

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

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

T. T. SHIELDS
PASTOR AND EDITOR

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

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

THE PERIL OF PROCRASTINATION

A Sermon by the Pastor.

Preached in Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, Dec. 10, 1922.

(Stenographically reported.)

"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

"And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

"He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him."—Acts 24: 24-26.

THERE is a sense in which our Lord Jesus comes before men, again and again, for judgment. The question asked by Himself so long ago is still being asked: "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" In apostolic days, you find that the apostles so presented the gospel as to compel their hearers to weigh the claims of Christ. Paul himself, as Saul of Tarsus, had done so; and had ultimately been convinced of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was the Son of God; "and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." From that forward, he brought that testimony before the people; and he found that the word concerning Jesus was treated exactly as Jesus Himself had been treated! Again and again, you find the apostolic preachers standing in their Master's place,—being brought again to judgment.

And it is still true that men are called upon to weigh the claims of Jesus Christ. They do it every time they turn to the Bible: there is a sense in which men sit in judgment on the Bible, as to whether it be the Word of God. Every time the gospel of God's grace is preached, men are compelled to consider whether the claims of the gospel are valid; and what their attitude toward Jesus Christ shall be. Yet strangely enough, whenever the Lord Jesus thus comes for judgment, He becomes Himself the judge. When men turn to God's holy

Book to pass judgment upon its validity, upon its authority, they discover that the Book itself is judging them.

On this occasion the Apostle Paul is brought as a prisoner to the bar. He is called upon to give an account of himself; and in the doing of it, the gospel he preaches becomes itself the judge of the judge before whom he stands. He is sent for him, and asked him concerning the faith of Christ; and this prisoner so spake that the judge upon the bench trembled, and said, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

I. I want to speak, first of all, this evening, **Concerning the Faith in Christ;** and ask you to judge of its claims. And I am sure that as you do so, you will discover that it is itself your judge. What is "the faith in Christ"? Is it merely a human estimate of an historic person? Is it a consideration of the value of some human philosophy? Is it a religious toy with which men may play; and concerning which they are free to form their own estimate? This inspired Apostle so spake of "the faith in Christ" that "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." And it is with these tremendous matters, the gospel of the grace of God is concerned. It does not require you to consider some musty theory treasured in some ancient museum; but to consider the claims of One Who lived in the long ago upon this earth, and of Whom it is testified that He still liveth, and to form an estimate of His character.

The religion of the Lord Jesus deals, first of all, with the question of righteousness. It is not related merely to the intellect: it is related to the whole man: it has to do with character, with conduct, with destiny. I would remind you that there is appointed a day in which God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." This gospel is to be a standard of judgment. It is a divine statute by which man's conduct and character are to be measured. It is said that when the Holy Spirit is come, He will—among other things—convince the world of righteousness. Now, the gospel of Jesus has to do with righteousness. I know that men speak of the creeds of Christendom as though they had to do merely with intellectual matters, as though Christian orthodoxy were something entirely apart from human character and conduct. We hear frequently a demand for an ethical gospel. But the gospel is ethical all through; the gospel insists that there is a divine standard of righteousness, by which all must be judged.

What, then, is righteousness? Can it be expressed in the will of the majority? When a law is put upon the statute book, is that the standard by which your conduct and mine is to be measured? Are we to determine what ultimate righteousness is, on the low plane of human judgment, of human standards of what is right? Because a man owes no man anything; because he is just in all his dealings; because he is reputed to be a truthful man; because he is a worthy father and husband; straightforward in his business relationships; considerate of the poor; and living in all respects a worthy life, so far as his life is related to his neighbour; is that what the Bible means by righteousness? Not by any means! When Paul "reasoned of righteousness," I am sure that he made it clear that apart from, and far above, and beyond, all human laws, there is a moral law in the universe; that there is a moral constitution of things; that above the law there is a divine Lawgiver; that there is a fixed standard of righteousness which never changes; that behind that standard of righteousness, is God; and that the supreme question after

all is not, how am I related to the day in which I live, to the men with whom I mingle, to the circumstances of the time; nor how far do I discharge the obligations of my citizenship, of my relationship to my family,—the supreme question, the question that goes to the root of all right living, of all right thinking, of all essential righteousness, is the question of a man's personal relationship to God. And it was of that Paul reasoned, showing this man that he was not ultimately to be judged by human standards; but that he was to be measured and justified—at last by God Himself.

And that is what the gospel is for; the gospel fulfils the law and the prophets. And I bring that message to you, and to my own heart, this evening, to remind you that there is Somebody Whom we do not see, but Who is always present with us; to whose eyes "all things are naked and opened," and from Whom no secrets are hid; Who is "no respecter of persons"; Who sits upon the throne of the universe as the supreme Judge: and that the chief business of your life should be to discover your relationship to Him.

