

The Gospel, The Church, and the Servant.

Eph. 4: 1-16.

"Handfuls of Purpose" Part 3 (Miscellaneous, chapters 15 - 30).

Let fall for eager Gleaners.

Thirty Addresses on Various Scripture Truths and Incidents

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CHAPTER 25 — THE GOSPEL, THE CHURCH, AND THE SERVANT.

I have before my mind, the Lord helping me, to glance a little at the way in which the gospel and the Church, the Assembly, are connected in Scripture, with the service that is afforded to us by the Lord in His grace. It is of vital importance to be clear as regards the service that is connected, on the one hand with the gospel, and, on the other, with the Assembly, as the Body of Christ, and to know what the relation of the servant is to Christ, as his Lord, and to the Assembly, of which he is an integral part.

Now, beloved friends, it is an immense mistake to separate the gospel from the Church. I do not see how that can enter anybody's mind. The gospel is the revelation of the heart and nature of God. The Church is the tender object of the love of Christ. In it we have also the carrying out, in absolute power, of what were the eternal purposes and counsels of our God. These counsels have been developed in power, so that consequent on the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, we have this wonderful new structure, the Church of God, the Assembly, called also the House of God. This Church is the object of the deep and tender solicitude of the blessed Lord Jesus.

It is a blessed thing to know what the Church is to Christ. I feel utterly incompetent to handle the subject as I would like to, but I count on the Lord's help. The apostle Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, unfolded the mystery, the truth of the Church as the object of Christ's love and care, because it is His body. He was the "chosen vessel" — a servant of God specially called — to unfold this truth. But his ministry had two sides, for he was "separated unto the gospel of God" (Rom. 1: 1), as he says, "Whereof I Paul am made a minister" (Col. 1: 23), and had to suffer "for his body's sake, which is the Church: whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God" (Col. 1: 24, 25).

If I speak of the gospel, do I merely mean the tidings that would tell a poor sinner how to get rid of his or her sins? By no means! There is the thought of what it is to have the blessed God, in all the magnificence of His love and grace revealed, and made known here, to the hearts

of men, and they brought to know Himself, and brought into the joy of His own love. All such, so blessed, form the Church. You cannot have the gospel standing alone, and leave out the thought of the Church. And I believe the man who is seeking to do that is doing very poor and unsatisfactory work. No, they are really one. The gospel produces the Church, and the Church is sustained, or enlarged by the gospel.

I think the way in which the gifts are introduced in this fourth of Ephesians is very interesting. Paul was chosen to give out the truth of the Church. With this end in view he carried the gospel to the Gentiles, and the Jews would not permit this, but imprisoned him. It was his very love to souls that impelled him to carry out the gospel.

As a prisoner in bonds he writes this lovely epistle. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4: 1). We do well to heed the Word of God, and see that we walk worthy, for we have been called to this. It is the calling from God. We have been called into association with Christ We have also been called into a sphere that is absolutely and blessedly divine. Scripture calls it a "heavenly calling." It is a wonderful calling, and Paul beseeches them to walk worthy of it.

The way so to do is next given: "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4: 2, 3). Now I have been at a good many readings on this chapter, and they have usually taken this shape. First, "What is the calling?" (ver. 1). When that has been discussed has come the query, "What is the unity of the Spirit?" (Eph. 4: 3). Why have you left out the second verse? We want the second verse. We never shall touch the meaning of the unity of the Spirit unless our souls are bathed in that which the second verse gives. That is the Spirit of Christ, the grace of Christ, the long-suffering of Christ. And do you think you are going to be a churchman without this second verse encircling you? Do not deceive yourself You will never touch the truth of the unity of the Spirit, nor be in the power of what that truth is, unless your soul has been really bathed into, yea, dwells in the truth of this second verse.

Lowliness will save you from knocking your head against the lintel of a door that is not high. Do you grasp the figure? And if I am walking in meekness, I shall carry myself rightly when other people are not acting rightly towards me. How beautifully do we find this presented in Scripture as that which marked the Lord Jesus. You and I have to be exhorted to be meek, but the blessed Lord was ever the expression of meekness. He could truly say, "I am meek, and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11: 29). It is sorrowful how soon we can be the reverse. That a saint can resemble Christ in this quality is manifest, for "The man Moses was very *meek*, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12: 3).

Perhaps you will say to me, I am surrounded by most difficult people to get on with. Very likely. Do you think they are worse than those who murmured at Moses? If so, there is a fine opportunity for you to show them long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. It is what God's dear people everywhere need, and what every Christian needs the Lord will give us, if we seek His face.

