

The Cross and Methods

by L.E. Maxwell

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Cross in our methods and message as Christians, and the need to be uncompromising in our witness.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:4

Topics: "Faith And Rest", "Gods Strength"

Description

The preacher delves into the concept of 'rest' as described in the Bible, emphasizing the idea of ceasing from activity to find true rest in God. Through the study of the Greek word 'katapauo,' the sermon explores how God's rest is not about idleness but about relying on His strength and power. Unbelief is highlighted as the main hindrance to entering God's rest, while faith opens the door to experiencing His peace and victory even in the midst of life's troubles.

Transcript

A FRIEND OF THIS WRITER SAYS, "A pioneer, but now retired missionary, to a land where mission work has very largely developed on the 'educate the heathen and hope to win them in the process' plan, told the writer that, in the early days of that work, his mission had discussed the question whether it would preach the gospel despite all hindrances, or whether it would build up schools, and try to win the rising generation and through the students won to Christ seek to evangelize the nation. The latter course was decided upon." Said this man, "I know today, too late, that we failed and, as a result, the gospel has been bound in that land. The other plan would have brought persecution, perhaps even blood-shed; but that would have cleared the air and the gospel would now have been free!"

This account sets before us at once the great fact that the Cross must be central in our methods as well as in our message. It is perilously easy to be orthodox as to our message and to deny the Cross in our methods. In our imaginations we would stand again with a hot, dusty missionary at the grave of a fallen hero and say: "Of all plans ensuring success the most certain is Christ's own-becoming a corn of wheat and falling into the ground and dying." And we would pray afresh as never before: Lord, give it to us to be so identified with the great Corn of Wheat, that in our very method of presenting Christ, as well as in our message about Christ, we shall set Him forth crucified before the people's eyes.

To the Corinthians, Paul says, "We preach not our-selves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." Tremendous in-deed is the task of the preacher and witness for Christ. As an old Scotch theologian said, "No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time." No man can give at once the impression that he

himself is clever and Christ mighty to save. Our supreme task is to press upon men the claims of Christ of a whole-hearted surrender and obedience. To do so, we must create an issue, shut men up to a conclusion. They must face life and death, heaven and hell. Their response must be yes or no-now. We must cut from their feet a kind of no-man's-land neutrality.

The Captain of our salvation prefaced His "Go ye" with His "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." The gospel may seem to have lost this power. The solution lies, however, in our be-ing consciously commissioned by the pierced hand. As ambassadors, we must know our authority. Our gospel has ceased to grip men's souls because we use the language of compromise. The Spirit of Christ can anoint only the utterly uncompromising man. An old soldier once said, "I do not want people who come to me under certain reservations. In battle you want soldiers who fear nothing."

In enumerating his mighty incentives to an unquenchable zeal, the great apostle named two. He said: "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ... the love of Christ constraineth us." This is the apostolic, the scriptural, the divine order. Paul was moved by terror and by a tearful tenderness to save perishing men. Today we need this order reestablished. Our preaching is too lovely. It merely scratches the surface of this unafraid generation. In the face of conditions, "as it was in the days of Noe," men have ceased to fear. Noah was "moved with fear" to pro-vi 'de an escape for himself and family. After many years of census-taking in connection with our students of the first year, we have discovered that of all the motives which move men to be saved, "fear" alone claims sixty to seventy-five per cent. Others are moved by desire for peace, joy, rest, deliverance, etc. Between five and ten per cent are moved by love. However, this past term we learned that not one in that class of over one hundred had been moved by love to be saved. Sixty-six per cent, had been saved through fear. Let all who seek to win souls be instructed from God's Word and from facts rather than from twentieth century sentiment.

In another connection Paul referred to "speaking the truth in love." Here is the same divine order, Our first duty is not to speak lovely or to speak in love, but to speak the truth. How? "In love." The devil would have us reverse the order. In this same connection we forget that we are first to love the Lord our God, before we love our neighbors. If we love our God, we shall then speak the truth to others; and in keeping with the second commandment, we shall speak to them "in love." Let us not offend our God for a sup-posed love of our neighbors.

It was this glorious compound of a terrible, yet tearful tenderness, that caused the early church to go forth as a terrible army of "Invaders from another world," bent on taking human hearts captive for their crucified Master. They knew the meaning of Christ's promise: "Because I live, ye shall live also." They knew the downfall of the Spirit. They had "not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline"--of power, to speak the truth fearlessly; of love, that constrained and drove out fear; of discipline, that could stand up against all the dreadful engines of torture mustered by the Roman Empire. Oh, the invincibility of such an army! What a presentation of the Crucified! Little wonder they lifted that empire off its hinges, and turned the tide of history. Concerning these invaders, let us repeat again what Dr. A. J. Gordon said:

The help of the world, the patronage of its rulers, the loan of its resources, the use of its methods they utterly refused, lest by employing these they might compromise their king. An invading army maintained from an invisible base, and placing more confidence in the leadership of an unseen commander than in all imperial help that might be proffered--that was what so bewildered and angered the heathen, who often desired to make friends with the Christians without abandoning their own gods.

