

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

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

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

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

THE ACCUSED IS ACQUITTED.

A Sermon by the Pastor.

Preached in Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, Dec. 31st, 1922.
(Stenographically reported.)

"And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

"And the Lord said unto Satan, 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?'

"Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel."
—Zechariah, 3: 1-3.

IT is quite probable that this prophecy looks forward to the final restoration of God's people, "the time of restitution of all things." But the future restoration of Israel does not by any means exhaust its meaning: "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."

Joshua was the first high priest after the Babylonish captivity; and he is here seen standing in the presence of the Lord as the representative of God's people. He is described as being "clothed with filthy garments." We have also a picture of an adversary standing at his right hand, in the very presence of the Lord, to resist him. And the Angel of the Lord, the Angel of the covenant, none other than Jehovah—Jesus, a manifestation of the Saviour in the Old Testament dispensation—the Angel of the Lord, is represented as pleading the cause of Joshua; and standing between the accusations of the adversary and the judge, saying to him, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." Then flinging this challenge into the very teeth of the adversary, with respect to Joshua, he says, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

This story is illustrative of the methods of divine grace; for in all dispensations human nature is the same; sin is the same; divine grace is the same; the terms of access to the divine presence are always the same; and the opposition to our growth in grace is always the same. We have here the truth of the gospel wrapped up in this striking picture of one who is accused; of one who is the accuser; of one who is an advocate; with the final triumphant scene describing a complete acquittal.

I. Joshua, therefore, as a representative of the people, appears in the presence of the Lord as **One Accused** of wrong-doing. It is a picture of the people who have wandered from God in ancient time; but of you and me also: it is a representation of the relationship in which every one of us, by nature, stands to God. We are accused; we are "under the law"; we are "condemned already."

Sin is portrayed by a most striking metaphor. Joshua is likened to "a brand plucked out of the fire." Look at the figure for a moment or two. It is impossible to say what that charred thing was in its original form; whether it was an ornament of the temple, displaying the consummate skill of the sculptor; whether it was designed to represent the cherubim, the palm tree, or the open flower; whether it was one of the implements used in the holy service of worship when the high priest went into the temple with blood: whatever it was originally, its beauty has been marred; its shape destroyed. It is now nothing more than a brand that has been plucked out of the fire; something that has barely escaped utter destruction. But whether it was a part of the pinnacle of the temple, or a support of the hangings that veiled the holy place, or a board upon which the feet of the consecrated priests walked when they performed their holy service: whatever it was, it has been so changed by this devouring element that it is no longer a thing of beauty, but only "a brand plucked out of the fire."

Thus, sin accomplishes its work in us; and there is not one of us here this evening who does not bear the marks of the flame upon him. We have passed through the furnace; our original glory has been completely changed, the image and likeness of God effaced: "There is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Turn back the pages of history, and glance at the ruin sin has wrought. I remember motoring over the battle-fields of France, following up the armies while still the war was proceeding, and climbing over the ruins of what had been magnificent buildings—the City Hall of a French city, the great mansions of the wealthy, now utterly destroyed. And looking at that plain of death—the region of the Somme, where cities were utterly demolished, and villages reduced to dust, where death reigned supreme—one had a feeling that the very Pit itself had been opened, and that the fiends of Hell had been busy among the habitations of men. But that is only a picture of human history. Look at the magnificent temples built for the habitation of Deity! There is not one of them that has not been despoiled of its beauty, even the best of them: Moses, with his meekness; Samson, with his strength; David, with his goodness; Solomon, with his wisdom; all blackened with the fire, and some of them reduced utterly to ashes. Call the roll of the names of these great personalities, whose record is preserved in history—Pharaoh, Ahab and Nebuchadnezzar, who walked in his palace and surveyed his city, and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"—yet all reduced at last to nothing but ashes. Sin is a devouring flame; and there are no fireproof buildings. It fires the passions, and destroys the body; it inflames the imagination, and corrupts the mind; it perverts the highest instincts of the soul, and reduces a man made to be the companion of God to the very level of the demons in the pit.

Moreover, fire does its deadliest work in the secret places, in the garret, in the cellar, behind closed doors, or where blinds are drawn, and the windows

are shuttered, and everything is concealed. There it does its work, until at last it burns its way out, and manifests its terribly destructive might. Such is sin! Though small in its beginning, like a little taper which a child's breath might extinguish, it becomes at last a devouring fury which no human power can stay. How ought we to be afraid of the tiniest spark of evil; when we remember that it was by one sin this world was plunged to destruction!

