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MISSIONS IN THE THOUGHT OF JESUS

by A. M. HARMAN

IN view of our long-standing and close association with the Free Church College, Edinburgh, a contribution to the QUARTERLY from a member of its *Senatus* is always specially welcome. Here, for the first time, we publish a paper by its present Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament. It is based on an address given by Professor Harman at the Scottish Tyndale Fellowship Conference last year.

THE discussion concerning the thought of Jesus in relation to the proclamation of the Gospel to Jew and Gentile is by no means new. The early church fathers were well aware of the apparently contradictory instructions given to the disciples by Jesus and made various attempts to solve the problem, resorting often to allegorizing to overcome the difficulties. In more recent times the question has been approached from different angles and the discussion continues. The present study is concerned solely with the words and activities of Jesus in regard to missions and not with the comments of the evangelists on the ministry of Jesus, even though it may be argued that those comments stem from the teaching which Jesus gave.

I. THE BACKGROUND

At the outset we must view our Lord's concept of missions against the background provided by the Old Testament teaching about missions, and the revelation given in connection with the nativity of Jesus and the work of John the Baptist.

(1) *The Old Testament*

The anchor of all missionary effort lies in the nature and character of God as a self-revealing God who wills to be known by all His creatures. This fact comes to clear expression in the calling of Abraham, who was assured that in him all the families of the earth were to be blessed (Gen. 12: 3). From the period of the Abrahamic covenant there is a gradual increase in revelatory data respecting the ingathering of the Gentiles, until the prophets speak certainly of the Messianic era and the spontaneous coming of the Gentiles to share in the blessings of the New Covenant.¹ Likewise the psalmists depict the subjection of the nations to Jehovah and their conversion to the God of Israel. This is not just a matter of a future vision, but under

¹ Cf. the discussion on the eschatological pilgrimage of the Gentiles in J. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London, 1958), pp. 57ff.

the impact of the subjective element the psalmists express an eager desire to see this vision coming to fulfilment. "Thus a real missionary urge is born out of the eschatological vision of Jehovah and his kingdom. This desire projects itself into the future and breaks out into a direct missionary appeal conceived as addressed to the Gentiles from that standpoint."²

(2) *The New Testament*

(a) *The Nativity*. The thought of the Abrahamic covenant coming to fulfilment with the birth of Christ comes out in Mary's expression of rejoicing in God her Saviour. She explicitly refers to God's remembrance of His mercy in fulfilment of covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants (Lk. 1: 54-55). A fuller reference occurs when Zacharias, "filled with the Holy Spirit", prophesies (Lk. 1: 67), and in his doxology speaks of God's remembering His holy covenant, the oath He swore to Abraham (Lk. 1: 72-73). No mention is made of that part of the Abrahamic covenant which specifically referred to the blessing proceeding to all nations, but it is significant that the redemptive events which form the subject of the doxology are viewed as fulfilling that covenant. Zacharias proceeds to speak of Jesus' mission and alludes to Isaiah 9: 2, the passage which refers to Galilee of the Gentiles and the glory which God was to bestow upon it (cf. Matt. 4: 12ff.).

In the words of Simeon there is further intimation of the universal scope of the Gospel and of the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's kingdom. In addressing God he prays that he may depart in peace, "for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel" (Lk. 2: 30-32). The conjunction in his words is striking. The same salvation is a light to the Gentiles and a glory for the people of Israel. Moreover, in these words of Simeon and the following ones addressed to Mary there is clear indication not only of universal salvation but of divine particularism. "An illumination of the Gentiles seems to be foretold, which will have for its foil the darkness of the unbelief of Israel. . . . Here the idea is that through the unbelief of the Jew the Gentiles will be brought in (cf. Rom. 11: 11ff)."³

(b) *John the Baptist*. The significance of John as the forerunner of Jesus and as the messenger of the covenant is probably to be viewed

² G. Vos, "Eschatology of the Psalter", *Princeton Theological Review*, XVIII (1920), 25.

