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The Jarvis Street Pulpit FROM DEATH TO LIFE

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

Preached from the Open-Air Pulpit of Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, July 18th, 1926
(Stenographically Reported)

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."—Ephesians 2:1, 2.

JUST for a few minutes I shall try to tell you what it means to be saved. We have it in this first verse of our text, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins"—you hath He made alive who were dead. Between the condition of salvation to which the believer is brought through grace, and the condition of nature in which we all are found by our first birth, there is all the difference there is between life and death.

There is a very great deal of "churchanity" in our day: we have so-called Christian organizations multiplied, there are churches of all sorts; and many people are persuaded that their souls will be saved by relation to some human organization—or through the church. But I desire this evening to make it clear to you that salvation is an act of God; that the soul who is really saved has been made the subject of the regenerating power, the recreating power of the Spirit of God; and that a true Christian is just as much a miracle as any work of physical healing, recorded in the Book. By nature we are not all "good fellows" as we are so commonly taught to-day; but, on the contrary, we are dead in trespasses and in sins.

I am quite aware that it is a somewhat hazardous business to tell people about their sin. We none of us like to have even our friends point out our faults. I am afraid that most of us like to be complimented—even though we know the compliment is undeserved, and is utterly untrue. I remember a few years ago a certain brother, who used to be a deacon of this church, came to me one Sunday evening greatly disturbed and he said, "Do you know what they say about you?" I said, "They say a great many things! I do not know to what particu-

lar thing you refer." He mentioned two particular churches and he said, "The young people of this church say that they can go to such a church, and they are complimented and praised; and they come away feeling ever so much better. They go to another church, and they are frequently told that the worst of every man is outside, and that if you could only get at his heart you would find it all goodness within; and they go home feeling very happy. But they say when they come to hear you they are miserable for a whole week"! That may be so—I try to make unsaved people uncomfortable.

I remember our friend, Mr. Davis, the Superintendent of Yonge Street Mission, before that new building was erected at the end of Gerrard Street, had a vacant wall, such as we have here, on which he printed a text—and this was the text: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." And there was one man who wrote a letter to one of the city papers in which he said something to this effect, "Men ought not to be allowed to put such texts as that on any wall; for," he said, "I go down Yonge Street every morning to my business, and it makes me feel uncomfortable all day"!

That is what it was intended to do. If a man is sick, he ought to know what is the matter with him, and the faithful physician will not fail correctly to diagnose his disease and tell him faithfully and honestly what is his true condition. The Bible says that by nature we are "dead in trespasses and sins".

Death is a terrible thing. It is very difficult for us to define, and it is impossible for us to tell what life is; but we all know that between life and death a great gulf is fixed. Some of you have had death come to your home

when some loved one who perhaps has been ill for some time is taken away. You have known that there was no chance of recovery, you have been facing death for six months, nine months, or twelve months; and when at last breath leaves the body the neighbours say, "Well, it is a happy release"—and you know that it is a happy release if that person is a Christian; and yet again and again I have been told as I have visited the home of sorrow, "It is impossible to prepare for death." You think you know that it is coming, you think you are getting ready for the coming of the king of terrors; but when at last he lays his icy hand upon that beloved form and life departs, and you look upon him or her and say, "He is dead", the shock of it is almost as great as if it had come suddenly. And the reason is, that there is such a wide gulf between life and death. Men can take life away—but no man can give life.

What does it mean for a soul to be "dead in trespasses and sins"? We read in the Word of God about a day of future punishment; we read about a place where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched; we read about a place—I do not speak it lightly, I hesitate to speak it at all. It falls lightly from the lips of some men—but we speak about a place called "hell". I remember a great theological professor a few years ago preaching from this text, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." The professor was trying to explain the difference between these great words "life" and "death"; and of death he said, "It reaches the long hand of its meaning out beyond the boundaries of Time and it goes down—and down—and down—until it touches"—and then he paused as though afraid to utter it—he said, "until it touches hell." He said, "My friends, God's estimate of sin is"—and again he paused—"is hell." Do not speak it lightly, do not dare to let that word drop lightly from your lips. I do not know what it means in the future—I hope that no man or woman within hearing of my voice will ever know the awful, the immeasurable, the infinite depths of the meaning of that dreadful word; God grant we may never know it. But here and now, what does it mean to be "dead in trespasses and sins"?

Men have tried to define death as an interruption of correspondence. They have tried to define life as consisting in correspondence with one's environment. For instance; the heart beats, the lungs inhale and exhale—the body corresponds with the air about it. It receives food, it is in communication with its environment—the eye sees, the ear hears, the senses feel, the palate tastes, we smell the fragrance of the flowers—by all these means we are in communication with the world about us. But sometimes the man loses his hearing, and so far he is cut off; again, he may be partially paralyzed: he loses his sense of feeling and he is cut off from his environment in that particular; he loses his sight, he loses his sense of feeling, he loses his taste, he loses his smell—the senses are numbed. But still the heart beats, still the breast heaves, still the man lives—he is in correspondence with that about him; but by and by the heart is still and the breast ceases to heave, there is no pulse, there is no respiration; and the watchers say, "He is cut off, he is dead."

What does it mean to be "dead in trespasses and sins"? It means that sin has so gripped the heart, the conscience, the memory—all the faculties of the mind,

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

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and in some cases has mastered the powers of the body—until the man is cut off from communication with God. There are men and women who hear me this evening who have lived for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or more years, as though there were no God. You have never bowed the knee in prayer, you have shamefully—or shamelessly—taken God's gifts and you have never even acknowledged His goodness about your family table; you have declared that you have no fear of God before your eyes; you have never prayed, you have never praised, you have never trusted, you have had no communication with God whatever—dead—dead—cut off, separated from God: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God."

Sin, my brethren, effects such separation sometimes in this life between members of families. Oh, the tragedy of it—how it separates husband and wife, how it separates children from their parents! Probably some young man hears me to-night whose mother is away over on the other side of the sea, and you have not communicated with her since you left the Old Land. She has not ceased to pray these many years that that wandering boy would come home; and to-night, it may be, she is asking, "O Lord, is he dead or alive? He is dead to me; I have not heard from him"—never a word, he has cut himself off entirely. So sin separates in human relationships.

That is bad enough; but the tragedy of it is, that it cuts men off from God so that there is no communication at all. I do not doubt that I speak to hundreds of people yonder in the park (some of you who have not come near enough to be seen, yet may the voice of the Word of God reach you. Men and women yonder, somebody in one of those verandahs, or looking out of a window) who hear God's Word, you have not prayed, you are without God in this life, here and now you are dead in sin; that awful thing of which our preacher was speaking inside the church this evening has so laid hold upon you that you have no power to deliver yourself from it. That is a black picture, is it not? I have dealt with hundreds of men

who have come to me in their chains, and they have told me of their heart-sorrow; they have told me of the shackles that bind; they have confessed, though not in scriptural language, that "the strong man armed keepeth his palace"; and while again not in scriptural terms, they have really cried, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Is there any real salvation? Is the hope of the world a lie? Is there a real Saviour? Is there a salvation that can set men free, and fill their hearts with joy and gladness for time and eternity? That is the great question. I know there are ministers of the gospel—at least, so-called—who would endeavour to persuade you that this Bible is not the inspired, infallible, authoritative, Word of God. But I come to you in His name to declare that I, in my own experience, have proved beyond all possibility of a doubt that this Bible is the Word of God Who cannot lie; and I bring you a message in His name. What is it? Just this, "You hath he made alive."

I said just now that between life and death a great gulf is fixed. Our preacher this evening referred to the Simplon Tunnel. Oh yes; human engineering skill has availed often to tunnel the mountains. I remember the first time I crossed the Prairies and passed through the Rocky Mountains. There were a lot of people on the train who talked like magpies. I felt like asking them to be quiet, for I wanted to admire the works of God. Somebody said to me, "What do you think of the mountains?" I said, "I cannot describe them. But I will tell you what I have been thinking: as I saw this railroad winding its way along, I have thought of the bigness of these mountains, and of the greatness of the men that conquered them, and I have thought of the scripture, "Thou madest him to have dominion." Men have conquered the mountains, they have thrown their bridges across the rivers, they have brought energy from above—they have learned that the very air is charged with energy, and have learned to harness these natural powers for their services; but there is one gulf that no man has ever succeeded in bridging; nobody has learned how to throw a bridge across that gulf between life and death.

Science boasts of its accomplishments, and a few years ago men dreamed of the possibility—they postulated, at least—the possibility of spontaneous generation; they thought life could produce itself, or that life might be chemically produced. I heard of a biological professor not so very long ago who said that he still looks for that great miracle. But the fact is, life comes from antecedent life, and all the scientists in the world cannot tell you where life came from. But we can—this Book can: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Our glorious God is the Source of life, and He has reserved a point at the genesis of life for His own direct appearing. He has never delegated to anybody else the power to give life: as the Father hath life in himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in himself. Our God has power to quicken dead souls—and dead bodies too, for that matter—into newness of life. That is what happens when a soul is saved: one who is dead lives again, he is brought out of a state of death into a state of life; as our preacher said in the church service this evening, out from under the dominion of the tyrant Sin to a place under the gracious reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But the text says, "You hath he quickened." Before I tell you how He does it, let me make this clear to you,

that no church can quicken dead souls. That is true of all Protestant denominations: there is no Baptist church, or Methodist church, or Presbyterian church, or Anglican church, that has the power to make dead souls live—and let me say it without offence, notwithstanding its claim, the Roman Catholic church has no power to save men. "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord"; the Lord must save; the Lord must quicken dead souls; men must be brought into personal and vital contact with Jesus Christ Himself or they never will be saved,—"You hath he quickened."