Fire is sometimes very attractive. Have you not seen in the summer time those delicate creatures flying about the light, those tiny moths with delicate wings, flying into the flame? We were made with wings; but sin lays hold upon the very finest qualities of the mind, the noblest attributes of our human nature; and unless the wind of the Spirit blows strongly heavenward, the highest qualities of the mind are used to fly to hell with! Like silly moths, men fly right into the fire.

But there is another side to this. Joshua is represented by another figure, which suggests the principle of moral responsibility. He is "clothed with filthy garments"; and thus arrayed he comes into the presence of the Holy One, bearing witness against himself. What if the murderer came before his judge with the stain of his victim's blood upon his garments? What if the thief rushed madly into court bearing his plunder in his hand? What if Judas should try to excuse himself, while having the price of his infamy fast locked in that covetous fist of his? No further witnesses were required. When the prodigal came home it was not necessary for him to explain the life in the far country, nor to tell how he had been employed at the menial task of feeding swine; his filthy garments were the proof of it. That is the picture which the word of the Lord gives of every one of us. I read to you this evening that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." And we come into His presence with the evidence of our sin clinging to us: we are condemned already in the presence of the divine Judge.

These garments, which are here described as "filthy garments," were also the vestments of religion. Joshua is not here represented as a flagrant criminal, as an outlaw, as one who has trampled the decencies of life beneath his feet: he is here as the flower of his people, as the highest product of a specially religious race; and yet even his dress is likened unto "filthy garments." "Brethren," said the Apostle Paul, "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." How unpopular the Apostle Paul would be in certain religious assemblies to-day! How he would be cried down if he were to say, "Brethren, there are thousands of religious people who are not saved." But Paul said, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge"—the Pharisee with his immaculate robe, the priest with his elaborate ritual, a religious race with all their religious traditions,—"I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

In years past I have preached on several occasions in asylums for the insane. The patients seemed to be quite sane at times; but one peculiar characteristic which distinguished some of the women was their head-dress. They wore the most grotesque creations. I must admit, however, I have seen people not in insane asylums somewhat similarly distinguished. But I remember in one place there was a woman who was fearfully and wonderfully arrayed; and

the attendants told me that she prepared her dress with the most elaborate care. She wore a most wonderful bonnet, and she used to come proudly up at the close of the service, and say, "How do you do? I am Queen Victoria. I am going to be married next week. Will you come to my wedding?" I was invited by her repeatedly. You laugh at it; but she thought she was splendidly dressed; she thought she was ready for the royal wedding.

But she was sane in comparison with a great many people who imagine they are ready for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. When once the light from the Throne shines upon us, we are led to say, "And did I ever dream that I could stand before God like this? Was I ever so ignorant of God's righteousness as to go about to establish my own righteousness, and to refuse to submit myself to the righteousness of God?" Human nature at its best, when it has made its utmost effort to dress itself up, is like Joshua in his priestly robes—clad in filthy garments, accused, condemned in the presence of the Judge.

II. And then to make matters worse, **There Was An Adversary**, an accuser, to give emphasis to every defect, which one might have supposed was sufficiently evident without argument. There was an adversary "standing at his right hand to resist him," and to forbid his acquittal. That is a doctrine that has largely fallen into desuetude in these days. It is almost out of date to believe in the existence of a personal devil, of an evil intelligence, who is the implacable enemy of humankind. But it is the revelation of Scripture; and I want you who are Christians, while I speak now for a few minutes, to pray; because the devil never likes to be exposed. The worst devil of all is no devil at all. He likes so to disguise himself as to persuade men of his non-existence, that he may have a free hand to accomplish his deadly work.

But the teaching of Scripture is, that there is an evil intelligence whose supreme purpose is to destroy our souls. "Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." He is described as "the accuser of the brethren." Our Lord Jesus spoke of him as a strong man armed, who keepeth his palace, and whose goods are in peace; and against whom no human power can prevail. Jesus believed in the existence of a personal devil. He was led up into the wilderness to be tempted; and He unsheathed the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, against this mighty adversary. In the soft and affectionate tones of one of His own disciples our Lord detected the voice of the tempter; and, turning sharply to one who would have persuaded Him to turn aside from His purpose, He said, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man."