³ G. Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1959), p. 332. Cf. also the comments on this passage in N. B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Luke to Christ* (London, 1951), pp. 51ff.

in the light of ancient covenant administration.⁴ John came as the last messenger of the old covenant with an ultimatum to the rebellious Israel, calling for repentance and warning of judgment to come. If the required fruit was not produced by the trees they would be cut down, and the axe was already poised to inflict this judgment. There was no point in his hearers relying upon earthly relationships such as claiming Abraham as their father, for, says John, "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Lk. 3: 8). As a number of commentators note, it is possible that John was in these words referring to the ingathering of the Gentiles into God's kingdom. In the Lucan account of John's preaching this reference to raising up children to Abraham from the stones follows upon the quotation from Isaiah 40: 3-5 in which the expression occurs, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God".

Then too it was John who perceived that Jesus was God's lamb who was bearing the sin of the world (Jn. 1: 29). Not only do we have pre-supposed in his words the recognition of the transcendent character and office of Jesus, but an indication that His expiatory work was in marked contrast to that effected under the Old Testament sacrificial system. The only Old Testament sacrifice which even made provision for the sins of the whole congregation of Israel was that on the Day of Atonement. However John declares that our Lord's expiatory work has reference not just to the sins of Israel, but to the sin of the world. While there is no explicit reference to the Gentiles yet it is clear by implication that the scope of the Messiah's work is to be universal.

II. CHRIST'S TEACHING IN THE PRE-RESURRECTION PERIOD

With this background in mind we must now approach the teaching of Jesus on this question. The expectation is created by the Old Testament disclosures and the early New Testament revelation that the appearance of the Messiah would usher in the new era in which the Gentiles would be incorporated into the kingdom of God.

When Jesus appeared in the synagogue at Nazareth He interpreted His own mission in the light of the Old Testament, and read the prophecy in Isaiah 61: 1ff., declaring that this scripture was that day fulfilled in the ears of His hearers (Lk. 4: 21). This again was from an Old Testament passage dealing with the ingathering of the Gentiles. But more significant still are the words of Jesus which follow. He referred to Elijah's being sent not to one of the widows in

⁴ For a discussion of John's mission in the light of covenant administration see M. G. Kline, "Oath and Ordeal Signs", *Westminster Theological Journal*, XXVII (1965), 127ff.

Israel but to the widow at Zarephath, and of the many lepers in Israel in Elisha's day but the only one healed was Naaman the Syrian. In the context where Jesus had quoted the proverb, "No prophet is accepted in his own country", there is the implication that His own ministry, just as that of Elijah and Elisha, was to extend to the Gentiles after His rejection by Israel.

Now when the evidence in the Gospels relating to the ministry of Jesus is reviewed, do we find Him ministering to the Gentiles, even if such a ministry is subsidiary to that directed to the Jewish people?

(a) His ministry of teaching and healing was attended by large crowds from Galilee, Judaea, Jerusalem, Idumaea, from beyond Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon (Mk. 3: 7-8). Matthew records that His fame went throughout all Syria and that many sick and demon-possessed were brought to Him and were healed (Matt. 4: 24), while Mark 7: 24 speaks of a ministry in the borders of Tyre and Sidon. It is not sufficient to dismiss as Jeremias does the account in Mark 3: 7-8 with the claim that the enumeration "does not rest on any concrete tradition",⁵ or to say that Idumaea is "inserted without any adequate evidence merely to round off the geographical description".⁶ These accounts record in general terms a ministry which quite possibly involved Gentiles, though there is little specific evidence to provide confirmation of this.

(b) There are two recorded healings involving Gentiles. The first is that of the centurion's sick servant (Matt. 8: 5-13). It must be conceded that the centurion was possibly a proselyte,⁷ for the Jews thought highly of him and he had built them a synagogue (Lk. 7: 5), but he was still distinct from those of Israel (Matt. 8: 10). The faith of the centurion was commended by Christ who declared that He had not found such great faith in Israel, and He went on to refer to the ingathering of the Gentiles at the last day, while the children of the kingdom would be cast out (Matt. 8: 11-12).

The other case is that of the Gerasene demoniac recorded in Mark 5: 1-20. While it is not stated that the man was a Gentile, yet the fact that the event took place in a predominantly Greek area (manifested here by the presence of the swine) and the expression used by the man in verse 7 in addressing Jesus, "Son of the Most High God" (cf. Acts 16: 17), suggest that he was a Gentile.

(c) Activities of Jesus amongst the Samaritans also form part of the Gospel narratives. In this connection the events recorded in

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33, n. 1.

