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"Simple truths which, if believed, would fill every seat in Bible-preaching churches"



A sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day 8th September by Rev. Ivan Foster

Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God, Acts 10:33.

There is a dignity attached to the preaching of God's Word that few today recognise. Paul said of himself, as a gospel preacher: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God," 2 Cor 5:20. The preacher, who is truly called of God, is the appointed ambassador of the King of kings. The preacher serves a glorious court far off from the shores of this world. It is the preacher's task to convey to the minds and hearts of men, the mind, the will, the word of the Creator of the Universe.

Consider these words before us, spoken by an unconverted man, Cornelius, who was anxious about his soul's salvation. God was about to show Cornelius how he might obtain peace and forgiveness of sin in the only fashion God does show men this glorious truth. A meeting has been arranged and a servant of God is about to preach the gospel. Had more people his understanding of what a gospel meeting truly is, there would not be room here tonight to accommodate the people. May God send us a day when the disposition of heart and mind that grace granted to Cornelius, may be given to all around us in this land of ours.

I. MEN SHOULD GATHER TO HEAR GOD'S WORD

1. It is right that we gather here for it is commanded of God. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is," Hebrews 10:25. Attendance upon the House of God is not an option for the Christian. It is a duty of the first rank. Christ expected His disciples to gather together and promised to be there when they did. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," Matthew 18:20. Doubtless, former generations understood this more clearly than it is understood today. Cornelius and his friends clearly felt themselves to be under an obligation to attend this gathering. "We all here present before God," they say. These are the words of those who believed themselves summoned to attend. Do you recognise the duty to attend upon God in His house? Our homes are to be places where God and His Word is honoured and I hope that regular family worship is a feature of your home. But it is very definitely our duty to gather together as Christians on the Lord's Day to worship the Lord. We must bless God for the large degree of freedom that we enjoy in this land to assemble in this house of God. We all find it very easy to get here. The working arrangements of most here permit them the proper use of the Sabbath Day. May we ever value this blessed



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institution!

2. Such gatherings maintain Christ's testimony in this world. The flag of Christ is flown, the law of Christ is obeyed, the honour of Christ is upheld by the means of gatherings of His people in His name. What a dreadful day it is when such assemblies cease! Do you recall Elijah's lament. "And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away," 1 Kings 19:10. Apostasy brings on the death of this vital witness to God's honour and glory. Christian, do not contribute to the demise of the Sabbath by being absent from God's house on the first day of the week.

3. Such gatherings are the occasions when Christ mingles with His people. He walks in our midst here. It was on the Lord's Day that John saw a vision of Christ in the midst of the seven churches in Asia. "And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches," Revelation 1:12-13, 20. The Saviour is in our midst tonight. He is invisible to the human eye, but He is here nevertheless. He is walking in the midst of His churches. May we have the visible evidence of His presence, even a manifestation of His power and grace convicting sinners of their lost condition and a building up of believers in their most holy faith. Do you not think that if this truth, of Christ's presence amongst us, was really known and believed then none would absence themselves from the meetings. Sadly, we manifest so little of the grace and power of Christ when we gather that our neighbours do not believe us when we claim His presence.

4. Here Christ feasts with His people. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me," Revelation 3:20. This is one of the churches to which John was writing and the Saviour declares that He desires to fellowship with them, to spiritually sup with them. Fellowship with His people is indeed spiritual food to Christ. It was to this truth He referred when He said in John 4:32. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," John 4:32. On that occasion, the meat that he was eating was conversation with the poor sinful woman of Samaria, a conversation which led to her conversion.

5. It is here Christ saves sinners. The public preaching of God's Word is a chief means under God for the conversion of sinners. Paul asked a series of questions which illustrates the path by which gospel light is brought to sinners. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Romans 10:14. The public proclamation of the cross is God's chief instrument in conversion. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God," 1 Corinthians 1:23-24. Thus it was on the Day of Pentecost. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and



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brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37. The same pattern was seen in Philippi. "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul, " Acts 16:14. Ought not this to attract sinners into the gatherings in God's house? As the sick gathered to the pool of Bethesda (John 5:110) because of the occasional miracle wrought there upon the bodies of the sick, should not sinners gather to God's house, for there He meets with sinners and saves them? May it be as it was in Capernaum as recorded in Mark 2:1-2. "And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them," Mark 2:1-2.

II. IN SUCH GATHERINGS WE ARE BEFORE GOD

What a solemn truth this is!

1. God is present in the person of His representative. That is what the gospel preacher is, 2 Cor 5:20. When Saul of Tarsus, later to be Paul the apostle, attacked the servants of God, Christ accused him of persecuting His person. The authority and dignity of a representative of God's court rest upon the preacher of the gospel. We are as Abraham's servant seeking a wife for Isaac. We act on behalf of our heavenly Father and in the interests of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham's servant was not named in the account given us in Genesis 24:1-9. The preacher, in himself, is a nothing and a nobody. But as a preacher of the gospel, he speaks for God.

2. God is present in the person of the Holy Spirit. He is here tonight. He is here to carry out that great task given Him of Christ. "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment," John 16:8. I trust that His sweet influences are even now being experienced by Christians here and that sinners are aware of His strivings with them over the great issues of eternity.

3. God is here tonight for we hear His voice. So it was for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" Genesis 3:8-9. "The Voice of the Lord" is one of the titles of Christ for He is the Word, the Message of God to men. His voice is heard amongst us tonight. How glorious a thing it is to be able to attend a gathering where the voice of the Son of God may be heard speaking to us the wonderful truths of heaven! In such a gathering as this in which we meet, though it does not measure up to what the world would deem an impressive assembly, nevertheless we meet in the presence of God. Surely this should bring many here tonight, if only it was believed.

III. PLEASE LEARN OF THE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE SHOULD COME TO GOD'S HOUSE

"To hear all things that are commanded . . . of God." Here is the condition and frame our minds and hearts should "be in as we gather."



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1. We should be ready to hear. A spirit of submissiveness should be present, to listen and to attend like “Lydia whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul,” Acts 16:14. We should be ready to attend to the matters brought before us from God’s Word. Woe unto us if we are like those to whom James refers. “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed,” James 1:25. May you all be blessed through God’s Word tonight by submitting to it. Cornelius was not there to debate or to dispute. He was there to hear and to obey the Word of God.

2. We should be ready to hear all things. Whatever God’s Word says, we should be ready to submit to it. Mary, the mother of Christ, said to the servants at the wedding of Cana, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it,” John 2:5. Are you here in such a spirit? Are you willing to submit to what God’s Word says, irrespective of how it runs contrary to what you consider your interests to be? May we say like Peter: “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net,” Luke 5:5.

3. We should hear gladly. Cornelius was waiting with eagerness, verse 24. He was looking out with longing for the approach of the gospel meeting. I do not read of any description given us of how this man looked as he listened to Peter, but I would stake my life that his face must have shown the happiness that he felt within his heart to be, at last, hearing the message of salvation!

4. We should hear expectantly. Cornelius and his friends expected to hear the words of life. That is how Peter recounted Cornelius’ account of the angel’s instructions to him when reporting on the incident to the leaders in Jerusalem. “And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved,” Acts 11:13-14. How carefully, how eagerly, how expectantly we should listen to the gospel for it is “words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.”

In a world beset by misery and distress, anxieties and doubts, how welcome ought such words to be! Surely if our fellow citizens were to believe that such words were proclaimed in our church, they would press in to hear. May God send us a time when just such a spirit prevails amongst the people.