

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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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

THE COMFORT OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

An Address by the Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Thursday Evening, November 2nd, 1939

(Stenotypically reported)

"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.

"For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

"For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."—Philippians 2:19-21.

The passage I have read to you is not strictly doctrinal. It has a biographical touch about it, and reflects something of Paul's own experiences, giving some indication of the quality of those who, in that apostolic day, were associated with him. If we look at these verses they may yield us some useful instruction.

Life at its best, to any of us, is not wanting in cloudy and dark days. There are times when we have need of some such comfort as the Apostle Paul indicates he needed in this situation. In England the daily papers, in the record of the weather, tell the number of hours of sunshine on the previous day. They build motorcars there with what they call a "sunshine roof." The roof of the car slides back; even the closed car such as we drive here has a sliding roof, so that when the clouds lift and the sun shines, one can push the top of his car back so as to get the full benefit of such sunshine as there is.

In this world's climate, we all need to live under "sunshine" roofs. Most of us feel the need at times of taking full advantage of whatever brightness life may afford. I direct your attention this evening to a source of comfort and inspiration which perhaps some of us make but little use of.

The Apostle Paul lived a very strenuous life. He wrought industriously in the Lord's service, and "counted not his life dear unto himself". He was in prison often, he was twice shipwrecked, a good many stripes had been laid upon him for Christ's sake; and he had suffered much persecution, and had shared the experience of many other faithful Christians "in perils among false brethren." If he had been disposed to be a grumbler, he

had had plenty of occasion for grumbling. He might easily have become morose and cynical, but he always put a cheerful courage on, and managed not only to rejoice in the Lord himself, but was fond always of exhorting others as though it were a duty to find springs of joy from which they might refresh themselves.

Paul is writing here from Rome to the Philippians. It is well to remember how this church at Philippi began. Last week we heard from a number of churches that are not very conspicuous for their size, little groups of believers here and there like the group of sixteen or twenty in Kapuskasing. The Apostle Paul went to Philippi very much as some of our own men have gone to places to begin work for the Lord, with no one especially to encourage them, no congregation awaiting their arrival, and no announcement of their coming. They had to open doors for themselves and go in and begin wherever the providence of God made a beginning possible.

It was in that way that Paul, heeding the call from Macedonia, went to a certain city called Philippi. There he had not met the man from Macedonia, whom he had seen in his vision, saying, "Come over and help us"; for when he got to Macedonia he found the man was a woman. On the Sabbath he went out by the riverside to a place where a company of devout women had gathered together for prayer. Who they were, or what they were, I do not know. They were not Christians, in the sense of being believers in Christ for they had not heard of Christ. They were Gentiles; but they believed in God, and they had gathered together in the place where "prayer was wont to be made".

I have no doubt that it was that group of devout and spiritually hungry souls that was the loadstone, the unknown magnet that drew the Apostle Paul to Philippi. That is how mission work was done in apostolic days, Paul went to Philippi, and sought out the place where he believed his message would most readily be received. He found this company of devout women praying. With what light they had, they were seeking the favour of God. Paul spoke to them, and the Scripture says, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

I fancy she said, when she heard the gospel at the lips of Paul, "That is what I have been longing for. I thought there ought to be something like that for me somewhere." She was hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and God, in His mercy, sent someone to preach the gospel in order that she might be filled.

But immediately trouble ensued; and it seemed as though everything was going to be upset. I suppose Lydia and the rest said, "It is most unfortunate that our preacher should be taken away from us and cast into prison like that on the first day." But while he was in prison there was an earthquake, and another family was added to the church; for the jailor and his household believed the word and were baptized. The church at Philippi was formed of this little handful of believers, and perhaps a few others whose names are not mentioned; and when the years had passed, and the little one had become a thousand, Paul writes a letter from Rome to this group of Philippian Christians. In the chapter I have read, he reveals his heart, and shows what manner of man he was, particularly in this that he had learned to find great comfort in his own spiritual children, and in the fellowship of believers generally.

No man did ever spend himself more unreservedly than the Apostle Paul in the exaltation of Christ. To him, Christ was the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Centre, and Sum and Circumference, of everything. He knew nothing apart from Christ, and it was because he loved Christ, he loved those who loved Him. It was for that reason his heart was knit to these Philippian believers—because they were the friends of the One Who was his Saviour. Now in Rome he is anxious to hear about their state.

I.

