

THE GOSPEL FOR ALL NATIONS

A SERMON

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“Thus says the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.” Zechariah 8:23

WE cannot, I think, have any reasonable doubt but that the ten men here referred to are the apostles; and though they were twelve in number, yet they are here, by a figure of speech, represented as ten. They are the persons, I think, primarily referred to; while, at the same time, we may take the number ten as a definite number to denote an indefinite number, which is a way the Scriptures sometimes mean. And there are three numbers which the Scriptures seem rather to delight in using, the number *seven*, arising, as we see, from the completeness of the creation. And so, we frequently meet with the number *seven* figuratively used; as the lamb having seven horns and seven eyes, all representing to us the perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the completeness of his work. *Ten* is another number which the Scriptures also frequently deal in, and that figuratively, which perhaps may have some allusion to the number of commandments which is in the law. And if that be the allusion here, it is very beautiful, because the very business of these apostles was to proclaim Christ Jesus as the end of those ten commandments; as the righteous end and the atoning end of those ten commandments; he being made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that such may receive the adoption of sons. *Twelve* is another number which the Scriptures frequently bring before us, as it were figuratively to denote the constant supply of the needs of the Lord's people. Hence you read of the tree of life bearing twelve manner of fruits, from the beginning of the year to the end, according to that scripture wherein it is written that “My eyes shall be upon the land from the beginning of the year even unto the end.” Take these three numbers, and they present a great deal of the gospel. First, in the completeness of the Savior's work; secondly, that he is the end of the law; and third, that he is the way by which we are from time to time supplied, from the end of one year to another, and shall be, and that forever, Nor can we have any doubt but that the Jew spoken of here is the Lord Jesus Christ. The word *Jew*, as we so often have to notice, signifies *praise*; and Jesus Christ is all praise. There is not anything about him that is not praiseworthy. He is praiseworthy in his person, praiseworthy in his state, praiseworthy in his achievement, and

praiseworthy in the relations he bears; indeed, praiseworthy every way. And it is by him that the Lord can and does also praise his people. So that I say we cannot be at a loss as to who the person is. And perhaps the Savior might have some allusion to this when he says, "Salvation is of the Jews." He was a Jew literally; he was a Jew spiritually; he was a Jew in this relative sense of the word, he being the praise wherein God praises us, and he is the praise whereby we praise the Lord our God.

I will notice, then, first, *the promise here given of the extension of the gospel*; for that is the doctrine contained in the first part of our text. Secondly, *what these ten men should do*, that they should take hold; and they are in this representative of all the people of God, that they should "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew." And then, lastly, *the reason*; "saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you."

I notice, then, first, *the promise here given of the extension of the gospel*. And the words, "Ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations," must be understood in a twofold sense. First, literally; and second, mystically. First, literally. And I would just make a remark or two upon the literal fulfilment, because there is something in it that is exceedingly encouraging. Here are persons, as you learn in the 2nd of the Acts, from sixteen different provinces, all speaking, if not different languages, at least different dialects, almost as bad as though they were different languages, and these are come to Jerusalem, and the apostles are appointed to preach unto them. Now how are the apostles to preach to these persons in their own language? Is it not, friends, a wonderful thing for a man, we will take the apostle Peter, a man who was not, like the apostle Paul, originally educated. Peter was evidently, at least in a comparative sense, an uneducated man originally, and yet here is power bestowed upon him to speak in any and in every language in which he may be required to speak. And those of you that know the immense labor it is to acquire a foreign language, even a living language, and, of course, much more labor and much more difficult to acquire competent knowledge of the dead languages, or languages that are not now spoken and used, is it not a wonderful thing that the Holy Spirit should enable one man to speak in as many languages as should be required? Even if it be sixteen or sixty languages, it matters not how many languages they had to speak in; the Holy Spirit furnished them with the knowledge of each language. I must say for myself that it is a wonderful thing. I will in this part, though it is not a part that I will enlarge upon, just remind you of two or three things. The first is, that you never find the apostles in any linguistical difficulty. I know not what the dialect was of the Ethiopian, but he could understand Philip; and if the Ethiopian did not understand the Greek language, which was the most popular language in that part of the world at that time so, if the eunuch could not have understood the language generally spoken in those parts at that time, Philip could speak in the eunuch's own language. And so Peter, when he went to speak to the Romans, for Cornelius was a Roman, and was, as you are aware, a centurion, that is, a commander of Roman soldiers, and would therefore speak in the ancient Latin language; when Peter was there, you do not find that he was under any difficulty whatever in causing himself to be understood. And hence, when they said to Paul, "Can you speak Greek?" why, if the apostle had chosen to do so, but he was in circumstances too solemn, and therefore could not trifle, nor even be playful, the more so, of course, that he was among enemies; but, in fact, the apostle might have answered and said, I can speak any language under heaven if the Lord require me to do so; because, whatever he requires of me, that he will bestow upon me. He has sent us to preach the gospel in all the world, and therefore, whatever languages we meet with, the Holy Spirit will furnish us with such deep

