

GENERAL AND YET PARTICULAR

NO. 566

A SERMON
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*“Thou hast given him power over all flesh,
 that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”*
John 17:2

THIS was used by our Savior as an argument why the Father should glorify Him in His dread hour of conflict. Our Lord did as much as say, “Thou hast already given Me what I now ask; therefore, since Thou hast virtually bestowed it upon Me in the covenant, give it Me now in very deed.” So the believer, when he prays, asks for what is already his own, and when we come before the Lord in prayer this should encourage us much, that our heavenly Father has already given us all things in giving us His Son, so that we ask for what is virtually our own.

The text itself we will try to open up briefly. It contains two statements—first, *that Christ, as a Mediator, has received from God universal authority over all flesh.* And secondly, *that the object of this is special and peculiar, that He may give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given to Him.*

You have universal power, but you have within it a *special purpose.* We know that our Lord Jesus Christ has all power given to Him in heaven and in earth, “Angels and men before him fall, and devils fear and fly.” All things, whether animate or inanimate, confess the majesty of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Our text, however, mentions the most stubborn thing in all the world—“flesh.”

Jesus has power over *all flesh.* That willful, wicked, disobedient thing called flesh, Christ knows how to govern. He has power over all men as fallen men, for such the term flesh describes. I understand then, that Christ has power over all men, to pardon all whom He wills.

Christ has this day as Mediator, power to convince of sin every living soul by His Spirit, if so He wills. And power to bring all men to the footstool of His grace, and to give them pardon if so it seems good in His sight. We do not believe that there is any exception to this rule—Christ has power over every man of Adam born, to give to him the grace of conviction and the grace of pardon, if so it should please Him to do.

He has power also to make those who are not convinced of sin and who are not pardoned, subservient to His purpose. He has power to restrain their evil passions from running to an excess of riot. He can use them as His drudges to effect His purposes, even when they proudly rebel against Him, so that though they boast themselves in their own free will, they shall really be working out His own eternal purpose.

He has a bit often in the mouth of His fiercest enemy, and a hook in the jaw of the bloodiest persecutor. Over all flesh He has authority, whether it be crowned with royalty or wrapped in rags. Whether it curse with profanity or bow down with reverent adoration. There is not a mortal man from the equator to the poles, of any rank or any language, or bearing any hue upon his skin, who is not subject to this universal mediatorial power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If I understand my text and Scriptures parallel with it, it was ordained in order to the salvation of the chosen, that the whole world of man should be taken from under the immediate rule of God as absolute God, and placed under a new form of government of which the Mediator should be King and Head. As the result of this gracious arrangement a fallen race is permitted to exist. A sinful world coming into contact with an absolute God would have been instantaneously doomed to hell.

Man, while yet a rebel, lives on in virtue of the mediatorial power of Jesus. He has stepped in between avenging justice and the sinner, and so the sinner is spared. I trace to Christ's atonement the continued life of the most obdurate. All the long-suffering mercy of God seems to me to flow through the channel of the Savior's authority over all flesh.

It is in virtue of this power that the Gospel is preached to all men—"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." Hence the command to believe receives its divine sanction, and those are condemned who believe not in His name. On account of this universal dispensation of mediatorship, an honest, gracious, and sincere invitation is given to whosoever will, to drink of the water of life freely.

It is, I say, on account of this universal mediatorial power of Christ, that I can stand upon this platform and say in the broadest possible terms, that whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus shall never perish, but have eternal life. And I can preach a gospel which, in its proclamation, is as wide as the ruin and as extensive as the fall.

But why all this? The text tells us that *the object and design of all this was not universal, but special*—that the intention of God in thus putting all men under the power of Christ was not that all men might receive eternal life, but that He might give eternal life to as many as had been given to Him. So that in all this universal dealing there is the special and peculiar design, that the chosen may receive life—that the elect may be filled with spiritual life on earth, and afterwards enter into the glory-life above.

God might doubtless have acted upon another plan, and have given Christ power only over His elect if He had willed, that He might give eternal life to them, but it has not so pleased God. It has, on the contrary, pleased Him to put the whole race under the mediatorial sway of Jesus in order that He might give eternal life to those who were chosen out of the world.

