

The Gospel Witness

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T. T. SHIELDS
PASTOR AND EDITOR

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

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

A Sermon by the Pastor.

Preached in Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, December 23rd, 1923
(Stenographically reported).

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."—Luke 1:35.



I WANT to speak to you this evening of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ—a doctrine which is everywhere being assailed, and which, by many, is said to be no necessary part of Evangelical faith. Those who contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, are described very often as contentious persons. We are contentious in the sense that we contend for the faith. We are described, too, as disturbers of the peace; but what are the facts of the case? We have fallen into the habit of describing the deniers of the faith as "modernists." I have felt like taking a week off from other duties, to see if I could find in any dictionary a name that would be more fitting. I think the term "modernist" is altogether too complimentary. I do not think it carries with it all that ought to be embodied in the name that is given to this present movement in opposition to Evangelical truth. We might, perhaps, more appropriately describe those who would destroy the foundation of things as insurgents, as insurrectionists, as rebels, for they are not the King's loyal subjects—as theological revolutionaries—or, if you like, as theological bolshevists; because this thing that calls itself Modernism is anything but progressive: it is the philosophy of religious reactionaries; it is a movement that, so far from delivering us into a larger liberty, would carry us back again into the darkness of the middle ages, or, indeed, into the outer darkness of paganism itself. I say, those of us who contend for the faith are described as disturbers of the peace sometimes. There was an editorial in one of the city papers during the week on the conflict between Fundamentalism and Modernism, in which the writer paid me the compliment of quoting something I had said. And, in that connection, he said that this conflict was being waged with much bitterness. He ought to be a little more careful of his terms. There is no bitterness necessarily involved in strong speech; although the man who speaks plainly of this issue is in danger, I suppose, of being misunderstood. I said in New York the other day that, so far as I was concerned, I refused absolutely to fraternize with those who denied the Deity of my Lord; I would accord them

no recognition as Christian teachers or even as Christians—that I would refuse to number them among my friends, nor would I eat their bread. Is that what you call “bitter” speech? Can you imagine any of the disciples breaking bread with Judas Iscariot after that terrible act of his? Can you imagine anyone who knew and loved the Lord Jesus extending the hand of fellowship to Pontius Pilate—the man who washed his hands in innocence, and said, “I will have nothing to do with it”? It was even necessary for Peter himself publicly to confess his allegiance to Christ, and implicitly to acknowledge his fault, before he was restored to the full confidence of his fellow-disciples.

Before the war, Lord Roberts frequently warned Great Britain that she was in danger, and that it was necessary that she should arm, that she should be careful of her defences; and everywhere he was described as a militarist, as a man who loved war. Probably there was not a man in the world at that time who knew what war was better than Lord Roberts; nor, therefore, who hated war more intensely; but he had sense enough to face the facts of the international situation; and he warned his country, as a true patriot, not to shut its eyes to the impending danger.

In the Spring of the year in which the war broke out, I was travelling to Ottawa, and I met a gentleman who had been speaker in the House of Commons. He took from his bag a speech which he had delivered in the House of Commons, opposing our making any contribution to imperial, naval, or military defence. I did not read the speech then, but I said, “Give me the gist of it.” “Well, it is simply this,” he said, “that human nature has changed, and that war on a large scale is now impossible.” I said, “What do you make of a man like Lord Roberts?” “Oh, he has war on the brain,” he said; “he is a professional soldier, he loves fighting, and that is why he talks like that.” “Well,” I said, “what do you make of the great editors of the leading London dailies, for instance—men who ought to feel something of the responsibility of their position, who are constantly warning the country of the peril to which they believe we stand exposed?” “Oh,” he said, “they are simply in the pay of the Armament Trust.” I then told him that I was present in the British House of Commons just the year before, when I heard some man deliver a speech in criticism of the government’s proposals for the expenditure on armaments, and he declared that it was a waste of money, that it was a disgrace to a civilized country to appropriate so much money for the army and navy. After he had delivered his speech, I heard Mr. Lloyd George reply, and in his reply he said in effect: This gentleman’s speech reflects great credit upon his sentiments, upon his feeling toward other nations, and he wished very much that he could join with him in believing that there was no danger; but he said that those who were charged with the responsibility of maintaining the inviolability of His Majesty’s dominions could promise no reduction. “We regret to have to tell the country,” he said, “that so far as we are able to judge of the present situation, we shall probably have to spend much more money in the future in national defence.” And I said to my friend on the Ottawa train, “What do you make of a man like Lloyd George? He was looked upon as a pacifist at one time. During the Boer war he boldly avowed his opposition to that campaign.” “Oh,” he said, “he is in the same category. He, too, is in the pay of the Armament Trust.” I then said to him, “If that be true, that these great editors and leading statesmen and soldiers are in the pay of an Armament Trust, if there is such a trust, it is the most damning characterization of human nature I have ever heard in my life, and you had better get ready for war.” That was in April, 1914. In 1917 I made a few political speeches, the only political speeches I ever made in my life; but I was especially asked to go and stand on the platform beside this man who had said there would be no war, and plead for his election in order that he might reinforce the government in prosecuting the war to victory. And I told the audience on that occasion of the talk I had had with this ex-Speaker about war.