I sometimes think that we fail to take full advantage of the source of comfort and inspiration which awaits our use in other believers. We ought to be more concerned about each other, and more interested in each other's spiritual welfare. The "tie that binds our hearts in Christian love" needs not only to be strengthened, but to be more generally recognized.

We have all been disappointed on the one hand with professing Christians. Not seldom has darkness come upon us, and great searching of heart and restlessness of spirit, because we have been disappointed in some who professed faith in Christ. As a Pastor, I have experienced it. I suppose a pastor is something like the father of a family: if one member of the family should go wrong, or in some way fall short of the possibilities that were before him, he is stricken with grief. He feels like David when he cried, "O my son Absalom, my son,

my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

It is a great grief always to the mature Christian who is concerned for the honour of God's name when he or she sees other believers—I do not mean when looking upon them critically, but with the deepest affection—when we find that some who ran well have been hindered, and instead of exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit, are indulging in the works of the flesh.

On the other hand, what an unspeakable joy it is to turn to the other side of the book and to read the record of those who are growing up into Christ in all things. It was thus Paul, in writing this letter, reflected upon the condition of things in Philippi. He addressed his epistle, not only to the saints at Philippi, but to the bishops and deacons. Sometimes, for myself, I have had—in time past, of course, I do not speak of the present—more joy in the saints than in the bishops; but the bishops and deacons at Philippi, with the rank and file of the membership, seem to have been of such a spiritual order as was a source of perpetual inspiration and joy to the Apostle Paul. So much so that he said, in effect, "I have you in remembrance often, and I find that upon every remembrance of you, upon every mention of your name, I am inspired with thanksgiving to God."

It is a good thing to give thanks unto God. It is always a good thing to find some reason for thanksgiving. If someone brings you word of fellow-believers walking in the light, that should lead you to give thanks to God, for it will have a wholesome reaction upon your own spirit, and it will be a means of grace to you.

I am always interested in the biography of great men, especially great ministers and missionaries, and great saints. But there are few people disposed to write the biography of ordinary saints. The record of the average, ordinary Christian life is not put down on paper; you cannot read it. There were people in Philippi whose lives were not written. No one paid any attention to them in Philippi, but Paul remembered them, and his remembrance of what they were was to him a source of inspiration.

I confess that, not infrequently as a Pastor, I feel like turning away from my books to my memories, to remember not only the days of old, but the days that are now; and call up the names of people whom I have myself known—I do not need anyone to put their imprimatur on their book and say, "Everything in it is true." I used to know a man years ago who had a habit of saying, "I like things that are so." I, too, like things that "are so", and to be sure that things are so, I like to remember people I have known—not people someone has told me about, but people with whom I have lived. I have seen them converted, I have watched them grow; and I have said to others, "You may deny the gospel if you like, but they are my apology for preaching it. I thank God upon every remembrance of them."

That is one of the blessings of the life of a minister—and it may be yours, to treasure up in your memory the recollection of people who have lived Christ, who have proved to a demonstration that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. When dark and gloomy days came for the Apostle Paul, he had always that well of comfort to which to resort. He could think of people who had been a joy to him—and so can you and I. And we should

set them over against the disappointments of life, and "be of good cheer".

These people to whom Paul spoke *were always in his prayers*: "Always in every prayer of mine for you." That was a great thing for even Paul to say, that he was praying for them all the time. I am sure we should love each other more if we were to pray for each other more. It is not possible for you or me to take someone to our hearts, to long for their growth in Christ, and then every day to bring them before the Lord, without finding, kindled in our heart a deep affection for them. You cannot help loving them if you pray for them. You remember the story of how two women prayed for D. L. Moody? They heard him one day as a young man, and agreed, that while he preached well, he did not preach in the full power of the Spirit. They prayed for him constantly, and one day Moody felt impelled on the street to find some place where he could be alone with God. He secured a room in a boarding-house, and there, in describing it afterwards, he said God seemed to take him all to pieces. He did it, in answer to those women's prayers: they prayed Moody around the world as God's instrument in the salvation of thousands. I met one of those two saints when she was a very old woman.

That is how Paul prayed for the people in Philippi. That is how you and I ought to be praying for the members of Jarvis Street Church, and for all others, for the rank and file; for the saints that are in Jarvis Street, and the bishops and deacons. It is no wonder Paul loved these people, for I repeat, you cannot do that for people without learning to love them.