God might have commissioned His servants to go into the world and preach the Gospel to the chosen, He might have told us to present Christ only to certain persons upon whom there should be a peculiar mark, it has not so pleased Him. He bids us go "into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," His high decree and divine intent being that those whom He has ordained unto eternal life shall, through believing, enter into the life which He has ordained for them.

I do not know whether I have brought before you what I am certain is the full idea of the text—a general power given to the Mediator over all flesh, as the result of which a proclamation of mercy is universally published to men, and a general declaration of salvation through faith presented to all creatures, but this always with a special, limited, definite design, that a chosen people, separated from before all worlds from the rest of mankind should obtain eternal life.

I have aimed in my ministry constantly to preach, as far as I can, the whole of the Gospel rather than a fragment of it. Hence those brethren who are sounder than the Bible abhor me as much as if I were an Arminian. And on the other side, the enemies of the doctrines of grace often represent me as an Ultra-Calvinist. I am rejoiced to receive the censure of both sides. I am not ambitious to be numbered in the muster-roll of either party.

I have never cultivated the acquaintance nor desired the approbation of those men who shut their eyes to truths which they do not wish to see. I never desired to be reputed so excessively Calvinistic as to neglect one part of Scripture in order to maintain another. If I am thought to be inconsistent with myself, I am very glad to be so, as long as I am not inconsistent with Holy Scripture. Sure I am that all truth is *really* consistent, but equally certain am I that it is not *apparently* so to our poor, finite minds.

In nine cases out of ten, he who is nervously anxious to be manifestly consistent with himself in his theological system, if he gains his end, is merely consistent with a fool. He who is consistent with Scripture is consistent with perfect wisdom. He who is consistent with himself is at best consistent with imperfection, folly, and insignificance. To keep to Scripture, even though it should involve a charge of personal inconsistency, is to be faithful to God and men's souls.

My text seems to me to present that double aspect which so many people either cannot or will not see. Here is the great atonement by which the Mediator has the whole world put under His dominion. But still here is a special object for this atonement, the ingathering, or rather out-gathering of a chosen and peculiar people unto eternal life.

I. Let us, this morning, meditate upon the principle of the text, and our first remark shall be, that THE DOCTRINE OF A GENERAL DISPLAY OF POWER, FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF A SPECIAL OBJECT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ANALOGY OF NATURE.

In the world around us we shall find the Creator accomplishing special purposes by a far wider display of power than the immediate object appears to require. Take, for instance, yonder plant. What is the main object for which a plant lives? Every botanist, and every common observer, will tell you that its object in living is, that it may produce seed, and perpetuate its like. God's object, then, in yonder plant, is to produce a seed from it that its species may be perpetuated.

How will He do it? Will He send an angel to watch over the seed, and the seed alone? No, my brethren, there shall be a watchful care over root, stem, cells, tissues, leaves, and flowers. Although when winter comes, every leaf will drop off and rot in the ground, and never be heard of again, yet those leaves have been the object of a superintending care, most marvelous and wise.

Though the real object of it all has been the seed alone, yet stem, and leaf, and cell have all been watched over. Just so I think it is in God's dealings with His elect, He is looking to them as to the seed and substance of mankind, but those graceless ones who will perish forever like fading leaves have been the object of His tender care.

If you tell me that the leaves were absolutely necessary to the seed, I will give you another illustration still more clear. You are not to think that when God is about to accomplish a purpose He studies just how much will do it, and then spends no more power than a pinching economy finds needful. We are wanting rain. Our gardens and fields are crying out for showers. Well, our gracious God will send it to us very soon. But will He just allot a shower to that piece of ground which requires it—will He not rather send a wide range of rain?

I have sometimes wondered at this, that when the shower falls it must be God's intention to bless the field, and yet He scatters the liquid blessing upon the salt and briny sea where no plants can be nourished, and where it seems to be a waste to pour the cooling drops. You shall find it rain quite as heavily upon the Atlantic as upon the thirsty earth which is opening its mouth for the moisture.

Why is this? Because it is the rule of God when He is accomplishing a purpose to deal after a general fashion though still the object be specific. Here is this air about us. Why is it made up of oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen, and so on? Is it not that plants and animals may live upon it? Surely this is the Creator's drift in making such a compound. But suppose you transfer yourself in imagination to the polar regions where life cannot exist, or to spots in the great desert of Sahara where even the vulture with swift wing has never flown, you will find the air composed of precisely the same particles.