What has this to do with the subject before us? Simply this: that the day will come, and it is not far distant, when multitudes of Christian people will awake to a realization and a recognition of the fact that the people called Fundamentalists have been the seers; they have seen the sword coming; they know the implications of this assault upon the foundations of the faith, and are calling upon the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem to put on the whole armour of God that they may be able to stand in the evil day.

We are told that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, for instance, is no necessary part of Evangelical faith. That is a favourite position of men like Dr. Fosdick and Dr. Faunce. They, of course, do not take the position of openly denying the Deity of Christ and making an assault upon the whole body of Evangelical truth; but they say there are certain parts of what is called the gospel that do not belong to a modern man's thinking. Dr. Fosdick says, "The virgin birth involves a biological miracle which is unthinkable to the modern mind." Now, does it matter? That is my point this evening. I have said again and again that I have no fear for this Bible. Men will be preaching from that Bible, if the Lord tarries, centuries after the last Modernist has been buried and forgotten. This is "the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." We have no fear about that; and, as a matter of fact, if it were possible to gather every single copy of this Book and make one great bonfire of it so that there should not be left anywhere upon earth a solitary copy of the Word of God, God could produce it again the next morning without one jot or tittle omitted, for He has a copy which He keeps Himself: "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." We do not fear the theological seminaries, nor all those blatant infidels who strut around calling themselves professors and college presidents: the Word of the Lord stands. But, I say, it is well for us to ask how much we can wisely surrender, or whether we can surrender anything in the interests of peace.

The attitude of a great many people is simply this: I believe the Bible; and I believe the great body of truth which Evangelical Christianity has always represented. But, then, is there not some halfway place of meeting? Can we not, somehow or another, have peace? Why this contention about the things of God? I remind you that the gospel was given to the world in contention. Paul disputed in the synagogue; he argued; he did exactly what my friend Dr. Straton is doing in New York—he debated the great fundamentals of the faith with those who held contrary opinions, and trusted to the power of the Holy Ghost to carry that truth to the hearts of the people. In the days when the Church was worthy to be called a militant Church, it had victories to its credit; but nowadays we are told that if there is any way by which we can maintain our positions as Christians and not insist upon acceptance of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, by all means let us do so.

I am reminded of the great prescience of that man of God, C. H. Spurgeon, who knew more in five minutes than some of these men will know if they live to be as old as Methuselah. He had the gift of spiritual discernment; and in one of his great addresses on this downgrade controversy long ago, when those whom we call Modernists had taken positions which would be classed to-day almost as conservative, Spurgeon, dealing with this principle of being willing to surrender this, that, and the other thing, in order to placate the enemy, said: Yonder, galloping over the plains of Russia there is a sleigh drawn by six or eight horses. A pack of hungry wolves are in pursuit. The driver lashes his horses in an endeavor to make headway and get away from the devourers. But he sees the wolves are gaining upon him, their cry comes ever nearer; and he sees his only salvation is to stop for a moment and cut loose two of the horses and leave them to the wolves. They do so; they take off the first team, and presently they hear the pack as they hungrily feed upon these two horses. But when they have gorged themselves with them they hear them in full cry again: Again they are being outclassed in speed, and they decide to cut off another two horses. And so they turn back two more, and go on with the remaining four. Presently the wolves gain on them again, and now they make the last desperate effort, and they cut off the third team, leaving only two horses harnessed to the sleigh. Then the driver urges his horses on and they gallop along with what remaining strength they have; but their sacrifices have been in vain; for presently the cry is heard again. "What shall they do?" says Spurgeon, "they have only two horses left.—What shall this driver do? Do? Why, man, do the only thing now possible, throw out your wife, of course!" Exactly!

What are we to do? Give up the inspiration of Scripture? Give up the Virgin Birth? Give up the Deity of Christ? Give up the Vicarious Atonement? Give up the doctrine of the Resurrection? Give up the doctrine of the New Birth? Give up the promise of His coming again? Give up everything, and throw it all to the wolves? Not for a minute! We might as well stop first as last. There is a point beyond which we cannot go; and I shall en-

deavour to show you, by giving you the simplest possible outline, that this is a doctrine which cannot be surrendered without surrendering the whole body of Evangelical truth.

