

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

IN THE INTEREST OF JARVIS STREET BAPTIST
CHURCH, TORONTO, AND OF EVANGELICAL TRUTH

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PASTOR AND EDITOR

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1: 16.

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

HOW TO COME HOME AGAIN.

A Sermon by the Pastor

Preached in Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, Nov. 26th, 1922.
(Stenographically reported)

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found; surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.

Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."—Psalm 32.

This psalm, by the Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, is carried into the New Testament dispensation; and Paul said that David describes "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." The whole psalm is a commentary upon the first verse: the first verse is a summary of the teaching of the whole psalm. And this inspired Psalmist declares that the highest blessedness a man can know is to have his transgression forgiven, and his sin covered; to know that his case has been taken to the highest court in the universe, and settled there in his favour; to know that every debt is paid—the past, present, and future; that all his transgressions have been taken account of, and have been forgiven; that he has absolutely nothing to fear in the future. It is therefore possible not only to be sure that our transgressions, our individual sins, are forgiven; but that our sin, our inherent sinfulness, is covered; so that we may dare to come into the

presence of God unabashed; with boldness, with a holy confidence, with the assurance that He will say to us, "Thou art all fair . . . there is no spot in thee."

I want first of all this evening to lay that down as a principle; to show you that salvation in Christ is infinitely more than escape from the consequences of our sin; that it is more than relief from banishment from the presence of God: it means that our transgressions are forgiven; that there is no more remembrance of them before God; that an equivalent has been rendered to God's holy law, by virtue of which our obligation in that respect has been cancelled; and that He has provided means whereby our sin—sin in the mass, sin in all its aspects, the sin that is part of our being—whereby our sin is covered; that so we may come into the white light of His holy Presence, and look forward without fear to the great white throne, and say, "As for me, my transgression is forgiven, and my sin is covered." To know that, is to enter into a state of blessedness. There is no joy in the world equal to that. I commend it to everyone here this evening; for whatever the world may bring to you of its delights, however alluring its rewards, however engaging its friendships and fellowships, however bright its promises; there is no blessedness anywhere to be found which is to be compared with that sweet sense of acceptance with God, with that deep assurance of forgiveness, with that profound certainty that sin is covered even from the eyes of the Holy One, to Whom all things are naked and open, and of Whom it is said, "Thou are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity," which they enjoy "to whom God imputeth righteousness without works."

It was to accomplish all this that the Lord Jesus died in our room and stead: His blood cleanses us from sin; His righteousness is imputed to us; our sin is covered; and we are "accepted in the Beloved." Do you know what that means? Is there anyone here this evening who has not tasted of that blessedness? I wish you would begin with me now. I wish you would enter into the joy of this psalm from the beginning, and say, "Well, as for me I will ask for forgiveness. God be merciful to me a sinner." The righteousness of Jesus will then be imputed to you, and you shall be "complete in Him."

But this is the story of a man who has had experience of that blessedness but has lost it; and it tells how he regained it; how he came back to the place of joy and fellowship. There is a haunting memory of happy days expressed in that second verse: "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile: as though he had said, "Well do I remember the day when I appeared before Him, when with faith in the great sacrifice I could look up into His face and be sure that He was not imputing iniquity to me. That was a blessed day, when I was absolutely sincere in my worship, when my heart was as an open book, when in my spirit there was no guile."

There is an illustration in the Old Testament of this principle: In the days of famine Jacob said to his sons, "I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die." And they went with their sacks and with their money to buy corn of the governor of the land. O how proudly they went; for they were proud of their family, proud of their religious inheritance, proud of the traditions that lay behind their marvellous history; and were they not all the sons of one man? Thus they came into the presence of the strange governor, and asked for corn. But for some reason he did not take them at their own valuation. He said, "Whence come ye?" And they told him. "And who are you?" They said, "Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man