Why is this? There is no animal to breathe it, no plant to bloom in it. Why then the same? Simply because God is not like finite man. He has not to stint Himself to such an expenditure as shall just accomplish His own purpose, but He acts like a God, and in the infinity of His nature He gives more than is absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of His purpose.

Think again now of nature in another aspect. We are proud enough to think that God made this world for the comfort of man, and with an eye to human convenience. Suppose we grant that principle for a moment. Here is a violet peeping out among the green leaves. Why has it that delicious perfume making the spring glad? Why, you tell me it is to gratify man. Very likely, very likely. But here are millions upon millions of violets which are never smelt by anybody, which grow among the nettles at the back of the church, or away in the woods where not even a child has wandered, or at a distance from the abodes of men where they are never seen or heard of, for—

“Full many a flower is doomed to blush unseen,

And waste its fragrance on the desert air.”

Why is everything so painted by the sun? Why do crystals sparkle when the sunbeams fall upon them? How is it you see the many hues of a rainbow when the sun is shining on a crystal? Why, it must be to gratify the eye. God would have this world a place of beauty and a joy forever. But crystals sparkle in the polar regions where there is not even a bear to look upon them. In that inhospitable region where life goes out, and where we believe no creature having life could possibly exist, the sun still shines, and still the crystal flashes back to him the colors of the iris.

Why is this? Why is this? I cannot tell you, except that I perceive that God gives to the sun a power over all things that He may give pleasure to the eye.

What multitudes of landscapes were never gazed upon by the artist's eye, yet there they are, sleeping in their beauty beneath the eye of God. How the birds are singing this morning, how they are pouring forth from their throats sweet melodious strains, and yet they are singing quite as well in the deep forest glade where no man can ever hear them as in our gardens and walks.

Why is this? Do we not think that the birds sing for our joy, and that the landscape is spread out for man's mental delight? It certainly is so, and yet there are landscapes and birds where there are no men to see, and ears to hear. So I think I might continue all the morning giving you analogies from nature, in which God in the accomplishment of a specific purpose adopts a general mode of action.

II. I will take another view of the question. THIS PRINCIPLE IS SEEN IN PROVIDENCE.

All of you believe in a general providence. You believe that God superintends all the affairs of the universe, so that there is not a grain of dust blowing in the street today which has not its orbit ordained and fixed as much as the planets in the sky. You believe that God overrules the motions of the rush that waves by the river as much as He does the policy of kings and emperors. Do not you believe in a special providence, too? I do, and I believe you do.

You believe that God is watching specially over His own people, and that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to His purpose. And did it ever strike you that there was any inconsistency in believing in a general and a special providence? I do not suppose it ever did—I know it never did me.

I know I feel quite easy in believing the two things, and I should have been very uneasy in not being able to believe both. I do not see why the Christian may not transfer the idea and believe that there is a general influence for good flowing from the mediatorial sacrifice of Christ, and yet its special design and definite object is the giving of eternal life to as many as the Father gave Him.

We will take one or two instances in providence. There is Jonah going to Tarshish. He has betrayed his Master and has fled from Nineveh. The Lord will have him back. He intends to bring him back in a strange conveyance, He has prepared a great fish to swallow him. How is Jonah to be got out of the ship?

The storm must come, and when the storm comes what does it do? Does it shake Jonah? Does it expose Jonah's life to danger? It does, but it also shakes the whole ship, and all who are in the ship are afraid that they shall suffer shipwreck, and what is more, if there were a thousand ships upon the sea that day they felt the storm, and yet God's special object was to have Jonah thrown into the sea. Though all the ships upon the sea must be tossed with the tempest, still there is the special design.

Take another thing. It is ordained according to prophecy that Christ must be born at Bethlehem. Then Mary His mother, who is great with child, must be brought to Bethlehem. How shall it be done? Why, in order to fetch Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, every man and woman in Judea must go to the place of their pedigree. And still, though God's express design is to bring Mary there that Jesus may be born, He uses a general method in order to accomplish it, and every other Jewish man and woman must go to the place of their pedigree. Here, again, is a particular object accomplished by general means.

