

Memoirs: 2. -- His Labors in the Vineyard Before Ordination -- 35

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Robert Murray M'Cheyne reflects on his early ministry experiences, emphasizing the importance of personal devotion, the weight of preaching, and the challenges faced in caring for a large parish.

Scripture: Psalm 126:6, Jeremiah 8:20, Ezekiel 34:4, Hosea 14:1, Romans 1:16, Jude 1:20

Topics: "Devotion to God", "Ministry"

Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne reflects on his early ministry before ordination, emphasizing the weighty responsibility of preaching and the necessity of personal devotion and prayer. He recounts his experiences in various parishes, the challenges of ministering to indifferent souls, and the deep yearning for the salvation of his congregation. M'Cheyne's commitment to spiritual growth and reliance on God is evident as he navigates the trials of ministry, including illness and the burden of souls. His heartfelt desire to serve and the lessons learned during this formative period laid the groundwork for his impactful future ministry.

Transcript

CHAPTER 2

His Labors in the Vineyard Before Ordination

He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.(Psalm 126:6)

While he was still undergoing a student's usual examinations before the Presbytery, in the spring and summer of 1835, several applications were made to him by ministers in the church, who desired to secure his services for their part of the vineyard. He was especially urged to consider the field of labor at Larbert and Dunipace, near Stirling, under Mr. John Bonar, the pastor of these united parishes. This circumstance led him (as is often done in such cases) to ask the Presbytery of Edinburgh, under whose superintendence he had carried on his studies, to transfer the remainder of his public trials to another Presbytery, where there would be less pressure of business to occasion delay. This request being readily granted, his connection with Dumfriesshire led him to the Presbytery of Annan, who licensed him to preach the gospel on July 1, 1835. His feelings at the moment are recorded in a record of his own in the

evening of that day: "Preached three probationary discourses in Annan Church, and, after an examination in Hebrew, was solemnly licensed to preach the gospel by Mr. Monylaws, the moderator. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, be stirred up to praise and magnify his holy name!' What I have so long desired as the highest honor of man, Thou at length givest me-me who dare scarcely use the words of Paul: 'Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Felt somewhat solemnized, though unable to feel my unworthiness as I ought. Be clothed with humility. "

An event occurred the week before that cast a solemnizing influence on him, and on a fellow traveler and brother in the gospel, who was licensed by another Presbytery that same day. This event was the lamented death of the Rev. John Brown Patterson of Falkirk-one whom the Lord had gifted with preeminent eloquence and learning, and who was using all for his Lord, when he was struck down by fever. He had spoken much before his death of the awesomeness of a pastor's charge, and his early death sent home the lesson to many, with the warning that the pastor's account of souls might be suddenly required of him.

On the following Sabbath, Mr. McCheyne preached for the first time in Ruthwell Church, near Dumfries, on "The Pool of Bethesda"; and in the afternoon on "The Strait Gate." He writes that evening in his diary: "Found it a more awfully solemn thing than I had imagined to announce Christ authoritatively; yet a glorious privilege!" The week after (Saturday, July 11): "Lord, put me into Thy service when and where Thou pleasest. In Thy hand all my qualities will be put to their appropriate end. Let me, then, have no anxieties." Next day, also, after preaching in St. John's Church, Leith: "Remembered, before going into the pulpit, the confession which says,(1) 'We have been more anxious about the messenger than the message.'" In preaching that day, he states, "It came across me in the pulpit, that if spared to be a minister, I might enjoy sweet flashes of communion with God in that situation. The mind is entirely wrought up to speak for God. It is possible, then, that more vivid acts of faith may be gone through then, than in quieter and sleepier moments."

It was not till November 7 that he began his labors at Larbert. In the interval he preached in various places, and many began to perceive the peculiar sweetness of the word in his'He here refers to the Full and Candid Acknowledgment of Sin, for Students and Ministers, drawn up by the Commission of Assembly in 1651, and often reprinted since. In accepting the invitation to labor in the parish proposed, he wrote: "It has always been my aim, and it is my prayer, to have no plans with regard to myself, well assured as I am, that the place where the Saviour sees meet to place me must ever be the best place for me."

