

# 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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No. 8

## The Jarvis Street Pulpit

**CHRIST'S COMING THE HOPE OF THE BEREAVED.**

**A Sermon by the Pastor.**

Preached in Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday evening, June 17th, 1923.

(Stenographically reported.)

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."—1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18.

This Bible is written in pregnant speech. The words of Scripture are manifold; they are fulfilled again and again. You have, for instance, in the story of man's first temptation, not only a history of the first temptation, but a prophesy of every subsequent temptation, and an epitome of the history of every human soul. Man made his choice between believing the Word of God and the word of the Tempter; and believing the word of the Tempter brought death into the world and all our woe.

The Divine requirement set out in the Word, by which our first parents were hedged about, was a requirement that demanded the sacrifice of the pleasures of the present for the larger and more abiding interests of the future. From then until now, the Devil has endeavoured to lead men to live for the present rather than for the future, for time rather than for eternity. There is not a man or woman here who has not at some time or another engaged in a course of action which, if persisted in, inevitably would result in disaster. But it was done without intention of continuance. "Let me enjoy myself for the present, and in due time I will give attention to the weightier matters of the future."—that has long been a temptation of the adversary of souls: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." But for some years now that seductive temptation has issued

from the pulpit. The modern interpretation of the Gospel lays emphasis upon the present rather than upon the future. Those of us who talk about "days to come," whether it be the coming of the Lord Himself, or the day of reckoning which inevitably awaits all men, or the day of rewards for those who have been redeemed, are voted to be altogether out-of-date, and to have failed to keep up with the progress of human thought. In religious assemblies where the representatives of the churches convene to do the business of the churches, you find it again and again declared that we have left behind us the old habit of seeking to persuade men to prepare for the future. The average preacher to-day, it seems to me, is not exerting himself to persuade men to come into such relationship to God that they may be prepared for that life, that sinless life described in this wonderful Book, for the City whose streets are gold, and whose walls are jasper, and whose gates are pearl, and whose glory is the Lamb: the business of the church to-day is supposed to be to organize itself into a colossal institution. As somebody said at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, "I should like to see the Government in Canada that would dare to say no to a demand of a United Church." My contention is that it is no business of any religious body to demand anything of the Government. The Lord Jesus did not leave His Church in the world for any such purpose. We may exercise ourselves as citizens, but as an organized body of believers it is no part of the Church's function to wield a club over governments, and to compel legislation according to its own will. That whole conception of the church is just about ten million miles away from the New Testament conception; it has nothing in common with the revelation given to us in God's Word.

But I just point out to you the tendency of the time—not, I say, to prepare men for the future but to make this world a little more habitable. Of course, we ought to do that. We have a right to exercise our influence as Christian citizens. But our social service should be a product of something deeper than that. I do not believe that the Church of Christ was put into this world to improve the sanitation of our cities, or to whitewash our houses, or to paint our verandahs, or to give us more richly furnished homes: what it was put in the world to do was to give us better hearts, and cleansed souls, and to make us over again into the image and likeness of God. But you may go to church after church—and do not call me a pessimist; do not charge me with fault-finding: I cannot be faithful to my trust if I do not with all my soul protest against these tendencies—and on the right hand and on the left, you will find that the Devil has turned aside the ministers of Christ to some other mission than that which was given them by the Lord Whom they profess to serve. But, I say, you may go to place after place and never hear men exhorted to prepare for a life that is to come, and to come into such relationship to God that they shall have no fear of the future.

Now, I venture to assert that our Lord Jesus always laid the emphasis there. You remember it is said of those worthies whose names are inscribed upon that honour roll in the eleventh of Hebrews: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." I have quoted it before, I quote it again. Long ago Whittier said—and I think, perhaps, it is more emphatically true of the Christian Church to-day than it was in his day:

"The church, to place and power the door,  
Rebukes the sin of the world no more;  
Nor sees its Lord in the homeless poor.  
Everywhere is the grasping hand,  
The eager adding of land to land;

And earth, which seemed to the fathers meant  
But as a pilgrim's wayside tent,  
A nightly shelter to fold away,  
When the Lord should call at the break of day,  
Solid and steadfast seems to be;  
And time has forgotten eternity."

