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Labourers needed in the harvest of Christ.



A SERMON,
DELIVERED AT SUTTON, (S. P.)

MARCH 18, 1812,

AS PRELIMINARY TO THE FORMATION
OF A SOCIETY,

IN THE

COUNTY OF WORCESTER,

FOR THE AID OF

PIOUS YOUNG MEN,

WITH A VIEW TO THE MINISTRY.

BY BENJAMIN WOOD,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN UPTON.

PRINTED AT WORCESTER, BY ISAAC STURTEVANT.

SOLD BY ISAIAH THOMAS, JUN. WORCESTER AND BOSTON;—

ALSO, BY LINCOLN & EDMANDS, NO. 53, AND SAMUEL

T. ARMSTRONG, NO. 50, CORNHILL, BOSTON;

AND BY MARK NEWMAN, ANDOVER.

1812.



SERMON.

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LUKE x. 2.

THEREFORE SAID HE UNTO THEM, THE HARVEST TRULY IS GREAT, BUT THE LABOURERS ARE FEW : PRAY YE THEREFORE THE LORD OF THE HARVEST, THAT HE WOULD SEND FORTH LABOURERS INTO HIS HARVEST.

CHRI^ST is King in Zion. Under this character, he has the sole and exclusive right of calling, and commissioning men to labour for the good of the church ; and to extend the triumphs of the cross. Hence those whom he sends into the harvest, on this important business are called his ambassadors, the ministers of the Lord of Hosts. Having sent forth the twelve Apostles, Christ appointed a band of seventy auxiliaries to assist them in carrying forward the benevolent purposes of his grace. A great field of missionary labour was before them. They found much work to be done : And were they

sufficient to do the whole? Could they take every stand, that was needful to be taken? Could they sound the alarm, in the hearing of all who were defiled with sin, and exposed to the wrath of the Lamb? Let us hear the opinion of Christ, and abide by his decision. He declares "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." The import of these words is plain, and their application easy. By the harvest is meant the world of mankind, and by the labourers the ministers of the gospel. With this explanation, we shall proceed to apply them to the present occasion, presuming they will not be considered unappropriate.

This declaration "*The harvest is great,*" is as true now, as when uttered by Christ. What an immense number of inhabitants is spread over the face of the world! Though death has continued to triumph over men of every nation, climate, colour, language, and government, yet instead of decreasing, the number has surprisingly increased. This is very evident. Look into our *own* country. How have its inhabitants multiplied! From thousands we have risen to millions. But the number of people, in the United States, is but a *little handful*, when com-

pared to the rest of the world. And the greater part of these unnumbered millions too, are without the means of grace. It is believed, from good authority, that in Europe, there are one hundred and thirty seven millions of Mahometans, Papists, and Pagans. If we survey Asia, we shall find that moral darkness pervades the most of that immense territory. In *that* quarter of the globe, there are, doubtless, not less than six hundred millions of Mahometans and Pagans. In Africa, it is judged, that fifty two millions are enveloped in Pagan, and Mahometan darkness. And in the North, West, and South of the United States, there is a land, where Satan has for a long time, holden his cruel and bloody empire. Upon a moderate calculation, one hundred and ten millions of the inhabitants are Pagans, and Roman Catholicks. Surely the harvest is great ; but it will appear still greater, if the natural state of mankind is taken into consideration. The scriptures represent *all men*, in their natural state, as being dead in trespasses and sins—possessing the carnal mind which is *enmity* against God. This most solemn truth, has been abundantly confirmed, by observation, and experience. Mankind have in all ages, given the most clear and decided proof of their *total* apostacy from God. This has been given, not