knowledge that we shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, and shall preach unto them in their own language. Now then, my hearer, one inference I draw, and that is the only one I will before I go into that which is still more vital, and it is this, that if we are lovers of the truth of God, whatever gifts we may need, whatever mercy we may need, whatever favor we may need, if the Lord does not seem to work, in the absolute sense, a miracle, as he did in that day, yet we have this comfort, that as he enabled his servants then to speak in one and every language, wherever they came, for they were to go all over the world, and we have no account of their going to college first, to be crammed with theological theories; we have no account of their going to college first, to learn how to divide their sermons, how many paragraphs to break them up into, and whereabouts to set the pathetic, and whereabouts to place the sublime, and whereabouts to put the logical; we do not read of anything of this; no conferring with flesh and blood; sent forth into the world at large, and whatever they needed it was bestowed upon them, so that the whole should be of God. Seeing then, friends, the Lord thus dealt with them as the matter required, so whatever we need, that is, that is for our good, and that is for our success; whatever we need as personal gifts; whatever we need as personal grace; whatever we need in providence; whatever we need in any way, if we are blessed with sense enough to believe that the Lord knows better than we do what we do need, and that the Lord knows better than we do how to deal with us, and that the Lord knows better than we do whether it is good we should retain this or part with that; whether it is better we should go this way, that, or the other; if we are blessed with sense enough to commit our way unto the Lord, he will direct our steps, and we shall not need anything that he will not bestow; there is not anything too hard for him. This is the inference I draw, so that I get a little comfort, a good deal of comfort, indeed, from this circumstance, the ability of the Eternal Spirit to bestow such wonderful gifts upon men as to enable them to speak, wherever they came, in the language of the people to whom they preached. Now then, after these two or three remarks upon the goodness of the Lord in that respect, and to show how determined he was to have his people, and not to suspend their ingathering upon anything acquired by the creature, but to do the whole of it himself, I will now go on to notice what appears to me to be the more particularly the meaning of this first part; namely, that the apostles should preach the gospel in all nations. I have suggested before, and it will be my hint this morning, and I am more and more convinced of it the more I read the Bible, that the gospel was preached in the apostolic age more extensively than we are aware of. Their mission was to go into all the world. How far they went we know not; how many thousand times ten thousand to whom they preached, and how many thousand times ten thousand were gathered in, we know not; but this we know, that their mission was general. And my first question is, as there never was such an order of men before as the apostles were, and there never has been such an order of men since, my questions are, and I put them merely in the way of questions; and I hope those Christian friends that are well taught, and know the truth, will not take offence at what I am going to say, because I will say it carefully, and I say it because it is a conviction upon my mind, and I will put it merely in that form; and my question is this: Will there be, between this and the end of the world, another class of men like the apostles? I think not. Will there ever again be, while the world lasts, such an outpouring of the Spirit upon men as there was in the apostolic age? I myself think not; that is my feeling. And as to the doctrine of the ten tribes, the talk about the ten tribes, that they are to be found, I find nothing in the Scriptures to authorize that idea. I find in the New Testament that those who were called by grace in the apostolic age are first spoken of as being out of the twelve tribes. 7th of the Revelation; there are some out of each of the twelve tribes. Now, if the ten tribes were lost, how could there have been some out of the twelve tribes? And then those who were in that apostolic age called among the Jews out of every tribe, all the twelve tribes, those