Has He touched you—has He touched you? Do you know God? Have you been brought into direct relation to Him? Put aside your church membership, you Baptist people. Although Baptist churches profess to receive into membership only people who have been converted, sometimes people get into Baptist churches who have not been converted. Perhaps some have got into this church without being saved. We cannot save you: you must get into right relationship with God. He will quicken, nobody else can. Will you put aside your church membership and your denominationalism, and remember that salvation consists in direct personal dealing with God Himself? He has appointed no human priest, nor mediator—there is just one Priest, only one Priest. There is a passage in the Book that I love, I think I preached from the text out here one night last summer, but I give it to you now: "Every priest"—that refers to the Old Testament—"standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins"—that is the work of the priest whose work is never done (that is like the work of you women. I have always heard that your work is never done.) But here are priests who stand "daily offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins"—never done. There were no seats in the temple, there were no chairs for the priests to sit down on—they did not need them, because in that temple there were priests whose work was never done—"but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." His work was finished, He sat down on the right hand of His Father.

Let me explain to you how He has made it possible for dead souls to be quickened. I heard my father say years ago when I was a boy that there were two engineers in England, one called Stephenson and another called Brunel. He said these men showed their skill in two different ways: one by avoiding difficulties, and the other by overcoming them. He referred to a certain bridge built by one of these men, and he said that without losing anything he could have moved down the river or up the river and found an easier passage and accomplished the same end, but it was his glory to meet the difficulty and overcome it. "So I remind you," my father said, "that men have long tried to pass from this life into the next by avoiding the difficulty of death, looking for some elixir of life that would bridge the gulf; but Jesus met death. He went through death into life, and He said, 'I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and I have the keys of hell and of death.'" He is able to open the door of life: "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Just this simple word in conclusion. How does God

quicken dead souls? What instrumentality does He use? Are all the people who are dead exactly alike? Somebody would point to little children, and say, "You do not mean to say that they are as 'dead in trespasses and sins' as is the criminal behind prison bars?" Or, they would point to some drunkard staggering down the street and say, "But you do not mean to tell me there is any comparison between these little children and this outrageous sinner?" There are three illustrations in the Scripture, let me give them to you very simply: One was of a little girl twelve years of age. She was sick, and died in her father's house; and I suppose all the friends came in to sympathize with the parents, they were mourning and making a great ado. Although she had not yet become repulsive to her parents, although decomposition had not set in, yet she was dead. The second instance was that of the young man of Nain whom they were taking to his burial place, the only son of his mother who was a widow. Just as the funeral procession was passing through the city Jesus met them and stopped the procession, and sent the young man walking home from his own funeral! He had been dead longer than the little girl and it was time for burial, but there was nothing to indicate that that body was repulsive. Death reigned within but had not manifested itself outwardly. The third case was that of Lazarus. You remember Jesus came and said, "Where have ye laid him? . . . Take ye away the stone." And the sisters of Lazarus were afraid to have the grave opened; they said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days. Do not let us get the stench of death in our nostrils. Let us think of him as we laid him away; do not let us look on him now." What is the principle? That little girl of twelve years of age in her father's house, upon the bed in her own room, was just as dead as Lazarus. The father could not call her back to life; the mother called her name and she made no answer. The same was true of the young man, the son of the widow of Nain—he was dead; nobody could awaken him, he made no response to all the calls made to him. So of Lazarus. They were all dead.

Sin reigns within, and in some cases it reigns without as well; but the sin that has begun its work within sooner or later will manifest itself outwardly. That little girl left alone, without the touch of the life-Giver, would have become just as repulsive as Lazarus, for she was just as dead as he.

What means did our Lord employ to quicken those who were physically dead? He came into the ruler's house and said, "Why make such an ado? She is not dead, but sleepeth." And they laughed Him to scorn. But to Jesus belongs the power to impart new life, and He knew that He could call that child back to life again; and when He said, "Maid, arise," the little child just opened her eyes, and began to talk, I suppose. She sat up, and possibly that dear little girl did not know that she had been dead; she may have thought that she had just gone to sleep—but she had been dead. There are some people converted like that when very young, and they hardly know the miracle that has happened—but it has happened just the same. A young woman came to me some years ago and wanted to be baptized. She said, "I came to your predecessor some years ago"—it was not in this church—"and told him I wanted to be baptized; and he asked me when I was converted, and when I told him that I did not know, he said, 'I cannot baptize you until you can tell me how and where you were converted.'" She said,

"I was brought up in a Christian home and went to Sunday School always as a child; and sometime, somewhere, somehow, I was converted; but I cannot explain how it happened." "Well," I said, "do you remember when you were born?" "No!" "But you are alive, aren't you? As long as you are alive, we will forgive you for forgetting your birthday!" The great question is, Is your soul alive unto God? not, when were you born?

In the case of the young man of Nain: he has been carried out, and Jesus takes him by the hand and lifts him up. What was the instrumentality in each case? Just this: to the little girl He said, "Maid, arise." Perhaps her mother had said the same thing, she had wrung her hands in anguish and called her by name, but her ears could not hear that voice; but when the Incarnate God said, "Arise," there was life-giving power in His word, and the heart began to beat, the breast to heave, and the little child was made alive by the power of God's word. In the case of the young man, it was the same: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." Nobody else could so command, but when Jesus said, "Arise," Death spread his black wings and flew away, and Jesus delivered him to his mother. And in the case of Lazarus—what a striking case that was! I never read it without wishing I could have been there. Jesus commanded that the stone be rolled away, and quietly lifting His heart and voice to Heaven said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he had thus spoken, he cried"—Oh, I wish I could make somebody on the other side of the park hear it—"he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." What a strange word that was!—Lazarus was in a rocky sepulchre, bound around with grave-clothes, with others just as dead as he himself; yet Jesus said to him, "Come forth." And in some way that we cannot explain Lazarus responded to it, and he came forth bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, quickened by the power of the divine Word. I cannot explain the mystery, it is beyond me or anybody else. I do not know how that little girl answered the call of Jesus, nor the young man, nor Lazarus, except this: that Jesus is God, "and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" And when Jesus Christ commands, it is the very voice that spoke the worlds from naught, it was He Who said, "Let there be light, and there was light." And if you will take His simple Word and trust the promises of God that cannot lie, you will find life in His Word.

I will give you my own text, and I have done: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." My conversion happened this way; Once upon a time I was very proud, and like all proud people, I had not a thing in the world to be proud of—but a great many things to be ashamed of. But I really did have the idea that I was somebody—but I got over it long since, and a great many people have helped me to get over it! But I went to hear a man preach, and he could not preach a bit—and I am glad he could not. (I remember Spurgeon's telling of how he was saved, and it was under the preaching of a poor, illiterate, local preacher in a little Methodist church. The man did not know how to preach, he had never been trained to preach; but he had a great text:

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." Spurgeon said he knew so little that the only thing he could do was to shout his text; but at last, for a little diversion, seeing a young man sitting alone away back under the gallery he said, "Young man, you look very sorrowful. Look!—Look!—Look! And the young man looked. That young man was Spurgeon! If the preacher had been educated he might have quoted poetry, he might have referred to the classics; but because he knew nothing but the Word of God, God blessed it.) That was the kind of preacher who led me to Christ. He came to preach for my father, and I thought my father was a great preacher—and I still think so. I wondered why in the world they brought him to preach in my father's church. He spoke like a school-teacher talking to a lot of boys and girls—and I felt like a little boy! I do not know what he preached about, I have not the faintest idea what he said; but he quoted that text of Scripture, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Then he said this striking thing: "If you sincerely confess your sins to God, then either you are a Christian or God is a liar." He could have said no better thing than that for me that night. I turned it over in my mind and I said, "God cannot lie; He never did lie. He is the God of truth." As I thought it over and knew that God could not lie, I said to myself, "The only alternative is, I must be saved." I do not know how it happened, but I passed from death unto life.

Some of you may say when you go home, "We went out to that open-air service and all the preacher did was to give us a text, and repeat that text." That is all I want to do, just to get the Word of God into your heart and conscience, that you who are dead by nature may be made alive by grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. You can then go home and say, "I have something I can carry right up to the judgment-seat. When I come to that great judgment-day and am asked for the reason of my salvation, I will simply say, 'Jesus died for sinners; and I told Him I was a sinner and I claimed His grace, and I was saved.'"

I talked to a dear soul before I came out here to preach—I think she is here, she said she would come out—who said, "I could say that I could trust Christ to-night, but what of to-morrow?" "Well," I said, "then you do not trust Him. If you are afraid of to-morrow, that would not be trusting Christ because he says, 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.'" Jesus Christ does not give you life for ten years, or twenty years, or thirty years: when He saves He saves for ever. Did you ever see a man putting up a scaffold to repair the sun? We have been doing all kinds of building here, and sometimes after we have some heating arrangement installed it does not give warmth enough. Is it usually warm enough when Old Sol gets to work? Yesterday we were having some lights installed here for our opening services, but we did not put up enough because we did not know how many we needed. I can see you folks in the front seats, but I cannot see the people at the back at all. We shall have more before next Sunday. But when God put one light in the heavens to rule by day and another to rule by night, He adequately lighted the world, and He has never had to improve on it since. And when He sent His Son into the world, He provided a salvation that never has been improved upon—and never will have to be improved upon ("Hallelujah!" "Praise the Lord!")

