

Letters: Rev. a.n.somerville Glasgow (8)

by Andrew Bonar

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being deeply affected by the call to ministry, being occupied with Christ and His glory, and being content with our role in the kingdom of heaven.

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 40:31, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, Philippians 2:3-4, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 12:2, James 5:16, 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 22:12

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Ministry", "Temptation"

Description

Andrew Bonar reflects on the solemnity and joy of beginning a full ministry in the Gospel, comparing it to the anointing of a young priest. He acknowledges the temptations that may arise, urging his friend Alic to remain focused on Jesus amidst challenges. Bonar shares his happiness in preaching to both Jews and Gentiles, emphasizing the importance of prayer and humility in ministry. He encourages Alic to seek wisdom and to remember the unity of laborers in Christ's work, highlighting the need for mutual support and prayer among brethren. Bonar concludes with a reminder of the eternal beauty awaiting them in the presence of their Redeemer.

Transcript

Monday, Dec. 11th, 1837.

MY DEAR ALIC,

--you now know the beginning of a full ministry in the Gospel of Christ. Has it, then, solemnised you deeply? Have you felt as the young priest-- some young son of Aaron--would feel on the day when first the anointing oil that ordained him to his office was poured on his head, and himself permitted for the first time to go in at the door of the Holy Place, and walk by the side of the Golden Candlestick and touch the shew-bread and tread the floor of the place where God was peculiarly present? Anything like this in you? Or anything like Christ's spirit after His heavenly baptism? Perhaps, rather, you have been like Christ after His baptism in regard to temptation. Has Satan already assailed you? Has he three times tempted you? Has he puffed you up with a high idea of self or made you doubt the love of God your Father, or asked you to court the honour of the world? I cannot conjecture your state of soul--but I trust that at least it is ever 'looking unto Jesus' and 'into Jesus.'

All went well at Kelso. I felt as if God melted my soul to perfect softness, when I saw the hands of the Presbytery laid on the head of my brother [Horatius]. The feeling was that of joy and praise at the honour,

and a sort of awe. . . . You will be saying 'What! this long, long letter, and not a word about the Jews! Well then, dear Alic, I must tell you what I seriously consider to be another answer of prayer. . . Last week a foreign Jew, who has been long in Britain, found his way from Dublin through Glasgow (N.B.--He did not stay in a city where the lately ordained minister was for taking to himself and his fellows all the glorious things written by the prophets regarding 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem') till he reached Edinburgh. . . He is very poor, speaks almost nothing but German, is very simple, and has almost come to believe in Christ. He is very interesting. Last Sabbath I had the satisfaction of preaching in Rose Street (Part of his mission-district in connection with St. George's Church, Edinburgh) to him and another Jew on Rev. 14:1. Now, Alic, is there not something from God in all this? Is it not Christ saying to me that I am right in peculiarly loving Israel? My meeting in Rose Street last night was very full, and there were about thirty men . . . two careless Roman Catholics among them. So that you see I am a happy man, honoured of God to preach to some followers of Antichrist, and to some of His ancient people. Indeed I have been very happy of late in my soul. Remember to observe our concerted times of prayer, and count it absolutely necessary to be often alone, like Jacob at Jabbok, until you can call your study 'Peniel; for I have seen God face to face'. Pray for wisdom for me, that I may speak to sinners and to saints in season. . . . Yours truly, dear Alic, in the flesh and in the Lord,

ANDREW A. BONAR.

COLLACE, Wednesday, Jan.19th, 1842.

MY DEAR ALIC,

-- A friend loveth at all times ; but I find that hours of peril make us know our love to one another more than other times. We were alarmed by hearing of your sickness, and I write to get some account of you. Have you been in 'the valley of the shadow of death' ? Was it dark? Did the 'staff ' support you? Could you sing in its gloom, 'I am persuaded that neither death nor life,' etc.? I hear you are better now, you are to be spared a little longer for our sakes and your own. Robert M' Cheyne is staying with me at present, and we joined heartily in prayer for you on Saturday evening especially. Write us and say what are the 'peaceable fruits of righteousness' that 'afterwards' appear. What views of your Master did you obtain? what views of your own heart? Are you more weary than ever of your own righteous ness--of self, which is truly a Hydra--of your fellow-men and corruption? Are you not 'looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Day of God' ? You and I shall then stand in our Redeemer's beauty, . . . and all our brethren alike beautiful--all fair--no spot-- without blemish--without wrinkle--white and clean-- in fine linen--in garments of needlework--like Jesus. Will you know me in that day? Will you know yourself?

Remember me to Mrs. Somerville, though we be strangers in the flesh. Bid her remember 'the elect lady.'
--Believe me, dear Alic, yours truly in the Lord,

ANDREW A. BONAR.

COLLACE, Sept. 23, 1844.

