A MISSION FOR THE TIMES.

A Sermon delivered on Lord's Day Morning, September 13th, 1896, by the Rev. C. W. Townsend, at Hatfield's Point, Kings Co., before the New Brunswick Baptist Convention.

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"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Acts 26: 18

We are living in a wonderful age. "The bells of time are ringing changes fast." It is a period of transition. Old landmarks are being removed. Old ideas are being severely overhauled. Old positions are being forsaken. Iconoclastic hands are being laid upon the most sacred things. Science is giving new interpretations of nature and man, and professing to alter and enlarge our whole conception of life. Higher critics are attempting the stupendous task of revising and re-editing Revelation itself. Archæologists are extorting from the earth secrets which have been buried for millenniums. Scholars and Thinkers are busy, we are told, reconstructing theology. Social Reformers are propagating, with tireless enthusiasm, their schemes for the amelioration of humanity. Institutions hallowed by memory, consecrated by love, illumined by faith, are marked for destruction. And as these excavators are at work endeavoring to undermine foundations which have stood for centuries, we seem to hear them singing in chorus:

"Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be."

Amid all this turmoil of revelation we ask,—Is there anything stable? Is there anything secure from demolition? Is there anything to which we may tenaciously cling? Are there any facts that remain the same through all ages? I venture to say in reply, that our text is as applicable, timely, and powerful as when first uttered. The work to which it calls us is as much needed today as ever in the past. Whatever discoveries may yet be made, whatever further light may break forth from the volumes of Nature or Grace, whatever tenets may have to be abandoned, whatever long-cherished theories may have to be yielded up—there are certain great facts which stand out, gigantic and immoveable, amid the ever-varying sea of mutable opinion. There is the fact that both right and wrong exist in the world, and are irreconcileable. There is the fact, so patent, of the presence of sin, and the fact, so pathetic, of the need of salvation. There is still a difference between good and evil. There is still a division between the church and the world. There are still the same old answers to the same old questions: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" And those other old questions—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation"? There are still the same old statements of the same old truths, irrefutable yet—"Ye must be born again." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." So we may possess our souls in peace, and be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. Let all that is merely of human origin in our creeds and customs perish. This troubles us not one whit. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and is doomed to decay and dissolution. "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the Word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Our text is part of the divine commission of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. It comes with fresh and authoritive force to us to day; for we claim to be among his successors in the ministry. We believe that we are heirs to the same work of evangelization; that we are called to the same regenerating mission, and that we are entrusted with the same gracious message. Let us notice these three things suggested by the text: 1st. *An implication of the deplorable state of unregenerate humanity.* 2nd. *An intimation of the glorious mission of the church of Christ.* 3rd. *An indication of the success which may be expected when that mission is faithfully discharged.*

I. An Implication of the Deplorable State of Unregenerate Humanity.

We infer the state of man from the mission to which we are called. Whatever theories we may entertain as to the possibilities of human nature, we have, as I before hinted, to face the facts of life, and those facts are stubborn things. They are in accord with the testimony of Scripture concerning human depravity; and man's due need of illumination and deliverance.

1. *The condition of unregenerate man is one of blindness.* He has eyes, but cannot see. He possesses the organ, but not the power of vision. He has an understanding which is the eye of the soul, but it is darkened. All the faculties are found in him as in the primal man; but they are all perverted. And have we not abundant evidence of this sad truth in our fellowmen around us? Some are confessedly blind—as the agnostic who assumes an attitude and adopts a language, which prompts our pity when it does not provoke our contempt. And there are others who, like the inspired Laodiceans are self-confident, proud of their fancied sufficiency, and know not that they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. We have only to listen to the opinions of ungodly men and watch their actions, to be fully persuaded of their blindness. Their views of life, of sin, of Christ, of the future, all loudly proclaim their condition. And even when they are orthodox in sentiment it remains true that they are spiritually devoid of sight. The words of Paul are constantly verified: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Such a man calls "evil good, and good evil; puts darkness for light, and light for darkness, and bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." And those thus blind will never see till the eyes of their understanding are divinely enlightened.

