

The Gospel Witness

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

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

"GETTING HOMESICK"

(The Fifth Sermon in a series on "The Adventures of a Modern Young Man").
A Sermon by the Pastor.

Preached in Jarvis St. Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, December 21st, 1924.
(Stenographically reported)

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee,

"And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."—Luke 15: 17-19.



HIS is the story of a soul's awakening, of one who becomes homesick for heaven and for God. The whole parable is a relation of great principles which have their place in human life and experience. It is, intended to teach us about ourselves, and still more about God.

I.

The text implies that A LIFE OF SEPARATION FROM GOD IS AN ABNORMAL LIFE. Before this young man turns his thought toward home and affords hospitality to thoughts of his father, he comes to himself as one who is awakening from sleep: he is brought back to a normal condition. Sin is itself an abnormality. The sinner is a man whose life is out-of-centre—eccentric; his sin involves an inversion of values, an inversion of the laws of order. It turns the world upside down. It transposes everything: it puts enemies in the place of friends, and friends in the place of enemies; it puts darkness for light, and light for darkness; evil for good, and good for evil. The godless mind, indeed, is an unbalanced mind: the sinner is a man who is not himself; he is beside himself. His mind is not properly adjusted. I know that that is not very complimentary—to tell a man that he does not know how to think; that when he thinks, he does not reason accurately. But it is a matter of fact, that a mind that is out of adjustment with God is a mind that never thinks truly. It is a subjective mind: it thinks of itself; it lives to itself; it has its own standards; it lives in a world of its own creation; it is

without power to perceive the things that are really objective to itself. It has no consciousness of any realm but the finite realm. The man is a law unto himself: his "carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

We were intended to be related to another world, to other realms than that of sense. There are some things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man"; they are outside the realm of the senses, beyond the reach of the normal human mind. The soul that is rightly adjusted relates itself to the unseen. There are some described in the Word of God as "sensual," or soulish—"having not the Spirit."

We sometimes speak of mental defectiveness,—of minds that are below the normal standard, minds that do not properly function, that cannot comprehend things that are open and understandable to minds that are normal. There is a sense in which every unconverted man is mentally defective. Have you ever talked to anyone in the asylum? Have you ever tried to reason with a mind that is unbalanced? Have you observed how it moves in a circle, and has no comprehension of things that are outside of that limited subjective realm? You cannot persuade an insane man of anything: you cannot even persuade him that he is insane. The sanest people in the world are in the asylum—at least they will tell you so. They will all tell you they have no right to be there. I heard the other day of a man who had been confined in an asylum for some time. After a while they found he was perfectly harmless, and decided to dismiss him. But he was rather uncomfortable about it, and demanded of the superintendent a certificate that he might now safely be at large. After he came out, he met an acquaintance whom he charged with being out of his mind. The acquaintance smilingly assured him that he was quite sane. "Well," said the former asylum inmate, "prove to me that you are not insane." The sane man thought it was hardly necessary, but the former inmate of the asylum drew his certificate from his pocket proudly and said, "You have not a certificate of sanity like I have." That is what the university degrees of certain modernist "scholars" are,—certificates of sanity,—most useful for those who need them.

You cannot persuade the soul dead in trespasses and sins, that there is another world into which he has never looked, that there is a spiritual realm; and that that is the realm of truth and reality; and that it is entirely beyond his ken. He says, "I do not believe that." It would be considered impolite to tell such unbelievers as Fosdick and his school, that they are incapable of estimating spiritual realities, yet the truth is they are crazy, and do not know it—religiously unbalanced. There is a world of truth they have never glimpsed as yet. The natural man must "come to himself" before he can understand.

II.

THE GODLESS LIFE IS A DISLOCATED LIFE: it is a life that is out-of-joint; it is out of its proper relation. No human soul was ever made to live apart from God any more than my hand was designed to perform, to execute, a given task, separated from the direction of my mind. It is fitted in there,—I do not understand it; I do not know how these men play. If we could have a moving picture of the operation of the mind of some men like Paderewski and Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Penney—they all belong to the same class—(laughter), when they play, it would be very wonderful—that telegraphic communication. But it is impossible that these fingers should properly perform if there is any dislocation anywhere. I dislocated my wrist once, and I know. It is impossible for

us to do our tasks unless every member of the body is rightly related to the head, and obedient to its instruction.