MY DEAR A.,

--Your letter teased me--for it is not in my power to come to your Communion. I am engaged to Edinburgh--all the diets. David Brown had previously written me to come to him, and I thought, 'Now if I could have done this, I might at least be with A. S. at a Communion!' But it is ordered otherwise. We have got different spots of the vineyard to labour in, and the Husbandman who hired us knows best how to use us. Was it to keep us from being ambitious like the disciples, that He said of the labourers: 'They received every man a penny?' We are apt to seek to be great in the kingdom of heaven. I find it often difficult to be content to be 'the last of all and servant of all,' to stand ever on the low step of free grace, without one quality or personal property to make a difference between me and the brand plucked from the burning at the last hour. We must exalt Christ so high as to get out of sight of ourselves in looking up to Him. We must be like the company in Rev. 4, so occupied in setting Him on high as to forget altogether that we have any separate existence from Him.

The Lord make your vestry to be to you 'The secret place of the Most High.' I have been laid up in the house for a fortnight by a sprained foot, which I got in falling from my horse when it started at something on the road. I find this trial useful. 'All the paths of the Lord' are 'mercy' as well as 'truth.'

Go on, brother, through the valley of Baca. Zion will soon be in view! 'Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me.' --Believe me, dear A., yours in the Lord,

ANDREW A. BONAR.

COLLACE, Sept. 18th, 1846.

MY DEAR A.,

--Here is a fragment supposed to have been transmitted by the 'Anticipative telegraph.'

St. Vincent Street, Glasgow

Breakfast-table spread. Mrs. Somerville waiting for Mr. S., who enters at last, still rather dull.

Mr. S. 'Any letters this morning? I have been thinking of my Communion arrangements.'

Mrs. S. 'There is one there marked "Perth." Perhaps it may be from some friend whom you asked to come to your Communion.'

Mr. S. 'Oh, I know the handwriting. It is from Collace no doubt.' (Reads very gravely.)

Mrs. S. 'Well, is it a promise of help?'

Mr. S. 'O no, no--as provoking as ever. That man will never look near us. Well, well, good Mr. Cumming will do more than supply his place.'

(Caetera desunt.)

The truth is, dear Alic, I am engaged already to the Edinburgh Fast Day and Sabbath, but if you will feel it at all of use I shall at once do this. I could come on Monday morning, I believe, by the train in time to preach forenoon and evening I have just returned from ten days' preaching in the Mearns, round about Montrose. . . . I preached about fourteen times during these ten days; one of the times was a

morning lecture on the Jews and the Second Advent. However, with the exception of this last, and, of course, occasional statements of the coming Day of God, the ten days were spent in evangelising. 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' I saw in two places a good deal of impression...

Finally, dear brother, I do not always feed among the lilies. I know my Shepherd always feeds there and that He feeds me, but He often gives me 'bitter herbs' for food. Sin and sinners--God dishonoured by us and by others--will never be otherwise than bitter herbs. But let us eat the Paschal Lamb all the more. . . . Believe me, dear A., yours in the Lord,

ANDREW A. BONAR.

COLLACE, Nov. 23rd, 1846.

MY DEAR ALIC,--I have nothing worth to send you about Paul. You have no doubt anticipated almost all I could offer from a somewhat hasty glance. In my usual reading I have come to 1 Corinthians, and there have been led to notice one interesting feature in Paul. Though the greatest and wisest--best stored of all--he never seems to like to stand alone. It is always Paul and Timothy--Paul and Barnabas--Paul and Apollos --Paul and Titus--Paul and Sosthenes, etc. Now this is not from want of firmness, needing the sympathy of others to decide him, but from deep wisdom. He sees that this is God's way of keeping the workers humble. He does not employ one only at a building, but several, and so no one can say 'the success is owing to me.' It may be your fellow-labourer that is the secret of the blessing--perhaps he is more prayerful than you, more single-minded. Hence, says Paul in 1 Cor. 3, 'He that planteth and he that watereth are one,' that is, it is one and the same work, and has the same wages. None is to say, 'Planting is far more important and difficult than watering.' These departments of labour form but one work in God's view, and each labourer is alike rewarded for success. We are God's sunergoi, i.e. we are set by God to be one another's fellow-labourers. It is not 'we are labourers along with God.' No, but we belong to the corps of labourers who build God's temple and get our penny at night. Thus we are kept from despising one another. Hence, blessing comes down best when not the minister only, but elders, teachers, visitors, are all alike active and full of prayer and faith. No room here to say, 'It is I that bring down the shower.' Our Lord meant this also in John 4: 'He that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.' There is somewhat of the same principle in 'two or three agreeing together.'

This is a hasty note, but, among other ends, it will show that I retain a lively remembrance of the happy evening I spent with you in Glasgow. Peace be to your house, and mercy and peace to you its head, responsible for so many souls.--Yours truly, dear brother,

ANDREW A. BONAR.

COLLACE, Oct. 1st, 1847.

MY DEAR A.,--Did you ever read this extract from a sermon recently delivered, or supposed to be recently delivered, to a congregation in Glasgow? 'Paul, my friends, was a pattern of kindness to his brethren. If he touched at Tyre away he went to see his brethren there. But more than this; Paul was most generous in his kindness; he spent not only one, but seven days with these disciples. Alas, it is not so in our cold days! My brethren pass through the very town where they know a brother dwells, and go not up to salute him. I

can speak from experience ' . . . (Caetera desunt.) (Course of sermons on Paul's life and ministry.)

