

# His Call to Evangelistic Work

by Martin Knapp

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and utilizing the gifts of evangelists in the church, as they bring people to Christ and establish new churches.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, Acts 8:4, Romans 10:14, 1 Corinthians 9:22, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2 Timothy 4:2, 2 Timothy 4:5

**Topics:** "Evangelism", "Church Leadership"

## Description

Martin Knapp preaches about the importance and duties of an evangelist, highlighting the unique calling and responsibilities of spreading the gospel and leading revivals. The sermon delves into the scriptural authority for the office of evangelists, emphasizing their role in the early church and their position below apostles and prophets but above pastors and teachers. It discusses the challenges faced by evangelists, the need for proper recognition and utilization of their gifts, and the divine calling and significance of their work in the church.

## Transcript

"Do the work of an evangelist." -- Paul

Having noticed his call to the ministry and successful pastorate, we now come to one of the most eventful periods in Mr. Weber's life.

Soon after his call to the ministry he became convinced that his life work was to be that of an evangelist. That God was calling him to fill

"An office which a man could scarcely hold

And live. A gift of burning coal

To hands that must not tremble holding it for God.

A robe of costly white on which one stain

Meant shame and death."

The Scripture authority for this office is found in Eph. iv. 11, 12, where the distributing of gifts of "apostles," "prophets," "EVANGELISTS," "pastors," and "teachers" are all attributed to the Holy Ghost. Also in many

other places.

It may not be amiss for us, at this point, to stop and study the status of this calling, and notice some of the duties pertaining to it. Rev. A. B. Hyde, who, in his sparkling "Story of Methodism," gives a charming chapter on "Evangelists," has, in said chapter, collated many of the facts connected with them and given what appears to be the substance of the results of the investigation of many of our best authorities, such as Barnes, Bengel, Olshausen, and others. He says,

"The term 'evangelist' is used in the New Testament to indicate a class of laborers well known and valued in the constitution of the early church. They are shown to be a certain class of Christian teachers who were not fixed to any particular spot, who traveled either independently, or under the direction of one of the apostles, for the purpose of propagating the gospel. The absence of any detailed account of the organization and working of the early church, at least of the first century, leaves us a little uncertain as to their function and position. Their title, 'Publishers of the Glad Tidings,' might belong to all the Christian ministry, yet evangelists are named next after 'apostles and prophets' and before 'pastors and teachers.' If, then, apostles were those who immediately represented Christ, and prophets were those who spoke under the special impulse of the Holy Ghost words mighty to effect men's hearts and consciences, then it would follow that evangelists were in authority below the apostles and in power below the prophets. Yet their office was higher and more conspicuous than that of pastors who watched over a church that had been founded, or the teachers who carried on the work of systematic instruction. They were apparently set forth by the apostles as they had been set forth by their Master as missionary preachers of the gospel, preparing the way, calling congregations and founding churches to which pastors and teachers should afterwards minister. The evangelist was then a preacher with no pastoral superintendence. In the Middle Ages these evangelists were called Gospellers, and they have remained in the church of Rome as Preaching Friars.

"Methodism itself is an evangelism, and the early Methodist preachers were evangelists more than anything else. One can easily see that the work of an evangelist was wholly that of Whitefield, and more than half that of Wesley. The former went from place to place, not to organize, but to cry aloud; and his career was wonderful. Wesley did the same, going free among the dead and dark of the English parishes, as the apostles and evangelists had gone to the utter heathen."

That God in His infinite wisdom has appointed these different orders of workers in His ministry is evident. It is also plain that all the duties devolving upon each calling is not as clear as might be wished. It is also a fact that, like the mingling of the tints of the rainbow, so the labors connected with each of these callings sometimes are blended in the life of one person, and he becomes evangelist, pastor, and teacher all combined. Wesley and Finney and others have belonged to this class. It is also a fact that there has been a tendency to exalt the pastorate and minimize the distinct calling of the evangelist; also a tendency to think that the work of pastor and evangelist must always blend in all who are called to the pastorate.

"Every pastor his own evangelist," sounds nicely, but is as unscriptural as it often is impossible. Otherwise would the office of evangelist ever have been instituted? It is also unjust to a large number of true and faithful pastors whom God has called to at office, and in it abundantly blessed their labors, but who have not evangelistic gifts.

That there are many evangelists in the pastorate, and that an evangelist may, like Paul and John, labor three years, more or less, in one place, there can be no doubt. It is also true that every Christian should

seek the salvation of souls; but to hold that a minister is not called to the pastorate because he has not evangelistic gifts, is to be wise above what is written.

