

The Gospel Witness

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AND IN DEFENCE OF THE FAITH ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS.
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"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

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WHAT DOES PRAYER ACCOMPLISH?

It is rather disturbing to discover, on careful analysis, how many generally devout people have little thought of prayer's having any other than a subjective value. If in their prayer, they are inspired to praise, and in the exercise are led to recall many of the promises that are "exceeding great and precious", they enjoy a sense of spiritual exultation, and feel a very happy and wholesome reaction upon their own spirit. But should not the element of praise in our prayers really be designed to minister to the Lord? He is described as the One Who "inhabitest the praises of Israel". We believe there is abundant scriptural justification for the assumption that God delights in the praises of His people. We ought therefore to praise God primarily as an act of worship, of real devotion to Him; and in doing so, to believe that we actually are permitted, by His grace, to minister to the divine pleasure. Of course it will minister joy to our own souls at the same time, but we ought to give our principal thought to the objective aspect of prayer, even that part of it which consists of praiseful worship.

Sometimes our prayers are petitions for guidance, and there is a special danger than when we thus petition the Lord we may, like the Pharisee, pray with ourselves, and having put the case before God, and repeated our own desires in respect thereto, the subjective influence of prayer may be then allowed the preeminence. We ought, when praying for guidance, to seek the illumination of our minds by the principles and precepts of the Word, and carefully to study our circumstances and unfolding events in an endeavour to come to that wisdom which will enable us to understand what the will of the Lord is.

Again, the objective aspect of our prayer for guidance requires the chief emphasis. Otherwise, by the repetition of our own thoughts and desires, and the stimulation of our own imagination in connection therewith, our prayer may really become a means of self-hypnotism, and instead of obtaining guidance from God we may persuade ourselves that we now have a knowledge of His will, in which case almost certainly such fancied knowledge will be identical with our own desires.

The same may be said of such prayers as seek special help from God, in given circumstances: power for service, deliverance from circumstantial distress, the relief of an urgent need of some sort. In all these matters, in order to effectual prayer, emphasis must be laid upon the objective aspect of our petition. Then may we

place our heart's desires before the Lord, and plead for special divine intervention, that the thing we ask may be done for us. Too often, however, the subjective influence of our request may be allowed to possess the mind, and by much asking there is stirred up within us a something which we are disposed to identify as faith, and to persuade ourselves that we now really believe that we shall have the things for which we have asked; when, as a matter of fact, we do not believe in the exercise of divine power in our behalf so much as we feel it is probable that our desires will be realized. We should exercise our minds to see that our faith is faith indeed. That is to say, that it is not a subjective confidence born of our own praying, that there is no element of self-trust in any of our petitions, but that we have trusted the promises, laid hold upon the Promisor, until there is wrought in the soul, by the Spirit of God, a deep-seated conviction that God will really do the thing we have asked Him to do. Then we shall hear Him say, "I the Lord have spoken it: I also will do it."

We need thus to be constantly on guard lest self should intrude into the holy of holies. As we are not heard for our much speaking, neither are our prayers answered because we deserve that they should be. The essence of faith, after all, consists in an apprehension of the objective reality of Christ as the living Saviour, by Whose death and resurrection and perpetual intercession, we are accepted of God. To behold the Lamb of God means far more than to glance in His direction, and give a nod of recognition: it means perpetually, by faith, to gaze upon Him, feast the soul upon the reflection that He is the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world, and that by His boundless merit the vilest sinner is cleansed from all unrighteousness: "This man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."

HONESTY IN THE COLLECTION PLATE

We are not speaking of offerings that have been deliberately planned, and the amount predetermined—for example, the regular contributions of people through a weekly offering envelope—but of giving to what are sometimes called “loose collections”. Such offerings afford an opportunity for people to give to a particular cause.

How many really give when the collection-plate is passed? Nickles or coppers, or at the best, ten-cent pieces, predominate; and we are inclined to think that a very large number of the pieces of money put upon a collection plate are not “given” at all: they are put upon the plate because the person doing so does not like the plate to pass without his putting something on. If the smallest coin be the limit of one's ability, then in this, as in other matters, “if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.” But if the smallest coin is put on merely for the sake of appearance, to give the impression that one is giving, is there not an element of deception in the act? We ought to give, no matter how or when or where, to the Lord's work, generously and as unto the Lord. Sometimes people seem to be manifestly rather ashamed of their giving, and put the coin on the plate in such a way as to make it impossible for anyone to see how much was given.

If the Lord Himself were to pass the collection-plate, how much should we give? As a matter of fact, He does so. He still sits “over against the treasury”, and when the widow casts in her two mites, He appraises her gift, not by the size of her gift, so much as by the fact that she has nothing left. Sometimes we have heard the collection announced after this fashion, “We shall worship the Lord with our offering.” There was a great deal of worship in the widow's mites; but there is not much worship in the act of putting the smallest coin possible upon the collection-plate merely so as to appear as a contributor.