Jesus, however, said: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

The testimony of the apostles was to the same effect; and in this word which I have read to you, the Apostle writes in order that his readers might not "be ignorant concerning them which are asleep." "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord." This apostle professes to be speaking by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. He declares that the word he writes is not his word; it is the word of the Lord. And he is writing about a matter concerning which all human voices are silent. He sees a great company of people coming down to the edge of the dark river; he sees their loved ones leave them, and go out into the great unknown. Whither they have gone; what they have discovered in that bourne from which no traveller returns, no one may know unless God shall tell them. And he writes this especially that they may not "be ignorant concerning them which are asleep." Is there one of us here who has not dug a grave? Is there one of us here who has not projected himself into the future? We have followed with an affectionate imagination those who have left us; we have tried to visualize them in that unknown realm; we have tried to picture them, to imagine what they are like, what they are doing, whether they are happy, whether they are better off than they were here, whether they ever desire to come back again, whether they have any thought about us; but, notwithstanding all our heart's longing, no voice comes back to us from across the river. And there is no voice apart from the voice of this Word. But here we may come and find a sure footing for our faith. Here is a word designed to enlighten us, that we may not "be ignorant concerning them which are asleep."

What then has the Word of the Lord to say about those who have gone? It tells us that there are some who sorrow without hope? That, my brethren, is a terrible word. That is a word whose truth we are ourselves reluctant to believe. It is a truth we would fain persuade ourselves must surely have some modification. For I have observed that some even of the most orthodox, even some who profess to believe this Bible to be the Word of God, in face of the death of one who has apparently died in his sin, in rebellion against God, will somehow or another hope against hope, in order that they may sorrow not without hope. My dear friends, I would not add anything to anyone's anguish; I would not intensify your sorrow; I would not deepen the shadow that has fallen upon any life; and yet, faithfulness to my trust demands that I should tell you that, if this Bible be true—and if it is not true, I repeat, we know absolutely nothing of the life beyond; we know no more than Abraham knew: with all our advancement we have discovered nothing—Sir Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge to the contrary notwithstanding; we have discovered nothing of the future apart from the Word, and—if this Bible be true, then it is possible for a man to die in his sin; it is possible for a man to go down into the grave with heart unchanged, with sins unforgiven, and with the black record of his iniquity written in God's Book, awaiting the day of revelation and righteous judgment of God. I can conceive of nothing more hopeless than that. Jesus said: "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." And in the nature of the case there can be no hope for a man who thus rejects

and neglects the Gospel to the end of life. I offer this evening no word of encouragement to those who believe in a future probation. I cannot conceive that it is possible for God to do more than He has done: He has emptied Heaven's exchequer; He has invested His all; He has poured out His own life's blood for the redemption of the world; "last of all, He sent unto them His Son." You remember how in the opening chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle expounds the great doctrine of the essential Deity of Christ, of His oneness with the Father from all eternity, of His superiority to all angels; and he leads up to this tremendous climax: "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" God Himself speaking His last word in the Person of His Son certified to His Deity in the resurrection and ascension, witnessing to the testimony of the witnesses of that tremendous fact by the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven. And the Scripture says, in effect, "There is nothing more that even God can do to save a soul from hell." Therefore, for a man to reject this Gospel, to trample under foot the blood of the Lord Jesus, to say "no" at last to the Son of God—there is no hope for such an one in the future. There is nothing more that God can possibly do. He has no other Son: "He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Well, there is another sense in which some sorrow hopelessly. Many I have seen standing at the graveside of some they love—a Christian mother, a Christian father, or some darling child carried by the angels into the Divine Presence, without a shadow of a doubt as to the glorious future of the one departed: but the man or woman left behind is himself or herself without preparation to stand before God. It may be there is somebody here this evening—like that—you sorrow without hope for yourself, not concerning those who have gone, but you are unprepared to follow them into the glory. Blessed be God, you need not sorrow without hope; for the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth from all sin. And it is possible for us to be prepared so that we can say of all our loved ones as David did when he dried his eyes and washed and asked that they set bread before him. When they asked him why he sorrowed no longer for the child, he said: "Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Blessed be God, some of us can say, "I shall go to him—or to her; we are on the way; we are bound for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." And we can say, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We have no doubt about the future whatever. We shall go to those who sleep in Christ.