who were called are by the apostle James called the twelve tribes; he addresses his epistle to the twelve tribes. And therefore, I do not believe in a lost ten tribes, I do not believe in a restored ten tribes, and I do not believe in any national restoration whatever. Now these are my feelings upon the matter. If there is to be another such outpouring of the Spirit, I would be one of the first to delight in it. If our brethren can prove that there is to be another such outpouring of the Spirit as there was upon the day of Pentecost, I would be the first to rejoice in it. But you must forgive me not rejoicing in it if I am not convinced of the truth of it. And if the period is ever to arrive in which the gospel shall be again so extensively preached as it was in the apostolic age, if that period is ever to arrive, if our good ministers and friends will prove it from the word of God, I will be one of the first to rejoice therein. And if the time is ever to come in which vast numbers, yes, all the Jews and all the Gentiles, yes, all the world, the whole population of the world, are to be brought in, I would be one of the first to rejoice therein. I am not much of a man for books, except for the books of the Bible; I cleave pretty close to them, and feel more and more a servant to the Scriptures. You must allow your minister full scope; let him speak right out clearly, at the same time in love, all his convictions; and then take nothing upon trust yourselves, test what he says yourselves, and every one judge for yourselves. Thus, then, I believe the gospel was preached in that age to a very much greater extent than is generally supposed.

But now let us come down to what appears to me to be the beauty of the first part of our text. You only imagine the mission; you just look at it. "Go you into all the world." "They shall take hold out of all languages of the nations." "Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Only imagine it. What does it say? What does such a mission say, my hearer? It says this; that there is not a man, nor a woman, under the canopy of heaven that ought to despair. It does not matter if you have been as black as the devil, if you have been the greatest blasphemer, if you have been a murderer, and the vilest wretch that ever walked upon the earth; if the mission is to preach the gospel in all the world, to every creature, then I say that no one sinner under the canopy of heaven, that is convinced of his state, and feels his need of mercy, ought to despair. And have we not this infinitely precious truth set forth in Peter's vision, the very same truth? What did he see in that vision? Why, he says, "wild beasts, and four-footed creatures, and creeping things." And what are creeping things, but worms, and vipers, and serpents? all to represent the awful state we are in. I ask, then, what must be the glory of that gospel that can commend itself to the whole population of the globe? "Go you into all the world." You will never meet a sinner, great a sinner as he may be, so great as my salvation. You will never meet a sinner whose case is so bad that my blood cannot cleanse him. You will never meet with a sinner so sunk in condemnation that my righteousness cannot lift him out of that condemnation, and present him before the righteous Judge, righteous as God is righteous; for it is in the righteousness of Jesus Christ; he is Jehovah our righteousness. Oh, my hearer, how encouraging this is! The Christian, that knows what he is in his own heart, says, But for the grace of God I might have been the vilest reptile upon the face of the earth; but, says such an one, had it been my unhappy lot to have been so, here is blood, the blood of our Incarnate God, that has in it all the excellency of his person; here is the righteousness of an Incarnate God; here is the grace of Almighty God; here is the love of the Great Creator. Why, this gospel comes with, "I will," and "They shall;" ministers life to the dead, and its language is, "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you be willing and obedient," brought to believe this and receive it, "you shall eat the good of the land." What a glory there is, then, in the mission of the gospel! When I hear the paltry talk of state churches, and here is a