Now, the life that is cut off from God is a life that is dislocated, disarticulated, out of its proper relation. If you have ever broken your leg or your arm you will know what a painful thing it is. And the dislocated life is full of misery; there is no joy in it at all. This young man thought he had a better way of living than living at home and in obedience to his father; he supposed that his will was better than his father's, that his mind was wiser than his father's; and that to live life his way would bring him greater pleasure than in the house of his father. So he cut himself off from his father; taking all his powers, taking himself into a far country, and spending all that he had; and finding in return only utter destitution, and indescribable misery. That is the life apart from God. It is not greatly different, whether it is lived in a palace or a hovel. A million dollars will not bring a man back into right relationship to God; and a broken arm is just as painful under broadcloth as it is under homespun. A life that is estranged from God is just as full of sorrow in the castle as in the cottage.

Therefore, that is the lesson: he found himself other than he was made to be—yonder in the far country. And the text says, "He came to himself"; he was restored to sanity. That is the most stupendous miracle imaginable! Who can minister to a mind that is diseased? It would be a great thing to see the cripple healed so that he could walk, the fever patient raised up; but for a man who has been demon-possessed to be cleansed of an alien possession, and clothed, and put into his right mind—that is the miracle of all miracles. And he is in his right mind who is found sitting at the feet of Jesus: that is the only place for sane men to sit—at the feet of Jesus. That is the best certificate of any man's sanity that could possibly be given, to be found in the presence and at the feet of the Lord of light and of glory.

Nothing but the power of the Spirit of God can work that miracle in any one of us. We read of a Power that brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Did you ever wish for a power that would bring your thoughts into captivity? There are all kinds of memory systems; there are many experts who will undertake to develop the will, and to develop one's personality, and so to train the mind that all its powers will properly function. But I say that is the miracle of all miracles, that can work a change of mind so as to bring a man back into right relationship to God: "He came to himself."

In this particular case his change of relationship was effected by the ministry of circumstances. He proved the fallacy of his own philosophies, the futility of his own plans, the impotence of his own will. He wanted his own way,—he was permitted to have it; and, as we say, to have his full fling. And when he came to the end of that experience, by that fact, "he came to himself"; for he saw the folly and the un wisdom of his own thinking and his own planning. I am afraid, dear friends, that we fail sometimes to pray for the ministry of circumstances in the lives of the ungodly. There are people who will not listen to sermons; they will not listen to the preacher. But they will listen to the doctor. They will not listen to one who brings them plenty; but they have an attentive ear when gaunt famine stalks through the land.

I am not at all sure that there is not a very clear divine purpose in the present condition of world affairs. Men have had their opportunity to prove what they can do. Just think of it! Eleven years ago now—less than that since the outbreak of the war—but eleven years ago there was one land which

was an example of all that is here represented—a whole nation who said, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." No man was considered educated in certain circles unless he had imbibed something of German culture; it was supposed to be the land where the human intellect had come to full flower; and where the very best and the utmost that the human mind could produce, had been achieved. It had its portion of goods; and it went into such a far country that it forgot God, and denied God, and wrought without God; and deluged the world with blood, and every nation upon the earth with poverty.

Oh, my friends, this is a prodigal world: we have spent all—and we have begun to be in want. The statesmanship of the world is utterly, absolutely, bankrupt; changing in Germany from government to government; changing in France from government to government; changing, apparently, even in Russia; changing in England, changing everywhere—the human mind at the end of itself, with no power to bring about a better condition of affairs. There are thousands of hungry people in this city of ours. I was talking to a young man yesterday; and he said, "They say, 'Why don't you go somewhere else?' But," he said, "what would be the use? It would be just as bad in the next town as it is here." Why not go to another country? Tell me a country where it is any better than it is here. Why? Because this principle, on a large and magnified scale, has been given its full trial. Oh, that the world by a sweeping spiritual revival might come to itself! I don't know anywhere to go to escape it, do you? And just as in the individual life, God does with a man what sometimes a mother will do with a child if that child is disobedient, and self-willed, and determined upon its own course—the mother has stood against its having its own way for a long time—and when at last, if it be that she may safely let it go a little without working permanent ill, she says, "Very well, then, have your own way." And the child comes back in a little while, when it has proved that the way of self-will is the way of disaster. It does look to me as though God has allowed the world to have its own way; and a pretty bad way it has been. May we come to ourselves!

