

The Tent Dwellers of Faith

by Finis S. Idleman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of co-operation among established congregations to support the tent dwellers of faith and to build temples for the dissemination of wisdom.

Scripture: Matthew 25:35, Galatians 6:2, Hebrews 11:9, Hebrews 11:13, James 2:14

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Church Stewardship"

Description

Finis S. Idleman preaches about the audacious faith of ancient heroes and the disciples of Jesus, who renounced worldly comforts for the promise of a better country. He emphasizes the importance of Church Extension as an opportunity to partner with faith's immortals, sustain the faith of tent dwellers, and build places of worship for the community. Idleman challenges established congregations to show loyalty and love through contributions to Church Extension, highlighting the need for cooperation and stewardship in shaping new communities and supporting homeless Disciples.

Transcript

Duquesne Garden, Friday Morning; October 15.

In the catalogue of ancient worthies is this inscription on one of the imperishable monuments of fame: "By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations whose architect and maker is God." And as if undue distinction might have been conferred upon one, a galaxy of immortals are grouped in one pæan of praise.

Who are these who come up from the village and countryside--from the din of the great city and the onstretching monotony of the Western plain--asking alms at the gate Beautiful of this Centennial temple? They are of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, which time would fail to recount. They are "disciples of Jesus," who can think of no higher and will wear no less title. They have renounced all that stood in the way of crowning him King of kings on earth. Religiously speaking, many of them had a country. They could have returned had they been mindful. But, desiring a better country of spiritual freedom, they chose to suffer with the people of God the afflictions incident to a feeble folk or of pioneer hardships. They were willing, aye, desirous, of exchanging measurable maxims of earth for the immeasurable principles of heaven. They belong, therefore, to the ancient heroes of faith by virtue of their unmindfulness for the kingdom's sake, and in so doing they are our picket-line on the world's horizon of conquest and endeavor.

But these friends who appeal to us have yet another element of similarity to ancient worthies in the audacity of their faith. They have more than passive submission to unanswered prayer or unfulfilled desires. They dare the seemingly unattainable. They demand no precedents. No despair because of lack of illustration palsies hope. Their faith in the moral realm declares with Napoleon in the material, "I make opportunities." With scant wealth and though few in numbers, they face the necessity, in the teeming and unheeding city or on trackless prairie, of a building of God for the household of faith. The shrewdness and sagacity of the exchange, would hesitate. But they step out on faith as the soul's standing-room and begin to move a world. They accept the words of Jesus at their face value: "Greater things than these shall ye do." They attempt the impossible, and where measurable, complementing response is made by the brotherhood, the impossible is made possible.

We dare to press the relation once more. Church Extension is our opportunity to enter into partnership with [261] faith's immortals. For was it not written of this unending chapter of uncrowned royalty, "And these all had witness borne to them that without us they should not be made perfect"? The possibility has stirred many hearts, but the response has been isolated and poorly distributed. Often churches most able to build were assisted, while those least able were far from kindred brethren. Vagrant methods have been tried and they have beggared both purse and principle. But the economy and beneficence of Jesus is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the administration of funds contributed to Church Extension. No individual who might personally direct the disbursement of his estate in church erection should hope to secure such returning perpetuity of his money; nor call out other gifts in such

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proportion; nor maintain such self-respect in the recipients; nor leave the crowning grace of gratitude to a brotherhood which bears perpetual interest in loving response to all the brotherhood's missionary program as the Church Extension Society yields. The business sagacity of such a gigantic enterprise, the signal record of economy and the magic power by which the Church Extension method multiplies the money at its disposal, are demonstrated and demonstrable facts. They inspire faith in the Board's ability to use money more wisely than personal philanthropy may hope to administer. I do not praise the Church Extension Society any more than I would praise the channels through which the reviving waters flow to the thirsty plains. But I do want to know that the channel does not absorb all the water on the way, and that it does reach the plain with the least mystic winding. And I have my desire. Church Extension, like the honest smith, looks the whole world in the face and gives account of its trust. The record of its years discloses the unprecedented fact that but one-tenth of one per cent. of all the moneys loaned and reloaned to thirteen hundred churches has been lost to its treasury either through panic or neglect of recipients. What we give through other channels lives alone in the good it has done. What is given to Church Extension lives both in the good it has done and in its accelerated volume of ability to do more. For Church Extension is like Moses' bush--burning, but unwasting; better still, it is the cruse of oil and bit of meal that satisfies the weary, but never fails; or, more appropriately still, it is the loaves and fishes in the hands of Jesus which multiplies with the using. Whatever clouds may appear on the horizon of our co-operative work, no shadows fall across the Church Extension map. It is not distrust that cripples its work. Every friend of the cause finds his heedless brother and bids him "come and see." To see is to believe.