Then Paul said, "I thank my God . . . for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." There are some people who do not go all the way with you. They go part of the way, and then leave you. Paul had had that experience, and cast in such a heroic mould, he found it difficult to be tolerant of a cowardly spirit. It was a long time before Paul would receive John Mark back into his good graces when he had turned back, failing to go with him all the way. He said in effect, "Mark, you taught me how to do without you. I have no patience with people who go home to their mother at the first sign of danger, or at the first ill wind that blows." But Mark repented, and later Paul received him.

But there were some people who had fellowshiped with him "from the first day until now". What a blessing it is when you find people who are constant. When I was a young minister I used to covet for the membership of my church gifted people, talented people. I thought, it would be a fine thing to have a church made up of people who could do things, but long, long ago I got beyond that. Now I appreciate people who are just *good* people. He was a good man, "full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost". Perhaps not greatly talented, not very conspicuous, but one of those men who warmed your heart, and made you feel it is a marvellous thing to be a Christian, and to have Christians about you.

These people in Philippi *had never disappointed Paul*. They had stayed with him all the way. Some of you have had that experience of people who never failed you "from the first day until now". You can always count on them.

I have no doubt that one reason for their steadfastness was that Paul prayed for them. Some of us have been guilty in that respect. If we had prayed more earnestly

for those who began with us, we should have greater reason to thank God for the people who continue with us "until now".

So I could go on through that chapter where Paul expresses his confidence that what has been begun, will be carried on. He said, "I have no question about the reality of your conversion. I know that what the Lord has begun will be carried on until the day of Jesus Christ. You are of the sort that are established in Him. I am praying for you, and I always have you in my heart."

I have been to some places where the people have asked for autographs. You people have spared me that, but I remember a place in Wales where someone started the procession, and presently there must have been a hundred or more. I feared I should miss the train; it seemed as though they would never stop—Bibles, hymn-books, all kinds of books. There was a long queue of them, and it became a nuisance. They wanted to have me in their books. I do not care whether you have me "in your books", but I should like you to have me in your heart. Paul did not ask for the autograph of these Philippian Christians. He said, "I do not need it: I carry you in my heart. And though I am in Rome and you in Philippi, it is meet that I should think of you like this, for the reason that I have you in my heart." Now he is separated from these people he loves so much, and he is anxious about them. He says, "I am wondering how you are getting along. No letter has come, no messenger, no word from Philippi. I am going to send Timothy to you, especially for one thing, that I may be comforted when I know your state."

Can you see this mature and aging apostle saying to Timothy, "Timothy, I am longing to get some word of my friends in Philippi. I long after them. I have heard nothing from them for a long time. I want you to go from Rome to Philippi, look them over, hear them pray, see what they are doing, just see how that part of the vineyard of the Lord is flourishing. See whether the vines flourish, and whether the Beloved comes there to eat His pleasant fruit—then hasten back and let me know, because I need the comfort of it. I want you to bring back word, so that I may be comforted, strengthened, when I know of their state."

How often do we, as Christians, concern ourselves in the spiritual welfare of our fellow-Christians? We meet and say, "How are you?" "Very well." And not infrequently a minute afterward, we have forgotten what they said. It is a matter of form. If someone tells you he has been very ill, you may remember that; but how many of us are disposed to say, "I have been thinking about you a great deal. I have been praying for you. I am wondering how you are getting along in your Christian life. Are you getting to love the Lord more than you did? Are you living with His Book? Are you growing up into Him in all things? How are you getting along spiritually?" Some people would be almost offended if you were to ask them such a question. They would assume that you thought they were backsliding. That ought not to be. I do not mean that, but we ought to be earnestly interested in the spiritual health of each other.

I have known a mother of a family when sickness has come into the home, to have her hands full waiting upon that one; and scarcely has he recovered when another

has been stricken. You know how sickness can upset a household. It goes from one to another, and mother is as sick as anyone—but she does not know it; she has not time; she is looking after everyone else. Of course, the strong man of the house goes down too—and must have special attention. When they have all had their turn, poor mother has time to think of herself, and she has a touch of it. You know what I am thinking about! The whole world looks dark and gloomy, but at last everyone is well again and at the table, father, mother, and all the children; and though it may be zero weather without, all is sunshine in the family circle.