ABOUT THE SEMINARY AND THE GOSPEL WITNESS

We are most grateful to any friends who have responded to our appeal for help in the rebuilding of Jarvis Street Church, and are still hoping to hear from hundreds more. But at the moment we are chiefly concerned for the Seminary and THE GOSPEL WITNESS Funds. Many people who are most generously disposed have only a little income, and readily respond to a special appeal. There is always danger therefore that appeals for special objects will divert many from regular funds. While many of our friends have been most kind in responding to our appeal for the Building Fund, we are finding that the Seminary and GOSPEL WITNESS Funds have been somewhat overlooked.

If one member of a family should fall and break a leg, it is very important to get the doctor, and have the bones set, and the patient cared for; but it will not do to let the rest of the family go hungry while the patient is being nursed. That is our fear just now. Every week THE GOSPEL WITNESS goes out, the expense of the Seminary continues, and we are trying to carry on all our interests; and, at the same time, give thought and energy to the gigantic task of rebuilding the church.

We feel sure we have only to remind our friends of this to ensure a resumption of contributions to the objects we have named. We shall be most grateful for contributions to these funds.

TIME TO COOL DOWN

Many very good people have rather violent tempers, and are easily provoked—and this is a provoking world. The average person is likely to meet a hundred causes for irritation every day. The quick-tempered person is disposed to respond very readily to such irritation. But everyone who amounts to anything has a bit of temper tucked away in his constitution somewhere, and if the annoyance is sufficiently severe, such a temper may manifest itself.

But whether the response be quick or slow, it always has an unhappy reaction upon one's judgment. It is a dangerous course to make decisions when one's temper has been stirred. The smoke from it clouds one's vision, and any action taken under such provocation is far more likely to be wrong than right. One ought to cultivate the habit of taking time to cool down, to let the irritation pass; and usually it will be found to have left not even a scratch behind. And if one can but let the matter which clamoured for action, rest in abeyance over night, usually when morning comes it will be gone with the dew—and we shall have to conjure our brains to recall what it was that upset us so greatly yesterday.

THE SIN OF EXAGGERATION

“Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.” Multiplied disappointments serve to make most people rather cautious about attaching too much importance to anyone's word, especially if that word relates to anything of great value. Where money or property is concerned, people are in the habit of exercising great care, that any word spoken or written respecting these things actually has full value. People are seldom tempted to exaggerate in any sort of commercial transaction. They count the money they pay out, and carefully count what they receive, but in other respects how very careless many good people are in the matter of language.

The story of the boy who reported “thousands of cats on our roof” is so familiar as to be almost proverbial. But it is a common habit to which few people are immune, to enlarge upon the actualities of life, by invariably magnifying the positive to the superlative. We know no more clear illustration of this tendency than is to be found in the reports of people respecting the size of congregations. We were once at an afternoon meeting in Westminster Chapel, where Dr. Campbell Morgan has ably ministered for so long. A man in the same pew remarked upon the great numbers that assembled for Dr. Morgan's Friday evening Bible lecture. He informed us that Dr. Morgan invariably had three thousand in attendance. We asked him where the lecture was given, and he said, “In this building.” We said, “You surely do not mean that this building seats three thousand?” “Oh yes; that is its capacity.” We happened to be preaching at the time at Spurgeon's Tabernacle, but were of course quite unknown to the man beside us. So we said, “Then this place must be as large as Spurgeon's Tabernacle?” “Oh no”, said he, “that seats six thousand.” As a matter of fact, the present Tabernacle seats only twenty-seven hundred and fifty.

But we have grown so accustomed to such exaggerations that we have formed the habit of cutting all estimates of religious assemblies in two. We know a building in Toronto that was occupied by a certain congre-

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

A WEEK-NIGHT MEDITATION ON SOVEREIGN GRACE

An Address by Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Cooke's Presbyterian Church, Toronto, Thursday Evening, May 26th, 1938.

(Stenographically Reported)

"Till he come."—I Corinthians 11:26.

"And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited.

"Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.

"Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.

"As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts: so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the Lord."
—Ezekiel 36:35-38.

In whatever direction one turns his eyes in our day, and whatever be the subject of one's thought, we see men floundering about in the ruins which their own folly and wickedness have pulled down upon their heads. Let it be but a small section of life, a nation, or the world at large, that is brought under review, one cannot but feel that we are living in a day in which God, in a very special sense, is making foolish the wisdom of men; when human limitations and insufficiency are proclaimed by universal human failure. By a thousand loudspeakers we are being advised to try as many new methods by which men, in the littleness of their wisdom and might, would improve upon the present general appalling condition of things.

Even in the realm of religion we are recommended to all kinds of human endeavour, to merely human schemes for human betterment. How refreshing it is to turn to the Bible! It has a different Voice. In the New Testament we find the Lord Jesus saying, "My sheep hear my voice." There is always something unique, something peculiar and distinctive about the voice of God. They said of the Lord Jesus Who was "God manifest in the flesh", that "never man spake like this man." How wisely and accurately might we also say, "Never book spake like this Book"!

