the Golden Candlestick

GOD'S BUILDING

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GOD'S MASTERPIECE

Reading:

"We are God's fellow-workers: ye are ... God's building. According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another builds thereon. But let each man take heed how he builds thereon" (1 Cor. 3:9,10).

In these messages, we shall not be dealing with the Christian life as such, but with the work of the Lord. We are introduced, by the words that we have read, to one of the great dominant ideas of the work of God, that is, *building*. It is an idea which has a very large place in the Scriptures. With the apostle Paul it was predominant. We are only able sufficiently to realise this and be impressed by it if we translate the original word according to its original meaning. The English Authorised or King James version does not help in this connection. That version does not provide for the systematic study of any one subject. It is in the Revised version that we are put straight when it comes to any particular subject, for that version is as a rule consistent.

What I mean is this. In the Authorised Version we have this original Greek word translated often by the words 'edify' or 'edification'. Of course, when the King James version was written, this was quite all right, for at that time the word simply meant 'build' from the Latin 'aedificare'. Nowadays, however, the word edifying has come to connote other information, intelligence, understanding, though usually with the sense of improvement, profit, advantage. But this 'idea' of 'building' or 'building up' is particularly character-

istic of Paul. Some idea of how dominant this thought was with him may be gained from the fact that he uses the word for 'build' more than twenty times.

Now, let us summarise and analyse this matter.

God has a building in view

Firstly, God has a building in view. "Ye are God's building", and back of all the instrumentalities, all the ministries, all the agencies, and despite all the opposition, God is going on with His building. He has set Himself to realise the accomplishment of this great spiritual edifice, and nothing will turn Him aside. In all those things which so often seem to be rather destructive, God is working constructively. Through all those things which often seem to us to be disintegrating and undoing, God is working at the building. God is committed to this, and He will take hold of everything that comes into our lives and use it as material for building. God has a building in view, and He is getting on with it. And when we say God, we mean the Trinity. The Trinity is in a 'combined operation' in this matter of building. Here it is stated: "Ye are God's building."

God the conceiver and architect

God is the great conceiver and architect of this building. It has come from His mind. It originated there; the initiation was with God, The Lord Jesus said: "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). The Lord Jesus is building according to God's pattern, and He Himself is God's pattern. The second Person of the Trinity is the pattern of the Building, the design, the plan. We know that from Old Testament types of tabernacle and temple that it is all figuratively a representation of Christ. Christ is what we may call God's blueprint. Everything is to be according to Christ. The New Testament makes that perfectly plain. And for this one who calls himself the *skilled* master-builder — for that is the word, not the wise master-builder. According to Paul it was all a matter of learning Christ, of seeing

Christ; everything according to Christ, the pattern of the building.

The Holy Spirit is the executive of the work, the superintendent of this work, the inspirer in relation to it and the custodian of it. It is in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Very early when the building began, Ananias and Sapphira interfered with the building, put their hand on the building, and the Holy Spirit met them, and it was in a very forceful way laid down for the whole dispensation that the Spirit of God is the custodian of the building of God, and to interfere with God's work is to meet the Holy Spirit. So the divine Godhead is combined in this work of building.

The Lord's people the building and the builders

Then here again it is said: "We are God's fellow-workers." The Lord's people are God's fellow-workers in building, workers together with God.1 Not only are the Lord's people the building, but, by a strange change of thought, they are the builders. The apostle Jude says that at one point: "building up yourselves on your most holy faith" (Jude 20). And Paul says much about building one another up, so that, while we are the building, we are at the same time builders together with God. We find that the Word has much to say about the builders and the building. It says something about specific ministries in building, specific ministries and specific functions. We come to that presently.

But it also has, as has just been indicated, much to say about the general and universal work of believers that while in the work of the Lord there are those specific ministries for building which are indicated, it is just as true that every believer and all believers together are, according to God's mind, to be His fellow-workers,

I The author's interpretation of $\sigma v v \varepsilon \rho \gamma o i$ $\theta \varepsilon o i$, ('fellow-workers of God') as 'workers together with God' and as applicable to Christians in general is a fundamental idea in this series of talks. However, in the light of the context and of Paul's use of the word $\sigma v v \varepsilon \rho \gamma o i$ in other instances in his letters, it is more likely that, in this case, Paul refers to himself and Apollos only as each other's fellow-workers. The genitive case $\theta \varepsilon o i$ ('of God') suggests possession rather than a placement alongside. Of course, in a sense all Christians are God's fellow-workers as they are obeying His instructions, and this is what the author implies.

cooperating with Him in this building. It is a very important matter for us to understand that we are not just hearers of the Word, we are doers, we are not just those who listen to teaching, who are the congregation; we are not just the rank and file, with certain people who do the work and are especially the builders. We must take this in; it is going to be much stressed as we go on, that every one of us, as one of the Lord's people, is, by His will, purpose and desire, included in the work. There is a sense in which all the Lord's people are workers, and workers together with God.

God's masterpiece

"Ye are God's building." This particular building upon which God is engaged is His masterpiece. It is not some subsidiary thing, not something among other things. It is His great eternal masterpiece. It is God's masterpiece in this whole universe. This building — and of course we are using human language when we speak of a building: let us be careful that we do not get visualising some objective, material, temporal structure, but pass swiftly from the simile to the spiritual reality in our minds — this great masterpiece of God is to stand eternally as overshadowing everything.

That is what men do with buildings. The temple of old overshadowed everything. It was the one conspicuous object in the city, and being on a high elevation could be seen from afar off. In a sense, it could very truly be said to overshadow the whole land. Everything was in the light of that temple, governed by it. That is true of many other structures put up by men, buildings which are given a central, dominating, all-governing place. The great temple of Diana at Ephesus was such a building. It just overshadowed the whole life of the city and of the province; everything came under its influence and its domination. We could refer to many other such places. The idea is that such a building is intended to gather everything under its shadow, to affect and influence everything and to be the standard of everything, to which and from which everything moves — the radiating, focal point of the whole life of the community.

And the building that God is engaged upon, His great Master-piece, is going eternally to dominate everything. Everything is going to take its life and direction from that. It will give character to everything else in God's universe, this great, central masterpiece of God. Call it by its different names in the New Testament if you like. It is one thing. Whether you say the church or the city or the temple, or anything else by which the same thing is indicated, it is something which eventually comes into the centre of all God's interests and governs everything in the life of the people of the coming ages.

Central to a larger realm

And once again, let it be clearly understood that this is something central to a much larger realm, for everyone in the ages of the ages will not be of this structure. So far as the designation 'the city' is concerned, there will be "nations" who "walk in the light thereof" (Rev. 21:24), and so it will be. There will be a great looking towards what God has done, and this will be the sum and essence of His greatest operations.

Paul's apprehension of God's work

Paul's apprehension of God's work, his conception of God's engagement — the building — just dominated his whole life. This thing was with Paul every moment of his life, and he sought to make it like that with all other believers. I expect that Paul's mind on this matter was very largely inspired or stimulated by his own contacts, the whole outward tenor of his ways, because Paul was more a man of the cities than of the country. He was always moving from one great city to another, and in most of the cities to which Paul went the architecture, the great buildings, were the main feature. This was always keeping him very close to the spiritual counterpart, so that for him the thought of building was something ever present day and night. This thought, of what God is doing, he was ever seeking

to bring home in a spiritual way to believers.