minister, he must preach only in a consecrated place! I wonder really that such men can remain in such trammels. My friend and neighbor here, Hugh Allen, he might well call me a free Dissenter. I am a free Dissenter; I preach anywhere; down stairs or up; among friends or foes, profane, professor, anywhere and everywhere. And if the place wants consecrating, and the gospel does not consecrate it, nothing else can; if the man wants consecrating, and if the gospel does not consecrate him, nothing else can; if the building wants consecrating, and if the Lord does not consecrate it, nothing else can; and if the building ought to be licensed, if God's record of his name there be not a license, none else can really license it; there will be no liberty in it, no life in it, no blessedness in it, without the presence of the blessed God. See the freeness of the mission, then. "Go forth into all the world." You will meet with some bad cases; you will meet with some wretched sinners; never mind, I will be a match for them. "Preach the gospel to every creature," if it is a creature. If you turn around and say, Lord, this is such a sinful, such an ugly, such an apostatizing creature, such a wretched creature, such a sinner; worse than the devil, I think, Never mind; you go. and preach the gospel to every creature. And let no one despair; it is a great Savior, an almighty Savior, a glorious Savior. And what can be more delightful? "Whosoever;" why, it is an address to the whole population of the globe; "Whosoever believes on him," let the man be what he may, "has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." And if the unpardonable sin doctrine, as held in general, be true, then what I am now saying is not true. Some of you that did not see with me in that, you ought to read my sermon over again on the unpardonable sin, and it strikes me you will see with me in it. I know what some of you would like, good people I speak of now, Christian friends, like me to go on quietly, and not disturb any of the old notions, any of the old sentiments; just go on in an eighteen hundred and fast asleep sort of way; take my text, and go my round. But no, that is not how I am made; that is not my character. Let me search the Scriptures, and everything that appears to magnify the grace of God, everything that appears to make free course for the word of the Lord, everything that appears suited to poor sinners, everything that has a tendency to commend itself to a poor convinced sinner's conscience, to give him hope, everything that appears to have a tendency to convince the unconvinced, rout him out of his delusions, and bring him to the feet of the Savior, that I must preach, or else I will not preach at all. Why, you ought to be glad when I knock you about a bit sometimes. You know what Cowper says upon common conversation; he says,

"Discourse may want an animated No,
To brush the surface and to make it flow."

We should never have any improvements in the world if we got into one mill-horse dead opinion of matters. No, my hearer, we have souls, and know, the more you are capable of knowing; the more you understand, the more you are capable of understanding; and the more you enjoy, the more you are capable of enjoying; and the more you see of God, the more powerful becomes your spiritual vision; the more you hear of the Shepherd's voice, the more clearly you can recognize it; and the more you eat of eternal things, the more hungry you are. This may seem a sort of paradox, but it is so. Such is the character of eternal things, that there is no danger of extravagance there. God help us, then, to appreciate the freeness of his mercy, the ability of his mercy, the glory of the gospel in its being thus sent unto all the nations of the earth.

How beautifully the Psalmist, in the 19th Psalm, sets forth the cosmopolitan character of the gospel; not merely a national gospel, but a cosmopolitan, that is, a gospel that extends to all the

world. "The heavens" and what heavens are like gospel heavens? what heavens are like salvation heavens? what heavens are like the heavenly places that center in Christ Jesus? "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament" what does the word "firmament" mean? The word "firmament" means expansion. And so, the gospel was in a kind of contracted state, until the Savior achieved universal dominion, rose from the dead, and thus gave it an expansion, and expanded the firmament of the gospel east, west, north, and south. "I say unto you," and in the apostolic age it was fulfilled, has been fulfilling ever since, and I pray God it may more; though I hold the sentiments I just now advanced, do not look at me as one that is cold toward the salvation of men, or toward the extension of the gospel. I pray it may extend yet more, and more, and more; the Savior has said, and those words were particularly fulfilled in that age, and will go on more or less fulfilling down to the end of time, "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." Here is the expansion, then, that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handy work." That work that has extended mercy to Gentile sinners, that work that has extended the gospel to earth's remotest bounds, that work that has thrown the firmament of protection over sinners to the ends of the earth, and to them that are far off upon the sea, that was handy work with a witness! that can speak of work with a witness! Loving Jesus! blessed Mediator! dear Savior! How true the words of Watts are:

"If all the world did but Jesus know,
Sure the whole earth would love him too."