only, by the poor heathens, destitute of religious instruction, but even by those, brought up under the glorious light of the gospel. Such have exhibited plenary evidence, that they had not the love of God reigning in their hearts. They have made light of the great salvation, which the gospel reveals. Calls, warnings, and invitations have been disregarded. They have invaded the rights of Jehovah, and refused subjection to his righteous government. They have loved themselves, supremely, and pursued an interest, in opposition to the authority of God, and the best good of his kingdom. This is true of all men, whilst in a natural state, without exception. To characters of this description, Christ observed, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you." Unless sinners experience a change of *heart*, effected by the agency of the Holy Ghost, they must die in their sins, and lie down in eternal despair. Means and ends are connected, both in the moral, as well, as in the natural world. Thus the ministry of reconciliation, under the government of Christ, is happily adapted to meliorate the moral condition of men, and promote their highest interest. Hence it is infinitely important, that mankind in their fallen condition, have exhibited before them the true character of God. His revealed pleasure

should be shewn, his requirements illustrated, the terms of pardon explained, and the duty of repentance urged, by all the motives which can be produced—motives, arising from life and death, blessing and cursing, probation and judgment, time and eternity, heaven and hell. “Go ye, said Christ, to the Apostles, into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Go, and preach *my gospel* in the hearing of perishing sinners. The command is limited to no nation. The Apostles understood it thus. With this impression, therefore, upon their minds “*they went forth, preaching every where.*”

In these regions of sin, there are some who have imbibed the spirit of Christ, and are desiring to be fed with the sincere milk of the word. It is necessary, therefore, that sinners are not only, faithfully warned of their danger, and exhorted to flee from the wrath to come, but, that saints also, be encouraged, to persevere, in the way of holiness, by the great and precious promises of the gospel. They are to be urged, by the solemn injunction of him who said, “Ye are my friends if ye keep my commandments,” by the example of Jesus, by the acts of the Apostles, and the sufferings of the Martyrs, to quit themselves like men and be strong. If, then, men must be instructed, if the gospel

must be preached to all nations, if sinners must be warned, if churches must be planted, and the ordinances of the gospel administered, what a harvest, my Brethren, is before us,—a harvest, calling for a host of able, and pious labourers, to put in the sickle, and reap down the fields.

“ *But the labourers are few.* ”—Were we to confine our views, within the limits of *this* County, the call for labourers would not appear so urgent and pressing. Great thanks are due to the Lord of the harvest, that he has so graciously noticed this part of the vineyard, and supplied, so generally, Churches with Pastors, and Societies with Teachers. But our views are not *here* to be circumscribed. We must look abroad. A great portion of the New-England States is running over to briars and thorns, assuming the appearance of uncultivated fields in a moral point of light for the want of labourers. It is believed, that upon a moderate calculation, in these States there are six hundred thousand, who are destitute of the stated means of grace. In many places you will find churches planted, but no Pastors ; Societies, but no Teachers, and multitudes who never heard, either a prayer or a sermon. We find by reports, made from time to time by missionaries to the Board of missions, that the harvest, is, not only great, but the la-

bourers are *few*. Calls for missionary aid, are continually increasing; especially among the new settlements. The Macedonian cry "*Come over and help us,*" with affecting importunity, is heard from different directions. The untutored Tribes of the wilderness, whose souls are precious, and who must shortly appear in judgment with the rest of mankind, who enjoy the gospel, have few to point them to the cross of Calvary—to the blood of cleansing. No less affecting is the condition of more than *one* million of poor slaves in our own country. How distressing is their situation! without religious instruction,—human beings, treated more like *brutes* than like men, and yet destined to the joys of Heaven, or the pains of hell. How long have these miserable creatures been neglected! O that the time to favour *them* were come; that men could be found, who would go and preach unto them Jesus and the resurrection. But, my Brethren, shall we find labourers equal to the harvest, were we to take a view of that widely extended field across the Atlantic, where dwell the stupid Hottentot, the credulous Hindo, and the wandering Tartar? *There* labourers are few. There are millions, and millions of inhabitants in the eastern world, that have none to break unto them the bread of life.

