

A
DISCOURSE,

17

PREACHED IN BOSTON,

BEFORE THE

**Massachusetts Baptist Missionary
Society,**

MAY 25, 1803.

BEING THEIR FIRST ANNIVERSARY.

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☞ *Those parts of the Discourse that were omitted in the delivery of it, through indisposition of body, are added in its publication.*



D I S C O U R S E.

ROMANS X. part of verses 14 and 15.

*AND HOW SHALL THEY BELIEVE IN HIM OF WHOM
THEY HAVE NOT HEARD? AND HOW SHALL THEY
HEAR WITHOUT A PREACHER? AND HOW SHALL
THEY PREACH EXCEPT THEY BE SENT?*

WE live at a period of time, marked by very great events. Among these we place the blow that hath been given to the anti-christian kingdoms, the uncommon success of the gospel, and its present flattering appearance. The seat of the beast hath been attacked, and those popish countries which have shed the blood of the martyrs with awful profusion, have been deluged in blood. God, as a just punishment for their crimes and cruelty, hath given them blood to drink in great measure.

The man of sin, though not destroyed, hath received a blow, from which we venture to say, he will never recover. He hath lost his power in a great degree to do harm, especially in France; by which nation he hath been principally supported for many centuries. In that country, he is entirely sub-

jected to the control of the civil power ; his authority is limited, and held by permission.

It is also a pleasing and promising event, that there appears, at this time, a door opening in France for the propagation of the gospel of Christ ; a most animating account of which hath been lately published in the Evangelical Magazine. Time would fail me to transcribe it into this discourse. I will only say, that the persons who were sent to inquire into the state of religion in that country, met with encouragement that far exceeded their most sanguine expectations. And attempts are now making to furnish its inhabitants with the New-Testament, and an excellent defence of its divine origin in their own language ; and to send proper persons to preach the gospel among them. Many of their rulers favour the design. May the glorious Head of the church, who bought her with his blood, bless this excellent attempt !

The numerous and uncommon *revivals of religion*, that have taken place in different parts of the United States of America, also mark the day in which we live : that in our western country was the most general and surprising. Thousands have been hopefully translated out of darkness into marvellous light ; who, according to our latest and most correct information, are careful, with few exceptions, to live as becomes the gospel ; which circumstance ascertains the reality of that moral change, these people profess to have experienced. *By their fruit ye shall know them*, is an infallible maxim.

In various other places there have been great additions to the churches of Christ of different denomi-

nations. The Lord hath revived his work in the midst of the years, and made the wilderness to blossom like the rose ; which many of the friends of religion consider as an answer to prayer.

It is about seven years since the quarterly concert for prayer, among christians of different persuasions in Europe and America, commenced. The principal object of which is, to pray for the revival of religion in the world, and the more general propagation of the gospel. During that period, the enemy has in a very uncommon manner, come in like a flood ; but the Spirit of the Lord hath lifted up a standard against him ; and the cause of Jesus Christ hath been remarkably progressive.

The surprising *missionary spirit* that prevails in the old world and in the new, is one of the signal events of the present day. Great attempts have been made, and large sums of money have been, by our pious friends in Europe, expended, for the important purpose of sending the gospel to pagan countries. This event hath been attended with such union, love, and friendship, among christians of different denominations, as cannot fail of giving exalted pleasure to all those, who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

The same spirit animates many good men in our own country, who are exerting themselves in various ways to extend the Redeemer's kingdom. In imitation of our Pedo-baptist brethren, the Baptists of this Commonwealth met in May, 1802, and formed themselves into a society by the name of the "Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society." The design of which is, "to furnish occasional preaching in the new settlements, and to promote the knowledge of

evangelic truth within these United States ; or farther, if circumstances should render it proper.”

To aid this important design, there will be a sermon delivered annually, and a contribution for the benefit of the Society ; the expenses of which are to be defrayed by the subscription monies, and by donations.

