

(Missionary Messages) 5

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Transcript

"If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; shall not He that pondereth the heart see it and shall not He that keepeth thy soul know it, and shall He not render to every man according to his works?" (Prov. 24:11, 12). I. We have here a great peril. "Them that are drawn to death, and those that are ready to be slain." This might describe any great danger. Some of us have seen a man overboard at sea, and we remember how quickly the signal was given, and the cry was heard over the ship: "There is a man overboard!" And the engines were reversed, the boats lowered, and every human being on board that vessel intently absorbed in trying to save that man.

Or, greater still, we can recall the catastrophe of a ship lost at sea and all the passengers and crew in peril of their lives. How the multitudes throng the beach to watch the struggle amid the breakers; how the lifeboats are manned and pushed through the wild surf to rescue the sinking men! Or how eagerly on shore the friends and relatives throng the approaches to the steamship offices to learn the latest news of the terrible disaster! Who is there that would not do his best to save one of those previous lives?

Sometimes even more terrible tragedies on a wider scale startle the great of the world, as when in a single moment some town is leveled by the cyclone; some great city is swallowed up by the earthquake, or some valley is deluged by the devastating floods, and thousands of lives in a moment swept away! Oh, how the hearts of men are stirred with sympathy, and their hands are opened wide to relieve and help! What millions were poured out of the generous hands of our people to rescue the victims of the Chicago fire, the Johnstown floods, the Chinese famine and the destitution of millions of starving Russian peasants; and base and ignoble the man would be who would refuse to help his fellow-man in such an hour of need.

But there is another side to human life, not less real because less visible. Every fifteen minutes in yonder heavenly world the awful tidings are reported that a thousand souls have been lost forever. Every morning the news could be heralded through heaven that a city the size of Albany has perished forever, and a hundred thousand souls have passed into eternity with-out a ray of hope. Every New Year's day it could be announced yonder, without exaggeration, that a population as great as the whole of Great Britain has been blotted out of life, and passed to an eternity of darkness and despair.

Perhaps you have sometimes stood in a crowd and seen a man pass by on his way to execution, and you knew that a few minutes later he was passing through the strange horrors of a violent and shameful death. Your heart is sick at the remembrance; but if your eyes were open to see as God sees, you would behold, not one human being, but a procession of men and women long enough to girdle the earth more than

thirty times, passing every moment to something worse than death, and every step of their pathway marked by sin and sorrow, until at last they drop one by one into a hopeless and Christless grave. There are a thousand million of them in that procession today, and when they shall have passed on, another thousand million will be pressing hard behind.

How many do you suppose in the sixty generations of the Christian era have passed on in that procession and are waiting somewhere in the realms of sorrow to meet us at the judgment and say, "Why did you never tell us of salvation?" At the lowest estimate, twenty thousand millions, more than twenty thousand cities like Chicago, and more than twenty million congregations of a thousand persons. Oh, beloved, are they not being drawn to death and ready to be slain; and does there not come to our ears this sad and awful refrain:

Oh, I seem to hear them crying, As they sink into the grave, We are dying, we are dying, Is there none to help and save? Think, for a moment, of their dreadful sorrows as they pass down to that hopeless grave. As we sit in the comfort and joy of our Christian privileges and hopes, over yonder in India some little girl, the brightest in her village, is being publicly dedicated to a life of shame as a priestess in the temple of her hideous and unholy god. At this very moment some poor child-widow is cursing the dreadful fate that ever made her a woman; some poor, wretched Chinaman is dragging his emaciated form into a lonely cave to die alone, as a victim of the curse of opium.

But all this would be possible to endure, if there was a brighter hope beyond. I have seen a dying mother, whose life had been one long sad story of wrong and cruelty, passing through yonder gates with shouts of victory, and all her earthly anguish was swallowed up in one drop of heaven's hope and joy. But these have no such hope. When they lie down to die, there is nothing but darkness and despair. There is no sweet promise to cheer them; there is no inward illumination to light up the gloom; there is no Comforter to whisper: "Fear not, I am with thee ;" there is no Saviour's bosom on which to lean the dying head and breathe the life out sweetly there. But around them on earth are the horrid rites of paganism, and within the dark heart is naught but the presence of evil spirits and dreadful fears and agonies, and they pass out of a wretched existence, here, into a darker future beyond.