If you read the chapter from which our scripture is taken—indeed, the book of Ezekiel's prophecy—you will observe it was written to people in trouble. Ezekiel saw his marvellous visions, not in a day of great prosperity, but when he was among the captives by the river of Chebar. It was then and there, he tells us, "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God." "And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, and a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings." Then he saw wheels whose rings were so high that they were dreadful. Considering the living creatures of fourfold aspect, he observed, "The spirit of the living creature was in the wheels"; "When they went,

they went upon the four sides: and they turned not when they went." As his eye followed them, he saw above the firmament that was over their heads the appearance of a throne, and the likeness of the appearance of a man above upon it. In spite of all the perplexities, the inexpressible sorrow, and the indescribable distress of the people, strangers in a strange land, where they sat beside the rivers of Babylon, and in harmony with their sobbing waters, hanged their harps upon the willows in the midst thereof—amidst all this gloom and despondency, the heavens were opened, and somewhere above the earth, and over all the chaotic conditions of things which he observed below, Ezekiel saw the appearance of a throne, and on the throne there was One Who bore the likeness of a man, a Man in the heavens, humanity at last redeemed, triumphant, crowned, in the person of Him Who was to come, Who is *the Man*.

The marvellous wheels which filled the prophet with awe, the dimensions of which he could not estimate, but which were so high they were dreadful, were not lifeless mechanical wheels, for "the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels"; and like the living creatures, "they went everyone straight forward." All the machinery of Providence was moving in one general direction, all in the direction of a throne: "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."

That, really, is the theme of the whole Book. It is a prophecy of divine triumph, of ultimate victory. You could not find a passage such as I have read this evening, in any other book than the Bible. The most daring human imagination would never put into human lips so strange a word. No novelist could ever imagine anyone's announcing a programme which required for its execution, power adequate to subdue nations, to control all the forces of nature, to subjugate the whole earth, and to bring all its decrees to a sublime fulfilment at a particular time, at a particular place, for the honour and glory of a particular Person. No one but God could ever conceive such a programme.

I would remind you, particularly some of you who are younger, and who may in the course of your reading and

your contact with an unbelieving world, find your faith in divine things, and especially in the integrity and divine inspiration and authority of the Bible as the word of God, challenged—I would have you remember that such a principle as that to which I have just now called your attention, is really one of the most striking proofs of the divine inspiration of Scripture: namely, that it speaks with a divine voice, it dares to defy all enemies, and to predict complete, final, absolute, everlasting, victory over evil. I say, no one but God could imagine it—and no one could have written it had not God given him His word. Hence the assumptions of Scripture are as authoritative as its specific assertions.

It would be possible to labour to show to what people, and to what precise day and age this particular prophetic word applies; but I do not know that it would be possible, however we might study to do so, to reach finality. In earthly courts, nothing weighs more with a judge on the bench than the citation of a precedent. That is to say, there is submitted for interpretation a particular statute, by a certain matter of disputation being brought for the court's decision under the authority of that statute. Then it becomes the function of the court to interpret and apply that statute, that law, to the particular case at issue. The court's attention is called to the fact that, under the same law, some similar case was somewhere at some time brought to judgment, and that a court, in the exercise of its authority, had put upon that law a certain interpretation, in its application to the case before it. That interpretation and application of law to a similar case have established a judicial precedent which binds the court in subsequent cases; for the judge will not, under the same law, give a judgment that is at variance with a judgment already recorded.

Our whole British system of jurisprudence is based on the principle of broadening down from precedent to precedent, in laying the foundations of righteousness and truth. The great Judge never contradicts Himself. He never acts in one age or dispensation in a way that would be at variance with His rule in some other age. What God did in His grace to people, and for people, throughout the Old Testament dispensation is a precedent upon which faith must rely. Hence the principles of prophecies already fulfilled are still regnant, and have application to us. Nothing is obsolete in the Book. We may therefore study the scriptural history from the garden of Eden down through all the vicissitudes of human life, and find that what God did in one age becomes a precedent for His action in another.

When you read the Psalms, you will see how the different Psalmists—for the Psalms were not all written by David: some were written by Moses, some by Asaph—very often encourage themselves by reference to the past: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old." I think it is often a safer method of interpretation of Scripture to look for these continuing principles which have their application to every phase of human life through all ages, than to try to split the Bible up into many "dispensations" on the assumption that so to do is rightly to divide the word of truth—and say, "This belongs to the Jew, and this belongs to the Gentile; and this belongs to the church of God." As though God changed; He never changes. The Bible is one and indivisible. It is the word of the living God Who is the same "yesterday, and to-day, and for ever".

I.