The work of God is building

Now what I want to emphasize is this, that the work of God is building. If you want to know what the work of God is, what Christian work is, what it means to be a Christian worker or what it means to be a Christian at all according to God's mind, then it is to be a builder. The whole embracing, dominating conception of a Christian is that they belong to the building and are workers in the building. Do let that come right home not just as something said. As Christians, our very existence is for building. The work is building. I am afraid many Christians seem to think or act as though they think that the real job is to pull down. Their influence and their effect is either negative or destructive. The effect of very many is anything but building. They either do not count at all in what is being done by the Lord, they make no contribution to what is going up, or by criticism, and by many other things, they are an adverse influence on the building. It is all a tearing down. It may be very clever, but it is not the idea.

I know, of course, that the Lord said to Jeremiah that he should pluck up and pull down (Jer. 1:10), but that had to do with false structures, and I am not talking about false structures. There may be something to be done in the disintegrating of false structures, but we are talking about God's building, and among 'workers together with God' there is no place for those who are making no contribution. There is no place for people who are detracting. Building is a positive concept. We must challenge our own hearts all the way along and ask ourselves individually and personally: "What is my effect? What is the effect of my being a Christian upon other Christians, upon the Lord's interests, upon the Lord's work, upon the Lord's house?"

A mentality

You see, it is a mentality. In Nehemiah's day in the building of the wall, it was said that "the people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). It was a mentality. What is our mentality? Is our mentality a critical one, an adverse one, one that is seeking all the time to show up the flaws and the weaknesses and the imperfections? Is it a detracting mentality? We must seek the Lord to save our mentality.

Here is this man Paul, whose mentality was an intense one. You cannot fail at any point or time to meet something positive with Paul. He is on the positive line. Oh, what a lot he has to teach us about this matter of being positive! No man ever met more that was disconcerting and discouraging. No man ever had to meet more that could have put him off or could have made him say: 'It is hopeless, the whole stuff is worthless, we shall never be able to make anything of this.' But in the most amazing and outstanding way, Paul is all the time repudiating every negative element. Look at his handling of the situation at Corinth. It would have been easy to have washed his hands of the whole thing, and said, 'We will make anything of this! Look at that and look at that and look at that! And what there was to look at! We know what is in that first letter. Look at it! What are you going to make of that? You will never do anything with that! That material, that situation, is utterly impossible. Can we see anything for the glory of God coming out that? Oh no, let us go somewhere else, find better prospects!' But no, he is on the positive line; there is something even there, impossible as it may seem and invisible as it may seem, something there is coming out for God. We are going to hold on until we get something for God out of that; we not abandoning it.

We all too easily abandon people who seem to be so unpromising and situations which seem to be so impossible. It is a mentality. We need this mentality — a mind of the constructive kind. If we have not got a constructive mind which is stronger than all appearances and all seeming evidence to the contrary, we shall never build; we shall give it up like the people at the end of the Old Testament who

just gave it up because of difficulties, and the house of God went into decline. They said: "It is not the time for the Lord's house to be built" (Hag. 1:2). Why? Because difficulties had arisen. You notice that the Spirit of God refused to accept that. The Spirit of God took hold of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah and said, 'It is time that the house of the Lord should be built! The situation may not apparently be propitious, conditions may not apparently be favourable, but it is time to build.' "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The Holy Spirit has no parenthesis in this matter, and we may not either. We have to have a mind.

Specific ministries in building

Now let us come back to this matter of the different functions, the different functions and ministries all in relation to one object.

That is the thing that I want you to keep in mind. The apostle does give us different catalogues of these functions and these ministries, but he is careful to point out that, although there may be a variety of gifts, a variety of ministries, they are all related to and centred upon one object. It is that one object which gives them their value. They have no value in themselves, he says, in themselves apart from the one end in view. So he says, "And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11), and then he gathers them all together and says: "unto the building ...". It is not my purpose to stay with each of those functions, to try to define them. I do not think that is necessary at the moment. I have one point in view.

Then we turn to Romans 12. Paul says: "Having gifts differing ...". And then he enumerates the gifts: "Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry" (v. 6,7) and lest you might visualise some special kind of dress and adornment associated with the ministry, let me say that that word there is a very much wider

word than what we have in mind when we say, 'He is the minister. Here comes the minister'! That word is simply the word which is used of deacons, and deacons have as their function all sorts of practical matters in the house of God. "Whether ... ministry ... let us wait on our ministry" (let us give ourselves to our ministry). It is a comprehensive word, you see, here. Do not narrow it down.

"Or he that teaches, to his teaching; or he that exhorts". I always like that word; it is a great function in the house of God to be an exhorter. You do not need to go to any academy to learn how you do that; you do not need to put on any special dress to fulfil that function. An exhorter is one who exhorts another, who says, 'Come along now, the Lord has not given up yet', don't get down, get up, see what the Lord has in view.' That is exhorting. Anybody ought to be able to do it. You do not need to set apart special people for that. "He that exhorts, to his exhorting ... he that rules, with diligence." The word 'rules' there is not an official word. It is a very wide word in the original. It just means one who is placed in front, that is, he that is set over or placed in front, he that superintends things. "He that rules, with diligence".

And then finally, "he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness". Do you think there are special people who have got to be set apart with the laying on of hands to show mercy? What does the word here mean? Well, if it refers to the people who are visiting the sick and the suffering, the Roman Catholics have the idea of the 'Sisters of Mercy'. Now this is the only place in the whole New Testament where that word 'cheerfulness' occurs. The Latin equivalent of the Greek word is 'hilaritas' — our 'hilarity' or 'hilariousness'. "He that shows mercy, with hilarity". The apostle just meant this. He that shows mercy, let him bring cheerfulness, bringing an atmosphere of hilarity, joyfulness, exuberance to lift the poor people up. When you go to see somebody in trouble, someone sick, how easy it is to bring a real burden and add to their troubles by your miserable bearing and the things you talk about, such as other peoples' troubles! Now, the apostle says, he that goes on a visit of mercy to the sick and the suffering, let him do it in a spirit of cheerfulness and lift them up.

These are ministries, and every one of them is, you notice, for building, a many-sided diversity of gifts, but with one object — all building up. Apostleship, which is a comprehensive word, gathers into itself almost everything else. An apostle is an evangelist, an apostle is a teacher, an apostle is a prophet. It is the one inclusive designation, an apostle. There are very few of those. The prophet, in its widest, fullest sense, means the one who brings the mind of God into view, the one who makes people aware of God's thoughts, His full thoughts concerning them. The evangelist is the one who collects the wood for the building, the one that gathers the material. The pastors and teachers are the ones that go out into the woodyard and preach to the wood about the building?! Nothing of the kind! They bring the wood into its place; they construct the materials together. The work of pastors and teachers is love and instruction, caring for and instructing. It is all to reach this ultimate end.