It is only when the soul is in this spirit that it is able to keep the unity which the Spirit has formed. You cannot make it, and you cannot break it. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4: 4-6). The apostle talks of three circles here: the Spirit's — reality, the Lord's — profession, and God the Father's — universal ubiquity. Then he says in the seventh verse, "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." I apprehend this to mean that to each the Lord gives that grace in the way of gift, which He sees fit to bestow. With regard to our service, we have each an individual gift and place, according to His sovereign will, and infinite wisdom in the choice of His vessels. From Him comes every grace, every gift, but it is for the good of all. This is evident from Eph. 4: 16.

But notice that it is only by love that we grow, and only by use that we develop what is given to us, in the way of gift. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4: 16). Mere knowledge puffeth up, but love edifies, and builds up. It is only by the exercise of love that we can build up.

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4: 8-10).

Here you will observe the exercise of the sovereignty of the ascended Head in glory, who communicates a certain gift to you or to me, as He wills. All is His doing. If He has made you an evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher, or if He has only made you a little help in the Assembly, it is all His doing, it all comes from Him. If you get anything that will help the saints, thank Him and use it. Remember there is something in every one. Do not let us forget that, because we are all here to help each other. "To every one of us is given grace."

Now, see how beautifully the apostle traces all gift to Christ ascended. He came down, assumed manhood, and absolutely overcame the one who had been the victor over man. At first, in the wilderness, He defeated him morally, and then came out in His own blessed grace to meet captive man, and to deliver him in every way from the bondage of sin (*see* Matt. 4: 23-25). But now He has passed, through death and resurrection, out of this scene, and He has gone on high, and although the powers of the world to come are in abeyance, and miracles have ceased, we are suffered to have a most blessed part in what He is doing now, and He counts upon our hearts to be interested in all that He is interested in.

There are three things in the eighth verse of this chapter. (1) He ascended up on high; (2) He led captivity captive; (3) He gave gifts unto men. When He came into this world He found Satan the captor, and man chained, so to speak, to the wheels of his triumphal car. Man was in captivity, led or driven through the scene by the devil. Now the whole thing is reversed. It is not now that Satan is the captor, and man in captivity, but that Christ has been the Victor. He is now risen from the dead, the mighty Victor, and Satan is chained to the wheels of His car. "He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." These are two wonderful things. Satan vanquished, and man delivered, to become Christ's willing vassal.

He gives the gifts unto men. That is, He makes you the depositary of a certain gift, and then He takes you, gift and all, and makes a present of you to His Assembly. He takes up you and me, who have been under Satan's, power, He saves us, delivers us, puts our hearts right with God, and brings us nigh to Him. And not only that, but He gives us the Holy Ghost, so that our eternity of gladness is begun here, as we go through this scene, and makes us the depositary of some gift by which we are to be the exponents of His grace in this scene. He "went about doing good," and we are to walk in His footsteps. That is Christianity, or I do not understand it.

The statement that He ascended up on high is a quotation from the sixty-eighth Psalm, which also says: "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil. Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon. The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Ps. 68: 11-18). "The Lord gave the word," and to us is accorded the immense favour and privilege in this scene, according to our little measure, of holding forth the Word of Life. It is not only a question of preaching. But the saint is a light in this scene of profound darkness. A light that comes from Christ in glory. He will come back, by-and-by, and He will put all things right, and He will not need our help in that day of manifest power, but now, during His absence, He will use us if we yield ourselves to Him. Was there ever such a Master? Was there ever grace like His?

"Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" That is the basis of all this unfolding about gift. He has gone right down to the very depths where He overcame Satan, and ascended to God's right hand. His present position and His glory give Him the privilege of making those who were Satan's captives the vessels of His power to deliver others. We follow Him in a holy war against the common enemy of God and man. God fills the whole horizon of the soul here with Christ. Look as deep down as you like, He has been there. Look as high as you like, He is there. Nothing but Christ in victorious power is put before the soul.

And now He unfolds what He gave. "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4: 11). You have in your English Bible, most probably, a comma (,) before each of these gifts, but it should not be there. I do not think the point in the eleventh verse is that He gave some *to be* apostles, or *to be* prophets, but in the knowledge which He had, of that which was necessary to the carrying out of His own purpose, He gave the persons, in whom He had deposited these various gifts, to the Assembly. Now, as to apostles and prophets, we have not those in person here today, nor indeed do we need them. They have been, and have done their work. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom

ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2: 19-22). The result in full of their work will be seen, by-and-by, in the "holy city, new Jerusalem" (see Rev. 21).

