

The Gospel Witness

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

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

"POWER FROM ON HIGH"

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

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, November 24th, 1935

(Stenographically Reported)

"And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."—Luke 24:49.

I suppose I ought to apologize for being so long absent from this pulpit. So far as I can recall, it is the longest period of inactivity I have known since I began to preach. But no doubt it is a good thing to discover our limitations. Mine is a simple story of coming downstairs too quickly; and in order that it may not pass without profit I propose next Sunday morning to speak, especially to the children, on, How to avoid tumbling. Will you please tell the children to come.

I am glad to know the work has gone on so well during my absence. The attendance at the Bible School has kept up admirably. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, saying, "Wherefore, beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." I once asked Dr. Conwell, who spent literally many years of his life on railway trains, how he managed to care for a great church, and a university which now numbers more than ten thousand students, while spending most of his time away from home. "That is exactly how I manage it", he replied. "But", I said, "I do not quite understand." "If I were home, they would leave everything to me. I call my officers together on a Sunday night and tell them that I am going to the train, that I will be back next Sunday morning, and that there is certain work to do. Then they have to do it because I am away from home, and there is no one else to attend to it."

I will not promise to tumble again in order to give proof of that principle, but I am grateful that our Sunday School and other departments of the work have been so splendidly maintained during these weeks—the school attendance this morning was 1,291—which only goes to prove that this is God's work, and His workshop; and He carries on His work quite independently of us.

Having some such thought as that in mind, I ask you to turn with me to the Gospel according to Luke for our text, "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

Our Lord was always a worker. He was never idle. He was the worker in creation, with His Father and the Holy Ghost. In the days of His flesh He said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." It is written of Him that "by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." Mr. Brown, in his prayer this evening, quoted the first chapter of John where our Lord is spoken of as the Word, and as being Himself God. In that same connection it is said, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."

I have repeatedly called your attention to the principle that there is no revelation of God anywhere apart from our Lord Jesus Christ. Such revelation of God as is contained in nature—and "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse"—but such revelation of God as is contained in nature is a revelation of God through Christ. He is the utterance of God; He is God made manifest. All that we see in the world about us is a revelation of Jesus Christ—not only as Creator, but as Governor, as Ruler. Do not forget that it is said of Him that He upholdeth all things "by the word of his power"; that all authority is even now given unto him in heaven and on earth.

But He was a Worker too in the matter of redemption. He said in the days of His flesh, "I must work the works

of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." He declared that He must finish the work which His Father had given Him to do. It would be a stimulus to us, and an inspiration, if we could read our Gospels, the record of His earthly life, and see how every moment was crowded with labour. How marvellously—if I may dare to say it—how marvelously industrious our Lord was! He never allowed a moment to pass without exercising Himself to fulfil the Father's will, and to complete His earthly task.

Let us not think that work is the penalty of sin: work is the greatest blessing that God can give to any one of us. It is a high privilege to be busily employed, to have so much work to do that we have no time to get into mischief. It is a great blessing to be well, and always thoroughly employed. Even heaven itself is not a place of unemployment. Those of you who dream of heaven as a place of perpetual inactivity, I fear are entertaining a misconception of the future. When we get yonder there will be no night, and we shall "serve him day and night in his temple". We shall always be employed, and shall delight ourselves in such exercise as our redeemed spirits are permitted.

I say, our Lord during the days of His flesh was working out the redemption of man. His infinite spirit wrapped itself with our human flesh: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." In that brief parenthesis of His eternal existence of which we are accustomed to speak as the days of His flesh, His incarnation, He was busily working out the eternal purpose of God. He never had any work to overtake. He finished each day's work as the day came to Him. He never had to retrace His steps. May I reverently say, He had so much to do that in His brief life there was no time for Him to make a journey twice: he had to do His work as it came to His hand. When life's day was closing in—for Him, a very short one—and the shadows were falling about Him, He offered the prayer contained in the seventeenth chapter of John in which He said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." He was not disappointed: He finished His work. On the cross, ere He dismissed His spirit and gave up the ghost, He cried triumphantly, with a loud voice, "It is finished." He was the only Man who ever lived life's day so completely, and in such perfect harmony with the will of God, that when the last moment came, He was able to say, "There is nothing left undone."

Is it true to say that the work of redemption was accomplished within the brief space of the days of His flesh? It is true that, as a man, He lived our life for us. He was "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." It is true that He paid the price of our redemption. He did all that needed to be done for us objectively. He deposited in Heaven's bank such an infinite measure of merit as would make it possible for all the sons of men to the last syllable of recorded time to draw thereon for the cancellation of their debt, and for the settlement of all their accounts before a holy God. It was because He was God He did it; because He was God *and man*.