Let me remind you, my friends, that the Modernists are not especially concerned with the Virgin Birth alone: they direct their attacks upon that, upon the inspiration of Scripture, upon the Deity of Christ, upon the Second Coming of Christ, or some other aspect of Evangelical truth. And they are disposed to say, "Now, if you will yield us this, we will be content." But anybody who knows the history of this movement, anybody who is at all conversant with the currents of the time, knows that the difficulty is, that the type of mind that is opposed to the Virgin Birth is opposed to every doctrine of supernaturalism. It is simply the natural against the supernatural. And when Dr. Fosdick says that the virgin birth involves a biological miracle that is unthinkable to the modern mind, I say, "Yes; only I would like to change one word: it involves a biological miracle unthinkable to the carnal mind—that is, entirely beyond the ken and experience of natural men. It belongs to a realm which they have never even glimpsed; they have never caught sight of it; they do not know of its existence.

I suppose I ought to stop now. ("No!") One cannot resort in a sermon even to such technicalities as perhaps are allowable in a lecture; nor can one deal with a subject like this from the pulpit as one would be justified in dealing with it in a classroom. Therefore I shall try to give you a simple outline of a subject upon which volumes have been written, and upon which volumes more may yet be written. Will you allow me to say this? There is one advantage, at least, to a congregation in having the messages of the pulpit printed; for if a man gives the result of years of thinking, it is not likely that the average hearer will grasp all that is said in one hearing. He gets the impression, he remembers much; but he goes away, if he has been interested at all, saying, "I wonder what the speaker meant by such a statement? I wonder what was the connection? I wish I could recall exactly what he said." But when it is reported and written down, you can take and study it. I hope you will take that message of last Sunday evening—a very simple statement; but I want you to think of that which differentiates Evangelical Christianity from Roman Catholicism. Study it for yourself, and think it out for yourself. And do the same thing with this subject.

I.

Now, let me state this simple proposition: *That The New Testament Affirms and Nowhere Contradicts the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth.* It is set forth in detail, of course, in the gospels of Matthew and Luke; and if you carefully study those two narratives you will find they are mutually complementary. One evangelist records what another has omitted to mention; but if you put the two together you will find they are in perfect agreement, and they complement each other. Now, we believe in the inspiration of Scripture; but inspiration does not necessarily preclude the possibility of the writer's receiving information from human sources; inspiration does not necessarily require that every word of that which is written should be directly received by divine communication; it does require that in the writing of that record, the writer should be so completely directed by the Holy Spirit that he would write exactly what God willed should be written. But he may have received his information respecting certain matters through human channels. Where did Matthew and Luke get their information about the virgin birth? That sacred secret belonged to two people: it belonged to Joseph and to Mary herself—and to nobody else, except as they learned it from their lips, unless, indeed, by direct divine communication. And I do not think it requires a very keen observer to recognize, when you come to read Matthew's story of the birth of our Lord, that Matthew is writing that story from Joseph's standpoint. It looks as though he had talked with Joseph. Joseph has told him certain things, and Joseph has told him his own fears, of how he himself was shocked at a certain discovery, until God came to him and explained it all. Then, when you come to read this matchless story contained in Luke's gospel—and for beauty of expression and noble reticence, I question whether you can find a sublimer passage in literature than Luke's account—when you come to read the story of Luke you will find that Luke is writing from the standpoint of Mary. Mary has opened her heart. She has communicated her secret. And these two writers write the story as they have learned it.

Into the details of that I cannot go, except to say this: that these stories of the virgin birth of Christ are integral parts of the gospels. You cannot delete that story from Matthew or from Luke without invalidating the whole gospel narrative. There is the same authority for that as there is for any word in the gospel. There is no part of either of these gospels that is more firmly settled, that is more generally attested, than the fact that these birth-stories of Jesus, in the oldest manuscripts, are part and parcel of Matthew's gospel and Luke's gospel; and if you delete them you may delete everything in those two gospels. Dr. Fosdick says that the apostles never made the virgin birth a fundamental; that the apostles never preached it; that only two evangelists record it; that if it had been so important a matter, it certainly would be in all the gospels. It is not necessary that God should say anything more than once. In the beginning, He said, "Let there be light: and there was light." He did not need to repeat it; and if that be the Word of God, it is quite enough for me to have the complete story written once without having it written over and over again.

Take Mark's gospel. Mark does not say one word about the early years of Jesus. He does not refer to the infancy of Jesus at all. He begins with His public ministry, with His baptism; but how does he begin? "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Surely we are justified in saying that it is there by implication! Then, when we come to John's gospel, oh, what a wonderful word that is! Somebody says, "But John did not say anything about the virgin birth?" No; but do you remember that on the cross the dying Saviour looked at His mother and at John and He said: "Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." Don't you think that somehow or another the sacred secret came out? How does he begin? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Is John speaking of a mere man, think you, in those words? And you remember how he goes on: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which was born, not of bloods (R.V.Marg.) nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." He says that those who received Jesus were born from above; and that "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." And in that matchless chapter, the third of John, John records as having come from the lips of Jesus the great doctrine that inasmuch as Nicodemus and all like him were born of the flesh, they must also be born of the Spirit.