The parish to which he had come was very large, containing six thousand souls. The parish church is at Larbert; but through the exertions of Mr. Bonar, many years ago, a second church was erected for the people of Dunipace. Mr. Hanna, later minister of Skirling, had preceded McCheyne in the duties of assistant in his field of labor; and Mr. McCheyne now entered on it with a fully devoted and zealous heart, although in a weak state of health. As assistant, it was his part to preach every alternate Sabbath at Larbert and Dunipace, and during the week to visit among the population of both these districts, according as he felt himself enabled in body and soul. There was a marked difference between the two districts in their general features of character; but equal labor was bestowed on both by the minister and his assistant; and often their prayer ascended that the windows of heaven might be opened over the two sanctuaries. Souls have been saved there. Often, however, did the faithful pastor mingle his tears with those of his younger fellow soldier, complaining, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" There was much sowing in faith; nor was this sowing abandoned even when the returns seemed most inadequate.

Mr. McCheyne had great delight in remembering that Larbert was one of the places where, in other days, that holy man of God, Robert Bruce, had labored and prayed. Writing some time later from the Holy Land, he expressed the wish, "May the Spirit be poured upon Larbert as in Bruce's days." But more than all associations, the souls of the people, whose salvation he longed for, were ever present to his mind. A letter to Mr. Bonar, in 1837, from Dundee, shows us his yearnings over them. "What an interest I feel in Larbert and Dunipace! It is like the land of my birth. Will the Sun of Righteousness ever rise upon it, making its hills and valleys bright with the light of the knowledge of Jesus?"

No sooner was he settled here, than he began his work.

With him, the beginning of all labor invariably consisted in the preparation of his own soul. The forerunner of each day's visitations was a calm season of private devotion during morning hours. The walls of his chamber were witnesses of his prayerfulness I believe of his tears as well as of his cries. The pleasant sound of psalms often issued from his room at an early hour. Then followed the reading of the word for his own sanctification; and few have so fully realized the blessing of the first psalm. His leaf did not wither, for his roots were in the waters. It was here, too, that he began to study so closely the works of Jonathan Edwards considering them a mine to be worked, and if worked, sure to repay the toil. Along with this author, the Letters of Samuel Rutherford were often in his hand. Books of general knowledge he occasionally perused; but now it was done with the steady purpose of finding in them some illustration of spiritual truth. He rose from reading *Insect Architecture*, with the observation. "God reigns in a community of ants and ichneumons, as visibly as among living men or mighty seraphim!"

His desire to grow in acquaintance with Scripture was very intense; and both Old and New Testament were his regular study. He loved to range over the wide revelation of God. "He would be a sorry student of this world," he said to a friend, "who should forever confine his gaze to the fruitful fields and well-watered gardens of this cultivated earth. He could have no true idea of what the world was, unless he had stood upon the rocks of our mountains, and seen the bleak muirs and mosses of our barren land; unless he had paced the quarterdeck when the vessel was out of sight of land, and seen the waste of waters without any shore upon the horizon. Just so, he would be a sorry student of the Bible who would not know all that God has inspired; who would not examine into the most barren chapters to collect the good for which they were intended; who would not strive to understand all the bloody battles which are chronicled, that he might find 'bread out of the eater, and honey out of the lion.'" (June 1836)

His anxiety to have every possible help to, holiness led him to notice the disadvantages of those who are not daily stirred up by the fellowship of more advanced believers. "I have found, by some experience, that in the country here my watch does not go so well as it used to do in town. By small and gradual changes I find it either gains or loses, and I am surprised to find myself different in time from all the world, and, what is worse, from the sun. The simple explanation is, that in town I met with a steeple in every street, and a good-going clock upon it; and so any aberrations in my watch were soon noticed and easily corrected. And just so I sometimes think it may be with that inner watch, whose hands point not to time but to eternity. By gradual and slow changes the wheels of my soul lag behind, or the springs of passions become too powerful; and I have no living timepiece with which I may compare, and by which I may amend my going. You will say that I may always have the sun: And so it should be; but we have many clouds which obscure the sun from our weak eyes." (Letter to Rev. H. Bonar, Kelso)

From the first he fed others by what he himself was feeding on. His preaching was in a manner the development of his soul's experience. It was a giving out of the inward life. He loved to come up from the

pastures wherein the Chief Shepherd had met him-to lead the flock entrusted to his care to the spots where he found nourishment.