As one star differs from another star in glory, so it is among these different yet divinely instituted constellations in the church of God; and in each constellation there is diversity of gifts, of graces and of usefulness. What the especial work of each is, it would be profitable for us to know, and particularly, at this time, the duties of an evangelist. There seems to be much darkness here, but some light -- enough to keep them busy.

There is another class of workers mentioned in Scripture under the name of "helps," who at the present sometimes wrongly pass under the name of "evangelists." Many are called to be "helps" who are not called to be "pastors" or "evangelists." They have special gifts for prayer, or song, or personal persuasion, or exhortation, or house to house visitation, or for all of these combined, which make them a mighty power under wise leadership to help in revival work. They may not have evangelistic gifts to lead a service successfully, but in the place where God has set them they are a power.

Evangelistic pastors who are striving to do their own preaching and conduct their own revival services, often feel the need of such workers to aid them in inspiring their membership to work, and in the exercise of their peculiar gifts as "helps." Such were often utilized in the Methodist Church under the name of "exhorters." As has been seen, no calling is more clearly defined in the New Testament, or has been more abundantly blessed of God, than that of "evangelists." Early Methodism was extensively organized through "helps" and itinerant "evangelists." As churches sprang up the work of "pastors" and "teachers" was more and more manifest, and God has "set them in the church," with special gifts and training for their special work.

The following are some of the providential openings that invite the labors of an evangelist.

1. Destitute places where there are no churches established. In our rural districts there are thousands of persons who "never read the Bible nor hear the Sabbath bell." Pastor's hands are so tied by other imperative duties that they are unable to reach them. Our towns and the country both are being filled with a foreign element that must be converted or they will ruin our nation. God has two ways of reaching unconverted foreigners.

First. He sends us to them.

Second. He sends them to us.

Thousands come to us to one of us going to them. God commands us with judgment-day solemnity to Christianize them.

If we turn from the call and do not all we can for their salvation, we will sink down to hell with their blood upon us.

Christ poured out His life's blood for their redemption and now bids us to tell them the "good tidings, and preach to them the gospel of repentance," and, if they will not come to our services, to "go out into the highway and hedges and compel them to come in." They are precious souls whom our Father loves, for whom our elder Brother died, and whom we must soon meet in judgment. Unconcerned they are sleeping the fatal sleep of sin at our very doors.

They must be awakened! THEY MUST BE SAVED!!

What is done must be done speedily. Jesus says of his workers, "As thou hast sent me into the world even so have I also sent them into the world."

Should there not be some system generally adopted that would more fully utilize the "helps" and "evangelists" whom God summons for their special work, to the taking of these strongholds of sin for the King?

The Canada Band movement, under Dr. Savage, and the Michigan State Revival Band under Rev. D. W. Parsons and his associates, both of which have been instrumental in the salvation of thousands of souls, seem to be wise steps in this direction.

If organized effort works good in the distribution of pastors, why not in that of "helps" and "evangelists?" Or, can they be better trusted to make their own appointments?

2. Where churches are already organized, but have become cold, formal and lifeless. Like a stumpy, stony, weedy "fallow ground," they need the application of extraordinary measures, and God provides for them through the advent of the evangelist.

3. Where a man is called to be "a pastor," yet has not evangelistic gifts. Because the Methodist Church in its origin was a sort of an evangelistic association, and nearly all of her preachers were evangelists, some of her children have become blinded to the fact that a man may be called of God to be a "pastor" without being an "evangelist," just as truly as he may be a pastor and not "have gifts of healing" and other powers which are granted to those to whom Christ sees fit to give them in his church.

4. Where the pastor is not physically strong enough to bear the burdens of his charge and at the same time conduct a revival.

5. Where the powers of darkness are so strongly entrenched that the combined efforts of both "pastor" and "evangelist" are required to dislodge them.

Knowing that such fields as this would await them, no wonder that God "set them in the church" as a permanent part of it, and has kept them there and demonstrated their divine calling by the success with which he has crowned their efforts.

No wonder that progressive churches are framing their regulations so as to recognize and utilize this right arm of power with which Jehovah puts to flight his foes.

That some of their number prove unworthy is no argument against their calling, but should be an incentive to the providing of proper regulations, by which those unworthy may be relegated to their proper places. What a stupid simpleton the man would be considered who would sneer at the office of pastor, because some who fill it are recreant to their trusts. In God's sight, all who belittle the office or work of the evangelist for a similar reason, are guilty of a like folly.

The silences, sneers and opposition, with which evangelism has been met by some professed followers of Christ, argue either the grossest ignorance of Scripture teaching and Divine leadings along this line, or else a heart hatred of it which the profession of piety and the possession of official position is utterly unable to hide. That their work is "superficial" is doubtless sometimes true. Fallow ground gets so hard, and is so

stony, that sometimes it is impossible for the best of plows to go in deeply.