The recognition of our function

Now what is the point in all this? The point is this: that we have got in the first place to recognise our gift, our function. Everyone has a function. We are all builders, but we cannot all build alike. We may covet certain building gifts, certain qualifications, but we cannot all do the same thing. We are not called upon to do it, but we are all called to do *a* thing. This always provokes a stream of enquiries: 'How are we to know what our gift is?' The answer is: 'Get on with the job, and you will discover!'

Take the case of some of us personally: how did we discover? We know today what our particular function is. I have no doubt as to what my function is, none whatever. I know quite well that I cannot do what some other brothers can do — that is as clear as daylight — and I do not attempt it. How did I discover? I never received it by direct revelation from heaven — 'You are called to be so-and-so.' I got into the interests of the Lord with all my heart, I just poured my life into the work of the Lord in any way I could, and I discovered as I went on that there were some things I could not do: the Lord was

not with me in them. But there were some things in which the Lord was with me every time. When I went that way, the Lord was with me. If I got off that way, I lost the Lord. And I came in the course of time, by earnest devotion, to discover: 'That is my ministry; and I must keep to it; I find the Lord there.'

If your heart is really over to the Lord, and for the Lord, and you are on full stretch; not staying or waiting until the Lord comes to tell you that you are called for this or that or the other thing, not waiting even for the church to say, 'This is your work' (the church can make an awful mess of lives, putting people into jobs for which the Lord has never called them), as you go you will steadily come to the position where you know that that is your particular function, that is where the Lord is with you, that is where you find that He helps. You take note of that.

We all have a function. It may not be one of the major things, as we call them – an apostle, or a prophet, or an evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher. It may be as a 'help', to be in some way a help, that in that way that we are most blessed of the Lord. It may be that we are a kind of 'cementing agency' in the house, in the building. The Lord blesses and uses us in drawing people together, bringing them into fellowship, healing breaches: a wonderful ministry — how very necessary! Somehow or other the Lord blesses us there; that is where the Lord's seal is. Or in any one of many more ways. It is just like that that the Lord is using us.

But, mark you, you have to discover by devotedness of heart. It will not come to you; you have to come to it. No angel is ever going to visit you from heaven and tell you that you have got to be a help or an apostle or a prophet or something like that. That would at once constitute you something official. The most dangerous thing in all Christianity is the official. Functions are not official appointments; they are organic developments. Paul keeps the idea of building very close to his other idea of the Body, by which he means to indicate that this is an organic building (compare Peter's "living stones") and not just some inanimate stonework.

Well, we must recognise our own function, and this will become

manifest as we are actively on full stretch for the Lord, and not passively waiting.

The recognition of the function of others

Then we must recognise the function of others. There must be no overlapping because we want to do what someone else is doing, no interfering because we like their kind of work, their job, and are not so particularly enamoured of our own. We must recognise that they have their function to fulfil. Do recognise this. There is a great deal of loss because of failure at that point. The whole evangelistic function is so often in serious danger of discounting the teaching function instead of taking this attitude: 'That man who has the teaching gift is as essential as my gift as an evangelist, and I cannot fulfil my work without him; he is indispensable to the very thing I am doing.' That applies to every other function. We must recognise that, and give it its place; otherwise there is going to be very serious loss. We must never despise another function. It may be, in our natural judgment, something guite small, but Paul works this down to a detail. 'You cannot say to the hand, the foot, the eye, and so on, I have no need of you' (1 Cor. 12:15-21). Not at all. There is absolute interdependence of every function in this building. You have only to pass your mind over any kind of building work being done physically. In a building there are many little things that have to be done, very many menial things; but leave them undone, and the whole thing lacks something. We must take that attitude over this matter of building, never despising, never saying, 'We have no place for you, no room for you.'

No selectiveness

We must be very careful to recognise that the Lord Jesus, as the Way, never for one moment was selective among people. We must be very careful if someone intellectual, someone with an academic background, appeals to us being the sort of person we want, while

people without those qualifications naturally, without education are depreciated. Some with a social position and others without such — well, we select. Oh, the Lord Jesus never did that! We are down entirely upon natural grounds when we take an attitude like that. We are failing to recognise that the Lord Jesus can make a very great deal more of spiritual value of some people without any natural advantages than He can do with others. It is not always those who have the natural advantages who count most spiritually. We are in another realm altogether when we are in the realm of spiritual gifts, and most of us have to thank God for that; for if we have discovered one thing more than another in the Lord's work, it is that we are not equipped for this. This is something for which we have no natural resources. Intellectually or in any other way, we have got to get everything from another realm for this work. It is no use either making something of, or depreciating, on the natural ground. The Lord Jesus never did it, and we must be very careful. Some of us can say that some of the people who have ministered most of the Lord to us, have been people who would never have had any standing in this world at all, either intellectually or socially. It is like that. We must always know "in Christ", and we must always take the attitude that, whatever there is or is not there naturally, grace makes for great possibilities. In the end, when the building is finished and all the parts are in their place, it will be a bringing forth of the top stone with shoutings of what? (Zech. 4:7). None of the things will ever be mentioned that men count upon for a building. 'Oh, that is because they were such splendid people, that is because they were such efficient people, that is because they were such educated people' — not a bit! Grace did it all. Grace is the builder. Thank God!

Our responsibility

But then I must close with this. While this is all so true and so necessary for us to recognise, there is a side of this whole matter where you and I have a responsibility for the work to see to it that,

in a right way spiritually, we are efficient in the work. There is no place for slovenliness in the work of God, in spiritual building; no place for carelessness, inefficiency. I am not talking about natural efficiency at all. Paul writing to Timothy, a fellow-builder with him (for he still has the building in view): "In a great house", he says. Paul writes to Timothy: "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed" (2 Tim. 2:15, 20). How was Timothy to give diligence? Paul was not only saying, "Be earnest, be zealous, be enthusiastic." He was saying — "Give heed to reading" (1 Tim. 4:13). I mean, he was very practical; he was, in effect, saying: 'Look here, Timothy, you know your Bible and you know rightly to divide the Word of truth; if you are to be efficient in handling the things of God, this requires care and attention and work' (vv. 15,16).

Do not rest too much upon spontaneous inspiration. Remember that the Holy Spirit works upon your work. This 'open-your-mouthwide' business and I will fill it, is an utterly false idea of the work of God. You know quite well that we place perhaps no greater emphasis upon anything than we do upon the matter of revelation. But if you think you are going to sit in a chair and get a lot of revelation, that it is all going to come to you as you just sit there and wait for it, that you are going to sit down and 'open your mouth wide' and the Lord is going to fill it with a sermon, you are going to make a great mistake. There is real hard work behind building, and I have found very often that the Lord has made me work hard and then not used what I have got ready; when the time has come He has just set it all aside and put something else in its place. But I have come to learn, through over forty years ministering the Word, that God has no place for carelessness, slovenliness or laziness. This 'inspiration' business is very often really a blind for laziness. "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed." Not that you and I are going to take the glory, because after we have done everything, where are we if the Lord does not come in on it, and through it?