2. *The element in which unregenerate man lives is one of darkness.* Being blind he is content to remain in an environment of gloom. "Spiritual darkness is not simply a negative state, the mere absence of light, but it is a positive evil." There is a kingdom of darkness with its prince, its ranks, its officers, its laws, its customs, and to that kingdom unregenerate man is in subjection. As surely as in the natural world light and darkness are found today even as they were a thousand ages since, so in the spiritual world light and darkness co-exist even as they did when our text was first spoken. There is, however, this difference, in the natural world they exist successively; but in the spiritual world they exist simultaneously. They are contemporaneous, and the darkness infringes upon the light. In a Western town I have seen saloons and brothels nestling beneath the very walls of a house of prayer. And though that be an extreme case; yet everywhere we see darkness and light in close contact and in fierce conflict. When we speak of men being in darkness we do not refer only to those dwelling in so called heathen countries or to the Roman Catholics of Quebec. We mean unrenewed men in all places; in our centres of highest civilization, and where the clearest Christian teaching is given. Outside the sanctuary where the gospel is most plainly, faithfully, and powerfully preached, men are walking in the midnight of sin. Yes, even within our churches, where the goings of our God and King are glorious, men are sitting in darkness and under the shadow of death.

Consider the import of the figure and look abroad on modern life and see the reality to which it corresponds. Does darkness mean *bewilderment*? Yes; "he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." Do we not behold many around who are staggering, stumbling, groping their way with painful uncertainty, crying, "who will show us any good?" See, how they run hither and thither in mazes of superstition, unbelief, and wickedness! Are they not as sheep without a shepherd? Are they not preyed upon by every variety of quack: quacks social, medical, commercial, literary, scientific, political, and religious? How often there rises before us the spectacle, which would be ridiculous were it not so tragic, of the blind being led by the blind. Alas into what ditches of sin, error, folly, and shame do these poor, deluded souls fall! Does darkness mean *ignorance*? Yes, and near the close of this 19th century with its boasted advance, beneath a superficial show of knowledge, what black abysses of ignorance there are. It is true now as ever that the world by wisdom knows not God. Even the light that is in men is darkness, and how great is that darkness! They are yet ignorant of God's righteousness, are going about foolishly and futilely seeking to establish their own righteousness. They know many things; but they know not Him whom to know is life eternal. They know not, neither do they consider the work of the Lord, or the operation of his hands." They are altogether ignorant of God, of Christ, of themselves. They know not their danger; they feel not their load. And this darkness can only be dispelled by the in-shining of the glorious gospel of Christ. Does darkness mean misery? And is not the state of unregenerate man one of misery? There may be much of so called happiness, but the laughter is mad, and the gaiety only disguised despair. Underneath the shallow mirth there is deep-seated discontent, weariness, and woe. As we gaze upon the faces of passing strangers how little do we find in them telling of rest, peace, and joy. Care, anxiety, and dissatisfaction have left their traces upon almost all. Think of all else that is symbolized by the term *darkness*, whether it be defilement, uncomeliness, or danger, and you will find it pertaining to the state of the unregenerate. "Darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people."

3. *The position of unregenerate man is one of bondage.* He is under the power of satan. A Boston newspaper a few weeks since, in writing of the trend of thought in New England, said, "The belief in a personal devil has so completely disappeared that the very existence of this personage is seriously questioned." Well, of course a Boston newspaper ought to know all about the devil; but unfortunately for its contention in the same issue of that paper the movements of that personage were chronicled as matters of current news. One need not go to the Bible for proofs of the personality of the devil—the journals of the day (especially Sunday editions published on the other side of the line) teem with evidences of it. Several years ago I met with some lines concerning this matter which have remained with me ever since. While not highly poetical, they are pithy and practical.

"Men don't believe in a devil now, as their fathers used to do,
They have forced the door of the broad-est creed to let his majesty through.
There isn't a print of his cloven hoof, or a fiery dart from his bow,
To be found in earth or air to-day; for the world has voted so.

But *who* is mixing the fatal draught that palsies heart and brain,
And loads the bier of each passing year with its hundred thousand slain?
Who blights the bloom of the land today with the fiery breath of hell?
If the devil isn't and never was, won't somebody rise and tell?

Who dogs the steps of the toiling saint, and digs the pit for his feet?
Who sows the tares in the field of time wherever God sows His wheat?
The devil is voted not to be, and of course the thing is true;
But *who* is doing the kind of work that the devil alone should do?

We are told that he does not go about as a roaring lion now;
But whom shall we hold responsible for the everlasting row
To be heard in home, in church, in state to earth's remotest bound,
If the devil, by a unanimous vote, is nowhere to be found?