And yet there is a sense in which the work of redemption was eternal. The Lamb was slain from the founda-

tion of the world. Again and again I have told you that you must never begin with Jesus, Christ at Bethlehem. Long, long before the days of Herod the king it was appointed upon Him that He should bear our sins in His own body on the tree. Thus in plan and purpose before the foundations of the world the Lord Jesus began the work of our redemption. He paid the price. And yet, when His day's work on earth was done, while He had done all that needed to be done for us, "having obtained eternal redemption for us", it still must be conferred; it still must be applied; it still must be made effective in the lives of men and women of generations as yet unborn.

Hence this great Workman, Who had worked from all eternity, when He was about to quit this mundane sphere, looked in a certain sense upon an uncompleted task: there was still much to be done, notwithstanding the work of redemption, in respect to the payment of its price, was already "finished".

Among mortal men many have had to survey—and full often with sadness—the uncompleted structure of their lives. They have wondered sometimes just how it could be completed. The Wise Man long ago said, "I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?" How many a father has desired that his son should carry on some projected work,—even as David, when he called Solomon to his side and said, "During these latter years of my life I have assembled materials for the fabrication of a great temple wherein Jehovah should be worshipped, and His name glorified. He will not allow me to build it because I have had other work to do; but He has said you shall do it, Solomon." David committed his unfinished task to Solomon to finish, saying, "Thou mayest add thereto."

But very often wise men have built up somewhat worthy structures, have accomplished some little thing in life, and they have been followed by one who was not wise, who destroyed it all. The Preacher said, "Who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?" But I read of one who had done much, and, contemplating his Successor, rejoiced in Him; for said he, "This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me . . . he must increase, but I must decrease." "What sayest thou of thyself?" "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."

Then came this great Workman of Whom John spake. He has been to the cross, and into the grave; He has risen a Victor over all, "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." And now the work is yet to be completed—and I have heard men say that Jesus Christ committed His work to His disciples. He did nothing of the sort. No! No! He never did. He knew that if He had left His work with the disciples, it would never be done. He did say to them, "Ye are witnesses of these things." But he said in effect, "I have begun a work which only God can do. I go away, but I will send another Workman to carry on My work, equal with Me in nature, equal with Me in power, equal with Me in continuity of life, one with Me and with the Father. He will carry on My work. Do not dare to try it yourselves. Ye shall not see Me for a little while, but I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

During these weeks of confinement I have occasionally listened to a service over the radio. I hope you will not think I am unfairly censorious, but I have said again and again, "O man, why do you not tell them of a risen Saviour, and of an ever-present Spirit, able to save to the uttermost?" Will you let me talk to you a little about that folly to-night, and about our high and holy privilege as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ?

I.

HOW SIGNIFICANT IS THE PHRASE IN WHICH OUR LORD PROMISES THE PERPETUATION OF HIMSELF, HIS PRESENCE AND HIS POWER! The writer of this Gospel, Luke, was the writer of the Acts of the Apostles; and he begins that great work after this fashion, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen." As though he had said, "You have read my Gospel, Theophilus. That was the story of what Jesus *began to do*. I shall tell you now of what He is *continuing to do*." The Acts of the Apostles is but the inspired record of Christ's continued life and activity.

But I say, there is very special significance in the peculiar phrase in which He wrapped that promise. He said, "I send the promise of my Father upon you. My work is done. The blood has been shed. I have trodden principalities and powers under foot. You will not hear it here below, but it is written in anticipation of it, and in but a little while they will be singing up above, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.'" He is the King of glory; and He said, "I have accomplished my work. I have earned something of great price with the authority to bestow it as a gift—My Father's promise to Me; and I am going home to receive the promise. And when I have received the promise, I will send the promise of My Father upon you."

What a foundation for the feet of faith it is for us to recognize, and ever to believe, that there is no division in the Godhead! I had not been Pastor of this church many weeks—now more than twenty-five years ago—when a young man, who was a graduate of a university, wrote me asking me a number of questions, and desiring an interview, that I might explain to him the sermon I had preached the previous Sunday evening. I made the appointment, and when he came he said, with a somewhat superior air, "I do not want to misunderstand you, and certainly not to misrepresent you. I thought it would be fair to ask you to explain. Did I understand you last Sunday evening to say that Jesus Christ had to die in order to make God the Father willing to save sinners?" I said, "Mr. So-and-So, I have not the remotest idea what you understood; but I can assure you that the language I then employed could not, by any well-balanced mind, possibly convey that implication. I never said anything of the sort. Have you not read that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son'? Have you not learned that the salvation that is in Christ is a salvation effected by the whole Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?"