III.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF THIS RETURNING SANITY? "He came to himself." Have you ever been in a sick-room where one has been long unconscious, where the hours and days have passed in unconsciousness? The patient has been lying there perfectly oblivious of all his surroundings; then at last, when the disease had spent itself, he opens his eyes, and sees somebody he knows, and utters a word,—it may be his wife, or his mother, or someone else—and the word is telegraphed through the house: "He has recognized someone." At last, he has spoken the one word that has not passed his lips for many a day. Consciousness has returned; he is coming to himself. Here was a man who had been in a far country; and for a long time he had not thought of home at all. But when he got to the end, absolutely, of his resources, and the beginning of his want, "he came to himself." And he said,—What did he say? First *there was a recollection of his father*. Out of the long fever he came, and he said something about "my father." For days, for months, for years, perhaps, he had not uttered the word, nor allowed himself to think of the one he had so grievously wronged; but now he comes back out of that artificial life, back to the realm of reality,—and he says, "My father!"

What is the first sign of returning spiritual consciousness? It is a consciousness of God, a recognition of God. Perhaps there is some man here to-night who has not prayed for years, who has not desired to pray, who has been devoid of any kind of religious desire or religious interest—somebody here who has lived, perhaps, for years as though there were no God, no hereafter at all. And you do not know how, you do not know why, but latterly, when you have been alone, for some inexplicable reason, you have been thinking of God; you have not perhaps, mentioned His name, but you have thought of Him: He has become, at last, an element in your life. He is round about you; He is somewhere; He cannot be always and for ever ignored. Perhaps you have been rather disturbed by your recognition—without an open acknowledgment, perhaps—of your recollection of God? Oh, if that has come to you, my friends, I should like to be permitted, in the name of the Lord, to interpret that experience. It is a return to moral sanity: it is the beginning of spiritual homesickness. After all, the far country, the swine troughs, the hunger and

the longings—all there is in the far country must fail to satisfy something that is within.

Then there is another thing, the second point: The second sign was a recognition of the fact that *satisfaction was to be found in a right relationship to his father*. He is not speaking of himself now. But he says, "Yonder across the wide expanse that separates me from my father, my thought travels; and I remember that even the hired servants of my father's have bread enough"—To be rightly related to him is to have enough. That is all! But that was the one thing he had not got. He had explored the far country, and had found nothing. But he began to think accurately, you see, and he recognized that great fact, that the satisfaction was to be found in a proper relationship to home. That is the great truth of the gospel. We shall never find enough until we get back to God, we shall never satisfy the hunger of our souls until we find our way to Him Who is the Bread of Life. Nothing else will do it,—“Bread enough and to spare!”

Then another thing: *His first act was to determine that he would, by an act of his own will, restore that broken fellowship*. “If it be true that my father lives, and I have lived without him; if it be true that satisfaction is to be found in right relationship to him, then I will arise and go to my father; I will go back home.” That was a sensible thing to do, wasn't it? He never would have said it if he had not come to himself. And you will never say it until you come to yourself. But God the Holy Ghost waits to re-enfranchise the will of him who will turn his face toward home.

“I will arise and go to my father.” And yet I said just a moment ago that he was as one who had awakened out of a long sleep. I read of one who had been long stricken with some kind of fever; and it had a serious effect upon his mind. Then he came to himself, when he returned to consciousness, while there was a recognition of friends about him, he was as a little child again: he had forgotten all that he had learned; and he had to go back and learn his alphabet, and climb to the top again. This man had been so long in the far country that he had forgotten the speech of his father's house. I have heard of missionaries who have lived so long away from home, and who have thought and taught in the language of the people to whom they ministered, that when at last they got back again, they could hardly speak their mother tongue, or could speak it only with difficulty.