Our adversary is here to-night. "There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them." And there are men and women here to-night, I doubt not, who have come to this place, or to some other place, again and again, with a desire to find salvation; but have gone away, and said, "I scarcely know why I did not yield myself to Christ. I wanted to do so. I heard the voice of the Spirit urging me to do it; and yet there seemed to be another power greater than my own which held me back." There was another power; and the choice which every man and woman must make ultimately, for evermore, is between light and darkness, between life and death, between heaven and hell, between Christ and Barabbas, between God and the devil—one or the other. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey."

We have all had evidence, we have all had proof, of the existence of that terrible adversary. Not alone from my study of the Word of God have I become convinced of the reality of this evil presence: the Word of God has interpreted certain facts of life, which, apart from that, would be inexplicable. I know that I am pursued, and have always been pursued by an evil power; that while it has found place within, it is yet objective to myself. If your life's history were written by the pen of inspiration, written by one who sees the philosophy of that life, the reason for things, the springs of life,—if the record of your life were so written, the shadow of that accuser would fall across every page of it; and you would discover that the murderer of souls has been on your track from the beginning.

As I have already said, Jesus believed in the reality of that evil intelligence. He was under no delusion whatever when He essayed the task of man's redemption. He knew that Beelzebub would never be divided against himself; and He was prepared to face principalities, and powers, and the rulers of this world's darkness, unified, and under the supreme command of an evil personality; which, in his capacities, was second only to God Himself.

And here is a picture of what happens whenever a soul seeks to come into the presence of God: Satan comes also into the presence of God, standing at his right hand to resist him. There is no temple which has not been defiled by his hateful presence; there is no pinnacle to which we may climb, however lofty, from which we may not be tempted to cast ourselves down; there is no wilderness upon whose sands his cloven foot-marks may not be traced: he follows us everywhere; he pursues us into the presence of God Himself. This representative of the people has come where God is; and at his right hand, in the very presence of Deity, this presumptuous accuser stands, as though he had resolved, "I never will surrender him; I will capture him yet; he is my lawful prey." Alas! alas! it is the experience of every one of us! "Bring him hither to me," said Jesus, to the father who had brought his lunatic boy to the disciples that they might cast the devil out, and they had failed;—"Bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him." Men have shut themselves within stone walls; and they have deliberately chosen a monastic career; and they have said, "We will shut evil out; we will bolt and double-bar the doors; and shut ourselves in with God." But even as they bowed to pray in their solitary cell, it seemed as though a trap-door into the pit were opened, and there swarmed around them and into their minds a million evil thoughts, like the flies and frogs of Egypt. And behold, the devil was there! Indeed, the realm of religion is his chosen sphere: transforming himself into an angel of light, he still does his deadliest work where men bow to pray. Ah, there is the picture!—seared, scarred, fire-marked, arrayed in filthy garments unfit for the presence of God, guilty, utterly defenceless; and at our side the most practised prosecutor, the most terrible adversary in all the universe, who will show no pity, who will demand the utmost penalties of the law!

III. If my story ended here, you and I were lost men and women. But, behold, there is a third,—the angel of Jehovah! There is the accused, and the accuser; but there is **An Advocate**: and the angel of Jehovah answers and says, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee."

Will you observe that He speaks in behalf of one who has nothing to say for himself. No word of Joshua is recorded. He is like the man without the wedding garment,—he is speechless; he has no defence to make whatever. But his Advocate undertakes his cause, and pleads it before the throne of heaven.

My friend, are you going to plead your own cause by and by? If I were to come to you personally this evening, and say, "Are you a sinner?" somebody here would say, "I do not know that I am a very great sinner, sir." You would immediately tell me of somebody who is worse than yourself. He is a very bad man who cannot find somebody worse than himself; and if we proceed on that score, we shall have no difficulty whatever in finding some sort of self defence, or self-justification.

But so long as you have one word to say for yourself, Jesus has nothing to say for you. Remember! so long as you cherish a hope in your heart for yourself, on the ground of your own merit, then Jesus will leave you to yourself; and you will have to plead your own cause. Woe be to the man who stands at last before that great White Throne without an advocate! But if here and now we have got to the end of our pleading; and if we have sat down with our

Advocate,—or let me rather say, if we are humbled in His presence; and if we have said, "I have no defence to make; look at my filthy garments; look, there are the marks of sin: all things are naked and opened unto Thine eyes with Whom we have to do; look within, I am guilty—guilty—guilty; I have nothing to say;"—then the great Advocate will take up your case. "My little children," said John, "these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." He will plead our cause.