Won't somebody step to the front forthwith, and make his bow and show
How the crimes of a single day spring up,—we want to know.
The devil is fairly voted out, and of course the devil's gone;
But simple people would like to know, —*who carries his business on?*

That business is more flourishing than ever; the hellish concern is doing a rousing trade: its agents and establishments are more numerous than at any former time; *but the same old gentleman is still the head of the firm.* The devil is often a great dude in these modern days; but he is nevertheless a devil still. He encases his cloven hoofs in patent leathers, and carefully conceals his tail beneath the graceful folds of a fashionable frock-coat; but he is just as real, and is doing work as deadly, as when he appeared to our forefathers under forms which to us are grotesque and well-nigh inconceivable. He is the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. And he still possesses the same mysterious, mighty, and malignant power. He is still able to blind men, and bind them fast in his slavish chains. This phrase, "the power of satan," has a most ominous and dreadful meaning yet. The unsaved are in bondage to the evil one.

4. *The state of unregenerate man is one of guilt.* He needs forgiveness. We must not regard men as merely unfortunate, diseased, or misled; it is true that they are blind; but it is also true that satan hath blinded the minds of *them which believe not.* It is true that they are in darkness; but it is also true that they love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. It is true that they are captives of the devil; but it is also true that they yield themselves his servants today, and are rebels against God. They are responsible beings and will be held accountable when they stand before the judgment seat. We must not minimise human guilt nor attempt to apologize for it. Sin is more than a fault, or failing, or accident. Men are breakers of a divine law, traitors against a divine government, rejectors of a divine Redeemer, and are therefore exposed to divine wrath. The only hope for them is in the exercise of divine mercy based upon the satisfaction of divine justice. Blessed be God that hope exists, and so we notice:

II. The Glorious Mission of the Church of Christ.

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." These words are reminiscent of an older prediction of the Messiah. That passage in Isaiah Jesus applied directly to Himself when he read it in the synagogue at Nazareth, saying, after he had closed the book, "this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." You remember the words: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Now, in our text, the risen Saviour appears to delegate His own work to Paul as the representative of the church. That church remains on earth as His embodiment, and carries on the work which He so blessedly inaugurated. A modern preacher has said that "the Christian is Christ continued." I would take the liberty of applying that definition to Christians in their collective capacity, and say "*the church is Christ continued*"; it is "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." It goes on with what Jesus began both to do and teach. After the Lord had ascended up on high, the disciples "went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Had He not previously said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father". Through the instrumentality of His church the work of Christ becomes universal instead of local; it becomes age-long instead of three short years; it reaches millions instead of hundreds.

It will be readily seen that the *mission of the Church is a supernatural one.* To open blind eyes and turn man from darkness to light, is a God-like, Christ-like, miraculous work. It can only be accomplished in divine strength. The same spirit must rest upon the church that was upon Christ in order that she may perform these wonders. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." All human eloquence, all carnal learning, all fleshly wisdom are inadequate. We absolutely need the power from on high; the heavenly anointing; the unction of the Holy One. Let the church never forget the supernatural character of her mission, then will she ever remember her need of supernatural power. We cry, as we think of the marvellous nature of our work, "Who is sufficient for these things?" and we reply, "Our sufficiency is of God." We can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us.

The mission of the Church is most thorough and comprehensive. Nothing short of the regeneration of man is the work we have to undertake. Our aim is to produce a radical, complete, and lasting change in human character. And while that work is divine, and, as we have said, supernatural, yet it is effected through the truth which God has given us to proclaim. Believers are "born again not of corruptible seed; but of incorruptible; by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. And this is that Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you."

According to the text there are three ends for which we are to labor—the Enlightment, the Emancipation, and the Ennoblement of men, and the second and third of these blessings are the outcome of the first.