Why was it not necessary for Jesus to be born again? Why? Because He was begotten of the Holy Ghost. He was human, but He was divine: He was both God and man. And this marvellous miracle which John in his first chapter insists must take place in the experience of every one who receives Jesus had already taken place in the experience of Jesus Himself, because He was born from above: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." "The Word was made flesh"—what does he mean? "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." And then, if you will follow all the way through John's gospel, as through Mark's, you will find that if in so many words the virgin birth is not stated, it is certainly there by implication; and one cannot by the wildest stretch of the imagination, it seems to me, conclude that Mark or John has said a single word that is contrary to the two records we have in Matthew and Luke which declare that Jesus was virgin born.

But these men say that the apostles did not make it a fundamental of the faith, and that Paul had nothing to say on this subject. I am not at all sure of that. You take that wonderful passage in the first of Romans—and I will not weary you much longer with these matters—that wonderful passage in the first of Romans where he says he is writing of the gospel of God "concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared—or defined, or proclaimed—to be the Son of God with power,

according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Dr. Orr points out in his book on the Virgin Birth that in the passage which I have quoted as a text this evening, the definite article is omitted; that it is not "the Holy Spirit" but "Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee." And a similar phrase occurs here: He "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh"; and then He was "declared—defined, proclaimed—to be the Son of God with power, according to Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." That is to say, the resurrection from the dead was the revelation of that fact; but He was the Son of God according, not to the Spirit of holiness, but according to Spirit of holiness. He "was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh," but the Son of God by "the power of the Highest,"—and that fact was declared, manifested, by His resurrection from the dead. Thus, if I had time to take you through Paul's Epistles and to remind you of the many times in which he refers to the pre-existence of our Lord Jesus, God sending His Son into the world, and saying that he was made of a woman, made under the law to redeem those which were under the law, I think I could show you that implicitly the doctrine of the Virgin Birth runs all through Paul's epistles.

Take, for example, the fifth chapter of Romans, which I referred to in our baptismal service this evening. Paul there plainly declares that "as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." There is no exception to it in Paul's theology: he speaks of Jesus as the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, exempted from the stain of sin, coming into the world as no other man did ever come into the world. If I carry you forward into the Epistle to the Hebrews—"He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham"—He took on Him deliberately the seed of Abraham, identified Himself with us.

III.

Let me now ask this question: *What Practical Bearing, after all, has this Doctrine upon the body of truth which we are to believe if we are to be saved?*

We are represented, particularly in newspapers, sometimes, as men who are quarrelling over shibboleths, striving about words to no profit. But, my friend, these words represent certain truths. If you are entering into a contract, if you are buying a house, for instance, when the lawyer puts the title deed before you, you say, "Wait a minute, I must get my glasses." And if he says, "Don't bother about the words"; you reply, "I must see what I am going to sign. These words mean something, not as words, but they represent certain obligations I assume." Our Lord Jesus said: "Every idle word that man shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." We need, therefore, to be careful of our words. We are not striving about mere words, but we are trying to strive for the body of truth which these words represent. We are not thinking of a dead Christ, of some historical figure. One brother got up last night in our prayer-meeting and read an excerpt from a speech delivered in London in 1888—something about the Jews and their persecution in the Russian Empire. The trouble with it all was, that the Jews who were then persecuted were dead, the Russian Empire was no longer, and the man who made the speech had passed away. We are not talking about something that belongs to the dim and distant past: we are talking about something that is of vital interest to every believer to-day. What vital relation has the doctrine of the Virgin Birth to the body of Evangelical truth?

In the first place, *if you reject the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, you reject the inspiration and authority of Scripture.* Is that anything? It is impossible for any man to call that in question without denying the divine authority of the Book that records the fact. Of course, when he has done that, he has paved the way for the denial of everything. Anybody can understand that. There it is in Matthew and Luke, plainly stated; implied through the whole new Testament; declared, I omitted to say, in Matthew, to be the fulfilment of prophecy: "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel—God with us." Thus, you not only deny the inspiration and authority of the New Testament, but of the Old as well. So far as I am concerned, I part company absolutely with the man who does that. I would put him out of any pulpit if I could. The man who denies the inspiration and authority of the Bible has

no business in any Christian pulpit; he has no right in any Christian college as a teacher. And I will try to make it easy for him to get out and to make it as difficult as possible for him to stay in.