But is that enough? What was that loved one to you? You tell me of his or her mental qualities; you tell me of the moral beauty which characterized that, as you think, symmetrically developed and beautifully spent life. But was that all? No. So many times, so many hundreds of times, I have stood first at the casket and then at the grave when I have seen someone weeping over some loved form. I cannot join with my brethren who make light of the body. "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved entire unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Even in the Old Testament those who died in faith must have had some faint apprehension of this glorious truth.

as when Job said: "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Oh, no one but God could have taught him that. How careful those ancient saints were of the sepulchres of their dead! I am glad it was written of Jesus: "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death." I shall never cease to feel grateful to the women who lovingly wrapped His precious body about with fine linen and embalmed it with spices, and who went to the grave where Jesus was laid. And since Jesus came forth in His resurrection body, we have had a new conception of the life to be; for with that body He returned to the Father: He actually took a physical body back into the glory with Him. I need not remind you this evening of those passages which prove the reality of His physical resurrection: "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." You remember His word to Thomas: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." "They gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them." And He did actually carry His resurrection body into the Glory.

I met at the close of the service this morning in Guelph a certain professor whom I had never met before. I left hurriedly while they were singing the last hymn, and I met him outside the church. And he said, "I want to talk with you for about fifteen minutes." I said, "You will have to come down and have lunch with me, so that we can talk as we eat, for I must hurry away." And he told me of a certain Movement among the students—The Student Christian Movement—and of his experience, of how in discussion with a certain man, this man had said to him, "Do you mean to say that Jesus did actually go up through the clouds into the glory?" "Well, yes," he said, "put it that way if you like." "Do you think he did actually take his body up into the glory?" He said, "Yes, put it that way if you like. He took His body into the presence of God." "Well," the doubter said, "where is He now?" My friend said, "Was your grandmother a Christian?" "Yes, sir," replied the doubter. "Well, where is her spirit now?" enquired my friend. He said, "I do not know." "Now," continued my friend, "I have told you where my Saviour is, that He arose, that He ascended into the glory, and that He is at God's right hand. Where is yours? Where is He?" We cannot think of Christ in any other terms than those in which He was pleased to manifest Himself. He clothed Himself with human flesh, and "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." That is our conception of the future with respect to Christ.

But what about your loved ones? Where are they? Can you love them as disembodied spirits? Can you think of reunion with them as intangible spirits? Can you think with joy of meeting them in some sort of spiritual realm where they will not be clothed with flesh? Do you say the bodies are not raised? There is undoubtedly an intermediate state of which we know but little. We only know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. I cannot conceive of it as being a state of unconsciousness. I cannot conceive of an active spirit like that of Paul, which had so heroically served his Master, saying, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you," if departure from the body meant a lapse into unconsciousness. I have myself wrought with men who did not want to depart, who have found a little bit of heaven in the service of God here. And yet with all his splendid achievements, with all the joy of service, with all his splendid

powers trained, sanctified, subjected to the will of God, Paul said, "There is a realm into which I have had a glimpse, and I would rather be there than here; it is far better."

The story of the sixteenth of Luke suggests to us that in that intermediate state, while still there were some brethren upon the earth, Dives was in a state of consciousness, and so was Lazarus yonder in Abraham's bosom. There is no warrant there for the doctrine of soul sleeping. "To depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better"—I cannot measure that. You young gentlemen, when you go to school, learn to count things up, will you? And when you have spent fifty years, and you have measured all your astronomical distances, and you have projected yourself to the rim of the universe, come and measure this great word, "to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." It must be something very wonderful, and yet there is something better than that! Because the day is coming when the soul and the body will be reunited. Ah, will she forgive me? I think she will; she is here to-night. I stood with a mother beside her darling boy, and I shall never forget when she laid her loving hand upon that icy temple, she said, "Pastor, that is death." Ah, yes, it is death. And death is an enemy which takes our best and most beautiful out of our embrace, and we have no redress whatever. But shall we never see them again in the flesh? Shall we never see that precious body again? Of course we shall. You say, "I'm comforted whenever I read the story of the resurrection." You remember how Mary supposed Him to be the gardener, and said, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus said unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master"—a recognition on the other side of the grave! And when He comes to break bread, sitting at the table, their eyes were opened, and they knew Him, and He vanished out of their sight. And when they were fishing that morning at daybreak, and they saw him on the shore, one keen of vision said, "It is the Lord; I know Him—the same Jesus I loved before He died. And I love Him a thousandfold more to-day." They knew Him in His resurrection power and glory.