. . . the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not." But he said, "Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come." "Nay, my lord," they said, "but to buy food are thy servants come. Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not." And I should not wonder if they carefully scrutinized the face of the governor: I should not be surprised if they detected a strange expression as they looked up into his face and said, "One is not;" and he answered, "That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies." He spake roughly unto them; and he called the captain of the guard, and he took one of them and bound him before their eyes, and sent him away to prison; and to the others he said, "Go back to your father, and the next time you come bring that youngest brother you told me about; for except your youngest brother be with you, you shall in no wise see my face." And even while he talked with them, they said one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear." Ah, something had happened twenty years ago! But they had resolved, "We will bury that: we will forget all about that." They had returned to their father, that never-to-be-forgotten day, so long ago, and they had said, "This we have found; know now whether it be thy son's coat or no." And the old man handled the coat, dripping with blood; and he said, "It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces . . . I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning." But that was long, long ago. They have tried to forget all about it; and now they come proudly into the presence of the governor. But immediately he imputes iniquity to them. His words seem to blot out the intervening years, and make the past live again; and they are filled with fear; and at last the silence of twenty years is broken; and they say among themselves, "We are verily guilty."

When they went back home I think they resolved to be as economical in the use of that corn as possible, so that there might be no necessity for their returning to that man again. They had no joy in talking to the governor: there was no peace whatever in his presence. There was something about him that probed them to the very depths and uncovered their sin. He insistently imputed iniquity, notwithstanding their protestations of innocence. Blessed is the man "in whose spirit there is no guile." Oh, they knew how untrue they were! They knew they were wrapping a veil about something which ought long ago to have been confessed; and there was no blessedness for them in that experience of the presence of the governor of Egypt, notwithstanding his full storehouses, and their full sacks.

That is why some people do not come to prayer-meeting: "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." That is why some people do not read their Bibles—because the Bible is a stern governor; and it says to them, "Ye are spies, Ye are spies. Ye are not what you profess to be. There is guile in your spirit." David knew all about that: he had been there: once he had tasted the blessedness of which he here speaks. I wonder is there a professing Christian here this evening, one who used to sing:

"O happy day, that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!"

who entered into the blessedness of the man "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered;" but who has lost the joy of it; and who, if I could talk with you privately, would say to me, "Sir, I never feel so uncomfortable as when I get on my knees. I never feel so uneasy as when I try to read my

Bible: it brings me no comfort; it stirs me up; it troubles my conscience; it charges me with all sorts of things; it imputes iniquity to me; it charges me with insincerity. I wish I could come into the presence of God in such a way that He would not impute iniquity to me; that I could pray with the consciousness that my prayers have ascended to heaven His dwelling place, and that hearing, He forgives." Is this your cry,

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?

"What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill."

What is the explanation? It is this: "When I kept silence"—Ah! yes, there had been a period in David's history when he had kept silence; there was a secret in his heart that he had not laid bare before the Lord; he had kept silence, just like those sons of Jacob. But time is nothing with God, my dear friends: He does not forget! The sin of the past is a sin of the present to Him. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." He became an old man before his time. He lost his spiritual joy; his spiritual energy diminished; the grasshopper became a burden, and he became afraid of that which was high, desire failed, and fears were in the way!

Have you not seen professing Christians grow old suddenly? Have you not known some in whom the processes of the years seemed to be mysteriously accelerated? Do you know what I mean? Here is a man who used to find it his greatest delight, let us say, to be at the early morning prayer-meeting on the Lord's Day. He entered with greatest heartiness into the service of worship; and if he went away from home on a visit, he would be sure to ask, "Is there a Sunday School this afternoon? Is there anything I can do?" Or, if he were at home, he would be teaching a Sunday School class; or working in a mission; or in some other way making himself spiritually useful. He went from place to place, and never tired: waiting upon the Lord he renewed his strength, and mounted up with wings as eagles; he ran and was not weary, and walked and did not faint. But by and by he began to complain that the work was too heavy for him. Poor man! you could see him going down; and he came to the Sunday School Superintendent, and he said, "I shall have to give up my class. I cannot go to the mission; for really, you know, one must take care of his health; and I must be more careful." In the early days he could walk twenty miles in the service of the Lord; but now though perhaps he has two or three motor cars, he is really too tired to lift his foot and get into one on the Lord's Day, unless it be to wheel out into the country somewhere. What has made him grow old so suddenly? Ah! here is the secret: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."