Do you say you do not believe this? that God is too merciful to let them be lost, and there must be some other way of hope and salvation for them? Beloved, this settled unbelief of God's Word is probably the secret of most of our sinful neglect of the heathen world. We are pillowing our consciences on a lie. God has solemnly told us in His Word, that there is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus. The tender-est voice that ever spake on earth declared, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." If God could have saved men in any easier way, He would never have given His Son to the horrors of Calvary.

Beloved, if there be any other way of the heathen being saved, we had better never send them the Gospel, for it only increases their condemnation if they reject it. Better let them live and die in ignorance, and go to heaven through God's mercy without Christ. Ah, there is no such way! The true principle of the Divine government respecting them is given by the prophet in these unmistakable words: "If thou warn not the wicked he shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hands." The meaning is unequivocal. The sinner is lost although he was unwarned; but the faithless watchman is held guilty of his blood. The heathen perish, but the Church of God will be held accountable for their doom. Such is the awful peril of a dying world.

But one more touch needs to be added to the dark coloring; namely, their helplessness.

There is no one in this land of churches and Bibles who may not be saved if he will. But more than half the human race cannot if they would. They have never heard of Jesus; and surely we owe it to them that we should give them at least one chance. Talk not for a moment of the need of home fields in comparison with the heathen world. The darkest pictures in New York or Chicago are as a drop to the ocean compared to India or China, where nearly a thousand millions are drifting into eternity and crying, as they meet their Judge, "No man cared for my soul."

II. A great neglect. We have next the picture of our awful neglect and indifference to the need and peril of a perishing world. "If thou forbear to deliver those that are drawn to death, and those that are ready to be slain," it is not necessary to do anything to be guilty of their blood. It is quite enough to do nothing, but simply let them alone. Yonder switchman needs not to throw a great rock across the track to hurl a hundred lives into eternity. It is enough that he simply neglects to close the sidetrack and the switch at yonder station, and the train itself will rush into ruin with all on board. It is not necessary for the lighthouse keeper to lure the vessel by false beacons upon the reefs and rocks. All that is necessary for him is simply to neglect to light the lamps at sunset in yonder lighthouse, and tomorrow morning a hundred mangled bodies will be lying on the shore.

A few years ago a man under sentence of death was found at the last moment to be innocent, and a messenger was dispatched with a pardon from the governor to the place where he lay awaiting execution the following morning. But the messenger, thinking there was time enough, lingered a little too long on the way, stopping to rest and refresh himself at the wayside inn, and thoughtlessly falling asleep. Waking suddenly, he found his terrible mistake, and that the life of a human being hung upon a thread. Wildly he dashed along that road, renewing horses at every post, until at last, covered with perspiration and foam, he dashed up to the courthouse square, loudly calling out the message of pardon that he had brought; but alas, he was too late! Just one minute before that innocent man had been hurled into eternity. Could he ever forgive himself that crime?

I have seen a man, who, all his life long, walked with a shadow upon his face, and a head bowed with a weight of insupportable gloom, because, by a moment's neglect, he had once taken a human life. Oh, how men and women will go through eternity crushed with the consciousness that they have ruined human souls by their selfish neglect. When the Johnstown floods were just beginning to pour down the valley of death, a horseman was seen dashing down the little stream, and shouting at the top of his voice, "Escape for your lives! the floods, the floods! to the hills, to the hills!" until at last he, too, was overtaken by the awful deluge of destruction. But he would rather give his noble life than let his fellow beings perish unwarned. Oh, beloved, you will some day wake up to see the awful meaning of what you have not done and might have done!

It was not necessary that David should slay Uriah with his own hand. It was sufficient that he should let him be put in the front of the battle and perish without support, and David was branded as his murderer, and his kingdom was blighted by the awful crime. It was not necessary that Ahab should stab Naboth to the heart and steal his vineyard. It was enough that he should let his wicked wife do it all, while he lay comfortably on his couch, drinking wine and listening to sweetest music. But Naboth's blood stained his wicked soul all the same, and sent him down under the curse of an indignant heaven to a dishonored grave.

It was not necessary that Esther should raise her hand against her countrymen, but Mordecai told her that if she even forbore to risk her life to intercede for them with the king, she and her father's house would be destroyed and she would be held guilty of their destruction. It is not necessary for you to club your brother to death to be a murderer, but you can simply let him drown by your side and not put forth your hand to save him. It is not necessary for you to go to China and Japan and live a profligate life, seducing the poor heathen into the shameful vices of American and English visitors; you can simply stay at home and neglect to help and save them.

