

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF EVANGELICAL PRINCIPLES
AND IN DEFENSE OF THE FAITH ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS.
\$2.00 Per Year, Postpaid, to any address. 5c. Per Single Copy.

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

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Registered Cable Address: Jarwitsem, Canada.

Vol. 12, No. 38

TORONTO, FEBRUARY 1, 1934

Whole Number 611

The Jarvis Street Pulpit

A POPULAR DEVIL

A Sermon by the Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, January 28th, 1934.

(Stenographically Reported)

Broadcast over CFRB, 690 k.c., as is every Sunday evening service of Jarvis Street Church, from 7 to 9 o'clock, Eastern Standard Time.

"And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing."—II. Samuel 15:11.

Prayer before the Sermon

We thank Thee, O Lord, that we have not to go into heaven to bring Thee down from above, nor into the deep to bring Thee up again from the dead, but the word of salvation is nigh us, even in our mouths and in our hearts. We thank Thee for the promise of Thy Word that assures us of Thy presence in the midst of Thy assembled people. We believe Thou art already with us, for Thou dost never fail to fulfil to Thy servants the word upon which Thou dost cause us to hope. This we desire above all other things this evening, that there may come to every one in this assembly a sense of the nearness of God.

We need Thee, O Lord. We need Thee every hour. We need Thee now. Come to us in all the fulness of Thy saving power this evening. We read in Thy Word that when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them. There is not one of us who has not the capacity for entertaining that spirit of evil, even the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Forbid that any one of us should be the channel of his power this evening. Come to us, we pray Thee, in all the fulness of Thy grace. And if into the heart of any the enemy shall endeavour to come as a flood, we pray that the Spirit of God may lift up a standard against him.

We are all of us pilgrims, journeying from this life to another. We confess we have no continuing city, that we seek a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. We would set our faces towards the sunrise, toward the morning-land, and make our way toward that city in which there shall be no sorrow, no sighing, no pain, no tears, and no death—and all because there shall be no sin.

We make mention once again of the righteousness of our Lord Jesus. We plead the merit of His precious blood. Indeed,—

"We stand upon His merit,
We know no other stand,
Not e'en where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land."

Draw near to us notwithstanding our inherent sinfulness, notwithstanding all our unworthiness, for we are not fit to

be where Thou art. Receive us as we come in the name of the Lord Jesus.

We think of many whom we do not see—we know not how many, whether hundreds or thousands, but we know there are many who are bowed in Thy presence, and who share with us every exercise of this hour. Be present in those little groups that gather in homes and elsewhere for the hearing of Thy Word by radio from this place this evening. Some there are who have invited friends to come in and listen to Thy Word. Among them there may be some who know not the Lord. We beseech Thee to make this an hour of salvation to a multitude of people. Let the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shine in many hearts.

Graciously visit every assembly of the saints, wherever Thy people are gathered in the matchless name of Jesus Christ. Wherever Thy servants proclaim the gospel of the grace of God, salvation through the precious blood, may the presence and power of the Holy Spirit be there to convince men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Quicken those who are dead, and further sanctify those who are Thine own.

Be mindful of those who are sick this evening. How many there are upon beds of pain! Some who hear this service are sorely afflicted. The Lord be gracious to them. Make their pillows very soft; make them aware of Thy ministering angels roundabout them. Give them the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Notwithstanding their pain, help them to rejoice in the Lord. If there be among them any whom Thou wilt call into Thine immediate presence to-night, prepare them, we beseech Thee, by Thy grace. Help them to trust wholly in Jesus Christ.

It may be there are some in other institutions than those for the sick, who listen. We have been surprised by hearing from many whom we never dreamed could hear. We beseech Thee to carry the message of Thy gospel as on the wings of the morning. Bring to many the sense of pardon and release from sin. Show them, by the power of Thy grace a prospect of better days, of a richer and fuller life in time to come.

Help us now as we meditate upon Thy truth. Let Thy word come to us with power. May it prove itself to be this evening the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Nothing, I think, is more self-evident in universal human experience, or in the testimony of that experience in time past recorded in human history, than the presence in this world of two differing, contrasting, and antagonistic, principles; the principle of good and the principle of evil, of righteousness and of unrighteousness, of truth and untruth, of light and of darkness. Account for it as you may, these two principles have ever found in human history their incarnations. We have always had the Cains and the Abels, the Isaacs and the Ishmaels, the Jacobs and the Esaus—always beside the good, the evil springs up; and wherever the wheat is sown, an enemy will sow tares.

Behind that indisputable fact, so true to all human observation and experience, is the scriptural teaching that there are two personalities: the One, God over all, the Source of all good, of all truth, of all righteousness; and, on the other hand, an evil, malignant, spirit who seeks the injury and destruction of humankind. Nothing is more clearly taught in the Word of God than that there is a personal devil, a malignant spirit, the father of lies who, from the beginning, was a murderer, who is described as the "accuser of the brethren", "the adversary", "the dragon", "Satan", "the serpent". He is represented under many figures, but the truth is clearly taught in Scripture that there is such a personality.

And unfortunately there is no truth of the Word of God that is more abundantly and unmistakably confirmed in human experience than the existence of such an evil personality. Mr. Whitcombe read to you this evening the inspired record of his attack upon Incarnate Goodness, of the temptation of our Lord in the wilderness by the devil. The Apostle Paul speaks of him as "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience".

He has his human instruments, the tools which he employs for his own purposes. Hence there are many characters in history which illustrate the machinations of the devil, which serve to show how he does his work. One of the most striking of which I have knowledge in the Word of God is that of the beautiful and dashing son of David, Absalom. You remember how he had rebelled against his father, and had taken himself off to a neighbouring kingdom. Then, by his father's grace, he was permitted to return to his own country. Having done so, this chapter from which my text is taken tells us that he rose up early in the morning, sat in the gate where he might meet the people who were coming up to the king for judgment, and as he greeted them, said, "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice." And to every one he said, "See, thy matters are good and right." Nobody was wrong: everyone was right. And thus he stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

When he had thus sown the seeds of sedition with a sufficiently liberal hand he obtained permission to go to Hebron, ostensibly to pay a vow which he had made during the time of his banishment. Then he sent spies throughout all the land of Israel, telling the people, "As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron." He challenged the supremacy of the Lord's anointed, essaying to take pos-

session of his throne and kingdom, and to rule over His chosen people.

The text says that, as he went forth to go to Hebron, "With Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything." This story provides us with a very interesting and striking illustration of the devil's method of procuring recruits, and effecting his evil purposes in their lives. It is the story of a brilliant leader, a cunning strategist, and of an army of dupes.

I

Absalom was A BRILLIANT LEADER. He was no fiction, but was a very real person who brought the force of his personality to bear upon the personality of others. And there is a real devil. That is old-fashioned doctrine, is it not? I wish the fact of it were as obsolete as some people imagine him to be. But surely it requires no stretch of the imagination to believe in the existence of some mighty, malignant, personality who designs the destruction of men. There is a devil. He who tempted our first parents in the garden, and who stamped all human history with his slimy course, who tempted the one and only perfect Man Who was God as well as man—that same devil lives, modern theologians to the contrary notwithstanding. When a bandit, or a criminal of any other order, has left a trail of wreck and ruin behind him, he exerts himself often to the utmost to give currency to the idea that he has ceased to be. The police of a thousand cities do not spend their time looking for a dead criminal, but for a living one; and if, by any means at all, he can persuade them that he has passed out of existence, then they are apt to be less diligent, and doors may be left open for him to do more of his predatory work.