The work of the apostles and prophets was laying the foundation. That, I apprehend, we have in the writings of the New Testament, on which the faith of our souls is now built, and if once the foundation of a house be laid, you do not want any new foundation. The point is this, they are no more wanted. Consequently the idea of there being apostles and prophets now, in their primary sense, is clearly a mistake. We doubtless still have prophetic ministry in the sense of "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (1 Cor. 14: 3). Ministry that reaches the conscience, that edifies, or builds up, stirs up, and comforts, is prophetic. The man that can speak in that way is a most useful gift. We all need it. And if there be a prophet here, thank God for it. But mark, he is not a prophet if he do not build you up, stir you up, and bind you up. The prophets of this order are in evidence today when the Assembly is in function, i.e., gathered together; but as to apostles, there are none. They have done their work — laid the foundation — and passed off the scene.

But what of apostolic succession? It is a figment of man's mind, and has no trace in Scripture. Successors they have doubtless had, and there are two very solemn scriptures which refer to them. Paul, in addressing the elders of the assembly to whom he wrote the epistle we are considering, thus describes his successors: "For I know this, that after my departing shall *grievous wolves* enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20: 29, 30). The Lord also gave the same Assembly commendation — in the second epistle to them — for having detected impostors. "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which *say they are apostles*, and are not, and hast found them *liars*" (Rev. 2: 1, 2). The men, therefore, today, who assume to be either apostles, or their successors, are in a serious case. They are either "grievous wolves" rending the flock of God, or "liars," easily, and surely to be so proved. These scriptures settle the whole question as far as the question of apostolic succession is concerned. Apart from these there is no mention of the subject in God's Word.

But if apostles and prophets have passed away, let us thank God that there are still evangelists, and pastors, and teachers, abiding. Such gifts may not be done without, and the Lord continues to give them right on to the end. So long as the body of Christ is here on earth, so long will He give these gifts. Such, alas, is the confusion in the Church today that each gift may not be doing his work in divine order, and as a consequence, I think the servant of God today has to be a man-of-all-work. That is, he who is an evangelist may have to do a little pastoral work, and seek to teach also, just because all the pastors and teachers are not exercising their respective gifts according to the lines laid down in God's Word.

First let us glance at the pastors and teachers. The teacher is occupied with the Book, the pastor more with the need of the soul. The latter is a very rare gift, while the teacher is a very useful gift. In Ephesians 4: "you notice they are linked together, in a way quite different from the

other gifts. Do you pray for the teachers? We ought to pray greatly for the teachers, but we are apt to forget our privilege in that respect. A pastor loves the saints, gets near them individually, and thus helps and leads them on. You can tell a pastor in a minute, by the way he prays for the sheep.

The pastors and teachers, however, would have little to do were it not for the evangelists. Their position is very blessed, for "How shall they hear without a preacher?" is God's query. He answers it by sending out the preacher (*see* Rom. 10: 14, 15).

Let us look at what the Scripture tells us about the evangelist, and notice that this gift comes in between the apostles and prophets on the one hand, and the pastors and teachers on the other. There is a great difference in the work of the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher. I think I might perhaps put this difference in such a way as the simplest can understand. What is the evangelist occupied with? He is occupied with the soul. What is the pastor occupied with? He is occupied with the sheep. And the teacher? He is occupied with the Book. Men have immortal souls, and what marks an evangelist is intense love to souls. Love for souls should mark every child of God, and if you have it not, is there not grave doubt whether you be one?

Love desires the blessing of others. If you have the enjoyment of the love of God yourself, you cannot be in a right state if you are not solicitous to get others to enjoy it too.

Let me now turn your attention to the Acts of the Apostles. What has greatly interested me lately is the way in which the truth went out in the beginning.

Redemption accomplished, and the blessed Lord gone on high, the Spirit of God came down on the day of Pentecost, and fell upon the hundred and twenty that were gathered together (see Acts 1, 2). Do not forget they were gathered together in prayer when the blessed Spirit of God fell upon them, and the House of God was formed upon earth. The effect of that was that "the multitude came together," and the Spirit of God led Peter to preach, and three thousand men were brought to the Lord that day. It was a beautiful triumph of grace.

The day the Law was broken, do you know what took place? A very different effect was manifest. Moses cried: "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men" (Ex. 32: 26-28). All the sons of Levi came to the help of the Lord that day, and three thousand men died. How beautiful is the contrast on the day of Pentecost. The day the Holy Ghost comes down, Simon the son of Jonas (was he a Levite?), or Peter, as he is now called, drew his sword — "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" — gave splendid testimony to Christ, and three thousand men were saved and added to the Lord's Assembly that day.