"Christ the first fruits": He is the type, He is the symbol, He is the prophecy, He is the promise, the incarnation of "God, that cannot lie." The Marys will meet their loved ones by and by. But where? where? when? Some friends have been talking about healing in the atonement. Is there healing in the atonement? Yes; do not say there is not. But the resurrection is in the atonement, too. The redemption of the whole creation is in the atonement, and there is as much scriptural reason for demanding the immediate resurrection of the body on the ground of the atonement as there is for demanding the healing of the body on the ground of the atonement. Think it over. Do not be carried away by every wind of doctrine. Every blessing we receive is in the atonement. I will tell you what is in the atonement: everything short of hell is in the atonement—the promise of the future, and of the resurrection. The body of our Lord Jesus had the marks of the nails in His hands.

I remember when I was a child when death came into our family—the only occasion in my memory until later years—how just as a little boy I used to lie awake at nights and dream of the resurrection—a waking dream—wondering what it would be like to have that little brother back again. I had never stood beside a grave until then, and I had wondered what it would be like. But he did not come back! And your loved ones have not come back! and you have had a lonely, weary time of waiting. The years have not fled rapidly. It seems so long since they were here.

But, my brethren and sisters, there is hope: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." And this is the condition: "*if we believe that Jesus died and rose again*, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them

which are asleep." There will be some alive who will be on this earth at the coming of the Lord, but they shall have no advantage over those who are asleep: "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ rise first." "Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

There is a day of reunion, and it is inseparably connected with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether there is recognition between those who have departed in that intermediate state, we cannot certainly say, but it would appear that there is. If across that gulf Dives recognized Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, even before the resurrection, recognized him as quite distinct and separate from all others, identified him as one he had known upon earth, it would seem that even in that intermediate state there is recognition. But the perfection of redemption will be realized when soul and body are reunited, when our whole spirit, soul and body are presented "faultless, before the presence of his glory."

Now, that is all connected with the coming of our Lord Jesus. Let no one rob us of this "blessed hope." I love to think of His coming down the sky. I do not know when it will be. I remember Spurgeon saying that for himself he could not say that he desired to be among those who were alive and remain at the coming of the Lord. He said that he would prefer even to pass through the article of death that he might enter thus, in some measure, into the experience of Jesus. But we shall all be changed; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. And I would insist upon that, notwithstanding the mystery which surrounds it—and we cannot be positive of many things; we cannot be wise beyond that which is written—we should be content with that which God has been pleased to reveal to us,—there is a day coming when our Lord Jesus will return, and He will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Why is it then that men are so opposed to this doctrine of the "blessed hope"? Why is it that men are so opposed to the proclamation of this great truth in our day? I cannot tell, unless it be a further illustration of the truth that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Our Lord Jesus said: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself." Oh, what a joy it will be, what a glorious meeting that will be when those who sleep in Jesus shall return triumphantly with the Lord! It is the only hope of the bereaved. Can you give any comfort to anyone on any other ground than this? "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Sin and sorrow at an end, no more crying, no more tears, no more infirmities of the flesh: with perfect bodies, with sanctified spirits and renewed minds, we shall be with Him, and "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." I think of some whom I do not want to see precisely as I saw them last. I am glad they are going to have new bodies. I would have relieved them of pain, and so would you. And with streaming eyes and aching hearts, you have said, "At last the long fight is over. They are at rest. And I am glad for their sakes they are delivered from their pain." But to have them back again, with bodies like unto those we knew in easier years, but glorified, and fashioned like unto His glorious body, what a meeting that will be!

