

The Twofold Missionary Task Of The Church.

Text: Isa 49:6

1) The Scope Of This Work

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Purpose Of This Work

224, 269, 221, 217, 219

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Isaiah 49:6, ***‘Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A mission festival by the very nature of the case will find us reviewing the mission work of the Church. We may well be awed when we think of the scope of the Great Commission: ***“Go into all the world!”***¹ We are to attempt to evangelise every nation.

In this way the first disciples received it, and therefore the Church today accepts that task. That charge of the Lord Jesus is therefore like a bugle call which to the present day has lost nothing of its stirring, obedience-commanding power for all the cohorts of the Cross.

Nor is mission work to be a mere fair-weather enterprise, something in which the Church might be engaged when times are easy and peaceful, but which could be shelved and set aside in times of strife and perplexity.

When the Children of Israel were camped on the banks of the Red Sea on the evening of the sixth day after their exodus out of Egypt, Moses was directed: ***“Tell the children of Israel to go forward.”***² What, forward? Right into the waves of the Red Sea? That is exactly what the Lord meant.

In the lexicon of our God there is no such word as retreat. In the program of our God there can be no such thing as standing still. It is ever and always a matter of going forward.

And if we today are confronted by a seeming Red Sea of a world in turmoil and strife, of people in unrest and seething with uncertainty, and if we have on either side of us the steep cliffs of a cold and stony indifference to all the kind invitations of the Gospel, and a stark and haughty self-righteousness that does not want a Saviour from sin, let us remember that for us, too, there is that same sharp, incisive, sweeping, majestic command: *“Go forward!”*

In order to understand this task better and mutually to encourage one another for a vigorous attack upon it, let us consider *The Twofold Missionary Task of the Church*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Scope Of This Work

Our text says, *It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob*. Who is that Servant to whom this missionary task is given? In the first place it refers to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is in a very special sense the Servant of the Lord, the Messenger of the Covenant.

Then in the further development of this theme and work this term is applied to the Christian Church, the Daughter of Zion, the great body of all believers. To them the Lord says in Isaiah 49:3, *‘You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified.’*

That is always God’s method and plan by which He wants to have His kingdom built and the boundaries of His Church extended, that those people who themselves have come to a knowledge of their Redeemer are now to busy themselves to bring that same saving knowledge also to others.

That call is therefore addressed also to us who, by the grace of God, have been incorporated in the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian immediately recognises that.

As soon as we become children of God, we are also classed with the labourers in the vineyard, and the tasks of the Kingdom of Christ are placed upon us.

And this would apply with particular force to the Lutheran Church. By the grace of our Lord we have kept the full possession of the pure Gospel and the correct Biblical principles of church work. The Lord has been gracious to us so

that up to the present time we have all the treasures of the unadulterated Word of God.

As we are blessed we assume the great responsibility for the task which our Church, the servant of the Lord is to undertake.

And what is the scope of that task? From our text we see that it is a twofold missionary task.

In the first part of the text we read, ***“It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel.”***

There you have a graphic description and a vivid picture of what we call home mission work. Zion-Jerusalem, the remnant that had remained loyal to the Lord and that still knew the true God, is to be concerned about her fellow citizens. Zion-Jerusalem is to reach out for the tribes of Jacob and the preserved of Israel and try to bring them back to the faith of their fathers.

The Church of the Lord was in a deplorable condition at that time. Wild fields, broken hedges, and crumbling towers marked the status of the Lord’s vineyard in that day. Under these conditions the faithful children of the Lord were to undertake a rehabilitation of that vineyard.

In a similar fashion those who are gathered about the Word of God reach out for those who are unchurched, either those who have strayed away from the church of their fathers, or that they never did belong to a church of the pure Word, or that they moved into new localities, or are placed in institutions where they would ordinarily not have access to the Word of God. We thank God for the work of the Gideons in this area.

It is altogether in the spirit of this great commission that we should indeed concern ourselves most decidedly with the spiritual welfare of the people who live around us in this country and we should exert our best efforts to find and reach and win such people and bring them into the Church of the Lord Jesus. That is very definitely our task, it is a great big job.

Nevertheless, the text calls it a ***too small a thing***. Not that it is small in itself. It is a task of tremendous proportions.

