

On the Two Great Instruments in the Conversion of Sinners

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the written word of God and the preaching of the Gospel in the conversion of sinners.

Scripture: Psalm 19:7, Mark 16:15, John 5:25, Romans 1:16, Romans 10:17, Ephesians 2:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:23

Topics: "Conversion", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches on the two great instruments in the conversion of sinners: the written word of God and the preaching of the Gospel. He emphasizes that all men are dead in trespasses and sins by nature, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, many are quickened to a life of faith and holiness. Reade explains how the Gospel, when preached faithfully, has a profound effect on awakening dead souls to spiritual life and vigor, as seen in the Scriptures and the apostles' experiences.

Transcript

27. ON THE TWO GREAT INSTRUMENTS IN THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS

The written word of God is one of the sacred instruments in the hands of the eternal Spirit for the regeneration of sinners. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." The preaching of the Gospel is another instituted means for awakening dead souls, and leading them to Jesus Christ, through the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit; for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." All men, without exception, are by nature dead in trespasses and sins.

Multitudes, however, are quickened to a life of faith and holiness. But, how are they quickened? how are they born again? As God is pleased to work by means, what instruments does he employ in this great work of bringing dead souls to spiritual life and vigor? Our blessed Lord himself has told us, when he said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live." This voice is heard, when the Gospel is preached; and wonderful is the effect produced by it.

That our Lord meant dead souls, is evident from his mentioning another hour, when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and come forth to judgment. Those preachers of the Gospel must therefore be

very defective in their views, who will not exhort sinners, under the idea of its being useless to speak to the dead; making no difference between those who are naturally and those who are spiritually dead. The hour is indeed coming, when the former shall be aroused from their slumber by the voice of the archangel and the trump of God: but the hour now is, when the latter are awakened, through grace, by the sweet sound of the trumpet of the Gospel of peace.

When Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy in the valley of dry bones, and was asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" he modestly replied, "Oh Lord God, you know." Without reasoning upon the subject, or objecting to the work of prophesying to dry bones, he implicitly obeyed the divine command; and immediately there was a shaking, and the bones came together, and the sinews and flesh came upon them. Then he was again commanded to prophesy unto the wind, and the breath came into them, and they lived.

So also when the apostles went forth at the command of Jesus, to preach the Word of life to thousands "dead in trespasses and sins," an agitation was felt wherever they came; and multitudes were turned unto the Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes thus to the Ephesian church: "In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation;" also to the Thessalonians, "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only," (like Ezekiel's first prophesying,) "but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance."

A quickening influence accompanied the word; and souls, before dead in sins, were quickened and saved by almighty grace. "For this cause," says the apostle, "we thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God, which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works also in you who believe." James, in like manner, plainly declares, "of his own will he begat us with the word of truth." Peter, again, fully confirms this doctrine: "Being born not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever."

"The word of the Lord endures forever; and this is the word, which by the Gospel is preached unto you." Surely, then, may the Messenger of peace say to a ruined world, "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." His duty is to preach the word. The promise of God is, "it shall not return unto me void." Our blessed Lord, in his beautiful parable of the sower, compares the word of God to seed sown on various grounds. There is the hard-beaten pathway, which cannot receive the seed: it lies on the surface, and is devoured by the fowls of the air.

There is the rocky ground, lightly covered with earth, which admits indeed the seed; but, affording from its shallowness no moisture, in seasons of heat and drought the plant withers away. There is the thorny ground, so covered with weeds and brambles, that the seed, if it spring up at all, can bring no fruit to perfection. There is the good ground, which being ploughed and broken up, is brought into a proper state to admit the scattered grain from the sower's hand, and plentifully rewards his toil.

Wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached, there the good seed of the word is sown. The soil is the human heart. Careless hearers receive no good whatever from the most faithful preaching of the Gospel. Mere carnal excitements are of short duration, while the stony heart remains unchanged. Worldly riches, cares, and pleasures check the growth of the Gospel in the soul. One soil, and only one, is good; that is, a heart prepared by divine grace; a heart deeply impressed with the command of God; "break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns, lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it;" a

heart groaning under the burden of conscious guilt, and crying out, "what must I do to be saved?"

Such a heart, like soil that has been ploughed and broken up, is prepared to receive the precious seed of Gospel grace; those glad tidings of great joy which proclaim pardon and peace through a crucified Redeemer. According to the strength of faith, is the produce which this blessed soul yields, in some thirty, in some sixty, in some a hundred fold. Fruit is invariably produced by such a soil in a greater or less degree; it is "the ground which the Lord has blessed." Happy is he who abounds in the fruits of righteousness, for Jesus has declared, "herein is my father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples."

Now, if the word of God, or the great truths drawn from that word, be the instrument of our regeneration; if a spiritual change be thus effected by spiritual means; how invaluable are the two great blessings which a God of mercy has bestowed upon mankind, that is, "the Scriptures of the prophets," and "the preaching of Jesus Christ." Paul knew their value when he wrote, "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him- to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!

Amen." Romans 16:25-27. Thus the wisdom, as well as the grace of God, is manifested in appointing the Holy Scriptures and a preached Gospel, as the two grand instruments in the hands of the eternal Spirit, for the bringing of all nations to the obedience of faith. If such be the great authority, and such the sure foundation, on which Bible and Missionary societies are established, what must we think of those who, professing to be guardians of the truth, labor to paralyze the exertions, or suppress the endeavors, of the zealous servants of Christ, whose only aim is to extend the knowledge of salvation among the perishing millions of mankind, by those very means which infinite love has ordained for our present and future happiness?