Are there any here this evening who are without that "blessed hope"? Any man or woman here who has loved ones yonder, and yet you are not ready to meet them? Anyone here who, if you were called to-night, would die in your sin? Ah, it is an almost forgotten doctrine, but it is terribly true! I at least know of no way whereby any human soul can be prepared for that great day but through the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and the cleansing of the precious blood. How many are there here this evening, I wonder, to whom this is a "blessed hope"? I wish those of you who believe that Jesus is coming again would tell everybody about it. And let me ask if there is one who desires to be numbered among those who shall be ready when the Lord shall come? Somebody said to me last Sunday night, I wish you had given the invitation before you announced the hymn. I give it now. Is there anybody here this evening who desires to know Jesus Christ as Saviour, and to be ready to meet Him when He comes? Let us pray.

## CHURCH NEWS.

**Is The Gospel Witness a Blessing to You?**—We have recently been greatly encouraged by evidences of the increasing influence of this paper. Several papers in the United States have reprinted some of The Witness sermons, with the result that many enquiries are reaching us from different points as to how to obtain the paper regularly. It is now being sent by interested people to many parts of the world.

In these days of spiritual declension and wholesale departure from the faith, we believe The Gospel Witness has a definite mission. We ask our readers, therefore, to regard it as a piece of missionary work. Of course, in size, in comparison with other papers, it is small. Notwithstanding, its message is being blessed to the conversion of sinners, to the edification of saints, and many ministers of the gospel are finding inspirational and suggestive material in its pages.

For these reasons, by authority of the church, we are this week starting a campaign to endeavour to cover the cost of the present weekly issue of the paper by monthly contributions to The Witness fund.

If this succeeds we shall reduce the subscription price to \$1.50 a year, and then advertise the paper in many of the leading religious papers of Canada and the United States. We shall then hope to induce a great number of our members to endeavour to obtain new subscribers. New subscriptions are coming in from all parts continuously, and that without solicitation. This encourages us to hope that earnest effort will give us a great circulation.

We ask our readers to help us in this matter. We admit \$3.00 per year is a high price for so small a paper. But we ask you to support The Witness as you would support a Missionary. And will you pray that God may move some of His stewards to assist us with substantial sums. If we had two thousand dollars to guarantee the immediate future so as to permit us to make the subscription price merely nominal we could reach thousands more weekly. There are pastors of churches in America receiving \$10,000 a year salary who do not preach to more people in a month than The Witness reaches weekly. Let us send The Witness as our Missionary all over the world.

**To the Young Ladies:** The young ladies of the Mission Circle, and all the young ladies of the church are invited by Mrs. C. J. Holman to a garden party at her home, 75 Lowther Avenue, **Saturday afternoon, July 14, at 4 o'clock.** Mrs. Holman is hoping that every young woman in the church will come, and will endeavour to be there at the hour named. Keep the date open.

**Pray for the Church Treasury.** God supplies our needs when we ask Him. Let us ask Him for money. Hitherto He has helped us. He will continue to do so, but let us each fulfil our obligation by giving as the Lord prospers us.

**Last Sunday evening** a great congregation assembled, and a second great crowd gathered at the open-air service on the church grounds. Several indicated a desire for salvation.

**The Prayer Meetings,** too, continue to be seasons of inspiration and power. More and more let us pray.

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## The Church Calendar

**Sunday.** For the week beginning Sunday, July 8th, 1923.

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

11.00—**Public Worship.** Dr. Carter, of London, Eng., will preach.

12.15—**Communion Service.**

3.00—**The Bible School** will meet.

6.00—**Prayer Meeting** in Church Parlor.

7.00—**Public Worship.** The Pastor will preach.

8.45—**Open-air Service** about the platform on the church grounds. The Pastor will preach.

**Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, 8 o'clock—Meeting for Prayer.**

**Tuesday and Thursday, 9 o'clock, Open Air Services**

**The Parliament St. Branch, 250 Parliament St. Sunday:** Bible School, 3.00; Evangelistic Service.

**Wednesday, 8.00.** Prayer Meeting.