How many are there who tonight really in your heart now say, "I do for the first time this evening give my soul into the keeping of Jesus Christ"? I would be afraid to ask how many of you have victory bonds, but if you have them, do you keep them in your pocket? Do some of you women keep them in the tea-pot at home? "Why, no;" you say, "I put them in a strong box in the bank." Then you have no victory bonds! "Yes, I have." But you have not. "Yes, I have, I have them in the bank." But you cannot see them, how do you know they are in the bank? "I have my pass-book, I have the receipt. The bank is taking care of them for me." Why do you not take care of them yourself? "Because I should be afraid I should lose them." Do you not know that you have a soul that is worth a million times more than a million worlds? Hand it over to the Son of God, and He will save you for time and for eternity. Is there anyone here who will trust Christ to-night? In the Great War I had men walking up the aisles of this church; they volunteered and were not ashamed of it. Some of you men out in the road, will you not honour God by saying, "I will trust Him"?

THE EDITOR'S ILLNESS

As inquiries as to the Editor's condition are so numerous, we think it wise frankly to say what his condition is.

We have not reported Dr. Shields' illness as particularly serious up to now; but it may now be said that on November 21st and 22nd, the doctor and nurses feared he was nearing the end. He was actually at death's door. However, he has greatly improved. As in all such cases, the patient has his ups and downs, but from November 30th there has been very slow but steady improvement. He is not yet strong enough to see as much as one visitor, with the exception of the doctor and Mr. Slade.

Dr. Shields is earnestly hoping, he may be able to be present at the New Year's Morning Meeting in Jarvis Street. But it is not likely that he will be able to take on any public duty for some months to come. When he has gained his strength he is hoping, with Mrs. Shields, to find a warmer clime for a little while.

It is difficult in such a case to report from day to day: one has rather to measure progress by weeks. There is now every reason to believe that Dr. Shields will completely recover from his illness, and that thereafter he may have better health than he has had for some years. He asks us to assure the Church Membership, THE GOSPEL WITNESS Family, and all other friends, of his great appreciation of their prayerful interest in his progress, and also asks for continued prayer on his behalf.

CHRISTMAS SERVICE IN FRENCH

Sunday, December 27

In view of the usual delay in the mails at this season due to the Christmas rush, we announce in advance the French Christmas service that will take place in Greenway Hall, on Sunday, December 27, at three o'clock, in the afternoon. All our friends are asked to note the date and to make this service as widely known as possible.

"Thou art the way; — to thee alone
From sin and death we flee;
And he who would the Father seek,
Must seek Him; Lord, by Thee."

—GEORGE DOANE

CONVERSIONS DESIRED

A Sermon by C. H. Spurgeon

Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, March 5th, 1876
At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

"And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."—Acts 11:21.

THE brethren who had dwelt together in church fellowship at Jerusalem were scattered abroad by persecution which arose about Stephen. Their Master had told them that when they were persecuted in one city they were to flee to another. They obeyed his command, and in the course of escape from persecution they took very long journeys—very long journeys indeed for that age of the world, when locomotion was exceedingly difficult: but wherever they found themselves they began at once to preach Jesus Christ, so that the scattering of the disciples was also a scattering of good-seed in broader fields. The malice of Satan was made the instrument of the mercy of God. Learn from this, dear brethren, every one of you, that wherever you are called to go you should persevere in making known the name and gospel of Jesus. Look upon this as your calling and occupation. You will not be scattered now by persecution, but should the demands of business carry you into different climes, employ your distant travel for missionary purposes. Providence every now and then bids you remove your tent, take care that wherever it is pitched you carry with you a testimony for Jesus. At times the necessities of health require relaxation and change of air, and this may take you to different places of public resort; seize the opportunity to encourage the churches in such localities by your presence and countenance, and also endeavour to spread the knowledge of Jesus among those to whom you may be directed. The position which you occupy in society is not an accidental one; it has not been decreed to you by a blind, purposeless fate; there is predestination in it, but that predestination is wise, and looks towards a merciful end: you are placed where you are that you may be a preserving salt to those around, a sweet savour of Christ to all who know you. The methods of divine grace have ordained a happy connection between you and the people with whom you associate; you are a messenger of mercy to them, a herald of good tidings, an epistle of Christ. The surrounding darkness needs you, and therefore it is written, "Among whom ye shine as lights in the world." You are intended to warn and rebuke some, to entreat and encourage others. To you the mourner looks for comfort and the ignorant for instruction; let them never look in vain. Be the true friend of men, observe their condition before God, and endeavour to reclaim them from their wanderings. If Joseph was sent to Egypt that he might save his father's house alive, you also are sent where you are for the sake of some hidden ones of the Lord's chosen family. If Esther was placed in the court of a heathen king for the deliverance of her nation, so are you, my sister, called to occupy your present position for the good of the church of Christ. Look ye to it, brethren, lest ye miss your life's object, and live in vain. It would be a sad thing indeed if you who profess to belong to Christ should be "creation's blot, creation's blank", by having failed to work while it is called to-day.

These good people of the early church, however, with all their zeal, were somewhat narrow-minded and ham-

pered by their national prejudices, for they preached at first to the Jews only, and it was very hard to make them see that the gospel was meant for the whole race of man, Gentiles as well as Jews. Their Master had said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," and yet they began with preaching to the Jews only. Words could not have been plainer, and yet they missed their meaning. It is not to be wondered at that some in our day are still unable to preach to men as men when we see how slow the early saints were to learn the lesson. Brethren if there be any narrowness about our spirit, let us pray the Lord to take it away. We shall not, of course be shackled as these Jews were by boasting our nationality, but perhaps there may be classes of society of whom we despair, and therefore for whom we make no effort. We say, "It would be useless to attempt the conversion of such characters. I feel myself quite able to talk to other persons; but although I am placed in the midst of these people I cannot bring my mind to speak with them about spiritual things, for I feel hopeless of success." Beloved, may you be delivered from this snare, and learn to sow beside all waters. The Gentiles, though they were for awhile passed over by the brethren, turned out to be the most hopeful of all classes; from the Gentile fields they reaped harvests such as were never gathered in Judea. Antioch with its Grecians became famous among Christian churches — there the church of Christ first took its name amid a revival of religion, when great multitudes believed and turned unto the Lord. God had from of old intended that the great majority of the election of grace should be gathered out of those very Gentiles whom even the apostle themselves scarcely ventured to address. Now then, my brother, in the light of this incident begin to work where as yet you have done nothing: begin to hope where hitherto you have despaired, throw out your best energies in that very direction in which you have felt most hampered, for there awaits you, to your own intense surprise, a success which will amply reward you. You need not restrict yourselves to lands familiar with the plough, invade the primeval forest, fell the ancient trees, and clear the broad acres: that virgin soil will yield you harvests a hundredfold such as you will never find in fields where others have laboured before you. If your spiritual mining is becoming a failure, open fresh lodes of the precious metal, for veins of treasure lie concealed in the unbroken ground. Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught, and multitudes of fish shall crowd the net. It seems to me to be the obvious teaching of the text that wherever we are cast we should try to do good, and that we may hope for the largest success among the most neglected portions of society.

Coming closely to the text, I desire to press upon you this morning, with great earnestness, the need of the conversion of men, and the desirableness that we should have many converted here, and I shall want to suggest what we can do to produce that result. In all these I beg to be assisted by the Holy Spirit, without whose aid I shall only exhibit my own weakness; and deaden those energies which I long to arouse. These will be our heads: first, the end we aim at, that many may believe and turn unto the Lord; secondly, the power by which this can be attained, "The hand of the Lord was with them"; thirdly, the desirableness of our object; and, fourthly, how we may promote its attainment.

I. Let us speak upon THE END WHICH WE DESIRE. It

may seem very commonplace, but it is in fact one of the grandest designs under heaven: he who contemplates it has a higher aim than philosopher, reformer or patriot. He aims at that for which the Son of God both lived and died. We desire that men may believe, that is to say, first, that they may believe the testimony of Jesus Christ to be true, for there are some who have not reached as far as that: they reject altogether the inspired Word, and to them the incarnation, the redemption, the resurrection, the glory, the second advent, are so many old wives' fables. You to whom these truths are the light of your lives can scarcely realise the power of unbelief of this kind, and yet some men live and die in its gloom. We pray that they may be taught better, and that the evidence of these great facts may be forced home upon them. Alas, there are many who profess to believe these things, but their only reason for so doing is that they have been taught so from their childhood, and it is the current religion of the nation. They regard the inspiration of Scripture, and so on, as matters about which it is not expedient to trouble themselves — they do not care one way or the other, but find it the easier and more respectable plan to admit the truth of the gospel, and think no more about it. Such a vain complimentary belief is rather an insult to our holy faith than a thing to be rejoiced in. But, dear friends, we want more than this faith of indifference, which is little more than dishonest unbelief; we want men to believe for themselves the saving power of Christ Jesus. We pray that nominal believers may treat the doctrines of revelation, not as dogmas, but as facts; not as opinions, but as verities; as surely facts as the events of history, as much verities as the actual incidents of every day life; for, alas, the grand doctrines of eternal truth are frequently treated as venerable non-entities, and have no effect whatever upon the conduct of those who profess to receive them, because they do not realise them as matters of fact, or see their solemn bearings. It is shocking to reflect that a change in the weather has more effect on some men's lives than the dread alternative of heaven or hell. A woman's glance affects them more than the eye of God. We, therefore, desire to see men really and truly believing the facts of the gospel, in an honest, practical manner.