If, in the family of the Lord, we could be concerned about each other, and could think of the people who are giving such evidence of abounding spiritual health, we should do like Paul did, rejoice, saying, "What a lovely thing it is to belong to the family of the Lord, such a big family, and all of them well, growing up, loving the Lord so much."

Do you not see that that is what the church is for? The New Testament church was left on earth for that purpose. It is the earthly family of the divine Father. It is the family circle. It is the place where every member of the family ought to love all the other members of the family, and be interested in each other, rejoicing in each other, and helping each other. That is the ideal. That underlies these verses I have read. That was the apostolic way. The absent apostle was deeply concerned for these dear friends in Philippi.

II.

I wish I could leave it there, but there is another side. Paul said, "I have selected Timothy because he is a spiritually sensitive soul. I can trust him to go and bring a report of what he finds. I have one man who will understand the situation, and I am sure that what he reports will be true." "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." If a man or woman should have fallen out of fellowship with God, and have lapsed into a backslidden condition, it will not do to send just anyone to see such an one. You must send someone who is spiritual, someone who will understand the case, someone who is able to minister to a soul that is out of condition spiritually. If not, you might better leave him alone.

Paul said, "I have selected Timothy to go because I know him. I want a true report of the church at Philippi, and I am sure that no one would be able to measure things more accurately than Timothy. He will bring me back a good report."

What a blessing it is to have a Timothy! There is always someone to be found who knows how to appraise a spiritual situation, to go into it, feel the pulse of it, and come back with a true report. There is always much of that sort of thing to do where the people of God are concerned.—not only to encourage those who are walking in fellowship with God, but to recall and restore those who have fallen out by the way.

How necessary it is that you and I should seek to be possessed of those spiritual qualities which will fit us to be ministers to such as have fallen; and who will be so free from envy as to be able truthfully to report others' virtues! Paul knew that if Timothy went, his

heart would be open to the good news, he would not be envious of anyone, he would not discount anyone else's piety for fear he would suffer by the contrast. Paul said, "He has laboured with me in the gospel, and I have especially selected him."

Here is the sad part of it all: Paul was forced to say, "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." I have often rebuked myself. I have asked myself, What does my ministry amount to? I ought to have a great company of stalwart spiritual giants who could do anything. What have I done, I ask myself. Suppose you want a piece of very, very difficult work done, where is your Timothy? I can find them. "How many of them, of either gender?" Not many, but how many had Paul? He said, "I have only one. I look about, and can find only one man whom I can trust with this mission." And I comfort myself with that reflection. It must be a difficult job if the ministry of a man like Paul produced only one. Even I know more than one man and woman, but how sad it is that there are not more!

You have heard the story of a Moravian being asked how many missionaries they had. He replied by saying they had so many thousands. "As many as that? What is the membership of your churches?" He quoted the same figure. "But what do you mean?" "I mean every member is a missionary." That is a happy condition. Oh happy state if we could multiply our testimony so that we should have a great army of people who could go to Philippi, and bring back a good report, people equipped for delicate spiritual missions. It requires a very high state of spiritual cultivation to be able sympathetically to understand difficult cases, and minister, not to a mind diseased, but to a soul diseased. That is a difficult task, but let it be our ambition, that as we find comfort and inspiration in reflecting upon the record of others, to resolve that people who think of us, God helping us, shall find some inspiration in our lives, something that will make them give God thanks, something that will tend to the confirmation of their faith, something that will have the effect of strengthening them, settling them, establishing them in the faith of Christ. Oh that we could live in such a way that whenever people think of us they will say, "The Bible is true, the promises of God are true, the ministry of the Holy Ghost is real, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation." "How do you know?" "I saw it exemplified in the life of a man I know; and it fills me with thanksgiving to God."

But Paul was forced to say, "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state—no man other than Timothy. He will. It has become second nature to him to play big brother to other people." Has it become your second nature? Are you other people's big brother? "I heard something the other day"—do not tell me what you heard; do not tell anyone. Someone has not been at prayer meeting? Did you notice it? Go and see that person and say, "I missed you; will you not come?" Never mind telling other people; go and tell that person. Go out after him. "Who will naturally care for your state." That means, one who had so grown up into Christ that he was naturally a big brother to everyone who needed him.