Do not be too hard upon those who are trying to make

something of the League of Nations. I pity them. I must say that I have come to entertain a much greater respect for that strange organization than I once did. But I would remind you of this principle, that when the League of Nations was contemplated by a statesman whom I never greatly admired—perhaps that was on account of my shortsightedness—he conceived of a united League, a League having in it the United States of America, with its one hundred and twenty-five millions of people, and its vast wealth. He thought of Germany, having come to her senses, as a member of the League. He thought of Japan, a rising power, as a member of the League. He conceived of Italy as a member of the League—of all the great powers forming a League who could say to any bad boy among the nations, "You behave yourself or you will get a spanking." If we had a League of Nations like that, any such nation would behave itself! It is a matter of profoundest regret—I use it for illustrative purposes, and remark upon it only incidentally—that the United States refuses to accept her legitimate moral obligations in world affairs. I wish, next to a great spiritual revival, there could be a revival of international intelligence in the United States. I wish her statesmen could see that there can be no permanent peace for the world, no progress, no prosperity, apart from united action by the Great Powers. I do not suggest political union, but an understanding between the great Republic to the south of us and the British Empire. Such a League of Nations as that would compel the world to behave itself. It could! But if one will be selfish, chaos must reign. Japan has withdrawn, and Germany; and the United States will have nothing to do with it; and by and by Italy will leave. And John Bull will have no one but a lot of little boys to help him, unless it be France—and what can you expect? Yet that is the present situation.

But, my friends, when the whole world needed saving, there was a League, there was an eternal covenant to which the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were parties. It is by the outworking of that covenant that a rebellious, sinful, world is to be saved. That power, power to regenerate individuals, power to re-order and re-organize, if that were His programme, all the nations of the earth—that power is wrapped up as a promise of the Father to the Son. The Son has paid the price; He has purchased something vastly more than the forgiveness of sin, even the promise of the Father—"I send you the promise of my Father."

May I point out to you that in the passage which Mr. Brown read to you, this evening, this promise of the Father is directly related to the expiatory work of Christ, to the redemptive work accomplished on the cross. After He had gone to glory, and while yet the disciples waited, "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." When this was noised abroad, and the people came together, Peter stood up to explain it all: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." Then he quoted the sixteenth psalm that prophesied His death and resurrection, explaining that it could not possibly apply to David because he was dead, and his sepulchre was with them. It could refer to no one but great David's greater Son. Then triumphantly he exclaimed, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear—this power which you see, this power from heaven, this supernatural power coming down upon men, is made available to weak, sinful men because Jesus Christ Who was crucified, has been received of the Father, and He has received the promise, and has shed it forth."

That is the basis of all blessing. It comes to us by way of the cross. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the culmination of His redemptive work. Having received it of the Father, He shed Him forth.

II.

Very well then, look for a moment at HIS ESTIMATE OF THE CHARACTER OF THE WORK THAT HE HAS LEFT US TO DO. I heard a man over the radio this morning deliver a very interesting address. He had just returned from a trip around the world. He was Foreign Mission Secretary of one of the great denominations. There were many good things in what he said. He did say that what we need is God. But his sermon was very much like an Atlantic liner out in the Bay, with no gang-plank. It may have been all right, but I do not know how anybody was expected to get on it. He gave us no intimation of how we were to get into contact with God, but repeatedly said, "It is your business to bring in the kingdom of God." The Lord have pity on this old world if human hands and human power are to "bring in the kingdom of God". Our Lord never intended it, He never commanded it. He knew that not one soul could be saved by human power.

I speak to you who are unsaved, if there are any here this evening. Jesus Christ never commissioned me, as one of His ministers, to save you. He never delegated that power to human hands. In that last extended prayer of His He said, "Thou hast given him (Jesus Christ) power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." There are no intermediaries, no priest, no prophet, no church, no ordinance, no almsgiving—nothing that a man can possibly do can change a soul that is dead in trespasses and in sins. Eternal life is God's free gift in Christ. Hence our Lord Jesus said, "You need power from on high." And we do. There is no other way. I have seen thousands in this place through the years profess faith, hundreds of whom I have know later, whose lives have attested the genuineness of their conversion. Who did it? This place has been again and again the workshop of the Holy Ghost. God the Holy Ghost has been here, and has laid hold of poor sinners, dead in sin, and has quickened them into newness of life—wrought as great a change in them as was wrought in Christ's body when He was preserved from corruption and raised from the dead.

Let me say further that *it is sheer insanity for anyone ever to attempt that work.* I have been interested in hearing announcements made over the radio. Thank God, we have no clubs, and societies, and dramatic

affairs in this place. What is it all about? It is leagues removed from the programme laid down here. You cannot save men and women after that fashion. I care not where it happens, whether a man from the gutter in some rescue mission, or a man well dressed in a respectable church, whenever and wherever a soul is really saved, there God Himself has been at work. That is what our Lord said. He did not commit His work to His disciples. He said—our soldiers coined the phrase, and it would not, I am sure, be out of the way for me to say it—Jesus said, "I will send the Holy Ghost, and He will carry on." Any real work of God that has been done from that day until now has been done by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Will you Sunday School teachers try to remember that your teaching is utterly valueless unless accompanied by the power of the Holy Ghost? Will you pray much before you teach, while you study, while you teach, after you teach? One of our missionaries in China, praying here one evening, commending His work and workers to His care, prayed for "the seed already in the ground." I talked to you about gardens in THE WITNESS last summer. Some of you pitied my ignorance—but it entertained you, and that was all to the good. I had many plants that I wanted to preserve, and, having a furnace, I thought I could keep them indoors. I have a few of them left, but the garbageman has taken most of them away! Why? They could not live without the sun. You cannot do without God. Will you remember that in your teaching, and in your witnessing? Our Lord Jesus said, "Do not attempt it. Do not be so foolish as to think you can do what I can do. Get this power before you try."