I do not often go to police courts, or other courts of justice. I would rather preach the gospel than practise law; but I have been there, and I have seen how entirely an accused person leaves his defence in the hands of his advocate. He is absolutely silent; and his advocate appears in his behalf.

What is it to trust Jesus? It is to plead guilty, and to hand the case over to Him entirely; it is to make Jesus Christ your Advocate before the throne of God, and confess, "I have nothing to say."

Observe the case proceed. There is the silent Joshua "clothed with filthy garments;" the Advocate arises and turns upon his venomous accuser, and says, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." Joshua had no power to do it; his salvation depended entirely upon a greater power than his own. In a few hours we shall reach the end of the year; and I do not say to anybody, "Do not attempt to make a New Year's resolution." But I do say that any resolution you are going to keep will have to be made in a power that is not your own.

I would like you to see how the weakness of Joshua was reinforced by the might of his Advocate, Who said, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." Ah, but Satan had chosen Jerusalem, too! Satan had said, "I will have Jerusalem"; but God had said, "No, it is a city which I have chosen to set my name there." It is a conflict, not merely of the human and satanic will, but a conflict of hell and heaven. Who is going to win?—"The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem: I have willed his acquittal; I have willed his deliverance; I have willed his salvation; I am here to give effect to My purpose of grace: The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee."

Do you want this brought into the New Testament? "I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." What a heroic figure is Peter! But his Advocate says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat;—into your life that satanic power has come; Satan has desires concerning you—but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Jesus knew the issue, as when, in His great high priestly prayer, He said, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory. Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition. I never was his advocate; and he never engaged me. I have never prayed for him; but for the rest I plead before the throne of heaven: none of them is lost; and I will that they all may behold my glory."

I make this as my confession, that I have no hope toward God at this moment, no hope of my soul's ultimate salvation, apart from this great principle that the Lord, Who for reasons I have never understood, set His wondrous love upon me, and has chosen me: He brings to bear the might of His will against the will of the enemy; and it is He who is my Advocate.

Observe further: "The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." As though He had said to Satan: "I have brought them back. Thou leddest them into sin. The judgment fell upon them. They have been yonder in Babylon for seventy years; but behold they have come back again. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Thou didst kindle the fire; thou didst feed the very flames of hell; but I have plucked him out of the fire. Here he is. Thou art defeated; thy purposes have come to naught; and grace has triumphed."

My brethren, that is salvation. There is fire within, fire about us, fire beneath us; there is enough of hell in your heart to rekindle the fires if they were extinguished at this moment; evil potentialities are in every one of us that would lead us in an everlasting descent away from God; and yet He says concerning the redeemed soul, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" There is no place for human glory in that! It is a picture of a fire, and someone going right into the burning fiery furnace, jeopardizing his own life, and putting his strong arm about the helpless victim in the flames, and bringing him out in safety.

Thus our Lord Jesus came out of the glory down into the pit, into the flames

of hell, itself: He tasted death for every man; He paid our debt; He cancelled our indebtedness; He balanced the books; He justified us before God—"a brand plucked out of the fire."

May God for ever be praised for a salvation that meets the need of defeated sinners; for a grace that puts,—may I dare to say?—that puts at the disposal of the morally vanquished all the resources of Omnipotence, bringing us out of the fire!

Then the Angel of the Lord "spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Here is a wonderful word! The Advocate was pleading; He has won His case: He says, "Take away the filthy garments; clothe him with clean raiment; let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments." And, hear it! "**The angel of the Lord stood by!**" He always stands by the penitent sinner, taking away the filthy garments, acquitting him, clothing him, justifying him, robbing him with garments "for glory and for beauty," restoring him to the divine favour, defeating the purpose of hell, and triumphing over principalities and powers. To secure this "the angel of the Lord stands by!"

Do you want to have a salvation like this for the New Year? Do you want to have the Angel of the Lord stand by? Will you cross the threshold into the New Year in company with Him? Will you dismiss your fears, so far as it is possible to do so, and hand over your case to the Advocate, and be silent before Him? How shall I urge upon you the necessity of this great decision here and now? Guilty every one; the throne of judgment awaiting us: either your case in the hands of the accuser, who is the prosecutor, and will pursue you right up to the great White Throne; or otherwise, your case in the hands of Jesus Christ, your Advocate, who never lost a case;—which shall it be? Is there some one here to-night who will retain—may I use the legal phrase?—who will "retain" Jesus Christ as your Advocate? somebody who will say, "I will"?

PRAY ON!

