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

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

"TAKE YE AWAY THE STONE"

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

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, May 6th, 1934.

(Stenographically Reported)

Broadcast over CFRB, 690 k.c., as is every Sunday evening service of Jarvis Street Church, from 7 to 8.30 Eastern Daylight-Saving Time.

"Take ye away the stone."—John 11:39.

The narrative which I have read to you in part is a record of a very commonplace experience. We all know something about cemeteries, and about the digging of graves. But there is an element in this story which distinguishes it from all other stories of the same sort. There was a unique Presence at that graveside which entirely redeemed it from the commonplace. Life is full of commonplace things, and lessons may be learned every day from the most ordinary events.

The Man of Nazareth came to Bethany, and at His request was conducted to the place where Lazarus was laid. Before He wrought the miracle of raising him from the dead He commanded that the stone which sealed the sepulchre should be removed. Why did He so command? What significance is there in the command itself? What reversal of ordinary human courses is here prescribed? What is the meaning of the stone?

I.

You need no great discernment to recognize that it was representative of HUMAN IMPOTENCE APART FROM DIVINE POWER. They were not to be blamed for digging a grave. They were not censurable for having laid their loved one there. And having done so, it was a matter of necessity that a stone should be placed at the mouth of the sepulchre: "It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it."

I say that is a commonplace of human experience: we are driven to the business of grave-digging. And in the nature of the case we are compelled, if we would live at all, to seal the graves which have thus been made. What is the significance, I say, of the stone which human hands have placed there to cover the decaying and disintegrating form which was the tabernacle of a spirit greatly beloved? *The grave is the end of all human possessions.* That is where we all lay our treasures.

We live in a world where mortality abounds, a world that is death-stricken. It is literally true that in Adam all die. You do not need to go to school to learn that. All that belongs to Adam dies, everything.

That is *the end of our affectional treasure*: our loved at last find their way to a grave. We do not so desire, we do not plan it; it is the ordinary course of human life, literally and metaphorically. There is a grave at the end of the road, and there we deposit our possession,—a husband, a wife, children, parents, friends, associates. Sooner or later we all do it, or they must lay us there, not because we or they desire to do so, but because we are impotent to do anything else.

And the same is true of *our ambitions*. How delightful it is to see a young man in the heyday of youth, in the springtime of life, looking forward and dreaming of the world he is going to conquer, and of all the great things he expects to accomplish! His ambitions may be worthy enough, but he finds them difficult of achievement, and after a-while he becomes reconciled to comparative failure, to falling short of the realization of things. When you meet him in middle life, you find the spring is gone from his step; he is not quite so confident of success; he has gradually assumed a less cheerful and expectant attitude toward life; he has become somewhat disillusioned and his spirit is touched with a suggestion of cynicism. His ambitions have perished; he has ceased to try to climb. If you ask him what has become of his youthful ambition, he replies, "I buried it. It is out there in the grave."

Sometimes that is true of *the actual achievements of life*; they are but short-lived. I was in the cemetery this afternoon, and I noticed an inscription upon one of the monuments to this effect: "In proud and loving memory" of so-and-so. His friends had estimated that this man, whose body had been laid in the grave, had distinguished himself, and they were proud of his

achievements. But now they have become only a memory: it is but a grave with a stone upon it. The day's work is ended. Life's opportunities have passed, and there is a grave at the end of the road.

Once more: the stone is significant of *our acquiescence in the inevitable*. There are some things we fight against, but you cannot postpone the sunset. When the dark night drops down, and the stars refuse to come out, you must accept the darkness. It is a dark and ugly night. Yes; but it is the best there is. Put up with it! Surrender to it; accept it; make the best of it. The tide goes out. You see the little eddies in the stream, and by and by it begins to go out toward the sea, "When that which drew from out the boundless deep, turns again home," and little by little the stream narrows, and the ugly mud is exposed to view; until by and by, instead of appearing as a broad and mighty river, it is little better than a muddy ditch, with no depth or power of motion, nothing to inspire your admiration, nothing to challenge you to action. But you cannot help it: you cannot dam back the tide. There are things to which we must submit. I know, there are tides in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood lead on to fortune; but, there are the diminishing streams too; irresistible tides which flow out and leave the proud ship stranded. At length the defeated spirit yields to the superior drift. He says he cannot help it. He can only submit to it, make the best of it.

Look at that man: In his youth he cherished a very high ideal for his own character. He said, "I will not be like other men; I will not live the sordid, selfish, earth-bound life of other men. I will keep my eyes toward the stars, and live nobly." He meant it too,—but he failed! "If thou hadst been here"—ah, but He was not there. What wonders might have been accomplished had He been present in that young man's life; but He was not. The resolution of his own will was his ideal's only dynamic. Like the mountain-climber who has resolved to explore the lofty peak of some cloud-capped mountain, he has concentrated all his energies to the achievement of an ideal; but he has fallen sadly short of it, and when he has suffered successive disappointments and defeats, and the malarial mists of the lowlands have robbed life of its zest and the will of its power, he admits that

"Time, who changes all, has altered him
In soul and aspect as in age: years steal
Fire from the mind as vigour from the limb;
And life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the
brim."

He still strives for a little while, but by and by he finds life's propelling power diminishing, and the momentum of youth dies down. What has become of his ideals? He has buried them. He used to think a higher life was possible, but he has ceased to believe it, or to entertain any expectation of better things. He went out to a cemetery awaiting the interment of infant hopes, and ambitions and ideals. He found a cave and in it he sorrowfully laid the once-prattling, beautiful babes of promise, and it was inevitable that he should put a stone of acquiescence upon it. Thenceforth he has lived a dark, drab, dreary sort of life. Alas! How nobly he expected to serve! He said, "I will be a lawyer, but I will not stain my hands as some men do": or "I will go into business, and if I succeed, I will succeed worthily. There shall be no blemish on my business record."

But years have passed since then. What now? What about last week? In reply he says there is a vast differ-

ence between the ideal and the actual; that the idealism of his youth proved to be impracticable. Being in the Rome of commerce he had to do as the Romans were doing. He could not take his ideals with him into business and professional life, and they perished of neglect. He could not help it. "You are not doing business on that high plane of which you dreamed?" you ask. "Oh, no, I found that was impossible."—"If thou hadst been here"—but He was not! He failed woefully because he tried to do it all himself; and gradually all that was lovely and beautiful slipped away from him, and year by year he laid these mortal, because human, prototypes in the grave, and rolled a stone upon it. He has dried his tears, and has resolved to be content to take the lower road of the commonplace, notwithstanding it is thronged with fellow-travellers who are obviously of the earth, earthy.

The stone, my friends, is significant of *the utter hopelessness of a Christless prospect*. There is nothing else to do but find a cave and a stone. If you rule Christ out, if you sever yourself from all commerce with the skies, if you try to do without God, you must inevitably become a professional grave-digger. You must find there is nothing to do but bury all the highest ideals, ambitions, interests and hopes of life, and ultimately drift along, disillusioned, disappointed, defeated, bereaved, hopelessly and irreparably impoverished! You will carry the best of life to a grave, and bury it all there. Ah, how many have done so! How many hear me tonight, who would give all of life to be back in Bethany cherishing a hope for better things, with some ideal,—call it Lazarus, call it what you like—but your noblest plans and purposes of life have all failed. You laid them in the grave.

The picture is not exaggerated; it must be admitted that that is a fairly accurate picture of life, of life's mortalities, when human impotence is divorced from divine power.

II.

But here is an imperative word. Here is another Will; another Power finds utterance: "Take ye away the stone." What is its meaning? It is THE CHALLENGING COMMAND OF DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE IN CONTRAST WITH HUMAN IMPOTENCE. They said in effect: "Thou hast come, but Thou hast come too late." And Jesus, in effect, answered, "I am never too late: I am always on time. Unseal your graves, reopen your sepulchres. I will show you what I can do. Alone thou hast failed. Thou has proved thine own impotence. If thou wilt believe, thou shalt see the glory of God." Yes: "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Do not too readily conclude that the dreams of youth were impossible. They were impossible only because Jesus was not there. Do not be so sure that the burial of your Lazarus was a necessity. It was inevitable within the limits of your own power. But the distinctive thing about the Christian religion is that it introduces another Power; it brings to us another Presence; it issues a countermanding order: "Go and open that grave, and let Me show you what I can do."