Have you been giving up your Christian work? Have you been relinquishing this task and laying down that burden, and trying to justify yourself in the doing of it? I will tell you why you did it. You kept silence about something that you should have settled before the Lord. That is the explanation of it. There are some people, you know, who are always "roaring all the day long." You read in the Old Testament the story of the murmuring of God's people in the ancient time. "As for this Moses . . . we wist

not what is become of him." And people talk like that about the servant of God still. I have sometimes imagined Mrs. Isaac talking to her neighbour, and saying, "Have you seen Moses lately?" "No; did he call on you?" "No, I have not seen him about the camp anywhere." "Well, where in the world can he be? What can he be doing?" Of course, he was up in the mount talking with God; but they did not know anything about that. They were just "roaring all the day long." Now do not be offended; because, I am happy to say I do not hear that sort of thing now-a-days. But then I have not had the radio put in my house yet! Some things I escape; but you know my meaning—how many people fall into the habit of grumbling, until they really imagine that everybody is wrong but themselves; and they cannot be happy anywhere. What is the secret of it all? "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." There was something within—that is where the whole trouble was: something within that should have been confessed before the Lord, and cleansed away, and put right before Him; then he might still have enjoyed the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity. If the Lord is imputing iniquity to you, confess it at once, and get rid of it; break your silence; get back to Him: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

When the governor of Egypt looked at the sons of Jacob, he looked into their hearts; and I think he said, "I wonder if they have repented. I am going to find out." "Who are you?" And they told him. "Where did you come from?" And they told him. "We are all the sons of one man; the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not." "What is that? What about that other brother? What became of him?" They did not tell the whole story. There was one thing that they had covered up these twenty years; and this governor resolved to make them tell that story. So he laid a heavy hand upon them, and took from them Simeon and bound him before their eyes; and he spake roughly to them, charging them with being spies of the country.

Not only rough speech, my dear friends, but rough treatment sometimes we must receive at the hand of a gracious God. Somebody told us last night in the prayer-meeting about getting a whipping from his mother when he was a boy; and he said he had the unusual experience of hearing his mother pray and ask the Lord's blessing on the whipping! "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth;" sometimes He has to whip His children; He has to lay a heavy hand upon them: "Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me." And His hand will be heavy upon us, until we surrender in the point where we are rebelling against God and where He is determined to have the victory.

"My moisture is turned into the drought of summer." In the early summer, in June, when the fields are a beautiful emerald, and the trees are just opening their thousand leaves, and the air is sweet with the fragrance of the blossoms, and the woods are full of the music of the birds; and there is evidence of exuberant life everywhere; and you go out in the morning sunlight when the dew is sparkling, and you open your lungs and breathe in all the freshness of it, and feast your soul upon the beauty of it, and say, "Can heaven itself be better than this?" But late in August, when the sun has been pouring down his scorching beams upon the parched ground for many a week; when there has been no rain, and everything is burned brown and dry, and the trees are covered with dust—and all nature droops and languishes beneath the withering heat—what a change, when spring's "moisture is turned into the drought of summer"!

Have you not seen a life take on just such a changed aspect? Have you not seen a Christian man or woman who seemed to be growing up into Christ; developing symmetrically "like a tree planted by the rivers of water," shooting out its branches, and bringing forth blossoms and fruit to the glory of God. And have you not seen such an one suddenly wither, his leaves dry up; his branches become destitute of the fruit of the Spirit; until he appears wholly to lose his fellowship with God? And you say, "What a change there is!" One was speaking to me the other day about a certain man, and he said, "I can hardly believe he is the same man. I used to know him as such an earnest, zealous Christian. Now he is everywhere he ought not to be; always engaged in the things of which he ought to be ashamed; running with the world as rapidly as he can." Why? Because he has "kept silence," and his "moisture is turned into the drought of summer." Though we cannot lose our salvation, as I shall show you in a moment, it is possible to lose the beauty, and fragrance of the Spirit; and, being without a savor of Christ, to give no true witness for Jesus Christ at all.