It is the mission of the Church in these days when the very fundamentals of the faith are being denied by so many who are called Christians, to demonstrate in its own life the supernaturalism of the Christian religion. A church becomes a real witness to the truth when it becomes the workshop of the Holy Ghost. There is no argument for the gospel like a regenerated man or woman. Therefore let us exercise ourselves to bear such fruit as shall be unmistakably the fruit of the Spirit. God is permitting us in some small measure to show what God will do for those who trust Him, and who will honour His word by putting His promises to the proof.

We are finding that there are many people who have wearied of the policy of compromise with the world, and with the unbelief which masquerades in the robes of Modernism, who have been longing to find a church which is at least endeavoring to practice the principles of the New Testament, and who are finding in our great prayer meetings, and in our Sunday services, an answer to their prayers.

The past year was one of unexampled blessing in Jarvis Street, and this year has already yielded us more than one cluster of Eshcol. Let us highly resolve that we will prove the promises of God to the uttermost by cutting ourselves off from all support save God alone. We would summon the whole church to prayer! To more prayer: in private and in public, let there be more and more prayer. Let us besiege the throne of grace with our petitions, and hold on to God until there shall blaze up in Jarvis Street a revival fire which shall spread throughout the whole country. Begin at once in private, and Saturday night in public.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Last Sunday.—One was baptized in the morning, and at the Communion Service following fourteen received the hand of fellowship. Last monthly Communion we welcomed thirty. We trust that no monthly Communion may pass for the rest of the year in which we shall not welcome a larger number than last Sunday. At the evening service there was a large congregation, and

two were baptized. Four responded to the invitation, and came forward, at least three of whom we believe were soundly converted, and gave their testimony before the meeting closed. But this was not all. There were such evidences of the Spirit working in the hearts of the people, that after a long and wonderful after-meeting in which there were often three and four on their feet at once, a good number felt constrained to continue in prayer until midnight for blessing on the word preached. Surely the Lord God is walking in the midst of His garden. Not in judgment but in grace we have heard Him walking among the trees of the garden. Let us bestir ourselves in the confidence that the Lord is going before us.

The Bible Lectures.—Last Monday the Pastor gave the first of a series of lectures on "How to Study the Bible." The parlor was packed, literally packed, with about twice as many people as it can comfortably accommodate, and then many were crowded out into the primary room, and others into the hallway. This week we shall hold the meeting in the Lecture Hall, and we hope we shall be crowded into the main auditorium, as we were last year, before long. The second lecture of the series will be delivered Tuesday, on "Where to Begin." Tell your friends, and come early for the prayer meeting at 7.45. The room was full at this hour last week. Let no one forget these lectures will be useful only as they are blessed by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The Last Two Wednesdays.—The first was the Sunday School Christmas Tree Supper, and the last the Festival programme. We have never attended such a wholesome, happy, and withal, spiritual entertainment as on these two evenings. We have never seen children and parents happier, and their happiness was of such a quality that it seemed reasonable to expect it to issue in revival. Shall we not all pray for our School more and more. We may well thank God at every remembrance of those who labour so lovingly with the children.

Thursday and Saturday This Week.—When will the revival fire break out into a great conflagration? Perhaps this week! It may be on a Thursday or Saturday. You cannot afford to be absent.

WOMEN! PLEASE NOTE.

The "Open" Meeting of the Women's Home Mission Board will be held in the Beverley Street Baptist Church (corner Beverley and Sullivan Streets), at 10.15 a.m., Thursday, January 18th. Do not miss this. It will be a meeting of inspiration and intercession. Missionaries will speak. Come! Bring that interested friend with you. Her awakened interest may mean much to your church. Bring sandwiches. Hot tea and coffee will be provided by our hostesses. Adjournment at three o'clock. Remember the date, Thursday, January 18th.

The Baptist Candle. A new tract by Dr. C. J. Holman entitled, "Put the Baptist Candle in the Candlestick," companion to "Why Keep the Baptist Candle Under a Bushel?" may be had at the Church, Office. About 25,000 of the first have been circulated over this continent and Great Britain. Help to put the candle in a candlestick.

The Church Calendar

Sunday. For the week beginning Sunday, January 14th, 1923

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, 7.45, Prayer followed by Bible Lecture by the Pastor, on "How to Study the Bible—Where to Begin."

Wednesday—Junior Service, 7.15.

The Parliament Street Branch, 250 Parliament Street. Sunday: Bible School, 3.00.

Evangelistic Service, conducted by W. L. McKay.

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