What was Pentecost? It was the inauguration of the Spirit's day. The Holy Ghost was upon the earth. Is He upon the earth still? Yes, you say, but He is not working now as He wrought

then. I admit that, but shall we blame Him? Shall we blame God? I think if we turned the eye in it would be better for ourselves. A faithless Church, an Assembly that has lost the sense of what it is to belong to Christ, is sure to hinder His activity. Do not let us forget, however, that we are in the day of the Holy Ghost.

I believe where we are lacking today is in prayer. If you ever traced through the Acts of the Apostles you would be struck with how much prayer comes in. If you read the Gospel by Luke, where you get the lovely history of Jesus, as the dependent Man, you find that blessed One seven times bowed in prayer. Three times seven, and more, the saints are bowed in prayer, in the Acts. The weakness of our day can be easily explained. But we want to be encouraged, and surely what we read of, then, should encourage us.

We have in the Acts the history of a man — and the only man that I know of — who is called in Scripture an evangelist. It was Philip. He was one of those who were selected, if you recollect, to look after the money, and the poor. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Acts 6: 1-6).

In the seventh chapter of the Acts we get the testimony of Stephen, and for his testimony he loses his life. But how did he die? He died exactly like his Master, praying for his murderers. What did the blessed Lord say, when on the cross? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). And what does Stephen say? "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7: 60). Beautiful testimony to Christ,

Now the result of this was that persecution broke out, and they were all scattered abroad, and the disciples went everywhere carrying the gospel with them. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem: and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8: 1-4). Why does the Lord allow that persecution? I have no doubt He had a divine purpose in allowing it, because you know very well in the end of Luke the Lord had told the assembled company of apostles and disciples, "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among *all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*" (Luke 24: 47). That is how it is put in the end of Luke.

But when you come to the opening chapter of the Acts of the Apostles you find that they were to wait in Jerusalem till the Holy Ghost came down, and then they were told, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 8). Now what were they doing? The apostles and all the brethren had stuck fast to Jerusalem. They made it a sort of spiritual metropolis. It is amazing how we like to stick to the old place, the old room, instead of going out. There they were, they would not go out of Jerusalem. The Lord says, I will broom them out, by sending persecution. Probably you say, The apostles stuck there still. They did stick still, but I do not think they were obeying the Lord in their action, and He raises up other servants, lesser, as Philip (Acts 8: 6), or larger, as Paul (Acts 9). If you go far afield you will be obeying the Lord.

A right evangelist always works from the divine centre. He works from Christ, and from the thing that is nearest, and dearest to Christ, and that is the Assembly. Philip was in full touch with the nearest Assembly when he went down to Samaria, and "preached Christ unto them," as recorded in the eighth chapter. In the end of that chapter the quality of an evangelist is sweetly seen in him. Commanded of the Lord, he leaves the flourishing work at Samaria, and travels one hundred miles to meet a poor anxious soul that had travelled over a thousand to get light from God. He met that poor solitary eunuch, and "preached unto him Jesus." I do like to hear a brother preaching Jesus. I do not think there are very many that can do it. You need to be very near the Lord to go and preach Jesus. It is easy to talk about Christ. When I was a young Christian I heard more about Jesus than I do nowadays. We have not enough of Jesus about us, nor the grace of Jesus, nor the ways of Jesus. We all of us need a great deal more of Jesus.

Philip caught a great many fish in Samaria, one in the desert, and after he had helped the eunuch he began at "Azotus, and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8: 40). This evangelist therefore preceded Peter in his remarkable mission to Cornelius, and I venture to think had to do with that beautiful work in Caesarea, recorded in Acts 10. In the twenty-first chapter you will find he lived there, and when Paul came thither he stayed with the fully-fledged gospel graduate "Philip the evangelist." "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him" (Acts 21: 8). The apostles had a greater idea of the evangelist than many people have nowadays.

Evangelists may not always be very intelligent. If this be the case, help them. If I am wrong, put me right. I really want to know the Lord's mind, and to do it. Possibly Philip needed and desired help; anyway, I am very much struck with the fact that the greatest man that ever lived, save the blessed Lord, when he comes to Caesarea does not go to an hotel, nor to the mansion of the noble centurion Cornelius, but puts up with an evangelist. It would do you good to go and stay with a warm-hearted evangelist.