How can such spiritual drought be broken? What is the remedy? This: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid." He broke the silence; and when the Spirit of God brought home to him his sin, he cried out, "I have sinned;" and Nathan said, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin": "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." It was all done in a moment; and the rebellious child had his garments washed, and was brought back into his Father's fellowship.

And that is possible to every backslider,—just to come back home again; to renew the blessedness of former days. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." "The Lord is my shepherd—He restoreth my soul."

"For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." They may wander far; but every one who has really known the Lord, who has really tasted the blessedness of which the psalmist is speaking, every one that is godly, by the grace of His Spirit shall be brought back again; and he shall "pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters—in that day of judgment when 'the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place'—in the floods of great waters they shall not come night unto him." "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy strength fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Jesus knew the experience through which Simon would pass: he would fall, but would not be utterly cast down. And is not this one of the times when He may be found? May this night be one of the times when the godly shall cry, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit." I pray that it may be so.

What then? Oh, what if I come back! What if I get back to the place of fellowship, and of service, what then? Will it be but an oasis in the desert from which I must return to the burning sands again? Listen! "Thou art my hiding place—I have learned my lesson, Lord—Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." Hallelujah! there is no necessity for our moisture being turned into the drought of summer: there is no real necessity for our wandering from the Lord. If we have done so, may we come back again. And as for the future, let faith declare, "Thou art my hiding place! I have come back to stay. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I: I will hide in Him. Thou shalt preserve me from trouble." Blessed be God! We may pray for forgiving grace, for pardoning grace,—

"Who is a pardoning God like thee;
And who has grace so rich and free?"

But we may pray for preventing grace, for preserving grace, too. A fence at the top of the precipice is better than a hospital at the bottom; it is better to receive the grace to keep us trusting in Him, and walking with Him, than to be asking for pardoning grace alone: "Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." Mark the contrast! "My bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long"—not a very comfortable companion, was he? but when he has come back, and is secure in his hiding place, he is preserved from repeating his sin. "Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance"; the angel of the Lord who encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them, will lead a choir of angels in songs of deliverance!

Now here is a verse which I am afraid some of us plead at times when we have no right to it. The Lord responds to his re-dedication of himself with this promise: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." To whom is this word spoken?—not to the man who keeps silence; certainly not to the man to whom the Lord imputeth iniquity; but to the man who has said, "Thou art my hiding place; I will abide with thee." And His answer is, "Very well then, I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

Some of you perhaps have travelled a great deal; and you can distinguish a well-trained hotel waiter from one who is untrained. The trained waiter turns his eye as often as possible toward those whom he serves. If he serves but one he watches intently, so that if you need him he instantly responds to your glance. That is how the masters of ancient times were accustomed to guide their servants—not by speaking to them, but just by looking at them. That is the meaning here: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye"—as long as thou art looking at Me; as long as thou dost not turn thine eye from Me; as long as thou art desirous of learning My will, I will guide thee with mine eye."

But "be ye not as the horse": the tendency of the horse, as you know, is to get the bit between his teeth and gallop away down the road on his own pleasure. Now do not be like the horse, getting the bit between your teeth, and running ahead of the Spirit of God. Do not do that, or you will be sure to run into trouble! "Be ye not as the horse or as the mule": you know the characteristic of the mule? He puts down two feet and says, "Thus far and no farther." Well, we need to pray to be saved from the mulish tendency; because some of us are disposed to do either one thing or the other; to gallop before the Lord, or to lag behind; to be too fast or not fast enough. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." Do not bolt nor baulk!

"Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule." We are reminded that the Lord has a way of managing those who would run away, and those who will not move at all. You will remember what the Lord said to Sennacherib: "I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou comest." And when the Lord does put a bit in a man's mouth, and He undertakes to drive him, He can do it! But how very tenderly He teaches us, "That is not the life of fellowship; that is not the life of happy and willing obedience which needs bit and bridle: I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." And we shall be delivered from the bondage, and the bridle, and the smart of the whip; we shall be delivered "into the glorious liberty of the children of God;" as we keep our eyes unto the Lord as the eyes of the servant are unto the hand of his master, and the eyes of the maiden are unto the hand of her mistress. "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net." That should be the attitude of every Christian—waiting for divine instruction; waiting to be guided by His eye.