I might continue with many, many other instances, but indeed you have only to open your eyes and see. My brethren, if you pray tomorrow for God to send a favorable wind to waft the missionary ship to

its haven, the same wind will waft a merchantman or a pirate too, if they are going the same way. It may be that you pray that rain may come to extinguish a fire, and perhaps a shower comes, but you do not expect it to fall just where the fire is, but also for miles around. If you know some poor man living in Lancashire, and you pray for him, that God would deliver him from poverty—if your prayer is heard, it may very likely be by quickening the trade of the whole country, and conferring a blessing on the people of the whole neighborhood.

In fact, you know yourselves if you are praying to God to bless your children, it is not possible that your children should be blessed without the blessing coming down upon others, because God's blessing any one man is the means indirectly of blessing other people. You cannot have a godly family down a court, without the whole court being the better for it. You cannot have one Christian man favored by his God without his household having some portion of the favor. God sends the favor only to His servants—that is the special intention, but still there comes with that a wider blessing.

While thinking over this matter I could only compare it to the moon when surrounded with a halo. The interior ring was the moon's own self, but round about it was a halo of brightness. Such is God's dealing with His people. There is the central substance of eternal, immutable love, but round about it there is a divine halo. It encompasses all the creatures of God, and makes them in some measure to participate in the light of the great central love, which belongs peculiarly to His saints.

III. Let us for one moment show that this has been ILLUSTRATED BY MIRACLES.

Joshua is fighting with the Canaanites. There has been a long battle, but he desires to see his enemy exterminated, and boldly turning round he cries to the sun, "Stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon." What did the sun and moon stand still for? Why to help Joshua against the Canaanites, but do you not think all the people everywhere had a longer day as the result? Did not every man who looked up wonder how it was that the sun stood still?

There was a poor man with a hard task, and he was afraid he should not finish it before the sun went down. How glad was he to find an extra hour added to the day. *He* knew nothing about the special purpose, and yet there was a special purpose in it all. Every man and woman on that side of the hemisphere enjoyed a length of light unusual for that time, and yet there was no design of blessing *them* in Joshua's prayer. They were blessed incidentally. The real object was that the children of Israel might fight the battle and complete it.

Take another miracle, Sennacherib has come against Jerusalem. He is about to swallow up Hezekiah and all the little kingdom of Judah. Hezekiah takes Rabshakeh's letter and lays it before the Lord. As the result of this, the angel of the Lord went through the camp of Sennacherib and slew his mighty men, and the power of Assyria was broken. What was the effect of it?

There was the little straggling kingdom of Babylon, then contending for existence with Assyria, that kingdom was spared and became afterwards the destroyer of Assyria. And you read that Merodach-baladan, the king, sent messengers to Hezekiah to thank him for what was done.

You see Babylon gets good out of the destruction of Sennacherib, but was this the main design? Certainly not. The grand object of God in destroying Sennacherib was to deliver Hezekiah and his people, and yet the whole earth rejoices and has rest when the great hammer of the Lord falls on Assyria and its empire is broken and destroyed. It was a blessing to all the East, when the power of the despot was broken that night, but the object of it was for Israel, and for Israel, alone.

Come to the days of Christ and observe another miracle. There is a ship tossed within the tempest. Her mast is ready to go over the side. Her timbers crack. She will be swamped and go down. No, she will not, for there sleeps with His head upon the helm, the Master of the tempest, the Lord High Admiral of the sea, King Jesus, and when He has been awakened He stands up and rebukes the winds and waves, and instantly there is a great calm.

Why did He make the calm? For the preservation of His disciples and His own ship. But did the calm end there and give no blessing to others? We are informed that there were with Him many other little ships, and so they all enjoyed the calm too. The direct and definite intention was to make His

disciples at peace and in safety. But the effect of it did not end with the disciples, but every ship which was out upon the sea of Nazareth that night enjoyed the calm.

One more instance and I will not multiply them, lest I fatigue you. Paul and Silas are in prison—God’s object is to terrify the jailer, and to bring out of prison His two servants, Paul and Silas. What does it say?—“The foundations of the prison were shaken, and Paul and Silas had their bands loosed”? No, brethren. “And *every man’s* bands were loosed.” Was it God’s object to bring every man out of prison? No one dreams of such a thing. This was merely a concurrent benefit which went with God’s special object in dealing with His poor persecuted followers, Paul and Silas.

