

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.

Address correspondence: The Gospel Witness, 130 Gerrard Street E., Toronto

TORONTO, JANUARY 25th, 1923.

Vol. 1

(\$3.00 per year, postpaid, 5c. per copy.)

No. 37

The Jarvis Street Pulpit

"THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH."

A Sermon by the Pastor.

Preached in Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday morning, Jan. 21st, 1923.
(Stenographically reported.)

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went."—Hebrews, 11: 8.

"And Abraham took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."—Genesis 12: 5.

We are accustomed in this day to doing things by machinery. We are rather proud of the rapidity of our progress. We are disposed to boast of what we are able to accomplish in a short time. This prevailing spirit has very largely taken possession of the Church of Christ, until men are no longer content to follow the example of the good shepherd who left the ninety and nine in the wilderness and went out after that which was lost until he found it. Nowadays, I say, but few are content to devote their energies to the saving of individuals. We want to save people by multitudes, in the mass: hence, the Church has given itself to all kinds of schemes for the rapid increase of its membership.

This morning I would call you back to the divine plan, and to show you from the Word of God what great importance the Lord attaches to the individual. We are born, one by one; we die, one by one; we must be saved, one by one. For salvation is an individual, a personal matter; and we must come as individuals into vital union with Jesus Christ if we are to be saved. Go back over the history of God's unfolding purpose. You will recall readily how God undertook to rebuild the world, to repopulate the earth, from one man. "The end of all flesh," said He, "is come before me,"—"but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." And of Noah and his family God rebuilt the world. And when again He would choose a nation for Himself, He selected

one man. He did not begin with a multitude. He began by calling one man, and he a very old man. And as though God would show what He could do with one man who would believe Him and obey Him, He selected one who is described as being "as good as dead": "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable." I think we must take that verse for a text some Sunday morning: "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable." That is God's way of blessing the world. And we shall try to learn this morning how the blessing came through this one man, for God's ways are ever the same: He is "the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

I. To begin with, **The Call of Grace Generally Disturbs One's Natural Relationships.** When God came to Abraham He did not leave him as He found him by nature. God's call effected a revolution in Abraham's life. He came to him saying, "Get thee out." The writer of the book of Genesis is writing, historically. He is writing of an experience that is past, and is explaining Abraham's pilgrimage. He begins by saying, "And the Lord had said unto Abraham, Get thee out,—move, emigrate, find another place. This is not the place of blessing." The trees of our heavenly Father's planting have all been transplanted from their native soil. The plant of grace is not native to this sinful world, it is an indigene of the heavenly places, it is indigenous to the soil of Paradise, it is a little bit of heaven let down to earth. And when God calls to a man He comes to make him a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, and so deals with him that he is enabled to say, "Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." God's people here are a colony: they are aliens in respect to the things of this world. The call of grace says, "Get thee out." God did not leave Moses in the palace of Pharaoh; He did not allow him to consent to being called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He said to Moses, "Get thee out." The divine Gardener laid His hand upon him to transplant him to His own garden. Being a Christian means much more than a change of name. It means a change of nature, a change of situation, of environment, a change of companionship, a change of all the relationships of life—for they are all affected by our new relationship to Him Who said, "Get thee out." The Christian recognizes a new authority; he is regulated by a new law, he is directed by the will of God.

This involves very often the severance of the tenderest ties. In the case of Abraham it involved leaving his country: "Get thee out of thy country,"—leave Ur of the Chaldees, the place of all your old associations, where all your affections are rooted and grounded. It meant tearing Abraham up by the roots; for the religion of Christ is radical, it goes to the root; it does not concern itself merely with externals, it goes to the heart of things. "Get thee out of thy country." Every connection with that country was severed; for God would find a man who would become separated unto Himself. Sometimes it may mean such a change of situation as necessitates the giving up of our occupation, the leaving of a situation which has afforded our livelihood: "Get thee out of thy country." Abraham might have said, "But Lord, here I have tilled the soil; here I have found shelter and sustenance; here is my home; here are my barns, my granaries; this is the land that has given me such wealth as I have." But God said, "Get thee out of thy country, leave it all behind you." Obedience to the divine call does not always involve a

change of occupation, but not infrequently it does. It does mean, however, separation unto God. The Apostle Paul gives us the secret of his marvellously successful career as a minister of the gospel, when he says he was "separated unto the gospel of God." A minister ought to be separated unto the gospel, that is his one business. But what is true of the minister is true of every believer: we are all separated unto the gospel. That is every believer's business. We are all to be witnesses for Christ. It may be there are some here this morning who are being called to that privilege. I bring you the word of the Lord: "Get thee out of thy country,"—but follow Him, no matter what it costs: no matter what radical change it may effect in your manner of life, I conjure you to obey Him!

