



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

THE GLORY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE • Samuel Zwemer

Samuel Zwemer committed to be a missionary his senior year in college 1887. After graduating, he soon organized a mission to Arabia with several other students. After 23 years of service in Bahrain and Kuwait, he focused on a ministry of speaking and writing that radiated out from Cairo, Egypt. During this time he wrote a great many books and articles, as he pioneered studies and training to aid the church in reaching Muslims with the gospel. For many such reasons, Samuel Zwemer is regarded as the premier apostle to the Arab world. This excerpt is taken from article he wrote in 1911.

The challenge of the unoccupied fields of the world is one to great faith and, therefore, to great sacrifice. Our willingness to sacrifice for an enterprise is always in proportion to our faith in that enterprise. Faith has the genius of transforming the barely possible into actuality. Once men are dominated by the conviction that a thing must be done, they will stop at nothing until it is accomplished. We have our “marching orders,” as the Iron Duke [Arthur Wesley, Duke of Wellington] said, and because our Commander-in-Chief is not absent, but with us, the impossible becomes not only practical but imperative. Charles Spurgeon, preaching from the text, “All power is given unto Me...Lo I am with you always,” used these words: “You have a factor here that is absolutely infinite, and what does it matter as to what other factors may be. ‘I will do as much as I can,’ says one. Any fool can do that. He that believes in Christ does what he cannot do: attempts the impossible and performs it.”¹

An Inverted Homesickness

The unoccupied fields of the world await those who are willing to be lonely for the sake of Christ. To the pioneer missionary, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ to the apostles when He showed them His hands and His feet, come with special force: “As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). He came into the world, and it was a great unoccupied mission field. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:11). He came and His welcome was derision, His life, suffering, and His throne, the Cross. As He came, He expects us to go. We must follow in His footprints. The pioneer missionary, in overcoming obstacles and difficulties, has the privilege not only of knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection, but also something of the fellowship of His suffering. For the people of Tibet or Somaliland, Mongolia or Afghanistan, Arabia or Nepal, the Sudan or Abyssinia, he may be called to say with Paul, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill to the brim the penury of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake which is the Church” (Greek text, Col 1:24, cf. Mark 12:44 and Luke 21:4). What is it but the glory of the impossible! Who would naturally prefer to leave the warmth and comfort of hearth and home and the love of the family circle to go after a lost sheep, whose cry we have faintly heard in the howling of the tempest? Yet such is the glory of the task that neither home-ties nor home needs can hold back those who have caught the vision and the spirit of the Great Shepherd. Because the lost ones are His sheep, and He has made us His shepherds and not His hirelings, we must bring them back.

Although the road be rough and steep
I go to the desert to find my sheep.

“There is nothing finer nor more pathetic to me,” says Dr. Forsyth, “than the way in which missionaries unlearn the love of the old home, die to their native land, and wed their hearts to the people they have served and won; so

that they cannot rest in England, but must return to lay their bones where they spent their hearts for Christ. How vulgar the common patriotisms seem beside this inverted homesickness, this passion of a kingdom which has no frontiers and no favored race, the passion of a homeless Christ!"²

James Gilmour in Mongolia, David Livingstone in Central Africa, Grenfell in the Congo, Keith Falconer in Arabia, Dr. Rijnhart and Miss Annie Taylor in Tibet, Chalmers in New Guinea, Morrison in China, Henry Martyn in Persia, and all the others like them had this "inverted homesickness"— this passion to call that country their home which was most in need of the Gospel. In this passion, all other passions died; before this vision all other visions faded; this call drowned all other voices. They were the pioneers of the Kingdom, the forelopers of God, eager to cross the border-marches and discover new lands or win new empires.

[The Apostolic Ambition](#)

But the pioneer husbandman must have long patience. When Judson was lying loaded with chains in a Burmese dungeon, a fellow prisoner asked with a sneer about the prospect for the conversion of the heathen. Judson calmly

calls today for those who are willing to endure and suffer in accomplishing it.

No Sacrifice, But a Privilege