I have been very much interested lately in considering four things in relation to the gospel: *What* to preach; *where* to preach; *when* to preach; and *how* to preach. What to preach? Well, you will be interested to see the varied kinds of preaching in those days. It was many-sided. It was beautifully varied. You will find it to be so, if you just take the trouble to see what the preaching was like. But we all have to be like Jonah. The Lord said unto him, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that

great city, and preach unto it *the preaching that I bid thee*" (Jonah 3: 2). Young preacher, preach what God bids you; not what your brethren suggest, or expect, or your hearers like. Get your orders from the top, and stick to them. You must get the right kind of bait if you are going to catch fish. What we want is our hearts enlarged. Oh, for enlargement of heart! That is what we all want, my dear friends. It is a mortal disease physically, but it is the very thing we all want spiritually. A large-hearted saint takes in the purpose of God, the thought of God, and the grace of God, and, in His service proclaims the whole truth of God.

The evangelist's sphere is the world. He brings Christ to it, and seeks to bring souls out of it to Christ. But, if instructed, he always works from the Assembly, and leads souls into it. You know what a pair of compasses is? An evangelist is like that — or should be. One leg is fixed, and the other you stretch out as far as it will go. Where is the fixed leg of the evangelist? In the Assembly; and his other leg, to use my figure, circles the world. He goes out in burning zeal, and whole-hearted energy to seek souls, wherever God leads him. The world is his parish.

My beloved brethren, let us listen to the Scriptures in this matter: "Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (Matt. 13: 47, 48). When the net was full, they drew it to shore. They work very hard. And mind there is downright hard work connected with the gospel. It is a very easy thing to stay at home, and toast my toes, and say, Thank God, I am going to heaven. But to go out, and labour for the Lord, and get hold of souls, is not so very easy. But they had their recompense. They caught the fish, and "gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away." The vessel is the Assembly. You cannot expect to catch fish in the Assembly. You must go out into the dark waters around to catch them. And what is the water? It is the world, beloved friends.

Everything is in view of the Assembly, and leads to it. But the question arises, Is the evangelist for the Assembly? It is to be noticed that in the list of gifts, which edify it, in 1 Corinthians 12, that of the evangelist is not named. Is this the reason that saints do not need and enjoy the gospel? I trow not. I pity the saint that does not enjoy the gospel. There is nothing I like better than to sit down and listen to the gospel, and we must bear in mind that we live in a day when unestablished souls hover about, and perhaps even get into the Assembly. To all such the simple gospel is divinely suited.

The Lord said to Simon and Andrew, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4: 19); and what I understand by a fisherman is one who *catches* fish — not merely a man with a rod, or a net, that goes a-fishing. The work of the evangelist is to bring souls to Christ first of all, and then to the door of the Assembly. My advice to you is, Do not introduce your own converts. Let the porters take them in. We read of the porters in Solomon's days. Their *names* are given in 1 Chronicles 9: 17, 18; their number, four thousand, in 1 Chronicles 23: 5; their *courses* in 2 Chronicles 8: 14; and their *service* in 1 Chronicles 35: 15. Are you a good porter? A few good porters in the Assembly are of great service, because the porters keep out what ought not to be in, and let in those who have a title to go in. It is a great cheer to a young soul when the porters can say, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord." I like a good warm-hearted porter.

We have all had our work assigned to us, but let us remember we are all subject" to Christ. The evangelist catches the fish, others should determine if they be good or bad. Then what is the relation of the evangelist to the Assembly? Is he under the control of the Assembly? Under the control of the Assembly! What, my servants under your control? My house and my servants belong to me, and not to you. The evangelist is of the Assembly, and, of course, if his walk and ways are not right, he comes under the discipline of the Assembly, but he is the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do I owe allegiance to anybody? Yes! to my Lord and Master, surely to none other. Then as to control? "One is your Master, even Christ" (Matt. 23: 8-10). Of course as to doctrine, that is quite another thing. Being of the Assembly, if the evangelist's doctrine is not sound, he is therein amenable to it. But for the Assembly to think that the evangelist's business is theirs is a profound mistake. On the other hand, for an evangelist to seek to work in a spirit of independence apart from the Assembly, I should condemn with my whole heart.

If souls are reached by the gospel, what is the natural thing you wish? That they will gravitate to the spot where the Lord is. We might help these dear servants — the evangelists — and we should help them if we prayed more for them. They, however, must be left free to carry out the exercise of the gift which the Lord has given them, where, when, and how He would lead them. For the Assembly to pray much for them is a very blessed and happy thing.

If any whom I address feel that God has called them to this blessed service, let me affectionately urge you to be devoted. Yield yourself to the Lord. You have only one life, and if the Lord has put it into your heart to preach the gospel, go and do it. Do not preach sermons; be like Philip, preach Christ.