The foundation is one of Enlightment. We are to open their eyes. We go to men as Ananias went to Saul saying the Lord Jesus hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight. Our instrument for the accomplishment of this ophthalmic marvel is the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. It is the heavenly eye-salve with which we anoint the eyes of the blind. The entrance of God's word giveth light; the law of the law is perfecting converting the soul. When divine truth comes with omnipotent might to the heart then the eyes of the understanding are opened. By that Word is a knowledge of sin and its consequences; of Christ and His salvation. Then conversion results from the opening of the eyes, according to the Revised Version which reads: "to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of satan, unto God." As the blind beggar when he received his sight, followed Jesus in the way, so it is with every newly enlightened soul. Such an one will go after Him who says, "I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life." Converted souls will ever be turning from darkness to light, and it is ours, as God's servants, to assist them so to do. From the darkness of sin to the light of holiness; from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge; from the darkness of error to the light of truth; from the darkness of defilement to the light of purity; from the darkness of evil association to the light of holy fellowship; from the darkness of self to the light of God in whom is no darkness at all. So will they—

"Walk in the light—and follow on,
Till faith be turned to sight,
Where in divine communion
God is Himself the light."

2. *Emancipation.* To turn them from the power of satan unto God. The deliverance of men from the power of the devil results from the preaching of the Gospel. That Gospel is the silver trumpet proclaiming redemption. Its message was:

"Ye slaves of sin and hell,
Your liberty receive,
And safe in Jesus dwell,
And blest in Jesus live:
The year of Jubilee is come!
Return, ye ransomed sinners, home."

How blessed a work to be engaged in freeing men from such accursed bondage? Do we not sometimes think of the heroes and heroines of the abolition movement in the States? Are we not deeply stirred as we read of those days? We think of poets whose songs were like the angel who smote off Peter's chains, and led him forth to life and liberty. We think of *authors* (like the late Mrs. Stowe, of immortal memory) who, by the magic of their pens, caused the tragedies of slavery to be enacted before the face of the civilized world. We think of *orators*, who, as champions of freedom faced hostile mobs, standing like light-houses buffeted by an angry sea. We think of *enthusiasts*, guilty of magnificent indiscretions, like John Brown, whose death glorified the gallows and made it well-nigh a sacred symbol. We think of *soldiers* who fought in the nation-dividing war, and thousands of whom, fighting, fell. We think of many others who toiled and suffered in the holy enterprise, and who as John Bright said, were—

"On fame's eternal bead-roll worthy to be filed."

And as we have read and thought of those days, and those men and women, we have felt that we should liked to have had a part, however insignificant, in the great struggle; that we should have liked to have done something, however small, towards the furtherance of the noble cause; that we should liked to have had some share however obscure, in the triumphant consummation. But, my brethren and sisters, we are called to deliver men from a more cruel and irksome thraldom, and introduce them to a more glorious liberty. We are called to a more heroic strife against more tremendous odds. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places." "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds." We are the "Conquerers who haste with armies of the light
The cloud-topp'd towers to o'erturn of evil's tyrant might;
Wage truceless war 'gainst cruelty, and advance
Their fiery hosts to invade thy realms, black Ignorance."

3. *We seek also the Ennoblement of men* That is set forth in the latter part of my text. We teach men to believe in Christ, and through faith in Him they rise from depths of degradation to heights of glory. This exaltation is three-fold.

1. *From a state of guilt to one of forgiveness.* Through the man Christ Jesus we preach the forgiveness of sins. And as sinners trust in Him they enter into the blessedness of those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered, and unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity. It is a wonderful uplifting, indeed, from the horrible pit of depravity and condemnation—from the miry clay of earthliness and evil, to the great Rock of salvation on which our feet are placed by sovereign grace. What a choice unspeakable favor is this! To receive such a forgiveness: so free, full, irrevocable, eternal. Forgiveness received from the pierced hands of the risen Christ, bought by His own blood, and secured by the power of His endless life.

"Forgiveness! 'tis a joyful sound
To rebel sinners doomed to die;
Publish the bliss the world around;—
Ye seraphs shout it from the sky."

This is an amazing promotion, for a poor guilty sinner to be brought into a state of pardon, and enough to make him sing to all eternity. But this is only the first step in his advancement. He is further exalted—

2. *From a state of dark defilement to a place among the sanctified.* He who was once blind and walked in darkness, is, called to be a saint and walk in the light as God is in the light. He is separated and set apart for the divine glory. He who once was afar off is made nigh by the precious blood. They who were once strangers and foreigners become fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God. We should think that from the gutter to the peerage was a marvellous rise; but that which converted sinners experience is far more marvellous. God lifts them from the dunghill to set them among princes, even the princes of his people. I see that holy and happy company of the sanctified—clad in the fair linen of righteousness; bearing upon each brow the impress of the Spirit's seal; each one resembling the children of a king. I ask who are they, whence came they, what was their past history? And I learn that they were amongst the vilest of the vile. But they are washed, but they are sanctified, but they are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. But this exaltation is further—

3. *From a state of abject bondage to the dignity of heirship.* They receive an inheritance. I have referred to the liberation of the slaves in the South of America, and I have heard it said that in material matters some of them were worse off after their enfranchisement than before it. They were without homes, without property, without means. But it is not thus with those who are delivered from the power of satan. They are redeemed that they may receive the adoption of sons. They become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. All things present and to come—are theirs, and for them is reserved an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. This then is the enrollment of men which we seek, and which they obtain through faith in Christ.