So I believe that as it was in these miracles, so it is in that grander miracle, the great work of grace. Jesus Christ comes into the world as a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. And yet it is true He loved His church and gave Himself for it. He laid down His life for His sheep, and for His people did He die, and not for the world, in one sense, and yet in that other sense which I have tried to bring out, He was a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

IV. Let us now LOOK AT FACTS.

How do we really find the Gospel operate? I think I see this island of Great Britain covered with forests, with men living in it having their naked bodies painted, dwelling in caves, feeding upon herbs and acorns. I think I see a simple-minded man—some think it was Paul—landing upon the shore, and coming forward, trying to teach these savages the way of salvation. Oh! what a prolific hour was that when first the Gospel was preached in Britain. What has been the effect of it?

Brethren, let us answer another question first—what was the immediate design of God in sending the Gospel to Great Britain? My answer is to save as many as He had ordained to eternal life. That was His great object, but what has been the effect of it?

I trace the liberty, the happiness, and the prosperity of our country throughout these many centuries, to the prevalence of the Gospel in it. And though I believe God’s design in sending the Gospel—I mean the central design—was that He might separate unto Himself His own chosen people. Yet in connection with the Gospel, innumerable and incalculable blessings have come to every Englishman. And there does not live a man who claims the name of Briton who is not under solemn obligation to the preaching of the Gospel for ten thousand benefits.

Christ has indeed, in England, seemed to have power over all Englishmen, that He might give eternal life to as many as the Father gave Him.

Look at the Reformation. What was God’s object in raising up Luther, and Calvin, and Zwingli, to work the Reformation? Why, for this grand purpose, that Christ might see of the travail of His soul, and that His chosen might believe in Him. That was the purpose of the Reformation. But what did the Reformation accomplish? Not only this, but a thousand things besides, for it was to the Reformation that arts and sciences owed their progress. The human mind was liberated and expanded, and millions of people who never obtained eternal life through Jesus Christ, nevertheless, through the glorious Reformation obtained their liberty, and ten thousand other mercies beyond all price.

This is a matter of fact, and if you take the Gospel to the South Seas, if you preach it to the benighted people there, you will find that it will subdue all flesh to its divine power. But still the object is kept in view, that as many as God gave to Christ might have eternal life.

Let us observe one self-evident truth. It is a remarkable fact, that where the Gospel is not preached in its general aspect, God does not seem to work out His special object to any large extent. I mean to say that if you will go into any chapel in London, and you find a minister there who preaches nothing whatever of the Word of God, except that one part of it which is most blessedly and sweetly true—God’s electing love; if you will listen to that man, and hear him preach from the first of January to the end of December, upon that one topic—the specialty and peculiarity of divine grace—you need not go into the vestry to ask the deacons if they have many conversions. I am certain you will find there are few indeed, and those mostly among persons who were convinced of sin and aroused *elsewhere*, and who obtain liberty under the gracious doctrine. But the absolute conversion of many is not a thing to be

expected, and certainly not a thing found where the preacher is so restrained by his sense of electing love as to be unable to boldly preach the rest of the Gospel, and say, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

You have only to try it, dear friends—put your feet into the Chinese shoes, and prevent their growing to the proper size, in order to keep them in ecclesiastical comeliness, and you will soon find your walk of usefulness very much restricted.

Hold on to the point of being consistent; make that the main thing; banish those texts which speak about anything general; never open your mouth with a universal invitation; make it out that the Bible has not a word in it directed to men as men, but only to the chosen, and I will undertake that unless there be an unprecedented act of God’s sovereignty, you shall preach from one end of the year to the other and you shall not be troubled at the number of the elect people. There will be very few who will ever come forward.

But I know also (and he who will look candidly will see it), that the most effective ministry is this—which is not ashamed of the doctrine of grace, the ministry which does not stutter or stammer in talking about election, does not trim or cut the divine sovereignty of God, but which is equally clear upon the other point that God has declared His own solemn oath, “I will not the death of a sinner, but had rather that he should turn unto me and live,” a ministry which holds sovereignty but holds responsibility too, which dares to talk about God’s special object with bold voice and yet insists upon it that He has proclaimed to every creature under heaven this gracious proclamation, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

Well, now, these are facts and facts which are not to be disputed either. We hear people sometimes sneer and say, “Ah! there are many conversions, but are they genuine?” Sir they are genuine, for we will boast this much that if there are not genuine conversions found in this church for instance, there are no conversions genuine under heaven.