We cannot, however, be content with this; we labour that those around us may savingly believe by putting their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the grand saving act: the man brings his soul and commits it to Christ for safe keeping, and that entrusting of the soul to Jesus saves him. He makes the Saviour trustee of his spiritual estates, and leaves himself and all his eternal interests in those dear hands which once were nailed to the cross. Oh, how we long to see the Holy Spirit bringing men to this, that they may believe in Jesus Christ by resting in him and trusting upon him. For this we live, for this we would be content to die, that many might believe.

The end we aim at is that men may so believe in Jesus that they may be altogether changed in their relation towards God, for "many believed and turned unto the Lord." What does that mean? It means that these heathen gave up their idols and began to worship the only living and true God. We desire, dear hearers, that faith in the Lord Jesus may lead you to give up the objects of your idolatrous love, yourselves, your money, your pleasures, the world, the flesh, the devil; for there be some whose God is their belly, and who glory in their

shame. When a man believes in Jesus Christ he puts away his false gods, and worships the great Father of spirits; he makes no inferior object the aim of his being, but henceforth lives for the glory of God. This is a glorious, turning, a complete conversion of the man's heart and soul.

To turn to God means not merely to forsake the false god for the true, but to turn from the love of sin. Sin lies that way, but God's glory lies in the opposite quarter. He who looks sinward has his back to God—he who looks Godward has his back to sin. It is blessed conversion when men turn from the folly of sin to the glory of God. With weeping and supplication do men so turn, confessing their wrongdoing, lamenting their transgressions, abhorring their evil lustings, desiring pardon, and hoping for removal of their nature. Precious in the sight of the Lord are the tears of penitence and the sighs of contrite hearts. We can never be satisfied with the results of our ministry unless faith leads man to hearty repentance towards God, an intense loathing of their sins, and an actual forsaking of them.

To turn to God means that henceforth God shall be sought in prayer. "Behold he prayeth", is one of the indications of a true convert. The man who lives without prayer lives without God, but the man who has turned to God is familiar with the mercy-seat. What a turning it is when the eye is turned upward to seek the Lord with the solemn glancing of the eye, when none but God is near. To turn to God means to yield yourself obediently to his sway, to be willing to do what he bids, to think what he teaches, and to be what he commands. Faith is nothing unless it brings with it a willing and obedient mind. Wilful rebellion is the child of unbelief, sincere obedience is the offspring of humble believing. "They believed, and turned unto the Lord." We want men, indeed, so to turn that their whole life shall be a going towards God, a growing more like him, a closer communing with him, leading on to the soul's becoming perfectly like him, and dwelling for ever where he is.

Now, dear friends, when I speak thus of believing and turning unto God some will say, "Well, but that must be a very easy matter, only to believe and turn." Yes, my brethren, it appears simple, but it is none the less vitally essential. "He that believeth on the Lord Jesus hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he had not believed." You say, "Why make all this stir about it?" Just because upon this apparently little matter depends the present and eternal condition of the sinner. To believe and to turn to God is to be delivered from the present dominion of sin, and from the future punishment of it; to be without faith and without God is to be without joy here and without hope hereafter. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is what you and I must aim at in all our attempts to influence our fellow men. It may be useful to reform them, but it is far better that grace should regenerate them. God speed every effort to promote sobriety, chastity, thrift, honesty, and morality; but you and I are sent for something more than this, our work goes deeper and is more difficult; it is not ours to wash the blackamoor, but to seek to change his skin; we do not so much pray that the lion may be tamed as that he may be turned into a lamb. It may be well to lop the branches of the tree of sin, but our business is to lay the axe at the root of the trees by leading men to turn to God. This is a change, not of the outward conduct merely, but of the heart; and if we do not see this result, if men do not

believe and turn to God, we have laboured in vain, and spent our strength for naught and in vain. If there are no believings and turnings to the Lord, we may get us to our secret chambers and bewail ourselves before God because none have believed our report, and the arm of the Lord has not been revealed. There is the object—aim at it, saying, "This one thing I do." Praying in the Holy Ghost, and depending upon his power, push on with this one sole object. Drive at it, you teachers in the Sabbath-school; do not be satisfied with instructing the children, labour to have them converted! Drive at it, you preachers; do not believe that you have done your work when you have taught the people, you must never rest till they believe in Jesus Christ. Pursue this in every sermon or Sabbath-school address; throw your whole soul into this one object. Yours must not be a cold inculcation of an external morality, but a warm enthusiasm for an inward regeneration. You are not to bring men to believe in themselves and so become self-made men, but to lead them to believe in Jesus, and to become new creatures in him. There is our end and aim, and are we all alive to it?

II.

Secondly, let us consider THE POWER BY WHICH THIS CAN BE ATTAINED, — "The hand of the Lord was with them." None ever believe in Jesus except those in whom God's arm has been revealed, for Jesus says, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." But, brethren, in answer to prayer that power has been revealed among his people, and is with them still. His arm is not shortened that he cannot save, neither has he withdrawn it from his church. Be encouraged while I suggest to you a few thoughts. The hand of God is upon many of our friends before we speak to them. It is most pleasant to me when I am seeing inquirers to observe how God makes ready the hearts of my hearers. I am studying a certain subject, and praying to God for a blessing on it, and upstairs in a chamber, which I have never seen, one of my hearers is being made ready for my message; his is smitten with a sense of sin, or troubled with uneasy thoughts, or rendered hopeful of better things, and thus he is being made ready to accept the Christ whom I shall preach to him; yes, and ready to accept that particular form of the gospel message which the Spirit of God gave me when I preached. There on a sick bed will lie a woman painfully exercised with the sad memory of her sinful life, in order that when she comes up to the house of God every word may have power over her. Sickness and pain, shame and poverty, often produce a condition of mind most hopeful for the reception of the gospel. A man well to do in circumstances has been ruined in business, he despairs of happiness below, and therefore comes to hear the gospel, made willing to seek his happiness above. Another has lately felt failures of bodily strength, and so has been warned that life is frail, and thus he is prepared to listen to the admonitions which speak of eternity. Courage, minister of God: you are nothing, but the Almighty God is with you. When you lift your hand to build the house of the Lord, omnipotence works with you, and makes your labour a success. Every revolution of those awful wheels, so ponderous that even the prophet said, "O wheel!" is working to accomplish the object which is near your heart. The stars in their courses fight for you. The stones of the field are in league with you. Eternal wisdom plans for you; infinite power works with you, bound-

less patience perseveres with you, and almighty love will conquer by you. "The hand of the Lord was with them." What more do we want? Sow, brother, for God has ploughed. Go up and build, for God has prepared the stones and made ready the foundation.

Moreover, the hand of the Lord is with his people in helping the teachers and preachers themselves. There are strange impulses which come over us at times, which make us think and say what otherwise had never crossed our minds, and these work with power upon men's minds. If you will live to win souls it shall be given you in the self-same hour what ye shall speak. You will often say to an inquirer what you would not have beforehand arranged to say, but God, who knows that inquirer's heart better than you do, has prevented your saying what you would have liked to have said, and has led you to say what you afterwards judged to be a mistake. My experience teaches me that we are often wise in our ignorance, and as often foolish in our wisdom. We have frequently done best when we felt that we did but badly. If we will but trust God and be whole-hearted in the winning of souls we shall have a power assisting us in our speech of which the greatest orator in the world is not aware. Speak in the House of Commons for a party, and you will have to look within for aid, but speak in the house of the Lord and you may look upward for spiritual aid. The poet invokes the fabled muses, but for you, O servant of the Lord, there is real help from a higher source. Think of this, ye workers, and be encouraged.

Besides providence and the gracious help by which good men speak, there is a distinct work of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men where the gospel is preached. Not only is the Spirit in the Word, but over and above that, is his own elect God worketh most effectually, so the truth is rendered irresistible. Let us never forget where our great strength lieth, for in this matter we must rely alone upon the Spirit of God. How often has God wrought in the power of his grace by making men feel the majesty of the word. They come, perhaps, to hear the preacher out of the idlest curiosity, they look for something which shall amuse them; but the truth comes home to them and searches their heart. Simple as the language is, "As if an angel spake they hear the solemn sound"; it goes through them like a dart, and they cannot help feeling, "Surely God was there, and he spoke with me."

The Spirit of God makes men recollect their sins: they try to forget them, but sometimes they cannot; sad memories steal over them, and wholesome regrets thrill their very souls. Men who have been giddy and careless, and forgetful, have on a sudden found themselves turning over the pages of their old diaries, and with thoughtfulness reviewing the past: all this leads to repentance and faith. That same Spirit makes men see the beauty of holiness; they cannot help admiring it, though they are far from it. They are charmed with the loveliness of the character of Jesus, and begin to feel that there is something about it which they would wish to imitate. When the preacher proclaims the way of salvation the same Spirit leads men to admire it, and to say within themselves, "There is something here which human wisdom could never have devised," and they begin to long for a share in it. A wish takes possession of their heart, as thought some strange bird from an unknown land had flown into their souls, and had amazed them with a new song. They do not know where the desire came from, but they feel strangely bound to entertain the stranger.

Sometimes also the Spirit blows like a hurricane through men's hearts, and they have been borne along by its power without the will to resist. As when a tempest rushes across the sea, and drives the frail bark before it helplessly, so have I known the divine Spirit sweep away the peace and quiet of the soul's self-righteousness, stir up the deeps of inward trouble, make the soul to reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, and impel the heart forward to the iron-bound coast of self-despair, where every false hope and vain-glorious trust has been wrecked for ever. Glory be to God when this is the case, for then the soul is driven to cling to Jesus.