Paul reasoned with Felix of righteousness, and then of temperance,—of self-control, of continence, of the control of the human personality in all its attributes, in all its powers, in relation to that objective Standard. As though Paul said, "There you are, Felix: now measure yourself. Turn your thought upon yourself; and consider whether you are able so to control your life, that you can live up to that standard; whether you can control your thinking; whether you can cleanse your memory; whether you can clarify your judgment; whether you can purify your heart; whether you have sufficient power of will to live your life in relation, not to what men call right, but to what God calls right." He reasoned as though he had said, "There is God's pattern of a man. Stand up beside it; and consider whether you have resident within your own personality, the power of self-control to direct your life in conformity with that standard."

He then reasoned of "judgment to come." For he said, "Be assured that God's laws are inexorable in their operation: they never change: they are never suspended: they are never amended: they are part of God Himself. The very character, the very nature of God, is expressed in the moral order, in the constitution of things; and as sure as God is God, every infraction of His law will be visited by Him." He said to Felix, "There is judgment to come. You cannot escape it. If you do not fulfil that divine measure, and have no power to attain to it, God will take account of it; and some day you will stand before Him, as I stand before you, and you will be judged."

That is the truth, my friends. I am afraid we have forgotten it almost in our day; but it is true. We talk about being modern, and about our varying standards of conduct; but what is a span of a century or so in the economy of God? "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil"; but judgment is certain for every one of us. Wherein we fail to realize God's plan and purpose, He will bring us into judgment.

But why did Paul so reason of righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come? Because he had a message of grace. The gospel message is this: that as for the righteousness required by God, He has provided it in His Son,—"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"; and the perfect righteousness of another is imputed to the man who is short measure, if he believe. As for self-control,—the regulation of the human personality in relation to God's law; is there any provision for

that? O yes, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh that the righteousness of the law—that objective rule—might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Did you ever see anybody trying to learn to drive a motor car? You have seen the thing wobbling all over the road; and you were afraid to pass it or get near it: then suddenly everything changed; and the car went along as straight as an arrow. Why? Somebody within said to the amateur, "Sit over, and let me show you how to drive."

What is it to be a Christian? It is to have the objective requirements of the law satisfied in Christ, atoned for,—His righteousness imputed. But it means a new driver for this old car: that the Holy Spirit comes to take possession; to give us self-control, a new heart, a new hand on the wheel, a new memory, a new judgment,—the whole man made "partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

The gospel tells us of a judgment that has come. The gospel puts that terrible "judgment to come" in the past. All my sins were judged at the cross. "Now," said Jesus, "is the judgment of this world; now is the prince of this world cast out": "the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all." The gospel brings to every one of us the glorious message that in the person of Jesus Christ our sins have already been judged: "There is therefore—hear it!—there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." That is the gospel—"righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come," all satisfactorily met in the person of Jesus Christ, by the ministry of the divine Spirit, by the gift of the boundless grace of God Himself.

II. What Response Did Felix Make to Paul's Reasoning? He trembled; as every man must tremble, who really faces these great questions. There is not one of us here this evening—not one, who can come into the white light of the judgment of God, and be unafraid. When we consider Who He is, and that He judges not by the appearance,—but according to truth,—for what we really are; it is enough to make any of us tremble.

There is, perhaps, someone here this evening who would say, "Well, sir, I have put all that nonsense behind me long ago. I have been to school; and I do not believe that kind of thing at all. I believe the human race is climbing the golden stairs. We are in an evolutionary stage; we are getting better all the time." But alone with God, you do not believe anything of the kind; and I want you to be alone with God, to-night. I want you to shut your school books, and be alone with your conscience, in the presence of the God before Whom we all must stand. And when we think of the record of the past, and of the divine scrutiny of that record; we all must do as Felix did—tremble!

But observe, he postponed decision. He said, "Go thy way for this time." That is what you do sometimes with an agent who wants to sell you something. If you want to be polite, you meet him at the door, and you say, "Not to-day." He begins to argue with you, and to tell you of the advantages of the thing he has to sell you. But you say, "I am prepared to admit all that. We will have no argument on that score; but not to-day. Excuse me at this moment. Go your way for this time."

Thus men meet the claims of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and that is the devil's suggestion always. He is altogether too shrewd to come to a trembling

soul, to one who has faced the great question of "righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come," and say to him, "Ignore these matters: they are of no moment." Felix knew better; but he did say to him, "Not to-day: go thy way for this time."

And I would warn you this evening that the adversary of our souls will never offer any objection to your acceptance of Jesus Christ to-morrow: he will give his full consent to such a resolution, solemnly made, with all the strength of your will behind it. If he can get you to say, "Not to-day, but to-morrow," he will say, "Very well, I consent to that." "Go thy way for this time." The only thing the devil is afraid of is an immediate decision, an immediate surrender; because he knows very well if once a human soul is yielded to Jesus, he has lost it! Hallelujah! he has lost it forever, if once that soul says, "By the grace of the Spirit, now I yield myself to Thee." Is that your decision, or, will you again say, "Go thy way for this time"?