Now, I said to you last Sunday night that a characteristic of that land in which this young man had lived for some time, was that they gave nothing away, that the principle of grace was foreign to the idiom of their country. “No man gave unto him.” They bought, and sold, and got gain, so far as they could; but no man gave anything away. They did not know how to give anything away; they were strangers to grace. And when he came home, or determined to come home, he prepared a speech; he said, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.” That was true repentance. And there is no way back to God without that acknowledgment. But even though he repented, he had been so long away from home that he had forgotten the principle which obtained in his father's house, and so he said, “Make me as one of thy hired servants—Give me a job; give me an opportunity to earn my own living. I have nothing to bring, I acknowledge all that; but if thou will give me another chance I will show how faithful I can be. I will be a true servant.—Make me as one of thy hired servants.” He carried the idiom of the far country with him; and he made up his mind that he would talk to his father in the language of the far country. Blessed be God! He understands all languages. If He did not, none of us would ever be saved: for when we first have a desire toward God, when we first seek His face, we talk a lot of nonsense. I think I have never dealt with anyone seeking the Lord who did not talk like that. “What are you seeking to-night?”—“I am seeking an opportunity to begin life over again. I want to be a servant of Christ. Don't you know that when the prodigal came to himself he remembered ‘the hired servants of my father's house had bread enough and to spare’? I, too, would like to be a hired servant, and earn my own way”.

I suppose we shall never understand here, thoroughly, the principle of divine grace. It is the most difficult word in any language to define; in fact,

it is a word that no human tongue can define. Listen! "If so be ye have *understood* that the Lord is gracious"? No! "If so be ye have *tasted* that the Lord is gracious". We can taste the grace of God; we can receive the grace of God; we can be gloriously saved by the grace of God. (Hallelujah!) But we can never define the grace of God, because it is the big word of all speech: it is a word that is as high as heaven, as deep as hell, and as wide as the east is from the west. Grace represents all the qualities of Deity in harmonious action; and exercised in the salvation of a bankrupt soul.

But the poor sinner, returning, thinks he can pay for his bread and butter when he gets back to the father's house! Well, the Lord will forgive you for that prayer, my friends; and He will answer it above all your expectation, for you will find that He wants you, not as a servant, but as a son; that He will give you "bread enough and to spare", not as a reward for anything that you can do, but as the reward of the merit of One Who paid your debt on Calvary's Cross. He has already wrought out a righteousness which is to be received by you as God's free gift, the gift of His abounding grace.

How many are here this evening, I wonder, who will say, "I will arise and go to my Father"? There are many homesick souls here to-night: there are a lot of you who would not be in Toronto next Thursday if you could help it. I know where some of you would be if you could afford it. You would be across the sea, wouldn't you? Are you not homesick? Do you not wish you were a millionaire, that you could have a ship all your own, or at least, that you could afford to go whenever you liked? I remember when I first went away from home. In the town where I lived, I used to go up to the railway tracks, and look at the rails,—follow them to the vanishing point, and say, "Beyond that point, somewhere, miles away, straight along that rail is 'home.'" Very often I wanted to go, but I could not.

There are many like that here to-night,—who would like to be going home. You do not need to pay your fare to come home to God. Come without anything in your hands. A dear brother said to me yesterday that he did not like to come to church because his clothes were not quite as respectable as he desired them to be. When we have been a long time from home we like to come home with a new suit of clothes, don't we? Oh, you have seen that young man who has been in a distant city about six months, or a year; and when he comes home he has a new suit, or a new coat, a new tie, or a cane, or something. He wants to show the folks at home that he has done pretty well while he has been away. You smile at that because you know it is true! You have done it yourself. And I suppose if we could take our pride and glory in our own achievements we would all come home to-night. But it is very difficult to come home in a ragged coat, very difficult to come home when your shoes are worn out, and there is nothing in your pocket. It is difficult to say, "Father, I wish I had never gone away from home. I have made a failure of it all. I have been put to the proof; and I have found it is no use. Will you take me in, ragged coat and all?"

We don't like to come home like that. But, my friends, it is better to come that way than not to come at all. And that is the only way we can come when we come to the Lord. You will never get the shoes for your feet until you come home to get them; you will never have that bountiful spread anywhere but on your father's table—and you won't get that until you come home. And He has a special present, too, that he would like to put on your finger; but He will never send it by mail. You must come home to get it.

I shall have to anticipate my story of next Sunday evening. "I will arise and go to my father."—"And he arose, and came to his father." You have said you would arise many times, but you have never done it; you have dreamed of coming, but you have never come; you have desired to come, but as yet you have not come. Will you come to-night? "I will arise and go to my father."

"Art thou weary? art thou languid?

Art thou sore distrest?

'Come to Me', saith One; 'and coming,

Be at rest!'"

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

SHALL 1925 BE NEW?