In the field of his labor he found enough of work to overwhelm his spirit. The several coal mines and the Carron Ironworks furnish a population who are, for the most part, either sunk in deep indifference to the truth, or are opposed to it in the spirit of infidelity. Mr. McCheyne at once saw that the pastor whom he had come to aid, whatever was the measure of his health, and zeal, and perseverance, had duties laid on him that were altogether beyond the power of man to overtake. During the trial period of a few weeks, the field appeared more boundless, and the mass of souls more impenetrable, than he had ever conceived.

It was probably, in some degree, his experience at this time that gave him such deep sympathy with the Church Extension Scheme, as a truly noble and Christian effort for bringing the glad tidings to the doors of a population who must otherwise remain neglected, and were themselves willing so to live and die. He conveyed his impressions on this subject to a friend abroad, in the following terms: "There is a soul - destroying cruelty in the cold-hearted opposition which is made to the multiplication of ministers in such neglected and overgrown districts as these. If one of our Royal Commissioners would but consent to undergo the bodily fatigue that a minister ought to undergo in visiting merely the sick and dying of Larbert (let alone the visitation of the whole, and preparation for the pulpit), and that for one month, I would engage that if he be able to rise out of his bed by the end of it, he would change his voice and manner at the Commission Board."

A few busy weeks passed in which he was occupied from morning to night in such cares and toils, when another part of the discipline he was to undergo was sent. At the end of December, strong oppression of the heart and an irritating cough caused some of his friends to fear that his lungs were affected; and for some weeks he was laid aside from public duty. On examination, it was found that though there was a dullness in the right lung, yet the material of the lungs was not affected. For a time, however, the air vessels were so clogged and irritated, that if he had continued to preach, disease would have quickly ensued. But this also was soon removed, and, under cautious management, he resumed his work.

This temporary illness served to call forth this extreme sensitiveness of his soul to the responsibilities of his office. At its beginning-having gone to Edinburgh "in so sweet a sunshine morning that God seemed to have chosen it for him"he wrote to Mr. Bonar: "If I am not recovered before the third Sabbath, I fear I shall not be able to bear upon my conscience the responsibility of leaving you any longer to labor alone, bearing unaided the burden of 6,000 souls. No, my dear sir, I must read the will of God aright in his providence, and give way, when He bids me, to fresh and abler workmen. I hope and pray that it may be His will to restore me again to you and your parish, with a heart tutored by sickness, to speak more and more as dying to dying." Then, mentioning two of the sick: "Poor A. D. and C. H., I often think of them. I cando no more for their good, except pray for them. Tell them that I do this without ceasing."

The days when a holy pastor, who knows the blood-sprinkled way to the Father, is laid aside, are probably as much a proof of the kindness of God to His flock as days of health and activity. He is occupied, during this season of retirement, in discovering the plagues of his heart, and in going in, like Moses, to plead with God face to face for his flock, and for his own soul. Mr. McCheyne believed that God had this end in view with him; and that the Lord should thus deal with him at his entrance into the vineyard made him ponder these dealings more. He wrote, "Paul asked, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' and it was answered, 'I will show him what great things he must suffer for my name's sake.' Thus it may be with me. I have been too anxious to do great things. The lust of praise has ever been my besetting sin; and what more befitting

school could be found for me than that of suffering alone, away from the eye and ear of man?" Writing again to Mr. Bonar, he tells him: "I feel distinctly that the whole of my labor during this season of sickness and pain should be in the way of prayer and intercession. And yet, so strongly does Satan work in our deceitful hearts, I scarcely remember a season wherein I have been more averse to these duties. I try to 'build myself up in my most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping myself in the love of God, and looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus unto eternal life.' That text of Jude has peculiar beauties for me at this season. If it be good to come under the love of God once, surely it is good to keep ourselves there. And yet how reluctant we are! I cannot doubt that boldness is offered me to enter into the holiest of all; I cannot doubt my right and title to enter continually by the new and bloody way; I cannot doubt that when I do enter in, I stand not only forgiven, but accepted in the Beloved; I cannot doubt that when I do enter in, the Spirit is willing and ready to descend like a dove, to dwell in my bosom as a Spirit of prayer and peace, enabling me to 'pray in the Holy Ghost;' and that Jesus is ready to rise up as my intercessor with the Father, praying for me though not for the world; and that the prayer-hearing God is ready to bend His ear to requests which He delights to hear and answer. I cannot doubt that thus to dwell in God is the true blessedness of my nature; and yet, strange unaccountable creature! I am too often unwilling to enter in. I go about and about the sanctuary, and I sometimes press in through the rent veil, and see the blessedness of dwelling there to be far better than that of the tents of wickedness; yet it is certain that I do not dwell within."-"My prayers follow you, especially to the sick-beds of A. D. and C. H. I hope they still survive, and that Christ may yet be glorified in them."