But before we can thus present Christ, there must needs be many heart searchings and humblings before God. There must be an uncomplaining, uncompromising, embracing of the Cross, and an utter and courageous rejection of the idol "self." Ourselves we cannot save.

Some of my readers--let me warn and encourage you--will pass through agonies and inner tortures which will amount to a thousand deaths in order to unlearn the ways and means of the flesh. You may little realize how you lean on your committees on "ways and means." You may be organized to death. Or, you may have gotten into such habits of ostentation, and swagger, and self-advertising, that it will be like uprooting your very life to allow the Cross to be applied. But, before you can ever lay the Cross on the worldliness in your people, you must first be cut off from all your own "confidence in the flesh."

But let me speak encouragingly as well. My heart has been pained over the tragic troubles which bother the average minister. He is "betwixt and between"-of all men most miserable. As somebody puts it, "We suffer so much, but so seldom with Christ; we have done so much, and so little will remain; we have known Christ in part, and have so effectively barricaded our hearts against His mighty love, which surely He must yearn to give His disciples above all people." All these things have brought upon you untold frets and worries. Like Saul you are trying to save your kingdom. But you have actually suffered more miseries than the minister who has embraced the Cross. You may have saved your life, but you have lost it, even in this world. The energy of the flesh not only spoils God's work; it spoils your own life and peace.

Your trouble may be that you have been devoted to a cause instead of having the Cross as your sole inspiration, your one and only attraction. You have been ambitious to build your work. Shamefully you have made use of Jesus Christ. But as you contemplate cutting away these fleshly contrivances and false ambitions, you become almost paralyzed with fear. You will be different! You will be reckoned a fool and a fanatic! Oh, the shame you may have to suffer as you humble yourself before your parishioners, your Sunday school, your class! Then think of the contempt you may suffer before your fellow-ministers or fellow-workers. I believe I know how to sympathize with you. But cheer up. Once you have been undone in the fires of God's furnace, you will come forth without the smell of your religious self. Never again will you be content to live in the smoke of formalism and iciness and stiffness of the flesh. Ah, yes, it will be difficult for God to put His new wine into your old skin. Be earnest, therefore--dead in earnest--but above all things have a holy discontent to offer any longer "dead things, nothings, shams." Let your fears be gone. "Better a thousand times effective peculiarity than ineffective ordinariness." (D. M. Thornton.) Surely our half-hearted and calculating love for the Lord Jesus is the shame of the church, the grief of heaven and the laughingstock of hell. God cannot stomach the like. He says, "I will spew thee out of my mouth."

But if you persist in remaining unbroken, stout-hearted, and self-willed, let me give you the advice of Prof. T. C. Upham, a minister and theologian of a century ago:

They are slow to learn what is to be done, and equally reluctant to submit to its being done. God desires and intends that they shall be His; but, the hour of their inward redemption not being fully come, they still love the world. They attach their affections first to one object, and then to another. They would, perhaps, be pleased to have God for their portion; but they must have something be-sides God. In other words, they vainly imagine that they would like to have God and their idols at the same time. And there they remain for a time, fixed, obstinate, inflexible. But God loves them. Therefore, as they will not learn by kindness, they must learn by terror. The sword of Providence and the Spirit is applied successively to every tic that binds them to the world. Their property, their health, their friends, all fall before it. The inward fabric of hopes and

joys, where self-love was nourished and pride had its nest, is leveled to the dust. They are smitten within and without; burned with fire; overwhelmed with the waters; peeled, and scathed, and blasted, to the very extremity of endurance; till they learn, in this dreadful baptism, the inconsistency of the at-tempted worship and love of God and Mammon at the same time, and are led to see that God is and ought to be the true and only Sovereign.

It is thus that God chooses His spiritual leaders in the dreadful furnace of affliction. Such leaders can never be made by man nor any combination of men. Neither councils, nor conferences, nor synods, nor schools, can make them, but only God. This process, of course, applies equally to the man in the pew. God knows we should all be spiritual leaders in the vanguard of truth.