You see in the verses I have read how God announced His determination to care for His own name, and for His own glory. I am glad our gracious God is the custodian of His own name. He can look after it better than you or I could, in a day when He is set at naught, when modern Pharaohs, like ancient ones, ask the question, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice", and then assert, "I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." It is well to hear God say in effect, "Do not worry about that. I will introduce myself to him in due time. He shall know who I am before I have done with Him. I will have pity on my great name, and will glorify my own name."

Often I speak to you of the grace of God, and of a grace that is sovereign, that is unlimited. "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." Ah no! We are not sovereign. There is Someone above us, and we must say, "We will do so-and-so if we are permitted."

What is the principle of divine sovereignty? It is a concept in which we conceive of God as One Who knows no limitation whatever, and Who says, "I will do thus and so", and asks no one's permission whether He will do it or not. "I will do it", saith He. See men dodging about in Europe to-day. Hitler says, "I will do so-and-so"—and people are afraid, and let him do it. Someone else says, "I will do so-and-so"—and others bow to his threat. But Czechoslovakia says, "We are not disposed to allow you to have your own way; we are here"—and Hitler finds it convenient to go home for a while. These so-called dictators are only midgets after all, men whose breath is in their nostrils—and how much smaller are we! But the Voice of our scripture, and of the Book, is a sovereign Voice, the voice of One Who says, "I will do so-and-so"—and He breaks in upon this scene of desolation and distress, upon a ruined city, a wasted country, and scattered people, a land full of uncleanness, a fearful wreck, and says, "I will make it clean. I will rebuild the city; I will replant the desolate waste; I will cleanse the land—I will even cleanse the people. I will do more: I will give them a new heart, and take away the old one. I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them an heart of flesh."

There is a saying among men of the world, that certain people are "hard boiled"—by which they mean, calloused, hardened. There are people whose hearts are like stone. Have you not tried in your Christian testimony, to reach some people like that? You might as well have spoken to a stone. They are as dead as a stone, as cold as a stone, as hard as a stone. You can do nothing with them. How hard people are! But here is One Who says, "I can reach them. You had better leave that to me. I will perform an operation, and take that stony heart away; I will give them an heart of flesh; I will make them tender, responsive; I will make them new creatures; I will give them new spirits altogether." That is the biggest of all miracles, far bigger than planting a garden, or building a city. But here is the voice of One Who says, "I can do it, and I will do it."

What a blessing this Thursday evening that we can shut our newspapers and say, "Let me have no more of it." Do you want to get into a new realm of thought? Open the Book. Get light from Heaven; hear a Voice; read of One Who says, "I am not surprised nor distressed in any way. I will do it." I wish you and I could believe that more profoundly. Sometimes we sing, as we address our own souls,

"Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much."

Read Ezekiel through at your leisure, and if you are not in the habit of marking your Bible, it might do you good to begin. As you go through it, take your pencil and see how often through Ezekiel's prophecy God says, "I will", "I will", "I will", "I will." It is the sovereign will of God moving through history to ultimate triumph and complete and universal victory.

We can find no cause in ourselves for His dealing with us in grace. Oh that we might feel ourselves worthy—but we cannot. I dare say that even with those of us who are Christians, we are sometimes almost afraid to pray, to ask for certain things; because all unconsciously—though perhaps we do not formulate our thought in precise terms—we say, "Who am I that God should answer my poor prayers? What have I done to deserve that my prayers should be answered?" There are people who have the habit of saying, "I have great faith in prayer"—and some people have. I have none. You have great faith in prayer? I know some people who seem to think if they pray long enough, and say words enough, they will get something from God. You do not really mean that. It is an error in expression. What you mean is that you have faith in a God Who answers prayer.

If you could analyze your prayers you would say, "There is no reason why God should listen to a prayer like this of mine, a man with my record. Who am I that I should dare to address the throne of Heaven with expectation of an answer. What presumption!" It is presumption!—the height and length and depth and breadth of presumption, for anyone to assume that there could be any reason in us, why God should listen to our voice. But God says, "I have announced the programme of grace, of a great thing I purpose to do—and be it known unto you, I want you to know that I am not doing it for your sake." Blessed be God for that: not for our sakes, not because we deserve it, but "for mine holy name's sake."

You remember when the law was given on Sinai, one of the commandments was, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." When the disciples said to Christ Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples", He said, "When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven"—He is the Person to Whom our prayer is to be addressed. And what was the first petition? "Hallowed be thy name." God is very careful of His name. That is a study for you. Begin at Genesis, if you like, and go through the Book, and see how careful God is of His name.

I sometimes get letters bearing a signature, with the name that the signature is supposed to represent, typed underneath. I had one but a day or two ago, and I was very thankful that the name was typed, for no mortal would ever be able to guess what it was. I knew a man who was a very prominent, professional man, who

wrote a letter to the then Prime Minister of the Dominion, Sir John A. Macdonald. The letter was read by the Premier, and a reply written and enclosed in an envelope. The signature was cut from the bottom of the letter received, and pasted on the envelope, and above it written, "Believed to be so-and-so"—and let the postman wrestle with it. I was told that that man deliberately made that almost undecipherable signature. It was scarcely a signature: it was almost like the "mark" of the illiterate. But no one could copy it. It was deliberately designed so that it should not be forged.