I wonder, are there any cynically-disposed people who hear me this evening? You are not avowedly out of sorts with life. You know that a cynical spirit is never popular, hence instinctively you keep it to yourself. But in your heart of hearts that is about your

attitude toward life. Oh, how many ministers I have known who began with the loftiest conceptions of a life of usefulness! But they were met on every hand, even among religious people, by things that were disappointing and disheartening, until at last they settled down to a humdrum existence. And there is the man to-night mumbling his prayers, and reading his sermons, going through a dreary routine of duty because he has degenerated into a mere religious official. His Lazarus is dead; and is buried. He has got to keep on, but his Bethany has become a religious treadmill.

My dear friends, I preach to you a gospel of power; of the coming of One Who can entirely transform the prospect of life; of One Who breaks in upon our hopelessness, upon our tears, our despair, and Who says: "Take ye away the stone".

The man has lost hope for himself. He says, "I have ceased to hope, to expect that I shall ever be the man I once hoped to be." In the name of the Lord, I bid you take away that stone. I know that you can never be what you want to be, and what you ought to be of yourself. But here is Another Who comes to stand by, and to do something that you have needed to have done for you for many a year: "Take ye away the stone," saith He.

Ah, yes, and that applies to *all human relationships*. Here are two people who stood at the altar one day, and became no more twain, but one. In that hour they thought, others had failed, but marriage to them should be no failure! They would build a little paradise of their own; they would set up the gates of pearl, and live nobly and, as it is written in the story books, "happily ever afterwards". Then there came the first slight estrangement, and gradually an acceptance of that condition of life where the petals had dropped from all the roses and the garden was bereft of flowers. Of course, they were still eminently respectable. Even now no one knows anything about it at all. But there they are, and they know and admit that the marital paradise of their early dreams is lost. Their married life has become a test of endurance. They politely endure each other. They have persuaded themselves that nothing better can be expected in this life. That is true; it is terribly true, if life is to be continued without this other Presence of Whom I speak. But if and when He comes, "Take ye away the stone", I charge you in His name! There is no ideal you ever cherished, no dream you ever dreamed, that may not be realized, and a thousand-fold sublimed, with His grace and power to accomplish it.

Perhaps I have the ear of a man who is in the midst of an election campaign. He is to speak to-morrow night. Years ago he was a student in the University, and he said, "I am going to devote myself to public service, and I will be clean and honest and straightforward, and live for the service of others." And he meant it. Then he was elected to Parliament, and he got into the inner circle, only to discover that all crooks were not in the penitentiary, and that there were a lot of things in public life that would shame any country if only they were known. Read your papers if you would understand me. Personally, I shall soon cease to be proud that I am a Canadian. I am ashamed of many of our public men in this province. Some of them are a disgrace to the country. You want a new political party? We do not need new parties. The man we have in view said, "I tried, sir, I tried to do right. I tried to set an example. I tried to realize my ideals in public life, but I could

not." And you have given up, and you are drifting with the stream, like any other dead thing, are you not? Why man, what you need is the presence and power of Jesus Christ in your life, then you could stand up in Parliament, anywhere, everywhere, and stand for God against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Then we should have a new country. ("Amen!") We have no need of new parties; they would amount to nothing. We need new men in the old parties. We need God-fearing men in public office, men who fearing God will fear none others.

But is that possible? Some man who listens will say, "That preacher does not know what he is talking about. He knows nothing about public life." Yes, I do; just as much as you do, and a great deal more than some of you. I know that it is not easy to serve God. I know that we bury our ideals, and our hopes; and in practice we shall be dragged down to the level of the ditch, if we are not careful. But I know also that when Jesus Christ comes and bids us take away the stone, everything is changed.

He challenges us to a *re-consideration and re-interpretation of the tragedies of life*. When the friends saw Mary going out they knew where she was going. They said, "She goeth unto the grave to weep there." She has done it before, travelling the well-worn path that millions of feet had pressed before her. Then her sister came, and—wonder of wonders! "Mary . . . the Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that she arose quickly, and came unto him." That was something new: the Master had come. Presently Mary will look at things differently. She also said, "If thou hadst been here!"—"No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous."

Oh, how many disappointments we have all had! How often I have wished that I could begin life all over again, that I could be a boy again, that I could preach my first sermon again, and begin my first pastorate, unblinded to the Presence of which, thank God, I know a little, but, alas! too little. Ah, but are we going to let it rest there? There they are, these two sisters, sitting down and talking it over, just as they do after the funeral, telling each other about his last words; and as the friends come in they talk it over with them—and it is all ended. Too bad! How sad that Lazarus is gone! Then Jesus comes, and in effect He says, "Open that book there; read that chapter of your life's story again; re-consider that experience; reinterpret that tragedy. Let Me show you what has happened." Do you see what I mean?

I repeat: Do you see what I mean? That has been our difficulty, the difficulty with most of us. Tragedies have occurred when from our lives the Son of God has been temporarily absent. That was itself the tragedy! But now the Lord Jesus bids us hope again. He would reawaken these ambitions in our souls. He would set before us a loftier ideal than was ever conceived by the human mind. He sets before us a better man than we have ever seen; indeed, He says, "I want you to be like Me"; "Take ye away the stone."

I do not know what your peculiar difficulty may be, nor what may be your special circumstances, save only that we are together on this common ground that we are helpless apart from God, and that when Jesus comes all things are possible.

There is a brother in Massachusetts who wrote me last week, who is somewhat depressed in spirit because of the prevailing unbelief. He asks me if I know of any-

body who has his prayer answered to-day. He holds to the gospel and mourns that others do not and complains—and I do not blame him. Perhaps I have his ear to-night. If so, my brother, let me tell you I not only believe, I know that God does answer the prayer of His people. Sometimes He stays away, sometimes He lets Lazarus die, as He has apparently done in your case: "When he heard that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was"; He waited to let Lazarus die, He allowed the situation to grow worse. But He came at last, He arrived at the graveside in answer to the sisters' prayer. It seemed late to them, but He was still in plenty of time.

My word to you is that you reconsider the whole problem of life in the light of the possible presence and power of Jesus Christ. No matter how grievously you have failed, no matter how completely, apparently, you have been defeated; though it be so that the grim monster himself seems to have triumphed over you, and all that was best in life has withered, like the leaves of autumn, until the trees are bare, and grim winter has chilled your very soul, yet there is hope! Springtime may come to the soul again when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise upon you. He can change everything—I say *everything*, whatever your position. You may be president of a bank, you may be the head of a corporation that has been so dishonest in the management of its affairs that those responsible ought to be in the penitentiary. You may be as bad as that, so that you have to say, "How shall I straighten things out?" You may have succeeded in material things, while your soul has become as repulsive as the dead Lazarus. But because Jesus lives there is a possibility of better things. He comes to wash away our sins; He comes to make us new creatures in Christ; He brings the springtime with Him, and after that the summer, golden, bright, and glad. Will you listen to Him? "Take ye away the stone".

But *everyone has a past that cannot bear the light of a resurrection*. There is a grave which ought never to be reopened, for there are evils which it would be hell to disinter, sins which you would fain bury in a grave of everlasting forgetfulness.

There was no legal obstacle to the taking away of the stone from the grave of Lazarus; but Martha was quick to recognize another objection to its removal. Our sin has incurred a penalty which would doom us to a death eternal, and seal us in a bottomless pit, from the mouth of which no power could take away the stone. Moreover, sin is a more horrible corruption than any skin-worms can effect in a dead body. Hence there are legal and moral reasons why the stench of a sinful soul should not be released upon the universe by removing the stone from the pit of bottomless corruption to which every man's sin must consign him. Who then shall command in respect to that grave, "Take ye away the stone".

There is but One whose daring holiness can speak such an effectual word without risking the pollution of heaven's atmosphere; and He was "made sin for us" and bare our sins in His own body on the tree; so that as the scapegoat, in a figure, carried the sins of the people to an uninhabited and undiscoverable land, He consigned our sins to the capacious maw of death's own dungeon, and thus took away the sin of the world. Thus by the everlasting interment of men's sins in that eternal prison-house, there was released for our salvation a resurrection power which, pitying man's impotence, challenges his faith in divine omnipotence at the door of

every grave of man's digging, commanding, "Take ye away the stone".