Now this is necessary, not only in the 'great' ministries, in the

messages to be given, but in all those ways of which I have spoken earlier, all the simple functions in the building. We have got to give attention to it. Take contacts — oh, how often people are utterly at a loss in making good a contact because they have never thought about it. 'If someone came to me and asked me the way of salvation, what would I say? If someone came to me with such and such a problem, how could I help them?' Have you ever thought about it? I am not suggesting to you that you should be all the time thinking about special problems that you may have to meet but that we ought to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us, that is, to be able to put it in a rational form, to make people understand what we have got, that we are not in a fog about what we have got. We are not those who have got something and do not know what it is. We know, "our hands have handled", our eyes have seen; we know where we are, we know what we have got to say. I am quite sure that if you were called now to come into the construction of some great building, literally, and you were told that you had got to take a vital part in the realisation of that great plan, you would say, 'If that is so, and it is something worthwhile, something really glorious, something that is going to serve a great purpose, I must study this thing, I must give myself to this, I must seek by the grace of God to be as efficient in this as I can.' It is practical, it is not coming down to a low level to say that. Yes, efficiency. "Our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5). But God's sufficiency may wait in our measure to be efficient.

Well, if that seems to be rather elementary, pardon it, but we need constantly to be pulled up on this, so that we do not just drift along. We are in a great business. If it is true that we are called into fellowship with God as His fellow-workers in the masterpiece of the universe, well, surely that is worthy of our whole being and of everything that we can do and be, that our part in it shall not be weak or poor, or, as Paul said to Timothy, that of which we would be ashamed.

BUILDING BY REVELATION

"We are God's fellow-workers; ye are ... God's building. According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another builds thereon. But let each man take heed how he builds thereon" (1 Cor. 3:9,10).

Everything judged by its building value

"We are ... God's building ... let each man take heed how he builds thereon." So the apostle combines the two conceptions of Christians: one that they are the building upon which God Himself is working, the other that they are fellow-workers with God in His building work. The predominant thing in the work of God is building. That conception of God's work runs through the Scriptures and finds a particular fulness in the mind of the apostle Paul. We shall not go back over the details already dealt with, but we may sum them up in this brief word. From God's standpoint everything is determined according to its *building* value. Very many things may come into the sphere and scope of Christian activity, Christian work, Christian life, but from God's standpoint the value of anything is judged by its building quality.

Now that is not something said without the Book. The apostle Paul carried that very deeply and very closely into relationship with things which had come from God Himself. He referred to a number of spiritual gifts. He tabulated and catalogued the gifts of the Spirit, and then he made it very clear that even those gifts from

God Himself had their value alone in their building quality. Take an outstanding case: the gift of tongues, speaking in tongues. Well, that was something of the Holy Spirit. It is included in what Paul called 'the spirituals'.

He introduced what he was going to say with the phrase: "Now concerning the spirituals" (1 Cor. 12:1). Our translation has "Now concerning spiritual gifts", but the original simply puts it in the plural form of one word, "Now concerning spirituals", and then he mentioned the spirituals. Among them was tongues, and he had a lot to say about tongues; but when he had said it all, he summed it all up in this, that it was for building. Our versions have 'edifying', but 'edifying' is today a limited meaning of the word; Paul meant for 'building'. And if this thing did not work out for building, then it had missed the way, it had failed of the object for which it was given. Healings and everything else were the same.

But, you see, these things had been made ends in themselves. So that gifts, even abundant gifts, real gifts of the Holy Spirit do not necessarily and inevitably carry spiritual maturity with them. You may have them all and it may not signify that you have much spiritual measure.

The point is — what are gifts for? They are for building, and that is the condemnation of a Corinthian position — that you have the things which were intended by God to be building things, and there is no building at all, and the apostle has to come back with these castigations and admonitions and warnings. "Let each man take heed how he builds." That is the criterion; it is building. Everything, then, is judged accordingly. What, for instance, is the result of your knowledge? "If I have ... all knowledge" (1 Cor. 13:2). You may have a very great deal of spiritual knowledge. It might be stacked away at home in your bookshelves, it may be all the notes that you have taken at conferences — you may have a tremendous amount of knowledge. What is your own spiritual measure? It was meant for building. If it has not resulted in that, your knowledge is unprofitable. So we might cover everything with this tremendously important emphasis. It is the measure of our spiritual growth, as a

building going up to that ultimate everlasting "glory of His grace", that determines the value of everything within the compass of our Christian lives and activities.

Now in the ensuing pages we are going to consider one or two essentials of the builder. Paul compared this work to a skilful master-builder. I do not think Paul exactly meant that he himself was the master-builder. I think he meant 'like a master-builder', 'after the manner of a skilled master-builder'. He took his pattern from the Lord. God laid the foundation of Jesus Christ. Paul only came along and laid that foundation in local companies. Therefore, we shall be greatly profited if we look at him as such, and take our cue from him.

Building comes out of a revelation of Christ

What a wonderfully wide, rich field that opens up, to watch the master-builder at work. That requires weeks, months, years! Now we can only take perhaps two aspects of the work, representing the essentials of a builder. But when we look at this one as representative, as an example, we find that this whole matter, this thing which so mastered his entire being and filled every moment of his time, day and night, throughout his whole life, this *building* sprang out of a mighty, affecting, influential *revelation*. "It was the good pleasure of God ... to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1:15-16). That was the basis and the background of all that happened to him on that journey.

I do not think we have fully grasped what a tremendous thing it was. We just read the narrative, and as we read we may think, 'Well, Paul started out one morning to go to Damascus in a real fury, and about midday that happened to him.' We must remember that he was on that journey seven or eight days, from Jerusalem to Damascus, and if you give a man in that state of mind and spirit all those days, he has plenty of time to work himself up and to reach a fairly high pitch of strong determined feeling.

You see, it proved afterwards that he had a lot to overcome to

finish that journey. The Lord met him and said, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad" (Acts 26:14). The Lord knew all about the secret history that was going on in the soul of Saul of Tarsus which made it necessary for that positively to suppress and crush down, a lot of things that were calculated to upset his programme completely. He had to resolve again, day after day, not to be deterred in this thing that he purposed to do. Rising perhaps early in the morning, he set himself to another day of going on to Damascus in spite of the goads. What the goads were, we do not know. We know this: that throughout his whole life, and not excepting the seven or eight days on the way to Damascus, the face of Stephen haunted him, and what he had consented to was something in the nature of an awful weight upon him. He was suppressing it, crushing it down; he was not going to be weakened in his determination and he built this up day after day.

And then, as he drew near to Damascus with all that resolve, that build-up behind it, then this thing happened. And what a tremendous thing, that could break, smash and devastate all that, and all that lay behind it, in a moment of time! How affected that man was for the rest of his life by that one intervention from heaven! It is the greatness of what happened that I am seeking to emphasize. A man with his mentality, his tremendous brainpower, as well as his tremendous soul-force, would convince himself fully and utterly, by every argument, by drawing upon everything at his intellectual and emotional command, that he was right. This is no weakling; this is no poor thing caught in the grip of some fancy and some emotion. Here is a man with a tremendous brain behind what he is doing, and a tremendous soul and a tremendous will, which he has steadily built up, not only for those days, but long before. And now you lay all that waste in a moment — you disintegrate all that with a touch! Something very big has happened.

