

(Missionary Messages) 6. TWENTY-ONE REASONS

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Transcript

"Which is your reasonable service?" (Rom. 12:1.) We propose to discuss seven reasons which many people plead as excuses for neglecting the work of foreign missions; seven reasons which really explain their neglect; and finally, seven reasons why we should make this work the supreme business of our lives.

I. SEVEN EXCUSES FOR THE NEGLECT OF THE HEATHEN

1. The oldest excuse which we find in the Bible is Jonah. When God sent him to Nineveh, which then represented the heathen world, he tried to beg off because of his national and religious selfishness. He was such a bigot that he did not want Nineveh to be blessed or the heathen saved. When at last God compelled him to go and blessed his ministry beyond all precedent, he got so angry that God had to leave him under his withered gourd as a warning to future ages against selfishness, bigotry and exclusiveness.

2. The oldest excuse we read of in modern church history for neglecting the heathen comes down from the ancient Presbyterian Church of Scotland. It is said that when a young and zealous minister arose in the General Assembly in the days of the Erskines and moved that a committee be appointed to consider the practicability of beginning a mission to the heathen, the aged Moderator pointed his finger emphatically at the young presumer and cried, "Young man, sit down, and mind your own business. When the Lord sees fit to send the Gospel to the heathen in His wise foreordination, He will do it without your interference."

3. The next excuse is the old plea, "There is enough to do at home." This is really a pretext rather than a plea, because it is a fact that the people that are doing most for missions are doing most for the work at home and the people that beg off from foreign missions are as ready to be excused when the collection basket is passed for home work. So obvious was this to a shrewd solicitor for city mission work in London, that when he started out to ask his wealthy constituency for donations for home missions, he always wisely began with foreign missions. And when he was turned down in his plea for the heathen, he brought out the other book which he had from the beginning really meant to present and said, "Well, my friend, I am so pleased to find that you are deeply interested in home mission work, for I have also brought along with me a report of our city mission and one of their subscription books, and it will give me great pleasure to accommodate you in your preference for your home field."

4. One of the saddest and most common salves for guilty consciences on this line is the plea of the New Theology, and we fear the great mass of those who like to call themselves liberal Christians, that the

heathen are really in no great danger after all, for God is too merciful to let them perish through the neglect of others in sending them the Gospel, and that there really is some other hope for them apart from the cross of Christ and God's plan of redemption. This is really an insult to the precious blood and the loving heart of Jesus Christ. If any less costly way of saving men would have sufficed, God would never have allowed His only begotten Son to be crucified. "There is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved."

5. Modern culture and the study of Oriental religions have brought out a very popular plea along this line of which we have been hearing a great deal for a quarter of a century; namely, that the old religions of heathen nations are good enough for them and in some respects just as good as Christianity. Buddhism has been quoted as "The Light of Asia." Confucianism has been praised as the highest code of ethics and worthy of comparison with the Sermon on the Mount. And Hinduism has been actually imported into this Country by weak and silly Americans as a more ancient and profound system of spiritual truth than even the Bible. All we need to say in answer to these foolish and extravagant attempts of a few brilliant people to attract attention by startling theories that will not bear the slightest investigation, is to point to the land where these religious systems have left their impress for thousands of years. What has Buddhism done for Tibet, its greatest stronghold and the very last of the countries of the world to open its doors even to civilization? What has Hinduism done for India, with its enfeebled national spirit, where three hundred millions are held subject to foreign rule, with its child-wives, wretched widows and enslaving bonds of caste and superstition? What of China notwithstanding its moral teaching? China, that has stood still since the days of Abraham and only really begun to move forward since the vital touch of Christianity has stirred its veins in the last fifty years. And Mohammedanism, can we find a better proof of its blighting curse than the Turkey and Arabia of today? And as for Africa, Polynesia, and other barbarous and pagan lands, let the tragic story of the witch-doctor and his victims and all the horrors of slavery and cannibalism be the test between Christianity and idolatry.