In compliance with the wishes of my brethren, I address you on the present occasion. Permit me, therefore, to invite your attention to the passage first read—*And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher ? and how shall they preach except they be sent ?*

The apostle discovers his ardent love to the souls of his countrymen, and his strong desire for their salvation, in the plain and faithful manner in which he speaks of them in the context. *My heart's desire and prayer to God, says he, for Israel is, that they might be saved.* But why this anxiety, if, as some persons tell us, all mankind will certainly be saved ? Why anxious that they might be saved, if they cannot be lost ?

His fears were excited, it seems, by the mistake they were in concerning the mode of acceptance with God. *For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.* This, in Paul's judgment, was a fundamental and a fatal error ; because there is no name under heaven given amongst men, by which we can be saved, but the name of Jesus.

He now passes to explain the only sure method of salvation : *For Christ is become the end of the law for*

righteousness to every one that believeth—compared with chap. iii. 22, 23, 24. *Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe : for there is no difference. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The apostle teacheth us in these words, and in many other passages of his writings, that the salvation of sinners depends entirely, on faith in the finished and everlasting righteousness of Christ. And that under the gospel dispensation, there is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free ; but that whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ shall be saved. But how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher ? and how shall they preach except they be sent ?*

From the text I observe,

I. That the dispensation of the gospel is of infinite importance to mankind.

II. Therefore, that christians are under the most solemn obligations to diffuse the knowledge of it, by every method in their power.

I. We first observe, that the dispensation of the gospel is of infinite importance to the world.

By the gospel I do not mean every thing that goes by that name. Among mankind there are many corruptions of primitive christianity. These ought to be shunned, not diffused ; because destitute both of *truth* and *energy*. The true and proper Deity of Christ is denied by some ; by others, who have more caution, and a greater regard to public opinion, never mentioned. With this error at the foundation, no man, in my view, can preach Paul's gos-

pel, because he taught mankind that the Divinity of Christ is essential to christianity. A gospel without an Almighty Saviour, a perfect and an everlasting righteousness, an atonement for sin, is not his, but belongs to those who would pervert the gospel of Christ, by substituting repentance and sincere obedience, as the reason of acceptance with God, in the place of a divine atonement.

There are others who deny or extenuate the total depravity of human nature ; represent mankind in a much better condition than they are, and thus daub with untempered mortar.

Regeneration, or the new birth, is either denied, or so misrepresented, that many persons conceive it to be altogether ideal.

I will not, however, dwell on this part of the subject, but pass to observe, that by the gospel as a general term, we mean the great truths taught by Christ and his apostles, such as, the sinner's real condition of guilt and moral inability ; that he is under the law and under the curse ; that there is no salvation for him but by the obedience and death of Jesus Christ, who died the just for the unjust, &c. ; that sinners must be born again, or be renewed in the spirit of their minds by the influence of the Holy Ghost ; that the method of salvation is by grace alone, not of works, lest any man should boast ; and that whoever believeth in Christ hath everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation ; that true faith will be followed by a life of holy obedience ; or that all such as have believed in the Son of God, will be careful to maintain good works.

These and all the doctrines which are connected with them, we believe to be apostolic ; such as were

preached by Christ and his apostles ; such as were maintained by the churches of Christ in general at different periods ; such as are to be found in the confessions of faith of different denominations of christians ; such as were blessed by God to promote the various revivals of religion that have taken place in different ages and countries. These were the sentiments brought by our pious ancestors to New-England ; and are now to be found in the writings of those venerable men : Which we believe to be infinitely important to the world, because they teach man his true character and condition ; call up his attention to his best interests ; inspire him with conviction of his guilt and danger ; show him that he is undone forever in himself considered ; but that there is yet hope for him in Jesus Christ, who died for chief of sinners ; and that God can be just, yet justify the ungodly who believe in Jesus. They contain a complete answer to this all-important question, *What shall I do to be saved?* A question this, my brethren, that all the angels in heaven could not answer ; but which is now revealed in a style so plain, that the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Into it the angels desire to look ; while believers of every age and country adore the incarnate mystery—A GOD IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF. And a circumstance that carries its importance to its highest possible degree, is, That it gives us the most wonderful display of the divine perfections, and secures a present and an eternal revenue of praise to God.