III.

Last of all: This word of Christ's in principle **DEFINES THE COOPERATIVE METHOD OF DIVINE GRACE**. Jesus did not need the stone removed. He could have made Lazarus hear without its removal; but He always at some point demands the yielding, the surrender of the will, and heart and conscience to Him as a condition of the operation of grace. Grace never makes a man an automaton. God does not superimpose His will upon us and compel us, like so many puppets, to obey Him. He compels us to do it, but sovereignly disposes our minds to receive enlightenment, and instruction, and thus brings us into harmony with His will, but He does it with due recognition of the constitution of our natures, and accomplishes His design by securing the co-operation of the whole man.

"Take ye away the stone." *The removal of the stone was the least of the obstacles that had to be removed.* And it is always so. He never asks of us a great thing: "My master" said the servant to Naaman "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" It was the only thing Naaman could do. God never asks us to do the impossible. But He breathes power upon us even as He commands us to take away the stone. That was the only contribution to the miracle that anyone about that grave could make; for even when the stone was removed Lazarus remained as dead as he was before, and Martha was afraid to attempt it for fear of the consequence. She feared the awful stench of death that would come forth from that grave.

What can you do? "What must I do to be saved?" The answer is, "Nothing, and everything". What do I mean? I mean admit your impotence, your inability to do anything of yourselves. Trust Him, and you will be able to say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." What is faith after all? Taking away the stone, a reinvestment of the energies of life. Here are people who have prepared a grave, and rolled a stone upon it, and wearied themselves in the process. "Now, then," said Jesus, "use the same energy to roll that stone away. Open your grave again." Divine grace gives a new power and a new direction to all the faculties of the mind. Instead of putting the stone on the grave, it leads us to take the stone away from the grave: it reverses all carnal judgments, it turns us right about face; inverts the whole programme of life. The proper place for a dead body is the grave, and the appropriate act for the living is to put it there and seal it. But when Jesus comes He bids us hope again, and therefore commands us to reopen the grave.

Let me put it as simply as I can: What did the Lord Jesus really ask these people to do? nay, what did He command them to do? It was this: *To yield themselves wholly to an acceptance of a divine programme, predicated upon the infinite resources of divine grace*: "Take ye away the stone." Martha said, "Lord, that will do no good." And she was right, if He Who ordered it were but a man.—Who is He Who commands it? Who is He? "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day", said Martha. Jesus, in effect said, "Whom do you think I am? I am the resurrection and the life, and time and eternity find their complement in Me. The

eternal Son of the Father, I can anticipate the resurrection. I can do as I will. Take ye away the stone."

What sort of Saviour have you? Who is Jesus Christ to you? I do not wonder that we have come to our present straits when the modern pulpit has reduced Jesus Christ to the dimensions of a man. If that is all He is, do not ask me to open my grave. Do not ask me to take away the stone; it is useless. But if He be God; if it be true that "all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made"; if it be true that He is before all things, and in Him all things consist, then I will attempt anything He commands me to do; because His command is conditioned upon the outgoing to the penitent soul of all the resources of Deity. And the thing that apart from Him is impossible, becomes a gloriously accomplished fact, when Jesus commands it.

I bring to you in His name a great salvation, a salvation that takes account of all the past, and washes all your sins away; a salvation that takes account of the present, and fills it with power, with peace, and with gladness; a salvation that gilds the future with an immortal hope, and enables us to anticipate even now the glories of the celestial land.

Oh "take ye away the stone"! What does that mean? "Sir", says some man, "you always arrive there before you finish, and that is the one thing about your preaching I cannot understand. You always direct us to the supernatural; you always tell us that God can do what we cannot do, and it does not seem reasonable to me. My reason rebels." No; it does not. The highest office of reason is to convince the soul of the reasonableness of God, and of all His commands. You are never so utterly reasonable as when you accept what God says as being truth in the absolute, against which there can be no argument whatsoever. "Take ye away the stone." It means, yield your reason, your intellect with all its powers, great or little, whatever they may be, your affectional nature, your conscience, yield your all, and say, "I had buried my heart there; it was all that I could do. I concentrated all my powers in laying aside that dream, that ideal, that lovely prospect of life, blotting it out of my vision, trying to content myself, and go on without it. If I did not become a cynic I became a stoic. But now since the Lord commands it I will reopen the long-sealed sepulchre where the fondest hopes of life were buried, and taking away the stone, life shall become new by His grace."

I said I wanted to be a boy again, and the Lord says, "I will carry you farther back than that, and I will let you be a babe again": "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"; and so He begins with us at the beginning, and goes with us all the way through; saves us for time and for eternity.

That is the salvation that I offer you, that is the Saviour I proclaim. There is a man yonder in the penitentiary—do you hear me to-night, my friend—you have written me several times. If you will take away the stone your Lazarus shall live again, and life may yet be filled for you with the hopefulness of spring-time, and the sweetness of summer. He can take from us all that is sordid and unseemly, and fashion us at last like unto Himself:

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

"The dying thief rejoiced to see

That fountain in his day:

And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.

"Thou dying Lamb Thy precious blood

Shall never lose its power;

Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.

"E'er since by faith I saw the stream

Thy flowing wounds supply,

Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

"When this poor lisping, stammering tongue,

Lies silent in the grave,

Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save."

WORDS OF SIMPLE COUNSEL TO YOUNG MINISTERS

A Bible Lecture by Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto,
Thursday Evening, May 4th, 1934.

(Stenographically Reported)

Lesson Text: II Timothy, Chapter 2.

Next week will be examination time, so that this will be our last lecture in the course. I propose this evening to turn aside from the Old Testament studies just because this is our last evening together, and also because the fifteenth chapter of Second Samuel introduces us to another distinct period in David's history which we could not possibly cover in one evening; so we shall defer an examination of that until the Seminary re-opens in the Autumn.

This evening we shall hear what the Apostle Paul wrote to a young minister: "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus". This opening verse of the chapter will serve as a text, while I pass on to you, who shortly will be going out to different forms of service, some very simple and practical suggestions by way of advice.

I suppose most men who have had a little experience of life in almost any department are often disposed to wish they could begin all over again. I very often envy young ministers; I wish I could begin again where you are. But as I cannot, perhaps I may offer some helpful counsel to you as you set your faces toward the future.

The first and most important thing, not only for ministers, but for all Christians—for there is a sense in which we are all ministers, we are all witnesses for Christ, we are every one of us commissioned to make Christ known—is *that we should maintain our fellowship with God*. We should never lose the bloom of our early Christian experience. To so many it may be said, as Paul said to the Galatians: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you?" I do not suppose there is a Christian man or woman here of any extended experience who cannot recall times of special blessing, when you resolved that, like Abraham, you would walk before God:

I think there is nothing more difficult for a minister than to maintain his fellowship with God. That may sound strange to some, for no doubt there are many who often envy a minister his special privileges. And well they may envy a man whose life is given to the study of the word of God, to the proclamation of the great truths of the gospel, who, by virtue of his calling

must occupy his mind continually with the things of Christ—for surely that is a privilege, a very high privilege. But there is always a possibility of our allowing ourselves to become familiar with holy things. Oh, how many ministers there are who become nothing more than ecclesiastical officials, who "officiate"—as the word is—at various services! Funeral services, as I hear them conducted sometimes, are to me an affront to the spiritual intelligence of anyone. Sometimes I have felt that these lifeless performances are sheer mockery, and that we might sometimes be better without them. Not only funeral services, but other services are often conducted in the same way. I attended Canterbury Cathedral some years ago where they have daily service. There were not many people there, and I sat near the choir and carefully observed the choir and the ministers. They sang very beautifully, but it was a perfunctory performance all the way through. It was evident that it was. I recall being asked by one of the professors if I would take the chapel service at McMaster University some years ago. I said to him, half-sympathetically, "I suppose you do get a bit tired of it." "Tired!" he said, "I should think so." It ought not to be so, but it is possible for the exercise of family prayer, the performance of religious duties of any sort, to become mechanical and devoid of all spiritual life and profit. And the very fact that a minister is forced week by week, and sometimes day by day, publicly, to pray and to lead in religious services, unless he is very careful, will make him a mere machine. Some of you have come to church sometimes when you hardly felt like coming, but you had not to preach nor take any part, but you came, and through the service received blessing. But someone else had to come whether he felt like it or not, and was, by force of circumstances, compelled to do certain things.