My point is this: that behind his life-work of building, there lay this mightily affecting revelation of Jesus Christ. It was out of that that his building came.

Now, we are called builders, we are called to be God's fellow-

workers in building; and while we may not have the measure of Paul's calling, Paul's great vocation, while we may not be such dispensational figures as he was, the same principle holds good, even if it is in a small measure as a builder. As I was trying to point out earlier, there are many things that are functions, not only apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers, but many other things. You can call them minor if you like, but they are all functions of building. But every part and every bit is based upon this same principle. We cannot really build except in so far as by revelation of Jesus Christ we have been deeply affected.

This is a very serious and a very solemn consideration. We are not skimming the surface. Where does our Christian work, our ministry, our service come from? Where does it take its rise? Upon what are we drawing? Are we drawing upon other men's resources, books, commentaries, libraries? Are we working it all up, accumulating, gathering, arranging, and calling that ministry? We may call it that, and yet there be no building. It is true. Some of us spent years of our lives doing a lot of preaching, and a lot of Bible teaching, and we accumulated a tremendous amount of matter in order to give it out. We sought to keep abreast of all the latest theology and religious literature. We built up our libraries and we worked hard, but we did not build. There is no church to show for those years. We were not building because we had not come into an adequate revelation of Jesus Christ, sufficient to affect us and make something more of us than professional ministers.

For there will be no building if there is no revelation. Everything must be drawn from that. The revelation, of course, is the revelation of Jesus Christ that God must have shown to our hearts — not fully all at once, but in some very real way — the significance of Jesus Christ. Oh, what a lot just tumbles down like a pack of cards of all our misconceptions, false structures, artificial lives, strong misapprehensions, when we see from heaven for the first time something of the meaning of Jesus Christ, God's Son. It has got to be ours. Paul, the builder, said so definitely and positively: "Neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me

through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me" (Gal. 1:17), to consult them about this matter. 'It was so immediate, so personal, and so devastating, that I went away into Arabia.'

And here, again, you and I lose something by losing the time factor. You shut a man like Paul away for three years in a desert. Tremendous things must be happening. Oh, the overturning! Oh, the reconstructing! Oh, the driving deep down to the very roots and foundations of his being of that which he had seen! It was his own. Again, I say, while not suggesting that you and I are going to have it in the same measure, or that it is going to have the same tremendous accompaniments, nevertheless in principle it is the same. However small the measure, it has got to be ours. It has not got to be just material of the last conference we have attended, something that we have stored up and are reproducing. We are in these days driven back behind all this 'Christianity' as it has become crystallised and systematized, this thing which is all so secondhand. We have to get right back behind it; this must be a matter between ourselves and the Lord; so that we can say, 'He revealed His Son in me.' Yes, it may be imperfectly, and not as He did to Paul; but nevertheless, it is something that has come to me from God, not from man. We never really build unless that be so. This will, if we are honest, send us on our faces before God. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ. 'God revealed His Son in me.'

Christ the Key to everything

When once Paul saw, with heaven-opened eyes, the significance of Jesus Christ, that same Christ became for him the key to God's universe. Everything took on new meaning. You wonder how Paul got his great knowledge of Christ, his great knowledge of things eternal. How did he come to know the things that he wrote? How did he come to know that "the whole creation groans and travails in pain" (Rom. 8:22), with one object in view which is the manifestation of the sons of God? How did he come to know all these things

so mysterious to those who are not initiated?

The one answer is quite simple — he had seen Jesus Christ. He had seen that the key to all creation and the whole universe was God's Son, the Heir of all things; that the whole thing was created for Him, through Him, by Him, unto Him. What a place Jesus had taken with this man! So large a place that He expanded to the vast universe. All heaven was explained in the light of Jesus Christ and he could write that so pregnant and suggestive sentence: "the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20). Therefore, the whole universe of things perceptible by natural eyes conveys some thought, some principle, something in the mind of God that is spiritual, that is an interpretation of the universe. And how did Paul get it? By seeing Jesus Christ. Christ became the key, Christ just fitted into everything. He spontaneously fitted into everything.

Paul did not have to fit everything into Christ. That is what we have done. We have taken the Bible and tried to fit it all into Christ. We have started at the end, with the material, and worked back to Christ. You have taken your tabernacle in the wilderness, and you work back to Christ all the time, with it and through it. That is not how things really begin. You can have all the wonderful ways of doing things, all the knowledge about the tabernacle in the wilderness as a type of Christ in every detail, and it can all be of no building value. Oh, quite fascinating, full of interest, and in a sense very wonderful, but it does not necessarily build. It is the wrong way round. See Jesus Christ, and then you see that He fills all things; He fits into everything. That is the way. I never saw that until I saw the Lord Jesus! I never understood till I understood the Lord Jesus. When I saw Him, everything else fitted into place!

This whole thing was an utterly closed world to one of the most intellectual of men, the most religious of men, the most devout of men, the most thoroughgoing, conscientious man, with all the Bible as it then existed at his fingertips, for he had spent many years in the most exact training in the Scriptures. Again, we have missed

so much because we have not seen into the school of Gamaliel. We have not really seen the seven years and the next seven years of that meticulous education, from early boyhood, in the law and in the Scriptures, which every Jewish boy went through, and especially such a brilliant pupil as Saul of Tarsus. Gamaliel probably never had two more brilliant pupils than Stephen and Saul. And he had got it all and saw nothing beyond that. Then he saw the Lord Jesus by revelation, and when he saw, every bit of that sprang into life. Why? Christ just fitted into it all; he had never seen that before! What an immense thing it is when we really 'get' something from the Lord by the Holy Spirit!

Now, you see, he is saying, 'I laid a foundation; that foundation was Jesus Christ; and other foundation can no man lay.' And then he goes on with the superstructure, and he says in other words, 'Every bit of the superstructure has to correspond to the foundation. It is the foundation which gives the character to everything that is put on it. The superstructure is not merely something additional. It is the outgrowth from the foundation and partakes of the very constitution and nature of that foundation. What is in that foundation has got to be found running through every layer, every detail, so that the superstructure is an expression of its foundation.' That is what he is saying. That is the only thing, he says, that will go through the fire, and the fire will test every man's work of what sort it is (1 Cor. 3:13), and only that which is Jesus Christ will go through the fire and come out on the other side intact.

So that building is the building of Jesus Christ by revelation to our own hearts. I am not saying that we have to have a revelation of Jesus Christ extra to the Scriptures. It will come to us through the Scriptures. It will not be contrary to the Scriptures; it will not be something other than or independent of the Scriptures. No, the revelation is within the written Word. That is, of course, the supreme value of putting the Word into people's hands, to give the Holy Spirit something to work upon; and that is the value of the builder himself being very fully and richly acquainted with the Word of God. "Completely furnished unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17).