But it is seldom men make such a decision without some promise of the future. Felix did not say, "I will consider it to-morrow"; but he said, "When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee: when it is convenient for me to weigh this matter a little more thoroughly, and to reach a wise decision that will have behind it the strength of my whole judgment, I will send for you." Men want a convenient religion. They want a religion that is like a modern house, as advertised, "with all modern conveniences": they want a religion with all modern conveniences and adaptations, that will be comfortable in every respect, electric light and all kinds of luxurious appliances,—the sort of religion that will make you feel, O how luxurious this is! It is lovely to be a Christian after that order,—so convenient, so comfortable! Thus the inward resolution might be interpreted: "In the day when it costs me nothing; when there are no obstacles; my mood shall be agreeable to the decision; in the day when it shall be easier; when it shall be convenient I will consider the claims of Christ. Come and see me again."

I must tell you what you will find. It never will be convenient to receive Jesus Christ; and if you are going to postpone the decision until a convenient time, I tell you solemnly, in the name of the Lord, your soul is doomed and damned already,—if that be your ultimate decision. It will never be convenient to receive Jesus. The carnal mind will never find it convenient to submit itself to the cross of Christ—never! In the day that you yield to Christ, it will mean crucifixion, the grave; and if you are going to wait until the carnal mind consents to it, until there is no objection from anyone; you never will be saved, though you live to be as old as Methuselah. There will be no convenient hour in the future. And if you await a time when the devil shall be absent,—when he shall give his consent to your soul's liberation; then you are never going to be saved. Do you not see that there can be no convenient hour in the future? It is a false hope. "Go thy way for this time,"—not this time, but when it is convenient: that means, Never. You may as well face it: it means, Never!

III. What was the Root of the Whole Matter? This was not the last time Felix heard Paul preach: "He sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." Apparently for about the space of two years, Felix was in the habit of calling Paul into his presence, and saying, "Tell me something more concerning the faith in Christ." Felix heard the gospel from Paul's lips during those two years, again and again; and he continued to the end where he was the first time, waiting for a convenient hour, which never came.

But for the might of God's Spirit, I should despair of some church-goers. It is no unusual thing to have people come in here who have not been inside a church for years; and the first time they cross the threshold they are converted. There are some other people who never miss church: they are here every Sunday: they hear the gospel again and again; but there they stay. There are people here to-night to whom I have preached scores and scores of times: I have used every argument I know, and have done everything in my power to reason with you about these matters; but there you are, still waiting for the convenient hour. I tell you, my friends, it never will come; and this gospel which we preach to you is going to be either "the savour of life unto life," or "of death unto death," to every one of us. Better that a man should go to perdition from the wilds of Africa, than that he should go from the place of privilege, having heard the gospel and faced these supreme matters, but still waited for a convenient hour.

But what was the matter with Felix? He was evidently a man of ability or he would not have been in the position he occupied. He was the representative of Rome: he was the governor of Cesarea, before whom men came that he might judge them in Cesar's stead. And yet on this great matter he postponed decision year after year, awaiting a convenient hour. What was the reason? It is plainly stated: "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him." There was a covetous desire in his heart, and he said, "As long as there is any hope of my getting some money out of this business, I will postpone decision."

Why have you not decided for Christ? Why have you not submitted to Him? It is not because you have not been reasoned with, nor because your judgment has not been convinced. You have said again and again, "Some time I hope to be on the Lord's side." Why are you not on His side to-night? It is because you have wanted to get something: it is because there is something which you are unwilling to surrender to Him. And that is why men do not believe. The seat of religious belief, is in the will; and when the will is surrendered, it is easy to believe.

I remember talking to a young lady some years ago in a country place, who was home on a visit from college. She was just like Felix. She had heard the word, and she trembled. She came forward saying that she wished to be a Christian; but she insisted that she could not believe, that she could not yield herself to Christ. I asked her many questions; and at last I said, "There is something in your heart that is occupying God's place. There is something in your heart and life that you esteem of greater importance than your relationship to Christ; and until you make salvation the supreme concern of your life, for which you are willing to let everything go, you cannot be saved. Now, is that not true?" And at last she said, "Yes, it is true. There is something standing between me and Christ." "Well then," I said, "I will not talk to you any longer. It is for you, here and now, simply to surrender that thing to your sovereign Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and unless you are ready to do it, you cannot be saved." And at last she bowed in prayer, and she said, "Lord, I will let it go"; and the moment she let it go the light of His countenance shone upon her, and she said, "I believe."

"He hoped also that money should have been given him." He hoped that some way might be found whereby he might gratify his natural desire, and at the same time get right with God. But so long as salvation is subordinated to the hope of temporal gain, the soul can never find peace.