If such be the nature, design, and tendency of the gospel, it follows, That the *dispensation* of it is of infinite importance to mankind : for *how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how*

shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?

This great and glorious plan of saving sinners, was conceived in the mind of God in eternity; or, it is coeval with his infinite existence. And in time it hath been revealed to man. The first intimation of it was made to Adam immediately after his fall, and repeated through every succeeding period, till Christ himself came in the flesh. During the Old Testament economy this revelation was made by shadows, types and prophecies, to trace and explain which we are not now at liberty. During that dispensation the whole was confined to the Jewish nation; but after Christ came, the dispensation of the gospel was extended to the Gentiles. The commission is expressed in terms of universality: *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, &c.* Accordingly, the apostles, after our Lord's ascension, visited the Gentiles, and preached the gospel among them.

Since the days of the apostles, God hath raised up a succession of men in every age, whose business it is to diffuse the knowledge of evangelic truth; and who, in the text, are said to be *sent*. *How shall they preach except they be sent?*

We are hereby taught, that it is as impossible that any person should preach the gospel properly except he be sent, as it is, that the people should believe in him of whom they have not heard. It is a natural inquiry then, What are we to understand by this expression? I answer,

1. It implies, that the preacher must be called by divine grace to an experience of the gospel. This is the first qualification for the sacred office. Unless

this be the case, he will not love the work, nor realize the value of immortal souls, and the danger they are in of everlasting condemnation. Without this, he is not qualified to converse with anxious sinners, and to conduct them to Christ the only remedy. Like the unskilful pilot, he will rather be in danger of running the vessel on shore. How can he distinguish true from false religion, as a personal thing, who never knew it?

Persons of a different character may run before they are sent, and by virtue of uncommon talents, like a shooting star, shine for a moment, but they are quickly lost in oblivion.

The question which our Lord thrice put to Peter, every candidate for the ministry ought to answer for himself, *Lovest thou me?* Without this love to Christ he will be like the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal. And Paul's charge to Timothy, 2d Epistle ii. 2. ought to be most sacredly observed by us, my brethren in the ministry, when called to ordain others: *And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.* How comprehensive and interesting is this charge! The *doctrines* he had preached, he charges him to commit to *faithful men*; i. e. to believers, who had felt the transforming power of the gospel on their hearts.

2. To which I add, that a person his being *sent*, implies, that he possesses certain natural qualifications, among which, as a principal, is *aptness to teach*; or an easy manner of communicating ideas; which most assuredly supposes that he hath ideas to communicate.

There are some pious men, who seem to think that they are always to insist on the christian's experience, or the pious feelings of the heart. But they

ought to recollect, that the gospel contains a rich variety of important truths and duties ; with which they are bound to make themselves acquainted by a close application to reading and study, that they may be as scribes ready instructed in the kingdom of God, and be able to bring forth out of their treasure, things new and old. *Give thyself wholly to these things,* says Paul to Timothy, *that thy profiting may appear to all.*

Ye candidates for the ministry, and ye young men who have just engaged in the sacred office, permit me to call your attention to the great importance of general knowledge ; and especially of a correct acquaintance with the oracles of God. Hearts under the impressive sense of vital piety, and minds well stored with knowledge, will qualify you to be both acceptable and useful preachers. Depend upon it, if you wish to be useful you must preach Jesus Christ and him crucified ; and guard against that perpetual sameness, into which some preachers unhappily fall.

3. One thing more implied in the preacher's being sent, is, His obtaining the approbation and license of some regular religious society, or church of Christ. Such certificate will ascertain his character among strangers, and open a door for extensive usefulness. Without it no regular churches or ministers of the gospel will encourage him. After the conversion of Saul the disciples would not receive him, until he was recommended by Barnabas. A like caution should be observed by christians of all denominations, in order to prevent imposition.