Here is an expansion, then; no contraction in that. Hence the Corinthians seem as though they were afraid of having too much gospel today lest they should not have enough left for tomorrow, and so they were narrow about it. Do not be extravagant; do not go too far; you have so much gospel today, you will not have enough for tomorrow. "Why, says the apostle, "you are not straitened in us, but you are straitened in your own bowels." You did reign as kings, what have you come down for? We would to God that you did reign as kings, that we may reign with you, that you may come into the full amplitudes of the gospel, the dignity of the gospel, the glory of the gospel, and be spiritual kings and priests to God, reign over sin, and earth, and hell, and in the Savior's name defy the whole, and break them, as it were, to pieces, as the vessels of a potter, and move on toward your ultimate destiny, from strength to strength, till everyone in Zion shall appear before the Lord their God. These heavens, then, declare God's glory, and this expansion of the gospel shows his handiwork. It so surpassed the comprehension of the first Christians, they thought it dangerous to go so far, and called Peter to account for going so far. Why, brother Peter, I understand you have been preaching to those dreadful people down there, those Gentiles. Yes, I have. Well, you have done very wrong. Very well; will you be quiet? Well, we will hear what you have to say; but we have got our condemnation ready. Yes, and I have got my explanation ready. Well, it strikes me we shall bring in our condemnation. It strikes me you had better hear my explanation. And so, they were quiet, and the explanation came in; and did they bring in a condemnation at the end of Peter's explanation? No, they brought in a glorification: "And they glorified God, and said, Then unto the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life." Who would have thought it? who would have thought it? And this opened their eyes, and then they began to see that the gospel ran upon the promises of an everlasting covenant; not a natural but a supernatural covenant; confirmed by the Mediator's blood, intended for all nations, for millions, untold millions, to meet at the throne of God, and forever enjoy the wondrous consequences of what the dear Savior has achieved. Then

the Psalmist goes on, "Day unto day utters speech." How clear that is. Every heavenly day you have in your soul utters speech. Ah, when he shines upon you,

"Midnight with my soul till He,
Bright Morning Star, bids darkness flee."

When he shines upon us, then it is day. And day unto day says something, utters speech, gospel speech, strengthens us. "And night unto night shows knowledge." Every dark dispensation is very profitable, very painful, very humbling, very trying, very dark, still it shows knowledge. And if we learn by the manifestations of light, so we do learn by the dark dispensations through which we go. And I feel myself so sensible of this, that while I have no objection to be at a wedding, when I am called upon to marry some of you here, yet somehow or another I generally feel more at home at a funeral. I feel my thoughts more tied to the solemnities of eternity, to that great change that we must soon be called to undergo, having an opportunity of testing one's own feelings as to how matters will be with us when we come to that solemn hour. I do know the meaning of the wise man's words, "Better to go to the house of mourning than the house of laughter." The heart is made better, better prepared for reflection, and we think, in our solemn reflections, how sweet the gospel of mercy, the salvation of God, the Christ of God! He has swallowed up death in victory, that while in the first Adam death is a curse, in the second Adam death is a blessing; to die is gain; absent from the body, present with the Lord. Here, then, "day unto day utters speech, and night unto night" every dark dispensation, everything that beclouds our hopes and prospects and joys here below, nevertheless "shows knowledge." And we shall learn by these dark dispensation's that which will, in the Lord's own time, constrain us to bless him for all that is past, to bless him for all that he has suffered to take place, and to bless him for all his dealings with us, for all were essential unto us in his arrangements and appointments; there was a needs be for the whole. Then the Psalmist says, "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." So, in the apostolic age, the apostles went into all the world. "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world; which the apostle takes up in the 10th of Romans, and show's that this scripture that I am now upon has a spiritual meaning. "Have they not heard?" Yes, verily, their "sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." "In them", in this order of things, these new heavens, "has he set a tabernacle for the sun;" a dwelling for the sun, Christ Jesus. There he dwells in the gospel, there he dwells in his apostles, there he dwells in his ministers, there he dwells in his people. And Jesus Christ rejoiced as a strong man to run a race, carrying with him the burden of your sins, carrying with him all the responsibilities you are under as a sinner before God; carrying with him all the demands of the law. And he rejoiced to run this race as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; and so, Christ is the Husband of the Church. See how the Psalmist rises as he goes on in this great matter of the spread of the everlasting gospel of the blessed God. "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it." He began at the beginning, and will terminate at the end, and then shall come the universality of the blessedness of the people of God. "There is nothing hidden from the heat thereof." When the family of God shall meet at last, one may say to the other, "Brother, what say you?" His answer would be, "I say this, that while I was in that sin-blasted world, mercy found me out, and brought me into the light and healing rays of that Sun where I might begin to bear the testimony and to sing the song that the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the time of the singing of birds is come; my soul has been hidden from the heat thereof; this Sun of righteousness has shined upon my soul