But Church Extension is our opportunity to have partnership in the inspirational power it has to sustain the faith of the tent dwellers. The very fact that it is organized is proof of a brotherhood's concern for its weaker parts. Appeals may even be refused because of lack of funds, yet faith is kept alive because

organized sympathy gives proof of the dawn. Family ties are not forgotten. Though sundered far on the purple blur of toil, these heroic souls need not cry unheard. They are not mocked by empty echo as they call. The Church Extension Society is our medium of assurance that the most natural desire for a "certain place of worship" is elemental and fundamental. It points timid longing away to God's meeting-places with man through the centuries; to altar, tabernacle, temple, that mark the closest approach to God. It dares to assert that a "set apart place" is not only desirable, but essential. It asserts without contradiction that no great church has been permanently sustained in a hall, nor will one ever be. The homeless church must die or borrow a building or build. If it die, its blood will cry out from the ground against a neglectful people. If it borrow a building, it becomes among churches what the [262] unenviable cuckoo is among birds, one which rears its brood in another's nest. If it build, it must pay an impossible interest to disinterested parties who are not unwilling to foreclose the mortgage. If the congregation travel, the nomadic life destroys stability of character. Permanency of abode speaks of deepening strength.

Where do these tent dwellers of faith abide? We answer, for the most part in the two extremes of our civilization.

1. On the frontier of a nation's development.
2. In the midst of the modern city.

One is the sad warning to hasten to the aid of the other. The long delay in entering the city speaks out of bitter experience the cost of delay. They who entered early were a hundred-fold blessed in men and money. The new spirit of Christianity was embodied in Paul Revere the second, whom the Church Extension Society sent into Oklahoma when it was opened--hastening not with the speed of greed, but only that the church of the Redeemer might have the most advantageous sites in the midst of the magic cities to be reared to-morrow. Such foresight is our salvation from the look of rebuke as the patient Jesus turns to us, as unto them, and says, "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." For the audacity of commercialism does not wait for demand, but presses with matchless zeal into the heart of every unexplored land, creating demand. The greatest economy is in anticipating the demand. The Pilgrim Fathers built the church first and grouped the city about it, which gave dignity to the cause and character to the community. It was the wisest stewardship of the Lord's money. Where this method has been reversed, then the church has had to pay the world for its foresight out of the Lord's treasury. What is true of economy is equally true of the power to shape and mould the new community in its formative years ere the evil days come.

But the humbling fact of this Centennial gathering is that seven hundred bands of our dispersed brethren have asked sheltering aid of their more prosperous and longer established friends in Jesus, and they face the new century unanswered. We recall that every church among us dates back to the sympathy, love and mutual aid of material strength of some stronger church--yet eight thousand churches have forgotten to pass the gift along. The greatest need of this hour for the homeless Disciples is co-operation upon the part of established congregations. Indeed, we may reckon that, due allowance being made for pastoral neglect, the gift to Church Extension is the thermometer of brotherhood love and fealty in any congregation. And if I speak in love, I may be permitted to recite the fact that but 1,318 of our churches have given proof of such loyalty during this Centennial year in this fundamental Christian philanthropy. Yet who pretends to estimate the volume of protest if the remaining eight thousand churches were disfellowshipped? We are prone to pardon such lapses by the somewhat comforting title of "sins of omission." Yet that was all that was charged against the contemporaries of ancient martyrdom. Over the

slumbering conscience of a mighty throng a new prophet-poet must arouse by a new recessional. No sadder neglect may be charged to any man or company of men than that they have forgotten the pit from whence they were digged. Let us bring no railing accusation against the contemporaries of the ancient worthies of faith because they knew them not, nor shielded them from a pitiless world lest we be found similarly guilty and our Lord say unto us, "Ye garnished the tombs of the prophets, but yet lift not the burden."

Rather let the new century's dawn of our people's history find us cognizant of the presence in our very midst of an immortal company, who since Abram left Ur of Chaldea have kept the faith, been stayed on the promise of God, and have ever looked "for a city" of permanent habitation. And if we would claim kinship with the imperishably great, remember without us they can not be perfected. A new sense of the claims of the kingdom must grip men. While men of affairs are "enlarging their barns," the God of the harvest is keeping his finger on this sore spot in our congregational life--that we have [263] suffered a modern homeless people of our common faith to dwell in tents and hovels of worship.

Carnegies must arise who build temples for the dissemination of wisdom that man did not discover.

Over against the galleries of glory which would content us with the witchery of the world must be reared the temples that call to mind the eternities. The encroaching kingdom of Jesus, in its irresistible conquest over all realms of man, is beautifully symbolized in the Salisbury Cathedral, that stands with its 305 windows, its 9,000 marble pillars, 52 gates and heaven-piercing spire hard by the ruins of the Druidical temple with its stain of ancient bloody sacrifice.

But the created world about groans to speak its universal message of adoration. In our natures we cry out for the vast dome as a fit dwelling-place for God among men, and all about us the Omnipotent has piled the prodigal masonry of the mountains that testify forever the praise of their Creator, and call upon us to repeat his handiwork in tabernacle and church erected by a loving and grateful brotherhood among the tent dwellers of faith for the praise of our common Father.

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