The visitation work is largely responsible for the success of our School. I know well that you have been going from door to door. One young lady wrote me of her work, and said she called at a Chinese laundry to ask if there were any children there. She heard one of the men say, "Somebody looking for a job; give her a dime"! But she hastened to explain that the only job she was looking for was the teaching of children in the Bible School. The next time you visitors go prospecting, before you knock at a door, will you try to remember that there is One Whose hands are wounded, Who has said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Will you literally ask Him, "Lord, as I knock at this door, wilt Thou knock with me, knock for me. Make my invitation effective; give me wisdom to meet any opposition that may be offered." Pray a minute, and then knock; and who knows but it may be the Good Shepherd knocking with His crook, out looking for the sheep or the lambs. But sure I am of this: you have no power whatever in this sphere apart from God. Therefore "tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

III.

We had better pause to EXPLAIN WHAT IT MEANS TO "TARRY". The disciples went to the upper room that day. Those disciples knew exactly what Jesus Christ meant. They went to the upper room, saying among themselves, "There is no use to preach, or teach, or do anything, but obey orders and wait." They waited! They said, "He is gone. We saw Him go. He told us He would send us a Messenger." Therefore they waited.

We think the radio is up-to-date. We are far behind the time. Hear this: "Suddenly there came a sound

from heaven." Jesus Christ had arrived in glory, and had sent the message to say, "I am seated on the right hand of God. I have received the promise of my Father. Here it is." And suddenly the place was filled, and the people were filled; and they knew that Jesus Christ was enthroned above, by the fact that the Holy Ghost had come to dwell among men.

Do you ever find the disciples waiting after that? They did not need to tarry again. They needed only to pray, and always to pray; for the Holy Ghost came on the day of Pentecost, and inaugurated the dispensation of the Spirit, and took up His work as the Executive of the Godhead, to administer the affairs of His church—and He has remained ever since. That is what our Lord meant when He said, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Blessed be God, the Holy Ghost is still with us.

I would not offend those who imagine they still must tarry. If there are any here this evening, will you not look at your Bible again? Would you tell me that Knox, and Calvin, a million martyrs who died for the faith, knew nothing about the gift of the Holy Ghost? Would you tell me that Wesley knew nothing about this supernatural power? Would you tell me that William Carey, the great pioneer of modern missions, was a stranger to the power of the Holy Ghost? Would you say that Hudson Taylor knew nothing about the Holy Ghost? Or George Mueller? Or Spurgeon? Or Moody? Or Charles Finney? Or the great army of spiritual giants whom God has used as polished shafts to effect His purposes? If you tell me they knew nothing about the power of the Holy Ghost, and that we must speak with tongues, and stand on our heads, and go through all kinds of contortions, to get the Holy Ghost, I must insist it is not true. It is not scriptural. The Holy Ghost is here and may now instantly be received.

How, then, have we to receive Him? Just as they did. We are to receive the Holy Spirit by faith. They waited because He said, "Tarry." You might just as well insist that one must go to Jerusalem to tarry as to insist that He comes only to those who "tarry". Do you not know the Holy Ghost is here? We have been poor servants, poor disciples; and yet, to the glory of His grace, we can declare that we have known something of the power of the Holy Ghost. Oh that we may know more! God give us more!

This word to *my unconverted friends*. Do you want salvation? Do you say, "I am such a wreck of a man, sir. I have tried so often to do better, but my will is feeble, my mind is corrupt. Often I have been moved to desire better things. Sometimes I have tried, but I have about given up. I have concluded there is not much chance for me, and I suppose I will end the day pretty much as I have gone thus far." No! No! I recall motoring on one occasion when something went wrong with my car. I stopped at the nearest garage, and the attendant examined the motor. "Can you repair it?" "No. There is something beyond repair. I shall have to telephone to Toronto for a new part." And I had to sit down with what patience I could command, and wait four or five hours for a new part. It had to be *new*. The garage man put in the new part, and as soon as he had done so everything was all right.