Preachers of the preceding description enter into the spirit of the gospel ; realize its truth, its holy nature and unspeakable importance to sinners ; hence

they travail in birth again till Christ be formed in them. And christians in private life imbibe the same spirit ; hence feel, or are easily convinced,

II. That they are under the most solemn obligations, by every effort in their power, to spread the gospel as far as possible.

1. The first of these ariseth from the *infinite danger sinners are in*. Christians firmly believe that they are under the curse of a broken law, and exposed every moment they continue impenitent, to everlasting destruction. Is this the case, my friends ? How then can we remain easy one moment, without making some attempt to excite their fears, and to awaken their attention to their danger, before their feet stumble on the dark mountains, and the pit shut its mouth upon them ? Should we see our neighbour's house on fire, we should fly immediately to alarm the family, and extinguish the flame. Impenitent sinners are in an infinitely worse condition. How unspeakable then are the obligations of christians, to do every thing in their power for their salvation !

2. Especially since the gospel reveals *the only remedy for their recovery*. There is no name under heaven given amongst men, whereby they can be saved, but the name of Jesus. Can a real christian believe these two propositions, That sinners, as such, are in a lost and undone condition ; but that there is *one*, and *only one* method in which they can be saved, even by Jesus Christ, and his heart not burn within him, to attempt, at least, to convince them of their danger and the only way of their recovery ? Feeling the influence of these solemn truths, certainly, my fellow christians, especially my brethren in the ministry, we ought, like the angel mentioned in the

Revelation of St. John, to be ready to fly through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them who dwell on the earth.

3. And let us recollect, my brethren, that *the field is large* ; there is a *world* before us, and multitudes of perishing sinners who never heard the gospel. There are the heathen in our own country, who are sitting in the region and shadow of death, having none to break unto them the bread of life. Attempts have indeed been repeatedly made to convert our Indian neighbours to the faith of the gospel ; but so strong are their attachments to savage life, and to their own natural notions ; and, I add with reluctance, so strong their prejudices against some who call themselves christians, on account of the ill treatment they have received from them, that few, comparatively, have embraced christianity. Nor can we reasonably expect to be successful among them, until we regain their affection and confidence, and convince them that we seek not *theirs* but *them*. They have been repeatedly and shamefully defrauded in time past ; whence have arisen inveterate prejudices against the white people. These prejudices must be removed by a different treatment. The men who go as missionaries among them, ought to be pious, meek, benevolent, entirely detached from the world ; having nothing to do with purchasing lands, but solely to instruct them in the things that belong to civilization, and to their everlasting peace. By such men much might be accomplished among them under a divine blessing.

Hasten, O Lord our God, the happy period when thou wilt give the heathen to thy Son for his in-

heritance ; and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession !

There are also great numbers of families that have settled in the wilderness, who are unable to support a gospel ministry, and are therefore starving for lack of vision. One of our missionaries who was out sixteen weeks on the western mission the last year, informs the Society, That he preached in forty-one towns in which there was no stated ministry of any denomination ; and in thirteen towns in which a missionary never had been. In one part of the wilderness the people had not heard a sermon for fourteen years. A lad of fourteen years of age, who had never seen a Bible before, took it from him, and viewing it, said, “ Is this a Bible ? I did not think it looked so.” Hark, my christian friends, the voice of thousands, destitute of the means of grace, crying in the wilderness, “ Come and help us !” Certainly we cannot be deaf to their cry. They thank you for what you have done, and pray that you will pity them in their unhappy condition, and again send the gospel among them,