Now you will have that experience as ministers, and you need, above everything else, to keep your hearts with all diligence, and to give special care to the cultivation of your own spiritual life, lest you become mere mechanics, only religious officials.

I am going to prepare, if I can, a special number of THE GOSPEL WITNESS in commemoration of the centenary of Spurgeon. I have studied Spurgeon nearly all my life, and I know of no character whose ministry and witness has afforded me greater inspiration. In spite of all the plaudits of millions, in spite of the fact that he stood for nearly forty years head and shoulders above every other preacher of the gospel in the entire world—in my judgment since apostolic times he was the greatest preacher the world has ever known,—no one else even approaches him; in spite of that I say, the wonder of it all is that from the beginning to the end of that great ministry he spoke always as a sinner saved by grace, and who had never outgrown the surprise, the wonder, the marvel, that God had had mercy on him—he could be found of a Sunday evening after he had preached to assembled thousands, when his praise was upon thousands of lips, in the quiet of his own home, mourning before God because his tender conscience often made him feel that he might have been more faithful. That was what made Spurgeon a great preacher, that he was first of all one of the greatest saints of all history.

I covet that for you. A man of very ordinary gifts, of very limited intellectual capacity, with no genius at all, may be marvellously useful, and touch the ends of the earth with his influence, if he is first of all wholly given up to God. That is the supreme necessity. Let

me lay that upon your heart and conscience, young men, and young women, too: give time and thought to the cultivation of your own soul: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them," the prophet said. So must we, for ourselves, first of all, as Christians, nourish our souls on the word of God. We must fall in love with it; we must have a passion for it, an appetite for the heavenly manna, so that we shall desire above everything else just for our own souls' profit and enjoyment opportunity to study the word of God.

There is a life that we all must live before God, from which the world must be entirely shut out. There we must abide in Him. See that you give time for the study of God's word, with a view to your own profit. I am not speaking about preaching now. Build up your own souls with the word of God. Certain general principles are known to us all, and I do not need to instruct you in that matter, so much as to exhort you as I would exhort my own soul, to let these principles find application to your own life.

I would urge you not to advertise your praying, but to pray. When I was in Rochester a week or so ago I was asked if I thought it would be a definite contribution to the service of public worship, for the minister when he enters his pulpit, before all, in the presence of the congregation, to kneel in prayer. I have seen ministers do that. And I dare not say that such a course is generally taken for effect. But I have in mind now a man who made a parade of his devotions. Personally I would recommend you to pray, before you enter the pulpit, in secret; for you will need to be an extraordinarily saintly person to save such public solitary action from all semblance of affectation. There are soul conflicts that you and I must fight, and no one can fight them for us. There will be lions we shall have to meet in the way, as did Samson. Let us, as he did, slay them in secret, and say nothing about it. It is a familiar illustration, but it will do: kill the lions, but do not tell anyone. Rather bring the honey in your hands, then you will not need to tell anyone where you got it. I have known people who were much more expert in telling of their secret conflicts, than in producing evidence of victory in the form of honey. I once knew a woman in my church, before I became pastor of Jarvis Street. I never regarded her as a particularly sanctified woman, but she was exceedingly sanctimonious—you know the difference, don't you? I never looked upon her as specially good: she was so obnoxiously goody-goody. Her religious parades were nauseating. Again and again in prayer meeting she would rise and ask the people to pray specially for her, that she might be less selfish, expecting people to say, "Oh, is not that wonderful; that such an unselfish person should ask to be saved from her own selfishness!" In reality she needed all the prayers she asked for!

Cultivate your soul. Pray often in public, of course: you will have that to do of necessity. But I speak now of that habit of life enjoined by our Lord: "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet"—and do not forget that He said—"and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

If you are a man of prayer, or a woman of prayer, if you really live with God, you will not need to advertise it: people will find it out; and if you are not, your advertising will deceive nobody,—least of all will it deceive Him Who heareth prayer.

There are disciplines to be maintained in the indi-

vidual life if we are to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ". You cannot teach without discipline in a school. You cannot learn anything without discipline; in fact, that is part of your learning. You know the old educators used to talk about, not so many subjects, but so many disciplines. Mathematics was a discipline. Greek, or Latin, were disciplines, because by the study of these things the powers of the mind were brought under control and trained, so that one's mental powers could be used just as an athlete uses his body. And there are spiritual disciplines. There is the subjective power of the cross as well as the objective value of it. We must be able to say with Paul: "I am crucified with Christ",—and as a minister you will never want for people to help to crucify you; you will have plenty of opportunity to exercise all the graces of the Christian life. You need not fear that. But do, I adjure you, look after your own spiritual life. Remember, you will have no pastor; other people will have a pastor, but you will have none. You will exhort other people, but you will have nobody to exhort you. You will have to live to God for yourself.

I shall try to discuss one thing—I do not know with what success I shall be able to do it—in an analysis of the character and ministry of Mr. Spurgeon. Mr. Spurgeon had a mind that was thoroughly disciplined. He began very early, and, although he did not take a university course, he said he could have taken the Oxford or Cambridge degree, without difficulty, at fifteen years years of age. I have known not a few men who had little capacity, no genius, meagre natural ability, but who had passed through an educational institution, and had been hewn, and scraped, and polished, and sandpapered, until at last the poor fellow came out, as he said, "educated". And he was not worth five cents a carload of anyone's money; of no service to anyone. But he had submitted to a prescribed course, and he called himself "educated". Every university turns out in the course of its operation hundreds of men who have degrees, but who have nothing else. Of all the doctors that are graduated, there are only a handful who ever amount to anything. Of all the men who pass examinations in law, and are called to the bar, there are only a very few who ever become distinguished; others are not worth much; and of all the men who essay to preach the gospel, what a large number are utter failures!

Now what must you do if you are going to be what you ought to be as a preacher, without a pastor? There have been men who have been their own tutors. They have been, personally, strong enough to be student and faculty all in one. He is a strong man who can be that, who can make himself think, who can make himself study, who can hold himself to a stern and rigorous course of mental discipline without help from others, who can train his will until he can force himself to do whatever he ought to do. Such a man is a walking university! He is a student, but he is his own faculty also.

So must it be religiously in the pastoral office. You will have no pastor? Be your own pastor. You will have no teacher? Be your own teacher. Do you see what I mean? That is why you are chosen, if you are really chosen, to be a minister; not because you are weaker than others, but because you are stronger. So then, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

II.

Then one or two suggestions about your public ministry. I hope you will not be a delicatessen preacher. You know what I mean? There are housewives who prepare only one meal at a time, and for the prescribed number of people expected to dinner. If one or two extra guests should come in unexpectedly there would not be enough for them. And if anything should happen to prevent the dear woman's getting to the store between meals, she would not have enough for the next meal. Perhaps there are but few who are as bad as that, but certainly many provide but from one day to another. Read the book of Proverbs, and you will find that there is a good deal said there about those who gather their stores in the summer, and who are always keeping their storehouses full: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise." Yes; after you have left school, go out and sit on a sandheap somewhere, and watch the ants at work, and learn from them! That is what the Bible tells you to do.

Take your ministry seriously. It is the biggest job in the world to which anyone can give himself. I suppose we have all known men who seemed to take their responsibilities very lightly, as though it were a sort of game, and not much more. I would exhort you to take your task seriously. Never play with it, nor at it. Never allow yourselves to feel that you are its master, and that you can afford to be careless. Be afraid to go into the pulpit without having made every possible effort to prepare yourself for that great occasion.

I wish I could make clear to you what is in my own mind. I have known so many to take a text out of its context. They did not know much about the text, and apparently knew nothing at all about the context. Do not be content to gather enough material for one sermon. Fill your mind with the things of the Bible. If you are going to speak for thirty minutes, have enough in your head to speak for thirty hours, if you had the time. I am sorry for the preacher who ever runs down for want of something to say. I look forward to the time when we shall get to heaven, when "time shall be no more", when we can go on singing forever, and preaching forever, and talking forever, and nobody will be in a hurry.