The Church of God is like a trustee left with a great inheritance by a wealthy man to be used for the poor of New York, but instead of spending it for the poor, the trustee spends most of it in a luxurious mansion, with horses, carriages, pictures and servants, while the poor children pine in want and die in neglect. What would the world call such conduct? Infamous, too black and shameful to be forgiven by society or justice or law, and such a man would be branded as a criminal and driven from society as an outlaw. And that is just the attitude today of the Church of God in relation to the heathen world. God has given us the Gospel as a trust, and we have been keeping it as a luxury and letting the world perish without it.

Let me show you how the Church of God is neglecting a world that is being drawn to death. In the United States there is one ordained minister, and about a dozen Christian workers, for every seven hundred people. In India there is one ordained minister and a very small handful of Christian workers, sometimes none at all, for every four hundred thousand people, or nearly six hundred times as much provision for the people of America as for the people of India. In China the proportion is nearly the same, perhaps a little better. Does that look like neglecting those that are drawn to death?

Beloved, how far have we been guilty; how much have we left undone that we might have done? How much have we been wasting on work that did not need our help, or on selfish and needless pleasures, while souls innumerable have been sinking into death, and God has been charging us with their blood?

III. An insufficient excuse: "Behold, we knew it not." This is, perhaps, true. The ignorance of most Christians respecting the world's need is appalling; but this is no excuse. We should have known. If it should be found that a family in some little town had died of starvation, and all around them the people had been living in affluence, and had not even taken the trouble to find out the causes of those children's piteous cries, would not that town be branded by the secular press and the public opinion of the country as inhuman and without excuse? We ought to know the condition of our world, and God will hold us guilty for what we might have known. He has made us trustees for those that have not the gospel, and it is our business to find out the needs of the world and to see that they are supplied. We are our brother's keepers, and in the great day we shall find that our accountability will be coequal with our opportunity.

There are thousands of ministers of the gospel in the United States who know almost nothing of the need of the heathen world, and will scarcely ever present the matter to their people. There are millions of Christians in this land who never read a missionary paper and do not want to hear of this subject. Oh, friends! you will have to look it in the face some day, when thousands of millions of lost ones shall look you in the face in judgment, and God will say: "Who slew these souls," and a voice you cannot drown, will answer: "Thou art the man."

IV. A solemn accountability. "Shall not He that pondereth thy heart see it, and He that keepeth thy soul shall He not know, and shall He not render to every man according to his works?" Dear friends, you can

do as you please now. God gives to every one of us a strange and awful freedom to do as we like. Calmly the years go on and no thunderbolts strike us down as we live in selfishness and ease, and spend our lives and means upon ourselves.

In yonder judgment hall the Master stood one day and let those soldiers do their worst, those chief priests and Pharisees have their way, that time-serving governor unjustly condemn Him. They had their day; but long, long ago they have found that all this must come into judgment, and ages of sorrow have been reversing the picture on their wretched heads. You can be selfish if you like, you can spend your money as you please, but God is pondering thy heart and weighing thy life and calmly waiting till you are through, and have shown all that is in your heart. And then, oh, then!

I see two men passing into the judgment. One has spent his life for God. His money has been invested in immortal souls. Hundreds meet him yonder as the fruit of his life. Oh, how he exults that he did not throw away this glorious crown and recompense!

But another comes. He had the same fortune, the same opportunity, but he meets a blank eternity. There is no ransomed soul to greet him. He has nothing from his life. His fortune is gone, but upon himself; and God takes him apart and points him to that glorious picture which greets the other, and I think I hear him say: "My child, all that you, too, might have had; all that was waiting for you to claim, but all that you blotted out by your selfishness and neglect; and you have not only destroyed your own reward, but you have also destroyed all that company of happy immortal souls that you might have saved. Murderer of immortal spirits, go to thy place and to thy doom, and let the cries of those whom thou hast ruined be thy sufficient punishment!"

But there is a day of judgment now. This word "pondereth" literally means to weigh. God is weighing us and testing us by the way we meet His claims, and determining by our present lives what we are fit for and can be trusted with. When God gives us money, He stands back and watches to see what we will do with it and if He finds a good steward, He will give him more; and if He sees us mean and selfish, we cannot expect Him to give us a higher trust.