6. They are not worth saving. These swarming myriads of stupid, ignorant and brutal heathenism are just the offscouring, the scum, the vermin of society, and are better left to their inevitable fate to be swept away by the stronger tides of human life on the principle of the "survival of the fittest." Like the Indians of our own continent let them die out as inferior races, they are not worth our pains or trouble to save. That is the brutal argument of many heartless, selfish men and women today. Not worth saving! Then why did Jesus tell the story of the prodigal's welcome, of the woman of Syrophenicia, of the dying thief, of the chief of sinners? Not worth saving! Then how will you explain the story of such noble lives as the martyrs of the Boxer rebellion in China, the splendid trophies of Christian missions in Central Africa and Polynesia, the glorious men and women that adorn the native church of India today. Yes, and the cultured, consecrated and ransomed men and women of our own race who themselves would have been barbarians still had not Christian missions found their fathers and brought them to the light when they were wild Celts, Britons, Goths or Vandals, worshipping at the bloody altars of paganism and offering their very children in human sacrifice. Worth saving? Then please explain what our most far-seeing statesmen meant when they told us that China in a little while is bound to be the leading nation of the world, as Japan already threatens to become.

7. The most sordid of all mean excuses is that which some have the honesty to admit and which probably most who are guilty of this sin of admission would really admit if they were honest. It is, "We can't afford to give back to the God that gave us all, a little acknowledgment of his own bounty. Can't afford to trust the Lord of all worlds and all wealth to make up to you what you invest in His gracious hands?" It is

He that giveth thee power to get wealth," and one withering touch of His hand would take everything away. When His chosen people of old were faithful to the obligation of giving to Him, they were doubly prosperous, and when they were too mean and stingy to give the one year in every seven as a Sabbath year when the land should have rest from all crops and its Sons from all servile toil, they lost what they foolishly tried to save, the labor of the other years was fruitless, the rain ceased to fall, the fertility of the land departed, and God collected the back taxes which they owed Him by giving it rest seventy years during their long captivity in lieu of the Sabbath years which they had stolen from Him centuries before.

II. BUT LET US TURN FROM THIS DISGUSTING AND TRIFLING LINE OF THOUGHT AND LOOK AT THE REAL REASONS WHY PEOPLE NEGLECT THIS SACRED TRUST. 1. The first cause is undoubtedly the neglect of the Christian ministry to press this matter upon their congregations. The shepherds of Israel have the blood of the perishing heathen chiefly upon their hands. Blindly and foolishly considering their own churchly interest, they have really lost the strength and support that God would have surely given in the home work had they been faithful in this great trust. It is an appalling fact that thousands of Protestant churches of America every year fail to contribute a single dollar for the evangelization of the world. This is as foolish and blind as it is sinful and negligent.

2. The next reason why Christians fail to work for foreign missions is their ignorance and lack of education in regard to this great subject. Bishop Taylor Smith of England has said that the three things which the Church needs to bring the missionary revival, are "to know, to glow and to go." The first is to know.

We need to know God's plan for His church in this age. How ignorant most Christians are concerning it. We need to know the needs of our perishing brethren and the fearful conditions of the heathen world. You would have no business to plead ignorance if a neighbor were starving next door. You ought to know. And we need to know the facts concerning missions, the story of missionary sacrifice and achievement, the lives that have suffered and labored so nobly and left such inspiring examples to call us on in their footsteps. Do you know these things? Do you try to know them? Do you read about them? Do you love to hear of them? Do you take some missionary periodical and read its stirring pages with interest and delight? Every Christian who fails to do so on the pretext of poverty ought to be ashamed. The past quarter of a century has witnessed a marvelous revival in the spread of missionary intelligence and literature and even a greater increase in consequence in missionary results.