Yes, brethren, it is not the preacher, and it is not altogether what the preacher says, but there is a power abroad, as potent as that by which the worlds were made. Unbelievers sometimes ask, "Where is your God?" O sirs, if you once felt the power of the great Spirit you would never ask that question. "Since the fathers fell asleep," say they, "all things continue as they were;" but this they willingly are ignorant of, that new creations are being wrought every day, that there are men and women alive in this world who are neither liars nor enthusiasts, who can declare that upon their spirit the eternal power and Godhead has operated and changed them, conquering them, and holding them henceforth as willing captives to its supreme majesty. Yes, brethren, there is a hand of the Lord, and that hand of the Lord is with his people still. If it be not, then we shall see no believing and no turning to God; but since it is still at work among us, let us work on, for as surely as we live we shall see great numbers converted to God, and God will be glorified.

III.

Let us now dwell upon the DESIRABLENESS OF CONVERSIONS. It is no new thing to you and to me to see many believing and turning to God. These two-and-twenty years God's hand has been stretched out still: we have had no spasm of revival, we have not alternated between furious spurts and sudden lulls, but month by month, I think I might say Sabbath by Sabbath, souls have been saved, and the church has grown exceedingly, and God has been glorified. What we have enjoyed we desire to retain—yea, we would have more. The Lord says to us what he said to the church at Philadelphia, "Hold fast what thou hast, that no man take thy crown," and our crown is the crown of soul winning, which we must hold fast, for we cannot endure to lose it. This must be our crown, that we have preached the gospel to both minister and church members, and have been all of us soul-winners. We desire this because, first of all, we desire to see truth, godliness, virtue and holiness extended. Who among you does not? Does not every good man wish others to be good, every honest man wish others to be honest? Does not every man who loves his family desire that other families should be well-ordered? Oh, then, if there were no nobler reason, you may desire that men may be converted, since conversion is the root of everything that is pure, and lovely, and of great report.

You desire, too, that your fellow-creatures should be happy, but there is no such happiness as that which springs out of reconciliation to God. The peace which you yourselves enjoy through pardoned sin must surely make you desire that others may possess the same. If religion be indeed a source of perennial joy to yourself, you are inhuman if you do not wish others to drink of it. Brother, as you would make eyes sparkle, as you would make countenances radiant with delight, as I know you would

spread gladness on all sides, desire above all things that your children, your relations, your neighbours, your friends, should be converted to God. Thus shall thorns and briars give place to myrtles and rose, and deserts shall be turned into gardens of the Lord.

You also desire conversion, I am sure, because you feel the dreadful hazard of unconverted men. You have not yet subscribed to the modern doctrine that these men and women around you are only two-legged cats and dogs and horses, and will ultimately die out and cease to be. You believe in the God-given immortality of human souls, a heritage from which no man can escape, the noblest of all man's endowments; in itself the highest of all boons, though sin may pervert it into the direst of all necessities. You would have scant motives for desiring men's conversion if you did not believe that there is another and everlasting state; but, believing that men live hereafter, and exist for ever, you must, I am sure be eager that men escape from the wrath to come. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, you would persuade men; judging that there is one of two things for them all, either "These shall go away into everlasting punishment," or else, "The righteous into life eternal," you can never rest until you feel convinced that those about you are partakers of life eternal. Look at any unconverted person, and your sympathies should be aroused. If I saw tokens of fever, or marks of consumption in the face of any one I loved, I should be struck with alarm; what, then, must I feel when I see damnation—as I do see it—in the face of every unbeliever? How is it that we are not more distressed than we are when men are perishing in their sins? Why, my brethren, are we not more intent upon the conversion of men? Let these questions humble us and cause great searchings of heart. It is a shame to us that we have so little of the mind of Christ, so little compassion for men's souls.

Moreover, brethren, self-preservation is a law of nature, and the Church can never preserve herself except by increasing from the world by conversion. Where are the preachers for the next generation? To-day they are amongst the ungodly, and we must labour to bring them to God. Where are the stones that are to make the next course in the walls of our Zion? They are unquarried yet, and we must, by God's grace, excavate them. We who now labour for the Lord will soon go our ways. Our thrones and crowns are waiting for us, and the angels are beckoning us away; who will fill our places? Who will bear the banner? Who will blow the trumpet? Who will wield the sword? We must find new champions in the ranks of the foe; they must be born unto God, and we must pray that this may be accomplished by our instrumentality.

Seek conversions for Christ's sake. You know the agony and bloody sweat; shall these be spent in vain? You know the nailing to the cross and the shriek of "Why hast thou forsaken me?"—shall these be unrewarded? You have thought over and trusted in the bitter pangs of your Redeemer's death; shall he not see of the travail of his soul? Shall he not be satisfied? These lost sheep are his sheep, for whom he shed his precious blood; these lost pieces of money are his money, and they bear his image and superscription; shall they not be found? These lost sons, away there spending their living in riotousness, are his brothers, children of his Father; do you not desire for Jesus' sake that they should be brought home?

Dear friends, what joy it will be to yourselves if men believe and turn to the Lord by your means. I put that

motive last, and hope it will not be the strongest, but it may yet be one of the liveliest. What joy it will be to yourselves if you see many converted! Somebody has asked, "If the heathen are not evangelized, what will become of them?" I will put another question of a far more practical character. If you do not try to evangelize the heathen, what will become of you? Do not so much inquire about their destiny as your own, if you have no care for their salvation. He who never seeks the conversion of another is in imminent danger of being damned himself. I do not believe in any man's salvation who is wrapped up in self, assuredly he is not saved from selfishness. I cannot believe in any man's possession of the Spirit of God who is indifferent to the condition of others, for one of the first fruits of the Spirit is love. Even as flowers at their very first blooming shed their perfume, so do the saved ones in their earliest days of grace desire the good of their fellows. I know that one of my earliest impulses when I first looked to Christ and lost the burden of my sin was to tell everybody around me of the blessings I had received, for I longed to make others as happy as I was. I do fear me that you who never try to win souls lack an essential part of the Christian character. I leave the question with your own consciences.

IV.

Fourthly, let us enquire, WHAT WE CAN DO TO PROMOTE CONVERSIONS. Conversion is God's work: it cannot be wrought without his hand. Without him we can do nothing. Our hand is far too puny for such a work; the power of the first disciples and our own lies in the fact mentioned in the text,—“The hand of the Lord was with them.” Still, there are certain circumstances under which that hand will work, and there are hindrances which will restrain it. Let us think awhile. First, then, if sinners are to be converted we must distinctly aim at it. As a rule, a man does what he tries to do, and not that which is mere by-play. The conversion of sinners is not one of those things which a man is likely to accomplish without intending it. Sometimes in the sovereignty of God a preacher who does not aim at conversion may nevertheless be made useful, for God works as he wills; but largely, and as a rule men do not win souls if they do not eagerly desire to do so. Fishing for men cannot be carried out by throwing in the net anyhow, without caring whether fish be caught or not. Few traders become rich by accident, they generally have to plod and work hard for money; and to be rich in treasures of saved souls you must aim at it and labour for it. I am struck with astonishment as I think how many sermons are preached, how many Sunday-school addresses are given, how many religious books are written of which you are quite sure that the intention was not immediate conversion. It is thought that in some unknown way these good things may accidentally contribute to men's salvation, but they are not aimed at as their present object. Ah, brother, if you want men to come to Christ you must preach Christ to them with all your heart, with this design, that immediately they may close in with Christ, and at once give their hearts to Jesus. Yes, and you are to pray that they may do so through the present effort which you are making for their good. There is the target, and if you continue to shoot into the air long enough an arrow may perhaps strike it; but, man alive, if you want to win the prize of archery you had better fix your eye upon the white and take your aim distinctly

and with skill. If an individual would win souls he must bend his whole soul to it and make it the object of his whole energy.

Next to that we must take care if we would have souls won that we press upon them the truths which God usually blesses. Shall I read to you the verse before my text? Here it is: “They spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus and the hand of the Lord was with them.” Now, if we do not preach Jesus Christ we shall not see souls saved. There are certain forms of doctrines which condemn themselves by working out their own extinction. Did you ever hear of a minister whose preaching leaned towards Unitarianism but what the congregation sooner or later began to diminish? Though many such preachers have been men of great ability, they have not as a rule been able to keep the dead thing on its feet. You shall go into our small towns, and you may find an ancient chapel which was once an Independent or a Presbyterian, or it may be a Baptist chapel; but if you see over the door “Unitarian”, you have, as a rule, seen all that there is. There is neither church nor congregation worthy of the name; frequently the place is never opened at all, and the grass grows knee deep on the path to the door. Even when these little places are used, you will generally find that they contain half a dozen nobodies who think themselves everybody as to intellect and culture. It is a religion of the utmost value to spiders, for those insects are able to spin their webs in the meeting-houses without fear. Who ever heard, who ever will hear of a Unitarian Whitfield, or a Socinian Moody gathering twenty thousand people to listen to a Christless gospel? It is a phenomenon which never has been seen and never will be. Men's instincts lead them to turn away from a creed which contains so little which can solace the troubled soul.

If we want souls saved we must equally avoid the modern intellectual system in all its phases. “Oh,” cries somebody, “you should hear the great Mr. Bombast. It is—Oh, I cannot tell you what it is, but something very wonderful; it is an intellectual treat.” Just so; but how many conversions are wrought by this wonderful display of genius? How many hearts are broken by fine rhetoric? How many broken hearts are healed by philosophy? So far as I have observed, I find that God does not save souls by intellectual treats.