For when I see harlots made chaste and remaining honorable women year after year; when I know drunkards who forswear the cup and who labor with their might for the reclaiming of others; when I look upon those who were once singing the song of the lascivious on the ale-bench, who now for years—mark you, not months—for years persevere in holiness, I make this my glory.

If any can find better conversions under heaven let them find them, but I am satisfied that they are such converts as apostolic times added to the church, such as honor God in their lives and glorify Christ daily by their walk and conversation.

I believe you shall find most conversions where neither truth is held back, but where as in the text, the two are taught. “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”

V. OUR PRINCIPLE EXPLAINS MANY SCRIPTURES, and this goes very much in its favor.

I like to read my Bible so as never to have to blink when I approach a text. I like to have a theology which enables me to read it right through from beginning to end, and to say, “I am as pleased with that text as I am with the other.” You know, brethren—you must be conscious of it—that there are many texts of Scripture which look wonderfully like universal redemption, wonderfully like it, and if they do not intend some sort of generality they certainly speak in a very singular manner. Such a text as this, “He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.”—“Who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time.” I might mention more of these—but if you get with an Arminian brother he will have them all at his fingers’ ends, so you will spare me the trouble.

These people are always dwelling upon these, and think they have quite upset the doctrine of particular redemption though that is as plain in Scripture as the nose upon a man’s face. We know Scripture says, “He has laid down His life for the sheep”—He has redeemed us from among men. “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.” And you know that passage, “Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.”

How did He love the church? He loved the church with a special love, far above that which He gives to others, or else according to that metaphor, a husband ought to love his wife and love every other woman just as much. That is the natural inference of that text. But you clearly see there must have been a special love intended in the husband towards the wife, and so there must be a special love in Christ.

He loved the church and gave Himself for it. Now do you not think, brethren, as there are two sets of texts in the Bible, the one of which very clearly speaks about the infinite value of the atonement, and another which very evidently speaks about the intention of that atonement being for the chosen and for the chosen only, that the best way is to believe them both and to say, “Yes, I see it—as the result of Christ’s death all men are put under the system of mediatorial grace, so that Christ has power over them; but the object of His doing this is not that He may save all of them, but that He may save out of these all which He now has in His own hands—those whom the Father has given Him.”

The farmer trusts me with all his sheep in order that I may sever from them twenty which he has marked. A father tells me to go into the midst of his family, his whole family in order that I may take out of it one of his sons to be educated. So God gives to Christ all flesh, says the text, but still always with this definite and distinct purpose that He may give eternal life to those whom He has given to Him.

VI. Let us go on in the sixth place, to say briefly that this seems quite CONSISTENT WITH THE NATURE OF GOD.

We too often measure God after a human standard, and hence make mistakes. Remember that God has such an abundance of mercy, and grace and power, that He never has to calculate how much will be necessary for the accomplishment of His purpose, but He does largely and literally like one who cannot but act in an infinitely gracious manner. If you have some chickens, and you wish to feed them, you will only throw down as much barley as the fowls will want, but you do not think of feeding all the sparrows of the neighborhood. It would be a very good thing if you could for they all need food, but you throw down as much as will accomplish your purpose.

Now our God never has to stint Himself in this way, but with large handfuls He feeds the special objects of His care, and the ravens and kites besides.

God, again, exhibits a kingly character in His great methods of general love. At the coronation of the old kings, the fountains in Cheapside ran with red wine. Now you will say, “What a waste.” The gutters ran down on both sides with wine. It was not necessary, was it? The king’s object was that his subjects might have wine. Well if that were his only object that might have been accomplished by opening the bottles one by one, and stopping when there was just enough to satisfy their thirst.

Why did it run down the streets? Was it a waste? Not at all, it exhibited the royal glory. The king was glad to give the people wine to drink, but he wanted also to show himself a king, and as nobody but a king could make gutters run with wine, therefore he did it to illustrate his own magnificence. And our God, when He is about to exhibit mercy, does not say, “So much will just accomplish My purpose and save Mine elect”—that is His main object—but behold He makes the rivers run with wine and the floods with milk, so there is enough and to spare and yet no waste, because His grander object is His own glory, and He is glorified even by that love which does not effectually save.