III. The Success which may be Expected when this Mission is Faithfully Discharged.

The apostle Paul did succeed in the mission to which he was called. He was the instrument in God's hands of opening the eyes of the blind and turning men from darkness to light. In his epistles are several passages which read almost like echoes of our text. They are, indeed, the history of which it is the prophecy. I will remind you of a few. To the *Ephesians* he writes: "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." To the *Thessalonians* he writes: "Ye are all the children of the light and of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." To the *Corinthians* he writes: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." To the *Colossians* he writes: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who also hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear son."

Paul was eminently successful, and so may we be. If we pursue the apostolic mission; if we proclaim the apostolic message; if we practice the apostolic methods; we shall enjoy the apostolic success. And, as one has so well said, apostolic success is true apostolic succession. By such achievements we shall prove ourselves to be in the true order of God's chosen servants. We shall demonstrate the divine and heavenly origin of our holy faith. You remember how John when in prison, perhaps under stress of doubt through the inactivity, the loneliness, and gloom of his incarceration, sent two of his disciples to Jesus, saking—"Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" You also remember the grandly practical answer Jesus gave. "And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, 'Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.'" He evidenced His Messiahship by doing the works predicted of the Christ. And we must thus act. Let us shew our credentials in the works we perform. If men ask, "is this Christian system the highest possible system of religion; is it final in its power and perfection?" Let us point to its wonderful effects. Mr. Spurgeon, in the preface to the second volume of his sermons, says: "The best evidences of the truth of our holy religion are to be found in the marvellous effects it produces. Drunkards, harlots, swearers, thieves, liars, and such like, when reclaimed and regenerated are the jewels in the crown of truth, and of such we can say in confidence—'What hath God wrought?'" Cannot many here say the same? This is success and nothing short of it can be accounted such. We may raise money, build meeting-houses, multiply organisations; but if sinners are not saved we lamentably fail. There is need for such a soul-saving mission in New Brunswick, and while this Convention succeeds, as it has already done, in discharging that mission its existence will be amply justified.

Let us dedicate ourselves anew to our glorious work this day. As I invite you, with me, so to do, I think of Tennyson's splendid description of the Knights of the Round Table taking upon themselves vows of knighthood and oaths of allegiance to their king. The poet says:—

"Arthur sat
Crown'd on the dais, and his warriors cried,
'Be thou our king, and we will work thy will
Who love thee,' Then the king in low deep tones,
And simple words of great authority,
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half blinded at the coming of a light.
But when he spake and cheer'd his Table Round
With large divine and comfortable words
Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld
From eye to eye thro' all their order flash
A momentary likeness of the king."

So let us kneel before the Monarch of our souls and bind ourselves to Him in solemn covenant. Though we may tremble beneath the weight of responsibility, and thrill at the thought of all that is involved in the surrender, yet as Jesus speaks comfortably unto us there shall come out on each face, not a *momentary*, but an abiding and increasing, likeness of God's dear son who is King of our souls forever.

Never fear to bring the sublimest comfort to the smallest trouble.—Phillips Brooks.

One of the proofs of growth in grace is a deepening sense of our responsibility to God and our dependence upon God.

Did you ever thank God that He has chosen the life He has for you, or have you murmured that He has not given you a different lot?

Our I's and.... ....Other Eyes.

Our I's are just as strong as they were fifty years ago, when we have cause to use them. But we have less and less cause to praise ourselves, since others do the praising, and we are more than willing for you to see us through other eyes. This is how we look to S. F. Boyce, wholesale and retail druggist, Duluth, Minn, who after a quarter of a century of observation writes:

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Christ went about doing good. Too many of His professed followers sit down in a warm room and talk about it.

Faith draws the poison from every grief, takes the sting from every loss, and quenches the fire of every pain, and only hath can do it.—Holland.