The worst devil of all is no devil at all, nothing is more dangerous than the assumption that there is no evil leadership—leading men astray. I could not account for half the theological seminaries on the American continent, as they are now constituted, apart from the hypothesis that there is a personal devil. I cannot imagine who else is running them. How do you account for all the evil in the world,—for the denial of the Book, for a thousand things subversive of Christian faith,—apart from that scriptural doctrine of the existence of a spiritual Absalom who would lead men away from God?

Absalom was a man of great personal force, a man who could get other people to follow him; and on this occasion he had a personal following from Jerusalem of no less than two hundred men.

There are people who must, of necessity, work alone. They can never get anybody to follow them. They may do something of themselves, but they have no power to influence others, or to secure the co-operation of other people to effect the purpose they have formed. Not so was it with Absalom. He had only to speak the word, and immediately he was followed by a great company of disciples. The truth is, there is a leader in the ways of evil. There is someone who knocks at the door of every heart, who makes appeal to every human spirit to follow him, to become his disciple. There is not a man or woman here this evening who has not been subject to his influence; and, indeed subject—to use a stronger word—to his power. A man must be exceedingly dense, it seems to me, almost without moral sense, if he has not awakened to a consciousness of an evil presence without himself that reinforces, that augments, the evil of his own heart.

Absalom was a very attractive person. It is said that "in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him". He was probably one of the finest specimens of physical manhood of his day, a man of extraordinary charm, personally attractive, a man of engaging and intriguing spirit, who knew how to lay hold of the imaginations, as well as of the affections of people.

The devil always presents himself in an attractive guise. Sin is evil enough, and ugly enough, when stripped of all its trappings; but you remember the ancient story, the record of the beginning of human sin: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." Sin is always wrapped up in an attractive parcel. The devil always makes his attack in his best clothes. Not as the horned and hooped monster of the infernal regions does he appear, but as a modern, up-to-date, gentleman, a person whom it would be a pleasure, apparently, to know.

Surely everybody has had an opportunity of observing that. How attractive is the garden of forbidden things! How enchanting its music! How pleasant its fruits! How beautiful withal appears the life that is alien to the Spirit of God! I warn you this evening, not against one who is an apparent robber, not against one who comes armed to the teeth like a brigand, whose whole aspect is forbidding; but, on the contrary, one who knows how to insinuate himself into your good graces, to win for himself your highest favour, and to impress you, with what seems to be the high value of his friendship.

Moreover, Absalom did his chief work *under the guise of religion*. He had to get from Jerusalem to Hebron. It was there he proposed to set up his rival kingdom, there he proposed openly to challenge the sovereignty of the Lord's anointed. He left Jerusalem professing to go to Hebron to pay his vows unto the Lord: "Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord."

The most dangerous of all devils is a religious devil. Religion, indeed, is the devil's chosen sphere. He has always done his deadliest work under the guise of religion. It is against a religious devil I warn you. If you examine the inspired historical records of this Book, you will find that the devil effected the ruin of kings and the destruction of empires by means of religion. What was it that destroyed Israel? Jeroboam's calves of gold, and the long train of idolatrous practices which ensued, until at last the prophet, over a wasted and desolate land, is heard prophetically to exclaim, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off."

It was not a world of publicans and sinners that crucified the Lord Jesus. His chief opponents were the officers of religion. He was condemned to death by the high priests of religion. He was betrayed by one of the twelve. When Christianity began its course it met with opposition, not from the world without so much as from the religious world. There were gathered together against the apostolic preachers all the kindred of the high priest. Throughout the New Testament that doctrine

is taught on almost every page. When Ananias and Sapphira came with the lie upon their lips, and an offering in their hand, the inspired apostle said, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" He was the inspiration of their deception.

It is said, "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." Again it is written, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." The devil is the author and the inspiration of all false religions, Mohammedanism, and every other *ism* that is contrary to the Word and will of God.

For a good while now Evangelical Christianity has, in a sense, been struggling, battling for its life against—what? Against sin outside the church? Against the evils of the world? No! Against unbelief inside the church. We have had to do battle in this place against Modernism in all its forms; and I am just as sure of the superhuman inspiration of the tenets and practices, and of the whole programme of Modernism; as I am of the divine inspiration of the Bible. I know this Bible is of God: I am equally sure that Modernism is of the devil. I know it is preached in Christian pulpits. I know it is taught in theological seminaries. But that does not make it right. That spirit which denies the authority of God's Book, which denies the essential Deity of Jesus Christ, which mocks at miracles, and pours contempt upon the supernatural in the Christian religion, which would tell us there is no necessity for the cleansing blood, which scoffs at the atoning Sacrifice, and denies the necessity of a new birth and of a new creation—that spirit is not of God: it is the spirit "that now worketh in the children of disobedience", it is only the spirit of the pit itself, that denies these eternal verities that are indispensable to the salvation of the souls of men.

I warn you to try those systems that come to you in the guise of religion. I need not—indeed, I could not—name them all. But there is a touchstone to which all these things can be brought. The spirit that blinds the minds of men—to what?—Blinds them to the truth of the gospel, shuts their minds against the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is "the image of God", whether it comes to you in the name of science or philosophy, but with a religious flavour, that spirit is "the god of this world," "the prince of the power of the air." "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience".

Thus are men seduced from their loyalty to the Lord's Anointed. Thus are men led in ways of error; not in paths of righteousness, but in the opposite direction; not for His name's sake, but for the dishonour of His name, and the destruction of human souls. A brilliant leader, competent to outwit all men of science and philosophy, more skillful than all human founders and proponents of religious systems, is he. "With Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing."

II.

This leader was A CUNNING STRATEGIST. "Absalom rose up early." It is sometimes difficult to get people up early enough to come to church at eleven o'clock Sunday morning: it is still more difficult to waken some of them

in time to come to a morning school. But Absalom was up early in the morning, and he was early at work. He did not begin a day's work at noon: he began early in the morning.

And so does the devil. He knows the advantage of the early hours. Absalom was found at the king's gate early: no one was there before him. No one had passed by before Absalom had taken his seat. He was there to intercept the first man as he made his way toward the king's presence. My dear friends, we ought to be earnest in our endeavours to lead boys and girls to Christ. Some little children, and some adults, expressed their desire this morning to know the Saviour. There were two little girls. I asked them their ages; one said she was seven, and the other nine. Some people would say, "They are only little children." But are not little children of value? Will the devil let them alone until they grow up? How I have seen godly parents dread the day when they must send that little girl or boy to school. They had guarded that little one carefully, they had tried to protect his speech, to put a hedge about his mind lest evil thoughts should find lodgment there. When the child has been but a week at school, when father comes home one day he finds mother greatly distressed: she has heard a word from that little boy's tongue that does not belong to the vocabulary of that home. Already she is filled with horror because the speech of the boy who seemed to be so pure and noble, such a splendid little fellow, is already tainted.

A very up-to-date woman once said to a certain minister, "Doctor, I do not intend to give my child religious instruction until he is old enough to appreciate it." "When will that be, madam?" said the minister. "I think if I begin with him when he is ten years of age that will be early enough," she replied. "As you will", said the minister, "but I warn you that the devil will not wait until your little boy is ten years of age before he sows seeds of evil in his mind."