Some of us are in an even worse condition than that car: we are like "the wonderful one-horse shay". We need all new parts. You say if your car is very old, "There is no use wasting money on this car: it needs

all new parts." Yet most of the churches are busy wasting their energy on old cars—or, being interpreted, "the old man". We need a new heart. We need a new conscience. We need a new mind other than the carnal mind, a spiritual mind, a new will, with the very power of God in it—new all over.

Can you tell me any preacher who can do that for you? any school? No! But my Saviour can do it. Through the power of the Holy Ghost, He can make all things new: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

When that mechanic told me I needed a new part for my car I said to myself, I had better see how much I have in my pocket. How much will it cost? What does it cost to be made new? It costs more than Rockefeller could pay, or any other millionaire. But, blessed be God—

"Jesus paid it all,
All to Him we owe."

On the basis of what he has paid we can be new creatures in Christ Jesus.

You not only need a new car, but a new kind of gas to make it go. I have not heard of any car in the world, even the best car, that will run without power. If one should say, "You ask me to receive Christ to-night—what about Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday? The world, the flesh, and the devil, will attack me. What shall I do?" The power that can make you new will come to reside with you, to enable you to live; for Jesus Christ takes up His residence in our hearts.

I have a feeling to-night that I have forgotten how to preach, if I ever knew. Perhaps I have talked too long, but I do earnestly want to tell you this other thing, so that there can be no mistake about it. Your hope, my hope, the world's hope, is not here: it is up there. We have a Saviour Who came from above. He said, "Ye must be born from above." He said, "Set your affections on things above." He said that we may carry on until He calls us home, but "wait until ye be endued with power from on high". Everything from above.

Is that where our interest is centred? Is that where we are going some day? What a blessing it is that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are all ours! and that eternal salvation is the gift of His boundless grace! May the Lord help us, if we have not done so, to receive Him; and if we are His children, may we this very night resolve that we will not sleep until we have definitely applied for, and have received, on the strength of His promise, "power from on high". If we do that, there will be rejoicing above. The angels of God will sing their Hallelujahs yonder because we sing our Hallelujahs here.

Let us pray:

O Lord, Thou art ever with us. We know it, for Thou hast said, I am with you always; even unto the end of the age. This is one of the days, and Thou art with us still. Often have we seen and rejoiced in the working of the Holy Spirit. We beseech Thee to give grace to some poor sinner openly to confess Christ to-night, and grace to any of Thy dear children who may have lost the love they had, to come home again and renew their vows. Bless our meditation this evening. Help us to open our hearts to Thy word; give us spirits that will be hospitable to the truth, that so it may be profitable to every one of us because we believe. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

Vol. 10

No. 4

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 50 Fourth Quarter December 15th, 1935

THE VANITY OF EARTHLY THINGS

Lesson Text: Eccles. 1 to 6.

Golden Text: "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him."—Eccles. 3:14.

Bible School Reading: Eccles. 1:1-18.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS: Monday—I Kings 11:26-39; Tuesday—Prov. 14:1-14; Wednesday—Job 21:7-18; Thursday—Is. 59:9-15; Friday—Matt. 10:16-23; Saturday—Acts 17:1-9.

INTRODUCTION

The term "Ecclesiastes" signifies preacher. The author applies this to himself, and then proceeds with his preaching. His text is, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity". This he proves from experience and observation, concluding with emphasis on the excellence of wisdom. His evident purpose is to draw men from the pursuit of earthly objects, and to direct their attention to the things pertaining to God. The book has been termed the saddest one of the Bible. It has also been referred to as the book of the natural man, describing, as it does, the experience of all who seek satisfaction under the sun. Concerning the identity of the writer some difference of opinion exists, but from internal evidence it seems clearly indicated that Solomon was the author. He refers to himself as the son of David, king of Jerusalem (1:1, 12); and as having great wisdom (1:16); and great possessions (2:4-9); and as having set out many proverbs (12:9, 10).

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN (1:1-18)

In dealing with his subject of the vanity of all things under the sun, the Preacher intimates, first, the unprofitable nature of all labour under the sun, viewed in the light of eternity (Matt. 16:26). In all labour there is profit (Prov. 14:23), but only in its proper place. He then shows the brevity of man's duration on this earth (v. 4), with its substantiation of the former statement respecting man's labour; after which, as against man's changeableness, he emphasizes the continuity of nature's activities (vs. 5-11): "The earth abideth forever"; the sun rises and sets; the wind blows; the rivers run into the sea, and the water returns to the rivers; "the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be"; and "there is no new thing under the sun". The world has gone on for thousands of years just as in the present day. It is the wise person who learns from the past. After these introductory words, Solomon reverts to his own experience in support of his thesis; referring to his investigation of these things, and his conclusion respecting his efforts (vs. 12-18). From his position in society, and his possession of knowledge and wisdom, he was favourably situated for giving a just estimate of life. A life without God, and without hope for the future, is barren indeed of all that makes life worth while (Eph. 2:12; I Cor. 15:19). The chief pursuit of life should be the accomplishment of the divine purpose (Eph. 1:4). How may we form a correct judgment of life's activities?