with healing in his wings.” Not one object of everlasting love shall die without being brought into the light, and feeling the heat and melting power of the Sun of righteousness.

Thus, then, there are two, or rather three, doctrines in the beginning of our text; first, that the Lord blessed his apostles miraculously with the knowledge of any language wherever they came. If an apostle went into a region where he knew not even what their language was, and he could not speak a word of their language, nor they a word of his, no sooner does he stand up to open his mouth than that language is arrayed before his mental vision; he sees the words of it, he sees the meaning of it, and begins to utter it with superhuman eloquence, pours out torrents of eloquence, testifying of the wondrous things of God, and the people are astonished how this man can speak in their language, and at the same time tell out such wonderful things. The other doctrine is the freeness of the gospel, the ability of the gospel to gather up sinners of every dye, of every clime; from the sage to the savage; from the philosopher to the lowest degraded creature, so degraded, hardly knows whether he has a soul or not, looking at them naturally, but the gospel finds out the soul, degraded as it is, contracted as it is, benighted as it is, miserable as it is; the gospel finds it out, raises up the poor creature, the worm, turns him into a king and a priest unto God, and he may well say, all his journey through, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Then the third doctrine is the expansion of the gospel; the gospel, in its expansive power. It can reach anywhere; it does not matter what fires it meets with, it can quench them; does not matter what seas may roll between, the gospel and its object, the gospel, will roll them back; it matters not how lofty or strong the walls of Jericho; every impediment shall be moved; “My Word shall not return unto me void; it shall accomplish that which I please.” Such is the first part of our text.

I must now say a few words upon the second part. I knew, before I began, that I should not this morning reach the last part. The second part is that “they shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew.” In the few remarks I make upon this part I shall, take that which I am sure you would wish me to take, the word of God for my guide. I think, therefore, taking hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew means, in the first place, protection. They wish him to protect them; they wish Jesus Christ to take care of them; They are taught to put themselves under his protection. “Spread your skirt over your handmaiden,” said Ruth to Boaz, “For you are a near kinsman.” In the same Book of Ruth, we may get the spiritual meaning of that. Now, Ruth, this is a symbol of protection. Yes, And, who do you wish to protect you? The God of Israel; and Boaz, as a servant of God. Well, Ruth, you are perfectly right. “The Lord recompense your work there it is. So if you are favored, to believe in him, to take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, to touch his clothes is simply to believe in him, to know that he alone can protect us, “The Lord recompense your work, and a full reward be given you of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you are come to trust.” Was it not so with the disciples? Did not the disciples feel, when Jesus spoke of departing from them, that their protection would depart from them? There is our protection gone. “They all forsook him, and fled they felt unprotected. But when he reappeared, Here is our protection again with us now: he will take care of us now. Under the shadow of his wings his saints have dwelt secure. Second, believing in Christ, taking hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, means covenant relationship. Sixteenth of Ezekiel, 8th verse.