What else? *What relation has that to the Person of our Lord?* If He was the son of Joseph and Mary, what then? What bearing has that upon His sinlessness? How can He possibly escape the taint of sin? I do not mean to say that the Virgin Birth necessarily itself implies sinlessness. In order to effect that, the Roman Catholics have invented the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: they have taught that Mary herself was sinless; but that only puts the matter back another generation. All have sinned—Mary included; but "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." A miracle! Of course, it is a miracle; but how else could Jesus have escaped the taint of sin? That He was sinless, there is no question; but, my friend, had I time I could point out to you that this affects the whole record of His life. Let it be sufficient to say that the gospels represent the Lord Jesus as a supernatural Person from beginning to end, supernatural in the sense that He was free from sin as no other man was free from sin; His birth, according to the record, was accompanied by supernatural manifestations—the star, the angel; not the birth of a man only; it was the birth of a God. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him." As Dr. Orr points out, there are some who are fond of saying that John did not teach the doctrine of the Virgin Birth; Mary had "kept all these sayings in her heart." Mary knew that this child of hers was superhuman, that He was more than a natural child: what He was she may not clearly have understood; but she kept these sayings in her heart. She was always wondering what would come of that Boy of hers. When in the beginning of His ministry He came to that marriage feast, "and when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Oh, I think just at that moment Mary wanted to tell her secret. She knew the power that flowed from those fingers, that life itself would spring from that word of His. How and to what extent, she did not know. But it is John who records her as almost standing back in awe and wonder to see what this marvellous Son of hers would do.

What bearing has it upon His miracles? Granted that He was supernaturally born, miracles are quite explicable. I do not mean to say the Virgin Birth is necessary to the record of miracles. Elijah performed miracles; so did Elisha and the apostles.

But it does have a bearing upon His death. What was the meaning of His death? What was the meaning of His resurrection? In a word, it seems it is necessarily involved in the whole doctrine of the Incarnation, and the doctrine of Reconciliation, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." And let me remind you that whoever puts his finger upon that doctrine, and professes a rejection of that as well as any other aspect of the supernatural life of our Lord, that it is not that particular doctrine he is assailing, but the carnal mind is in rebellion against the whole revelation of God in Christ. It is not a question whether we are to have a Christ Who was virgin born or not virgin born: the whole question is whether ultimately we are to have any Christ at all; whether we are to have a revelation from God, or a light from heaven.

Well, my friend, it not only affects the Person of Christ, the Deity of Christ, and His atoning work, but *it affects your personal experience as a Christian.* Are you a Christian? What happened when you were saved? Anything? "Well, I just changed my mind, I changed my religious opinions, and I came to accept things I had formerly rejected." If it was but a change of mind, you have never been saved. It is "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." And if I were to ask you to tell me just now what happened, I think, first of all, there would be a profound silence; and if I could take you one by one, you would say, "Pastor, I would like to have a month to think about it, because something happened that I cannot easily explain"; "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The miracle of the virgin birth was repeated in your conversion. The miracle of the virgin birth is no greater miracle than the conversion of the soul dead

in trespasses and in sins; and it takes God to do both. You will always find that those who attack the doctrine of the Virgin Birth attack the whole body of Evangelical truth: they attack the doctrine of sin and regeneration—the whole matter of Christian experience; and they leave us utterly out in the wilderness.

I want you to remember, therefore, that these things are of practical importance, and that we do not propose to let the men who have removed themselves from the actualities of life to discuss these things in theoretical fashion before their classes in class-rooms, to have it all their own way; because if some of these gentlemen would try their theories out on the poor man who needs help, who is dead in trespasses and in sins, they would find it would not do. We need an almighty Saviour; we need a supernatural Saviour; we all need the power of the Holy Ghost to overshadow us. What is salvation? Not a change of mind only; not a change of religious opinion; but "Christ in you, the hope of glory." There is no other hope of glory but that Christ shall be born within your heart.

Thus everything is at stake; but we are glad that some of us have not any doubt about it. I like to make my confession of faith sometimes. This is a grand old Book. I have no doubt whatever of its inspiration. When I come upon a subject such as I have been discussing this evening, and begin to look into the marvellous depths of God's Word, I feel like saying that if God Himself did not write this Book it must have been written by a lot of clever men; that if some of those men who call themselves "scholars" can get men to discuss what they have written for twenty centuries together and keep at it, they may be entitled to a little respect. Their books wear out and pass away. A man who used to be a deacon here, our late Brother G. R. Roberts, told me that after visiting the British and Foreign Bible Society book store in London, he went into a great publishing house one day. He was up on the top floor and he saw a man wheeling load after load of well-bound books, coming to a chute, and upsetting the books, so that the books went down to the basement. On enquiring what the man was doing, he was told that he was sending those books back to the paper manufacturer to be ground all over again into paper. They were no good. They were out-of-date. Nobody would buy them. When he asked what the books were he was told they were copies of Colenso, on The Pentateuch—one of the first of the modern higher critics. "But," Brother Roberts said, "over in the Bible Society I did not see them sending the Bibles back to be ground up into paper." Oh, no; the Bible is still here, and you had better believe it. What, then, does the story of the virgin birth mean?