NO PROFIT UNDER THE SUN (2:1-26)

Solomon then proceeds to test pleasure and luxury, to see if in these he can discover life's chief good. He had sought mirth and wine. He had servants, and cattle, and peculiar treasures. He also had men and women singers, with musical instruments of all sorts. He was greater than all who had preceded him, and, having the wherewithal to procure what he desired, he "kept not from them"—but, on examination of these luxurious pleasures, he found they were but vanity and vexation of spirit (vs. 1-11). Those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:4) should study this record, remembering Solomon's deep experience of all that the world could give him in the way of

pleasure. His conclusion implies this world, even at its best, does not give satisfaction; and that something more than the material is needed for this purpose. None but Christ can satisfy; therefore it is the part of wisdom to seek those things which are above (Col. 3:1-3). Continuing his investigation, Solomon compares wisdom and folly, and decides on the excellency of the former (vs. 12, 13); but, realizing one event happens to both wise and foolish (vs. 14-16), and that he must leave his labour to another, he expresses his disappointment with his labour (vs. 17-23). Rehoboam, the son of Solomon followed his father on the throne, and acted so foolishly that the kingdom was rent in twain during his regime (I Kings 12:18-20). The closing verses of the chapter relate to false pleasure, and the source of real pleasure in God (vs. 24-26). It is only the labour of which God approves that receives reward here and hereafter (I Cor. 3:9-15). How may we labour acceptably unto God?

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN (3:1-22)

Labour, though not giving satisfaction as the chief good of man, is yet perfectly lawful in its place. This is observed in the fact that there is a time for everything under the sun (vs. 1-8). It is our duty to attend to each thing in its own time. But to make any, or all, of these things the chief object of life is to give them an unprofitable nature (v. 9). Each thing must be kept in its place, and God's business put first. God has given man the faculty of observation; yet he cannot understand the work of God (vs. 10, 11). It is not possible for the finite to comprehend the Infinite; but undoubtedly, due to his sin, man went into darkness respecting the things of God; and in the natural state he remains there unto the present time (2 Cor. 4:4). Light in this matter comes alone from God (I John 1:5). In contrast with the efforts of man, God's work is eternal, and continues unchangeable (vs. 14, 15). Succeeding thoughts relate to wickedness in the place of judgment, and the final divine judgment on men (vs. 16-22). Note may be made of the certainty of death, and of the judgment which follows it (Heb. 9:27). With such a future in mind, we should use the present time to the greatest advantage in the favour of God (v. 22). How may we know our service is pleasing unto God?

OPPRESSION UNDER THE SUN (4:1-16)

Returning to the thought of wickedness on the earth, Solomon expresses himself respecting oppressions. So bad were these that from the natural standpoint the dead and the unborn were in a better state than those who were witnesses of it (vs. 1-3). Envy is also considered, and the conclusion reached that the one who exhibits it is in a rather poor case, while the righteous person is in a position of blessedness (vs. 4-6). The miser receives condemnation; commendation is given of the helpfulness of companionship; and a comparison is instituted between the wise child and the foolish king (vs. 7-16). Note Solomon and Jeroboam (v. 13; I Kings 11:26); and Joseph (v. 14; Gen. 41:14). Observe also the cruelties of sin, and the alleviation of them through the power of God. What should be our attitude toward such cruelties?

RELIGION AND RICHES UNDER THE SUN (5:1 to 6:12)

From vanity in the natural realm, Solomon passes to possible vanities in the religious realm. First, he exhorts respecting the attitude of one entering the house of God, and his conduct after entering it (vs. 1-3). Note the necessity for reverence in attitude, and definiteness in prayer; also for carefulness in the words used in prayer. Warning is thereafter given concerning vows (vs. 4-7). God always keeps His word, and He expects men to do the same. There is danger in failing to do this. Observe the connection of dreams with religion, and the many vagaries they have given rise to in modern days. The final judgment is then referred to (v. 8); after which riches are mentioned. In connection with these, note the statements respecting the earth (v. 9), the unsatisfactory nature of riches (vs. 10-12); the accumulation of riches by wicked means (vs. 13, 14) the certain separation of the individual from his riches (vs. 15-17), the use of honest riches (vs. 18-20), prevention of the enjoyment of riches (6:1-5), their unprofitable nature (vs. 6-9); and the concluding question respecting the chief good of man in the light of the vanities referred to (vs. 10-12). What should be the chief object of man's pursuit on this earth?

A WORD TO THE FRIENDS OF JARVIS STREET INTERESTS

We have many friends throughout the world who are reached through THE GOSPEL WITNESS, who have very kindly adopted this paper, and some of the interests it pleads, as objects of their religious benevolence. We are most grateful to all these kind friends. It is only by their help that this paper, without any revenue from advertisements, has been able, through the recent distressing years, to "continue unto this day". But the voice that is not heard is soon forgotten, so THE GOSPEL WITNESS once again speaks for itself and its fellow-interests.