From lack of due consideration, some people confound the regeneration of the soul with the rite of baptism, and suppose that every person baptized is invariably born again, during the celebration of that sacred ordinance. A man cannot be born twice in a spiritual, any more than in a natural sense. If an infant be truly regenerated in baptism, (and who dare limit the Holy One of Israel?) he will, no doubt, manifest the change by corresponding fruits, at least in childhood, before the influence of bad example has unhappily corrupted his renewed nature.

But does not the painful experience of almost every family testify, that infants in general unfold the sinful powers of their souls, without manifesting one genuine fruit of the Holy Spirit? Lies, dissimulation, and perverseness in childhood--frivolity and licentiousness in youth--ambition and love of the world, in manhood--covetousness and peevishness, in old age: awfully prove the soul to be dead in sin, and an heir of hell. Should the Almighty transform a child after the holy image of its Savior, when presented to him in baptism, this would only evidence the sovereign mercy and grace of a compassionate God, but does not disprove the former statement of facts.

Man, under the Christian economy, as under the Jewish economy, is not necessarily and invariably changed by the outward rite either of baptism or circumcision: for Paul expressly declares, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of

men, but of God." Thousands, however, are turned from darkness unto light, through the grace of God, accompanying the faithful preaching of the Gospel.

Those who have been baptized, and have grown up in the visible Church in the commission of every crime, have been converted from the error of their way, and made the humble, holy followers of Jesus, through the word of his grace. The change produced by the Spirit, when thus bringing the truth to the heart, is radical and universal. They become, in every sense, new creatures. They are quite different from what they were before. Surely, then, all must confess, that the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, when wielded by the Almighty Spirit, through the instrumentality of men appointed to preach to a world of sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ.

So invaluable to fallen man is the Gospel of salvation, that the apostle exhorted the Thessalonians to pray for himself and his fellow-laborers, "that the word of the Lord might have free course, and be glorified." There is something peculiarly impressive in the object of the petition--"have free course." When the Gospel was first preached, it met with continual opposition. Yet, like some mighty river, checked in its progress by opposing rocks, it forced its way, and fertilized all the regions through which it bent its course.

The Gospel still flows onwards, and shall continue to flow, until the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. This prayer is always needful, because the enmity of the human heart is in every age the same. In the first family, we find a Cain opposing the work of faith and love. The same spirit continues to manifest itself, wherever the worship of the true God is established. The Israelites misused their prophets who spoke to them the word of the Lord, "stoning some and killing some."

The pagan powers, as well as the Jewish rulers, set themselves against the Lord and against his anointed. The holy apostles of our Lord were called to perpetual sufferings, while they spread abroad, through a preached Gospel, a Savior's dying love. Papal Rome has long carried on the work of slaughter among the sheep of Christ, checking, by fire, tortures, and anathemas, the progress of genuine Christianity, lest the pure, unadulterated word of God should have free course and be glorified.

No wonder, then, that the thunders of the Vatican are heard to roar against the most blessed of all human institutions, the British and Foreign Bible Society. But the Gospel has other enemies, who labor to check its progress. Infidelity directs the shafts of ridicule against its holy mysteries. Socinianism, under the specious name of rational Christianity, seeks to rob the Gospel of its brightest jewel, "God manifest in the flesh." Indifference, worldly-mindedness, formality, and hypocrisy, while they render the mere nominal professors of Christianity barren as the sand, tend more to check the spread of the truth, than all the united attacks of its most hostile foes.

There is, however, a goodly company of faithful Christians who delight in the Gospel of Christ, and whose lives are devoted to advance its progress throughout the earth. These are the happy servants of the Lord, who pray in secret, and are willing to spend and be spent, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. They meet with a double hindrance; the one outward, from the enmity of the world; the other inward, from the sin which dwells in them. Yet they are enabled, through grace, to press forward, and to help forward the work of the Lord.

Oh that my station may ever be among this blessed flock! Lord, make me one of the humble laborers in your vineyard. Give me a heart to receive the truth in the love of it, and to feel its power. Teach me to pray with holy fervor, "Your kingdom come;" and to rejoice in every opening prospect of that blessed period, when the earth shall be filled with your glory. Even now, the morning streaks begin to appear on the

distant mountains: even now, the Sun of righteousness is arising with healing in his beams.

Oh what glorious times are dawning On a dark and ruined world! It is the long-expected morning; Satan from his seat is hurled. Hallelujah--Amen. Hark! the jubilee horn is sounding, Gladsome notes are echoed round; Every heart, with joy resounding, Hails the Gospel's welcome sound. Hallelujah--Amen As the light is still advancing, Backward shrinks the hellish foe; Faith, through future ages glancing, Views another Eden glow. Hallelujah--Amen. Idols now--the spell discovered-- Dashed as potters' vessels, fall; Slaves, from Pagan chains recovered, Own Messiah Lord of all. Hallelujah--Amen. Hasten, Lord, the joyful season; Claim the heathen as your own; Break the pride of human reason; Reign as Sovereign Lord alone. Hallelujah--Amen.

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