God will not allow anyone to forge His name. You cannot forge the divine name upon the bank of Heaven. God is careful of His signature, of His name, of the honour of His name; because His name is representative of what He is, of the character of God—nay, more than that: the very nature of God is revealed in His many names. You remember how God said to Moses when He sent him to Pharaoh, "I am the Lord: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them." He used a new name, the name of the living One. "Go to Pharaoh and say, I AM hath sent me."

God complains in this chapter, "When they entered upon the heathen, whither they went they profaned my holy name." He said even to His own people, "You have dragged my name in the mire; you have dishonoured me; you have disgraced me; and the heathen do not know who I am. They mock at me, and take my name in vain." So said He, "I will have pity on mine own great name. This is my programme which I will sovereignly bring to pass; and be it known unto you that I am going to do this for mine own name's sake, and not for yours."

How the church has profaned the name of the living God among the heathen! The church that bears the name of Christ—I mean, what is called a church or churches, the people who have taken upon themselves the Christian name everywhere, the Roman Church, the Greek Church, the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church, Baptist churches of all sorts, Modernist churches, worldly churches that have turned the very house of God into a dance-hall, and a gaming-house, a theatre, a house of merchandise. Look over what is called Christendom—Christendom because the name of Christ has been put upon it, and what have we? A great nation mocking at Christianity, and putting their preachers in prison. There is not a place in Germany where there is a chapel or a church where a preacher can stand without the fear that there is a Nazi spy listening to what he may say. He dare not say anything but that which is prescribed. Openly Germany says, "We will have done with this Christianity altogether." Twenty-five years ago—those of you who can remember so long—you never believed that you would live to see the day when civilization would mock at Christianity, and say that it is an enemy of the state, and that there is no hope of progress but by abandoning it altogether. Think of Russia with its campaign of godlessness—and other nations that have not gone quite so far as that, but in effect have equally profaned the name of God among the heathen.

It is hard for a man who loses his reputation ever to recover his good name. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold." I saw that scripture on one occasion in the office of a great banker, carved on a panel above

his office door. I talked with him about it, and he told me that a good name to a financial institution is everything, and if it loses that, it loses all. An individual who loses his or her name finds it very, very difficult to recover it.

The people of God in all ages have brought dishonour upon the name of God. His name has been profaned among the heathen. Can you imagine its ever being recovered again? I cannot imagine anyone's so preaching, or any organization so working, as to wipe out the stain; but I delight to know that the great God has said, "I will look after that, that they may know that I am the Lord; and I will do it for my name's sake."

II.

"Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it." He said in effect, "I will do it in such a way that they will know who did it. The time shall come when I will not work anonymously: I will let men know that it is I the Lord Who doeth this thing." What good news that is! "The magicians did so with their enchantments." But there came a time when the enchantments of the magicians would work no longer, then they stood back and said, "This is the finger of God." They confessed it was beyond them:

That is what this world needs, such a manifestation of divine power that the heathen will have to say. "That is not of man: that is of God." Said our God, "The heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places."

May not all this be true and applicable to us as a church? May we not expect God to bless us in revival power, to give a new heart to the people, and multiply the people, to build again the city, and plant again the desolate waste? The Lord said they should see "this land that was desolate . . . become like the garden of Eden" before the curse, everything wiped out, and by the blessing of God, made so beautiful and fruitful that they shall say, "This land is . . . become like the garden of Eden."

You remember it is written, "And the Lord God planted a garden." We are all shut up to Him when we try our little bit of planting. It is His garden, and He makes it grow. But the Lord says, "When I have done what I now announce I will do, the heathen will say, This land which was desolate, this church that was desolate, this world that was desolate, is become like the garden of Eden again." And when He has done it, the heathen will say, "God did it"; and when they say God did it, His name shall once again be exalted, and be glorious among the heathen—and they will say, as did the people of Elijah's day, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God." "I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it."

There is a place in the Scripture where David praises the Lord because what He had spoken with His tongue, He had performed with His arm. Some people's tongues are much longer than their arms; they are ready to promise, but very slow to perform. But what the Lord speaks, He will do. Now He says, "Identify this messenger, identify the signature. Here is the programme: I thought; I have spoken it; I will do it." That settles it, does it not? There is nothing for us to do but believe, and rejoice. It is announced by God Himself.

"Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock." He hands over His programme, and tells us what His purpose is, and gives us His sure promise, stamped with His name. Now He says, "Come to me and remind me of it. I will do it, but it is part of my programme that you will ask me to do it." God's blessing upon His people always casts its shadow before in the form of prayer. It would be impossible for us to dream of this, left to ourselves. We could never rise to this height, but He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." We are to enquire of Him. We cannot ask too much; and as we pray, we have His promise: "I will increase them with men like a flock."