On resuming his labors, he found a residence in Carronvale. From this pleasant spot he used to ride out to his work. But pleasant as the spot was, and being partially recovered, he was not satisfied; he lamented that he was unable to overtake what a stronger laborer would have accomplished. He often cast a regretful look at the coal mines; and remembering them still at a later period, he reproached himself with neglect, though most unjustly. "The places which I left utterly unbroken in upon are Kinnaird and Milton. Both of these rise up against my conscience, particularly the last, through which I have ridden so often." It was not the comfort, but the positive usefulness of the ministry, that he envied; and he judged a place by its possibility to promote this great end. He said of a neighboring parish, which he had occasion to visit: "The manse is altogether too sweet; other men could hardly live there without saying, 'This is my rest.' I don't think ministers' manses should ever be so beautiful."

A simple incident was overruled to promote the ease and fluency of his pulpit ministrations. From the beginning of his ministry he reprobated the custom of reading sermons, believing that to do so exceedingly weakens the freedom and natural fervor of the messenger in delivering his message. Neither did he recite what he had written. But his custom was to impress on his memory the substance of what he had beforehand carefully written, and then to speak as he found liberty. One morning, as he rode rapidly along to Dunipace, his written sermons were dropped on the wayside. This accident prevented him from having the opportunity of preparing in his usual manner; but he was enabled to preach with more than usual freedom. For the first time in his life; he discovered that he possessed the gift of extemporaneous composition, and learned, to his own surprise, that he had more composure of mind and command of language than he had believed. This discovery, however, did not in the least degree diminish his diligent preparation. Indeed, the only use he made of the incident at the time it occurred, was to draw a lesson of dependence on God's own immediate blessing rather than on the satisfactory preparation made. "One thing always fills the cup of my consolation, that God may work by the meanest and poorest words, as well as by the most polished and ornate-yea, perhaps more readily, that the glory may be all His own."

His hands were again full, distributing the bread of life in fellowship with Mr. Bonar. The progress of his own soul, meanwhile, may be traced in some of the few entries that occur in his diary during this period:

"Feb. 21, 1836, Sabbath-Blessed be the Lord for another day of the Son of man. Resumed my diary, long broken off; not because I do not feel the disadvantages of it-making you assume feelings and express rather what you wish to be than what you are-but because the advantages seem greater. It ensures sober reflection on the events of the day as seen in God's eye. Preached twice in Larbert, on the righteousness of God, Rom. 1:16. In the morning was more engaged in preparing the head than the heart. This has been frequently my error, and I have always felt the evil of it, especially in prayer. Reform it, then, O Lord."

"Feb. 27-Preached in Dunipace with more heart than ever I remember to have done, on Rom. 5:10, owing to the gospel nature of the subject and prayerful preparation. Audience smaller than usual! How happy and strange is the feeling when God give the soul composure to stand and plead for Him! Oh that it were altogether for Him I plead, not for myself!"

"March 5-Preached in Larbert with very much comfort, owing chiefly to my remedying the error of 21st Feb. Therefore the heart and the mouth were full. 'Enlarge my heart, and I shall run,' said David. 'Enlarge my heart, and I shall preach.' "In this last remark we see the germ of his remarkably solemn ministry. His heart was filled, and his lips then spokewhat he felt within his heart. He did not give out merely living water, but living water drawn at the springs that he had himself drank of; and is not this a true gospel ministry? Some venture to try what they consider a more intellectual method of addressing the conscience; but before a minister attempts this mode, he ought to see that he is one who is able to afford more deep and anxious preparation of heart than other men. Since the intellectual part of the discourse is not that which is most likely to be an arrow in the conscience, those pastors who are intellectual men must bestow tenfold more prayerfulness on their work, if they would have either their own or their people's souls affected under their word. If we are ever to preach with compassion for the perishing, we must ourselves be moved by those same views of sin and righteousness that moved the human soul of Jesus. (See Ps. 38 and 55.)