Our expenses are kept down to a minimum. The Editor has not received one cent for his labour in which he has delighted these fourteen years. Practically all our income goes for printing and postage and yet THE GOSPEL WITNESS has been used to put thousands of dollars into other funds for worthy objects—far more than it has brought into its own fund. Will the friends who receive blessing from its pages remember that not only at the end of the financial year, when we make our plea, but continually, expenses have to be met on account of printing and postage. And please do not think THE GOSPEL WITNESS is a small matter, which needs little money. Gifts of thousands of dollars could be easily employed without paying any salaries, or extending THE GOSPEL WITNESS work in any way. Will you not help us with much or little.

Then there is the WITNESS' younger brother, Toronto Baptist Seminary. He is in his growing years, and has an appetite equal to that of a man. We need thousands of dollars to help him—between \$2,000 and \$3,000 monthly for the two of them. These children of ours are great luxuries, but heavy responsibilities.

Once again we venture to ask, Have you made your will? Whether you have or not, will you not see to it that that will makes some provision for helping the Seminary? People imagine that money given in other directions helps the Seminary. There is only one way to help the Seminary financially, and that is definitely to specify in the will that the money is to be given to "Toronto Baptist Seminary, associated with Jarvis Street Baptist Church". Will you not make your will at once, and help us as much as you can?

TO CORRESPONDENTS

The Editor has been away from the office for the greater part of the time since October 8th. Many letters remain unanswered, though acknowledged. Among these correspondents are many GOSPEL WITNESS readers; and this note is written to say we hope to send them a full reply at an early date.

Because there have been so many enquiries, perhaps it is well for us to say that the Editor's illness has not been serious, though somewhat painful, resulting from a fall on October 8th, on the stairs in his own home. He is rapidly returning to what the late President Harding would have called "normalcy"; and hopes in the very near future to be going "full speed ahead" with all his duties, none the worse for wear.

THE WEEK-END IN JARVIS STREET

Last Sunday morning the attendance at the School was just nine short of 1,300—1,291. Rev. W. S. Whitcombe, B.A., was the preacher at the morning service, which was an occasion of great blessing to all. In the evening the Pastor returned to his pulpit after some weeks of absence, and delivered the message appearing in this issue. A large congregation was present, and this service also seemed to be a means of blessing.

The Pastor is grateful for the splendid loyalty of the Jarvis Street members, which leads them to continue the work with unabated vigour in his absence. Once we called at a certain home for the late famous Dr. John G. Paton, apostle to the New Hebrides. He was a gracious man, and, as he bade his hostess good-bye at the door, he said, "Thank you for your kindness", and then lapsing into his Scotch he said, "The Lord reward ye, for I canna'." So say we to the splendid workers who so nobly carry on.

NEWS OF UNION CHURCHES

Galt

On November 20th, Galt Regular Baptist Church held its first Church Supper on the occasion of the anniversary of the organization of the church. The ladies of the church, including one most useful girl aged nine, prepared a bountiful and tasty meal to which one hundred sat down. The banquet was held in the Y.M.C.A. because the Galt brethren have no church building of their own.

Following the supper a programme of interest and inspiration was given. Friends were present from Kitchener, Paris, and Toronto, and several young people who have recently been converted in the nearby village of Blair. The speakers were Mr. D. S. Dinnick of the Toronto Baptist Seminary, who under the direction of Rev. W. N. Charlton of Hespeler, began the work a year ago last summer, and Rev. W. Gordon Brown. Mr. Brown gave a stirring message on the conversion of Matthew, and his methods in soul-winning.

This was a "tea meeting" of the right sort. The Spirit of the Lord was manifestly present, and a time of really happy fellowship was enjoyed. One interesting detail was that a number of those who took part in some way during the evening were converts of the last year. God is blessing the work in Galt. New faces are being seen at the services constantly. A Women's Missionary Society has been lately organized. The Sunday school has almost reached the capacity of the little building which the brethren rent, and a spirit of enthusiasm is among the people. We shall hear of great things from them.

Belleville and Trenton

Special meetings were held at Belleville from November 11th to 15th. The Pastor, Mr. J. Scott, preached on Monday, Wednesday and Friday; Mr. A. Dallimore on Tuesday and Sunday evenings, and Rev. W. S. Whitcombe on Friday. A number of new faces were seen in the meetings, and one young man professed conversion.

During the same week special meetings were held in the Trenton Baptist Church where Student-pastor E. Hall is labouring, with the assistance of his father, Rev. Jas. Hall of Ottawa. A number of strangers attended, and blessing was experienced. Three young men professedly came to Christ. On the Sunday evening four adults, who were the fruit of previous pastoral labour, were baptised by Rev. Jas. Hall.