Shall I tell you something that came to me on Tuesday as I sat in that cold building? I was impressed with the number of boys and young men—boys growing up into young manhood, and young men growing up into maturer manhood; and I said to myself, Thank God! There is an army of men on the way. And there is. But we ought to ask Him, that He will increase us like a flock. He is willing to do so.

"As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the Lord." Did you feel a bit down to-night? You did not feel quite "out", but I expect some of you had a slight feeling of depression. I get it sometimes—I will not tell you how often. But I never get any comfort by looking in the glass, do you? I say of myself, Poor thing! What can you do about it? I cannot find cheer that way. Then I think of the saints of God—I am thankful for very many, and give thanks at the remembrance of a great host—but I say, They are like myself; they cannot do much. Then I try to forget it, as I did this evening, by turning to the Book. I thought of Ezekiel sitting by the river of Chebar, and of the open heavens when he saw visions of God; and I said, That is what I need, to think of God. I rather thing that is what all the people need, to have their thoughts turned toward God. And so in an impromptu fashion I have rambled on, but I hope I have at least kept to the track of the four-faced creatures and the spirit-filled wheels, and directed your thought to the Throne. I leave this word with you—"My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord."

Let us pray:

O Lord, we know not how to thank Thee for Thine abounding grace. Grace to anyone were wonderful, but grace to us, such sinners as we are by nature, and such poor, poor, servants as we have been even since we named Thy name, is beyond our understanding. We profess and call ourselves Christians, but in the light of Thy matchless grace, the love Thou hast shown us in Christ, we abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes. But this evening we thank Thee for the grace of God, for the sovereign grace of God by which we are assured of Thy divine care over us here, and of eternal salvation hereafter. Bless us all who are here, the whole church family, the great multitude of Thy believing people everywhere. Bow the heavens and come down, we pray Thee, until the mountains shall flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence. Revive us, not for our sake, but for Thy holy name's sake, Amen.

THE SIN OF EXAGGERATION

(Continued from page 2)

gation for a year and a half. The Pastor of that congregation says that that building, when crowded to its utmost capacity, would seat eight hundred and fifty. Some little alterations have been made since by the removal of an organ, but we have actually read an inspired report of services in that building as being attended by two thousand people, which would be at least twice as many as the utmost capacity of the building. Surely, if we expect to enjoy the ministry of the Spirit of Truth, we ought at least to endeavour to be accurate in our estimates.

Of all people in the world, perhaps few are more given to this form of exaggeration than preachers. We have known some whose gooseberries are always as large as pumpkins, and their sprats are veritable whales. At least the exaggerator should make a determined effort to keep probability in view.

NEWS OF UNION CHURCHES

ALTON—*Rev. John Hunter.* "Our special services finished this evening (June 12) with a great gospel meeting. During the two weeks' effort a real time of blessing was experienced. Mr. Thomson and his daughter Margaret, Scottish Gospel Singers, rendered splendid services. The first meeting began with forty-seven present, and to-night we had well over three hundred present. To-day was my first anniversary in the Alton Church, and I had the joy of leading six into the waters of baptism. This is the first time for many years that a baptism has taken place in Alton Church, and we praise God for this beginning. While Mr. Thomson and his daughter sang, I carried the preaching programme myself, and rejoice that the Lord saw fit to save some, strengthen others, and show the six baptized the path of obedience. There are many more on our hearts and this old village is again being stirred."

ORILLIA—*Rev. J. Byers.* "We have just concluded one of the most successful evangelistic campaigns ever held in Bethel Baptist Church, under the able leadership and faithful ministry of Rev. Robert D. Guthrie, of Briscoe Street Baptist Church, London.

On Monday, May 23rd, the opening night, there was a perfect deluge of rain, notwithstanding which, however, no less than one hundred and three were present to welcome the evangelist. The showers of rain were only prophetic of the showers of blessing that attended the old-time preaching of the glorious gospel of redeeming love.

The congregations were the largest ever assembled for an extended period, representations from the various churches in the town gathered nightly and two Presbyterians were actually baptized. We always hesitate to give the number of decisions registered and personally dealt with, but it should be said for the glory of God that thirty-one professed saving faith in Christ, and by far the largest number were adults. Many came forward for baptism, and nine were baptized last Sunday night, while others are waiting to put on Christ by baptism. Several backsliders were restored to fellowship and rejoiced once more in the joy of salvation.

The campaign concluded on Tuesday night, when Mr. Guthrie, by special request, told how the Lord had saved him into the ministry. The church was crowded and many had come from a distance to hear his amazing story of God's sovereign grace. Seldom have we heard so thrilling and triumphant a testimony; it magnified the grace of God and brought untold blessing and inspiration to scores. A number came forward at the close of the service, and thus ended a great fourteen-day revival campaign.