If there were some man here at the head of a business concern dealing in hundreds of millions of dollars; and if the transactions of to-morrow in your place of business were likely to involve the transfer of millions; I would dare to say to you, that if you had it in your power to do the business of the whole world, of all nations, in your office, in one day: I come to you in the name of the Lord to talk to you about something that is incalculably more important than any business on earth,—and that is, What is your relationship to God? That is the supreme question. Will you make it your supreme concern to-night?

A brother who is here to-night told me a story a week ago,—and I am going to repeat it to you. He said there was a man with whom he had spoken periodically for many years about his interest in Christ; but he had never given himself to Him. This man went away to England; and his friend subscribed to the Sunday School Times, which was sent him week by week. After a while he wrote him to say that he had been converted; and that he had been led to the Lord by a little article on the front page,—just a paragraph, on “The peril of over-thinking.” It was the story of a man who professed an interest in the Christian religion, who said to everybody who approached him, “I will think about it. I will take it into my serious consideration.” And he continued “thinking about it.” At last when one friend came to him to present the claims of Christ, he returned him the usual answer, “I will think about it. I will think it over.” And his friend turned to him, as I recall the story, and said, “But, sir, that is not how you act in matters of business. If a man of business comes into your office and presents a certain matter to you, how long will you think about it? The moment you see that it is unprofitable for you to engage in it, you say, ‘No, I will have nothing to do with it’; or, the moment you see it is profitable, you say, ‘Yes, I cannot lose a minute. I shall lose profit if I do.’” And the man yielded to Christ at once. Do you not see it? Why think it over longer? Why say, “Go thy way for this time”?

Some of you have thought it over twenty years perhaps. You know that Jesus can save the sinner: you have seen him save others. Will you save yourself, as God helps you this evening, from the peril of over-thinking; if you will, here and now, say, “As for me, I will yield myself to Jesus Christ, at this time, at this hour, at this moment.” How many will do so?

CHURCH NEWS.

Sunday, December 3rd.—There was a very large attendance at the Monthly Communion Service. Thirty new members were received into the fellowship of the church, twenty of whom had been baptized during the month (of which number seven were baptized at Parliament Street Branch), eight by experience, and two by letter. **Sunday Evening, December 10th.**—Three were baptized; one young man was converted for whom some members of the church had long been praying. Another man, who indicated a desire for spiritual blessing, later gave his testimony, saying that he was a traveller, a buyer for a Western business concern, in the city on business. The night before, while sitting in his hotel, he made up his mind, he did not know why, to come to Jarvis Street Church,

although he had not been in a Baptist church for over twenty-five years. He was related to one of the old families of the church, and was baptized in Parliament Street Church in 1885 when a young boy. He had since wandered far away, but returned whole-heartedly to the Lord during the service, and, like the Ethiopian, "went on his way rejoicing." At the all-day prayer meeting (which began at 5 a.m. and continued till 10 p.m.) the day before, special prayer had been offered for strangers in the hotels, that God would send them to the church. Let us pray always for a "select" congregation, made up of people whom the Holy Spirit by various instrumentalities constrains to assemble to hear the Word. **December 17th.**—Two were baptized.

The Gospel Witness Fund gets a lot to eat, but as it does much work it is always hungry. If you have a loaf to spare send it along; if you have not, ask the Lord to send it through someone else. Above all pray for God's blessing on the message of **The Witness**, and if you know of its being a blessing to anyone, let us know.

Parliament Street Branch Festival.—You are cordially invited to attend the Branch Sunday School Festival on Friday, December 29th. The programme will begin at 7.45 p.m. Contributions of money for the hot Christmas dinner for the children may be left at the church office.

JARVIS STREET CHURCH DIRECTORY.

T. T. SHIELDS, Pastor, 96 Winchester Street. Tel., North 628.
A. W. RECORD, Treasurer, 41 Victor Avenue. Tel., Ger. 5273.
VIOLET STOAKLEY, Church Clerk and Office Secretary. Tel., M. 5670.
WILLIAM FRASER, Pastor's Secretary, 65 Homewood Ave. Phone N. 6047.
C. LEONARD PENNEY, Director of Music, 36 Earls court Ave. Tel., Ken. 7086W.
W. J. HUTCHINSON, S. S. Superintendent, 295 George Street. Tel., M. 3321.

The Church Calendar

Sunday. For the week beginning Sunday, Dec. 24, 1922.
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. The Pastor will speak.
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.
The Parliament Street Branch, 250 Parliament Street. Sunday: Bible School, 3.00, Mr. Thos. McGillicuddy will speak.
Evangelistic Service, conducted by Prof. J. H. Farmer, 7.00.
Wednesday, 8.00, Prayer Meeting. Friday, 7.15, Junior Service.