3. A low spiritual life is perhaps the most general and fruitful cause of missionary indifference. Barely saved, multitudes of Christians just squeeze through life with just enough of religion to hang on to the world and get as much out of it as they can while they stay in it. The secret of missionary consecration is a consecrated heart and a Spiritfilled life. Until Christ gets His true place in the center of your being you will not be good either for missionary enthusiasm or any other work. Therefore, in our conventions our first work is to get God's children wholly yielded to Him in practical consecration and filled and fired with the heart of Christ and the spirit of love and power. You that are without this experience are not going to take any practical interest in this message. God knows better than to expect anything from you, and you ought to know better than to expect much from Him. You will find in the end that you have had the worst bargain of the two. Let me warn you to repent of your selfishness, worldliness and worthlessness, and to give Him the life that He redeemed and claims, and then let Him give back to you power and love and service and with it His own exceeding great reward.

4. Worldliness and Self-indulgence. This is the prolific cause of the neglect of every form of Christian beneficence. Christian men and women today are increasingly abandoned to pleasure, indulgence and

extravagance. There has been vast increase of wealth in this land, but no such proportionate increase in giving to God. Where does the money go? To the theater, the summer outing, the automobile, the furnishing of your home or many homes, your style of living, your dress, foreign travel, the innumerable things that modern social life has added to its necessities, comforts and luxuries. Will you please sit down and compare what you have paid during the past year for dress, for amusement, for recreation, for novels, magazines and light literature, for pleasure travel, for art and furniture for yourself and your children, and then put up against it the amount of your missionary pledge last year of perhaps a paltry five dollars or what you thought of giving today and see if you will not be ashamed to look it squarely in the face.

5. Religious selfishness is quite as bad and quite as common. By this I mean the care, expense and interest we give to the architecture and adorning of our churches, to the multiplying of churches for denominational success or pride, to the musical services of fashionable congregations, and to religious endowments, investments, enterprises, that are even at the best in no sense missionary or benevolent. Again, put down what you paid for your own church and its manifold homework, for higher education, for religious books, Bibles, and helps in your own Christian life, for the pleasures of going to conventions and getting spiritual help, and then put over against this your little gift for the perishing heathen and see how the comparison will look in God's sight and in yours.

6. Lack of training in Scriptural giving. Much of the neglect of which we have been speaking is due to the fact that very few Christians really know how to give. Their education has been neglected. It is like a taste for certain fruits. It needs to be acquired by practice and then it becomes intense. God has given us a simple plan in His Word of laying by us systematically as He has prospered us, a certain proportion of the means He entrusts to us and then regard this as His portion and using it faithfully for Him. This has the advantage of giving to us at all times a certain fund which is absolutely for religious purposes and the only question we have to determine is what proportion we will spend on each particular object. The money is there and it is the Lord's, and it just needs a sound judgment and a true heart to divide it justly and fairly between the various interests concerned. For example, you have fifty dollars of the Lord's money, and instead of giving all that or most of it for a church organ, or a high soprano, or even your minister's salary, you make a fair distribution and see that God's perishing lambs on the dark mountains are not forgotten. Here today you can make a reasonable estimate of your probable income during the coming year. Say that it will be the very low estimate of five hundred dollars. The very least proportion of that that you could think of giving to God is one tenth, that is ancient benevolence, and in fact less than the Jewish tithe, for the Jews gave nearly three tenths. So you have fifty dollars to distribute in advance. Suppose one half of it be reserved for the work at home and the other half dedicated to the immensely vaster field and greater need abroad. That gives you twenty-five dollars for your missionary card today. Now take that to God for a moment of silent prayer and ask Him how much more you may dare to add to that on the score of faith from unknown sources that you can trust Him for. I should not be surprised if that would double the twenty-five dollars. Then bow your head again and ask Him how much more you can add to it by some real sacrifices the next twelve months, and if this works with you as it has with some of our people, I am quite sure that the twenty-five dollars you have already determined to put on your card will grow to a hundred before you get it signed. That is God's method of Christian giving, a fair proportion, stretched to larger proportions by faith and loving sacrifice.