None of us have learned to judge the passage of time accurately; therefore we have clocks and watches to record the minutes for us. The divine provision of the succession of day and night, and summer and winter, with the completed circles of successive years, all suggest the necessity of our learning so to number our years as to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

It is therefore wise, both for individuals and churches, to take account of the passage of time; and periodically take their bearings, to examine their record, and, like a merchant, to "take stock" of their spiritual wealth, that they may know whether or not real progress is being made.

It is common for most of us to justify a spiritually stagnant state by complaining that we lack opportunity for advancement. We persuade ourselves that if we could change our place or station, we might bring great things to pass. But it is ever the rule that we must begin at Jerusalem: the only place for a resurrection is where there has been a burial. Grace always wins its triumphs where it seems to have been routed. Thus failure must be converted into success, and defeat into victory.

A Christian's hope of true progress and of real success never lies either in himself or in his circumstances—but in Christ. Progress depends upon the relation of two things which cannot be changed by a mere change of place; and those two things are: what we are in ourselves, and what we may become in Christ. By the provision of divine grace, we are already blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, and are given all things that pertain to life and godliness. What is needed is that we should make use of our resources in Christ. Grace delights to accomplish that which, in the view of human wisdom and strength, is estimated as impossible. There is nothing more glorifying to God than to be praised by those who are in prison, with their feet made fast in the stocks. Even Paul and Silas, perhaps, little dreamed that earthquakes that could shake open prison-doors, were included in the resources of their divine Master. Joseph was given no chance by his brethren, yet found his opportunity to serve them and to earn immortal fame in the land to which he was introduced as a slave; Israel's great deliverer was cradled in an ark of bulrushes; Israel's greatest king was called from keeping his father's sheep in the wilderness.

Thus we may all make this year "new" by a new appraisal of the potentialities of our inheritance in Christ as described in the last will and testament of Him Who has made us His heirs; by a new appropriation of our share of the unsearchable riches of Christ; by a new experience of the power of the Holy Ghost; by writing a new record of implicit obedience to God's holy Word.

This especially applies to those of us who have been called to preach the gospel. A change of pastorate is sometimes a necessity; of that there can be no question. But we fear many changes involve a running away from duty. Many a preacher, like Jonah, fearing to face his duty in Nineveh, has found far greater trouble on board the ship that sails from Joppa. Many a pastor, inspired with high resolves to declare the whole counsel of God, having begun work in a new field of labour in a spirit of great devotion, by faithful preaching finds a reaction in the carnal mind. A faithful ministry always cuts to the heart; and some who are thus pierced, repent, as on the day of Pentecost; while others become angry with the preacher, and throw stones at him as they did at Stephen. But Stephen did not run away even from the stones.

When a faithful ministry creates difficulty in a church, it is cowardly to run away and leave the duty of removing the stumbling stones to others. We remember hearing of a certain township council who had among its members some men of very little education. As the year was drawing to a close, and the council to the end of its natural life, some very difficult problem was submitted to the council for solution; whereupon, one of the members rose and said, "I move, Mr. Chairman, that this matter be left to our ancestors." We fear that pastors, sometimes, under the fearful pressure of those who would oppose any searching ministry of the Word, give way and leave their problem to be solved by their successor.

This paragraph is written to suggest to brother ministers a more excellent way. If you want another sort of church than that which you now serve, if you desire to be pastor of an ideal church—a church that will approximate the New Testament pattern of what a church should be—be assured you will not find such a church ready-made. Why not, therefore, resolve to make the church you now serve into another church, to make that the ideal church? You will have difficulties wherever you go; and if you are true to your trust, you will encounter opposition everywhere. To put it, therefore, on the lowest ground, it is often wiser for a pastor to bear the ills he has than to fly to others that he knows not of. If you cannot make a new church of the one you now have, it is very doubtful whether you could do much better anywhere else.

On the other hand: If some deacon should read this article, and say, "What we need is a new minister", we venture to ask that deacon, Why not make a new minister of the minister you have? Uphold him by your prayers, support him by godly lives and faithful testimony; and you will probably see that you will have a new minister next Sunday. Thus both the pastor and the church will begin to be "new".

But whether or no, we say this to our brother ministers, Let us as new men in Christ Jesus, with a new determination, put the promises of God to the proof; and resolve that we will make the churches we now serve, new churches this New Year; and that thus we will write a new record which will inspire others in years to come to effect similar transformations. We have a great Saviour, a great Master, a great Architect and Builder; and we have His promise, "Behold, I make all things new." Let Him make us new, and our lives new, and our prayers new, and our sermons new, and our manner of service new, and our churches new—everything new! Then the promise will be fulfilled, and revival will come:

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

NEW YEAR SUGGESTIONS.

