

**MASSACHUSETTS A FIELD FOR
CHURCH MISSIONS: A SERMON
PREACHED IN BOSTON BEFORE
THE "DIOCESAN BOARD OF
MISSIONS", MAY 20, 1868**

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F. D. HUNTINGTON

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A SERMON PREACHED IN BOSTON BEFORE THE "DIOCESAN
BOARD OF MISSIONS," MAY 20, 1863. :

BY THE
REV. F. D. HUNTINGTON, D. D.



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DEDHAM, June 3, 1863.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,— At a meeting of the Diocesan Board of Missions, held at the house of the Rt. Rev. Bishop, on the 1st inst., it was voted unanimously :

“ That the thanks of the Board be presented to yourself for the sermon you preached, at their request, during the Session of the Diocesan Convention, and that a copy of the same be asked of you for publication.”

Yours very truly,

SAMUEL B. BABCOCK,
Secretary B. of M.

To the REV. F. D. HUNTINGTON, D. D.

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MASSACHUSETTS
A FIELD FOR CHURCH MISSIONS.

“ For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad.” — 1 THESS. i. 8.

THE special value of the words is that they give us a certain sense of energy of movement in missionary action. Whether we take this *sounding out* of the Word of the Lord as the express and voluntary proclamation of the Gospel to their neighbors by the Christians at Thessalonica, as some expositors do, or, with others, construe the phrase as referring to the honorable report that had gone abroad of the faithfulness of the men of this young church in their home-work, its fitness for our purpose to-night will be the same. The power of the faith then was such a vital and irrepressible thing that it would not stay in its entrenchments, would not hold its peace, or be hid. The life of their love for Christ is too intense, and too thoroughly charged with the law of increase, to let these believers nestle down satisfied with their own church privileges and accommodations, setting their candlestick so

low that the candle will throw its beams only a few stadia along the Thermaic Gulf, and limiting their Christian influence to the city where they get their living. If they do not take pains to publish their zeal for the Cross, it will publish itself, in their self-denial, consistency, and activity. From them as a starting-point, through all that Macedonian and Achaian region, the Word of the Lord must go sounding out, and sounding on, ringing and reverberating along the waking Pagan populations, like the voice of a trumpet, — quickening, converting, gathering in, by group after group, the great and glad *ecclesia*, — rank after rank and army after army rallying to the “sacramental host.” The term itself that the apostle uses, — used here alone in the whole New Testament, — answers well to the other word in his vivid Greek speech, which he chooses to signify the work of preaching, — *κηρυξίας*, — a word taken from the animating office of the herald, who stood, in the Greek games, at the end of the race-course, to stir the spirits of the runners, to hold up the prize, and to proclaim the name of the victor. So, according to St. Paul and his Thessalonian disciples, the preacher’s errand is the exhilarating one of declaring to men the prize of their high calling; the Word of the Lord is a message of *life* and *power*; and the first business of a Christian Church, anywhere, is to *sound out*, “in every place,” its “faith to God-ward,” and to “spread it abroad.”

That law of the Church's life is as unalterable as its Head; and no Church is apostolical that does not mind it. Literally it remains a *law*,—an inevitable condition and mode of its being as the thing which its name signifies,—as a Church of Christ, “yesterday, to-day, and forever.” Wherever this law begins to be suspended, or forgotten, there, and that moment, the Body has begun to part with its red blood, and to forfeit its title. The *figure* may stand, and, with languid functions, keep up the semblances of vitality,—as is seen in that malady of a decaying vital stream, which the physicians call *anæmia*; but the force slackens, the fibre whitens, and the seats of life are struck, along with the organs. A Church that is not constantly adding to its possessions, and enlarging its domain, by the earnestness of the souls already organized within it, however affluent, comfortable, and punctilious, is a backslider, and has a curse preparing. Not to grow is to die. Not to “spread abroad,” is to wither away. Napoleon's maxim is no more true of the *State* militant than of the *Church* militant. “The army that remains in its entrenchments is beaten.” It is the *live* Body,—so penetrated with Christ that it can say of itself every hour, “It is no more I that live, but Christ liveth in me,” which has no time for internal controversy, and no strength to waste in schism, and is only stimulated to fresh enterprises by unbelieving Jews or Gentiles around it; always, from St. Paul's day

to this day, — everywhere, in Macedonia, in Massachusetts, and round the world, — so *receiving* the Word in “much affliction,” and yet “with joy of the Holy Ghost,” as to “sound it forth” again, in such ready and cheerful responses of missionary effort, offerings, and prayers, as cannot be kept back.

As to the question, therefore, whether this extension of the Gospel and Church of Christ in our own territory is an obligation resting upon us, in conscience and heart, as an appointment of God, — the means of arriving at an answer to that would seem to be simple and near at hand. In the first place, our religion teaches us that the Christian salvation of any one human soul, anywhere in the world, is a result of such moment in God's sight, that if everything we could do and give would secure to only that one human soul the blessing of eternal life, a holy character here, and an everlasting spiritual activity and joy in the world to come, with all the benefits that follow from that one living power, the labor and the gift would be more than justified. If we have ever learned the love of our Lord truly, we shall know that all the wonders, the toils, the teachings, the sufferings of his ministry, from the flight into Egypt to the ascension into heaven, would have been accomplished just as readily for the weakest or wickedest heart in all this world, as for the earth itself and its millions. Again, in direct language, and repeatedly, Christ

makes it the business of his followers to multiply their number by conversion. No sooner are converts made, than they are sent forth, two by two, or one by one, to convert their neighbors; and every soul, of every nation, is a neighbor. As surely as the real spirit of the faith is received, the desire to communicate it will come with it. Two things, the Lord says, are utterly irreconcilable,—to be a Christian, and not to be in earnest in making others Christians. So that while he was on earth, and at the moment of his final separation from them, he was bidding his disciples go, be missionaries, preach and teach, found Churches, and set up ordinances; and those that could not go were to furnish support and a Godspeed for those that could. “How shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent.” Further, the moment Christianity began to act and to be a felt force in human history, it acted as a self-diffusive, communicative creature, and was felt as a missionary force. All the New Testament, from the Evangelists onwards, proves that. The “Acts” of the Apostles were aggressive, forthgoing acts. Their writings were sent as epistles to newly established churches, mostly from temporary missionary stations in their travels. Whatever permanent institutions were set up and left behind, the messengers were still flying on from one advanced post to another, bearing a Gospel portable and perambulatory, as well as constructive and binding; gathering with one hand,