power and perseverance and victory.

All the great missionaries were first of all great in their prayer-life. Paul leads and far surpasses them all. Prayer marked every crisis and every emergency in his life. The very impulse to his great career came to him after the Damascus vision, when he was on his knees in the Temple at Jerusalem: "**While I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance . . . and he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.**"

Next to the book of Psalms there is no part of the Bible that contains such wealth of devotion, such depth of adoration, such height of thanksgiving and such width of intercession as Paul's Epistles.

"**I bow my knees,**" he says, "**unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named**" (Ephesians 3:14, 15).

Paul lived and moved and had his being in the realm of prayer. He offered no argument for prayer because he believed in a living GOD who exercises direct influence on the hearts and affairs of men. Prayer revealed GOD's will (Galatians 1:12; 2:2), and brought direct answers to his petitions. His attitude to prayer was the direct opposite of modern humanism with its philosophical objections. He believed in the efficiency and efficacy of prayer always and everywhere (Acts 27:23-24).

He prayed for himself, for others, for the churches which he founded, for Israel and for the whole human family. What a list of converts he mentions in the last chapter of Romans, most of whom he had never met, and yet for whom he prayed. And he constantly asked for the prayers of others: "**Brethren, pray for us**" (I Thessalonians 5:25; Romans 15:30-32; Colossians 4:2-4; II Thessalonians 3:1; Philippians 22).

There are thirteen special prayers of Paul recorded at some length in his Epistles. [3]

All of them are definite petitions and intercessions for the spiritual growth of the young churches, and it is remarkable that five of them occur in his earliest Epistles to Thessalonica.

Paul's many salutations and benedictions were also sincere prayers. To all this we must add his thanksgivings so often introduced by the phrase "**Blessed be God**" (II Corinthians 1:3-4).

All these prayers were the outpouring of his deepest desire as a missionary-apostle. They teach us what intercessory prayer can be and should be. Compact sentences, weighty in thought and deep emotion, comprehensive in spiritual insight, wrestling against the powers of darkness such are the prayers of the dauntless apostle. And the result was victory.

It was Paul's prayer-life that produced the kind of Christians we read of in the New Testament, abounding in every good word and work. If you desire to learn the secret of communion with CHRIST and of power for service, read Paul's Epistles. Study his prayers and confessions of sin. In such case to go back to Paul is to go back to Pentecost - and the only dynamic of missions.

Raymund Lull, the earliest missionary to the Moslems, martyred in the thirteenth century, was profoundly convinced that the only weapon which Christians can rightly wield against their foes is prayer:

"It is my belief, O CHRIST, that the conquest of the Holy Land should be attempted in no other way than Thou and Thy apostles undertook to accomplish it, by love, by prayer, by tears and the offering of our own lives."

Read the story of the early pioneers who hazarded their lives for the Lord JESUS as ambassadors of the Gospel and you will find the narrative is eloquent with testimony to the power of answered prayer.

"Unprayed for," wrote James Gilmour of Mongolia, "I feel like a diver at the bottom of a stream with no air to breathe, or like a fireman on a blazing building with an empty hose."

"Prayer and pains," said John Eliot, "through faith in Jesus Christ will do anything."

John Hunt's dying words were: "O let me pray for Fiji, Lord, save Fiji." He did.

Adoniram Judson's life and that of John Paton are one long record of answered prayer.

Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission testified that the only explanation of the remarkable history of that mission is prayer.

"GOD Himself is the great source of power. We are led by a supernatural Captain to right paths to victory. It is not lost time to wait on GOD."

The Apostle Paul was not afraid, as the pacifists are today, of a military vocabulary. He was a soldier of JESUS CHRIST;

- He put on the whole armor of GOD.
- He wrestled not against flesh and blood but, on his knees, against principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world and against the powers of the air (Ephesians 2:2).
- When his feet were shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, he still needed the shield, the helmet and the sword - and as climax - **"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints"** (Ephesians 6:14-18).

A recent military strategist affirms that the United Nations will only win against their enemies in this present global war by air-power. Victory for missions today can only come through prayer-power. In spite of all the hoped-for changes, if GOD should give victory over the Axis powers in this terrible struggle, we must not put our trust in human reconstruction of society or any man-made charters of liberty. Only the Son of GOD can make us free indeed.

The rivers of GOD do not take their rise in the deserts of diplomacy or amid the active volcanoes of war. They flow down from the throne of GOD and of the Lamb. In the spiritual conflict of the ages, the true soldier stands in CHRIST's strength alone. The arm of flesh will fail us, even as it did in the first World War. We dare not build our hopes on governments or treaties or maps of a new world-order.

Prayer and the power of the Spirit - these are the hope of missions in every land. The energies of the universe, nay of GOD Himself, are at the disposal of those who pray.

- **"Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."**
- **"And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following"** (Mark 16:20).

So it was in the beginning, is now and evermore shall be until the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of the Lord and of His CHRIST.

All human means are secondary.

The work of missions from start to finish is a miracle of GOD's grace. So stupendous is the task, so great the obstacles and opposition that "if we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing." We must invoke and rely on supernatural power.

Dr. Joseph Schmidlin in his book on *Catholic Mission Theory* criticizes Protestant missionary strategy (unfairly) because at times it shrinks back from closed doors. After paying tribute to the work of the Edinburgh Conference and the gathering held at Jerusalem, the author says:

"From these shrewd tacticians we also might learn much, especially with regard to the appraisal of all natural factors. There is only one factor which has escaped their notice, and which they have not learned even from us; this factor is the cultivation of the religious courage and zeal that moves mountains - especially its cultivation to the degree in which this faith is possessed by our Catholic missionaries. Inaccessibility and persecution form no absolute barrier for this faith. Where neither road nor footpath leads, where land and people alike seem barred from every foreign religion and culture, where the executioner awaits everyone who crosses the frontier - there our missionaries have penetrated with an intrepid scorn for death, and preached the doctrine of the Crucified. They have thus lent heroic testimony to the truth and strength of their faith. Contrary to every human calculation, success has frequently justified their course, because the world-mission is the work not of man but of GOD. GOD, and He alone, is the great mission strategist, who by His providential guidance of the missions often shames the strong through the weak, and cancels merely human consideration. If the apostles and the early Christians had given any heed to such considerations, or been intimidated by the interdicts and bans of the state, Christianity would never have gained admission into the Roman Empire."

Do we not all of us, need this reminder of the apostolic strategy of missions and its true dynamic?

FOOTNOTES:

1 Roy L. Smith, *The Revolution in Christian Missions*, p. 198.

2. Zwemer's *The Glory of the Cross*, pp. 119, 191. NOTE: This book is posted at 3BSB.

3 Prayer for charity, I Thessalonians 5:12, 13; for sanctification, I Thessalonians 5:23; for GOD's good pleasure, II Thessalonians 1:11, 12; for consolation, II Thessalonians 2:16; for love and patience, II Thessalonians 3:5; for corporate perfection, II Corinthians 13:7-9; for unity, Romans 15:5, 6; for hope, Romans 15:13; for knowledge of GOD's will, Colossians 1:9-14; for full assurance of knowledge, Colossians 2:1-3; for the glory yet to come, Ephesians 1:15-21; for the Triune indwelling, Ephesians 8:14-91; for perseverance to the end, Philippians 1:9-11.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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