That God came down, was begotten of the Holy Ghost, born of a virgin, lived our life for us, died our death for us, went down into the grave for us, came out in resurrection power and glory, ascended into the heavens, commissioned His disciples to go to all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, to bid every poor sinner to look to the Cross, and believe and rest upon the promise of God Who cannot lie; and to believe not only that our sins are forgiven, but that some day these bodies of ours will rise again in the likeness of His body, glorified, separated from sin, and that He Himself will again come down the skies! For my part, I am going to stand by that old Book. There is nothing else worth preaching; and it is because I believe it to be true that I want everybody else in the world to believe it too?

I want somebody to believe it to-night. Hear this testimony in the Name of the Lord. It is a true Gospel, and Jesus will be your Saviour; but if you do not yield to Him, He will be your Judge. Jesus is coming again. May we all be numbered among those who love His appearing.

SOMETHING TO PRAY FOR.

Some addresses from "The Gospel Witness," by being reprinted in other periodicals, are finding a circulation of about fifty thousand a week. If each copy were read by an average of only two persons, it would mean one hundred thousand. We ask our readers to give the messages of The Witness a place in their prayers. We believe the ministry of this paper has become the most far-reaching of the enterprises of Jarvis Street Church. Pray, therefore, that God may move someone of large means to help us to send this paper round the world.

THE publication of this paper as a missionary enterprise is made possible by the gifts of members of Jarvis Street Church and others, and is sent to subscribers by mail for \$2.00 (under cost) per year. If any of the Lord's stewards who read this have received blessing, we shall be grateful for any thank-offering you may be able to send to The Witness Fund at any time; and especially for your prayers that the message of The Witness may be used by the Holy Spirit for the defence of the Faith, the salvation of souls, and the exaltation of Christ. As our funds make it possible, we hope to add to our free list, from time to time, the names of ministers at home and missionaries abroad.

EDITORIAL

HOW NEXT YEAR MAY BE REALLY NEW.

This is the last issue of this paper for 1923. What has the year brought to us? What have we done with its multiplied opportunities for spiritual improvement? Let us fling off all sense of failure and loss, and face the New Year with a new and richer faith in Him Who has been anointed "to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."

This is the programme of divine grace. What a prospect faith opens for the New Year!

"To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them."

The Lord of grace gets no glory for Himself in Laodicea, for He is allowed to "stand at the door and knock," by those who think they are "rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." Grace finds no function where self-complacency reclines; Grace has no message for one

"Who does not cast
On the thronged pages of his memory's book,
At times a sad and half-reluctant look,
Regretful of the past."

Grace is for the soul that has loved and lost, whose brain and heart have been parents to ideals which have perished at the birth; and whose past is scarred with the mounds of buried hopes. Grace is an angel of mercy to the soul that has failed, unmistakably, utterly, criminally failed, and knows it, and is sorry for it. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Yes, and grace is for the soul that has been twice disappointed, who has left the bondage of Egypt only to feel the hunger and weariness of the wilderness: "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion"—who has met the tempter within the gate, who has stained "the best robe," and soiled the new shoes, and lost the ring. Grace is for the one who has fallen asleep on the mount of privilege, and for the one who missed a spiritual fortune by turning aside to run after butterflies when Opportunity passed down the King's highway.

Yes, Grace is for those who mourn; for those who have missed something, who have lost something, who are not content with their position or possessions; who feel a holy hunger, and an insatiable spiritual thirst, and who ask their way to the river which proceedeth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Blessed be God, there is someone ordained and anointed "to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion."

But what will grace do for those who mourn? Rather, what will Christ do?

He will make the ruined life beautiful: "To give unto them beauty for ashes." Not as the kindly ivy covers the ruins of some ancient temple: this is a richer promise than that.

"Ashes"! What is the significance of the metaphor? "Sackcloth and ashes" were the apparel of mourners, as when Mordecai mourned the threatened destruction of his people, and was especially the sign and symbol of repentance and abject abasement, as when Job said, "I repent in dust and ashes."

This figure then, "ashes" represents the last result of sin, the utter, moral bankruptcy of our human nature. It represents the resolution into

their elements of all the fair fabrics of our dreams, the castles of our building, our ambitions, our hopes, the ruins of palaces wherein we dreamed of finding pleasure, of temples wherein we fancied we might worship. "He feedeth upon ashes" was said of the idolator. It is the end of the creations of our affections. Love comes to where its treasures were stored, as David came to Ziklag, only to find the choicest things of life, the joys of friendship and the delights of home and family, all turned to "ashes."