Young men, go out into the country, and tell the people, who perhaps never hear the simple gospel, the story of the love of Christ. Oh, you say, I do preach, but I do not catch any fish — I do not get any conversions. Do not let your mind be occupied with success. The Lord says, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25: 21). He does not say, "Well done, good and successful servant." The great thing is to be simple.

I remember what happened soon after I was converted. I was converted one Lord's Day evening, and at the Lord's Table the next. That was a great favour from the Lord, to put me at once amongst His saints, and I think I may truly say that I have been a Churchman ever since I was converted. Well, after two or three months I began to preach a little out in the country. But some of the saints said, Come and preach in the Room. The Room, of all places! The thought of preaching to these old, intelligent, and possibly critical brethren staggered me greatly. However, I was so pressed by them that I at length consented, and of course got up a most elaborate sermon. Thank God, I broke down in that sermon, which served me right, for I was trusting to my preparation, and not to the Lord. It is the only one I ever broke down in, all the days of my life, for, from that night, I learned to trust the Lord for His support and help when ministering His Word.

If you are going to be a successful fisherman, you will have to keep yourself out of sight. Wait much on God, and remember that men have immortal souls, and are hurrying on to a lost

eternity. Then go, and tenderly, lovingly, and beseechingly preach Christ. Tell them of Christ, and, my dear friend, you will be sure of catching men for Him.

The Acts of the Apostles give us great variety in the way of presenting the gospel, and it is very interesting to see the way in which the gospel is connected with the Assembly, and the way in which the work went on. The gospel and the Church were never dissevered in the days of the apostles. The reason of that was their interest in each other's work, and their manifest simplicity. Look at Philip with that beautiful work going on in Samaria, when so many were blessed. Peter and John came down. Do you think that was to examine the work of the evangelist? I do not believe it. The Holy Ghost did not fall upon the converts until they came down. God did not permit that until these men came down, and laid their hands on them. The reason is plain. The work of God is one, although the instruments vary. There was One Head in heaven, and One Spirit on earth, and the work at Samaria was one with that at Jerusalem, for there was but "one body." The apostles' action, therefore, was to show the identification of the work. The Assembly at Jerusalem took deep interest in the work of the evangelist in Samaria.

Doubtless Philip needed, and gladly received the help of the apostles. He thought Simon was converted, but he was not. An evangelist must be a hearty, sanguine man, or he would not succeed. It is part of his gift to be just that. Nothing daunts him. He is like a cork on the water, the more drenching he gets, the higher he floats. He always comes up smiling. He is set in the name of the Lord, and by the grace of the Lord, to win souls for the Lord, and as long as he is here you will find that is what he will do. Preaching is not evangelising. Many a man likes to preach to a large company, but do you ever find him dealing with souls. Such an one is not of much use. He is perhaps a splendid preacher, but he is not an evangelist. The going down of the apostles, in the case alluded to, was doubtless an expression of sweet and beautiful interest in the evangelist's work.

When Paul was converted, "straightway he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9: 20), before he got really into the Assembly. He was brought into the Assembly at Jerusalem by the commendation of Barnabas, and the saints soon recognised his worth, as he "spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus" (9: 20-29).

Why did Peter report at Jerusalem the wondrous tidings that "the Gentiles also had received the Word of God"? (Acts 11: 1). To share with the Assembly the victories of the gospel. Would that there were more of that kind of thing today, but alas, we are often too self-occupied to be interested in another's work. They were then of one heart, one mind, and one soul. It was not with them the question of this gift or that gift. God was working, and no matter who it was by, all the rest were interested.

See how this is illustrated in the eleventh chapter: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he

came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11: 19-24).

When the happy tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church of Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas, all the way to Antioch, a distance of about four hundred miles. They were interested in it. When you hear there is a beautiful work of God going on fifty, or five hundred miles away, do you send some one to see how it is getting on? If you do, mind he must be a good man. The man they sent "was a good man, and *full* of the Holy Ghost and of faith." That is the kind of man to send. If he is not a man of that sort, he will do a lot of mischief. They sent down that man to help the preachers, and the converts, and when he was come he was made glad, we read. It is a great thing to be always set to help everybody else. Barnabas comes and sees a company of happy saints, and of course he was made glad. A wonderful thing is the grace of God when it works. Why does He not work more in our midst? That is a serious question.