Mr. Guthrie is pre-eminently a sound, sane and safe evangelistic preacher; his messages were thoroughly scriptural, profoundly true to life, and convincing to the last degree. He has been endowed with a very pleasing personality, and a rich sanctified vein of humour, which was used to good advantage, and never out of place. His splendid illustrations were at once illuminating, and sparkling with life, wide open windows through which the truth flashed with power into the soul. Undoubtedly his sermons were unusually long, but not one weary moment was experienced by the people. Per-

haps his chief charm was his natural and unique humility in and out of the pulpit, a quality too rarely found among preachers. In the delivery of his messages, he was faithful to Baptist principles and practices in general, and to the whole counsel of God in particular."

ASSOCIATIONAL MEETING AT LINDSAY. One of the most largely attended district meetings in the history of this association was held in the Lindsay Church on June 8th. All present agreed that it was also one of the most spiritually profitable gatherings ever held in the association. The retiring Moderator, Rev. John Byers of Orillia, added much by his wise guidance of the meetings. In the afternoon a great message of exhortation to deeper and more fruitful Christian living was brought by Rev. R. D. Guthrie, who had just completed a two weeks' campaign at Orillia. A time of fellowship was enjoyed around the supper tables which were magnificently prepared by the ladies of the church.

In the evening the President of the Union, Dr. T. T. Shields, spoke to a house that was crowded to the point of suffocation and many more were turned away. His message was based on the inspired description of the constitution and activities of the Apostolic Church found in the second chapter of the Book of Acts. It was a great message, charged with sound Biblical teaching regarding the local church as a body of regenerated persons, and its challenge to a continuous growth in grace manifesting itself in the life and conversation of the believers was a fitting climax to the session. The newly elected Moderator, Pastor J. Greening, dismissed the meeting with prayer.

AN IMPORTANT RESOLUTION. From week to week this column carries reports of the progress of the work of the Lord in the various churches of the Union. It has said little or nothing of the large amount of money necessary to sustain the work and the workers on the Home Mission fields, believing that the reports of the working of the Spirit of God in our churches is a more effective call to sacrificial giving than direct appeals for money. This policy has been justified by the splendid support given by the churches of the Union. Regularly every month our missionary cheques have gone out on time. No disappointment has come to those who are dependent for their sustenance on these monthly allowances. All this has been done in the face of a greatly enlarged home missionary programme. Those who were elected to bear the responsibility for these arrangements are profoundly thankful for this evidence of the grace of God shown in the generous support of the Lord's work by His children. Yet they feel it is their duty as good stewards to lay the whole matter very plainly before the members of the churches whose servants they are. It is for this purpose that the following resolution, passed at a recent Board meeting, is inserted in this column. The members of the Board hope that our churches will respond to this call in such a way as to enable the Board to do two things: *first*, to continue to extend our Home Missionary endeavours, as we have done, and *secondly*, to report to the next Convention that the long standing deficit has been wiped out. We have already reduced our deficit, and in addition have made many advances on the Home Mission fields. By the grace of God and the loyal aid of our churches, we hope to do away with the deficit once for all and go on to enter into every open door the Lord sets before us. The resolution is as follows:

"As the only sound principle of administrative procedure, which is especially emphasized by the present world situation, and the general financial uncertainty involved therein, this Board hereby resolves that it dare not, and therefore will not, assume the responsibility of incurring any financial obligation beyond what its actual receipts will enable it to discharge.

"It is therefore hereby ordered that all grants for any purpose whatsoever authorized by this Board from this date, and until this resolution shall be amended or rescinded, shall be conditioned upon the Treasurer's actual receipts.

"The Board therefore hereby instructs the Executive Committee to keep the receipts of the Board under constant review, either directly or through the Finance Committee, and in the event of the income of the Board from month to month falling short of the total of the Home Mission grants authorized, that each grant shall be reduced by the percentage in which the Board's income falls short of the sum total of the grants authorized.

"It is also further hereby ordered that a copy of this resolution be sent to each recipient of a Home Mission grant for his information, and also to the Pastor of every church in the Union, that so the churches may be informed that

the maintenance of our present Home Mission stations, and any extension of our Home Mission work must depend entirely upon the giving of our churches.

"The Board also by this resolution would dare to exhort every church in the Union, through its Pastor, to do its very utmost to make it possible for the Board to maintain and extend our Home Mission enterprise."

Bible School Lesson Outline

OLIVE L. CLARK, Ph.D. (Tor.)

Vol. 2 Second Quarter Lesson 26 June 26, 1938

THE FIRST PERSECUTION

Lesson Text: Acts 4.

Golden Text: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."—Acts 4:12.

I. The Persecution of the Apostles—verses 1-4.

Religious leaders are frequently blinded by worldly wisdom, and spiritual pride to such an extent that they fail to grasp the truths which ordinary folk can clearly perceive (Matt. 11:25; 1 Cor. 1:26, 27). Not to the teachers and priests was the message of the Saviour's birth heralded, but to simple shepherds. While scribes and Pharisees endeavoured to entrap Him in His talk, the common people heard Him gladly (Matt. 21:46; Mark 12:13, 37, 38).