But, my hearers, what shall be done?—Have we nothing to do? Most certainly. Duty is plain. “*Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.*” Prayer is a most important and interesting duty, devolving on men. The command is “Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”—But does prayer comprise our *whole* duty? Has the farmer nothing to do in the Spring, but pray that he might have a crop in the Autumn? Has the mariner, sailing to the Indies, nothing to do, but pray, that his vessel may be conducted, safely, to the place of her destination? When we see a fellow creature in distress, for food, or raiment, have we nothing to do, but pray that his wants may be supplied? And when we see such a great call for labourers, have we nothing to do, but pray that the Lord of the vineyard would send them forth into his harvest? Yes, my brethren, we have *other* duties to perform besides this. If we ask of Christ any blessing, we ought to use all the necessary means for its attainment. Suppose a person were to make this prayer, “*Thy kingdom come,*” he is not to stop here. For duty requires him to pursue such measures, as may appear best adapted to advance

the interest of this kingdom. Prayer and good works are united. They go hand in hand. James, an inspired apostle, made this to appear when he said, “ Shew me thy faith *without* thy works, and I will shew thee my faith *by* my works.”—Prayer without works is dead, as well as faith without works. Prayer stimulates to action.—It had this effect upon the Prophets. They not only prayed much, but did much to promote the cause of Zion. It had the same effect, upon the Apostles. They were ready to travel from place to place, and from city to city, when the cause of Christ, and the best good of their fellow men required it; and even, to expose themselves to peculiar hardships and trials. The love of Christ constrained them to do and suffer all things for his sake. Whatever exclusive privileges the Apostles enjoyed, yet prayer is the same in spirit and substance in all ages; and will dispose men to make ardent exertions, for the accomplishment of any noble, and important object.

Considering the immensity of the harvest, and the pressing call for labourers, the formation of a society to assist *pious*, indigent young men of promising talents to a suitable education, with a view to the christian ministry, is contemplated. Many difficulties may be started, and even objections made to the proposed object; but be-

fore *resolution* they will disappear like the morning dew before the rising sun. Motives powerful to justify an attempt to form such a society, as what is *now* proposed, are at hand. Permit me, then, to call the attention of this auditory to a few, which may be considered the most prominent.

It is worthy of consideration, that there are men, who probably would be highly useful in the christian ministry, if they had means to defray the expense of an education, to qualify themselves, for this important work. They know not what to do. They dare not go forward, for they see *no way* to accomplish the object. Thus their talents lie buried, and their usefulness in a great measure is lost to the church and society for the want of a little assistance. Now a society, formed upon the plan proposed, if it were to meet with success from the christian publick, would be enabled to take such young men under their patronage, and afford them pecuniary aid. There are others of a like description, who, after surmounting many difficulties, obtain the honours of College. But still they are trammelled with embarrassments. The force of this moral precept is felt by them, in all its weight, "*Pay thy debts.*" What can they do? Their Theological studies for a time must now

be suspended, and a stand taken in a school, or in some other business, to enable them to discharge their contracts. Accordingly, they are not introduced into the field of harvest, so soon, as they might have been, were it not for their embarrassed situation. Or should they enter upon a regular course of studies with a view to the ministry, *before* they are in a measure relieved, they would still feel a weight, which would serve greatly to depress their spirits, and injure their usefulness, perhaps, through life. And besides, are not those, who have been accustomed to hardships, the *very men* that are now wanted as missionaries? Ministers, and especially missionaries must expect to meet with perils, discouragements, and disappointments. Men, brought up in affluent circumstances, and unaccustomed to fatigue, cannot endure hardships like those, educated in the school of adversity.—The latter, not only know what it is to be in want, but they know, also, what it is to be dependent for support. And the various changes through which they have passed, have prepared them to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Further, is not the object contemplated benevolent? The appeal is made to christians—it is made to *all* who are disposed to reason and

reflect. Does it not wear a most friendly aspect in favour of the Church of God ? In favour of perishing multitudes ? And in favour of society in general ? In this way, some churches may be supplied with pastors, some sinners brought home to Christ, and some destructive errors, which are now prevailing, receive a fatal check. The people in new settlements are greatly exposed to be misled ; and especially, the rising generation. Many are going about under the character of teachers, who need teaching themselves,—declaiming against the peculiar doctrines of grace, dividing society into parties,—speaking against a learned ministry,—and against the order of churches. This is a great evil ; and it is most seriously felt in many places. Is it not benevolent to make exertions to suppress the progress of such destructive consequences ? If the object now proposed be carried into effect, it will help to form a barrier against this great evil. For the number would be multiplied, who would be able “ by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” In giving existence to such a society, we hope *suspicion* will not consider it, a political combination. We solemnly disclaim, in this publick manner, all party purposes whatever. Instead of opposing, we are uniting with mission-