Revelation must be, first and last, from foundation to top stone, the revelation of Jesus Christ, God's meaning, God's thought. Jesus Christ, as we have said, is a universe of divine thoughts and the interpretation of everything. That revelation has a beginning. It should have a very striking and, as I have said, affecting beginning. There should be a point to which we are able to look back and say: 'At that point I began to see what I had never seen before; that was a critical point when my eyes began to be opened.' Sometimes the beginning of the revelation is quiet; it seems to be spread over a period, and not to come all at once. But we can see a turning-point from blindness to seeing, from darkness to light, from the mere mental grasp of things to a spiritual apprehension, from having a lot of information and knowledge and Bible teaching to having some life; the thing becomes alive. It may be a transition period lasting for some time, or it may be relatively sudden, or it may be sudden, but it has to be like that. We have to pass into that realm of the open heaven. The open heaven is the beginning and the everything of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. There must be a 'henceforth' in our lives, "Henceforth ve shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51), heaven's interpretation of Christ. There must be a 'henceforth' somewhere. I do not want to distress you, or oppress you, but I do want to say that; it is so important. There can really be no building in ourselves, and no building of the house of God without this. It must have some point at which it begins.

A growing revelation of Christ

But let it also be said that this unfolding of Jesus Christ must be a growing thing. Anyone who has just begun to see in a living way knows quite well that they have just touched the fringe of a mighty world. They know they have started on a course that has no end; they have been introduced into something that there is no compassing. There is a sense of that all the time. It does not matter how long you go on, or how much the Lord shows you: the longer you go on, the greater and deeper the sense of your own ignorance – 'I am only starting after all!' When we get to the end, it will be, 'Oh, that I may know Him!' Not, 'Thank God, I know Him', but, "That I may know Him" (Phil. 3:10).

Two things are true. Here is this eternal prospect. It must be growing. It is a challenge to us: Is our Christian life really one in which the Lord Jesus has a growing meaning and fulness to us? Our lives as Christians should not just date back to some day when we signed a card and said we decided for the Lord, and that is the beginning and the end; it all belongs to that day. Oh, it must not be like that! Believe me, I speak knowingly in a small way. We speak truth in this matter that it is gloriously possible for us to find that the Lord Jesus is always beyond us and drawing us on; that we are seeing more and more. It just *must* be like that, if we are going to be builders, even in a small way. It must be like that for building purposes.

Revelation by way of experience

Not only must it be growing, progressive, but, you see, the progressiveness, the growth of the knowledge and of the revelation of Jesus Christ is by way of experience. It is not just mental; it is certainly not theoretical; it is exceedingly practical. It is by way of experience. God keeps us right up to date, if He has us in hand, in this matter by experience. I mean this: that God is constantly allowing us, to say the least of it, to come into situations which test what we have and make necessary something more. It has often been pointed out, and it is such commonplace knowledge that one almost hesitates to say it again, that Paul wrote his letters because of intensely practical situations. He was in the midst of them. He was not a recluse sitting in his cloister writing treatises on theological subjects. Paul was right in the battle, right in the business, intensely real, serious, always in an emergency. He wrote for emergencies, he wrote for crises, he wrote for tremendous issues which were then trembling in the balance, and these very situations sent him continually to the Lord for fresh light, for fresh revelation. His sufferings demanded a greater knowledge of the Lord. His problems and difficulties made it necessary for him to see how Christ came into this, what Christ's place was in this, how Christ could meet this situation, how this could be handled in the light of Christ. Yes, it was very practical. God keeps things up to date like that. It is comforting to understand that. A true Christian life, because it is related to such important business, is going to be kept on the anvil. Oh, we cry for a bit of let-up, for an easing up of the terrible hammerblows, for a little parenthesis in the difficulties, for a lifting of the problems — but they grow. And it seems that the further we go on, the less let-up there is and the shorter the periods between this thing and the next. Indeed, there seems to be no period between at all, but just one thing after another. And we are just being kept there, where God Almighty has to meet us or at any moment we are finished. But He is meeting us. The wonder is that there is the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and we go on. That is what I mean when I say we are kept up to date in our knowledge of the Lord, and that is how the Lord does it.

So where will your next message come from? Where will your next bit of Bible teaching come from? Where will your next address or sermon come from? — From the cloister or out of some travail, out of some deep handling of the Lord, out of something very real in life? It may not be your own, but somebody else's that you have been brought into touch with, and you find yourself involved in their suffering, their problem and you are extended before the Lord about this. It becomes a very practical matter, just as though it were your own matter. That is the way sermons are made. That is the way ministry is formed. That kind of thing is building, whereas all the other, however much there may be of it, just does not build. You have only to think for a moment. Supposing every address, every message, every sermon preached in Christianity in any given week was really building the house of God, we should all have been in glory long ago! The top stone would have been on long ago. That is no exaggeration. But the ministry is lacking in the essential

principles. It is not just coming out of the *winepress*; it is not being *pressed* out.

The work and the worker identical

One further word. This does mean that the worker and the work must be identical. The message must be the messenger, and the messenger himself or herself must be the message. The message is not something that we take and give out in an objective way. The message is the messenger. The messenger himself must be the message, the worker must be the work. The building must be the builder. We are being built into this thing; we are not as it were doing something out there, quite separately. We are being built into this thing, and the building is ourselves. What God is doing, He is doing not objectively to Christians, but with Christians. They are the very substance of the building. It is just all a matter of how much of Christ there is that determines how much of the building there is. No, there is nothing objective. It is all intimately personal.

CHAPTER THREE

BUILDING BY PREACHING

"We are God's fellow-workers; ye are ... God's building. According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another builds thereon. But let each man take heed how he builds thereon" (1 Cor. 3:9,10).

"It was the good pleasure of God ... to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him" (Gal. 1:15-16).

We have been seeing that the work of God is building work, that God is engaged upon building His great masterpiece for all coming ages, that Paul's predominant apprehension of the Lord's work and of his commission was building, the word which in its different forms occurs more presently in his writings than in all the rest of the New Testament. "Ye are ... God's building ... let each man take heed how he builds."

We are now going to think about building by preaching: the builder as preacher and the preacher as builder. We have brought the two passages together — "as a skilled master-builder I ..."; "it was the good pleasure of God ... to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him." Paul's building was largely by preaching; Paul's preaching was altogether building. It may be that already, not a few of you who read these lines are feeling that you are out of things because you are no preacher. Your attitude is that there are certain people who are the preachers; and Christianity has got into the way of talking about 'the preacher' as belonging to a particular class.