⁷ J. B. Mayor, "Did Christ Contemplate the Admission of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of Heaven?" *Expositor*, 7th Series, VIII (1909), 397.

John 4 are highly significant. First there was the revelation of Christ to the Samaritan woman, followed by the woman's testimony which resulted in many coming to believe in Jesus. Later many more believed because of Jesus' own teaching during the two days He stayed with them (Jn. 4: 40-42). In Luke 17: 11-19 there is the account of the healing of the ten lepers, one of whom was a Samaritan. That man was the only one who turned back and glorified God, falling at Jesus' feet and thanking Him. Consistent with Jesus' attitude to the Samaritans was His use of the figure of the despised Samaritan as the example of true love to one's neighbour (Lk. 10: 25-37), and His rebuking the disciples for their anger when the inhabitants of a Samaritan village refused to recognize Him because He was on His way to Jerusalem (Lk. 9: 51-56).

(d) In His public teaching Jesus definitely spoke in terms which denoted a universal mission. This is especially so in some of the parables, such as that of the royal wedding (Matt. 22: 1-14), where those gathered in from the highways and byways depict the Gentiles. The same holds true for the parable of the great supper (Lk. 14: 15-24), where those gathered in from the highways and the hedges in order to fill the house are manifestly the Gentiles. We also have Christ's quotation of Isaiah 58: 7b in Mark 11: 17, "My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer", which is applied to the temple, and His statement that at the coming of the Son of Man "all nations" will be gathered before Him (Matt. 25: 32). In John's Gospel there is the reference to the "other sheep" whom Christ must bring, and of them He says, "They shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, one shepherd" (Jn. 10: 16). In the same Gospel we have the account of the voice from heaven when the Greeks came seeking Jesus. Following the heavenly voice He said, ". . . And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12: 32). While these references all speak of a future mission embracing the Gentiles there is no explicit mention in them of a mission by Christ Himself.

This evidence amounts to the recognition that although Jesus' ministry in the main was to the Jews, yet He ministered in predominantly Gentile areas too, and bore witness to Samaritans and Gentiles. However, there are two other passages which seem to imply a ministry exclusively among the Jews. The first of these is the account concerning the Syrophenician woman (Matt: 15: 21-28; cf. Mk. 7: 26 where she is definitely called a Gentile woman). She came with a request to Jesus, but He refused to answer her. After the disciples asked for her to be sent away He said, "I am not sent but

unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel". Upon her repeated entreaty He insisted that the children must first be filled for it was not right to take the children's bread in order to cast it to the dogs. Here Jesus was using the term "dogs" as it was conventionally used by the Jews in reference to the Gentiles. "He desired to see whether the woman was ready to take such a lowly position in order to win healing."⁸ The woman accepted that position and her daughter was healed. In no sense was this a reward for her wit, but for her faith.

The second passage is the charge to the disciples (Matt. 10: 5ff.; Mk. 6: 7ff.). The contexts in which this charge are recorded are striking. In Mark the charge follows the reference to the unbelief at Nazareth, while in Matthew it comes immediately after Jesus had bidden the disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth more labourers into His harvest, seeing that the harvest was plentiful and the labourers few. When commanded to go out on their mission the disciples were plainly told, "Go not to the Gentiles and enter not into the province of Samaria; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". We must recognize that it is implied by these words "that the idea of a mission outside the bounds of the Jewish people was in the minds of the disciples when they were sent out on their first missionary journey. The restriction would have been needless if the disciples had not thought of such a mission as a possibility".⁹ Nevertheless the definite restriction was made, although the use of the comparative "rather", "Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel", shows that no absolute or permanent prohibition on the evangelization of the Gentiles was intended.¹⁰ Jesus had already told His disciples that they were the salt of the earth (Matt. 5: 13) and the light of the world (Matt. 5: 14), and in this same context in Matthew 10 He tells them that they will be brought before governors and kings for His sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles (Matt. 10: 18). Later in the Gospels, words of Jesus are recorded which envisage a world-wide proclamation of the Gospel. Typical passages are Mark 13: 10 (cf. Matt. 24: 14), "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations", and Mark 14: 19 (cf. Matt. 26: 13), "Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her".

The attempt has been made to evade the implications of these passages just cited. First, there is the argument advanced by Jeremias¹¹ that these declarations refer not to the proclamation by

⁸ R. A. Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London, 1961), p. 123.