Should all "superficial" workers among them be relegated to the rear, it is probable, however that their ranks would suffer no greater depletion by such a process than those of other classes of workers. While it is true that in most of the churches at present, the evangelist has no "regularly fixed field" in which to labor, yet in this respect he is not unlike his Master, and with the world "for his parish," "victory" for his battle cry, "Salvation" for his watchword, "Holiness" for his motto, "Saints" for his companions, the "Church" for his mother, the "Word" for his instructor,

"God" for his Father, "Jesus" for his bosom friend, the "Holy Ghost" for his guide, and hosts of angels always on hand to report his meetings to the heavenly host, he is, even on earth, as happy as an archangel, and would not, unless God should will, exchange places with any created being. For such a delightful post of duty he will praise God through all eternity.

The following excellent extract on "Evangelistic Work," taken from the London Primitive Methodist, is expressive of much in this relation which is true:

"There is evidently a very general feeling in the connection that more aggressive work should be done. We have one district advertising for ten evangelists, full of faith and the Holy Ghost; and in nearly all the districts we have some movement on foot for evangelistic purposes. No doubt the legislation of the last Conference on mission work has given a stimulus to this movement, but the real cause lies beyond that.

"The traveling preachers as a rule, have not the time to devote to aggressive work which they desire and which is needed. We may talk as we like in conference and convention about laymen attending to the business of the churches; but after all it has to be done by the preachers. They have to look after chapel affairs, and the demand made upon them in this respect, in many stations is most exacting, Consuming time and energy and burdening the mind. And it must be done. We have the property and the property is needful for the housing of our people, and in a few years it will be a great blessing; but at present it consumes many of the ministers. The men who are doing this work are doing heroic service for the connection and cause of God, and are worthy of all honor. But they cannot give the attention they would like to evangelistic work. In other places the ministers are engaged in educational work, training the people in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. It ought not to be impossible to combine an educational and evangelistic ministry but there cannot be the concentration as where only the one thing is sought. And we should never forget the pulpit demands upon our ministers are much more exacting now than ever, and that many of the ministers have received only partial furnishing and require more time for preparation. Without assuming that there is any lack on the part of the ministers -- indeed, assuming, which is correct that they are anxious to see more aggressive work, -- they have not the opportunity and means to engage in it as they would desire."

The evangelist's field of labor is the world; the pastor's his pastorate. Evangelists devote all their time and strength directly to the promotion of revivals; pastors, for manifest reasons, are unable to do this. The peculiar work of the evangelist is to ring the gospel-bell and gather pupils into the gospel-school; that of the pastor to shepherd them. Evangelists, like the prophets of the old dispensation, usually receive their appointments "irregularly," but pastors through agencies instituted for that purpose. Both are called of God and are essential factors in His church below.

Like different wheels in the same watch they are designed to work harmoniously and for the common good until "all come into the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the

measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." As in our public schools, the parents, school-board, superintendent and teachers, all work harmoniously together for the banishment of ignorance and the enthronement of knowledge, so it is designed that all of the offices of the Church of God shall unitedly and harmoniously labor together for the dethronement of sin and the coronation of Holiness.

During Mr. Weber's pastorate he was called upon to aid in revivals on neighboring charges, and at these places, as we have seen, God abundantly owned his efforts. His success was such that he received many pressing invitations to evangelistic work from other places. These calls were so many and pressing that he began to feel that they were Providential voices telling him that the time had come when he should devote all his energies to the work of an evangelist, a work to which he now felt that God was calling him. Experience had shown him that he could not do justice to that work and remain in the pastorate.

(a) The people need the presence of a pastor and have a right to expect him to remain in their midst.

(b) It is difficult to keep special revival meetings running with profit constantly on any one charge.

(c) Constant revival work at one point compels neglecting care of converts in the places where the revival is not in progress.

(d) Much of a pastor's time is necessarily taken in church building and debt-raising projects, "sermonizing," attending weddings and funerals, and in doing many other things that those can do who have not evangelistic gifts.

(e) Constant revival work and the faithful discharge of the duties of the pastorate are too much for any ordinary minister. He will have to neglect one or the other. Hundreds of evangelists in the pastorate break under this double work. Other true pastors get discouraged and break down in trying to exercise gifts that they have not. God's plan of apportioning his work is best. With these facts before him, and both the Spirit's call and Providential voices ringing in his ears to begin a work for which a burning love is given, a man like Brother Weber wisely weighing the matter, will not be likely to make a mistake.