We are generally more influenced by history than prophecy. The inspired prophecies of the Word are just as reliable as inspired history; for what God promises to do, He will not fail to accomplish. But outside of the Word of God, we prefer history to prophecy,—which is to say, we prefer a record of what has been done, to a promise for the future.

Sometimes, however, it may be justifiable for one to tell his friends what he is going to try to do; and that is the purpose of this article. We are aware that no lasting spiritual work is accomplished but by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that such power is given in answer to prayer. This article takes all that for granted. But what instruments will God use? He gives us minds to think, and spiritual enlightenment that we may think aright. We offer some suggestions as to what we think might profitably engage the thoughts and activities of ministers and churches in the New Year. We suggest to others only a programme which we shall endeavour to carry out in Jarvis Street.

First of all, then, we should endeavour to build into the structure of the church, the material already on the ground. In our own church we have had hundreds of additions during the year. Large numbers of these are young converts; some have come from other Baptist churches; and still others have united by experience. But the gathering of all this material is like bringing truck-loads of bricks to the place of building,—after being brought, they need to be built into the walls. We are, therefore, planning to give special attention to all the new members who have come into our fellowship during the past year: to instruct the babes; and to lead all into some form of active service.

In the next place, we are planning a visitation of the entire membership of the church, not to canvass for money, but to ascertain the state of spiritual health of every church member. In this work we propose to enlist a great army of healthy Christians, whose spiritual health is certified by their spiritual activities. We believe the older members of church families should be taught to look after the younger members.

Once again: It is proposed to make further efforts to build into our Bible School the members of the church who have not yet responded to our many invitations. Our attendance at the Bible School during the past year has been as high as one thousand and fifty-five; even with the mercury below zero last Sunday morning, the attendance was seven hundred and ninety-one. These included a large proportion of the members of the church; but we shall endeavour to enlist every member in this organized study of the Word of God. Thus our first endeavour will be to make the utmost use of the material already on the ground in the church and in the Bible School. All this we shall do in obedience to the principle of the Masters' admonition, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

It is proposed, also, to endeavour to obtain much new material in our visitation of the membership and of the Bible School. We shall endeavour to take a census, obtaining the names of all the unconverted members of every family connected with the church; and, in addition to those, as far as possible, the names of unconverted friends and neighbours; and, ascertaining where raw material can be obtained, we shall spend ourselves in an effort to bring that material to the hearing of the Word, with a view to the conversion of the unsaved.

In the view of many, this will be a difficult task; and it will, of course, involve much labour; but it is by such labour we live; it is impossible that an idle Christian should be a healthy Christian. But mere activity does not necessarily bring spiritual health. We must engage in the right sort of work; hence it is necessary that the members of a church should be employed in a kind of work which will make it necessary that they should pray without ceasing, and diligently study the Word of God. In the past year great numbers of people in Jarvis Street have been enlisted in spiritual service. We shall aim to increase that number, and to put the inactive part of our membership in charge of the active part. The aim we have before us is to build a church which will be a mighty evangelizing and teaching force in Toronto.

In all this programme there is nothing that will make news for the papers. It is a programme which necessitates patient, pains-taking, humble, service on the part of everyone who loves the Lord; but we are confident that there will be large returns. We are planning to set this programme in motion immediately. Let the members of the church put this *Witness* on file, and if God should spare us, read it again at the end of 1925, and see what fruit this programme has borne.

We humbly offer these suggestions, also, to other pastors and churches in the confidence that whoever will endeavour to exercise his powers in some such simple service during the New Year will find no lack of opportunity.

The Whole Bible Sunday School Lesson Course

Lesson LXVII.

January 11th, 1925.

CONFIRMATION OF DECREES.—Ezra, Chapters 6-10.

Our lesson gives us further teaching respecting the revival among God's people which terminated the Babylonian captivity.