You must be a man of the Book, of course. That is what you are being taught all the time. But you ought to be a man of multiplied correspondences. You ought to be a man of this Book, of one Book particularly: you must know that or you cannot preach. Whatever else you know, if you do not know your Bible you cannot preach. Moody used to say, God cannot use a man who does not know his Bible. I believe that is true. I believe God uses us in the measure in which we know the word of God. I am positive of this, that I have found in my own little ministry that the portions of scripture with which I am most familiar, are the scriptures that the Spirit of God brings to my mind when preaching. Store your mind with the word of God, and if you are going to quote an extended passage, take that opportunity of committing it to memory. I did that for years, and if I quoted half a chapter, I used to write it out, every word of it, and then memorize it, so that I could say it backwards, forward, upside down, and every way. Saturate your mind with the word of God, and, too, with the great hymns of the church. Do not be content to sing, but store these hymns away in your mind, so that you can sing without a book. Test

yourself sometime. See how many hymns you can recite from beginning to end; I mean the great hymns: I will forgive you if you don't remember certain of the newer hymns, because some of them are not worth remembering. I mean the great hymns that have in them the very essence of the gospel.

It is a good idea to write poetry. Did you ever do it? Always on one condition, that you have sense enough not to publish it! or to ask anyone else to listen to you while you read it! Years ago I offended one of the Deacons of this church, and, for the life of me, I did not know what I had done to him. For a while he was up the miff tree,—and he was a very important man, at least he thought he was. One day I called on him and asked him what I had done. He said, "You made a slighting remark one Sunday morning about amateur poets, and you knew that my wife writes poetry." Well, I did not. If I had, I might have said more. It is a good exercise to see how much you can pack into one line. Learn the art of condensation, to say much in a few words when it is necessary.

Store your mind with knowledge of everything that is of value. I think a minister ought to be a widely-read man. Read what is said of Solomon, and of all the things that he spoke of, from the "cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall"; he knew all about ants, and about spiders, and about birds, and plants. He was a naturalist. Study everything; God's word first, and then His works, and you will find in the whole realm of human knowledge material that will serve you in illustrating and enforcing and applying the great truths of the Bible.

Dr. Stockley told me of a friend of his who was very intimate with Mr. Spurgeon. And on one occasion when he was packing up to go away on a brief holiday this friend was present, and he saw on the table a number of books. There was a pile of books on one subject. Do you know what it was? There they were, a dozen or fifteen books on one subject. They were all about butterflies,—and Mr. Spurgeon was no butterfly. But he knew butterflies.

I hope you will not be so foolish as to suppose that the ministry needs little training. Many young men have come to me saying, "I think your Seminary course is rather heavy: I should like to go to a Bible College for a couple of years. I want to be an evangelist." Two years to be an evangelist! A young fellow came to see me one day. I said, "What is your business?" He said, "I am a butcher." "Where are you from?" "I came from Ireland." "Well", I said, "what sort of butcher?" "Oh", he said, "I served my apprenticeship." "How long?" I said. "Seven years." *Seven years to learn to be a butcher, and two years to learn to be an evangelist!* An evangelist in two years! A superficial knowledge of the Bible! That is one disadvantage from which we suffer to-day. On the one side we have Modernists who have professedly, at least, overemphasized the intellectual side of things, and boast of their scholarship; and on the other hand we have many nice, good, young men who have taken a short Bible course somewhere—superimposed upon an utterly untrained and undisciplined mind. But they know everything in two years! They are utterly without fitness to lead any church; and when crises arise, when some great error attacks the church they are not competent to meet it; they have no reserves of theological knowledge upon which to draw. How I wish I could make you understand how big a thing it is to be a preacher and make

you wish, as every preacher who has had any experience at all must wish, that you could live to be as old as Methuselah, so that you might learn a little at least of how to preach the gospel!

Do not fail in pastoral visitation. While your chief business must always be the public proclamation of the gospel, do not neglect to deal with people personally. The time may come when you will not be able to visit people as regularly as you can now do, but there is no excuse for a pastor, who has fifty or a hundred people to care for, not cultivating them diligently. See them often, and do not stay too long at a time. Seek to develop them. Read that chapter that I have read to you, and see how Paul admonished Timothy. The thing that you have heard, commit to faithful men, that they may be able to teach others also. It will do your own soul good to go out and see someone else. When you are a little bit blue, go and visit the hospital, or if there is not a hospital in the town where you minister, go and visit some sick people at home; go and visit a blind man, a cripple, someone who needs your help, and who will make you thankful for the blessing you enjoy. In your personal contact with people you will learn more of human nature than in any other way. All the text books you study on psychology will not give you half the insight into the human mind that you will obtain for yourself in personal contact with men and women. The doctor studies his books, but he must have his clinical experience, he must be clinically instructed also. Therefore, try to practice the things that you have learned.

Perhaps I had better stop now, because there are so many things to be said that I cannot possibly say this evening. But I hope that in your experience this summer you will be led to feel, even more than you do now, how exalted is the privilege of everyone who is called to preach the everlasting gospel. What a solemn responsibility rests upon every man and woman commissioned to that great ministry! I do pray that the Spirit of God may lead you, and make your ministry abundantly fruitful to the good of men and the glory of God.

Let us pray:

O Lord, we confess ourselves to be, all of us, without exception, unprofitable servants. We thank Thee that Thy compassions fail not. We thank Thee that Thou art such a patient Teacher. Thou hast said: Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me. O Lord, if we know our own hearts we would learn of Thee more perfectly. Forgive us for all our blunders; forgive us for our unfaithfulness; forgive us that we have so imperfectly developed the gifts which Thou hast given us. We have so often failed to stir up the gift that is within us. We pray that Thou wilt make us every one more faithful.

Especially wilt Thou bless these young men and women who feel that Thou hast called them to a life of official service, to preach the gospel at home or abroad, or both. We pray that the great Head of the Church may direct them, that the Holy Spirit may lead them. Put them, O Lord, in the place of Thine appointment, and let Thy hand be upon them for good. Use them mightily in Thy service.

We thank Thee for those who have gone out from us. We think of them all this evening; some of them in far-away lands, some of them in remote parts of this country, and some nearer home. O Lord, we would earnestly and lovingly commend them to Thee this evening, and pray that Thou wilt keep them true to Thee, and true to Thy gospel. Do, we beseech Thee, be pleased to energize this church and the Seminary, and every influence that radiates from this centre. Be pleased, O Lord, to use it for the upbuilding of Thy people in the salvation of souls, and for the glory of Thy great name.

Hear us in this, and do for us exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to Thy power which worketh in us, unto Whom be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

ABOUT TORONTO BAPTIST SEMINARY

The Seminary graduation exercises will be held next Thursday evening, May 17th. This service is always of great interest, not only to Toronto people, but to Seminary friends who live elsewhere. We give all a most cordial invitation to be present at the Seminary Convocation, May 17th.

In this connection we would remind our friends that the Seminary is always in need of financial support. The Seminary exists to train men and women in the principles held by Regular Baptists, thus fitting them for Christian service at home and abroad. The burden of the support of this work has fallen chiefly upon Jarvis Street Church, and upon certain individuals beyond Jarvis Street borders. The contribution of the Union of Regular Baptist Churches, as a Union, and of the churches, as churches, amounts to very little. The amount received through the Union budget for Seminary support last year was six hundred and forty dollars; and gifts from churches of the Union amounted to one hundred and sixty-eight dollars, or eight hundred and eight dollars in all.

The cost of the operation of the Seminary last year was nearly fifteen thousand dollars. Many of our students have come from churches of the Union. We really think that many of these churches ought to make some effort to support the Seminary wherein their own young people are being trained. Every fund connected with Jarvis Street was balanced last year but the Seminary. We urgently appeal to the pastors of the Union to take the Seminary to heart, and to make some effort to assist in its maintenance.

We hope pastors and others will not think of the Seminary as something Jarvis Street is operating for its own advantage. The President of the Seminary has never received a cent of remuneration. Even in this time of depression we have been able to carry on our other enterprises, and close our funds without a deficit. Notwithstanding, we believe the Seminary is in many respects the biggest thing Jarvis Street is attempting to do. Where shall we find pastors for churches at home or missionaries for service abroad, who will stand uncompromisingly for the inspiration and authority of the Bible as the word of God if we do not train such men in our own Seminary?

