



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

A Day to be Remembered



Dr. Paisley presiding at the service

The 50th Anniversary services of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster that took place in the Odyssey Arena in Belfast on Lord's Day, March 25th, will live long in the memories of all those privileged to be there. God answered prayer and accompanied with His people on the unique occasion. The following is a report of the day's happy proceedings.

On St. Patrick's day just past, Dr. Paisley was in the White House in Washington in company with Mr. Peter Robinson, MP. They had been invited to attend a gathering of political representatives from Northern Ireland. Dr. Paisley later mused, "Little did I, or those with me in Killyleagh Street mission hall in Crossgar on March 17th 1951, think that I would be in the White House at the invitation of the President of the United States of America fifty years later!" Most certainly the enemies of the gospel in 1951 did not foresee what God was planning those fifty years ago. The Belfast Telegraph was one newspaper which declared that the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church was a non-event that would come to nothing.

On Lord's Day, March 25th, some 9000 Free Presbyterians gathered in the Odyssey Arena in Belfast to render praise to God for His mercy and grace bestowed upon them and their fathers, during the last fifty years. God had proved the critics wrong. Amongst the great gathering were ministers, missionaries, members and associates of the Free Presbyterian church from England, Scotland, Wales, the Republic of Ireland, Germany, Spain, Jamaica, USA, Canada, Australia, Africa and Korea.

Worship

The day of rejoicing began with a worship service at 11.30 am followed by a communion service, at which some 4000 believers were served the bread and the cup by their respective elders. A gospel service began at 2.30 pm, after the huge congregation partook of the refreshments that they carried with them to the service. During the afternoon meeting, the Clerk of Presbytery, Dr. John Douglas, Dr. Paisley's first convert after his ordination back in 1946, spoke movingly on behalf of all those who have come to know and love "the big man," as he is affectionately known within the ranks of Free Presbyterians. He likened him to the heroic characters in John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." Those of us who have stood with him in every sort of situation have, like Dr. Douglas, seen reflections of "Great-Heart", "Faithful" and, of course, the central figure in the great allegory, "Christian" himself. Dr. Douglas also presented to the Moderator a crystal bowl suitably inscribed. After the day's services, commemorative vases were distributed to all the wives of ministers as a memento of the day.

Mood

Dr. Paisley's introductory remarks to his morning sermon were indicative of the mood he



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sought to engender amongst the people that day. Speaking on the subject, **“The pre-eminence of our Lord Jesus Christ”**, from the text: *And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence*, Colossians 1:18, he said: “I come this day to do an exhilarating and glorious task, to join with you and lead you to exalt and extol and to excel in honouring our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, and God the Son.

No honour for man

“We are not here to honour ourselves in any way. *For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake*, 2 Corinthians 4:5. “We are not here to give any glory to any man, for man is a total failure, fit only to fuel hell but for the saving grace of God. Neither are we about to give a summary of the history of fifty years, glorious years though they have been. Jacob, in his prayer to the unfailing God of His fathers, Abraham and Isaac, as he returned to his father's house and to his own heritage, had this to say: *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands*, Genesis 32:10.

“When I think of a little tin church in Killleagh Street, Crossgar, on 17th March fifty years ago, and the people who gathered there to see the beginning of this church, and then I think of today and the work thriving on every continent of the world, I can only, in deepest sincerity, humility and gratitude, say the same. “This fledgling church was laughed at, mocked, scorned, ridiculed, and was the target of every poisoned religious and political pen in the country, yes, and across the world. “The Unitarian Church lampooned us as ‘the rise of the ranters’ that would speedily die and be buried without lamentation. The last census showed that the Unitarian Church is declining rapidly and, as far as numbers are concerned, the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster is four times larger in our Province than it is today. “The ranters are in the best of health and like the early church, ‘the sect everywhere spoken against’ is flourishing.”

Thanks

A great deal of organising went into the preparations for the day of rejoicing. The training of the 300-strong young people's choir by Mrs. Glynis Strong, was illustrative of the months of dedication and labour by many that bore much fruit on the day. The Presbytery Committee, under the chairmanship of Rev. David McIlveen, deserves the thanks of all who attended the memorable services. But one thing could not be organised and that was the presence and power of the Lord our God. Much prayer had been offered that nothing about the venue, a stadium more accustomed to staging sporting events and rock concerts, would detract or distract from the solemn and holy nature of that day. God answered prayer abundantly. This writer has been in many great gatherings over the last thirty-seven years, but for him the atmosphere in the Communion service, in particular, was as sweet as he has ever experienced. Over the whole memorable day we joyously write: **“To God be the glory, great things He has done!”**