Certain views as to man's future are equally to be kept clear of, if you would be the means of conversion. Diminish your ideas of the wrath of God and the terrors of hell, and in that proportion you will diminish the results of your work. I could not conceive a Bunyan or a Baxter, or any other great soul-winner, falling into these new notions, or if he did there would be an end to his success. Other crotchets and novelties of doctrine are also to be let alone, for they are not likely to promote your object, but will most probably divert men's attention from the vital point. Dear brothers and sisters, if you want a harvest, look well to your seed. Time was when gardeners threw all the little potatoes on one side for seed, and then they had bad crops; but now I have seen them pick out the very best and put them by. “We must have good seed,” say they. If I had to sow my fields with wheat I would not take the tail corn. I should grudge no expense about seed, for it would be a false economy to buy any but the very best. Go preach, teach, and instruct with the best doctrine, even that of God's word; for depend upon it though the result is not in your hands, yet it very much depends upon what you teach. O, eter-

nal and ever blessed Spirit, guide thy servants into all truth!

Next to this, if you want to win souls for Christ, feel a solemn alarm about them. You cannot make them feel if you do not feel yourself. Believe their danger, believe their helplessness, believe that only Christ can save them, and talk to them as if you meant it. The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving you. If you can rest without their being saved they will rest too; but if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy too. I hope you will get into such a state that you will dream about your child, or about your hearer perishing for lack of Christ, and start up at once and begin to cry, "O God, give me converts or I die." Then you will have converts; there is no fear about that. God does not send travail pangs to his servants without causing them to abound in spiritual children. There will be new births to God when you are agonizing for them.

But, let me add, there must be much prayer. I delight to be in prayer-meetings where the brethren will not let the Lord go except he bless them, when a brother prays, choking as he speaks, tears rolling down his cheeks as he pleads with God to have mercy on the sons of men. I am always certain that sinners are ordained to be blessed when I see saints thus compelled to plead with God for them. In your closets alone, at your family altars, and in your gatherings for prayer be importunate, and the hand of the Lord must and will be with you. Cry aloud and spare not, plead as for your lives, and bring forth your strong arguments, for only by prevailing with God will you be enabled to prevail with men.

Then there must be added to prayer direct personal effort on the part of all of you. Great numbers may be saved by my preaching if the Holy Spirit blesses it, but I shall expect larger numbers if you all turn preachers, if every brother and sister here becomes a witness for Christ. Are you indolent? Are any of you beginning to sleep? I charge you, wake up. By the love you bear to Jesus, and by the love you bear to your fellow men, begin at once to seek the conversion of those who dwell around you. O my beloved, do not become lukewarm. My heart fails me at the very thought. If you are earnest, I live; if you grow slothful, my spirit dies within me.

Last of all, if you want to see many converts, expect them. "According to your faith so be it unto you." Look out for them; believe that God will bless every sermon, and go a-hunting after the sermon to see where the converts are. As a company of sutlers and camp-followers generally after every army, and after a battle go up to strip the slain, so if you cannot preach I would have you follow after the warriors to gather in the spoil. No one needed to urge the voracious spoilers to prowl over the field of Sedan or Gravelotte, but now it ever seems needful to persuade you to collect a far nobler prey. Come ye up, come ye up, ye servants of the Lord, and divide the spoil with the strong. Christ has fought your battle, the arrows have been sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies, the two-edged sword has smitten right and left; come ye up, ye sons of Jacob, to the prey, and gather in the converts as your spoil. Speak with the young converts, cheer the broken hearts, comfort the seekers, and bring into his palace trophies for your Lord. Verily, I say unto you, if ye look not for conversions neither shall ye obtain them, but then blame not the Lord; ye are not straitened in him, but in your own bowels. God bless you, beloved, and may we have a larger increase to this

church during the next month than we have had for years past, that our God may have greater praise.

Portion of Scripture read before sermons—Acts 11.
Hymns from "Our Own Hymn Book", 387, 450, 331.

"YEA, RATHER"

It is often wise to ask for the old paths, and to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance with supposedly familiar places. There are scriptural words and phrases which seem to be altogether commonplace, and which acquire to our view a wholly familiar aspect because of their very obviousness. There is such a text in the eighth of Romans and the thirty-fourth verse. We have read it hundreds of times, and have seen something of its significance; yet it comes to us to-day with a new meaning, and flashes upon us with an entirely new relation.

The words seem, on the surface, to be one of those self-revelations common to many speakers and writers, which seem to indicate something of the inward operation of the mind. The writer has penned a word which falls short of his full thought, and he adds another to complete it. Or such an example may be found where the author deliberately uses such a supplementary form of expression for rhetorical purposes, and to give proper emphasis to his thought. Both may be involved in our text; but if we regard these words as divinely inspired, as we do, such a seeming correction and rearrangement of emphasis, has a special significance.

Truth cannot be wholly apprehended at a glance, nor fully expressed in a word. "It is Christ that died." Is that all? You are versed in geography. You know the way to Golgotha? And you have seen the Cross? You know its dimensions? You know its purpose—Oh, yes, you know it is an instrument of death. Pilate will instruct you, Herod will confirm his testimony, the chief priests and the scribes, the soldiers and the centurion—they will all agree that you have apprehended the truth: "It is Christ that died."

But look again, reflect again, investigate further. Do not sit down in the darkness and on the preparation for the Sabbath, and say, "It is Christ that died." Time must have opportunity to witness; friends must be heard as well as foes; angels must be allowed to speak, and then we shall say, "It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." "Rather"—"even"—"also", three adverbs! Do they matter? May we not drop out the little words? Ah, there is more in human speech than verbs and substantives. You must have your adverbs, and your adverbial phrases. We do not mean that the elements of truth are to be classified grammatically: we mean to say that there are the modifying elements of truth which must be examined in order to an understanding of it. Therefore we must look again; we must listen again; we must consider again. "It is Christ that died." Shall we leave it there? Is there any modification of the darkness, the tragedy, the defeat, involved in that sentence? What can an adverb do for us? Perhaps it can lead us on to other modifications until everything is changed. Let us look again: "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Thus death is swallowed up in victory!

Truth is worth a second look, is it not? It is generally recognized to be so when it concerns the visible and temporal. No man will either buy or sell without a "yea,

rather." We insist on proving all things, and holding fast that which is good, when the "all things" have a monetary value.

This is a principle which few ignore in their educational pursuits. There are principles which cannot be reduced to a truism, and there are aspects of truth which defy axiomatic expression. Hence in the pursuit of knowledge of natural phenomena, the necessity for patient research and prolonged reflection is assumed.

Why, then, should we presume to expect to receive all that may be known of the spiritual realm photographically and instantaneously? "It is Christ that died, yea rather"—then go on with the lesson, for within that infinite compass lies the truth, which, apprehended, lifts the soul from the ruin of death accursed on the Cross, to a life redeemed and resplendent in glory.

Then again: A half truth may involve an untruth: "It is Christ that died." That is perfectly true. But that is precisely what His enemies affirm of Him, and in and by their affirmation, deny the truth of that which He affirms of Himself.

We do well to remember that the gospel may be denied by proclaiming only a part of it. A person's life may be destroyed just as effectually by a process of starvation as by direct poisoning. A man may be strictly orthodox in his speech and dangerously heretical in his silence! What he says may be strictly true, and yet his speech may be rendered untrue by what he withholds. Thus the souls of men may be led astray—not so much by a false teacher's speech as by his silence. We believe that is a very real danger to-day. A one-sided presentation of Christ, a transference of emphasis in the reading of the Gospel, may constitute a positive misrepresentation of Christ to men. And in this realm, as in others, a neutral may be more dangerous than an avowed enemy. You can fight an enemy; a neutral demands a certain polite treatment. Thus the devil accomplishes his deadliest purposes under a neutral disguise. Beware of the modern heresy of deleting the essentials of the gospel; and insist on the complementary, "Yea, rather."

It may be worth while considering some examples of this principle. What is the gospel? Someone says: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps"—yea, rather—"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." Christ is your Example, yea, rather, He is your Substitute, and sin-Bearer, and Surety with God.

What is the truth as in Jesus? Another will reply: "In Him a perfect humanity is exemplified. I glory in the humanity of Jesus." And it is good to be assured of His perfect humanity; but—yea, rather—to be assured of His Deity also. We take these general things to illustrate a general principle. There is not a doctrine of grace which has not been distorted, and misrepresented, and denied, by means of mutilation and division into half truths. It is charged against Christian orthodoxy that it represents human nature as being totally depraved, and incapable of itself of right-doing. But that is not all. "Dead in trespasses and sins"—yea, rather—"You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins."

So, too, it is complained that the Old Theology consigns unbelievers to hell: we answer, "Yea, rather, it proclaims the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers."

This leads us to the further observation, that all truth must be viewed in its complementary relations or it ceases

to be truth. "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." The first is untrue without the last. If you break a piece of marble statuary to fragments, it is no longer true to say that it is a work of art. Any affirmation concerning Christ can be only conditionally and relatively true. For instance: He was a good man—it is not true unless you can add, "Yea, rather, He is the God-man." The first cannot be true without the last. Claiming to be God, He must have been what He said He was, or He could not have been even good. Thus the perfection of His humanity depends upon the reality of His Deity. Thus truth must be seen relatively or it ceases to be truth.

And this, in turn, implies order and perfection. "Ah," says one, "I would hear about the life of Christ. Let us go beyond the Cross to the resurrection—I believe in the risen Christ." But of what value is His life without His death? You cannot have a house without a foundation, nor build a temple upsidown. Let us see—"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again." Thus we must learn to view all truth relatively or we cannot view truth at all.

But these principles must needs be turned to practical account. We have not been speaking of truth in the abstract merely, of truth objective to ourselves; but of principles which affect the truth that is wrought into human experience.