The Union of Regular Baptist Churches was established as a protest against the Modernism of McMaster University, but the McMaster of five or six years ago might almost have been called conservative compared with the McMaster of to-day. On every hand we hear of the religious poison being disseminated by McMaster students. True, there are Bible colleges and Bible institutes that profess to stand for the Bible, and many of them no doubt do; but the courses they provide are a most inadequate preparation for the work of the ministry. We must surely set a higher standard for our ministry than that which is set by these short-cut institutions. Beside that, these institutions are not distinctively Baptist; and while many of them are theologically sound, they are ecclesiologically about as heretical as they well could be. If we are to have sound old-fashioned Baptist churches,—by which we mean New Testament churches, we must train men to serve such churches; and we know of no other institution in the entire Dominion of Canada where such work as our Seminary is doing, is being attempted. Already we have our graduates scattered from coast to coast in Canada, some in the United States, and many on foreign mission fields.

We would most urgently lay the claims of the Seminary upon the hearts of our readers. There are some who have a little money, or property, which they hope to leave to some good cause when they have done with it. To all such we suggest that they give a place in their will to Toronto Baptist Seminary. Have you made your will? If you have, have you remembered the Seminary? If you have not, will you not immediately make some provision for the Seminary? And be sure you properly identify the Seminary in the terms of your will. Leave what you leave to "Toronto Baptist Seminary, connected with Jarvis Street Baptist Church", then there can be no possibility of misunderstanding.

But there are others who, perhaps, could send us twenty-five, fifty, one hundred, five hundred, or a thousand dollars while they yet live. Last Friday we had a special business

meeting of Jarvis Street Church. We did not announce the object of the meeting. There was a very good attendance, but, of course, rather a small proportion of the entire membership. We made an attempt to clear off the three thousand five hundred dollars deficit of this year. The members present subscribed fifteen hundred dollars, payable within three months. There are many other members who were not present who will read this item. We ask all members of Jarvis Street to have a part in this. What can you give to the Seminary over and above your general contributions to the church, payable between now and the end of July?

There are many outside of Jarvis Street Church who could help us now to wipe out that other two thousand dollars. Send us in your pledge. It would be a most happy thing if we were able to announce on May seventeenth that the entire deficit on last year's operations had been already subscribed. Will not pastors help us all over the Union? Speak of the Seminary to your people, and if you know of some members of your church who have a little money to invest to help us send out pastors and missionaries to preach the gospel, urge them to send us a contribution for the Seminary Fund. We do not content ourselves with asking people to pray for the Seminary: we do need prayer, but recently we came upon a good story told in Mr. Chilver's foreword to Dr. Carlile's life of C. H. Spurgeon. The story is as follows:

"At a deacons' meeting a great need in one of the branches of the work was discussed, and it was generally felt that prayer upon the matter should be offered by them at once. But Mr. Spurgeon interrupted with, 'Wait a minute, brethren', and taking a sheet of paper, wrote: 'C. H. Spurgeon, £50', and passed it round for the others to add their names and amounts. When this was completed, he said, 'Now, brethren, we can conscientiously pray.'"

When we have put the wood upon the altar, and the sacrifice upon the wood, it is time to pray that God will send the fire. But it is useless to ask for fire when there is no sacrifice upon which the fire may fall.

This word is especially addressed to the pastors and churches of, and individuals in the churches of the Union, and, of course, to all others whose hearts the Lord may be pleased to stir up to help us in this great enterprise.

THE WEEK-END IN JARVIS STREET

Sunday was a good day, but unmarked by any very special features. The attendance at the Bible School in the morning was 1,213. We had a number of visitors from the United States and various parts of Canada, in the Pastor's class in the auditorium. Fine weather is now here, and, doubtless, many people from United States and many parts of Canada will find themselves in Toronto for the week-end. To all such we give a very cordial invitation to visit our Bible Class which meets in the Church auditorium each Sunday morning at 9.45. There was a good morning congregation, and the usual large congregation in the evening. Five were baptized, and at the Communion Service following a good number of new members were received into fellowship. The evening sermon, as usual, appears in this issue.

SPECIAL SERVICES AT KINMOUNT

At one time there was a Baptist cause in Kinmount, but it was closed, and the building was sold to be used as a Masonic meeting house instead of a place for the proclamation of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a fine hall available across from this former church, which is now being used as a house of worship by the Baptists.

Rev. Leander Roblin of Otterville, associated with Rev. M. B. Gillion of Bobcaygeon, is conducting this campaign. The earnest prayers of God's people everywhere are requested for this work. Some time ago the pastor of the Bobcaygeon field saw the possibilities in this place and after a series of meetings when over twenty surrendered to Christ, believed something of a permanent character should be undertaken. Perhaps out of these special services a new cause may be established. There is a part in this work for every child of God. Pray for His blessing upon the speakers.

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

Vol. 9

No. 2

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 22 SECOND QUARTER June 3rd, 1934

REVIVAL IN ISRAEL

Lesson Text: Ezra, chapters 9 and 10.

Golden Text: "For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem." Ezra 9:9.

Bible School Reading: Ezra 9:1-15.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS:

Monday—Ps. 4:1-8. Tuesday—Ps. 28:1-9. Wednesday—Deut. 12:29-32. Thursday—Amos 6:1-6. Friday—Matt. 16:24-28. Saturday—2 Cor. 6:11-7:1.

I. SIN IN ISRAEL, (9:1-4).

The Jews had been cured of idolatry by their experience in Babylon, but it was evidently hard for them to learn that separation was also necessary from idolaters. Before entering the promised land they had been warned against intermarriage with the heathen, (Deut. 7:3), but notwithstanding this some of them entered such a marriage relationship, and even after the occasion recorded in our lesson they again committed the offence, (Neh. 13:23). Such conduct is an evidence of a backslidden heart, for it manifests plain disregard of the command of God. Information of the unsatisfactory condition was made known to Ezra by the princes, (v. 1,2), and evidently was a great surprise, and terrible sorrow to him, (vs. 3, 4). Outwardly the colony appeared prosperous, and with the temple services going on it would seem to be religious, presenting a cheerful prospect to the late arrivals, but under the surface corruption was at work, and if allowed to continue it would permeate the whole, and wreck the undertaking. The danger was great, difficult to deal with, and overwhelmed Ezra with its seriousness and sinfulness. In his attitude of extreme sorrow and humiliation he was joined by others of like mind. Note Ezra's concern for the sin of his people, and his realization of their danger. Their separate identity was in peril and divine judgment was a possibility. Notice also the folly of the transgression, and the ease with which men forget God. It would be well for the Church if its members felt the burden of the nation's sin.

II. EZRA'S PRAYER, (vs. 5-15).

In the time of heaviness and soul pressure, the saint finds relief in prayer. It comes quite natural to him and he knows that God hears and is willing to help. Ezra prayed, and then acted respecting the matter. Concerning his prayer note several things. First, in relation to Ezra's posture in prayer. He bowed very low before the Lord in manifestation of his deep sorrowful feeling, (v. 5). He was sore stricken with the sin of his people, humbled himself to the very dust, and made his appeal unto God. His attitude manifests sincerity of purpose, earnestness of spirit, and an aim of supplication. Note the necessity for prayer in view of the nation's present condition. Abraham besought God on behalf of the cities of the plain, (Gen. 18:23-33), Moses prayed for his people, (Ex. 32:31, 32), and Daniel did likewise, (Dan. 9:3).

In his prayer Ezra confesses his shame at the sin of his people, (v. 6), refers to the judgment suffered in consequence, (v. 7), and to the mercy extended to them in their return to Palestine, (vs. 8, 9). He then makes confession of the sins of his people. They had forsaken the Lord's commandments, (vs. 10-12), notwithstanding His mercy toward them, (vs. 13, 14), and they were before Him in their trespasses, (v. 15). Note Ezra's unity with his people in confession of their sins. As part of the remnant he intercedes from within the circle. He shares his nation's lot, and bears his people's sins. Observe also the clear acknowledgment of guilt. No excuse is offered. The sins are great, and they are confessed as such. Men are prone to excuse their evil conduct, and blame either persons, or circumstances. Such an attitude gives evidence of a desire to evade responsibility, and does not bring pardon. There is also to be found in the prayer an acknowledgment of God's mercy, and justice, and a desire to trust to God's mercy. It is a prayer akin to that of the publican, (Luke 18:13), and like

that which all of us must make from time to time. It is best not to try to hide anything from God, and when we do sin it is the part of wisdom to confess it immediately, knowing that through our Advocate we shall receive forgiveness, (1 John 2:1), and be enabled to continue in our Lord's service unhindered by unconfessed sin.