When Napoleon was at war his favorite tactics were, we are told, always to bring crushing battalions to bear upon some one point to carry everything before him. That, my dear friends, is the mode of procedure in which you and I have to act. If we have to accomplish a purpose, we must concentrate the whole of our might upon that one point. But suppose one greater than Napoleon or a Napoleon with ten times ten thousand times more troops than he had, he would not need to concentrate his battalions upon one point, but simply cry to all his hosts, “Advance!” and they would go crushing down his foes at every point of the line.

So our God cares for the salvation of His elect, but that is not the only thing He cares about—His own glory is higher than this. His glory is the whole of the line, and our God, while He effectually saves those whom He has chosen, has no need to bring all His power upon one point. He has abundance to spare after He has done all that we know of. He can, while He is blessing His people, also bless the

entire universe according to His own will, and I doubt not that so He does, and that heaven and earth are full of the majesty of His glory, because heaven and earth, though they may not alike participate in the fullness of divine tranquility, are full of the beams of His love.

VII. I have to conclude by saying that this principle is a MODEL FOR OUR CONDUCT.

I was talking the other day with a brother. He said he did not think the conversion of the world was the legitimate object of missionary enterprise, because all that Christ intended by the Gospel was the gathering out of a people.

Well now, it seems to me that my dear friend was quite right and quite wrong. As to God's purpose in the sending of the Gospel to the world he was quite right, it is the gathering out of a people. But as to my work he was quite wrong, for the work of God's minister is not the gathering out of a people. Christ surely knows what His own disciple is to do. Just hear. "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." That is our work. He did not say, "Go ye and sever out of all nations a people to be taught and to be baptized." No, Christ's marching orders to His people are in these words, "Preach the gospel to every creature."

What will be the result of this universal proclamation? The chosen will be saved. Then, Lord, why not send me to Your chosen? Why send me to all nations? "What business hast thou to question thy Master's will? Is not this the very way in which I have chosen that My elect shall be brought, by the preaching of the Gospel to all nations?" I look as the result of missionary enterprise, not for the world's conversion—I do not expect it.

I believe that God will gather out of all people His chosen, and that Christ will come, and when He comes, then shall He reign from the river even to the ends of the earth. But all the Missionary Societies put together will never convert the world, nor do I believe they will do very much towards it unless they very soon alter their tactics. We shall have to try something very different from all the Societies which have ever been in operation ere we see any great results.

I am waiting for a good time to come. Till then we must use old vessels till we get better ones, but better ones will be found. My own impression is that the world will never be converted by missionary agency, but that is not your business. I am not to make God's decrees the rule of my walk. I am to make God's revealed will my rule of action. Christ tells me to "Preach the gospel to every creature," and if I were absolutely certain there was not one elect man upon earth, I would obey and preach the Gospel for all that, because if there were not a single soul saved by it, we are unto God a sweet-smelling savor.

So then, I say to you individually, talk about Christ everywhere—preach Jesus Christ to every creature. Say to every man and woman you meet, "There is life in a look at the crucified One." Tell men that "Whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out," and let this be always your comfort, that all who the Father gives to Him shall come to Him, that Jesus shall see His seed, that of all who the Father has given Him He will lose none, but will present them all at His right hand at last.

Fly back to God's electing love and the decrees of God as the pillow of your rest, but take the general command and the universal power of Christ over all flesh as the sword with which you fight and the staff upon which you lean.

It is for this end that I ask you, dear friends, to contribute as you shall see fit, to the spreading of the Gospel in foreign lands by the Missionary Society. I do not believe it is a perfect organization—I believe it is full of faults. I believe, however, it is the only way in which we can send the Gospel to the heathen just yet. We will have a better plan by and by, I hope, but meanwhile—as this is the only one—let us use it with vigor. For, after all, it is not the instrumentality, but God. And if I have to look upon this as an ox-goad—an unfit tool to strike the Philistines, yet as I have not a better I will use it till a better shall be found. Meanwhile let us pray the Lord to speed His own cause and gather out His chosen by His grace. Amen.

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