During the last war a man who was a chaplain came to me and said—and he was not a young man; he must have had twenty-five years of experience as a minister

behind him—"I had a wonderful thing happen to me." "What was it?" "One of the men in my battalion came to me and said, 'Padre, can you tell me what I must do to be saved?' And do you know, sir, that is the first time in my life anyone ever asked what he must do to be saved." People will soon find out if there is no water in the well. The path that leads to the well soon becomes overgrown if the well is dry.

Did anyone ever come to you for spiritual help and say, "I am a bit down. I wish you would help me." If they do not, do you know why? You and I ought to be men and women who are known as people who will naturally care for the spiritual state of others. In a little community you will always find some big-hearted neighbourly, motherly woman who has been a mother and grandmother—and everyone goes to her. If the children have croup or whooping-cough, half the mothers would rather have that woman than a doctor. She has a reputation for being able to help people. The young mothers go to her with their tale of trouble. Have you not known such cases? I have. Someone for whom everyone sent—and never in vain.

What ministry we could exercise, how we could multiply ourselves, if we were always in such a spiritual state as to be able to minister to others in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ! But Paul said, "I set Timothy forth in contrast with all others, for 'all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.'" "Have you no Christians around you where you are, Paul?" "Yes; a great many of them." "Have you any more Timothys?" "No; I have only one Timothy. I have plenty of Christians, in some respects good people, but people who are self-centered, people who think of themselves, who will never allow other people's interests to conflict with their own. They all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

The scriptural admonition speaks on this wise: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." And yet how many of us live selfish, self-centered lives, and assume that our first duty is to seek our own! I have had people say to me, "Of course, I must look after myself first. If I do not do so, no one else will." They seem to think that is sound principle. It is not Christian. "He saved others; himself he cannot save." You cannot save others and yourself at the same time: you will save others in the measure in which you lose yourself. You find your life by losing it, and lose it only by insisting on finding it.

I have been reminded of that principle hundreds and hundreds of times. "Mr. So-and-So, what about him?" "He is a good man." "Here is an emergency, shall I call upon him for this service? Would he respond?" "Not if he has something else to do. If you can find him disengaged, unoccupied, perhaps he will do it; but he would not allow his own interests to be put aside in the interests of anyone else."—"All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." That is the rule too often even among professing Christians. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

After all, the best way to find our life is to lose it; and in the last analysis, the truest way to look after our own interests is not to look after them at all. Seek the things which are Christ's, and I really believe that if we do with all our hearts seek the things which are Jesus

Christ's, and the things of others as they are related to the things of Christ—Christ first, others next, ourselves last of all—I believe that God will look after us. We shall not lose anything in the end of the day. I am sure He will say, "You looked after me; you ministered to my brethren who were sick and in prison; you visited them—now it is your turn."

You remember the lovely story in the Old Testament of Barzillai, the old man? When David was driven from the city in Absalom's rebellion, and went up Mount Olivet—as a Greater than he did in a later day, weeping as he went up—and he was without in desert places after he had already come to the throne; but there was a man called Barzillai who went out to meet David, when he was despised and rejected, and he brought him "beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness." By and by the tide turned, Absalom was defeated, and the people vied with each other to see who could do the most to bring the king back.

Among those who came out to meet the king was Barzillai, and when the king saw him he said, "Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee."

Barzillai had no longer a capacity for enjoying the things of the king's house, but if you and I are busy about the things of God, caring for His children, forgetting ourselves in service to others, some day the King will come back; and when He does, He will mark us. And when He says, "Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem", we shall not have to say we cannot hear the music or enjoy the bounty of the King's table, or be afraid we should not be fit for the palace. By that time He will have created a capacity within us for the enjoyment of all heavenly delights; and when He bids us go into that palace of joy, He will have prepared us for the full enjoyment of all that awaits us.

Paul later wrote a letter to Timothy, the same Timothy, in which he said, "I am going to say, Good-bye, to you pretty soon, Timothy; the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." God help us to set our affections on things above where Christ is seated on the right hand of God!

THURSDAY EVENING SERMON

This week we publish a Thursday, instead of a Sunday evening address. It is interesting to observe what a variety of tastes manifest themselves in a large family. Somewhere we remember to have read something to this effect by Dr. Joseph Parker, that some people in a congregation get their chief blessing in the invocation; someone else will find his "portion of meet in due season" in one of the hymns; still another will find refreshment of soul in the reading of Scripture, and could quite easily go home satisfied when the Scripture reading is completed; others will get the first part of the sermon; still others the last part; some perhaps a little in the middle of it. But few there are whose particular need at the hour, will appropriate the whole service.