⁹ J. Reid, "Missions", *DCG*, II, 194. Cf. also the comments of J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁰ Mayor, *op. cit.*, 396.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 22f.

men but by angels at the last day. Thus on his view these are references to an apocalyptic event. Secondly, there is the argument put forward by Kilpatrick,¹² who, on the basis of altered punctuation, avoids the obvious interpretation of the words in Mark 13: 9. He says: "If we let Marcan usage determine even the punctuation, the evangelist foretells a world-wide mission to Judaism, but none to the Gentiles. The text, which, in an English version, appears the clearest evidence for a Gentile mission is an illusion".¹³ Of these two arguments the first is the weaker, for Jeremias admits that Matthew and Mark understood the saying of Jesus to refer to the world-wide mission of the church, and he has to import ideas into the passages in question in order to obtain the interpretation for which he argues. Kilpatrick's case rests on more substantial grounds, though even the adoption of the altered punctuation he suggests does not necessarily exclude from Mark 13: 9 the mission to the Gentiles.¹⁴ After examining Kilpatrick's arguments Beasley-Murray concludes that "on critical, historical and theological grounds, there appears to be no sufficient reason for refusing the authenticity and plain meaning of Mark 13: 10".¹⁵

Two questions now confront us regarding the pre-resurrection ministry of Jesus and His disciples. First, how are we to explain the restriction of the ministry to Israel in the pre-resurrection period as compared with the universal scope of it after the resurrection? Secondly, what is the explanation of the fact that although Jesus explicitly said that His mission was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet He did extend His ministry on some occasions to Samaritans and Gentiles?

In seeking an answer to the first of these questions we must refer again to the role of the covenant messenger who had to carry out a judicial process. Not only is the mission of John to be seen in this light, but that of Jesus Himself. This is apparent especially when Jesus spoke in the parable of the vineyard of a succession of divine messengers. John's rejection seems to have been in Jesus' mind as the parable follows immediately after Jesus' reply to the chief priests and elders regarding the origin of John's baptism. In the parable the son who was sent and killed by the tenants is without doubt intended to signify Jesus Himself. "Because Israel had repudiated his lordship

¹² G. D. Kilpatrick, "The Gentile Mission in Mark and Mark 13 9-11", *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford, 1955), pp. 145-158.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁴ Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen* (London, 1957), p. 44, and C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 398f.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

and despised his ultimatum, God would inflict upon them the vengeance of the covenant. In fact, Jesus, as the final messenger of the covenant, was declaring the verdict against Israel in the very process of speaking unto them this parable".¹⁶

Because Jesus was the last messenger of the old covenant it is not surprising in the least that He should have directed His ministry almost exclusively to Israel since the Old Testament period has not yet run its course. The historical Israel was still in existence. The thought of the old covenant giving way to the new covenant brings us to the significance of the death of Jesus for the universal mission. Through the suffering and death of the Messiah salvation was to be opened "for many", Isaiah had foretold (Isa. 53: 11-12; cf. also Jesus' own words, Mk. 10: 45). Until that messianic death had taken place the guests could not be invited. To use the language of one of Jesus' own parables, all was not yet ready, the table had not been set.¹⁷

In the Fourth Gospel on two occasions references to a universal ingathering follow statements concerning Jesus' death. That in 10: 16 ("And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice") follows on from the statements that Jesus, the good shepherd, is to lay down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10: 11, 15). Then in 12: 32, after having said that the hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified (12: 23), Jesus goes on to speak of His death and declares that when He is lifted up from the earth He will draw all men to Himself. The evangelist adds the comment, "He said this to show by what death he was to die" (Jn. 12: 33).

The limitations placed upon the disciples prior to the resurrection of Christ flow naturally from the limitations on Christ Himself. An explanation has frequently been advanced which is in line with Bengel's pithy comment on the command to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: "The Apostles would find sufficient occupation in attending to these".¹⁸ Similar in approach is Mayor's remark: "It was impossible to send out labourers at once into all the world. It was necessary to begin somewhere, and it was well to begin with those who had some knowledge of the subject, and could be soonest fitted to become preachers to others".¹⁹ While there is some truth in Mayor's remark yet the real reason for the limitation on the disciples'

¹⁶ Kline, *op. cit.*, 129.