ary establishments. We heartily wish them success. And as an evidence too, and in zeal for the common cause, we are calling together our strength for the purpose of educating pious, indigent young men, with a view to the christian ministry ; and who, when qualified for the arduous work, may go forth, trusting in Israel's God, as David met the champion of Gath. Our object we trust, ultimately respects the glory of God, the cause of Christ, and the salvation of sinners. If so, it is benevolent, and therefore *ought* to be encouraged.

We observe again, To assist the poor is not only commanded, but is essential to true religion. Obedience to the divine commands must be universal. That man's religion is defective, who pretends to heed one command, but disregards another equally binding. It is therefore asserted, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in *one* point he is guilty of all." That love which will make no sacrifices, when duty calls is no better than "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbol." What saith the scripture?—"If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, *depart* in peace, be you warmed and filled, what doth it profit? Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up

the bowels of compassion from him “ How dwelleth *the love of God in him?*” If Divine Providence confer property on men, it is *always* accompanied with this injunction, “ That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.” It is in the power of such to discharge some of the most delightful offices of human life. They can give to the needy, comfort the distressed, and aid benevolent institutions, by opening their hands with generous liberality. And where there are ability and a call for acts of munificence, *negligence* is an open violation of the precepts of both tables of the law.

The great things which are now in operation to promote the cause of Christ, and the success which appears to accompany the adopted means, afford encouragement to proceed in the object before us. The period in which we live is truly eventful. Christians seem to be roused from their slumbers, and unprecedented exertions are making to publish to all nations the gospel of Christ. The means *now* in operation, for the accomplishment of this most desirable event, are truly noticeable. Who can look on without astonishment! Glory beams from the cross, and dazzling splendour excites admiration! Bible, Missionary, and Tract societies are formed—these

are streams which water the heritage of God.— In exertions, for disseminating divine truth, we are not alone. In the eastern world, the protestants of Europe are awake to missionary interests.

The happy effects of these numerous societies, formed in different parts of Christendom have corresponded in some good degree, with the sacrifices which have been made. Whilst the friends of Christ have been planting, the Lord of the harvest, has been pleased to give the increase— “*working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*” Now in view of these things, we are called upon, with impressive emphasis, to unite *exertion* with prayer and be ready to stand in our lot. Shall we not lay one stone, or drive one pin in this building? Shall we look on as idle spectators, whilst we see the friends of God so generally labouring? Rather, let us unite with them, and feel ourselves bound by every tie, to serve God, with all our talents, and with all our strength.

If we attend to the predictions, respecting the kingdom of Christ, and the spread of the gospel, we are furnished with an additional motive, stimulating to action. The rising glory of Christ's kingdom, and the universal spread of *his* gospel are things foretold in scripture. In this both the Old and New Testaments perfectly agree. There

is a day coming, when the Church shall emerge from obscurity, and put on her beautiful garments—when the gospel shall be preached to all the nations of the world. This is what we are to expect according to prophesy. For it is declared, “ *He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession—All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.*”

But, my brethren, how is this to be accomplished? Are we looking for miracles? Are we to sit still, and expect some providential interposition, like the sun, standing still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon? God is *able* to carry forward the benevolent purposes of his grace in this way, but we are not to expect it. He works by means. If the kingdom of Christ is to spread through all nations, the agency of man is to be employed in accomplishing it. If the standard of the cross is to be erected at Hindostan, money must be raised, a vessel fitted out, and missionaries must hazard their lives in the attempt. “ *How shall they hear without a preacher?*” The dispensation of the word is the established mean for converting sinners. Human efforts are concerned, in the works of Providence, and are they to be excluded in the most impor-