As we read these lines He is pondering our hearts and marking us by our very thoughts, purposes or excuses. "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him, for thou dost visit him every morning and try him every moment." Oh, how disappointed He is when He finds us unworthy of His confidence, and unfit to be trusted with the great things which He would love to have us do for His kingdom! Many a business failure, many an earthly sorrow has come because we proved ourselves unworthy of God's great trust for us; and many a great fortune has been given simply because some man was found on whom God could depend as a faithful steward.

"He that keepeth thy soul shall not he know?" Why, my friend, you are dependent on Him for your very life and every blessing of your soul. How can you have the face to go to Him and ask Him for anything, when you know that this very moment He is looking into the face of some poor heathen woman who is dying without the Gospel, and whom you might have saved?

Do you realize that every time you bow at His feet in prayer and expect Him to meet you with such gentleness and peace, His heart is being wrung by the despairing cry of some one of His lost children who might have known His love if you had been faithful! I should be ashamed to pray to Him tonight for His blessing on my head unless I believed that I was doing all in my power to send the Gospel to a dying world. All this we may not realize now; but the day is hastening on when it will meet us and we shall come

face-to-face with these men and women that have perished without our aid.

Bishop Taylor tells of a village in Africa where he called for a day with his little missionary boat, but was not able to remain or leave a missionary with them. They were bitterly disappointed and long entreated him to alter his purpose and leave a teacher among them. But it was beyond his power, and he sorrowfully left them. As he sailed up the river he saw them standing on the bank beckoning to him with eager entreaty.

Two days later he returned, sailing down the stream. As they passed the village, the natives were still upon the banks watching for him; and as they saw that he did not intend to land, they became wild in their gesticulations and cries, waving their arms, leaping high in the air, shouting and trying in every way to attract his attention. He felt the appeal in every fiber of his being, but he could do nothing. He had no one to leave, and as he sailed down the river his heart was broken with the sight.

When at length they passed out of sight of the village and were hidden by a projecting promontory from their view, he said he heard a great and bitter cry go up from those people, loud and long, until it pierced his very soul, and seemed to go away up to heaven as a protest to God against the cruelty of man. It was the lamentation of the heathen after God. Oh, friends, we shall hear that cry! It will come up in our ears once more in the judgment day. What are we going to do about it now? God help us to stand in that awful hour and say: "I am pure from the blood of all men."

We have called this Christianity's crime. You are not responsible for Christianity's crime, but you are responsible for all that you can do. The day has passed for this work to be done by great corporations. God is going to do His best work today by faithful individuals and often by humble instrumentalities. The few and not the many, the weak and not the great, the lowly and not the illustrious, the little band of Gideon picked out from a picked out people, are to be the deliverers of Israel and the standard-bearers of the last crusade, What can you do? Many of you can go, and go you should, unless God gives you a clearer call to stay, or closes up your way to go. Others of you can send in whole, or in part, some other worker.

One day in Kansas we met a young brother whom God had called to go to Africa. Along with him came another young farmer who lived on a neighboring farm, and who also had wished to go as a missionary; but with great sweetness he said to us: "I have wished very much to go, but I think God is lately calling me to stay at home and support John while he goes." So that those two brothers are joining hands across the sea. The one is going to the Soudan. The other, at even a greater sacrifice, perhaps, is staying at home, and by his hard toil and loving hands is standing back of him in his life work. God is waiting to recruit an army of twenty thousand heroes to go abroad and twenty thousand more to "stay by the stuff" at home, and when the crowning day shall come they shall both divide the spoil.

Beloved, what are you going to do about this matter? Are you going to waste your money any more in the miserable investments which are to perish with the earth, or are you going to turn it into the currency of Heaven and find it yonder in immortal souls that will shine forever in your crown of rejoicing. "What thou doest, do quickly." In a very few years the world that God expects you to save will all be dead and lost. The harvest will not wait. If the Gospel is ever to be given to our generation, it must be done at once.

God save us all from the crime of crimes, the blood of souls, and lead us this very moment, as we end this page, to kneel down upon our knees and honestly confess and thoroughly put away the great and awful wickedness which we have been so long content to have go on without compunction, neglect of our trust

and forgetfulness of the dying charges of our glorious Redeemer, and of the awful peril of a perishing world.

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