On his old battleground, his knees, the question is finally and fully settled, and he starts for Conference with a fixed resolve to be true to the voice divine. At this point such a pressure is brought to bear upon those who feel called from a successful pastorate to this work as only those who have been there know. I have a letter asking advice from a gifted evangelistic pastor in a Southern Conference that fairly makes one's heart bleed. He had come to the same point in his experience where we now find Mr. Weber. He had felt the call, and wisely and prayerfully weighed the matter for months. He had good appointments and apparently bright prospects as a pastor for the future, but was fully convinced that he should give all his time to evangelistic work. He went to his conference determined if possible to take a relation that would allow him thus to labor. Like Bishop Taylor, he had counted the cost and at his Master's call was willing to make the sacrifice of giving up good appointments, a good salary, a pleasant home, the tender ties that bind a pastor to his people, and the society of his precious wife and children. For a number of years he had been a member of his conference, and the strong and tender ties that attach men in these bodies of heroes of the cross were to him especially dear. He sought some way whereby he could be true to his convictions and at the same time retain his conference relation. Through some oversight, this branch of God's great church has neglected to make disciplinary provision for the recognition of this class of her ministry that the Scripture, her own best interests, and their rights demand. This neglect is doubtless due, in part, to circumstances that have so changed since her origin; in part to the fact of the new questions to which such a step will give birth; in part to a fear of new measures; in part to a conservatism that wants to be sure it is

right before it acts; in part to a jealousy of any new order, and in part to an ecclesiasticism which is always slow to see and adopt the leadings of the Holy Ghost. One of the many signs of spiritual awakening and advance of our beloved Zion is that her sons are agitating this question, seeking to know just the right thing to do, and determining that early in her councils this matter shall be made right.

As matters now are, our brother found that for "poor health" men could take a supernumerary relation and still remain with their brethren in the conference. He found that a very broad meaning is often attached to that relation, and that men are sometimes allowed to take it, engaging in secular business. He found that for "sickness in the family," a man might resign the pastorate and still be a member of his conference. He found that by regular conference appointment, a man could pass from the pastorate to become a college president, a college agent, a temperance, tract or book agent, or an editor. Express provision is also made whereby a minister may retain his conference relation and "attend any of our schools."

But for a man to labor DIRECTLY AND EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS, GIVING ALL OF HIS TIME, AS AN EVANGELIST, TO THE PROMOTION OF REVIVALS OF RELIGION, he found no provision whatever to be made. It is needless to say that this defect in the disciplinary provision of the church of his choice, his mother, the church whose founder said, "Gaining knowledge is a good thing, but saving souls is a better," and that "We ought to throw by all the libraries in the world, rather than be guilty of the loss of one soul," caused him deep pain. He also saw that this defect in her machinery would compel him, if true to God's call, to take a location and thus be where he would no longer be amenable to his peers. He also saw that he would be misunderstood by many of his ministerial brethren, and that doubtless some whose counsels he thus would disregard, might whisper, "Disloyalty to the church," forgetful that loyalty to the Spirit and the Word is always loyalty to the church, no matter how much opposition to the views of those whom the church may have clothed with dignity and power, and that loyalty to ecclesiasticism may be disloyalty both to God and to His church.

The pressure at the conference was so great that he resisted convictions, took another pastoral appointment and went to it, like Samson, shorn of his strength, to lament his mistake and rectify it as early as possible. When Mr. Weber reached this critical and testing point in his career, convinced of the divinity of his evangelistic call, he remained true to his church, true to his convictions, and true to God. He attended his conference held at Sydney, Ohio, Sept. 13, 1882, and giving his report for the year, asked for and obtained a certificate of location as the following extract from the minutes of that body attests:

"Joseph H. Weber was before the committee of examination, and his character was passed, and he was discontinued from trial in the traveling connection or ministry on his own request, with a view to entering upon evangelistic work."

Though his church does not officially appoint evangelists, yet unofficially she employs them, and gives them her support and all that they can do. So we soon find Mr. Weber thronged with invitations and busy in the work to which the Lord had called him. Thus he passed from the vestibule of his ministry into its great auditorium, henceforth to be, if God should will, like Whitefield, --

"A homeless pilgrim, with dubious name,

Blown about on the winds of fame,

Now as an angel of blessing classed

And now as a mad enthusiast,  
Called in his youth to sound and gauge  
The moral lapse of his race and age,  
And sharp as truth the contrast draw  
Of human frailty and perfect law;  
Possessed by the one dread thought that lent  
Its goad to his fiery temperament,  
Up and down the world he went  
A John the Baptist, crying, Repent!"

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