I. How God Makes the Wrath of Man to Praise Him.

1. The enemies of the truth in their endeavour to halt the building of the temple succeeded only in bringing the truth to light. They suggested that a search be made in Babylon to see whether such a decree had been issued by Cyrus the king, to build the house of God at Jerusalem, as the leaders of Judah had said. The decree was not found where they suggested search should be made for it. But it was found; and the truthfulness of Judah's leaders was established. Thus often does it come to pass in our day. Even those who would subvert the gospel of Christ, by God's good pleasure, are made to have their uses. The attacks which are being made upon God's Book have served to drive many of God's people to a closer study of the Book itself, only to find their faith confirmed, and the truth established. 2. Judah's enemies also, by their opposition, succeeded in making friends for Judah's cause. Until Tatnai and Shetharboznai and his companions sent their letter to Darius, the king was indifferent to Judah's cause. Their letter had the effect of awakening the interest of the king, and putting all his vast resources at the builders' command. If competition is the life of trade, then opposition is the life of true religion. The persecution of God's saints has invariably had the effect of challenging the interest and commanding the sympathy of many who might otherwise have been indifferent to the truth. The saying is true that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church". 3. The opponents of Judah found themselves compelled to further the work which they had endeavoured to halt (chap. 6: 13). The chiefest of all the apostles was once the worst enemy of the church: "They had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me."

II. How the House of the Lord Was Built.

1. The builders were inspired by the Word of the Lord. In the war-like days of Elijah, Elisha confessed that Elijah meant more to Israel than the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof; and when Elisha himself lay a-dying, the king put precisely the same estimate upon the value of Elisha. So now in the construction days of the text before us, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were the inspiration of the builders. Invariably when God has a great work to do, He raises up preachers; and the building of the church prospers under the ministry of God's prophets (chap. 6: 14). 2. The record of the actual building of the house is given in a few words, and without detail (vs. 14, 15). The scribe is content to record that the house was built according to the commandment of the Lord, and also by the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes. Thus we are taught that the morale of a church is more important than its material resources. When the spirit of the people is made willing by the Word of the Lord, there is no difficulty in building the house—and finishing it. 3. Yet how the people of God should be humbled to find that the house was built "according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." It should teach us that God is never at a loss to find workmen to do His work. 4. The house of God was dedicated with great joy. In contrast to chapter 6: 16-22, read the 126th and 137th Psalms. 5. In connection with the dedication of the house, they kept the Feast of the Passover (vs. 19-22). Thus the great central truth of the revelation of God's redemptive purpose, here, as in other revivals of which we have learned in these studies, namely salvation through the blood, is kept in mind.

III. The Ministry of Ezra the Scribe (Chapters 7 to 10).

1. Ezra was remarkable for his knowledge of the Word of God (chap. 7: 6-10). It is worthy of note that the Holy Spirit should thus describe the qualifications of Ezra for the important work committed to him. We do well to emulate his example, and the example of a still Greater than he, even that

of our Lord Jesus Christ. Beyond all question, the measure of our spiritual usefulness will be proportioned to our knowledge of the Word of God. Moody used to say that God could not use a man who did not know his Bible. Ezra has evidently made it the chief business of life to know the Word of God. (Read the first and the hundred and nineteenth Psalms). 2. Ezra commanded the confidence, and secured the co-operation, of the king (chap. 7: 11; 27, 28). Thus through one man God opened vast storehouses of wealth. 3. Ezra enlisted other men in the service to which he was called (chap. 8). It is a lesson which all leaders need to learn; it is especially important that Sunday School workers should learn it. To each scribe like Ezra, there should be added a list of names like the eighth chapter. Thus a great man may multiply himself. 4. Ezra recognized the responsibility of having such wealth in his charge. There is danger of our taking our task too lightly. A very heavy responsibility rests upon those who are put in trust with the gospel, and who are charged to bring the vessels of the house of the Lord to Jerusalem. 5. This man of God trusted God to help him "quite through", as Newton would say. He was at pains to practise what he had preached: "For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him." So ought we to be ashamed to require other help than God's. Ezra's trust was amply rewarded (chap. 8: 31, 32, and 36). "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed". 6. Ezra's greatest anxiety was occasioned by his discovery of corruption among the people of God. The church has nothing to fear from enemies without: its chief danger is from corruption within. What pastor has not had experiences which will help him to sympathize with Ezra's feeling as described in chapter 9: 5? 7. The course Ezra pursued is full of instruction (chap. 9: 3-15). He gave himself to prayer, "that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage". In other words, Ezra prayed for a revival and for such a revival as would cleanse the people from all corruption. Chapter ten is a record of God's answer to his prayer. It would have been folly for even Ezra to attempt to effect such a reformation in his own strength. The tenth chapter is the record of a revival of subtraction, of the putting away of those things which are offensive to God.