For many years now both addresses on Sunday and the Thursday evening address have been recorded and always there are some who want the morning sermon printed, others who want the evening, still others insist upon some Thursday night address. Could we afford the cost of enlargement, we should be happy to publish all three every week. As it is, occasionally we take a Thursday evening address—as this week.

For some people the time from Sunday to Sunday seems long, and they are glad of a scriptural meal in the middle of the week. So far as we know, there is no other service like our Thursday evening meeting, in Toronto. In our day, preaching is not particularly popular in most churches. The Jarvis Street Thursday evening congregation is larger than many Sunday evening assemblies. It is always a time of blessing, and, sometimes, of rapturous excursions into the heavenlies. We should gladly welcome other readers of THE GOSPEL WITNESS who may be within reach, to our Thursday evening meeting.

ABOUT MAKING ONE'S WILL

It would be a fine thing if some of the Lord's stewards would give a place to Jarvis Street Baptist Church. It will be enough to say, "I bequeath to Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto," But to make sure it is done, do it now.

Bible School Lesson Outline

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

Vol. 3 Fourth Quarter Lesson 52 December 24th, 1939

THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOUR

Lesson Text: Luke 2:1-20.

Golden Text: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."—Matt. 1:21.

For Reading: John 1:1-18.

I. The Lowly Sovereign—verses 1 to 7.

The Emperor Caesar Augustus had been hailed by men everywhere as a mighty monarch of peace. The poets were singing of the new Golden Age which was being ushered in, wherein peace and prosperity would prevail. But peace on earth was to come not through him, but through the little Child born at Bethlehem.

Caesar Augustus was called "the divine Caesar", and his subjects offered to him praises as to a god, for Emperor worship was then customary in the Roman Empire. But he was no god. The infant Jesus, however, was God in very truth,

"very God of very God", God appearing in flesh among men, according to the promise of the Lord (Isa. 7:14; John 1:14; Col. 1:19; 2:9).

The Roman Emperor is introduced to us as an absolute monarch, issuing edicts which none would dare to disobey. He little thought that he was but an instrument in the hands of a Sovereign God to advance the cause of One Who should reign in eternal majesty and glory, while his own Empire would soon pass away (Luke 1:32, 33). The Child was commencing a period of submission and obedience to His Father, but that subjection would one day restore to Him the glory, the outward manifestation of which He was laying aside for a time that He might be the world's Redeemer, as well as its King (John 17:4, 5; Phil. 2:9-11). He appeared in weakness and meekness which veiled from the unbelieving world His proper authority. Yet, never for an instant did He cease to be God, for He was God from all eternity (John 1:1-4).

The sovereignty of God is seen in the decree sent forth by Caesar Augustus that every man and woman must be enrolled in his native city. God desired that there might be indisputable historical evidence that Christ was born of the lineage of David (Matt. 1:16, 20; Luke 1:27), and also that there might be this testimony to the fulfilment of the Scripture that Christ should be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Sam. 16:1; 17:12; Mic. 5:2).

Christ was born when the days were accomplished; He came to earth "in the fulness of time" (Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:6). The world was prepared politically, socially and religiously for His coming. This was God's time to reveal Himself to men. The literature of the time reflects the longing of many earnest hearts for a Saviour, and the spirit of despair and pessimism which characterized that age constituted a mute cry for deliverance.

The infant Saviour was given tender care. His cradle was in the stalls, probably on the ground floor of the inn where the animals were lodged (as is still the custom in some parts of Palestine), because there was no room in the inn proper. The world has no place for Christ; it will not, and it cannot, receive Him (John 1:11; 14:17). He was despised and rejected of men then, even as to-day (Isa. 53:3; Matt. 27:30, 31).

II. The Adoring Shepherds—verses 8 to 20.

"In the same country" where the inn was located there were shepherds. The owner and the frequenters of the inn might repudiate the Christ-Child, but the humble shepherds were ready to receive, acknowledge and honour Him. The landlord heard no mention of a heavenly birth, nor did the priests or the leaders of the Jews. To faithful shepherds was the message sent.