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked—if you go that way you shall find the way of the transgressor is hard;—but he that trusteth in the Lord—if you go that way—mercy shall compass him about." Which will you have? Which path will you take? "Ponder the path of thy feet."

"Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." He comes back to the note upon which he began: only "in the Lord" can we "be glad"; only as righteousness, instead of iniquity, is imputed to us, may we rejoice; and only guileless spirits, conscious of uprightness of heart, can really "shout for joy." "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." May this blessedness be ours for His Name's sake.

"THE STORY OF THE GREAT HYMNS."

This will be the subject of a worshipful service to be held in the Lecture Hall, Monday, Dec. 11th, at 8 o'clock. The story of the great hymns of the church, by whom they were written, their authors' experiences, the circumstances by which the hymns were inspired, and above all, the great doctrines of grace they design to teach, will be told by our Mr. W. J. Hutchinson, himself a hymn-writer and the composer of many excellent tunes. Mr. Hutchinson is being wonderfully used of God in the Sunday School and children's services, and his work at the piano Tuesday and Saturday evenings is a benediction to the whole church. He will be assisted by the choir, with our beloved Mr. Penney at the piano, and by Mr. Fred Syme, whom the Holy Spirit is greatly using in the ministry of song. Mr. Syme also is one of our own men. A few lantern slides will be shown illustrative of events connected with the history of the hymns, discussed. The Pastor will preside, and an offering will be received for the Sunday School Christmas Fund.

This promises to be a service of great educational and inspirational value. We shall be enabled to understand the hymns better, and thus to "sing with the understanding" by attending. The Pastor would specially urge all members of the church to come. We shall have opportunity to sing these great hymns, as well as to study them. Everybody is invited.

Dorcas Thursday.—The closing Dorcas Meeting for 1922 will be held in the Church Parlor Thursday, December 14th, at 2 p.m. The Christmas boxes will be packed at this meeting. Donations of money will be gratefully received that we may be enabled to send \$10.00 to each of the six missionaries receiving boxes; also dolls, toys, games, books and candy, will be acceptable, so that the Society may play Santa Claus to all the little ones in the missionaries' homes. Tea will be served at 6.30, to which gentlemen are invited. A collection will be taken at the table to meet expenses.

Young Women's Mission Circle.—The regular meeting of the Young Women's Mission Circle will be held in the Church Parlor, Monday, December 11th, at 7.30 p.m. Mrs. Ward and Miss Madeline Shields will be the speakers, and they will bring before us the claims of Grande Ligne Mission. Miss Beth Walker will sing.

For the Sunday School.—To-day (Dec. 10th) we are to take our annual offering for our own Sunday School. We regret its coming so soon after our Foreign Mission offering,—but large amounts are not asked for for this, but rather **something from everybody.** The school is being greatly prospered. The attendance is increasing, but the spirit is more than numbers, and spiritual blessing is attending the work of the school. The officers and teachers serve as missionaries to many homes. Many who are denied the privilege of teaching will, we are sure, be glad to share in the work by making some contribution to the school's support to-day.

The Church Calendar

For the week beginning Sunday, December 10th, 1922.

Sunday

10.00—Prayer Service in the Church Parlor, Mr. George Greenway.

10.30—Communion Service.

11.00—Public Worship. The Pastor will preach.

3.00—The Bible School will meet.

6.00—Prayer Meeting in Church Parlor.

7.00—Public Worship—The Pastor will preach. Baptism will be administered.

Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday—8.00—Prayer Service.

Wednesday—Junior Mid-Week Service—7.15.

Thursday—Dorcas, 2.30. Tea, 6.30.

The Parliament St. Branch, 250 Parliament St. Sunday: Bible School, 3.00; Evangelistic Service, conducted by Mr. W. L. McKay, 7.00.

Wednesday, 8.00, Prayer Meeting. Friday, 7.15, Junior Service.