III. REFORMATION, (10:1-44).

The picture of such a prominent and highly-respected person as Ezra in earnest prayer, and manifesting such powerful signs of grief evidently made a great impression on the people, for "there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore", (v. 1). In this there is evidence of answered prayer, in the manifest interest of the people in the matter, and their sorrow, and consciousness of sin. It is a blessed thing when the Lord's people become concerned respecting sin in their midst. There is then the possibility of getting rid of it, and of purifying the general life of the people. Such a condition means the beginning of revival, for God begins with His own in spiritual quickening, and then reaches the unsaved. Note the need for repentance on the part of the people of God in general, for on every hand there is evidence of a loss of separation from the world. In many cases the world is in the church, and the church in the world. The Christian's attitude toward the world requires consideration, (1 John 2:15).

After prayer there comes action. God means us not only to pray about sin, but to put it away, (1 Sam. 7:3). The particular sin among the Jews at the time of our record was marriage with the heathen, and this condition must needs be remedied. This must have seemed difficult of accomplishment, as the ramifications of the trespass affected the leaders, as well as the people, (9:12), but it was possible, and the remedy of putting away the heathen wives was proposed. In this proposal there is found an acknowledgment of guilt, an expression of hope respecting a solution, (v. 2), a suggestion concerning the putting away of the strange wives with their children, (v. 3), and an exhortation to Ezra to put the plan into operation, (v. 4). There is manifest in the proposal the realization that half measures were useless in remedying the situation, and that there must be a thorough housecleaning. Compromise in relation to sin is always wrong. God never endorses sin, and His people must assume the same attitude.

In compliance with the exhortation made to him, Ezra arose and made leaders, and people agreed to carry out the plan suggested, (v. 5), after which he entered into "the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib" (v. 6), probably for the purpose of conferring on the working out of the plan. Proclamation was thence made throughout the territory of the returned exiles that all should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem, the penalty for non-compliance with the same within three days being the forfeiture of substance, and separation from the company of the returned ones, (vs. 7, 8). The people responded to the command, and after much detail work the reformation in Israel's domestic and social life was effected. Note the great open-air meeting, (v. 9), the message of Ezra, (vs. 10, 11), the response and suggestion of the people, (vs. 12-14), the method used in effecting the reformation, (vs. 15-17), and the names of the persons affected by the reformation, (vs. 18-44).

One of the chief lessons to be learned from this incident is the necessity for putting God first. We are instructed to put Him even before the members of our family, (Matt. 10:37), and only in doing so can we enjoy His blessing to the fullest extent. This is not an unreasonable demand made upon us, for we belong to God, (1 Cor. 6:20), and we are dependent on Him for the supply of our needs. And in addition we may rest assured that He will never ask us to do anything that will in any way harm us or our loved ones. We may also note the bitter results of sin. If the erring Jews had obeyed God's commands in the first place they would not have been placed in the position of separating from their wives. Sin is the cause of much misery. Carefulness should be exercised by present-day children of God respecting the marriage relationship, (2 Cor. 6:14). Observe further the willingness of the people to submit to reform, its drastic, though necessary, nature, the publicity of the action, and the thoroughness and importance of the transaction. It must have meant a great sacrifice of feeling on the part of those affected by the separation, but they submitted to this for the sake of the Lord. Suitable provision would undoubtedly be made for the separated wives and children.

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

Vol. 9

No. 2

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 23 SECOND QUARTER June 10, 1934

NEHEMIAH GOES TO JERUSALEM

Lesson Text: Nehemiah, chapters 1 and 2.

Golden Text: "Then I said unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach."—Neh. 2:17.

Bible School Reading: Neh. 2:1-20.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS:

Monday—Deut. 4:25-29. Tuesday—Jer. 31:35-40. Wednesday—Ps. 142:1-7. Thursday—I. Tim. 1:13-18. Friday—Rom. 8:12-21. Saturday—I. Peter 2:1-10.

I. INFORMATION RESPECTING JERUSALEM, (1:1-3).

The book of Nehemiah continues the history of the returned exiles found in the book of Ezra, an interval of twelve or thirteen years intervening between the two records. With but a word of introduction the writer plunges into his subject, informing us of the time and place of the incident he is about to relate, (v. 1), and then of the source, and nature of the information conveyed unto him, (vs. 2, 3). In Ezra's time the temple had been rebuilt, but the walls of Jerusalem were in a broken down condition, to the great reproach of the city, and the intense sorrow of all patriotic Jews. Observe that Nehemiah received the information in the month of December, in "Shushan the palace", or rather the fortress of Susa, an Elamite city, the winter abode of the Persian monarchs, eighty miles east of the Tigris. Note Nehemiah's interest in the city of his fathers, and the twofold nature of the information, concerning the state of the people, and the condition of the walls. Such a description is not without its spiritual counterpart. An enemy hath wrought the destruction and brought distress upon the city of God. Even so has the church been assailed, and its numbers scattered. The arch-enemy behind this wrecking business is the devil who has used human instrumentality in the accomplishment of his purpose. Both heathen and heretic have had their share in this, as well as some who claim to be orthodox.

II. NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER, (1:4-11).

The receipt of the sad information had a great effect on Nehemiah. He "sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven", (v. 4). This manifests his intense sorrow on account of the condition of his people, and his earnest desire for the improvement of the same. There is much to make us sorrowful these days in the state of the Lord's work. While in a few places the power of God is evident, in the salvation of souls, yet there is no widespread revival, many churches are without spiritual power due to Modernism and worldliness, and the unsaved in their thousands throng our cities and country districts. Note the significance of this condition in the loss of glory to God, of comfort and communion, and service to the saints, and of salvation to the sinner. We should view these matters from the Godward aspect, looking at them in the light of eternity. They will then impress themselves deeply upon us.

As a result of Nehemiah's intense interest there arose his prayer to God. Several things are worthy of note respecting it. First: the manner in which he addresses God, denoting the divine omnipotence, and faithfulness, and the union of Nehemiah with his people, (vs. 5, 6). Second: the humble confession of sin, (v. 7). There is nothing said about the harsh treatment at the hands of enemies. Sin is looked upon as being the cause of the nation's distress. And such is the cause of every national distress. Third: there is the assumption of the attitude of God's remembrances. Nehemiah reminds the Lord of His promise respecting His people. God's word is the authorization for all true prayer, and He desires us to put Him to the test, (Ps. 50:15). The conclusion of the prayer contains the personal petition for success in approaching the king on behalf of Jerusalem and its people, (v. 11). Observe Nehemiah's earnestness, sincerity, purpose, faith, and importunity, (v. 6).

III. ANSWERED PRAYER, (2:1-8).

Prayer is beneficial subjectively from the standpoint of communion with God, but it is also of supreme value objectively. God answers prayer. Numerous instances of this may be found in scripture, and in Christian experience. Fulfilling the conditions we may claim the answer, (John 15:7; I John 5:14, 15). Nehemiah was privileged to experience this. He was the occupant of a very important position, as cupbearer to Artaxerxes the king, (v. 1). This gave him access to the royal presence, but it also placed upon him certain obligations, among which was that of always being cheerful and gracious. To be otherwise incurred grave danger, for Persian monarchs were not scrupulous concerning the punishment of anyone offending them. The fear of Nehemiah on this occasion was therefore not without cause, (v. 2) although everything turned out well in the end. Note the inquiry of the king, and the reply of Nehemiah, (vs. 2, 3). Observe the reference to Jerusalem as the place of the fathers' sepulchres, implying Jewish regard for the dead. The answer of Nehemiah to the king's second inquiry, (vs. 4, 5) has an interesting sidelight attached to it, in its reference to instant prayer: "So I prayed to the God of heaven". A great deal depended on Nehemiah's reply, and the picture presented here is that of one looking to God in the moment of testing, for wisdom and success. These were granted and Nehemiah received permission to return and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, obtaining letters to the governors for aid in his enterprise, (vs. 6-8). The complete nature of this answer to prayer is worthy of attention, together with the fact that Nehemiah was used in the answering of it.