7. The last reason we will assign mingles with all the others and explains everything that may need explanation. It is the lack of a true love for Christ. If you have a great love in your heart for any one it will stop at nothing. It will overcome any obstacle. It will find a way through any combination of difficulties and

if you have no love for the one concerned, anything and everything will be difficult and trying. Dear friends, you have got to stop giving for missions, giving for your church, giving for the heathen and see only one thorn-crowned face and hear only one name, and listen to only one plea, "Lovest thou Me?"

But we hasten finally to consider:

III. SEVEN REASONS WHY WE SHOULD MAKE THE WORK OF MISSIONS THE SUPREME BUSINESS OF OUR LIVES. 1. Duty. "I am debtor," is the terse, homely and practical sentence in which Paul sums it all up. It is not sentiment. It is not a notion. It is not a fad. It is a debt, a matter of common honesty. It is a debt because my Master has commanded me to give the Gospel to all the world. It is a debt because the Gospel has been committed to me as a trust and not as a personal selfish luxury. It is a debt because someone brought it to my fathers and I owe it to other races to pass it on to them. It is the supreme duty of every Christian to give to every human being in the present generation a chance for salvation. Not to do it is the crime of Christianity, the unpardonable sin of the Church of Christ. It is the sin of breach of trust. It is the sin of disobedience to the Lord's last command. It is the sin of soul-murder and blood-guiltiness. Is it your sin?

2. Compassion. The condition of the heathen world is utterly hopeless, sad, despairing. There is no such condition in any homeland. There is no such need for any homework. There is nobody in this land but can hear of Christ in some way. Perhaps one person in a thousand here is outside the pale of Christianity. The figures are reversed in heathen lands. There is one thousand outside to every one within. They have none of the things that you hold most dear. Your sweet Christian Sabbath, your precious Holy Bible, your beloved sanctuary and church home, your Sunday School with its hallowed associations of childhood, your sweet peace through the blood of Christ and blessed hope of heaven above, your blessed memorial of deathbeds where father, mother, wife and little children have passed through the gates with beckoning hands and the parting was forgotten in the joyful hope of meeting to part no more; all this is utterly unknown to the men, the women, the little children of scores of Christless lands. And oh, what right have you to have these blessings for yourself alone. Then add to this the horrors of slavery, opium, the witch doctor, the child widow and wife, and the cruel rites of their very religions, and how can you dare to tell your Master that there is nothing you can do to brighten that black picture and help and save those perishing ones.

"They tell me of lands of sin and shame, And of hearts that break and tire, But I know of a name, a name, a name, That will set those lands on fire." 3. The Results. Does it pay? Listen, the census of India shows that the Christian population has increased five times as fast as the native population in the last ten years, and that at the present ratio India will be a Christian land in less than a century. Missionary statistics prove that the rate of conversions in our foreign missions is many times greater than the average of our churches at home. Results follow with great rapidity. It is but a few years since the King of Uganda was burning Christian boys at the stake because they would not prostitute themselves to sin. Today the Gospel is scattered over all that land and hundreds of thousands of souls are members in the church of Christ. It was only yesterday that the hostile province of Hunan permitted missionaries to reside within its borders. Today that great province, with twenty-two millions of people is being evangelized in all its centers. Korea has only been known to us with any particular advance for a few years, but already Korea has been swept by revival and is rapidly becoming a Christian land. The same might be said of many other heathen lands. There is no Christian work in which a little enterprise, a little seedsowing so quickly blossoms into a mighty harvest.