Liberia

Geah-bar Zondo

Our first letter from Rev. G. D. Mellish since his return to the Field is dated October 12th, 1935, and we know our readers will all be interested in reading part of it.

"We know that you will have been looking for a letter from us long before now," he writes, "but it has just seemed that we have had so many jobs since our arrival back on the field that all writing has had to be put aside.

It was nearly two weeks after landing before we actually arrived here at Geah-bar Zondo, for it took the best part of one week to finish up with the customs, and get some of the loads started for Geah-bar Zondo. Then we left the rest of the boxes at the beach in charge of a school boy who sent them off as men went down to carry them. Next we had several days at New Cess watching the clouds and the weather, just wondering when the rain was going to let up so the rivers would go down just a little.

Before we could settle down there were several repair jobs to do in the house, and we are still doing some on other buildings, so that I have spent a good deal of time at carpentry work.

My, it was certainly a grand sight to see Geah-bar Zondo again, and what a welcome we received from the people! Mr. Clubine has certainly looked after things well, so that all the work is substantially the same as before, except that he had to curtail slightly when he was alone. However, this type of building certainly requires a great deal of work, and it is so discouraging when you have to repair the same places time after time, and then it will not stay. We are all wondering now just what to do with our house. It is now over four years old and is getting very rotten. The

roof leaks like a sieve in many places. Mr. Clubine used to repair it a great deal before we returned, as that was the season when many wind storms occur, and these blew the thatch off. Now we are afraid to repair it, for if you put up a ladder to repair one place you will likely make half a dozen more holes. Thursday we had a very heavy rain and during it Mr. Clubine just turned around for a minute to light a lamp, when a whole deluge poured down over his Bible and books on the language from a place which had suddenly sprung a leak.

Mr. Clubine has done a great deal of splendid and valuable language work, and now all the missionaries on the field intend to follow the same methods of study so that we are really hopeful of accomplishing things. The workers have constituted Mr. Clubine and me as the language committee. We are very happy that Mr. Clubine is stationed with us, and we intend to do a great deal of work together in the coming months. First of all, we shall endeavour to combine the work that I have done with his. We have now settled on the general system of spelling of the language, and Mr. Clubine has carefully investigated and found just what sounds were in the language so that we have settled on what letters are necessary for it. Just this week Mr. Clubine has finished a translation of the Gospel of Mark. Now we shall go over my work on the Gospel of John, changing most of the spelling, correcting mistakes, etc. Then our work will be a dictionary which may serve as a reference for all the workers on the field, and along with that Mr. Clubine will rewrite the grammar notes which were destroyed in the fire, changing them a great deal. Next we are hoping to make a start on teaching some of the Bassa people to read and write their own language, and at the same time give them Scripture portions printed in their language which they can use. For this purpose we are ordering a very small flat duplicating outfit from England which may serve temporarily for this purpose, and later on we may purchase a proper duplicating machine. It seems that one of the main hopes, if not the main hope, of seeing this work go on amongst the Bassa people is to get the Word to them in their own language.

We are glad to say that the services on the mission are very well attended, especially by the women. There are many who come every Sunday regularly and show a real interest in the Word, though as yet they have not told us anything definite. We just continue to hold them up in prayer, and we know that the Lord will have His way in this place.

I am sorry that I did not get a letter off that you would receive before the Convention, but we shall certainly be remembering you very particularly during the days of the Convention, and praying that only the Lord's will may be done in it.

Briscoe St., London

On Sunday, November 10th, the evening service was well attended, the church being practically filled. There were two decisions in response to the invitation, one a mother, for salvation; and one of the most recent converts decided to follow her Lord in baptism.

Sunday, November 17th, was even better. There was a record attendance at the Bible School in the morning, the church being practically filled for the following service, and then at the extra service of praise and testimony at three o'clock in the afternoon a splendid congregation assembled. In the evening the church was filled to capacity. A number of chairs had to be brought in to accommodate the crowd. The Kinsmen Quartet from Toronto sang at all three services. Their ministry of song was characterized by heart fervor and devotion, the heart-music that God hears, "making melody in your heart to the Lord". We thanked God for their choice selection of hymns of praise. They unveiled His face and gave us a view of His beautiful countenance. At the close of the service six responded to the appeal of the gospel in word and song, all for salvation. There was many a bitter tear of repentance—the Lord is greatly blessing the ministry of our Pastor, Rev. R. D. Guthrie. The fellowship at Briscoe Street is being knit together in holy love. The unity of the Spirit obtains, and many strangers are coming to the services as a result of the personal appeal by the house-to-house evangelistic band. God is answering the prayers of our people in a way that is causing rejoicing and thanksgiving on every hand. "To God be the glory, great things He hath done."—H. WATSON.

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