This means often breaking with the natural affinities of life: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred." We all have our kindred, those who are related to us by the ties of nature, those who are of our own flesh and blood; but there is another kind of kinship than that. There are social affinities. There are people who have been similarly trained, similarly brought up; who have been accustomed to the same manner of life, and in the nature of the case these have much in common. They have been trained through long years to view things from the same standpoint. There are temperamental, and educational, and intellectual affinities. There are people who share the same temperament, others with whom we have much in common mentally; they are of the same capacities, they think on the same plane naturally, and we can sit down with them and talk about things which are mutually interesting. They are, too, educationally, our fellows, our equals. But sometimes the call of God interferes even with these relationships; and separates a man from all natural associations. As for instance, Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee. He was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. He had much in common with the doctors of the law. He was a man of massive mind, a man of keen mental perception, of great intellectual power; and when God's call came to him, it required him to get out from his kindred, and to associate himself with men who were called "unlearned and ignorant," but who had been with Jesus. There are also religious affinities. There are people who have been trained religiously to view things other than from a Biblical standpoint. They have been brought up in certain denominational affiliations. Somebody says, "I am an Anglican"; or another, "I am a Methodist"; or "I am a Presbyterian"; or "I am a Roman Catholic"; or "I am a Baptist." It may be that God's call will sometimes separate us from these things. "Get thee out," if God calls. Many people would answer the divine call, "Lord, I would like very much to respond to Thy call; but I should love to stay in Ur of the Chaldees; that is where I was brought up, that is where all my friends are; that is where all the interests of life are for me: may I not stay in Ur of the Chaldees?" God's answer is, "No! Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred." Obey God; put Him first—before business, before pleasure, before all your natural tastes, before all social ties, and natural affinities, and religious prejudices. Get thee out! Hear God's call; follow Him; go where He wants you to go; and He will show you what He can do with a man who will unhesitatingly follow after Him.

"And from thy father's house." "I am come," said Jesus, "to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." A woman says, "I understand the teaching of God's

Word; but I believe it is every wife's duty to go with her husband. Emphatically, No! I tell you in the name of the Lord it is not any wife's duty to go with her husband, unless her husband is going in the right direction. It is the duty of every wife to go with Jesus Christ wherever He goes, and if your husband goes too, then God be praised; but if he does not, don't you go with him. Or a mother says, "I have to consider the wishes of my family, you know." The worst thing that any father or mother could ever do in this life for their own or their children's sake, is to give Jesus Christ a second place in their own family. I have seen people do it, and as God is true those who have given the pre-eminence to their children, and have allowed their children to dominate their household, and to turn the parents away from obedience to Jesus Christ,—as God is true, I say, they will rue the day that they ever gave second place to Jesus: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." Can you not see the divine Gardener coming to this plant, taking His spade and digging all around it? He finds a root here and another there, but He ruthlessly drives His sharp spade through and severs it, and then He lifts it up by the hand of grace and transplants it. Get thee out! out! out! What is a church? It is a company of people who are called out, who are no longer in the world, but called out of the world. God cannot do anything with a man or with a company of men until every root connecting them with the old life is cut and they are separated unto Him. And He wants to show to-day what He can do with those who will yield themselves wholly to Him. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed." Did you hear it? By faith he obeyed! he obeyed! I wish I could hang that as a bell in your memories that it might keep on ringing all the week and for evermore. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed"! "Obeyed"! "Obeyed"! Can you hear it? He "obeyed"!