tant of all—in the spread of the gospel, and in the erection of Churches among those throngs of miserable pilgrims who are devoting themselves to the impure and sanguinary worship of Jugger-naut? No, the earth shall *help* the woman. God can press into his service, whatever means he pleases. And he is now mustering his hosts. See what is taking place. Kingdoms are shaking. Thrones are tottering. Heralds are going forth in many directions, “To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God.” The various nations of India, are receiving the word of God, translated into their languages. In this way, God will establish his kingdom, from the “River even to the ends of the earth.” When therefore we consider that means and ends are connected, we are furnished with a weighty motive to go on, and leave the issue with the Lord of the harvest.

One motive more remains, yet to be added, which is *the reward*. He, who gives to the poor, or for the purpose of aiding any benevolent object from pious motives, will receive a reward; not on the footing of debt, but of grace. It is therefore declared, the liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth, shall be watered also himself. Give and it shall be given unto you.” —“He, that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto

the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again." "He that giveth to the poor shall not lack." "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth." The widow, casting in her two mites into the treasury of the Lord, will be graciously noticed in the great day of accounts. Every cent, given with a temper of mind, corresponding to the spirit of the gospel will be carefully registered in the records of heaven. A reward is promised to the lowest act of benevolence—even, to giving of a cup of cold water! O then what a rich, and lasting reward is reserved for *such*, as give much, and do much for the promotion of the cause of Christ in the world. For them, are reserved in store, crowns of distinguished brightness, ensigns of everlasting honour. In serving Christ, and the souls of men, they are serving themselves; and in promoting the interests of others, they most effectual advance their own.

The motives exhibited in view of the object of the present meeting, are now submitted for your consideration. If they have any weight, it is presumed, you will act under their influence. The important question in a few moments is to be decided, SHALL A SOCIETY BE FORMED. God, and Christ, Angels and men, will witness the decision. It is hoped the result will be such,

as will bear the inspection of the last great day. Should a society be formed, having for its object the glory of God, in assisting pious, indigent young men to an education, for the christian ministry, its success will greatly depend on your exertions. To you, therefore, my Brethren and Friends, we look. And we look, with high expectations, that you are *ready* to second the object. We ask *not* for ourselves, but for *young men* whose hearts glow with all the ardour of holy zeal--for *young men*, who are anxiously desiring an education, that they might enter with others into the harvest, but see no way to obtain it. In asking for *them* we ask for Christ. "In as much, as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Shall the Saviour, then, be denied? Did he deny you? Did he shut up his bowels of compassion, when you were poor and helpless? Go to the manger, go to the garden, go to the summit of Calvary, and see what Jesus hath done. He who was rich became poor. Here is an exhibition of amazing charity. "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ." All have something to do. If all have not property to give; then *such* as have not must aid the object, by their counsels, by their prayers, and by their examples. Shall support be deni-

ed? What is money when put in competition with the salvation of sinners? All the riches of the world would be a price inadequate to redeem *one* when lost. Now a few dollars, thus appropriated, may be a mean in the hand of God of saving multitudes from the pit of destruction, and of enriching their souls with never ending triumphs. “Behold what a great matter a *little* fire kindleth!” If, then, the harvest is great, if labourers are wanted, if the souls of men are precious, if the honour of Christ is an object of our desire, and if we wish to lift up the standard in the defence of truth, let us, *this day* erect a monument of our zeal, which may be had in lasting remembrance when we may be sleeping in the dust.

As it respects us, as it respects this congregation, your opportunities for doing good, will soon be at an end. If, therefore, you have any thing to *do*, if you have any thing to *give* for the actual advancement of the glorious cause of Christ, be pleased to do it quickly. For *the King's business requireth haste*. It will be a distinguished honour to be employed, as instruments in gathering into the kingdom of Christ a rich harvest of souls. Under so pleasing an impression, we would now commit ourselves, and the cause to the direction of him, who is

Lord of the harvest ; believing that he who sows, and, he who reaps will rejoice together ; in that kingdom which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.