Observe how it bears upon our own spiritual conflicts. Can you exaggerate the depth of your spiritual wretchedness? How true is it that we are sinful and weak and helpless! How shall we express it?—"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?—yea, rather—There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." How prone we are to view life fragmentarily and temporally! In our estimate of life's griefs and tears, we have no perspective, and no sense of balance, and proportion. But again our principle helps us. We must often say with Jacob, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" — Yea, rather, we must ever believe with Paul, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

You recall an experience where you suffered humiliation and shame, when self-denial deepened into self-abnegation. You recall it with a shudder and say, "It was a veritable Calvary to me, an experience of real crucifixion"—yea, rather, let it be remembered as a resurrection, when the corn of wheat that fell into the ground and died, brought forth much fruit. Thus we shall be able to view the discipline of life perspective.

Even yet, we are too near the war properly to estimate it. But how shall we write it? Shall we say, "It was a time of suffering, of prolonged agony, of unexampled strain and effort, of unprecedented ruthlessness, and predatory bloodlust, of unparalleled lawlessness on land and sea, and in the air—yea rather, may we not say it was a time of loving self-denial, of self-sacrificing service, of heroic devotion, of noble determination, a renaissance of chivalry, of high thinking, and pure living, when righteousness proved its immortality, and truth was victorious, and liberty was crowned? So, perhaps, may we be able to speak of the long struggle of life. "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." The Cross is inevitable—yea rather, so is the empty grave! That is the testimony of history.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL IN PARIS

THE church at Colombes, a suburb of Paris, recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The writer had the privilege of preaching in French in this church last summer, and Dr. Shields has also visited it on several occasions. It was founded in 1903 in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Emile Raynaud who had been converted in the Salvation Army. They invited a few friends and neighbours to meet in their home, and from their faithful witness, with the blessing of the Lord, grew one of the strongest and most active Protestant churches in the region of the great city of Paris. Scepticism and indifference, lately aided by Communism, have made great inroads among working class Parisians, and the Church of Rome has undertaken special campaigns to win back to its fold great masses of professed Roman Catholics who have deserted the ranks of the Church. It is specially interesting in the light of this to read something of what God has wrought through the years in this evangelical Church, the only Protestant church in the district.

Madame Raynaud, the widow of the founder-pastor, who is now ninety-one years of age, gave a short message at the anniversary meetings. She said: "Do not be idle, and do not be timid for the Lord." Her long experience in the Lord's service and her great age gave a special authority to her words, and the affectionate regard of the entire church membership was expressed to her by a lovely bouquet of flowers presented by one of the smallest members of the Sunday school.

The pastor of this thriving work is Mr. Emile Guedj, well-known among us in Canada for his Gospel singing. He has given twenty years of life to this work, and we join with *Le Lien Fraternel* the organ of our French Baptist Churches, in praying that the Lord will strengthen, inspire, and bless him in his great task.

Seven members of the church, all converted from the darkness of Rome, gave their testimonies at this meeting, and as an instance of how the Grace of God works in France, we translate here the account of one of these testimonies as given in *Le Lien Fraternel*.

True "Socialism" Is in the Gospel

A Testimony Given by a Member of the Columbus Church

Since my childhood I was hostile to the principles of Roman Catholicism in which, for the sake of appearances, my family had given me special instruction. Encouraged by my father's atheism, I decided that as soon as the religious instruction was terminated, I would have nothing to do with the practice of religion. Much more, the hatred and dislike kept-up in my mind a continual revolt against all that had to do with religious matters.

About fifteen years ago, when the troubled epoch of the years 1939-1944 was being prepared in an agonized world, I completed a course of studies leading to the teaching profession. Like many of my young fellow-students, I used to dream of a renewed world where social justice would rule among nations of brothers. With the enthusiasm of youth I belonged to the International Socialist Federation. During that period, the newspapers and the gatherings of the extreme-left occupied all my spare time, and the idealistic impulse of my mind found a seeming satisfaction in Revolutionary Socialism.

The revolution took place, but it was the very One whom I had not known until that moment who brought it about in my heart. When I used to dream of social peace and of world-wide brotherhood, I was soon bitterly

deceived by the procedures and arguments employed. I was well acquainted with the atmosphere of those meetings of 1936 where one had to strike hard and fast to gain an argument!

Would the rumble of great armaments that moved across Europe bring a message of peace to the world? I lived in a world of bitter troubles and was often tempted to put an end to such an existence. One Sunday I sought to escape from the idleness and loneliness that oppressed me, and, noticing that the Protestant meetings of my little town were free to all, I made up my mind to go in and satisfy my curiosity, thinking that I should never return a second time.

The service had scarcely begun when I seemed to be a hundred miles from the earth. The calmness, the spirit of meditation, the tranquility of the congregation, the conviction evident in the hymns and the prayers, all were so different from anything I had ever known before. Suddenly I was ashamed of being seen in such a meeting, and it seemed that every word that I heard condemned me. Instinctively I bowed my head at the time of prayer and I realized that the peace that I had long sought, the true love, the only thing that could save me from myself, the pure hope of a better world, were all there, and I had not known it!

Stirred to the depths of my soul, vanquished to the point of kneeling in prayer, it seemed to me that the Divine Word that was read and preached that day were specially said for the lost child that I was. These are the words: "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Matt. 7:26f).

That night I took home a New Testament that I read until the early hours of the morning. At that moment a new life began for me, and I knew then that the disorder of my life and the pride of my thoughts would have forever separated me from God if His pardon had not been offered me by His great redemption in Jesus Christ.

The years have passed. He has been faithful, I know that He loves me and from Him I look for all things. The scorn of my former friends and the misunderstanding of my relatives have caused me to find still greater sweetness in the voice of my Saviour which never ceases to say to me, "And what is that to thee?"

BOOKS AND BOOKLETS By DR. T. T. SHIELDS

"The Plot That Failed" _____	2.00
"Other Little Ships" _____	\$2.00
Special Illustrated Number of Sept. 28 _____	.25
"Russellism or Rutherfordism", 71 pages _____	.25
"The Papacy in the Light of Scripture", 26 pages _____	.25
"The Oxford Group Analyzed" _____	.05
"Does Killed in Action Mean Gone to Heaven?" _____	.05
"The Christian Attitude Toward Amusements" _____	.05
"The God of All Comfort" _____	.05

The Gospel Witness
130 Gerrard Street East, Toronto 2 - Canada

FRANCO BAND PLAYS "O CANADA" AS ENVOY PAYS STATE VISIT

Madrid, Dec. 10 (Reuters).—Gen. Francisco Franco's palace guard band struck up "O Canada" for the first time today, when Lt-Gen. Maurice Pope presented his credentials as the first Canadian ambassador to Spain.

Pope, 64, introduced his staff, then had a 20-minute informal chat with the Spanish head of state.

He later said: "I was received by the chief of state in a most friendly way and we had a conversation on topics of interest to both our countries. Gen. Franco expressed the hope that now diplomatic relations have been established between our two countries, friendly contacts between Canada and Spain would be fostered thereby."

Thousands of spectators gathered along Pope's route from the Ritz Hotel to the presidential palace to watch the colorful parade.

The new Canadian ambassador rode in an 18th century state coach drawn by six horses, escorted by 100 of Franco's famed mounted Moorish Guard.

At the head of the procession was a two-horse coach carrying Canadian Trade Commissioner E. H. Naguie, followed by a four-horse coach carrying the embassy's first secretary, John McCormick.

Preceding the ambassador's carriage was a section of Franco's Guard of Lancers in flowing white capes and turbans and scarlet Moorish uniforms.

Behind the coach came trumpeters dressed in orange and white, with another section of lancers in blue and white bringing up the rear.

SPAIN HONOURS QUEBEC'S NATIONALISTIC ANTHEM

Last week Franco's Palace Guard played "O Canada" in honour of the new Canadian Ambassador appointed to the Spanish dictator's government.

Spain and Quebec are two of the most strongly Roman Catholic regions left in the modern world. They both boast of their loyalty and devotion to the pope and both exhibit the same Romish bigotry against Protestantism and the same opposition to free speech. Quebec enjoys a democratic government and the advantages of British law and order, due to the fact that it forms a part of the Dominion of Canada. Many French-Canadians recognize that the British Conquest has proved to be a blessing in disguise to them, and that under the British flag Canada has developed as a free, self-governing nation where there is justice and liberty for men of all creeds and races and languages. The priests, however, have exploited the narrowest and most fanatical sentiments of racial pride, linguistic prejudices and national feeling for their own selfish ends. They represent themselves as the friends of the habitants, and the "English" as the sworn enemies of French-Canadians. They teach that to speak French is to be a Roman Catholic, to speak English is to be a Protestant, and hence to be a traitor to one's race. This outrageous nationalism seeks to make Quebec into one huge monastery where no non-Roman Catholic influence may enter and where the Church of Rome may reign supreme as it does in Spain and in South America.

It is fitting, in our opinion, that Quebec's nationalistic hymn, "O Canada" should have been given a unique mark of distinction by being played by Dictator Franco's private band. Quebec and Spain have much in common and Franco would heartily re-echo the sentiments of the French version of "O Canada" which is not a truly Canadian anthem but Quebec's nationalist hymn as the following translation of it demonstrates. It speaks of "the faith", that is the Roman Catholic faith; the altar",

that is the altar of the Roman Church, and by "liberty" we must understand the sort that is preached and practiced by the Roman Church in Quebec and in Spain.