Preaching a comprehensive term

We come, of course, to our New Testament, and, while we cannot deal with much of the detail, and technical detail at that, we can keep very close to the Word, and make some general statements. The first thing is that in the New Testament 'preaching' is guite a comprehensive term. If we think that standing up on a platform is all that preaching means, that is just where we have gone wrong. In our English translations of the New Testament, the word 'preaching' represents several different Greek words. They have been almost universally rendered by the word 'preach', but behind the words so generally thus translated there are several quite distinct Greek words with different shades of meaning. You really need to make a careful study of these in order to see the original thought behind these words in different connections. One thing that will most certainly issue from even a superficial consideration of the matter is that this business is emphatically not shut up to a special class of people called 'preachers'. You will emerge completely free from any such idea. You will come out rather with the recognition that preaching is the business of the whole church and not of a special class in it.

a) To announce good tidings

As for the words and their different aspects, one word translated 'preach', means 'to announce good tidings'. You have that in the phrase 'preach the Gospel'. The word there is simply to announce good news. It is a very simple thing, and does not require any academic qualifications, to run indoors one day and say, 'There is good news! I have good news.' That was the apostolic preaching, and that was the preaching of the church. In the beginning the whole church just did that. That is the meaning of preaching to begin with — 'There is good news! I am the bearer of good news!' Well, that certainly is not tied up to any special people. It is the church's business universally to preach in that sense to say, 'We have got good news!' That is simply the meaning of 'Gospel': "We

have heard the joyful sound Jesus saves!" And that has a universal ministry.

b) To proclaim (1)

Another, quite different word still translated in our versions 'preach', is a word which means 'to herald' that is, 'to make a proclamation', and in this sense it is not just announcing good news. It is the business of one, such as a herald, who stands forth and makes a specific kind of proclamation. We have had that recently in this country when the heralds stood forth and proclaimed the beginning of a new reign. Someone had come to the throne and the heralds proclaimed; they 'heralded' that great fact. In the Gospel or in the New Testament the heralding has to do with a number of quite definite things. It is making the proclamation of an amnesty — prisoners that are forgiven and set free. It is a proclamation of pardon and of release. That is what Jesus was anointed to do -"to proclaim", to herald, "the acceptable year of the Lord", which meant the release of the captives, the setting at liberty of those that were bound, and so on (Luke 4:18-19). It is the heralding of the kingdom which has been brought in. They preached the kingdom, they heralded the kingdom and they heralded the king. In a word, they went out and made this proclamation: "Jesus is Lord, and the Kingdom of Christ has come; the kingdom of the heavens has come; the Kingdom of God has come." It is the work of the herald. Again, that is called preaching.

c) To proclaim (2)

There is an interesting point, in connection with the Greek word that most nearly corresponds to our word 'preach', to which I would like to draw attention. Our nearest English equivalent is to 'preach' or 'proclaim'. Now that word, interestingly, is used in 1 Cor. 11:26: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come."

d) To speak

And then we have another word translated 'preaching'. It is used of those who, upon the persecution which arose over Stephen, were scattered abroad. They went everywhere 'proclaiming the Lord'. The word is really 'speaking'. In 1 Cor. 14:34 it is used in connection with disorder created by certain women in the assembly — "it is not permitted unto them to speak." We should hesitate to put 'preach' into that particular context. Our point is simply this, that sometimes the preaching is just our manner of speaking about the Lord and His work, not necessarily in set congregations or religious buildings, but 'everywhere'. This surely is not confined to a special class called 'preachers', but is the calling of all.

e) To preach out

Now there is another variation of this word, used once by Peter, involving a different prefix. We are familiar with Peter's words: "that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). That word 'show forth' is our word 'announce' with the little prefix 'ex' added: 'publish, to declare abroad, tell out', to "preach out the excellencies of Him". It is rightly translated 'to show forth'. But is it to 'show forth' the excellencies of Him who called special persons called preachers out of darkness? 'No', you say, 'I am in that! He called me out of darkness into his marvellous light!' And so you are a preacher, to preach forth, to show forth, the excellencies of Him.'

A common foundation to all forms of preaching

So I think we have established our statement that this is a matter for the whole church, that preaching is a thing which belongs to all the Lord's people. Let us now come to the work of preaching in all its forms as having a common foundation for there is a common foundation to preaching in all its forms as we have indicated.

a) Something to make known

Firstly, preaching is based upon the fact that there is something to make known, something to impart. If it is good news or special information like that of the herald, or something to talk (not gossip) about, that is a basis. That is the beginning of all preaching, that you have something to make known. Have we got something, something to make known, something to impart, something to announce, to herald or proclaim, to talk about? You would not always think so if you heard Christians talking. You would not think that they have anything very much, anything very special, to talk about. But that is where it begins, with something to talk about.

b) Something that must be preached

And then it is something which *must* be preached. There is an imperative about getting it out. It is not just some interesting matter, some knowledge that we possess, about which it does not matter at all whether it stays with us or whether other people know about it or not. Preaching is based upon this: it is something which *must* be made known.

c) Preaching a trust

Again, preaching is a trust. It carries with it a great responsibility. That is, there is a great responsibility resting upon us to make the message known. "Woe is unto me", said the apostle, "if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). Paul always had an overwhelming sense that he must, he just must, get this out. "Necessity is laid upon me", he said. It was a great responsibility because it was a great trust.

d) A great issue contingent upon preaching

Again, preaching is based upon the fact that a very great issue is contingent upon preaching; no less a matter than the eternal destiny of many souls — of all souls who can be reached. Yes, a tremendous issue is bound up with preaching; therefore we must have something and we must get it out, and we must have a

sense of responsibility about this. Whatever form it takes, we must 'preach the Word' either in talking about it, or in proclaiming it, or in carrying it as good news.

e) Preaching based upon the urge of the Spirit

And then preaching is based upon a mighty urge, the urge of the Spirit, which creates a passion to make the message known. This is no perfunctory thing; this is no formal thing; this is not something for which we are paid. This is something that has to come out of the very urge of God. That is the common foundation of every form of preaching. Let us challenge our own hearts about it. Is that true of us? Is it true of you? Have you any of that sense — 'Woe is me if I do not get it out, and woe to many if I do not let them know'; I live under this sense of a great responsibility. Is that true of you who read these lines?

I am almost ashamed to be so elementary, but I feel that there is a need for us to recover something that the church had at the beginning. It was like this, and they were all like this, and wherever they went they did not wait for some organisation to invite them to come and take a service or to give a message. They did not wait until they were set apart as 'missionaries' or 'ministers' or 'Christian workers'. They did not wait for some badge or some uniform. The thing was within them as 'an urge' and they *must* talk. May the Lord recover that in you and in me! That is the way in which there will be a building of the church. It is on that basis that God's building will go on. Building in God's mind is not something technical, something formal. It is something altogether spiritual.

The preacher's theme

Next, the preacher's theme. Oh, how much time, how many hours we need, for the preacher's theme! Well, after all that we could say about the preacher's theme, it is resolved into one word. The preacher's theme is Christ; not a lot of subjects, but one all-inclusive Christ; and if Paul is the example of the preacher as builder,

let us remember his words: "It pleased God ... to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach Him." Just go through again and see Paul preaching Christ. What a Christ, what an inexhaustible Christ, what a wonderful Christ! This man is captivated by Christ. Some of you will have read F.W.H. Meyer's 'St. Paul', and you will remember how Meyer describes Paul as going to the Gentiles and seeing them in their idolatry, shame, empty-heartedness and tragedy. And then Meyer puts these words into the mouth of the apostle:

"Then I preached Christ, and oh, that you could see them!"

And he goes on to describe the transformation, the hunger met, the leaping to Christ, resulting in these Gentile churches all over Asia and elsewhere. And it all centres in this: "Then I preached Christ."