"Absalom rose up early." Surely we are not ignorant of Satan's devices in this respect. How many traps are set for little feet to-day! What efforts men make to catch the attention of the children! You have only to listen to your radio, to the programmes that are put on to interest little children. Why? So that the children will persuade father and mother to buy something. It may be good; but whether it be good or evil, men recognize the importance of getting hold of the children's minds in order to shape them for their purposes. They have Sunday Schools now in Russia where the principles of Sovietism are being propagated. It is not intended to let the little children grow up to become young men and women without having been indoctrinated with their devilish principles. Busy are they corrupting the minds of the young. Nor have you to go as far afield as Russia to find many an Absalom early in the morning calling people away from God.

Every one of the two hundred men was called. Not one lacked an invitation. The devil believes in personal work. He does not deal with people in the mass only: he deals with the individual. He sees that every boy and girl, every man and woman, is personally and repeatedly called into his service. Listen to-morrow. Watch your newspapers. Listen to your radio. Look as you go down the street—wherever you go, see how many voices are calling—calling—calling. What for? Calling men to God? No! Calling men away from God. "With

Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, *that were called.*

Absalom intercepted them as they came to the king for judgment, he did anything and everything to prevent their coming to the king. That is always the devil's method. Something happens to keep people away from church sometimes, and you say, "Circumstances were unfavourable. I felt indisposed". The devil will see that you are indisposed. My radio friends, that is why many of you are not at church to-night. Why did you not come? "I—I—I felt a little out of sorts." The devil will see to putting you out of sorts every Sunday if you let him. He is calling you.

You remember the record in the New Testament of when Christ came down from the mount? Certain parents had brought their boy to Christ, possessed of an unclean spirit; and the disciples could not cast it out. When Christ came down he said, "Bring thy son hither", and the record says, "As he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him." He always does. It is Absalom's way to get between the soul that is going up to the King for judgment, so as to prevent his laying his case before the King, to prevent his getting Heaven's appraisal of his true condition, that he may be made fit to come into the presence of the King.

Absalom was very astute in this, that *he had one sermon for everybody.* It made no difference what the case was: to everyone he said the same thing, "See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. This kingdom is badly governed. You are a righteous man, there is nothing wrong with you; but the difficulty is that the king has made no arrangement so that your case may be properly judged. "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!"

Whenever a preacher tells you that you are all right, be sure the Spirit of God is not speaking through him. "What!" Yes; I know you. You are the finest people in the world, many of you, but you are not "all right". You are a bad lot. I will change the pronoun: *we* are a bad lot. Our matters are not good and right. They are bad, they are wrong. We have "all sinned, and come short of the glory of God". We are none of us right. That is old-fashioned, I know. The popular thing is to tell everybody he is right. The next time you hear a preacher say that, you may know what spirit is speaking in him: it is the spirit of Absalom, it is the spirit "that now worketh in the children of disobedience". The Spirit of God brings comfort, cheer, solace, to the hearts of those who are penitent, and who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ: "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." But until we have reached that condition, and our hearts have been broken before the Lord because of our sin, there is no one that can truly tell us that our "matters are good and right". They are not. We have all sinned.

Thus *"Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."* He got at their hearts. We are warned against an "evil heart of unbelief". We are warned lest we allow ourselves to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. The devil will steal our hearts. There is Another, Incarnate Wisdom, Who says, "Son, give me thy heart." The divine Bridegroom has a rival. The Prince of glory has a sharp competitor. There is one who would rob the Heir of all things of His bride,—and he would do it by stealing her heart, by fulsome flattery, by persuading her that

all is well, and that she has no need of the Bridegroom's grace. Beware of the voice of flattery, of a religion of compliments, which is a substitute of the religion of complement. The religion that requires no change of mind, or amendment of life, is not of God. It is the voice of Absalom which says, "Thy matters are good and right."

III.

But here is a story of AN ARMY OF DUPES: "With Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing."

Have you not seen the souls of men duped of the devil? What a lot of simple people there are religiously! There are some people who seem to think that logic has no place in religion. Although they talk much of that which appeals to their reason, there is no reason in them. They have surrendered their reason. They have departed from it. I know of no realm of human thought in which unreason can make such rapid progress as in the realm of religion. Any man or woman who proposes a new religion can get a following. You do not need to prove anything: you only need to announce something. And an army of dupes will follow you. They will go in their simplicity, not knowing anything.

These men did not know that there was no truth in Absalom, that every word he uttered was a lie. Perhaps they thought he was a "scholar". The great scholar, Ahithophel, Professor Ahithophel, M.A., Ph.D., D.D., LL.D., and all the rest of it, joined forces with Absalom. He was a very clever man. He was looked upon as a divine oracle,—but he "knew not anything" either. Alas! alas! how easily men are deceived where their souls' interests are concerned!

These people did not know, they supposed Absalom was a man of honour and integrity, and that every word he uttered was true—although there was not a word of truth in it. That is what the Lord said of the devil, "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." He is the source and author of all deception everywhere—and yet men follow him.

They did not know that Absalom had no care for them. How different was he who was the shepherd of Israel,—that human shepherd, I mean. David, with tears, once appeared before the Lord, in behalf of his people, and said, "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house." And hear great David's greater Son, when in the garden He said to those who came with staves and swords, "I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." But Absalom merely exploited the people in his own interest. He did not care for them. The devil does not care for your soul. He is not seeking after you for your welfare, but for his own.

They did not know they were going away from the place of sacrifice, and therefore of salvation. They turned their backs upon Jerusalem, and upon the place of the altar, upon the shed blood, and the place where the high priest ministered. Leaving Jerusalem they moved, not in the direction of life, but of death; not toward the morning, but toward the night which knows no ending. "They went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing."

Let me say a daring thing. I do not believe that anyone can know anything, actually know the truth of any

realm, the ultimate of anything, apart from the Spirit of God. Turn your back upon Him, and you know not anything. "I am the way, the truth, and the life:" Jesus Christ said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Thus they went, and they came at last to the wood of Ephraim. When Absalom had numbered his men, and Joab, captain of David's hosts, had numbered his men, they joined battle in the wood of Ephraim. Absalom, you remember, was caught in the branches of an oak tree. When that glorious hair of his wrapped itself around the branches, the mule upon which he was riding went from under him, and left him suspended in the air. He became the target for Joab's darts, and was slain. The wood of Ephraim slew twenty thousand men; they never came home again. And among them were two hundred men who had gone "in their simplicity", not knowing any thing. They went to death because they turned their backs upon the Lord's anointed. It is ever thus.

Therefore I submit to you in the name of the Lord this evening this choice. We shall none of us leave this place of assembly alone. As you pass without those doors you will be accompanied by another spirit, somebody will go with you. There are two here in this audience-room this evening appealing for your following, for the obedience of your spirit: Absalom, the dashing, brilliant, leader who will promise you anything, but who will lead you only to death. It is easy to promise all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, when they are not the devil's to give. If they had been his, he would not have given them. But the devil will promise you anything—and will give you nothing. Will you go home with him?

There is Another Who, to the natural mind, is "without form or comeliness"; when you see Him "there is no beauty that you should desire him". He is a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"—and alas! alas! so many hide, as it were, their faces from Him. His hands are wounded, and there are marks of thorns about His brow. He comes to you in humble and mayhap, in your view, unattractive guise. But there are gifts in His hands, as there are nail-prints. There is power with Him, for all authority is given to Him in heaven and on earth. He is Lord of men as well as of angels. He would accompany you to-night. I had almost said He would slip His arm through yours. No! Let me rather put it as we had it last Sunday evening: He would lay His hand upon you, and hold you in the sovereign grip of Almightyness, declaring that no man shall pluck you out of His hand.