Just before our Denominational Forward Movement was launched, one of our most prominent Baptist laymen addressed the Toronto Baptist Ministerial Association. He had just come back from California, and his spirit was heavy because of what he had seen there. He had seen multitudes madly rushing after pleasure. He had observed that there was scarcely any distinction between the professing church and the giddy crowd that belonged to the world. He especially mentioned the passion for amusement, the craze for pleasure of every kind—motoring for pleasure, attendance at plays of all sorts, the mad craze for dancing, for gambling. People were living on stimulants instead of upon food. And he spoke of the necessity for Christian people and the Christian Church to take some stand upon these matters. As I heard that address I was deeply moved: for here was a man whom God had evidently called. He said gratefully that so far as his own family was concerned, they were with him in this matter. When he had finished I ventured to move a vote of thanks, as is our custom, and in doing so I suggested that this brother should call together a company of Baptist laymen in this city, our most prominent leaders; and that he should say these things to them as well as to the ministers; and that he should appeal to them, saying, "Brethren, let us as heads of families take our stand, let us call our children about us, let us tell them that as for ourselves, we will serve the Lord, and we will separate ourselves from all these forms of worldly pleasure." That gentleman replied to that resolution by saying, "I would gladly do what Mr. Shields has suggested, but,"

he said, "I do not believe that I could find twenty of what are called our prominent laymen in this city who would stand with me on that matter." Continuing, he said, "I do not think I could find a dozen." Then as they evidently came before his mind, he reduced the number still further. He said, "I fear I could not find half a dozen. Really I cannot think of even two or three who would definitely take that stand before their families." Later we had a great meeting; and we appointed committees; we discussed the evils of the day; everybody recognized that something needed to be done in this matter. In effect they said, "We have heard God's call, 'Get thee out.'" But alas! when they found it involved separation from kindred, and family, and many other associations, they elected to remain in Ur of the Chaldees. Even some of the ministers expressed the fear that to call people out from participation in these things would be useless. "Get thee out from thy kindred," is God's call; and "by faith Abraham when he was called, obeyed."

By the greatness of His mercy, God has permitted me to speak every week to a far larger audience than could be contained within these walls, through the printed page; and to send the message of this pulpit to India, to China, and to New Zealand; to Great Britain, to different parts of the United States, from coast to coast in Canada, and even to Mexico, and to South America; and I want now for one brief moment to speak to that invisible audience. I have deliberately told you the story of the failure of one man who unmistakably heard God's call to obey; and with all earnestness I urge every man and woman who shall read these words, when God calls, to obey;—in your church, in your village, in your town, in your city, wherever you are, whatever it may cost, obey! "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house," and let God show what He can do through a man, or a woman, or a church, who will trust in Him, even if all the world oppose.

II. True faith is content often with the apprehension of the word even while lacking a full understanding of the way of the Lord. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee"; "And he went out, not knowing whither he went"; went out into the dark, without seeing the end of the way; without knowing anything about the climate of the country to which he was going; without any promise of milk and honey; but he obeyed, though not knowing whither he went. Our great Admiral often sends His ships to sea with sealed orders. He bids us put to sea, and after we get to sea we shall know whither we are going. It may be there are some here this morning who are troubled at that point. You have heard God's call; but you are saying, "I am waiting for further light." If you have heard God's call, and clearly apprehend His word, you have no reason to wait for further light. Go, even though you know not whither you go. God unfolds His purposes a step at a time. I asked Mr. Penny to select the hymns for this morning. He did not know what I was going to preach on, and I did not know either, when he selected the hymn we sang just now:

"His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower."

A step at a time, he leads us: "Unto a land that I will shew thee."

Observe further: In the leading of His people, God never subordinates the Giver to the gift! He always subordinates the gift to the Giver. You can generally distinguish the children who yield obedience to their parents for a price; to whom father and mother say, "Do this or do that, and if you do, I will give you something." Our Lord never bribes His children. "Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right!" Do it without promise of reward, do it because it is father's will, because it is mother's command. "Get thee out," said God to Abraham, "to a land that I will shew thee." He announced His purpose to bless him, but the character of the blessing, and the experience of the path, He did not immediately divulge. And in God's dealing with His people, He always leaves, beyond the area of His clearly revealed purpose, a margin of mystery, of the unknown, for the exercise of faith:

"The steps of faith fall on the seeming void,
And find the rock beneath."