But most of all, it means the decay of moral character itself, when the holy and beautiful house is burned with fire. When the temple's beautiful gate called the Will, and its holy place, its reason and judgment, its Intellect, and its holy of holies, the place of the Affections—when these are all turned to "ashes," and life has lost its summer-time, and only disappointment remains! Alas, who of us does not know how the glories of life come to "ashes"?

But here is "beauty for ashes"—a garland for the unworthy, a crown for the defeated! That is the promise. It is amplified in the next verse: "And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations." It means that nothing is lost by sin which grace cannot restore. You have the two extremes—"Ashes" when sin has done its work, and "beauty"—a garland or a crown when grace is finished. The one is significant of failure, of lawlessness, of all that is destructive and unlovely—"ashes"; the other speaks of success, of worthiness, of definite achievement, and recognized victory—beauty—a garland or a crown. It is thus grace destroys the works of the devil—and gives beauty for ashes.

Christ makes the mournful life joyful. Nothing is more destructive of joy than the cherishing of vain regrets. The waste of yesterday must be converted into wealth or I can never be happy. Supplemental grace can never bring me the oil of joy. The mourning cannot be turned into joy by any work of repair. Not supplemental, but substitutionary grace. Not a power that will fill this day so full of brightness as to balance the gloom of yesterday. Grace must use my yesterdays to make the oil of joy with for to-morrow. Ah, this is the mystery and the miracle—that ashes can be made into the oil of joy! No, no, notwithstanding our sins and mistakes life could not have been richer than grace shall make it. Bitterly as we must mourn our sin, our tears have clarified our vision, and our highest joys have been born of our experience with ashes. It is true that extremes meet. You may reach the east by going west; mourning is the groaning of sorrow's press whence the oil of joy is squeezed. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Where Christ doth really minister to the mourner HE MAKES THE THANKLESS LIFE PRAISEFUL.

"The spirit of heaviness." It is not born of a reasoned judgment. It is a spirit that is out of tune with God. It paralyzes the will, it silences the tongue, it grips the heart with a leaden, deadly discontent. No soldier can fight with a spirit of heaviness, no teacher can teach, no preacher can preach, with a spirit of heaviness; no singer can sing with such a spirit; the church cannot be victorious with a spirit of heaviness.

But for this we are to have "the garment of praise."

Not a song for the voice, not an instrument for the fingers, but a garment for the whole man, as comprehensive and all-embracing as the spirit of heaviness. It is the outward expression of a victorious life. Where beauty is given for ashes the character is transformed, and a garland is put about the brow of the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. And where a new temple rises on the ashes of the old, the emotions are pleasurable excited, and the oil of joy abounds. And where a new character finds a new joy there is a new expression, and the new life is robed in a garment of praise. The whole life becomes vocal, and every act is an act of worship and every breath an ascription of praise.

Thus the CONTEMPTIBLE LIFE IS MADE GLORIOUS.

"Ashes" excite no emotion but contempt—they are the refuse which men cast out. They may have had a proud and exalted origin—but who cares? A proud cedar of Lebanon defying the storm—now prone and burned to ashes! A temple glorious, now a heap of ashes. A man fallen and decayed—now but dust and ashes—undistinguished and indistinguishable.

But when grace has wrought the transformation, it is "that they might be called oaks of righteousness." I have heard of an oak being in an acorn, but

here grace finds oaks in "ashes," and righteousness, where sin has fiercely flamed.

But it is for this we have been saved: that we may not be as reeds shaken by the wind, but that we may be called oaks of righteousness—the bulwark and stay of righteousness in the earth; even a character that is never broken by the storm. Not that we may be as willows by the watercourses, but as oaks—"steadfast, unmoveable." What a standard for a Christian character and life: Beautiful, garlanded, victorious, and crowned, abounding in joy, and vocal with praise, and established in righteousness, and uncompromising as the oak—the stuff that foundations are made of!

And grace proposes to exhibit us as specimens of divine husbandry: That ye might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified."

May our gracious Lord thus be glorified in every reader of The Witness during 1924.

So let our lips and lives express
The holy gospel we profess,
So let our works and virtues shine
To prove the doctrine all divine.

THE WHOLE BIBLE S.S. LESSON COURSE.

LESSON XIV.

JANUARY 6, 1924

PHARAOH'S DREAMS—Gen. 41, 42.

In this lesson we have a fine illustration of gospel truth. We do not fear to spiritualize the Old Testament; all the New Testament writers did so. In the gospels it is recorded that our Lord Himself spiritualized the history of Noah and the flood; the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Elijah and Elisha, and of Jonah. The Acts and the Epistles abound with such uses of the Old Testament.

Pharaoh was immortalized by association with Joseph. Otherwise he would never have been known until some archaeologist dug out some mention of his name. Thus the great and small share the glory of Him Whose Name shall endure forever.