To simple, earnest, heart-hungry souls we make our appeal. Seek spiritual liberty as soldiers "seek victory in a siege or in a battle." Believe with all your heart that the power of the Spirit will be yours. Sit down and count the cost. Be well assured that the sharp edge of the Cross will be felt, in your own life, and those to whom you witness. We insist that the great lack today is a mighty liberation through an inner crucifixion which will give us holy carefreeness (not fleshiness and lightness-there is far too much of that), so that, without embarrassment, we can witness before small and great, and be instant in season and out of season. When the whole hierarchy of Jewry gathered them-selves together in the first blast of persecution against the Christian church (Acts 4), they were shocked by the boldness of Peter and John. Now spiritual bold-ness is simply unembarrassed freedom of speech. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. To those fishermen, the Cross was real, vital, fresh. With Christ they were identified, crucified, and liberated. Theirs was an unembarrassed freedom of speech. Let the hierarchy rave! Christ's captives were free. They would neither fear nor flatter any flesh on the face of the earth. Among these first threatenings the early church fled-but only to her knees. There they prayed, not for the conversion of the hypocrites, nor that they themselves might speak more carefully, more lovingly. They asked nothing for themselves, but only for "all boldness" to present Christ-thereby jeopardizing their lives. And God was so pleased with such daring and uncompromising spirits that He shook the house where they were assembled. They had ceased to save their own skin. They had no cause to defend. Christ was the living Head of the church. He had died in uttermost weakness; they had died with Him. Be the consequences what they may, they would obey God rather than men. Neither success nor failure entered into their considerations. They were not afraid to jostle the Jewish proprieties. They put themselves at Heaven's disposal, and when they preached Christ Jesus as Lord, men were "cut to the heart" as the word of the Cross fell like

a two-edged sword

Of heavenly temper keen,

And double were the wounds it made

Where'er it glanced between.

'Twas death to sin; 'twas life

To all who mourned for sin.

It kindled and it silenced strife,

Made war and peace within.

In a generation that glories in the flesh and well-nigh worships power, God's choice of weapons seems to be "foolishness" personified. But "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." Paul says, "God hath chosen the

weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:27-29). These are the "things" which Charles Fox called, "God's five-ranked army of decreasing human weakness." Concerning this army, many of us can qualify to enter if we are

FOOLISH enough to depend on Him for wisdom;

WEAK enough to be empowered with His strength;

BASE enough to have no honor, but God's honor;

DESPISED enough to be kept in the dust at His feet;

NOTHING enough for God to be everything.

This is a heartening portion for God's people. We are most all among "the poor" who have the gospel preached to them. Paul says, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." God takes the ignoble, the negligible, and the nonentities, "things too insignificant even for contempt." Let us then be careful that we despise not our poverty, our stupidity, our insignificance, or even our homeliness. So far from being handicaps, they are all in the direct line of God's choice. Let us, then, seize hold of the opportunity by "yielding our nothingness to God's concealed omnipotence."

The Bible abounds with God's mightiest acts arising from the most trifling causes. God's insignificants--lice, locusts, flies--cause the mighty of Egypt to wail. Think of the little maid that brings life and healing to Naaman, a leader of the Syrian host. A lad armed with but a sling and a stone brings salvation to his people. A cloud no larger than a man's hand causes an abundance of rain to descend. Jericho's walls were blown down by shouts of faith and rams' horns. God incarnate comes as a little Babe, therein lodging and concealing the infinite wisdom and power of God. Five loaves and two fishes feed a multitude. Gideon's three hundred, armed with trumpets and lamps and pitchers, overcame 135,000. All of this and much more--that no flesh should glory in his presence."

Pitchers for the lamps of God--

Hark, the cry goes forth abroad!

Not the beauty of the make,

But ah, the readiness to break,

Marks the vessels of the Lord

Meet to bear the lighted Word!

Martin Luther was one of those broken vessels who was "meet to bear the lighted Word." He learned that the irresistible might of God lurked in the hidden "word of the Cross." By his fearless proclamation of the

truth, he confounded the vainglorious religion of Rome, and set aflame a current of life, and light, and liberty, which has worried every Pope until this day. But let us listen to that insignificant monk as he explains the victory of God: "Next to my just cause, it was my mean reputation and mean aspect which gave the Pope his deadly blow; for the Pope thought--'Tis but one poor friar: what can he do against me?"

In closing this chapter let me appeal to every minister, missionary, Sunday school teacher and witness for Christ--and who should not be a witness?--that we sink ourselves afresh into the unplumbed power of the Cross to take the nonentities, the nothings, and the nobodies, and yet make them, even in this infidel and unbelieving age, a mighty host for God.

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