What choice will you make? Shall it be Absalom? It was popular to join Absalom for a while. Everybody ran after Absalom for a while. But soon Absalom was judged, his forces were scattered, the king came back again, and he bowed all the hearts of the men of Israel. They vied with each other in bringing the king back.

Not always will my Lord stand at the door and knock, almost as a mendicant. Some day the Prince of glory will come down the skies, the white horse and his Rider will appear, and He will take to Himself His great power and reign. Woe unto them who repent not before that day of judgment shall come. Let us close with Him this evening. Let us dismiss the Absaloms, and the Absalom of all Absaloms, and refuse longer to listen to his word. Let us yield ourselves wholly to Him Who is our rightful Lord and King. May the Lord make us to know Him, and to know Him for what He really is, the Author of eternal salvation! Amen.

KING SAUL AT SUNSET

A Lecture by Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto,
Thursday Evening, January 25th, 1934.

Tenth in the 1933-34 Series of Thursday Evening
Lectures on Biblical Theology, which is included in
the Curriculum of Toronto Baptist Seminary

(Stenographically Reported)

Lesson Text: I Samuel, chapter 31; I Chronicles, chapter 10.

For some weeks our attention has been given to a study of the life of Saul, and of David in relation to Saul. Although our lecture text is the last chapter of the first of Samuel, I shall read from the first chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, David's lamentation over Saul and Jonathan:

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

The sixth verse of the thirty-first chapter reads, "So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together." In the first of Chronicles, the tenth chapter, we read, "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; and enquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

The character of Saul was a very complex one, and perhaps from some points of view somewhat difficult to understand. Perhaps there was no one more competent to form an accurate appraisal of his worth than the one who knew him so intimately because he had suffered so much at his hand; even David, the son of Jesse.

In the eulogy which I read to you David especially observes that Saul had been anointed with oil, and that the shield of the mighty had been "vilely cast away". Saul had been a man of high privilege, and his life-story, as a whole, presents one of the most pathetic pictures of Scripture, and one of the greatest tragedies. One cannot wonder that David exclaimed, "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

I.

We shall glance for a few minutes once again at the early days of Saul; or, if we look upon his life-record as of a day of life, we shall think of SAUL AT THE NOONDAY, when he appears in all the splendour of his young manhood, with all of life before him, called to occupy the

chief position in the nation, chosen of God, and acclaimed by men, the whole people crying, "God save the king."

If ever a man began his public career under favourable auspices, it was the son of Kish; if ever it might reasonably have been predicted that one would accomplish great things, it might have been predicted of Saul. He had everything in his favour.

The one question that will arise, I dare say, in the minds of many—and I state it now so that we may have it in our minds—is the question of Saul's spiritual state, of his relation to God; or, viewed by the standards of the New Testament, the question whether he was a saved man, whether, in New Testament language, he was a Christian. That is a great question.

Certainly he was a man possessed of many admirable qualities, a man who did not, in the beginning, think more highly of himself than he ought to think. If there was any pride native to his constitution, then as yet it had not manifested itself; for he seems to have been characterized in the beginning by a somewhat excessive modesty. He did not exalt himself above measure. He had to be sought for, and brought forward; he was found hiding among the stuff.

However, we must not overestimate the natural qualities of Saul, for there are many people who are not Christians who are delightful characters. There is a natural amiability which one might well covet, and which, in some characters, can be wrought at last only by a long process of grace. There are some people who are better looking before they go to the beauty shop than some other people are when they come out! There are some people who have natural qualities which are amiable and attractive—and there are some Christians who, naturally, are pretty crooked sticks. There are many rough corners to be rubbed off, and a great deal of the "old man" in his ugliest manifestations to be overcome. So that making an appraisal of human character from the outside is a somewhat difficult and hazardous business. However, we observe in passing, that Saul, at noonday, seems to have been a man of very fine sensibilities, a man who was pleasing to those associated with him, a man of attractive personality, and rather unusual address.

Then, too, it is to be remembered that *Saul was anointed with oil*. He was chosen of God to rule over His people. I know the people demanded a king, but when Saul was introduced, Samuel said, "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people." He was the chosen of God, and the anointing oil was poured upon his head. David ever regarded him with respect because of that fact.

That he was chosen as king, however, does not prove that he was, in the truest sense, at heart, a servant of God. And yet the fact that he was so chosen, and the quality of leadership displayed, seem to me to suggest that he was a man in whose nature some change was wrought by divine grace. He became a chosen instrument of the Lord. He delivered God's people by a great victory at Jabesh-Gilead. But neither does that prove that Saul was savingly related to God, because God sometimes uses those who do not know Him. "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria." Though apparently he did not know the Lord, he was yet the Lord's unconscious instrument in effecting vic-

tory for the people. Thus also did he call and use Cyrus: "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; and I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me." Therefore the fact that Saul was used of God does not necessarily mean that he was, in the New Testament sense, a Christian man.

But he was numbered among the prophets: "The Spirit of God came upon him (Saul), and he prophesied among them." The Spirit dwelt within him, and uttered Himself through him. In my own view, the general account of Saul's character and career seems to suggest that he was really what we should call, in New Testament language, a Christian man. Therein lies the lesson, because Saul's story shows us what a wreck a Christian man may make of his life, how far short of his high privileges he may fall.

II.

Let us now look at another period of Saul's day. As THE DAY BEGINS TO DECLINE, AND THE NOONDAY PASSES, Saul now has become prominent in the life of Israel. You recall how impatient he became; and refused to wait for the coming of Samuel, but usurped the priest's office, arrogating to himself a ministry which did not belong to him. In our lesson for next Sunday we have the story of Uzziah, the man who reigned for fifty-two years, the man who was marvellously successful in the early part of his reign, and who is described as a man who did that "which was right in the sight of the Lord". But "when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense." He was rebuked by Azariah and fourscore others of the priests who are described as "valiant men", who said, "It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests, the sons of Aaron that are consecrated to burn incense: Go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour". When Uzziah resisted the priests "the leprosy even rose up in his forehead". He was stricken of God, and spent the rest of his life "in a several house, being a leper", while his son was appointed regent to carry on the affairs of the kingdom.

Saul did practically the same thing: he usurped the office of the priest.

Sometimes believers may so sadly fail in the cultivation of their own spiritual lives as to become, as Peter says, "blind, and cannot see afar off", and forget that they have been purged from their old sins. We have seen a good many Sauls who seemed to turn away from the truth. I used to wonder whether they had ever known the truth, but I think that passage in Peter's second epistle explains a good deal, that even those

who have really been saved—are really saved—yet may become so stunted and dwarfed as to forget the hole of the pit whence they were digged, and the rock whence they were hewn, until they are without prospect or retrospect, or present power to discern between good and evil; and, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins, they take to themselves the office of the priest, and in their temporary blindness forget the necessity for the one great Priest, and trust in themselves instead of in the Lord.