4. God's mighty workings in heathen lands summon us to be workers together with God. There was a day when Isaiah heard the heavenly seraphim talking about earth and heaven and this was what they said of Jehovah, "The whole earth is full of His glory." But if that were true three thousand years ago, how much more is it true today of the bigger earth we know and the mighty God that fills it. Even in the New Testament we find such a bold and startling sentence as this about the angels that we call the angels of heaven. But if the verse be true they are rather angels of earth. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation." You will notice that the sentence is in the plural. They minister not only to the actual heirs, but to the prospective heirs. They are ministering today to many a heathen soul that shall yet be an heir of salvation. And in their ministering they are bringing the light to the heathen and the heathen to the light. How mightily God is working in every heathen land. Nothing like it is occurring among us here. God seems to have grown weary of the children of light and civilization, and today all the forces of Divine providence are converging in the earth's darkest lands. Every year has witnessed miracles of providence in every corner of the globe. China is one continuous miracle of providence, a sort of living picture on an endless chain of new wonders. Arabia has been penetrated with a railway to its very bosom. The longsuffering Congo has been transferred from the hands of a private tyrant to a responsible government. And within the present century transformations of equal or greater importance have taken place in almost every other heathen land. All these are in the direction of the opening up of the world for the entrance of the Gospel of Christ. And at the same time the Holy Spirit has been poured out as never before upon all flesh. India has had an unprecedented Pentecostal outpouring. Manchuria, Korea and China have passed through mighty revivals. Our missionary reports tell us of many accessions to the churches of Christ in thousands of mission stations around the globe. God is pouring floods upon the dry ground and the latter rain is falling upon the soil of heathendom. Surely, it is the time to work with God when God Himself is so mightily marching on.

5. The work of missions will hasten as nothing else the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ. It appears to be the one yet unfulfilled condition of preparation. It marks on the dial of the ages the hour when the clock of destiny will strike and sound the knell of the old dispensation and the advent of the new. "The Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come." If then we would be in the line of the providence and the purposes of God, the line of opportunity and emergency, the line that leads up to the marriage supper of the Lamb and the kingdom of our God and His Christ, let us be and do our best for the immediate evangelization of the world.

6. The Love of Christ. We have already spoken of the lack of that love as the cause of unfaithfulness, but only love can inspire and sustain a true and lasting missionary zeal. Once more let all others pass and let us see no man save Jesus only. He is the man of Macedonia that is crying, "Come over and help us." He is the sad Shepherd who is looking out upon the perishing and plaintively asking, "Lovest thou me? Shepherd my sheep, feed my lambs." You were lost, and He loved and sought and found you. By that love, by all that His cross and precious blood has ever meant to you, by all that that glorious heaven and that yet more glorious advent mean to your faith and hope, by all that His blessing has brought to your heart of sweetness and preciousness and grace, go forth to seek and save the lost. Oh, will your heart answer true to this His loudest call, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel unto every creature."

7. The reflect blessings which this will bring. There is only one way to be a happy triumphant Christian and that is to live out the cross of Christ yourself for others and to give forth the love, the grace and the great salvation which Christ has given to you.

If Christ were here today His willing feet would go to these dark, sad, lost lands. If Christ were here today His hands would be stretched out to the perishing heathen as they were stretched out on earth to the suffering and the lost. If Christ were here today His voice would cry once more in the ears of all the weary and the heavy laden, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." But Christ is not here today in literal flesh and blood. Christ has passed within those heavenly gates and His hands and His voice are lifted up before the throne for you and me. But He is asking for your feet, for your hands, for your voice. Oh, will you be feet for Him to go upon the mountains of darkness and sin? Will you be hands for Him to feed the perishing multitudes for whom His heart is moved with compassion? Will you be a tongue for Him to tell of His love, His mercy and His precious blood? Will you take the cross that has redeemed you and pass it on to your perishing brother? Will you take the cup of salvation which has quenched your burning thirst and hand it to the famishing children of the heathen world? Will you lay up in store this mighty recompense, some glorious day when He shall say, "I could not go, but you went for Me. I could not speak, but you spoke for Me. Inasmuch as ye did it unto them, ye did it unto Me."

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