Now come to the thirteenth chapter, and see how the gospel spread from this same Antioch. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus" (Acts 13: 1-4). Now observe, it was no work of the Assembly. But the Assembly was allowed to have fellowship with what the Holy Ghost was doing. The Holy Ghost led these servants, but He lets the Assembly have fellowship. Could not you do the same? "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." I would be very glad if you did that to me. Mark this, no hypocrisy. If I pray, and put my hands upon a man, I am identified with him. If I put my hand on my brother in prayer, I ought next to put my hand into my pocket, to help him, because "the labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10: 7). They were identified with these two men, and doubtless sustained them.

In the fourteenth chapter, you find Paul and Barnabas back again at Antioch. When they get there, what do they immediately do? Let us read: "And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14: 25-27). They gathered the Church together, and rehearsed all that God had done with them. When you come back from a happy and successful gospel campaign, do you dear evangelists gather the Church together to share the good news? Oh, you say, we should not like to put ourselves forward like that. The saints would not come together for that purpose. I am very sorry for the saints. That is all I can say. If you were to go home and do it, probably some would say, He thinks a great deal of himself. If that be so, at least something else is manifest, the Assembly nowadays has lost its first love for the gospel, and its triumphs. In plain language, we are not so simple as they were in that day. God enlarge our hearts, for we need it.

Pass on now to the fifteenth chapter: "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren" (Acts 15: 3). There again you have the servants sharing their common joy with the saints, and causing great joy. That is what took place in those early days of freshness and simplicity. I am only telling you what the Lord has recorded, just to stir us all up. And if you are not happy, I am. I know the secret of all this communion in the effects of the gospel. They had all one heart for Christ. They thought only of the glory of Christ. Oh, brethren, the Lord give us to be more in the enjoyment of His love.

I have been greatly struck, too, with the way in which the Lord sought to educate, and then sent out His servants when He was here. "Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth" (John 4: 34-37). Oh, what an evangelist He was. Come from the Father's heart, and laden with all its love, He travelled all through that burning desert to reach, and fill one empty, sinful heart. Son of God, we adore Thee! He went to death for you and me. Beloved brethren, what are we going to do for Him? Are not souls perishing on every hand? What are we doing? Are we carrying the light, the blessed gospel of God's grace, to them. Mark, it is a responsibility laid on us. Here the Lord says, LOOK, the fields are white already to harvest. May He press these words upon your hearts and mine.

If we go elsewhere, we find it written: — "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; *pray ye therefore* the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matt. 9: 36-38). "PRAY YE." Oh, how beautiful! In the fourth of John it was, Look ye; here it is, Pray ye. He, so to speak, says, I will take you into fellowship with Me in the work. I do not know that they did pray, but anyway He sent out twelve: "And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease . . . These twelve Jesus sent forth" (Matt. 10: 1, 5). Oh, beloved, the labourers are indeed few. Do we pray after this sort?

In the sixteenth chapter of Mark, we find Him risen from the dead, and there He says in the fifteenth verse, "GO YE into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16: 15) That is it. People sometimes say to me, Where shall we preach? He tells you, "Go ye into *all the world.*" I quite admit, if you contend for it, that it was a special injunction to the twelve. But would you limit it to them? We have been noticing that "He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for *the* work of the ministry; for the edifying of the Body of Christ" (Eph. 4: 11, 12). That is to say, He gives in His blessed grace, all that is necessary for the pathway of the saints, and for the carrying out of His work down here, whether in the Assembly, or outside it in the world. "Go ye into all the world," is an imperative command. Have we hearts to obey? Are our hearts so sweetly in tune with Him as to be ready to go.

This answers the question — *Where* to preach? If I look at the apostle Paul, I find him preaching in all sorts of places. Hilltops, river-sides, market-places, prisons, palaces, and synagogues, and his own hired house, all heard his voice. The point is that the servant is to be at the command of the Lord to carry out the testimony. His only exercise was as to how the Lord's word was to be addressed to those to whom his Master had sent him. Nor was it a question of fellowship with the Assembly, though his oft-repeated request for their prayers showed how he valued their fellowship. If their hearts are right, they will be praying to the Lord for blessing.

The servant gets his commission from his Master. He wants no other authorisation or commendation. "For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and *to every man his work*, and commanded the porter to watch" (Mark 13: 34). He has authority from his Lord: that is enough. What will be the result? There will be a reward for all service rendered to Him by-and-by. The thirty-second chapter of Isaiah gives us a good illustration of the query, *Where shall we preach?* "Blessed are ye that *sow beside all waters*, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass" (Isa. 32: 20). Sow beside all waters. What is the meaning of that? Diligent toil.