Note by a reader.-- 'We submit that Paul is rather too highly applauded here. It was because the ship was to remain seven days at Tyre that Paul stayed so long. Indeed, how else could a minister have seven days to spare! And besides, at Ephesus, Acts 20:16, "he determined to sail by Ephesus (parapleusai)," and to invite his brethren in the ministry to meet him elsewhere. Just as if the Pastor--the evangelistic, as well as evangelical Pastor--of Anderston were to be at the Bridge of Earn, and on his way to Glasgow to pass through Perth. He is near Collace, but he determines to "sail by,"-- "for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the Day of Pentecost.'" Such things have occurred in other times. 'From Glasgow he writes to Collace and invites the elder of that church.'

My well-beloved brother, I am real sorry that there are five, instead of four, Sabbaths in October this year, and you see the reason of my sorrow. Edinburgh Communion is on the 31st and so I cannot get to you on Saturday.. .. In going to Ireland I had arranged to see you in Glasgow, but found out that you and your family were alike out of town. And in returning I had to pass on that same day to Edinburgh on account of some necessary arrangements. It was not my forgetfulness of you . . .

Perhaps now you will come in to Edinburgh Communion and we may meet there; at Miletus, if not at Ephesus. . . --Yours affectionately, dear A.,

ANDREW A. BONAR.

COLLACE, June 30th, 1848

MY DEAR ALIC,--My Communion has filled up my time and made me delay writing to you. You have had a Patmos-time instead of the Upper Room, but both have their place and use, and you are dealt with as a son. Do not be like the Baptist in prison who began to grow impatient and to wonder at his Master's letting him lie in fetters, unused. 'Surely my voice could have still made the Desert ring with the cry, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" Surely my time for preaching was very brief. Surely it would be better doing something among crowds of souls than to be here! One of his disciples ventures to soothe him by suggesting, 'Perhaps the Master has not heard of this violent act of Herod's.' 'No, no,' says John, 'that will not explain it--He knows well. But I cannot understand His delay.' Another disciple suggests, 'Did not you say that He must increase and you decrease?' 'O yes, but I might still have been allowed to be His herald and proclaim Him to others.' The result is that he sends off two disciples with a message scarcely respectful enough, 'Art Thou indeed the Coming One?' After a few days the two return. 'Well, what did He say?' 'He said, "Blessed is he, who soever is not offended in Me.'" While they still talk over all that Jesus had done and said, lo! one of Christ's twelve, or one of the seventy, arrives, and tells him the Master had spoken most kindly, lovingly, applaudingly of His suffering servant. And so John reposes on his hard cold prison floor, thinking on his Master's love to him, though he cannot see through His ways. That very night perhaps, when a calm had succeeded to the storm, he is sent for to Paradise, and is not at all offended at being carried thither by the sword of Herod, rather than by a fiery chariot.

What an episode! But, dear A., do take care of yourself. Samuel Miller told me of you pretty fully a few days ago. May your new abode not be so 'haunted' as Newton said his old study at Olney was, viz., by legions of evil thoughts. I hope to begin my Berwickshire itinerating the last week of July, or first of August.

Thanks for your few hints. The remembrance of Daniel Cormick will, I trust, quicken me to work while it is called to-day, but more and more I see how wretchedly indolent and self-pleasing my soul is in the Lord's work. . . . Believe me, my dear A., yours affectionately,

ANDREW A. BONAR.

TO REV. DR. A. N. SOMERVILLE, ON HIS RETURN HOME FROM SOUTH AFRICA

CRAIGNURE, ISLE OF MULL, 6th August 1883.

MY DEAR 'ALIC,' friend and brother,

--We are all glad that you are safe home. Old Virgil would perhaps have sung of you as a man like AEneas: -

'Multum ille et terris jactatus et alto.'

wondering what could have impelled

'Insignem pietate virum tot adire labores, '

and might have thought of adding an 'Alexandrian' to his 'AEneid,' as Homer appended an 'Odyssey' to his 'Iliad.' But speaking unromantically, and as members of the family of God, we do give thanks for you. We followed your wanderings with great interest, and often asked for you the 'covering' of the Pillar-Cloud, as well as its 'leading'. . . . No doubt you met with old hearers and members, and were gladdened in finding them standing fast in the Lord. Now and then we got notices of your work, and sometimes the subjects you took in preaching Christ and His glorious gospel. You will find a few changes among us since you left.

. .

I am here with my family for holidays. A little quiet rest is delightful, and yet work among souls is still better. The other day I was glad to find Romaine saying of his busy days in London, 'I have been preaching Christ's salvation many years in the midst of a crowd, living all the time in a great hurry, and yet I can say I gain every year some fresh knowledge of myself and of my Incarnate God--and find it good indeed to be a poor preacher of His grace.' With kindest congratulations to Mrs. Somerville, I am as of old time,-- Your affectionate friend,

ANDREW A. BONAR.

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