About this time he occasionally contributed papers to the Christian Herald: one of these was On Sudden Conversions, showing that Scripture led us to expect such. During this month he seems to have written the Lines on Mungo Park, one of the pieces that attracted the notice of Professor Wilson. But whatever he engaged in, his aim was to honor his Master. I find him, after hearing a sermon by another, remarking (April 3), "Some things powerful; but I thirst to hear more of Christ."

On Sabbath 16, he writes: "Preached with some tenderness of heart. Oh, why should I not weep, as Jesus did over Jerusalem? Evening-Instructing two delightful Sabbath schools. Much bodily weariness. Gracious kindness of God in giving rest to the weary."

"April 13-Went to Stirling to hear Dr. Duff once more upon his system. With greater warmth and energy than ever. He kindles as he goes. Felt almost constrained to go the whole length of his system with him. If it were only to raise up an audience, it would be defensible; but when it is to raise up teachers, it is more than defensible. I am now made willing, if God shall open the way, to go to India. Here am I; send me!"

The missionary feeling in his soul continued all his life. The Lord had really made him willing; and this preparedness to go anywhere completed his preparation for unselfish, self-denied work at home. Must there not be somewhat of this missionary tendency in all true ministers? Is any one truly the Lord's messenger who is not quite willing to go when and where the Lord calls? Is it justifiable in any to put aside

a call from the north, on the ground that he wishes one from the south? We must be found in the position of Isaiah, if we are to be really sent of God.

"April 24-Oh that this day's labor may be blessed! and not mine alone, but all thy faithful servants all over the world, till thy Sabbath come.

"April 26-Visiting in Carron-shore. Well received everywhere. Truly a pleasant labor. Cheered me much. Preached to them afterwards from Proverbs 1."

"May 8-Communion in Larbert. Served as an elder and help to the faithful. Partook with some glimpses of faith and joy. Served by a faithful old minister (Mr. Dempster of Denny), one taught of God. This morning stood by the dying-evening, stood by the dead, poor J. F having died last night. I laid my hand on her cold forehead, and tried to shut her eyes. Lord, give me strength for living to Thee!-strength also for a dying hour."

"May 15-This day an annular eclipse of the sun. Kept both the services together in order to be in time. Truly a beautiful sight to see the shining edge of the sun all round the dark disc of the moon. Lord, one day Thy hand shall put out those candles; for there shall be no need of the sun to lighten the happy land: the Lamb is the light thereof; a sun that cannot be eclipsed-that cannot go down."

"May 17-Visited thirteen families, and addressed them all in the evening in the school, on Jeremiah 1:4, 'Going and weeping.' Experienced some enlargement of soul; said some plain things; and had some desire for their salvation, that God might be praised."

"May 21-Preparation for the Sabbath. My birthday. I have lived twenty-three years. Blessed be my Rock. Though I am a child in knowledge of my Bible and of Thee, yet use me for what a child can do, or a child can suffer. How few sufferings I have had in the year that is past, except in my own body.Oh that as my day is my strength may be! Give me strength for a suffering and for a dying hour!"

"May 22-0 Lord, when Thou workest, all discouragements vanish; when Thou art away, anything is a discouragement. Blessed be God for such a day-one of a thousand! Oh! why not always this? Watch and pray."

Being in Edinburgh this month, during the sitting of the General Assembly, he used the opportunity of revisiting some of his former charge in the Canongate. "J. S., a far-off inquirer, but surely God is leading. His hand draws out these tears. Interesting visits to L., near death, and still in the same mind. I cannot but hope that some faith is here. Saw Mrs. M.; many tears: felt much, though I am still doubtful, and in the dark. Thou knowest, Lord!"