¹⁷ Cf. H. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 380f., and K. Barth, "An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28: 16-30", *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. G. H. Anderson (London, 1961), pp. 65f.

¹⁸ J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1857), I, 238.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, 396.

mission must stem from the mission of Jesus to Israel and from the significance of the messianic death for the universal mission. The limitation which the disciples experienced was only for a period, and on one occasion at least the restriction regarding the Samaritans was modified for the disciples by Jesus (Lk. 9: 54). The sending of the twelve was of a temporary nature, and the terminology used points to ambassadors being sent on a special mission and then returning to report to their Lord (cf. Mk. 6: 30).²⁰ Ridderbos comments as follows on this restricted mission by the disciples:

Their apostolate—as well as that of the seventy (-two) in Luke 10—is still of a temporary nature. From this it follows that the instructions given by Jesus (just as those to the seventy (-two) later) refer to this particular charge and need not have a permanent and universally valid significance. . . . This is a question of a particular authorization within temporary and local limits.²¹

Though this restriction was placed on their ministry at this stage, the disciples were given indications that a world-wide ministry was in store for them. This is apparent even in the incident featuring the Syrophenician woman, for Jesus says, "Let the children *first* be fed", implying that provision was to be made sooner or later for satisfying the Gentiles. There are also the references by Jesus to a proclamation of the Gospel throughout the whole world, and in His parabolic teaching He gave further indication to His disciples that they were to be entrusted with the Gospel in His absence from them. But the formal sending of them on this mission could come only after the messianic salvation had been procured.

The second question must now be faced, and the problem is how the ministry of Christ to Samaritans and Gentiles is to be understood in the light of His express assertion that His mission was exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. While it is true that the incidents involving the centurion and the Syrophenician woman are exceptions in Jesus' ministry,²² yet they are no greater exceptions than incidents recorded in the Old Testament, and have to be regarded in precisely the same way. Consider, for example, the incidents relating to Elijah and Elisha cited by Jesus (Lk. 4: 25-27). These incidents formed part of the ministry of judgment upon Israel, which has as its corollary blessing to the Gentiles. The widow of Zarephath and Naaman were brought as Gentiles to participate in the blessings of which the later prophets were to speak more particularly. In the same light the book of Jonah must be seen. Redemptive judgment

²⁰ Cf. the discussion by Rengstorf, *TDNT*, I, 414ff.

²¹ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

²² So Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 31f., and T. W. Manson, *Jesus and the Non-Jews* (London, 1955), p. 18.

was meted out to Jonah, and then mercy was displayed to the Gentiles in Nineveh. Clowney has given this warning: "It would be altogether superficial to judge that Jonah's prophecy is a strange exception to a uniform particularism of the Old Testament".²³ The work of Jonah must be viewed against the background of the Abrahamic covenant with its promise of blessing to the nations. If that is done it will be clear that so far from being an exception it is merely the manifestation of that mercy of God to the Gentiles and a foreshadowing of the great ingathering of the Gentiles which was to follow the accomplishment of salvation through the death of the Messiah.

The so-called exceptions in Jesus' ministry to the Jews fit into the same category as those mentioned above. He came as the last messenger under the old covenant dispensation, and though His mission was primarily to Israel He shewed mercy to Gentiles as well. This was an indication of how the blessing promised to Abraham was indeed to flow to the Gentiles, as well as being a warning to Israel that the kingdom was to be taken away from her and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43).

III. CHRIST'S TEACHING IN THE POST-RESURRECTION PERIOD

With the death and resurrection of Jesus the way was open for the extension of the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations. The universal commission was given then because this is the period to which it rightly belongs. "The work of redemption had been finished; the gospel was completed; the limitations which had restricted its extension were no longer necessary. The intimations of a universal mission, which had been given before, were carried to their inevitable conclusion in the majestic commission . . ." ²⁴ It is not surprising that Christ imposed upon His church for all times the task of carrying the gospel proclamation to all nations. No longer was it just to be preached to the lost sheep of the house of Israel but to the "other sheep" as well.

There are several passages dealing with Christ's teaching after the resurrection which call for some comment, the first being Matthew 28: 18-20. The Great Commission stated in verses 19-20 is intimately connected with the claim to possess universal authority given in verse 18, an authority exercised by Christ in heaven and in earth. Although He had already exercised authority during His ministry this aspect of His kingly office comes to the fore now, and "it is *because* the Messiah has all dominion both above and below that

²³ E. P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (London, 1962), p. 92.