4. Which has the promise of the life that now is, no less than that which is to come. The great advantages resulting from the gospel to civil society, are an additional reason why christians should exert themselves to promote it. It produces the most evident and important change in the hearts and lives of all those who really believe it. It informs the judgment, and by its energy governs the heart, subdues the violence of the passions, and regulates the conduct. Hence the difference between the men of real religion, and the men of the world ; between Saul the persecutor, and Paul the preacher of the

faith he had laboured to destroy ; between our heathen neighbours, and the towns and villages in which the gospel prevails. To which I appeal for undeniable proof of the truth of the preceding observations.* The fact cannot be denied, though it may be vilified and misrepresented by those who are unfriendly to these things. But, my hearers, such an extraordinary change in those who had been wholly inattentive to religion, and in many instances, its violent opposers, should silence those men of every description, who ridicule this work. They ought to be extremely cautious, lest they be found to fight against God. When hundreds of mankind, of different ages and characters, who had lived without God and hope in the world, embrace the gospel, and live under its influence, which is attested by both the friends and the enemies of religion, we are obliged to confess the change is real, though, to many, it is unaccountable. To what cause shall we ascribe it? Certainly not to the influence of Satan, who is allowed to be the most wicked being in existence ; and who *blinds the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* His malignant disposition urges him incessantly to promote vice, and oppose virtue ; to make men wicked, not good. Before we can rationally believe that he has any agency in revivals of religion, unless to oppose them,

* There are two publications that contain particular accounts of these revivals of religion in different places. One of them intitled "Surprising Accounts of the revivals of Religion," &c. printed by Woodward, No. 12, South Second Street, Philadelphia ; the other intitled "Increase of Piety," &c. printed at Newburyport, by A. March, 1802.

and bring them into contempt, we must dismiss all our former ideas of his character, and admit that he is totally altered; consequently that the world have nothing to fear from his influence.

Nor can the change we plead for be ascribed to enthusiasm, or delusion; to some sudden impression on the mind, whereby the person is led to fancy that he is inspired with some new revelation from heaven.

The effects of such enthusiasm have sometimes surprized us, we confess; but in the present case we must look for a superior cause, because it is evidently a change of the disposition of the heart, acting itself out in the most rational manner in the life. The man confesses and forsakes his sins; God becomes the object of his supreme affection; Jesus Christ, in his character and fullness, the object of his love, his confidence and joy; holiness his choice and delight. His life and conversation are entirely altered; he denies ungodliness and worldly lusts, and lives soberly, righteously and godly in the present world. He continues in well doing; lives and dies under the influence of the same truths, that gave him hope and consolation when he first believed. Is this delusion? Would to God the world were under its influence. The wolf would then dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child might lead them. Neither would there be any to hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain.

Should we compare the effects produced by the gospel in modern times, with its influence on mankind in the apostolic age, we shall find that they are

perfectly analogous. The means made use of were the same : *It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, in that day, to save them that believe.* Under Peter's first sermon three thousand were converted. So it is in our day. The effects produced by the gospel are also the same. Sinners then were pricked in their heart, and said, *Men and brethren, what shall we do ?* This is the language of awakened sinners in the present day. They found no peace of mind till they believed in Jesus Christ ; so it is now. Believing in him, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. After their conversion, they were careful to recommend religion to all around them, by their lives and conversation ; so it is with such as are brought to the knowledge of the truth in this day. So different are they from what they once were, that their enemies are obliged to acknowledge it. And this has often been the case with whole towns and villages, where God hath revived his own work. Nor is it any reasonable objection to these revivals, that they are sometimes attended with irregularities, which the friends of religion lament. Human imperfection will always appear in a greater or less degree, in every thing mankind engage in. Is not this the case with all their struggles for liberty ? Though begun in justice and moderation, to what extremes have they been carried ; what injustice and oppression have marked their progress !— Shall we then condemn them in the gross ? by no means. What is right, we approve, and what is wrong, condemn. When, therefore, the wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and returns unto the Lord, every virtuous mind must approve a change so interesting to the man himself, and so beneficial to society.

The subject suggests a variety of reflections; to which I pass.

1. It naturally leads us to give glory to God for our distinguished privileges. The gospel, that brings life and immortality to light, is brought to our doors. This is a blessing of inestimable value. What a melancholy condition should we be in without it! Blessed be God, he hath not left us thus to perish, but hath sent his word and healed us. Let us then unite in one delightful song of praise to Him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood. To him be glory forever.