From that forward *a habit of disobedience grew upon Saul*. His conscience seems to have been dulled. It seems to have become increasingly easy for him to disobey the voice of the Lord. Nothing will induce disobedience to the word of God like forgetfulness of the Altar of Sacrifice on Calvary, even as nothing inspires to obedience like an abiding vision of the cross. When Saul was commissioned utterly to destroy Amalek he spared Agag, and the best of the sheep and of the oxen. You will remember how he was rebuked of Samuel, and how he boldly declared that he had executed the divine commission, and had done exactly as the Lord had told him. Samuel, grown to be an old man now, one can almost imagine his putting his hand to his ear, and saying, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" The truth came out—as it always does—and Saul had to admit it. It was then that Samuel said, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

We do well to remember that a habit of disobedience is very easily cultivated. I venture to say that the majority of Christian people lose more blessing by failing to follow the guidance of God, and the teaching of God's Word, in little things; by failing in obedience to the principles and precepts of the Word of God as they apply to the common, ordinary, duties of life—that we have all lost more blessing in that than by some outstanding act of rebellion. The study of the life of Saul will disclose that the word of God gradually lost its authority; its authority steadily diminished, and the will of Saul, his self-will, asserted itself. Instead of putting off the old man, and putting on the new, the old man obtained the ascendancy in the life of Saul. As was said of Israel at a later time, so might it then have been said of Saul, "Grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." And in the life of all believers, it is possible to let "the old man" become uppermost, and when he does the gray hairs, the evidences of the old nature, speedily appear.

That attitude of disobedience—for remember, *multiplied acts develop at last into a settled attitude*—on Saul's part, his disregard of and disobedience to the voice of God again and again, induced in him a general attitude of disobedience, and was the cause of his ultimate downfall. God's word at last ceased to exercise any authority over his life.

Of how many professing Christian people that is true! I suppose to the great majority who profess the name of Christ, the actual word of God is not a law, an authoritative law with them. You may show them the teaching of God's Word with respect, say, to baptism, or any other matter, but they will not obey it. I heard a certain clergyman in this city many years ago, say, when I went to London as a Pastor, "We have no quarrel with you Baptists respecting the question of

immersion. Of course it is scriptural. The Bible teaches it, and the prayer-book teaches it; but we do not do it because we do not want to." You know Christian people like that, do you not? They do not consult the oracle, they do not listen to the voice of God's Word, they make no effort to apply its principles to everyday life. They forget their religion between Sundays. Their little acts of disobedience have grown closer and closer together, until by and by disobedience has become a settled attitude of mind. Let us take warning from the life of Saul.

Anything may happen when thus we are out of communication with the Skies. Just at this time David appears, and David is lauded by the people. The heart that has shut out the Spirit of God admits another spirit, "an evil spirit from the Lord". Is not that a strange saying? "An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." There is another passage which speaks of a "lying spirit from the Lord" entering into the mouths of all Ahab's prophets. What does it mean? Just this, my dear friends, that we have the awful power of getting what we ask for. At last God may allow us to have our own way: "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." I have a conviction that God always answers our prayers, and that we are all praying "without ceasing", whether we want to or not. The general attitude of life is a prayer for something. My little dog asks things of me. She does not use words, because she cannot: she just comes up and looks—that is all. It is a prayer.

We can take up an attitude toward God. We can say to Him, "Do not speak to me. Do not worry me with Thy word. I do not want to be bothered with the restrictions of the word of God." And the Lord may at last take us at our word and say, "All right. I will cease to speak to you." That was what Saul asked, and forthwith an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" We can ask for His Holy Spirit, and have Him. We can ask for an evil spirit, and shut our hearts against the things that are good and true—and receive the evil. That is what Saul did.

III.

I need not rehearse the story of his jealousy of David, for we have covered that quite recently. But you observe the progress of evil in Saul's heart and life, until by and by THE LENGTHENING SHADOWS COME, AND THE SUNSET HOUR. Saul now wants to hear something from Heaven, something superhuman—but the Lord refuses to answer him. He maintains silence towards him. By prophet, by vision, by Urim—there was no voice, neither any that heard. Saul came to a crisis in life when he imperatively needed some superhuman counsel; more than human wisdom was necessary. We had it in our lesson last week: he resorted to the witch, and consulted with one who had a familiar spirit. He sought a voice from the other world. I said to you in our last study, I believe we should accept this at its face value. It was not the voice of God. God did not speak through a witch. But it was a superhuman testimony that came from the other world. It was Samuel who appeared and spoke, and between him and Saul there was mutual recognition. Was he one of "the spirits in prison" released from the

intermediate state at our Lord's resurrection? At all events it was by means of the forbidden intercourse with a familiar spirit, he was "disquieted," and "brought up".

That raises a question, a very interesting question: what is the extent of Satan's knowledge? And what is the extent of the devil's power? That voice from the other world told Saul, through Samuel whose spirit was disturbed, "Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." All of us have had a good deal of experience of the devil's power, but I fear we have not studied the teaching of Scripture respecting his devices, as carefully as we might. Paul says, "We are not ignorant of his devices." I fear some of us are more ignorant than we need be.

The devil has the power of death. The Scripture teaches that. We are not to think of the devil as being shut up in hell. He is going to be some time, but he is not now. As a roaring lion he goeth about seeking whom he may devour. In Job's day "when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them". He never misses attendance at church. Whoever else stays at home, he is always there. He is here to-night. He always is. No preacher who seeks to declare the whole counsel of God has failed to discern in the assembly of the saints a sense of the power of the devil.

I pass this on to you young ministers-in-the-making. I was preaching in a country church some years ago, assisting a pastor in special services. I became conscious of a tremendous opposition in the service. There was no open opposition, but I could feel it. One night I gave an invitation, but there was no response. I felt led to do what I think I have never done since, and certainly had never done before. I was younger then, and I did some daring things; perhaps I have modified my courses since. At all events, I said, "There are some of you here to-night who are fully given up to satanic power, and you are the media through which satanic power is flowing into this service. I can do nothing with you, and you are spoiling the meeting. We will sing a hymn, and as we sing, will those of you who know that you have yielded to the power of the devil rather than to the power of the Spirit of God, be kind enough to leave?" I put it so strongly that it seemed nobody would dare leave.

The congregation limped through the first verse—there was not much singing. At last one man stooped down for his coat—it was in the winter-time—and in a spirit of bravado, pushed his way into the aisle, and out through the door. Immediately about seventy-five people followed him and went out of that building in a rage. I went down to the entrance end of the church while the pastor was in charge of the service, and one man came to me and said, "What right have you to turn people out of church?" "I have turned no one out of church", I replied, "I have appealed to your own consciences. I simply give you permission to go." He turned on his heel without another word, and went out.

A solemn hush fell over that meeting—there was a large congregation. I walked quietly back to the front and said, "How many of you will yield to the Spirit of God?" Only a word, no further appeal, and fifteen men and women rose and walked to the front, without a word of persuasion. When the power of the devil

had been cast out, the Spirit of God had right of way with the people.

That is always true in the assembly of the saints. I do not, however, recommend any of you to do as I did. I believe I did right in that instance, but have never felt justified in repeating it. Let us endeavour to bring the power of God with us, and nothing else, when we come to the Lord's house.

But I say, the devil has the power of death. The case of Job is a remarkable one. Satan confessed the Lord had set an hedge about Job; and the devil could not touch him until the Lord let down the bars. God lengthened the tether, more and more until at last He said, "He is in thine hand; but save his life." God knew he would kill Job were he not forbidden.