"June 11-Yesterday up in Dunipace. It would seem as if I were afraid to name the name of Christ. Saw many worldly people greatly needing a word in season, yet could not get up my heart to speak. What I did failed almost completely. I am not worthy, Lord! Today sought to prepare my heart for the coming Sabbath. After the example of Boston, whose life I have been reading, examined my heart with prayer and fasting. 1. Does my heart really close with the offer of salvation by Jesus? Is it my choice to be saved in the way which gives Him all the praise, and me none? Do I not only see it to be the Bible way of salvation, but does it cordially approve itself to my heart as delightful? Lord search me and try me, for I cannot but answer, Yes, yes. 2. Is it the desire of my heart to be made altogether holy? Is there any sin I wish to retain? Is sin a grief to me, the sudden risings and overcomings thereof especially? Lord, Thou knowest all

things-Thou knowest that I hate all sin, and desire to be made altogether like Thee. It is the sweetest word in the Bible: 'Sin shall not have dominion over you.' Oh, then, that I might lie low in the dust-the lower the better-that Jesus' righteousness and Jesus' strength alone be admired! Felt much deadness, and much grief that I cannot grieve for this deadness. Towards evening revived. Got a calm spirit through psalmody and prayer."

"June 12, Sabbath-Today a sinner preached Jesus, the same Jesus who has done all things for him and that so lately!A day of much help, of some earnest looking-up of the heart to that alone quickening power, of much temptation to flattery and pride. Oh for breathing gales of spiritual life! Evening-Somewhat helped to lay Jesus before little children in His beauty and excellency. Much fatigue, yet some peace. Surely a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand."

"June 15-Day of visiting (rather a happy one) in Carronshore. Large meeting in the evening. Felt very happy after it, though mourning for bitter speaking of the gospel. Surely it is a gentle message, and should be spoken with angelic tenderness, especially by such a needy sinner."

Of this bitterness in preaching, he had little indeed in after days; yet so sensible was he of its being quite natural to all of us, that oftentimes he made it the subject of conversation, and used to grieve over himself if he had spoken with anything less than solemn compassion. I remember on one occasion, when we met, he asked what my last Sabbath's subject had been. It had been "The wicked shall be turned into hell." On hearing this awesome text, he asked, "Were you able to preach it with tenderness?" Certain it is that the tone of reproach and upbraiding is widely different from the voice of solemn warning. It is not saying hard things that pierces the consciences of our people; it is the voice of divine love heard amid the thunder. The sharpest point of the two-edged sword is not death, but life; and against self-righteous souls this latter ought to be more used than the former. For such souls can hear us tell of the open gates of hell and the unquenchable fire far more unconcernedly than of the gates of heaven wide open for their immediate return. When we preach that the glad tidings were intended to impart immediate assurance of eternal life to every sinner that believes them, we strike deeper upon the proud enmity of the world to God, then when we show the eternal curse and the second death.

"June 19, Sabbath-Wet morning. Preached at Dunipace to a small audience, on Parable of the Tares. I thank God for that blessed parable.-In both discourses I can look back on many hateful thoughts of pride, and self-admiration, and love of praise, stealing the heart out of the service.

"June 22-Carron-shore. My last. Some tears; yet I fearsome like the messenger, not the message; and I fear I am so vain as to love that love. Lord, let it not be so. Perish my honor, but let thine be exalted forever."

"June 26 True Sabbath-day. Golden sky. Full church, and more liveliness than sometimes. Shall I call the liveliness of this day a gale of the Spirit, or was all natural? I know that all was not of grace; the self-admiration, the vanity, the desire of honor, the bitterness-these were all breaths of earth or hell. But was there no grace? Lord, Thou knowest. I dare not wrong Thee by saying-No! Larbert Sabbath school with the same liveliness and joy. Domestic work with the same. Praised be God! Oh that the savor of it may last through the week! By this may I test if it be all of nature, or much of grace. Alas! how I tremble for my Monday mornings-those seasons of lifelessness. Lord, bless the seeds sown this day in the hearts of my friends, by the hand of my friends, and all over the world-hasten the harvest!"

"July 3-After a week of working and hurried preparation, a Sabbath of mingled peace and pain. Called, morning before preaching, to see Mrs. E., dying. Preached on the Jailor, discomposedly, with some glimpses of the genuine truth as it is in Jesus. Felt there was much mingling of experience. At times the congregation was lightened up from their dull flatness, and then they sunk again into lethargy. O Lord, make me hang on Thee to open their hearts, