

# Outlook and Appeal

by B.A. Abbott

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*B.A. Abbott's sermon emphasizes the importance of unity, spirituality, and the enduring relevance of Christ's teachings in the movement's mission.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 29:18, Acts 4:12, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 4:3, Colossians 3:23, 1 Peter 4:10

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Redemption Power"

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## Description

B.A. Abbott preaches about the significance of the Restoration movement, emphasizing its vision, passion, courage, and optimism. He highlights the movement's constructive nature, inclusive plea for unity, vitality, authority, and focus on spiritual membership. Abbott also stresses the importance of practical idealism, practical application of the gospel, and satisfaction in the Christianity of Christ as the ultimate power of redemption.

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## Transcript

Sixth United Presbyterian Church, Saturday Afternoon, October 16.

If we were to select a text embodying the outlook and appeal, the hopes and prophecies, of the great movement we celebrate to-day, we would find it in these words of Alexander Campbell himself:

"Celebrated as the era of Reformation is, we doubt not but that the era of Restoration will as far transcend it in importance and fame, through the long and blissful millennium, as the New Testament transcends in simplicity, beauty, excellency and majesty, the dogmas and notions of the creed of Westminster and the canons of the Assembly's digest."

This statement contains the vision of a seer, the passion of the prophet, the courage of the reformer, and the optimism of the man of God. With [449] largeness, sanity and fire, it was itself a prophecy and is to-day characteristic of the magnificent career of the movement which is now world-wide in scope of operation.

It is the claim of this address that one hundred years of life, but a heartbeat in the long millenniums of history, yet one-twentieth of the life of Christianity on earth--have demonstrated the value of this way to humanity, and therefore we have a right to appeal to those inside for continued enthusiastic support and to those outside for their adoption and practice of the principles so well tried. We believe it has been a pure stream of rational spirituality in the heart of our nation, and that it will go on from achievement to achievement, until, like beacon fires on the hilltops, its churches will spring up everywhere in the whole

world to help light it with the gospel of truth and salvation.

In the one hundred years of its existence, the movement has stood every

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test in the crucible of the most active, intense, complex, exacting and progressive civilization known in the life of the race. It emerges with honor, and has sacredly kept the pledges so solemnly made by the fathers. It has survived its own critical hours of adjustment and re-adjustment, and the disagreements that may have marred us in the past or seem to disturb us in the present, belong to the human nature we are trying to redeem, rather than to the interpretation of divine things to which we have foresworn our deathless and unreserved loyalty. The genius of our organization is such that, while a quarrel or temporary alienation in certain sections may come to pass, a schism is impossible. The power of correction lies within the body itself. The passion of the faith and the practice of the Lordship of Jesus Christ will finally assimilate parties to each other, and when the hour for perfect, unclouded fellowship comes, there will be found no barriers of ecclesiasticism nor self-satisfied officials to keep the people apart.

If one church with forty-seven members and one minister, becomes 11,000 churches, with 1,400,000 members and 7,000 ministers in one hundred years, what will these churches and members and ministers become in the next century? The twentieth century will witness the ideal apostolic church restored and the whole human race brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. We would not base such a statement upon a welcome, but merely rosetate, hope.

1. This movement is constructive and not destructive. It aims to conserve, in its proper place and full value, everything that has ever been thought or achieved by the church of the living God. We are loyal to all the people of God in all the churches, to-day and in all the past. God has ever been in the world working through his people. His autograph is on everything good, and his works are manifest in miraculous creations of character, literature, law, institution and enterprise in all the golden fabric of civilization. It is our aim to help make these grow from more to more. We only deny man's work and thought as substitutes for the original springs of inspiration, which are the word of God, and the life of communion with him. We do not enter the future with any bleak and fruitless set of negations, but with ardent faith we urge the great affirmatives of the gospel.

2. Our aim is inclusive and not exclusive. Our plea is for the union of all God's people. We are brothers to all who are striving to build the kingdom. We will oppose all who would destroy its doctrines, ordinances, life or works. We gladly own as co-workers all those of every faith who love the divine Lord in sincerity and truth, and, in the deep passion of his love, stretch out to them the warm hand of fellowship in work and word and worship, despite ecclesiastical differences, creedal opinions, sectional chasms, political antagonisms, or accidents of nation, color or caste. We believe in the brotherhood of the brotherly, and, as in the past, so in the future, we will labor and pray for the unity and union, the co-operation and [450] sympathy of all God's people. For us the church must mean organized love. And such a church must abide forever, for God is love. We have planted ourselves on the broadest possible foundation--the New Testament and the nature and spirit of Jesus Christ.

3. We seek also to be vital and not mechanical. "From scheme and creed the light goes out." We have no scheme or creed to which we are trying to adjust society, mold thought, or assimilate character, other than that in the New Testament. The movement is spiritual and not ecclesiastical. Ecclesiasticism, which is considering the church an end in itself, is decadent. All Christendom has been, or is, in revolt against it.

The days when proud and tyrannical organizations were apotheosized as the very kingdom of God itself have passed away and we are left ready for work, with no creed but the Christ, no book but the Bible, and no aim but to serve. We seek not a mere morality based upon rules, ordinances, precepts or commandments, however true they may be, but a spiritual life that is created by experimental contact with the living, personal Christ. A life surges beneath our cause and a great heart beats behind its facts. We hold to the vital significance of the personality of Jesus Christ in the world to-day and try to lead men to know him.

4. The dynamic of this movement is an authority and not a mere sentiment. The men of its evangel are moved by enthusiasm for the words of Jesus Christ, and not by any mercenary motives of personal gain or emolument; nor by ambitions for social prestige and position; nor by dreams of empire or politics; nor by romantic impulses of adventure, or quixotic effort to do a work which is not needed in the world. A mere sentiment spends its force and dies of inanity, or is lost in the mazes of the material which is ever so insistent in our age. But a cause which has the supply of life from a living leader, will abide as long as the life which supplies it exists. We have sought to realize the living presence of Jesus Christ, and through all the stress and vicissitude of our propaganda, to heed the heavenly voice of the Transfiguration which said, "Hear ye him." The law of our movement is the word of Jesus Christ, the life of our movement is his presence, and the spirit of our movement is the passion for service. It is that which makes religion a living fact and an irresistible force. Those who have been baptized into the eager, restless spirit of Jesus Christ will never crystallize nor come to a time when they wish to lie down and wrap about them the luxury of an ignoble ease.

5. We have sought to create a spiritual membership and not simply to gather multitudes into a movement. The religion of Jesus Christ is spiritual, and they alone who are imbued with his life assure to themselves immortality. Mere aggregation of numbers may be of little worth. Indeed, it is a real source of danger and goes before disintegration, unless a deep consecration fuses the people into unity and makes them plastic to the touch of the Master.

The elements of spirituality are knowledge, Christian experience, the spirit of obedience and the heart of sacrifice. These are conditioned upon liberty and personal choice.

We have placed the Bible in the hands of all the people and insisted on a personal study of it. The Bible is not only the book of the council, nor of the priest, nor of the scholar, nor of the preacher. It is the book of all the people. We have never been afraid to trust the Bible. It is its own evidence and safeguard.

For this reason also we have always been, and will continue to be, the friends of education. Nothing more calamitous to either religion or learning could come to pass than to divorce the university and the church. As the church is helpless without spirituality, so also is she without intellectual grasp and trained leaders. The Master said, "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

We also believe in and foster a free, broad, untrammelled Christian journalism, which is the university of the people in living topics and vital issues.

To the end that we constitute an enlightened spiritual membership, we have kept a broad, free pulpit. The pulpit is the church's messenger to the age. It is the way she fulfills her prophetic mission. Preaching is the greatest duty, as it is the greatest power exercised by [451] the church of the living God. The demands for more ministers and for a high standard of excellency in the ministry are good omens. Should the pulpit ever become worm-eaten, Christianity would decay. As long as there is preaching, the prophetic fire will

burn in the churches and all needed reforms will spring out of it, as the flower from the seed. It is the mightiest sacramental exercise of the church. It keeps society from stagnating, and it is an immeasurable stimulus to the heart and intellectual life of any people. Even if preaching creates antagonisms at times, it never fails to keep up interest in life. It is greater than all ordinances, mightier than all organizations, more effective than all literature. It is the fire of inspiration. When a man preaches he is in substance exercising all the functions, prophetic, priestly and kingly, of Christianity. The symbol of Christianity is a fiery tongue, and it is the frontispiece of church history. It is the most important condition of public purity and progress in the world. It is God administered in his sacramental life through the channel of human personality.

6. Our people are characterized by practical idealism. They have world-wide vision, and at the same time contact with things and people at close range. Where there is no vision, the people perish; where vision grows, the people are immortal. It is this which lifts people into the realm where the heart never tires and drudgery never sickens one. There may have been a time when we were in danger of being lost in the arid desert of provincialism, or destroyed by the antagonism of sectionalism, or starved by the pitiful bigotry and narrowness of legalism, or led out into the wilderness to die by the world spirit of party and petty politics, but all these dangers we have happily and decidedly escaped, and, looking at the world through the eyes of Jesus Christ, we see the vastness of the field to be occupied, and the depths of the wounds to be healed.

We would so preach this everlasting gospel of peace and brotherhood that labor may learn love; wealth, stewardship; pleasure, service; education, spirituality; rationalism, faith; and the congregations of God, unity; that thus we may save this country--"the brightest jewel on the outstretched forefinger of Time"--to the kingdom of Christ.

The American idea is fast taking the world. In our own day, we have seen the end of the world come many times in the falling of old systems and the destruction of effete civilizations. The spirit of democracy, which is the spirit of Jesus, grows. Our plea for the simple gospel of Jesus Christ and the priesthood of all Christians, is making the world over. We have seen the autocracy of Russia greatly modified, and the thin edge of the wedge enter, never to cease penetrating deeper until it has destroyed the age long tyranny, that all the people may come into their rights. In like manner, we have noted the trend in Turkey, Persia and Spain toward democracy, and all this must mean that it is God's way to elevate the people to a plane where every man is honored in due measure. Our movement of an uninvolved gospel, which honors every man's intellect and heart alike, is thus in line with God's purposes, as we are reading them to-day in the fiery and troublous times that stir the stagnant waters of old civilizations.

"And now the feet of Christ are in events

Bridging the seas and shaking the continents,"

and we are pledged to follow Jesus Christ wherever we may see the marks of his wounded feet.

7. Finally, and this is the sum of all I have said, we are satisfied with the Christianity of Christ and believe that no conditions of race will ever arise to outgrow it or to embarrass those who hold it. We are satisfied with Christ's ordinances, his words, his character, and his influence in the world, and we will continue to preach them as the sum and substance of our message as a people, as far as the limits of the race, as long as time remains the vestibule of eternity.

Christ is all in all. We believe him to be the only and ultimate power of redemption. We believe the words spoken directly by him, or through his apostles, to contain all that is needed for salvation. We believe the religion of Jesus Christ, as set forth in the New Testament, to be the final religion. [452] There are still, doubtless, many new forms of thought to blossom from his doctrines. The human race will grow, and new types and ideals will spring up, but Jesus Christ will never be surpassed. He will remain the leader of humanity to all eternity. Of his kingdom's increase there shall be no end.

To-day we stand on the mountain-top and hold in our hands palms of victory. It is an hour for faith and gratitude and prayer. All is well within. Without are no obstacles we may not overcome. The look forth from the open windows is upon a world waking in the light of a new morning. The backward look, the inward look, the forward look, all call us to loyalty. In our windows must burn all the lights of optimism, and upon our banners be written all the prophecies of hope. We will never forget to look backward toward old Jerusalem, but we will go forward with light in our faces, the agony of prayer in our hearts and the activities of work in our hands toward the New Jerusalem which cometh, which even now is coming down from God out of heaven.

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