Similarly, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees were united in their opposition to the ministry of Peter and John which was causing no small stir among the people. The priests, who claimed to be the authoritative teachers of religion, were greatly troubled that the apostles were teaching the people about Christ. The Sadducees, who believe neither in angels, spirits, miracles nor resurrection (Acts 23:8), were angered because the apostles were preaching through Christ the resurrection from the dead.

The persecution meted out to the apostles by the leaders merely aroused the interest of the people to a greater degree. The word of God had free course and was glorified (2 Thess. 3:1; Phil. 1:18). Faith came by hearing (Rom. 10:17), and about five thousand men were saved. The testimony of Peter and John and the other apostles proved very effective because they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The common people were hospitable to the truth while the leaders were hostile to the truth. Both classes heard the same message, but with what different results! We must take heed how we hear the Word of the living God (Luke 8:18). Impress upon the scholars the importance of a humble, obedient attitude to God's message. Five thousand heard the word gladly, received it with joy and were saved, but the rest thought only of the rebuke and pain which the truth brought to their guilty consciences, and rather than yield to its influence they closed their wills, hearts and minds, attempting to silence the voices of those who proclaimed the message (Isa. 29:20, 21).

II. The Defence of the Apostles—verses 5-22.

Simply, directly and forcefully did Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answer the question of the Sanhedrin Council as to the secret of the marvellous cure of the lame man. By the power of God and through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ the miracle had been performed.

Peter did more than merely explain to them the phenomenal cure. He openly charged them with the guilt of crucifying Christ, and pointed out that the same Christ, Whom they had repudiated, had been glorified by the Father (Acts 3:12-16). They were the builders who had rejected Christ the Corner-Stone, and they would be humiliated by seeing Him exalted to a position of honour (Psa. 118:22; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42-44; 1 Pet. 2:4-8).

The eternal destiny of a soul depends upon the attitude taken toward the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not merely the way to God (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19-22), but He is the *only* way to God (John 14:6; Gal. 1:8, 9); He is the *only* door into the sheepfold (John 10:1, 8-10). God will not give His glory to another (Isa. 42:8), and He has provided that salvation should be possible only on the ground of the merit

of Christ. No other person, no institution, no ceremony, no act can procure salvation for us. The name of Christ is all-powerful to save, as well as to heal.

Even the enemies of Peter and John attributed the holy courage of the apostles to their association with Christ. Their character and conduct reflected that of their Saviour, and they exhibited qualities altogether unaccountable by natural aptitudes or worldly training. So may Christ live through each one of us (Phil. 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:18).

The men of the Sanhedrin Council could find no fault with the personal conduct of the apostles, nor could they gainsay the miracle which had been performed. Their main object was to attempt to force the apostles to cease connecting the miracle with the name of Christ. Against that precious name all such opposition is directed (Zech. 2:8; Acts 8:3; 9:5).

Peter surprised the Council by presenting to them a problem for decision. He said in effect: "To whom does a man owe his first allegiance, to man or to God?" Obedience to their decree would involve disobedience to God. Christ is our Master and King, and our first duty is to obey Him (Matt. 10:37).

There is an inward compulsion of spirit which is more powerful than any external force. Life must find expression. Peter and John could not remain silent concerning the truth which had taken possession of them (Jer. 20:9; 1 Cor. 9:16; 2 Cor. 5:14).

III. The Prayer of the Church—verses 23-31.

As water naturally will seek its own level, so do men, when freed from outward restraint, repair to their own company and to their own place (Acts 1:25; 12:11, 12). Peter and John joined their fellow-Christians, and reported what had occurred.

The prayer of the Christians consisted mostly of thanksgiving. They recognized that the persecution which had been launched against them was but one phase of the antagonism to Christ which His enemies had exhibited in the past, and would exhibit in the future (Psa. 2:1-3). Yet even as these wicked men vented their rage against Christ and crucified Him, they were being used by a sovereign God as instruments to work out His own purposes (Acts 2:23; 3:18).

The prayer for courage, uttered in the name of the Lord Jesus, was quickly answered. The apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue to speak the Word of God with boldness. They did not request that the persecution cease. God grants us rest from trouble; sometimes He delivers us from our burdens, and sometimes strengthens us to bear them.

IV. The Practice of the Church—verses 32-37.

The Christians of the early Church were characterized by brotherly love and a spirit of unity and harmony which found expression in their desire to share with one another their material possessions (Acts 2:44, 45). This distribution was voluntary, just and appropriate, and far removed from the ungodly and impractical suggestions of present-day communists. The explanation of this arrangement lies in the history of the early Church. It was God's providential plan for His people, so that when they were compelled to flee in haste from Jerusalem when the city was captured and destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., they could carry their wealth with them. Their resources were not in lands and buildings, but in money. God watches over His own, and provides for their needs.

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