Caesar Augustus would be preceded by heralds with their trumpets as he rode along the street in the triumphal procession, but angelic heralds sang of the coming of this King. The Roman torches were as darkness compared to the light of the glory of the Lord which shone round about the shepherds on that day. It was a visible token of the glory which belonged to the Saviour. His essential glory was ever His, even though He had resigned some of its outward manifestations (Phil. 2:5-8). Here and there it flashed upon men who beheld somewhat of His glory (Matt. 17:1-9; John 1:14; 2:11; 2 Pet. 1:16, 17; 1 John 1:1, 2).

Although only a narrow circle witnessed the circumstances of the Saviour's birth, the news was to effect the world. The good tidings of joy were to all people. This event is indeed the pivotal point in all human history, and the attitude of men to the Saviour decides their destiny. The Child was none other than the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Lord Jehovah.

Christ was born to be the Saviour. He came to this earth that He might save men from their sin (Matt. 20:28; Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15).

How strangely significant was the sign by which the shepherds were to identify the Lord of glory (verse 12)! True nobility may frequently be recognized by the quiet, unassuming yet majestic bearing of an individual. Meaner men must assume outward trappings and insignia if they would appear to be great, but the genuinely great are simple in their greatness and great in their simplicity. King George VI never seemed more kingly than when he tramped along the muddy battle-fields of France, encouraging the brave soldier lads.

The shepherds were obedient to the heavenly vision. God's revelations are not given to satisfy curiosity or to give occa-

sion for boasting, but to encourage us to do His will. In fact, obedience of heart is the prerequisite to a knowledge of God's will (John 7:17). The obedience of the shepherds was immediate, whole-hearted and joyful. They presented no gift of gold, frankincense or myrrh, as did the magi (Matt. 2:11), but they offered Him the praise and adoration of their hearts (Psa. 50:23; Heb. 13:15).

Mary wondered at the sacred and mysterious experiences through which she was passing. They were too sacred for her to share them with others. God had honoured His handmaid in choosing her to be the mother of the Redeemer. She knew both glory and shame, exuberant joy and poignant grief as a result of her submission to the will of God.

As the shepherds returned to the hills, they went as different men; like the magi, they must return home another way (Matt. 2:12). Nothing would be the same to them again. One cannot look upon Christ without being transformed by the vision (2 Cor. 3:18).

NEWS FROM FRANCE

The following items of news from the various pastors in France will inform friends of the French Evangelical Association of how the war has affected the work, and thus enable those on this side of the Atlantic to bear up our brethren before the throne of grace. The first of the following notes is translated from the "Lien Fraternel", monthly organ of the French Association.

From "Lien Fraternel"

"The great trial which has come upon France seems made to unite still more the different parts of our Association. Everywhere prayers rise for sane, just, and durable peace. In the meanwhile many have been called away from us to fulfill their duty to their country. All our men of military age are either in the army or are preparing to go. In our families the spirit of sacrifice is general, and everyone is doing his utmost to maintain a serenity of spirit without hypocrisy or panic. In the churches, the call to vigilance is all the stronger as the spiritual warfare rages all the more fiercely. This is indeed the hour and the power of darkness.

"The churches in Alsace and in the district of Montbéliard and in the neighbourhood of Paris have been affected by the evacuation measures in various ways, but until now none of our churches have been closed. Again, good news continues to reach us from all our men in the army. Up to now all are safe, faithfully sustained by the Lord in their faith and witness, and assured that their loved ones at home are surrounded with the affection of their churches."

Pastor Georges Guyot

Pastor Georges Guyot of the rue de Naples Church, Paris, Treasurer of the Evangelical Association, in a letter acknowledging our last remittance writes as follows: "Seventeen members or close friends of our church have been called to the colours. One of them has been demobilized since. My eldest son has been mobilized as well as the husband of my older daughter. My son-in-law has seen actual fighting. My youngest boy, who is now twenty-one, will be mobilized in several weeks. You will be able to guess what a blow has been dealt to us by these departures and the problems that they raise for us. Several families have had to quit Paris or its suburbs either on account of the general evacuation for the sake of the children, or in order to follow the business houses transferred to various points in the country. In consequence our meetings, which continue regularly, are noticeably smaller, but they are characterized by great fervour. Our men in the army and the others who are far from us, like the apostles of old in times of persecution, go everywhere preaching the Word and carrying the Christian witness into parts of France where it would otherwise be unknown.

"The teaching and exhortations in our services seek to inculcate the principles of Christian strategy laid down in the Word, (for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.) Our aim is to occupy the positions in the heavenly places so that the divine artillery of our prayers may bombard, to use military language, the General Headquarters of Hell.