III. The obedience of faith leads always step by step, in the direction of the Canaan of the divine plan and purpose: Abraham went out not knowing whither he went; but the divine historian, with the record of Abraham's life spread out before him, and the light of God shining upon it, writing by divine inspiration, says, "And they went forth to go into the land of Canaan,"—Abraham did not know it, but he "went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came." I bring you this commonplace, but inspiring principle, which we all know, and have heard a thousand times, and which we all profess to believe, and I ask you in the name of the Lord this morning to apply this principle to your life. I am not speaking to somebody else;—I am addressing you, as I am speaking to myself: When God thus comes to us, and calls us out, though we know not whither we go, let us never forget that He knows; and though we know not whither we go, we may always know with Whom we go; and as long as we are with Him, in fellowship with Him, in the way of the divine plan and purpose, we are certainly going forth to go into His land of Canaan, into the place of His appointment. What do I mean by that? I mean this: that involved in every precept and principle of the gospel, there is a divine plan; that when God commands you to a certain duty, behind that command there is a plan for you, and that if you will do what He tells you, He will unfold His plan to you; for involved in that word of direction there is the energy of the divine purpose leading you out into some land of Canaan. I go farther than that, and say, that behind every principle of the Word, not only its explicit precepts, but behind and involved in every principle of the Word there is a divine plan, there is a divine purpose, and the moment we allow the precepts and principles of the gospel to become operative in our lives, the moment we bring our whole character and conduct under the dominion of the principles and power of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that moment we are brought into a place in God's plan and purpose, and we have all Heaven to help us to get to the land of Canaan. Do you not see it? You say, "It is so hard to live the Christian life, it is so hard to do as He commands me, it costs so much." You are mistaken there, my friend. I know we all think that; but in the light of God's truth, we are wrong. The expensive way is the way of disobedience, not the way of obedience. What do you know about to-morrow with all your wisdom? "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and

then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." We know not what a day nor an hour may bring forth; for when we have used all our wisdom, when we have based our plans upon the deductions of our own long experience, even then we must go forth not knowing whither we go, and without any assurance of ever getting into the Canaan of our desires. If, on the other hand, God becomes our Master and Guide, there is a land of Canaan for every soul to whom God comes saying, "Get thee out unto a land that I will shew thee."

And, notwithstanding the mists and fog which obscured the human vision at the beginning, "Into the land of Canaan they came." They always do! There is no falling out by the way. The train of the divine purpose always arrives; the ship the divine Pilot commands always reaches its desired haven; the bride He espouses must come to the marriage; he whom divine grace makes a guest always sits down at the feast; the poor lost sheep whom the good Shepherd seeks always finds his way home upon the shoulders of the divine Pastor. Can you not see the Heavenly Wind blowing the clouds away, letting the light shine down from Heaven, and behold, this life of mystery, and problem, and perplexity—use as many words as you like that mean darkness, confusion and uncertainty—God comes and sweeps away all the mists, and He says, "There is the complete story of one who in the obedience of faith went out, not knowing whither he went. Though he knew it not, by My plan and purpose, he went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan he came." Hallelujah! "He brought us out that He might bring us in."

Joseph went to see his brethren. Where are you going, Joseph? I am going to inquire about my brothers, and to bring word to my father. He is getting anxious about them, for they have been long away." And you will come back soon, Joseph? "Oh, yes, I will come back soon." Where is he going? God has called him; and he is taking the first step towards the throne; albeit he does not know it. And they said, "Behold this dreamer cometh." He is carried away with the Ishmaelites, and he goes out from his father's presence, and beyond his father's knowledge. You know the old story, how he was taken down into Egypt, and sold into the house of Potiphar; first promoted and then humbled and numbered with the transgressors in the prison house; but ultimately the chain of gold is put about his neck, and Pharaoh's signet ring is put upon his finger; all the storehouses opened at his command, even as they had been filled by his providence, and the lives of all the people of those famine-stricken lands put into the hands of God's king! He went forth to go into the land of the divine purpose—but his Canaan happened to be Egypt,—and into the land of the divine purpose he came.

