

church does not exist for the organization of her forces, the edification of her members, the collecting of revenues. But she is organized, her members are fed and edified, and revenues are collected—all that she may “go throughout all the world and proclaim the glad tidings to the whole creation.” A church which fails to go is like a ship which always stays in port. And the more highly such a church is organized and equipped, fed and trained, the more absurd the situation appears.

The command of the text is worthy of the most careful consideration. It grows out of the most sublime realities. Who is this who commands his followers to go on a mission to the whole creation? It is no other than the Christ of God. What right has he to impose his affairs thus on the attention of a universe? The most absolute right. His right has a two-fold basis.

I. *God's decree.* It is God's decree that the earth shall be given to his Son, and that he shall have the universal homage of men. “I will tell of the decree: The Lord said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Ps. ii. 7-8. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; * * of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end.” Is. ix. 6, 7. “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents, and the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him.” Ps. lxxii. 8-11.

These statements are most emphatic. They record God's decree concerning his Son. Why, then, should Christ not aim at world-wide dominion? The “nations” are his rightful possession. The “uttermost parts of the earth” rightly belong to him. When he claims the attention and homage of the whole creation, he is but claiming his own. In the face of God's decree, Christ could do nothing less than provide for the proclamation of his gospel in the whole world. His right to do so is beyond question.

II. *The character of Christ's religion.* The religion of Christ is fitted to be a world-wide religion. It meets all the spiritual needs of men. It is adapted to men of every race. It is fitted to flourish in every clime. Its history has demonstrated this. Its first vigorous life was among orientals. Its present most vigorous life is among western peoples. Yet now it is taking vigorous root in far eastern lands. It is equally at home in America and India, in England and Oceania. It is equally satisfactory amid the culture of the highest civilizations, and amid the deepest barbarism of the most primitive tribes. It finds a void everywhere which nothing else can fill, and fills it to repletion. *This is true of no other religion.* All others are unsatisfactory, if not dissatisfactory. They do not provide for all man's needs, nor for every man's needs. They can neither be final nor universal.

Christ has, then, something to give the world which the whole world needs, and which cannot be supplied from any other source. His right to claim universal attention is demonstrated in this. One who is able to be a universal benefactor has a right to a universal hearing.

But this command should be considered also in its relation to the church. It lays a tremendous obligation on the church. Christ has turned over the work of making known to the world his claims and his blessings to the church. The church is his agent. This world must know and acknowledge its rightful Lord. The church must do the work necessary to this end. This world needs the blessings of Christ's religion. The church must put them within its reach. And the church must not underestimate her task. “The whole creation” is the limit. Let her not stop short of that. Does that mean your next door neighbor? It does. Does it mean the man who lives on the opposite side of the earth? It does, indeed. And while you speak across the fence to your neighbor, without trouble or sacrifice to yourself, don't forget that you are to speak to the man on the other side of the earth, at whatever trouble or expense. By some means you must proclaim the glad tidings to him. You have not obeyed your Lord until you have done it. He says: “Go.” It is your business to go in some way. Let us understand this obligation. It is an obligation to perform a *duty*, not to procure results. We can't plead that the results won't justify the effort. We have nothing to do with results. Christ's command is to preach the gospel. It is ours to do that. Let him who commands take care of the results. We can't plead the “heathen at home” as against the heathen abroad. If your neighbor has not heard the glad tidings, that is your fault. You cannot make one neglect of duty an excuse why you should repeat the fault. If your neighbor has heard the tidings and has not accepted it, that is *his* fault; but it cannot be your justification for not doing your Lord's command to tell the tidings to the man who is ignorant of it, wherever he may be. There is no excuse which can stand for a moment against that plain command, to “go.” Not until we have exhausted our resources, or the Lord calls a halt, can we dare to stand still. The first is not likely to happen. Our resources are like the widow's meal and oil; when used for God they are always multiplied instead of diminished. The second has not occurred. “Go” is still the command. How fast and how far are we going on the business to which we have been called?

“OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN.”

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The opening thought to this petition is the key to all that follows, and to the truth of genuine prayer. From its simplicity and familiarity, its force is not always felt. Yet, when we master it and make it our own, the mountain top of divine communion is reached, with all the mists of superstition, fear, and unbelief far below. Jesus gives us in these words the conception of God we ought to have in prayer. It is seldom, perhaps, that persons stop to ask themselves: What is God to me? What is my conception of His relations to my life and being? Yet no questions are more important. Our working idea

of God is the basis of our moral and religious life. God may be regarded from different standpoints, and in fact is so regarded, from which arises the variety that prevails in philosophical and religious systems. Some think only of the mystery of his nature, and call him the Absolute, the Great Unknown, and other high sounding but empty names. This conception of God is misty, vague, worthless. Others regard him only as manifested in matter, a force showing itself in forms, and their thought is pantheistic. Others view him as a Creator only—a necessary element in a system of thought—to fill up a want in the plan of a philosopher. Some exalt certain attributes to the depreciation of others. To one, divine sovereignty obscures all the rest; to another divine love shuts out of sight all other attributes. The result is a conception of God that is more or less erroneous, with a corresponding effect in life and character. And so the first lesson the Master gives us in prayer is a right conception of Him to whom we go, and our relation to Him. When ye pray, say “Our Father.” Not that we are to think less of His nature and attributes. But in addition to the facts that he is Almighty, Eternal, All-knowing, and fills the universe, we are to remember for our comfort and assurance that—

“All this God is all for us,
A Father all our own.”

We feel at once that this is just what we need. God is brought very close to us. Communion and fellowship have a meaning they cannot otherwise have. John has said, “Our fellowship is with the Father.” Fellowship! Who can fathom the deep significance of the word when joined with the idea of Divine Fatherhood? Not only is the personality of God made vivid, but we feel that we are linked to him in bonds of nature and of life. For we need not regard the Fatherhood of God as a mere name, used as an accommodation to human intelligence. Though reason may stumble at the thought, faith joyfully accepts the mighty truth, that we are partakers of the divine nature. There is, perhaps, much undeveloped significance in the fact that when, for the welfare of humanity it was necessary, it was not repugnant to the divine nature to become man. We stand in dumb amazement before the fact that the Word, which was God, became flesh—that He who was the brightness of the glory of God and the express image of His person, took upon Him, not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. Some light may be shed on the mystery from the primitive revelation, that God, at the first, made man in His own image. Human nature is now abnormal and sinful—but we must not forget that though now a wreck, it was once as noble a vessel as ever God sent out on the sea of existence. We look backward as well as forward for the glory and dignity of manhood. The thought of God as a father kindles the noblest hopes and aspirations in the human breast, and stirs the soul with all the “powers of an endless life.” God is never so great to us, he never so fills and thrills us as when we think of Him as really “Our Father.” This conception of God, while it is the fullest and most satisfying, is also the simplest. The infant mind can grasp it. To the ignorant there is no difficulty in comprehending it. To the fearful and doubting it is attracting and assuring. Whatever these other conceptions of God, all mankind may meet on this common ground of thought, and relation, and in prayer, say “Our Father.”