A compelling constraint rests upon us to be aware of the implications of our time and to be awake to the urgency of the case so that we develop consuming zeal and a loving devotion to this task of raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the preserved of Israel, of spreading God's Word in our own country.

And yet, it is a comparatively small thing when you set it over against the rest of the text. That we should interest ourselves in the spiritual welfare of our neighbours, of the people of our own country, of people who speak the same language and share the same outward advantage with us, who stand beside us in the shop, that is something you should expect. You should find nothing strange in that.

But now the text points out that we are not to stop with efforts at preaching to the unchurched in our own country. The missionary task of the Church goes far beyond the boundaries of Australia.

We are to do much more than merely to attempt to gather the scattered fellow believers, or to win the unchurched in our own country. Listen to this challenge of our text, ***I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.***

Let us be perfectly clear on this point. The Lord wants us to be a light to the Gentiles and seriously to try to extend our missionary effort to all parts of the world. Anything short of that would change the intent of the Lord and would reduce the scope of His gracious will.

And now, if you compare the extent of the heathen world with the unchurched of our own country, and if you contrast the difficulties and hindrances and associated sacrifices of the foreign mission enterprise with the work among the unchurched and the scattered fellow believers in our own country, you will recognise the force and significance of that statement in the text, ***It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob.***

What are 15 million unchurched in our own country in comparison with the 1.4 billion in other parts of the globe? Awed though we may be and overwhelmed by the extent and the force of that missionary command, let us face it honestly and courageously.

The Lord expects us to attempt to evangelise of all the world and would have us try to reach every nation on the earth, circling the globe, starting with the person at our right hand, proceeding around the world and ending up with the person at our left hand.

This latter part of the mission program will not find such a ready reaction. While one would not look upon it as strange if people concern themselves with the spiritual welfare of people of their own nationality and community, it is not a small thing for people in this country to concern themselves in this fashion with people living on the other side of the globe of an altogether different race.

People with a completely different cultural and ethical backgrounds, of an entirely different philosophy of life, with so many customs and traditions that are utterly at variance with our own, and people who may not take it so kindly if you try to come to them with a religion that is completely different from anything they have known before.

For this work we would have no enthusiasm by ourselves. Only the grace of God can make us willing to undertake this work and can fill our heart with concern and love for those people.

2. The Purpose Of This Work

And now note how the text indicates the purpose and aim of our mission work. Striking and highly significant is this wording, ***I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation.***

That is a clear description of the purpose of our mission work and provides a vivid picture of the urgent need for the work we are to do. We are to be a light.

The Bible speaks of the heathen as being held in darkness, a people that walk in darkness. This is a correct description. Heathenism is totally and completely a religion of darkness, of hopelessness, of despair. Heathenism is a religion of fear.

All heathen religions aim at warding off some evil, of appeasing some angry deity, of placating some evil force, of finding shelter against some threatening catastrophe. And every heathen religion is selfish, self-centred, and self-seeking.

No heathen religion has any correct conception of salvation. Everyone of them, no matter how finely spun or how intricately contrived, ends in the everlasting “no.”

However, there is only one Saviour and only one Salvation, in Christ Jesus, and it is our blessed privilege to proclaim that Saviour and to make known that Salvation. Just the crying need of the heathen nations, their groping in darkness, at the present time the disillusionment and the feeling of frustration that has settled upon so many of these nations, gives an urgency to the call of the Lord to His servants: *Go, be a light, make for Salvation, to the ends of the earth.*

But how can we carry out this task? In this country let us put forth all diligence to raise up the tribes of Jacob, to gather people under the sound of the Gospel and to support mission work.

Let us make use of every legitimate means for spreading of the Word of God through various organisation that produce and distribute Bibles, and those who help persecuted Christians.

Let us do it individually through our own personal mission work. Furthermore, effective mission methods are the upright Christian life and the proper Christian example of the believers. This a powerful incentive for others to lend an attentive ear to the preaching of the Gospel.

Above all, let us pray fervently for the building of the Church of Christ in our own country.

Let us thank the Lord for all the blessings bestowed upon us, accepting the responsibilities and privileges of service that come with our being part and parcel of the Lord’s machinery for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Let us carry out the work of missions with consuming zeal and with a spirit of devotion such as is in harmony with our Christian calling. This is simply an expression of the out-flowing of our love for our Saviour, who is the only Light of the world and the only Saviour of men. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Mark 16:15

² Exodus 14:15