Those who are acquainted with the authentic French version of the song "O Canada" by Basile Routhier, recognize that it is not only regional, but racial and sectarian, and therefore cannot be the national anthem of all Canadians from sea to sea. But few English-speaking Canadians are aware that the words by R. Stanley Weir, which we usually sing to the same music, do not bear the slightest resemblance, except the title, to the French "O Canada". We give here a prose translation of the original French song as it is sung in Quebec. Our readers will be in a position to form their own judgment as to whether "O Canada" is a national anthem or a "nationalist" song.

"O Canada! Land of our ancestors, thy forehead is crowned with glorious ornaments. For thy arm knows how to bear the sword, it knows how to bear the cross; thy history is an epic of the most brilliant exploits. And thy valor tempered by faith will protect our homes and our rights.

"Under the eye of God, near the Giant river, the Canadian (Le Canadien) grew in hope. He is born of a proud race; blest was his cradle. Heaven marked his career in this new world: ever guided by its light he will guard the honour of his flag.

"From his patron saint (St. John the Baptist?), forerunner of the true God, he carries on his forehead the halo of fire. Enemy of tyranny, but filled with loyalty, he knows how in harmony to guard his proud liberty and by the effort of his genius to plant the truth on our soil.

"Sacred love of throne and altar, fill our hearts with thy immortal breath. Among foreign races the law is our guide; let us be a nation (un peuple) of brothers and the yoke of the Faith (la Foi); and let us repeat as did our fathers the victorious cry; For the Christ and the King!"

It will not surprise anyone who has read this French Catholic Hymn, to learn that it was specially composed for a Convention of the Saint-Jean Baptiste Société in Quebec, and that it was sung then "with great enthusiasm".

The sense of shame that most Canadians feel at being officially associated with the last of the Axis partners is sealed and signified by the doleful strains of Franco's band playing "O Canada" in the presence of his hired mercenaries, the Moorish Guards, whose arms were hired in the civil war to shoot down Spaniards who dared oppose a dictatorial Fascist. This was the proper setting for Quebec's Roman Catholic nationalistic anthem.

—W.S.W.

We must carefully note these two things — that a knowledge of all the sciences is mere smoke where the heavenly science of Christ is wanting; a man with all his acuteness, is as stupid for obtaining of himself a knowledge of the mysteries of God, as an ass is unqualified for understanding musical harmonies.

—JOHN CALVIN.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Dec. 21—The House of David Established 2 Sam. 7:4-17
Dec. 22—The Son of David and His Throne Isa. 9:1-7
Dec. 23—The Virgin Birth of Christ Isa. 7:10-16
Dec. 24—The Annunciation Luke 1:26-38
Dec. 25—The Birth of Christ Matt. 1:18-25
Dec. 26—The Word Made Flesh John 1:1-18
Dec. 27—The Adoration of Christ by the Magi Matt. 2:1-12

A HINT FOR PROHIBITIONISTS

By J. V. McAree

in the "Circle Bar" Fourth Column of the "Globe and Mail",
December 12, 1953

In the old "open bar" there was, naturally a bar with a rail in front of it on which the drinkers rested their feet. There might be a spittoon or two. Behind the bar was the bartender, and in front of him were beer kegs; behind him were bottles and glasses. It is possible that there might be a clock. That was all. There were no stools, chairs, benches or love seats. The austerity was intended to discourage lounging about the place. The idea was that men would take a drink or two and go home, or at least go somewhere else where they could sit down. Exactly the opposite tendency is to be seen in the "contemporary cocktail lounges." Here are voluptuous couches. Worse than that there is television in almost every beverage room, whose tendency is to induce drinkers to stay and watch it for several hours while drinking. Having no particular admiration for beverage rooms, cocktail lounges or television, we offer the prohibitionists the suggestion that they might, with more reason than they generally exhibit, make a drive to eliminate television from beverage rooms and cocktail lounges.

THE GOSPEL WITNESS takes this opportunity of expressing its thanks to Mr. McAree for his "suggestion to prohibitionists", disregarding his barbed allusion to their alleged lack of reason, seeing that anti-prohibitionists do not require its help as they have such powerful allies as the world, the flesh, and the devil. However, we have no more intention of setting out on a crusade against television than we have of following in the footsteps of that redoubtable knight Don Quixote in his campaign against the windmills. It is not to television that we object but to alcohol. It is noteworthy that Mr. McAree is the second columnist to admit in the pages of *The Globe and Mail* that the present liquor laws of this province have brought about a disgraceful condition in public drinking places. Despite the pious-sounding phrases employed in the official titles of boards and laws named by the legislature to "control" liquor, it is our opinion that in reality these official distributors are very efficient super-salesmen for the increased consumption of alcoholic beverages.—W.S.W.

Bible School Lesson Outline

Vol. 17 Fourth Quarter Lesson 13 December 27, 1953

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

Lesson Text: Luke 2:1-20.

Golden Text: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."—Luke 2:11.

I. The Census: verses 1-7.

God sent His Son to a people who were divinely prepared for His coming. Throughout Old Testament times the Jews had received revelations from God through His prophets and priests, and by means of laws and ceremonies, types and symbols, words and works, all of which paved the way for the full disclosure of God in Christ (1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 1:1, 2). John the Baptist was chosen to be the immediate forerunner of the Messiah (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; 4:5; Matt. 3:1-3; Luke 1:76-80). The prophecies concerning the advent of the Redeemer had become more and more specific as the time of their fulfillment drew near; and devout souls, hearkening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, were longing intensely and expectantly for the promised consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25, 26, 36-38).

The Roman world was chosen by the Divine Director to provide the setting for the most stupendous drama of human history. It was no mere chance event that Caesar Augustus

should be ruling over a vast and united Empire. One in government and language, one in its network of highways and lines of communication, it became an ideal vehicle for the spread of Christianity. As Caesar Augustus set his seal to the proclamation which decreed that a census should be taken which would include the population and property of every city, village and district of the Roman world, how little he thought that he was but a pawn in the hand of the Supreme Ruler of the universe!

This census was decreed for the destined year; God's time to manifest His Son had now arrived (Mark 1:15; Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 1:2, 3; 1 Pet. 1:20). From the papyri of the times we learn that such a census was taken periodically to serve as a basis for future taxation.

The regulation that each Roman citizen should enroll in the city of his own tribe must have seemed unnecessary and inconvenient to many, but this was God's way of bringing His servants to the sacred town of Bethlehem, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:4-6; John 7:42).

Here, too, was circumstantial evidence for future generations that Christ was indeed the lineal descendant of David, as had been prophesied (2 Sam. 7:12, 13; Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Luke 1:32, 69). If, as is probable, the genealogy of Joseph is given in Matthew 1:1-17 and that of Mary in Luke 4:23-38; we see why they were both required to register in Bethlehem, the city of David (Matt. 1:1, 16, 20; Luke 1:26, 27).

Notwithstanding the fact that Christ was the eternal Son of God, God manifest in human form (John 1:14, 18; Col. 1:19; 2:9), and that He was of the royal seed of David according to the flesh, He came to us in deep humility. Travellers to Palestine tell us that even to-day there are annexes to the inns and other dwelling-places, large rooms on the ground floor with doors opening out into the street, similar in plan to the garages which adjoin many modern houses. In some such humble place the Christ-child was born. Born for our redemption (1 Tim. 1:15), He lived a sacrificial life that He might die a sacrificial death (Heb. 2:7-11, 14-18). The child born for us at Bethlehem was the Son given for us at Calvary (Isa. 9:6). He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; He knew the pangs of human weakness, suffering and sorrow (Matt. 8:20; John 4:6; 11:35; 19:28; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 4:15).

II. The Chorus: verses 8-14.

Only a heavenly choir could teach men the new song of salvation from sin which the advent of the Saviour made possible (Exod. 15:2; Psa. 118:14; Isa. 12:2, 3; Rev. 5:9; 14:3, 4). No mortal could by his own reasoning have discovered the way to God (Jon. 2:9; John 14:6), but angels, whose interest in man's salvation is great (Job 38:6, 7; Luke 15:7, 10; Heb. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 5:11, 12), heralded the glad tidings.

Dazzled by the radiant glory, the shepherds might have thought that it was all a dream which would fade with the morning light, had they not been given a token that the tidings were true. They would find a babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:34)! Surely this was a strange sign of Deity (Luke 2:34)! How utterly unlike the spectacular signs which worldlings demanded (Matt. 27:40-44; Mark 8:11, 12; Luke 11:16; 23:8; John 2:18; 6:30)! And yet, the Incarnation was a stupendous miracle—the infinite God veiling Himself in the flesh of a little child.

III. The Child: verses 15-20.

The humble shepherds have pointed out to us the way in which the word of the Lord is to be received. They listened in Godly fear to the evangel proclaimed by the angels (Luke 2:15; Acts 8:6), recognizing that the message was from the Lord (Acts 10:33; 1 Thess. 2:13). Not satisfied with a mere intellectual knowledge of the good news, they made a personal investigation for themselves (John 4:39-42; Acts 17:11). When once they were convinced that the message was true, they declared it to others (Acts 4:20, 29; 2 Cor. 4:13). They also glorified and praised God for the wonderful revelation which He had given them of a holy Saviour Who had been born in Bethlehem (Psa. 106:12; Matt. 2:10, 11). So may we all bow our hearts before the Christ of God and reverently adore Him (Psa. 95:2; 100:2).

Mary of Nazareth treasured in her heart the memory of her sacred experiences (verses 19, 51). They were too holy and too deep for utterance, even for understanding. Rapturous joys and poignant griefs were strangely mingled for the one whom God had chosen to be the mother of our Lord (Luke 1:28-56; 2:34, 35).

How to Say

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