Turn to the New Testament. In the first epistle to the Corinthians is the story of a man guilty of a gross sin. He had been spoken of, apparently, to the Apostle Paul, and it would seem that Paul's letter was in answer to a letter of inquiry which had been written to him. He solemnly told the people to come together, and "to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus". The man was a grievous sinner, and yet his spirit was to be saved "in the day of the Lord Jesus", "saved so as by fire"—but saved. But he was to be permitted to do no further harm.

Then Paul to Timothy speaks of "Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme". I take it that by their prayerful ministry this terrible discipline was visited upon this man, not in judgment, but in mercy, that his spirit might be saved, and as an example to the people, the flesh was to be destroyed.

What about Saul? Saul's death did not occur in the ordinary course of nature: "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel from one who had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it, and inquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him." Was it, in principle, analogous to the case to which I have referred in the New Testament, where the hedge was removed? Was Saul thus delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord?

You remember how Saul was delivered into David's hand again and again, and David said, "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, the guiltless? David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed." And God did visit him, and he died at last prematurely, but as a direct visitation from God,—perhaps by His taking down the hedge and leaving him to the devil's power. For, be it remembered, Saul died a suicide's death, which could not directly be the work of the Spirit of God. "So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together." A terrible and complete collapse because he obeyed not the voice of God.

I go back to the doctrine I preached to you Sunday night. The children of God are for ever saved. But the New Testament warns us that it is possible for us to come empty-handed, for all our works to be destroy-

ed, and ourselves "saved so as by fire." I take it that Saul is an example of that principle, his spirit saved, but his life wasted, thrown away, destroyed because he did not put God first.

Are you familiar with Browning's Saul? What a fine interpretation of this complicated history it is! Browning puts certain words into the mouth of David, causing him to speak prophetically:

"What Stops My Despair?"

This;—'tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!

See the King—I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,

To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—knowing which,

I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown—

And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down

One spot for the creature to stand in'. It is by no breath,

Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!

As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved

Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!

He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee: a Man like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

WHY NO LECTURE LAST WEEK?

The week before last was examination time in the Seminary, and therefore the regular lecture course was suspended. A lecture on another subject was given, but, like the morning sermons, and many other addresses, its record was put away for future use.

THE WEEK-END IN JARVIS STREET

Sunday was a good day, but another day in which the mettle of church-going people was tested to the utmost. In the morning torrents of rain fell, but people were so grateful for a higher temperature that they braved the showers. There was a great congregation in attendance. The attendance at School, notwithstanding the rain, was 1,168. We dared to hope that the clouds would lift, the rain cease, and the temperature remain comfortable; but instead of that by service time in the evening the mercury had dropped to somewhere near zero—a drop of probably forty to fifty degrees in less than seven hours. Readers of THE WITNESS who live in warmer climates will sympathize with us. Notwithstanding, this is a great country! There was a fine congregation present at night, but we fear the temperature tempted some to sit at their radios. There were some confessions of faith.

TO THE WHOLE GOSPEL WITNESS FAMILY

This number is the thirty-eighth issue of Volume Twelve of THE GOSPEL WITNESS. In fourteen weeks, (D.V.), the twelfth volume will be completed. This is the six hundred and eleventh issue. We had not a cent of capital to begin with—we have no more now. We have endeavoured to plead the merits of many worthy enterprises, but we have never yet received a cent for any advertisement.

Some of our issues have been very large; the highest number of any one issue was seventy-five thousand.

This paper has published a sermon from the Jarvis Street pulpit in all but the first two or three issues. For a number of years now it has also carried a Thursday evening Bible lecture. Were the sermons and lectures alone put into volume form, and printed, with the number of pages usually contained in such volumes, we should have at least sixty volumes. But in addition to that, when we were engaged in sharp controversy, some of our issues were three or four issues in one in size. One issue, Number 26 of Volume 5, November 4th, 1926, contained one hundred and seventy-six pages, or eleven times the ordinary size.

This has cost a great deal of money, but it has been supplied by the Lord's people who have received blessing from the paper, and who have recognized it as a missionary enterprise. The subscription price has never been sufficient to pay for the printing, but friends of THE WITNESS have generously contributed to its support, and by this means, with the blessing of the Lord, we have continued unto this day.

During the depression our subscription list, like that of all other periodicals, declined, but we are happy to be able to report that it is now steadily on the upgrade; our subscription list this year is larger than it was a year ago at this time.

Every year just before the close of the financial year, March 31st, we have sent out a letter to GOSPEL WITNESS subscribers, asking for a contribution to the GOSPEL WITNESS Fund. Here, for the benefit of new subscribers, we state once more that the Editor of the paper has never received a cent of remuneration for his work in these nearly twelve years, and only one office salary is paid out of the GOSPEL WITNESS Fund. All the rest goes to pay the printer's bills and postage. We are just now sending out our annual letter to our subscribers, but it has occurred to us that many of our regular and occasional readers might also be glad to have fellowship with us in the support of this paper. Copies of THE GOSPEL WITNESS in bulk go to many churches, and single copies are purchased from week to week from an agent appointed by the church. The names of those who buy them are unknown to us. The WITNESS is also sold by some news-stands in Toronto and London, and many of our subscribers mail their copy, when they have read it, to other people; so that our GOSPEL WITNESS family is really very much larger than our subscription list.

We are giving this whole page to THE GOSPEL WITNESS this week in the hope that it will be read with interest by many people whose names we do not know, but who will gladly send us a contribution for the GOSPEL WITNESS Fund. We print herewith the letter we are sending to all our subscribers. Its appeal will apply to all our readers whether subscribers or not.

We suggest to every reader of THE GOSPEL WITNESS, first, that you try to send us a contribution to the GOSPEL WITNESS Fund between now and March 31st to help us balance the books of THE WITNESS by that date.

Secondly, we would ask every reader of THE WITNESS who is not now a subscriber to subscribe directly to THE GOSPEL WITNESS by sending us your name and address, with an order for the paper for one year.

Thirdly, we appeal to every reader of THE GOSPEL WITNESS to help us obtain new subscribers. Recommend the paper to your friends, and suggest that they subscribe for it.

And, last of all, we appeal to the Pastors of the Union of Regular Baptist Churches to assist us in obtaining subscribers, each in his own church, and, if possible, between now and the 31st of March. Ask your church to make a contribution to THE GOSPEL WITNESS Fund. We do not believe there is a church in the Union that would not be willing to do this if the Pastor would lead in the matter, and afford

the congregation an opportunity. We offer this last suggestion with some boldness, on the ground that for years THE GOSPEL WITNESS has published one or two pages of news of the affairs of the Union at its own expense, and has never received from the Union funds one cent in return.

Following is the letter that is being sent to subscribers, and below that, a contribution form which will make it easy for those desiring to have a share in this work:

Dear GOSPEL WITNESS Reader:

It has been our practice for some years to write a letter about this time of the year to every member of our GOSPEL WITNESS family. Although the majority of them are personally unknown to the Editor, yet he feels a peculiar interest in every one, and finds it difficult sometimes to persuade himself that he has not met each one personally. In my annual letter of last year I said, "Within living memory there has never been a time when it was so difficult for religious enterprises to pay their way as it has been for the last two or three years." But the ten months of our financial year now ending have really been still more difficult. But I am sure I do not need to argue the case.

For the information of our new subscribers who have not before received our annual letter I may say that the subscription price of the paper does not pay for its printing. We carry no advertisements, and have been able to continue these twelve years only through the generosity of friends who have recognized in THE GOSPEL WITNESS a great missionary enterprise. The paper goes to hundreds of ministers of all denominations, many of whom find in it, according to their testimony, both food for their own souls and inspiration for their ministry.