But a most distressing fear creates a pause—and swells each pious heart with anguish too great to be expressed, lest any of those who have been exalted to heaven in point of privileges should be thrust down to hell! God forbid that this dreadful anticipation should be realized. Sinners, think a moment what an aggravated condemnation your's will be, who have trodden under foot the Son of God, and have counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and have done despite unto the Spirit of grace. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Death may soon arrest you in your criminal career, and fix you for eternity. Oh, that you might immediately fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you. I pray God that it may not be said of you, that light is come into the world, and that you have loved darkness rather than light, because your deeds are evil!

2. What could have been the reason, that this best of interests did not engage the united efforts of christians of all denominations, before the present

period? The gospel has always been the same—sinners have, as such, always been in the same state of guilt and danger—good men have always believed the gospel to be of infinite importance to the world; yet how few attempts, comparatively, have been made with energy and perseverance, to send it to the unenlightened parts of the earth!

“It is a very affecting fact that according to the lowest computation, there are at this moment above **FOUR HUNDRED MILLIONS** of our fellow men in a state of pagan darkness. What pains and expense does it not deserve to attempt to rescue, at least, some out of so many millions from ruin?”*

I do not mean, however, to speak disrespectfully of those attempts that have been made by some christians to convert the heathen; but only to censure my own inattention, and that of many of my christian friends, to an object of such magnitude. It is with pleasure I remind you of the “Danish mission to the coast of Coromandel, in the East-Indies, since the year 1706, by which above 18,000 Gentoos have been brought to the profession of christianity. The Dutch in the island of Ceylon, and other of their East-India settlements, have had still more extensive success. The Moravian brethren, have within these sixty years past, sent missionaries to various heathen nations, and have discovered a zeal for the propagation of the gospel, which ought to provoke in all other denominations of christians, a godly emulation. Their success has been remarkable among the Greenlanders, and in the Dutch West-India islands. They have also sent missionaries among the

* Periodical Accounts, No. 1:

American Indians, and the Esquimaux on the coast of Labrador, who have been hopefully owned for the conversion of souls; and have attempted to preach the gospel to the Tartars, and to the Hottentots. We are informed that in the year 1788 they had in their societies 15,000 converted heathen.”*

The apostolic ELIOT and the excellent BRAINERD were happily instrumental of great good to the Indian nations. Yet with truth we may say, little has yet been done, compared with the millions of pagans, and the poor inhabitants of our back settlements, who are this day without the gospel. An extensive field for missionary labours is before us in our own country! and we have reason to bless God, that he hath excited such a spirit for missions among christians of different denominations in Europe and America. We trust it is a prelude to that blessed day, when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord; as the waters cover the deep.

I have already mentioned to you the melancholy condition of our people inhabiting the wilderness. Many towns without any settled minister: some that have not heard the gospel for fourteen years. And when an opportunity to hear it was offered to them, no weather prevented their attendance. Some of them were deeply impressed with divine things, and others brought to believe and rejoice in Christ Jesus. This is good news from a far country, and should animate us in all our future exertions.

Were I to judge from your solemn silence, and profound attention this evening, I should conclude that you are all deeply interested in this blessed cause:

* Periodical Accounts, No. 1.

And from your feelings and your number, anticipate a very liberal contribution. You cannot give your money for any better purpose. It is to defray the expenses of sending the gospel among the poor destitute inhabitants of the wilderness. The moment is at hand, my dear friends, when you will have an opportunity to gratify the finest feelings of a benevolent heart. What you give this evening is to be applied to the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. Remember, the Lord loveth a cheerful giver.

In fine, I congratulate you, my brethren of this Missionary Society, on the success that hath attended your first attempt. The letters that were read to you this day from your missionaries, left scarce one eye dry. You wept, but you wept with joy. You have ample encouragement to proceed. Remember that in this case, you are workers together with God. May that adorable Saviour, whose cause it is, crown your future efforts with abundant success, and give you many redeemed souls at the last day as your joy and crown. Even so, Lord Jesus.—
AMEN.