But there is not only the question of where to preach, but *when* to preach? Solomon furnishes a good answer; "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight: for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In *the morning* sow thy seed, and in *the evening* withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good" (Ecc. 11: 1-6). In the East they sow the seed upon the waters, the water subsides, and the seed drops into a soft fertile bed. This is not preaching. It is you and I just being keen to drop the blessed seed of the Word of God in the soul, wherever God carries us. You are to be a person going about with the heavenly seed-basket on your arm, dropping the seed wherever you go. It may be to a saint. It may be to a sinner. The fact is, far too much is left to the preachers. Verse 4 teaches us not to be governed by circumstances. I think God often gives us a fair wind. It took Paul only a day and a half to come to Philippi from Troas with the gospel (Acts 16: 11, 12). But it took him five days to get back to Troas again (Acts 20: 6). Do you think God has told us that for nothing? God did not put that in His book without purpose.

Go on with your work. Let nothing hinder you That is the great thing for a saint today. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand." That is when to preach. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4: 2). Where to preach? All the world your parish. When to do it? Morning and evening, always at it.

How to preach is also of importance, and Scripture tells us how to do it. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126: 5, 6). They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. I think that is the *How*. There is a moral state. There is exercise of soul. And

therefore you sow in tears, and reap in joy. That is a beautiful answer to the How, both in the way you go out, and in the way you present the truth.

Again we get an illustration of this in Paul's history. "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed" (Acts 14: 1). Connect that with "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And Paul and Barnabas so spake that a multitude believed. It is said of George Whitefield that he so felt the love of God, on the one hand, and the need of souls on the other, that he often wept over them when preaching. Little wonder that they wept under him. The Lord help you and me to preach like that.

What God looks for is a willing heart. You may be as devoted as you like to be, and will be no more. You may yield all to Christ. There is no *must* when it is a question of devotion to Christ. I never say to a person, You must be devoted. But I sometimes say, You may be devoted. We all have the opportunity to be such, and it is a fatal mistake if we miss that opportunity.

There is a striking illustration of this in the book of Judges. Some of the people responded splendidly to Barak's call, others held back. This is celebrated in the song of the fifth chapter, which I would ask you to study carefully in relation to the question of being devoted to the Lord. "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake; utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam" (Judges 5: 12.) They were anticipating the fourth chapter of Ephesians even in that day. No longer captives, but set free, a song alone became them. But some had no part in the battle, and no heart for the song, and so, alas! is it today.

"And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah evert Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheep-folds to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea-shore, and abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardated their lives unto the death in the high places of the field" (Judges 5: 15-18). Reuben thought it was far better to watch his sheep, than risk their loss, while away on the Lord's business. How is it with us? Are we seeking sovereigns or souls? Which is it? Is it Christ, Christ's people, and Christ's service that I am interested in? And to go wider, do I go out to win others for Him? If you are set to please and serve Him, you will have twice as much joy in your own soul. When we love "to hear the bleatings of the flocks," i.e., are commanded by our own interests, our business, our families, our worldly success, etc., we spoil our joy and do not often "utter a song." That is, Reuben had a chance of being devoted, and missed it.

Now, this is really very solemn indeed, for if I miss blessing, I am exposed to the reverse. "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (Judges 5: 23). That is, if I do not respond to God's call, which always leads to blessing, I come experimentally under a curse, a blight.

But, you say, does the Lord want my help? Well, you can take what you like out of that scripture. God keep you from the curse of Meroz. "They came *not* to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Their hearts were not free, and devoted to Christ utterly. Are ours? In His blessed grace He gives us the privilege of being thus His fellow-workers. It is a wonderful privilege to be among His helpers, albeit what we can do is little indeed. I expect to meet Lazarus in heaven. It was a wonderful day for him when he was raised from the dead. How did it happen? You say, The Lord raised him. Quite true, but did He not say, "Take ye away the stone"? Very likely more than one had a hand in it. What did they do? They helped to push the stone away.

If you can do nothing more, you might be like a little boy whom the Lord had saved. There lived a great, big, and very godless man in the village. This little lad persuaded him to come with him to a gospel meeting. When they reached the door of the meeting-room, the little fellow gave him a push in, and said, "Here he is, Jesus, save him!" And the Lord saved that man! It was all the little fellow could do, but he did it. He came "to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

The Lord help you and me to yield ourselves unreservedly to him. I take my orders from the top, and I recommend you to do the same. If you do, you are sure to be right, you are bound to be right. "He gave to every man his work." Let us each do our own work, and seek only to please Him, till we see Him face to face. Oh, how we shall rejoice to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" about others, if He cannot say it to us. It will be well, however, to so devote ourselves to Him, that He may have the opportunity to say it even to us.