²⁴ Reid, *op. cit.*, 195.

He gives this comprehensive charge to the Apostles".²⁵ The duty laid upon the church is that of discipling all nations, baptizing them into the name of the triune God, and teaching them to observe all things that Jesus commanded. This was the three-fold charge given to the disciples—they were to endeavour to bring others under the lordship of Jesus, to seal the discipleship of the converts by the ordinance of baptism, and to give them further instruction in the things commanded by Jesus.

The scope of the mission committed to the church is also made plain, for it is to "all nations". The meaning of this phrase appears to be people from among all nations, rather than nations as collective entities in themselves. This is made plain by the use of the masculine personal pronoun twice in the following words in verses 19–20, whereas the neuter would have been required if the reference was back to "nations".²⁶ Now that the accomplishment of salvation is past, the disciples are called upon to proclaim Christ's kingship to the people of all nations. Here is a radical change in God's administration. "In the generations gone by God suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14: 16) and "the times of ignorance God overlooked" (Acts 17: 30). The middle wall of partition is now gone (Eph. 2: 14) and there is to be made a free and unrestricted offer of the Gospel to all men.

In Matthew 28: 20 there is also given the assurance that the risen Lord Himself will be with the disciples as they seek to carry out this task laid upon them. At no time will they be bereft of His presence, for the promise of that presence is for "all the days", and this promise holds good until the end of the whole era. It is in force until the consummation of the age.

Another significant passage is Luke 24: 46–47, largely because of the context in which it occurs. Christ, having spoken of the fact that His own sufferings and resurrection were prophesied in the written Scriptures, proceeds to declare that it is written "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations" (verse 47). The sufferings and resurrection "are represented as the events that open the way and provide the ground for the proclamation of the evangel to all nations . . . In the present instance these events are said to have their fruitage in the preaching of the gospel to all nations".²⁷ Thus there is a close link between this passage and

²⁵ A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London, 1928), p. 429.

²⁶ Cf. Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

²⁷ J. Murray, "The Free Offer of the Gospel and the Extent of the Atonement", *Torch and Trumpet* 15 (1965), 19.

Matthew 28: 18-19, where the investment with authority is the reward of Christ's work on the Cross (cf. Jn. 17: 2, 4, 5; Phil. 2: 8-9). Our Lord, therefore, grounded the preaching of the gospel to all nations on His atoning death and resurrection.

The disciples were left in no doubt as to their commissioning by Christ. John 20: 21 records the words of Jesus to the assembled disciples: "Even as the Father has sent me, even so I send you". The substance of this statement occurs earlier in the record of Christ's high-priestly prayer (Jn. 17: 18), though now the words are addressed directly to the disciples. The close correspondence between the two missions is revealed by the "even as". The commissioning authority was the same in both cases and in essence the message to be proclaimed was the same, though the cross and resurrection were to have a prominent place in the apostles' preaching.

Finally there are the words of Acts 1: 8. The assurance is given that the disciples will be endued with heavenly power for the task of being witnesses to the risen Christ. The scope of their activities is stated to extend to Jerusalem, all Judaea, Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. This last phrase is a regular Old Testament one for "all nations", not excepting any (cf. the use of the same phrase in the quotation from Isaiah 49: 6 in Acts 13: 47). In contrast to the earlier injunction to the disciples, there is here no restriction at all upon ministry to the Samaritans, for, as Alexander expresses it, "the time of this restriction had expired, and the last great apostolical commission is entirely catholic and ecumenical".²⁸ With these words Jesus prepared the disciples to take the further steps of preaching to the Samaritans when they were expelled from Jerusalem and then to the Gentiles.

The world-wide mission of the church is not a concept which she herself devised, but is an integral part of the teaching of Jesus and an obligation which she must execute in obedience to her Lord. This mission, moreover, is inseparably connected with Jesus' death and resurrection, which form the basis of the proclamation of the gospel and the ground for extending the offer of mercy and salvation to Jew and Gentile alike. It is by this the ordained means, namely, the universal proclamation of the gospel, that the blessing spoken of in the Abrahamic covenant flows to all nations.

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²⁸ J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, 1956), p. 12.