THE BIBLE SCHOOL.

The last year has seen a phenomenal development in our Bible School, the greatest in all the history of the church. It reached high-water mark December 14th, with an attendance of one thousand and fifty-five. Last Sunday morning, with an officially-recorded temperature below zero, we had an attendance of seven hundred and ninety-one. At our reorganization of the School on the present plan in October, 1923, we had an attendance of less than two hundred. For the first six months, October to March, our average attendance was increased to four hundred and fifty. It continued at about that figure until August, when, with some modifications in our organization, and renewed effort on the part of the workers, and under the inspiration of the visit of Dr. Norris and Miss Kate Tarlton, a new period of rapid growth began, passing the thousand mark the first Sunday in December. We confidently expect to have fifteen hundred in actual attendance on or before Easter Sunday, and to reach the two thousand mark within the year 1925. What this will necessitate in the matter of larger accommodation it will not be difficult to imagine; but we urge all our friends to join us in earnest prayer that we may thus be able to gather this great number for the study of God's Word.

THE FIFTH YEAR OF THREE PRAYER MEETINGS A WEEK.

It was in January, 1921, that we added to the Wednesday prayer meeting, two others—at that time, Mondays and Saturdays. The days were later changed to Tuesday and Thursday and Saturday. With the meeting of the special watch-night service, December 31st (held instead of the Tuesday meeting) we have completed four years of three prayer meetings a week without a break. We begin the fifth year with every expectation that this year will exceed in

spiritual results all the years that have gone before. Shall we resolve that 1925 shall be a year of unceasing prayer for continuous revival?

Next week the regular services will be resumed: Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 8 o'clock, with the Bible lecture Thursday at 8.45.

THE FIRST COMMUNION OF THE NEW YEAR.

Our great Monthly Communion Service will be held at the close of the evening service, January 4th. We hope to see the largest attendance at Communion we have ever had. This note is to urge every member of the church to make an effort to be present.

JANUARY, WITNESS MONTH

THREE MONTHS FOR TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.

One of our readers has made a suggestion which we believe has great possibilities. Our suggestion that *The Witness* should be sent as a Christmas present met with a surprising response. Out of this came the suggestion that hundreds of *Witness* readers would probably be glad to assist in extending our circulation if a low rate were quoted for a brief period.

We have gone into the matter very carefully; and are now prepared to offer *The Gospel Witness* to new subscribers for a period of three months for twenty-five cents. Twenty-five cents will not pay for thirteen copies of *The Witness*; but we believe that the most effective way to advertise *The Witness* is to let people read it for themselves. We do not want dissatisfied subscribers; but rather, subscribers who have an appetite for the kind of things published in our paper. We appeal, therefore, to all our readers in Canada, and the United States, Great Britain, and elsewhere, to send us as many names as possible, and with each name, twenty-five cents. For this we will send *The Witness* beginning with the first issue in February, and continuing to the last issue of April.

We believe there are many readers of *The Witness* who will be willing to invest one, two, five, or ten dollars in sending *The Witness* to their friends. To all such, we suggest that you make a selection of as many friends as you can afford to subscribe for at twenty-five cents for three months: send us the names and addresses, and we will do the rest. Another way—which would involve more labour, but which would probably be more effective—would be to solicit your friends to subscribe for a three months' trial of *The Witness* at twenty-five cents for the three months. But use any method you like—only send us in hundreds of names during the month of January.

Our plan is not to begin sending *The Witness* until the first issue of February. It would not be possible to send them out as the names come in throughout the month, for that would involve an enormous amount of book-keeping. Our plan is to use the month of January to secure subscribers; and that such subscriptions shall begin with the first issue in February, and terminate with the last issue of April. In that way, we shall be able to deal with all these new subscriptions in a solid block, which will involve much less labour in the office. We further purpose, in the first issue of February, to put a notice which will explain that *The Witness* is being sent to hundreds of people for the first time on trial for three months. At the end of March, we shall write every one of these trial subscribers, notifying them that their subscriptions will terminate with the last issue of April; and urging them to become regular subscribers.

Who will send us the first list of trial subscribers at twenty-five cents for the three months, February to April?