This week I received a letter from a minister in Bulgaria, asking permission to translate certain sermons into the Bulgarian language, and print them in tract form for missionary work in that country. Some sermons, and parts of sermons, have been translated into Chinese and other languages. We have hundreds of missionaries included in our GOSPEL WITNESS family. From time to time we hear of conversions through the reading of the printed page.

I may confidentially confess to THE GOSPEL WITNESS family that this last year has been the hardest year of my ministry, what with a large church, THE GOSPEL WITNESS, Toronto Baptist Seminary and our great radio ministry, the problem of financing all these enterprises has been a tremendous one. As usual, THE GOSPEL WITNESS Fund is in desperate need. We need the support of our friends this year more than ever. Our financial year will end with the 31st of March, and we shall greatly appreciate any contribution you may be able to send to us. Make it as large as you possibly can, but if you cannot give a substantial sum, please remember nothing will be too small. We shall be grateful for whatever help our friends can give. A few, perhaps, can give no more than \$1.00, but others may be able to send \$2.00, \$5.00, \$10.00, \$25.00, \$50.00, or even \$100.00. Of course, if you can send more, rest assured not one cent will be wasted.

With deepest gratitude for your fellowship in the gospel in this matter, and hoping to hear from you at an early date, I am,

Very heartily yours,
THOMAS T. SHIELDS.

CONTRIBUTION FORM

Enclosed please find \$_____ which I send as a contribution to THE GOSPEL WITNESS Fund.

Name

Address

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

Vol. 9

No. 1

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 7

FIRST QUARTER

Feb. 18, 1934

HEZEKIAH PRAYS

Lesson Text: II Kings, chapter 19.

Golden Text: "Now, therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only."—II Kings 19:19.

Bible School Reading: II Kings 19:1-20, 35-37.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS:

Monday—Psalm 3:1-8.

Tuesday—Prov. 16:1-9.

Wednesday—Jonah 2:1-10.

Thursday—Matt. 21:17-22.

Friday—Phil. 1:1-11.

Saturday—I Tim. 2:1-8.

I. HEZEKIAH'S MESSAGE, (vs. 1-5).

In the previous lesson we studied the speech of Rabshakeh, the messenger of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, and noted its self-confident, boasting tone, backed as it was by the powerful army of that monarch. In this lesson we are informed of Hezekiah's reaction to it, and of the ultimate result arising therefrom. In the opening verses of the chapter the king is found sending a message to Isaiah, the prophet of God, desiring him to remember the nation in prayer. The time was critical, the northern kingdom had been carried into captivity by this power, and it looked as though Judah would meet the same fate. The foe was mighty, and before him the people of God could not stand. Their only hope, therefore, was in God. Note the wisdom of Hezekiah's attitude. He clothed himself with the garments of sorrow and humiliation. He entered the place of prayer, in acknowledgment of his need of divine aid, (v. 1). And he made his appeal to God's messenger on the basis of the vindication of God's honour, (v. 4). The attitude of this individual is taken account of when prayer is offered. Pride hinders an answer, humility is essential thereto, (2 Chron. 7:14; Luke 18:9-14).

II. ISAIAH'S REPLY, (vs. 6, 7).

The reply of Isaiah was not encouraging. Hezekiah is exhorted not to be afraid of the words which he had heard, and he is given the assurance of the departure of the enemy from his vicinity, together with the deal of the king of Assyria. It is interesting to note the frequency with which the Lord's people are enjoined not to fear, both in the Old and New Testament periods. They who fear God have no reason to fear man. God is almighty, and no one is able to stand against Him. Observe the direction in Isaiah's message, also the promise of salvation which would be divine in origin. Effective accomplishment, and gratuitous in its application. Faith in God would thereafter keep the mind of Hezekiah at rest, although, like most men in the face of great crises there would be moments of care. The blessedness of knowing and trusting God may be explained and emphasized.

III. SENNACHERIB'S MESSAGE, (vs. 8-13).

On leaving Jerusalem Rabshakeh rejoined his master at Libnah, another fortress apparently situated not far from Lachish, (v. 8). Here he gave an account of his mission, and from this place Sennacherib sent his letter to Hezekiah. Back of this letter, and hastening its despatch was the rumour which the king had heard of the coming of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, to fight against him, (v. 9). It was to his interest under the circumstances to secure the surrender of the Israelites, before the arrival of this formidable enemy. To accomplish this purpose a threatening letter, full of boasting concerning the might of Assyria, was sent to Hezekiah. There is contained in it a blasphemous reference to God as being unable to deliver His people, (v. 10), and a list of the enemies conquered by the Assyrians, given in emphasis of the uselessness of resisting such a power, (vs. 11-13). It may be observed that threats do not constitute accomplishments, and that previous successes do not guarantee future

victories. Sennacherib had overcome many, but he was doomed to failure against Israel. His letter shows he was not wholly ignorant of God, but that he despised Him. His message was a challenge to Almighty God, and he was speedily to be made aware of the divine power. We are living in days when men in large numbers are defying God, and seeking to stamp out the remembrance of Him from the earth, but their puny efforts will be without avail, and some day the judgment of God will fall upon them, (Ps. 2).

IV. HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER, (vs. 14-19).

Upon the receipt of Sennacherib's letter Hezekiah entered into the house of the Lord, and "spread it before the Lord", (v. 14). This manifested his simple faith in God, and his desire for divine action in the matter. His prayer which followed magnifies the greatness of God, (v. 15), calls upon Him to take note of the conduct of the Assyrians, (vs. 16, 17), and to save His people out of their hands, that He might receive the glory therefrom, (v. 19). Definiteness of petition is manifest in the prayer, together with faith, simplicity, humility, and a desire for the vindication of God's power and glory. The general subject of prayer may be dealt with, in relation to its purpose, (John 16:24), the conditions necessary to answers to the same, (I John 3:22, 5:14, 15), and the manner in which it should be offered, (James 1:6; John 14:13, 14). Scriptural examples of prayer may be cited, as, Abraham, (Gen. 18:23-33), Moses, (Ex. 32:31-35, 33:12-23), Solomon, (2 Chron. 6:12-42), Nehemiah, (Neh. 1:4-11), Daniel, (Dan. 9:1-19), and members of the early church, (Acts 4:24-31). The necessity for prayer requires explanation and emphasis. Many professed Christians go through life with very little prayer. In doing so they lose blessing, and usefulness in service, and remain spiritually weak. Prayer is needed for one's own life, as well as on behalf of others, that is, prayer in the Spirit, (Eph. 6:18).

V. ANSWERED PRAYER, (vs. 20-37).

Prayer is a great help subjectively to the one who prays, in that his burden is lessened by the act of making it known to one who understands and sympathizes; but it is greatly increased in helpfulness by its objective answers. The fact that God really answers prayer is evident in Scripture, and in human experience, and may be realized by anyone conforming to the divine conditions. Real prayer is a tremendous power. Would to God the consciousness of this was felt by a greater number of the Lord's people. There would then be a greater volume of prayer ascending on high, and greater blessing would be received on earth.