I. Joseph's Provision and Provision Illustrate One Aspect of the Work of Christ. 1. By interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams he anticipated the days of famine. So the prophetic aspect of the gospel predicts and describes man's spiritual poverty, his utter inability to produce that which can nourish his own soul. 2. By the same interpretation Joseph proposed the conservation of the surplus of the seven plenteous years. Thus, too, our Lord has laid up for us a store of grace upon which poverty-stricken souls may draw. 3. Thus Joseph as an interpreter of Pharaoh's dreams illustrates the prophetic office of the Lord Jesus. He came to be a revelation of God, to exemplify in Himself the principles which would enable us to forecast the future. 4. Joseph was exalted to a position of equal authority with Pharaoh, and was thus authorized to carry out his own plans, and fill the storehouses against the day of famine. So our Lord Jesus declared He had been given authority over all flesh that He might give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him. 5. Joseph accumulated such an abundance of corn that "it was without number." So the riches of divine grace cannot be measured. They are "enough for each, enough for all, enough for evermore." 6. As Pharaoh committed everything to the hands of Joseph, and required everybody who would seek corn to seek it at the hand of Joseph; so God may be approached and His grace enjoyed only through Him Who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

II. Joseph's Dealings With His Brethren Illustrate God's Way of Dispensing His Grace. 1. His brethren came to him because they were driven by famine. Thus, also, do sinners come to Christ. 2. They came for corn without any desire toward the governor. So do men seek salvation, often without any desire toward the Governor. While their sin against their brother was unconfessed, the governor spoke roughly and imputed iniquity to them. So, also, while we hide our sin, we shall find the Word of the Governor most searching and disturbing to our peace. 3. As the sons of Jacob found an unwelcome resurrection of their past in their own hearts and consciences as they stood in the governor's

presence, so the very thought of Christ effects conviction of sin. 4. Joseph gave them corn and returned their money in their sacks. Thus, too, when the sinner comes to Christ desiring in his pride to try to pay his own way, he is made to confess at last, "sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire, else would I have given it." 5. The net result of this first visit was, they were given an installment of the governor's grace, but they went out from his presence with a strange sense of guilt upon their spirits. Thus, too, our Lord deals with us from our first meeting with Him—takes measures to secure our reappearance, but will never let us go until He wrings from us a full confession of our sin.

The other parts of this story will afford the complement of the lesson of how God brings a sinner to His feet.

WOMEN'S MISSION CIRCLE INVITED TO IMMANUEL CHURCH.

The ladies of Immanuel Church, corner of Jarvis and Wellesley Streets, have very kindly invited the members of the Women's Mission Circle and ladies of the church to meet with them on Thursday afternoon, January 3rd, at 3 o'clock. This will be instead of our own Mission Circle meeting. We trust a large number of the women of the church will reserve this date, and accept the invitation of the Immanuel ladies. We want a large rally there from Jarvis Street. We understand the speaker of the afternoon will be Mrs. C. L. Whitman, of the Sudan United Mission.

THE NEW YEAR'S MORNING MEETING.

This has long been one of the greatest meetings of the year. We especially urge all our new members to be present. It will be a glorious time of prayer, praise and fellowship. It will begin at 10.30 and close at 12. Let us begin the year with the whole church family present, and by the blessing of God establish a new record for this service.

THE PASTOR TO BE AWAY.

The Pastor regrets that duty will take him out of the city for the first twelve days of the year. He will conduct the New Year's morning meeting, and will leave Tuesday night for Winnipeg, where he will speak in the Emmanuel Baptist Church, Thursday and Friday, January 3rd and 4th, in the interests of the work of the Baptist Bible Union. From Winnipeg he will go to Minneapolis, Minn., where he will preach afternoon and evening in connection with the dedication of Dr. W. B. Riley's new and enlarged auditorium, which has been rebuilt with a capacity said to approximate three thousand. A week of public services will be held in dedication of the new building, at which addresses will be given by members of the executive Committee of the Baptist Bible Union, who will be in Minneapolis to attend a meeting of the Executive Committee. We ask our readers to remember all these services in their prayers. L

A GREAT COMMUNION SERVICE JANUARY 13th.

The Pastor will return in time to occupy his pulpit January 13th. At the close of the evening service the monthly Communion and Reception service will be held. The December service was the largest ever seen in Jarvis Street. We are especially anxious to have every person who has joined Jarvis Street during 1923 present at the January service. We shall ask all these new members to sit together within the circle of the gallery, leaving only two or three of the front seats vacant for the new members to be received that night. We hope soon to see the attendance at Communion overflow into the gallery, and we shall not be surprised to see the entire ground-floor seating capacity occupied January 13th. To every member of Jarvis Street the Pastor sends this message: **Be sure to be present at the greatest of all our Communion Services, Sunday evening, January 13th.**