"A thousand thanks for your recent remittance by which our Canadian brethren demonstrate once again that they are our allies in the spiritual warfare while a community of moral

purpose has again made the inevitable alliance between their country and ours. What joy, thanks to God, in this observation that the world war, which is only an episode of the war between the Lord and Amalek, finds us both, as in the last war, shoulder to shoulder facing the same enemy."

Mr. Frederick M. Buhler

From Mr. Frédéric M. Buhler, late student-professor of French in Toronto Baptist Seminary, comes the following. We would specially emphasize his suggestion to any of our men going overseas with the Active Service Forces.

"How glad I was to get good news from a far country, and how encouraging it is to know that at such a time as this we have friends who remember us before the throne of grace. The letters which I received lately from Canada have been the occasion as well as the cause of real rejoicing. Tell the friends how much joy a letter provides sent to one so lonely among such a great crowd. I do confess that in some respects I feel as though I were in a spiritual desert, deprived of all tangible Christian fellowship. On Sundays I go to the Protestant service. This life is a new but not altogether unprofitable experience. Several times, I have had occasion to give my testimony and two friends have asked me to secure a small Bible for them. May it become for them the Word of Life and Light.

"It seems that I am to stay here in central France for several months, three, at least, perhaps more, in order to get my training. Later, when I shall be sent to the lines, I hope to meet some of the Canadian friends. Please tell those who plan on coming to France to get in touch with Mr. Dubarry as soon as they arrive. (9, rue des Bénédictins, Nîmes, France.) It would be a good thing for us to keep in touch with them. It will be a great joy, in spite of the unhappy circumstances, to meet with them, if possible. The necessity of fighting against a common foe will bring us closer together, and the fact of our common precious faith will unite us still more.

"I have been reading with great interest the sermons by Dr. Shields, though I have not received the last few numbers. I expect they will reach me with some delay. We agree, of course with the Doctor on his main proposition, as well as on matters of detail. War, as terrible as it may be, is preferable to servitude and injustice.

"We are not too uncomfortable in the army; we sleep on straw and I have not been in a bed for about two months now. But the Lord has blessed me physically and as my days so is my strength."

Pastor F. J. Waeker

From a personal letter of Pastor F. J. Waeker to Mr. Frey, dated at Mulhouse, Alsace, October 30, 1939: "As you see, I am still at Mulhouse. People are always talking about evacuation but it is indeed possible that we shall spend the whole winter here. Mother remains in Switzerland, but she is already homesick and she would like to return, though it is very difficult to do so.

"We had six baptisms last Sunday, that makes fifteen this year. I write to fifty-four of our members and friends who are either in the army or evacuated from here. My whole church council except me is mobilized. We cannot thank God enough for the privilege we still enjoy of holding our meetings. Let us labour while there is still time! Naturally our meetings have not been as large as they were. My health is good and I am not idle. I am having much joy in my work these days, and the Lord is good to me. I have never seen people listening as they do during these days.

Pastor A. Grosse

"In Brussels, Belgium, the church carries on in spite of threats of war and the darkness of the surroundings. Pastor A. Grosse tells of the fruit yielded by his open-air ministry in one of the parks of the great city:

"In spite of unfavourable conditions, the work goes on faithfully. This summer our meetings in the park have been better than those of other years, both in point of numbers and in point of attention. It is to the continual and persevering effort of these meetings that we owe two of the three baptisms that we celebrated several weeks ago. One of those baptized was the fruit of the testimony of a brother who was first brought to our meeting-place several years ago through the open-air meetings. For this we bless the Lord and are encouraged in spite of contrary appearances."

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Beautifully bound in cloth—nearly 400 pages—postpaid to any address, \$1.00.

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Bound in cloth, gilt letters—\$1.00.

Either or all of the above would be an appropriate gift for your Pastor.

OTHER CHRISTMAS BARGAINS

Many people grow weary, are all but tired out, before Christmas comes, trying to select Christmas presents for their friends; which must be, first, within their means; which will be agreeable to their friends' tastes, and so be to them a gift of real value; and last of all, which in some degree will reflect their own desire for their friends.

To those who are really believers, the further consideration will be added; whether the present will express the donor's testimony for Christ, and thus tend to further the spiritual interests of the recipient, and in the end be glorifying to God. To those whose minds are thus exercised, we offer the following suggestions.

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