Where are you going, David? "I am going to the army to take these few loaves, and this parched corn to my big brothers there; and these ten cheeses to their captain. They joined the army; they are wearing the king's uniform, and mother thought she would just like to have word from them. She filled up this basket, and I am going to take it up to Eliab, and Abinadab, and Shammah, and bring father and mother word again." Where are you going, David? "Just to show a little kindness to my brothers. I'll be back soon to look after the sheep." But if we could see with God's eyes, we should have seen that in the day when David set forth for the camp of Saul the very angels of Heaven swarmed down the skies. And if we had said, "What are you looking at, O bright spirits from before the Throne?" they would have said, "We are beholding the beginning of the triumphal march of one of God's kings." He too, went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan he came! Will you go? "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed." Shall we pull the rope and set the bell ringing again? He heard the call, so have you, but that is not the emphatic word this morning—hear it: he "obeyed"! "Obeyed"! "Obeyed"! "Obeyed"! "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore innumerable."

"If our faith were but more simple,
We should take Him at His word;
And our lives would be all sunshine,
In the sweetness of the Lord."

NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Bible Lectures. Last Tuesday's meeting was largely attended. There is probably no other church in the city of any denomination which has such largely attended week-night meetings. The collection and proceeds from the sale of the printed lectures have covered the cost of publishing the first two lectures, so that we are reasonably sure of being able to continue their publication to the end of the series. Will the Lord's remembrances give these Tuesday lectures a special place in their prayers?

The Ministry of The Gospel Witness. From week to week we receive most encouraging reports of the manifest blessing of God upon the testimony of this paper. In practically every hospital in the city it finds a place. Someone is sure to leave a copy with one of the patients, and we have heard of several cases where the copy is passed around until it has been read by every patient in the ward who is able to read. We have heard of other cases where it has proved a special benediction to deaf people who have not heard a sermon for years. Others are finding it useful to send to their unconverted friends in other places, and even in other countries. Some are finding it helpful in remote places where no religious services are held. One woman writes that she is trying to be pastor of a little shepherdless flock, and that she passes on to them the weekly message of The Witness. All this fills us with gratitude to God for making its publication possible. But there are hundreds who receive profit who never tell us. We are not asking for compliments when we write this request. The Witness is sent forth weekly with the most earnest prayer. We are anxious only that it should be used to bring people nearer to Christ. If our readers could hear the prayers which ascend weekly from Jarvis St. for all who read these pages, we feel sure that every one finding blessing in these pages would write and tell us so. We write now to make a very special request. While prayer is offered for The Witness at all our paper-meetings, we are going to ask the people to pray especially for The Witness and its readers Thursday, Feb. 1st, and Saturday, Feb. 3rd. Will every reader who has at any time and in any way found spiritual blessing in The Witness write us just a line—perhaps a postcard—and tell us about it. These will be read so far as possible at the meetings for prayer that we may pray the more intelligently.

Nearing the Year's End. Only two months remain to the end of our church year (March 31st). Shall we endeavour to make these months the most fruitful of the twelve? In every way, day by day, let us try to do better. Let us aim at increased attendance at our already great prayer meetings, and with a still deeper consecration give ourselves to the work of the Lord. Shall we not also endeavour to give of our substance to the Lord's work, if possible with an even more generous hand? Tens of thousands will be interested in the report of our year's work. Let us resolve it shall be such a report as shall be glorifying to God.

Women's Mission Circle. Thursday, February 1st at 3 p.m. in the Church Parlor the Women's Mission Circle will meet. The first of two programmes on "Grande Ligne" has been prepared by Mrs. Fleischer and Mrs. Ball, "Madame Feller's Life and the Beginnings of the Grand Ligne Mission" being the topic presented. Let no woman miss this inspiring story of this French-Canadian work. Collectors, please bring in the offering.

The Church Calendar

Sunday. For the week beginning Sunday, January 28th, 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 the fourth Bible Lecture by the Pastor, on "How to Study the Bible."

Wednesday—Junior Service, 7.15.

Thursday, 3.00. Women's Mission Circle.

Thursday and Saturday, 8 o'clock, Meeting for Prayer

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.