God has promised to answer prayer, (Ps. 91:15), but to Him must be left the way in which the answer comes, and the time of its arrival. Hezekiah prayed earnestly, through Isaiah God gave assurance of the answer, and immediately thereafter fulfilled His word. The king is, first of all, assured that his prayer had been heard, (v. 20). This was comforting and implied that the petition had been favourably received. God has not promised to hear all prayers. It is only those which are offered in accordance with His will that are accorded this favour; for answered prayer is not a right to be claimed by all, but a privilege to be accepted by those to whom it is granted, (John 16:24). We are enjoined to come boldly before the throne, (Heb. 4:15, 16). Such entrance is granted not on account of any worthiness or claim on our part, but is due to our position in Christ. By our sin we have forfeited all right to heavenly privileges, but by virtue of divine grace we are permitted to share the blessings of salvation. In prayer, therefore, let us ever be mindful of this, and approach the throne reverently, gratefully, and confidently.

After giving assurance that Hezekiah's prayer was heard Sennacherib is apostrophized, and words are uttered concerning him which clearly manifest the fact that in his war against Judah he was in opposition to God, and, therefore, doomed to defeat, (vs. 21-28). The king of Assyria was boastful, due to his many victories, he was confident of overcoming Jerusalem, but the people of that city despised him, and the Lord whom he had challenged would encompass his defeat, and turn him back by the way by which he came. A sign of this divine victory is given to Hezekiah in that for two years the people of Jerusalem would eat of that which grew of itself, but the third year they would be able to sow and reap, due to the departure from the land of the Assyrians, (v. 29). Assurance is given of the establishment of the remnant in the land, (vs. 30, 31), and of the safety of the

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The Union Baptist Witness

Is the Official Publication of the Union of Regular Baptist Churches of Ontario and Quebec. Send all communications to the Office Secretary, 337 Jarvis Street, Toronto 2, Canada.

TORONTO BAPTIST SEMINARY NEWS

By W. Gordon Brown

The work of Toronto Baptist Seminary is a long grind—class after class, day after day, week after week, quarter after quarter, teaching, studying, recitation, go on. Yet we believe that even such results as we mention below, and others which we have narrated from time to time, show that it is tremendously worthwhile.

Our present student body numbers sixty-two, including two new students who have joined us at the beginning of this the third quarter of the school year. These men and women, as they have opportunity, faithfully proclaim the Word. The Seminary Four have given the message in song in the York Road Baptist Church, Guelph; twice at Bethel Baptist Church, Orillia; at the East York Mission, at Willowdale Church, Toronto; several times in Young People's classes in Jarvis Street Bible School; again and again at the Don jail, and elsewhere.

It was the writer's privilege to visit the East York Mission with the Four on a recent Sunday evening. We found Pastor Bernard Jeffery doing a solidly progressive work, in spite of poverty, and the opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The preceding Sunday Rev. W. S. Whitcombe encouraged the brethren there by a gospel message. He also supplied recently at the Runnymede Road Baptist Church, Toronto, during the illness of its Pastor.

Our School paper, called *The Seminarian*, reports that Pastor C. S. McGrath, is pushing the work at Stouffville and community in a fine way. Sunday evening congregations have come up, and the week-night meetings are well attended. On a recent week-night forty gathered in a farm home, of whom many were unconverted young people. The paper also tells us that Rev. H. C. Slade, of the First Baptist Church, Timmins, is having a continual revival in his church. On a recent Sunday evening as many as seven professed Christ at one service.

Lantern Slides Available

In order to present the work of our school we have collected a number of interesting lantern slides showing the activities of our graduates and students on Canadian fields from Vancouver Island to Quebec, and in some of the lands beyond the sea. Some of these pictures were shown at the last meeting of our Convention. Since then they have been used at Alton, Brantford, Orangeville, and Orillia. We are sure that Sunday Schools, mission bands, and other church organizations, will find in them, and an explanation of what each one means, an hour's programme of real inspiration. These slides are available on request. No charge is made, except that of transportation, which is a small sum for express. Those interested should communicate with the Seminary for a convenient date.

The student body of our school is a noble band of self-sacrificing men and women. Most of them are afflicted with what has ever been common to the ministry, and is especially so in these days—poverty. We print an article which appeared in the January 22nd issue of *The Seminarian*, written by its Editor, Mr. A. Dallimore. It speaks for itself:

Not on the Curriculum

While Greek, Exegesis, Theology and Homiletics, in fact all the subjects taught at Toronto Baptist Seminary, have their place in the training of the young minister, they are not by any means all that the students of that institution learn during their course of study.

Before the days of the famous depression, students apparently did not find money so hard to obtain as at present, and many spent from four hundred to six hundred dollars per year. A Christian business man, thinking that a certain student was "promising," offered to keep him, and enquired if ten dollars per week were sufficient. But those things were before the depression.

Now the whole face of Seminary life has changed. Students have changed their residence from the boarding-house to the rooming-house, and live after the fashion called "batching". That means they prepare their own meals, wash their own dishes, and do their own washing, ironing and mending. But it is not so bad as it sounds. When "batching" became popular, our President, Dr. Shields, fearing that some might not be getting enough nourishing food, and wishing to assist, inaugurated a daily dinner, served in the B. D. Thomas Hall. All students were asked to attend, whether they could pay anything toward it or not. Many have since remarked that if it were not for this, they would not have been able to finish their course, and we suggest that after graduation they remember the assistance thus received and do what they can to repay the Seminary for its kindness.

But still there are other "batching" tasks to be done. We know of one student whose friends said they would support him if he would leave the Seminary and attend a certain heretical Baptist university. Refusing to do this, he had to exist on much less than ever before, and found it necessary to do his own laundry. Believing in doing with his might what his hands found to do, he learned the tricks of the laundry trade, and could soon wash and iron shirts as well as the Chinese. He decided to try his hand at starching collars and after a few attempts became expert at that too. Had there been a prize for the best laundry work that year, most certainly he would have won it.

Practically all men students have learned the art of mending and darning, and some even suggest seeking summer work at the tailoring or laundry businesses.

Another student found himself in need of a book-case, and procuring some old boxes from the Jarvis Street caretaker, converted them into a respectable set of shelves, with only a rasp, a piece of glass, a hammer and a saw for tools. A few coats of varnish made it fit to grace a mansion.

By such means as these, students have learned to live on much less than six hundred dollars per year. We know of one who existed for the eight months of the last Seminary term on seventy dollars, over fifty of which were spent on room rent. Where once, one student could live on ten dollars per week, four can do so now. Where once a man had a room to himself, now two or even three need only one.

It has been suggested that the subjects not on the curriculum will not be to the detriment of the Union's future preachers. Men who can cook, sew, do various kinds of manual labour, and live on nearly nothing, are being fitted for pioneer evangelistic work at home, or foreign labours, that involve much sacrifice, and the future should prove that "Old Man Depression" really benefited them.

One of the Presidents of the United States wrote to the effect that while often with barely the means of existence, lacking sufficient exercise and sleep, the student must spend long hours in diligent study, often impairing health and eyes.

All of these difficulties, we believe, have been experienced by the students of Toronto Baptist Seminary.

HEZEKIAH PRAYS

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city from enemy attacks. God's promise is given that He would defend the city, and that the Assyrians would not so much as shoot an arrow into it, or cast a bank against it. "By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city", (vs. 32-34). The enemy army which encamped not far from Jerusalem, was not permitted to approach near enough to throw an instrument of war into it. And being visited by divine judgment, the remnant of it departed for home, (vs. 35, 36), where the king met his death at the hands of his sons, (v. 37). Note the futility and folly of fighting against God, and the secure position of those who trust in the Lord. They can afford to be fearless of all enemies.