Christ as in the preacher's own life

But if Paul is an example of the preacher, of Christ, it was Christ as in his own life; not Christ as a subject, not Christ as a theme, not Christ as an accumulation of Bible references, not the topical Christ, but Christ in his own life. He "loved me, and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). 'He was revealed in me that I might preach Him'; 'that I might preach the One who has become an inward reality'. May I say to those who have anything to do with that form of preaching or ministry, that is before the people of God, that you should always stand back from what you think of giving and ask this question: 'How will that bring Christ into the lives of those to whom I am going to speak?'

That is a far more potent and fruitful question than you realise. I have learned that. It has been a governing thing with me for a long time. Contemplating ministry, and having worked hard, as I was saying earlier in relation to it, I have learned to sit back and say, 'Now then, there is a lot of matter there, a lot of things are touched on there, all sorts of thing included in that. But how far is that calculated to bring Christ into people's lives?' That is the criterion

as to its value. It may be very comprehensive, it may have many phases, aspects, interesting points and what not, but it is valueless unless it is calculated to bring Christ into the lives of those to whom it is passed on. Do always challenge everything by that, and you will find it will be tremendously helpful. The Spirit of God will come upon that. Yes, "then I preached Christ"; but it must come from the inside, and it must always be with one object: to bring Christ; not merely to talk about Him, but to bring Him into lives.

Oh, to be able to bring Him! You see, really the essential thing behind all preaching is just that – to convey Christ, to bring Christ in. It does not just mean to go to a place and say there is such a person as Christ and expound certain truths about Him. It means that the one who preaches actually brings Him. That is the very root of the matter — that He is *brought* by preaching. May our talk have this result, that we bring Christ in. A great deal of our talking just drives Him out. After much of it, there is less of the Lord than there was when we started. We have simply talked Him out; He has quietly left us. Oh, this is challenging! May the Lord make us preachers, preaching Christ, but in such a way that we *bring* Christ by our talking, by our announcing, by our heralding.

How we must preach

And then, finally, as to how we must preach and none of us knows! I am not speaking as one who knows how to preach. I am always suspicious of the person who can tell you how to do things like this because they know, because they are an authority on preaching. I am no authority on preaching. I do not know. And yet I know something of how it *ought* to be done. I know, but I am no authority. Really, none of us is an expert in this, and none of us really does know how to preach. But we may have some idea as to how it ought to be done, and it is worthwhile thinking about it and telling ourselves how we should do it. If we were going to be preachers, how should it be done?

To bring Christ in

I think I would put it in the first place like this. It must be done as though we had only one life to live, and Christ was the sum of that life. Some time ago, a question was sent round to preachers: 'If you had only one sermon to preach, what would it be about?'

Now, I put that in another way. We have only one life to live; that is a fact. What would we have our lives to be, when it is all over and the sum is taken and the story is told? What would we like the sum total of this one life, this one journey, to be? Could we think of anything more than that it should be said by grateful hearts: 'That man, that woman, meant Christ to me; I came to know Christ by them. They had many imperfections, many faults, but there is no getting away from it — their life meant Christ!' That is the one thing after all. We could criticize them while they were here, but when they were gone, you had to say, 'Well, Christ was a wonderful reality in that life; you could see Him and feel Him. We have gained Christ because of that life.' Do you not think that is how we ought to preach, or to talk, that it should be Christ? Let the preaching be of any form, but we ought always to preach so that the one thing that remains when we have finished, either in time or at the end of all our time, is that we have left a deposit of Christ. That is what I see in the New Testament with this man Paul and with so many others, and eternity alone will reveal how great a deposit of Christ was left by Stephen and those early believers. How many came to derive Christ from them! What are we here for? — to set up something, to keep something going, to propagate Christianity? No — to bring Christ in; our preaching should do that.

With urgency

Then I would say that it must be as though an emergency of the most serious consequence existed and what more serious consequence could exist than the eternal destiny of souls? Was it Richard Baxter who said, 'Let me preach as a dying man to dying

men'? That might perhaps be improved upon — 'as a living man to dying men'. But the point with him was that there is an emergency of the greatest seriousness in existence, and we cannot be perfunctory, we cannot be just formal, we cannot just stand up and talk without the seriousness and the passion required to meet a very serious emergency. We need to say to ourselves (as I myself say to the Lord before ministry): I am going to talk to people, and it can very well be that the whole course of lives, or of life, may be altered by what I say this time. Those lives, right on to the end, may be turned into certain channels through what I say, and it will not end with their lives. They have only one life to live, and that life is given to them for God's sake, for the glory of God and I am going to influence that life.

For we ought to influence people's lives. God has given us our very individuality and our very personality through which to speak to people. We are not disembodied spirits. We are persons, and the impact of personality is something quite right if it is in the hands of God, if it is infused with divine concern and passion. I believe the very presence of a man like Paul — just the presence of the man himself — meant a great deal. And our presence ought to mean something. It ought to be that we 'preach' — whether we talk or herald or announce — and we ought to do it with passion, as with a fire in our bones, through the mighty zeal of God upon us. We cannot influence lives thoughtlessly as all speaking, in some measure do.

As though our own destiny depended on it

And I would say that we must preach as though our own destiny depended upon it. Remember this word of exhortation concerning those in spiritual responsibility for the Lord's people: "They watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account" (Heb. 13:17) as those who must give account for your souls. The destiny of the preacher is bound up with his preaching. He is one who must give account. That surely should put us on our mettle and should

make this whole matter of the varied and manifold transmission, committal, passing on of Christ an intensely serious thing, extending us to the utmost. Listen to this man, this builder-preacher, this preacher-builder; listen to some of the phrases that he uses about his preaching. "We persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). "We beseech you" (2 Cor. 5:20). "We entreat" (2 Cor. 6:1). "Admonishing every man" (Col. 1:28). There is seriousness in those words, there is responsibility in those words, there is passion in those words. That was the kind of preacher that he was.

The need for self-effacement

My closing word must be this, for here lies a danger. With all our passion and our zeal and our well-meaning, we have got to keep ourselves out of the picture. It is very difficult, but it is the Lord Who is to be seen. Self-effacement is an absolute imperative for effectual preaching. We must leave a final impression, not of ourselves, but of our Lord, maybe of our Lord as precious to ourselves; but it must be our Lord. Always aim at that. When I started preaching, with some little sense of this responsibility, I had typed on a piece of paper and fastened on my pulpit, so that I saw it immediately I went up into the pulpit and reached the desk to start the service, these words:

"When telling Thy salvation free, Let all-absorbing thought of Thee My heart and mind engross. Then, when all hearts are bowed and stirred Beneath the influence of Thy Word, Hide me behind Thy cross."

That was well-meant. How often people were bowed and stirred beneath the Word I do not know! But I think it is a right sentiment. I pass it on to you. May the Lord make us worthy preachers of a worthy Lord and a worthy Gospel.

The purpose of this publication is to encourage God's people to lay hold on eternal life, the hope set before them, knowing that Jesus Christ, their Saviour, will soon return to establish His eternal Kingdom, "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:12).

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