IV. NEHEMIAH IN JERUSALEM, (vs. 9-20).

Receiving his commission and letters Nehemiah set out for Jerusalem accompanied by an escort of soldiers, and eventually arrived at his destination in safety, (vs. 9-11). A rather striking comment is made respecting the attitude of Sanballat and Tobiah toward the object of his arrival, wherein is clearly revealed their antagonism to the Jews. They were probably opposed to the rise of Jerusalem because of the possibility of their city of Samaria being obscured by it. Possibly also their resentment was due in some measure to former trouble with the Jews respecting the rebuilding of the temple. Looking upon Nehemiah's object as being the work of the Lord, we are conscious of the presence of enemies, who are opposed to the prosperity of that work, and with whom all true servants of God must enter into conflict. The human heart itself is at enmity against God, (Rom. 8:7), the natural man walks according to the spirit of the prince of the power of the air, (Eph. 2:2), and that prince himself is the great enemy of souls, (Eph. 6:12; I. John 5:19).

The practical nature of Nehemiah is manifest in his night ride around Jerusalem. He wanted to see for himself the condition of the city. He had been informed of this by others, but he could form a more correct judgment by a personal examination. In addition to this he would be better able to lay plans for the rebuilding operation. And, in order not to be disturbed, either by friend or foe, he told no man of his intentions, (v. 12). His night ride is described, together with the condition of the walls, (vs. 13-16). These were in a sad condition, heart-breaking to a pious, patriotic Jew, but not impossible of remedy at the hands of willing stouthearted workers. Note the advantage of understanding the nature of the work in which one is about to engage, and the necessity for careful thought being given to the same. There is no law against the use of brains in the Lord's service.

Having gained a knowledge of the work to be done, Nehemiah called a conference of the people to lay his plans before them. He explained the condition of the walls, called upon them to rise and build them, (v. 17), told them of the good hand of his God which was upon him, resulting in their decision to rise and build, (v. 18). Their enemies mocked them when they heard of their decision, (v. 19), but in the strength of the Lord they set forward on their task, (v. 20). Note the constructive progressive nature of the work, stone upon stone, until its completion. This was a building operation, in contrast with that of the Babylonians who overthrew the city which was of a wrecking nature. The Christian is called to build, not to wreck, and in order successfully to carry on the work conservation of purpose, and concentration, and co-operation of effort are required. Observe also the instant, hearty response of the people, and the spirit animating them in their decision.

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NEWS FROM LIBERIA

Word has reached the office that our missionary, Miss Minnie Lane, sailed for Canada on May 5th, and we are looking forward to hearing from her very interesting things about our work in Liberia, at the Rally in Stanley Avenue Baptist Church, Hamilton, on May 24th. More recent word has come that Mr. and Mrs. Mellish and Mrs. Hancox expect to sail for Canada on May 19th, and we are looking forward to seeing them also.

In the meantime, we publish extracts from letters which came to hand in yesterday's mail. Rev. H. L. Davey writes of the work as follows: "The work seems to be developing steadily; the spiritual side of the work gives joy; souls are being saved and added to the church, and God is awakening these people to a sense of their sin and their need of a Saviour. Since coming back I have had the joy of leading one very old lady to a knowledge of Christ as her Saviour. I happened to be in a village tending a very sick man, and held a little informal gospel service. The old lady listened and questioned us, then to our joy boldly confessed Christ, bringing me her charms, saying she had no more use for them. She came to church the following Sunday, and before all the people gave her testimony as to what she had done. This created quite a sensation, as it is not general for old women to do this. Since that time she has gone on well. We have sent native Christians to visit and encourage her, and they tell us that when they go she always gives a word in the gospel to those who come to the services. Praise the Lord for the wonderful way in which He works.

"I also had the joy of conducting the funeral service of the first professing Christian townmaster in this section. I say 'joy', because we feel that the testimony will bear fruit. The man had been a constant attendant at the services here ever since I came, and for a long time was a secret believer. When I returned I found him on his death bed. He boldly confessed Christ and asked for a Christian burial. When he died they turned the body over to the Mission, and we had the joy of telling the people of their need of trusting the same One in whom the departed one had put his trust.

"We have found that some of our school boys, during our absence, have found the Saviour, and they have been going out in the evenings with their Bibles, which they have learned to read in the school, and with the Word of God have been instructing the people. This has given our fellow-workers and us great joy, and we believe that much of the interest in the gospel services is due to this work on the part of the believing boys. Pray for them that they may have great joy in their labour of love, and that fruit may attend their efforts.

"Since our return two native women have been baptized. They are the first two native women from outside the school. One is the wife of one of the leading Liberian men in this county, and she has great influence here. We are hoping she will be used by the Lord Himself to lead other women to the feet of the Saviour.

"We are glad to say that we are both enjoying good health. The work in general calls for praise and gladness, and we believe that with the united efforts of the workers in the power of God; we shall see greater and better things than heretofore. Bear us up in earnest prayer, and we shall yet see the fruit that He Himself has ordained to eternal life."

The following extracts are from a letter from Rev. G. D. Mellish, dated March 31st: "The weather this month has been very much drier than usual, although usually during March we have considerable rain, coming in heavy wind storms. Just this week these storms, with the rains, have commenced, and we see the effects of the storms on the roofs of our buildings.

"We had another wedding the beginning of this week. This time it was Charlie, the boy who is now acting as assistant teacher. The girl whom he has married was bought for him some years ago by his father or mother,

and so very fortunately he has no payments to make on her. They are both quite young yet, and ordinarily we would have asked them to wait a year or so before being married, but knowing the life of any unmarried girl in this country we could not do this. Jye-wudo also professes to be a Christian and so together they have dedicated their lives to tell out the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We hope that perhaps by the time we return from furlough it may be possible for them to go out and take charge of a preaching out-station.

"The supper after the wedding, we made the occasion, also, of a kind of farewell before our leaving here, not only to the church members, but also to many of the town people who attend church regularly but who have not yet been saved. In all this we seek to give a testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. Altogether about seventy-five persons ate 'big' chop on the day of the wedding, plenty of rice, chicken, palm oil, pumpkin, mushrooms, coffee, and perhaps other things too.

"A week ago last night at a meeting of the members of the church we considered three more persons for baptism, of which two were accepted, and the other asked to wait for a time. These two, Gawi and Whiyema, a man and his wife, are to be baptized to-morrow (D.V.). Whiyema is the woman whom Dr. Gulck operated on when he was here in January, removing a tumour from her jaw. These people, and Widdi, who was baptized in January, have already suffered persecution for their stand for the Lord in their own town. A week ago last Sunday, while they were conducting a service in their own town some of the people stoned and beat them, but now they stand even firmer for the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for them."

We learn in a letter from Miss Florence Stacey that she has had to go to a hospital in Monrovia for treatment, following an attack of malaria. We bespeak the prayers of our readers on her behalf. She is not seriously ill, but the doctor has advised this special treatment which will save much sickness in the future, and greatly improve her health. We quote from her letter of April 2nd, in which she speaks of the work at the Geah Bar Zondo station. "Yesterday (Easter Sunday) we had the great joy of witnessing two others following their Lord and Saviour through the waters of baptism. This husband and wife have been doing a real work in witnessing for the Lord in the town in which they live. They come from a very godless town, one of the medicine towns, and you know what opposition they will have in a place like that.

"The interest here seems to be getting better all the time. We have been more than encouraged lately at the increase in attendance at the Sunday services. The mother of one of my little girls has been coming quite regularly of late, and bringing six and seven people with her from her town. This, to us, is very encouraging, for she has not been much interested in the past. But the Lord is working, and we are expecting great things in the coming year."

TWENTY-FOURTH OF MAY RALLIES

London Area

Briscoe Street Regular Baptist Church, corner Briscoe and Cathcart Streets, South London.

Special Speaker—Rev. A. J. Lewis of Kitchener.

Kinsman Quartette of Toronto will sing at all services.

Toronto and Hamilton Area

Stanley Avenue Regular Baptist Church, corner of Stanley Avenue and Lock Street, Hamilton. Welcome home for Miss Minnie Lane of Liberia.

Special Speaker—Rev. James McGinlay, President of the Convention.

The Invictus Quartette of Toronto will sing.