

Are We Trifling With Missions?

Arthur T. Pierson challenges the church of the 1890s—and today—to lay down its materialism in an effort to make the Gospel “speed its way around the globe.”

I am a little afraid that the seeds of a great apostasy are in the Church of God today, that in the midst of this century and its closing decade it should even be questioned whether we could evangelize the world in our generation, when the luxuries alone that crowd our homes, that cover our persons, that are hung upon our walls and stuffed into our library cases, the gold and silver, the jewelry and the ornamentation, the costly furniture in our homes, would of themselves suffice to make the Gospel speed its way around the earth inside of a decade of years.

It is a pretty solemn question whether we ourselves are saved if we allow this state of things to go on much longer. I used to think I was in earnest about missions. I made up my mind that I had been trifling with the whole subject, and I could not get over the conviction that I was trifling with it until I came with my wife and my seven children and said to

God and to His church, “If we can be of more service in foreign lands than here in spreading the Gospel, we will go and take our places in the foreign field.”

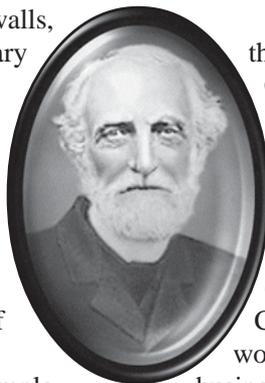
My friends, begin at your garret and go down to your cellar, and make an estimate of the useless things that are lying in the drawers of your bureaus, in the cabinets of your curios, on your walls, and on your library shelves, and wherever the secret treasures of your house are lodged, and consider how far towards the evangelization of the world in this generation the simple sacrifice of your superfluities might go.

Then go down through your conveniences and comforts until you come to the necessities of life, and consider what a marvelous awakening there would be in the Church, and in the world too, if we came to the point of dividing the last crust of bread for the

sake of giving bread to starving men, and consented to go without two coats where there was another man that had none. That is the only way to deal with the question of mission, and any other way of dealing with it is, in a sense, hypocrisy, or at least disingenuous and insincere treatment of our God and of lost souls.

It seems to me that the Church of God is trifling with the whole subject of missions. Why should we not show a spirit of enterprise in the Church such as the world shows in all business schemes?

What is the matter with the Church, that in this nineteenth century she has scarcely one of those great master agencies which men use to carry their inventions to the ends of the earth? Why should we not have a “great church exploration society,” and go forward and pioneer the way into destitute fields, on the basis of inter-denominational comity and courtesy, and put into every field some working force, so that no absolutely destitute place should remain in the



world? Why should we not have a pioneer information bureau, to guide missionaries into new districts?

Why should not the Church agree and covenant that it is as much a matter of necessity to give to the support of missionaries as to come to the Lord’s table or to the prayer meeting, or to make a decently punctual attendance at church? Why should not we have great world agencies to carry on this work for God?

What is the matter with the Church, that she has not learned even from the men of this generation the wisdom that guides them in matters of this world?...

When Francis Xavier stood and looked from the island on which he died, upon the colossal empire of China, he cried out, “O rock, rock! When wilt thou open to my Master?” If Francis Xavier could come back today and look on a world wide open before that Master, and on a Church lying in sluggish idleness in her hammock of ease, one end fastened to mammon and the other end nominally to the Cross, and see that Church supinely looking on the destitution of a thousand millions of the human race, that she might reach in 25 years if she had the energy of mind and the consecration of heart to do it, he would turn from the colossal empire of China and face the Church and say, “O thou rock, thou rock! When wilt thou open to my Master?”

Condensed from “The Evangelization of the World in the Present Generation—How Made a Fact,” a speech delivered by Rev. A.T. Pierson, D.D., at the First International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, Friday, February 27, 1881. Original address found in Student Mission Power, published by William Carey Library Publishers.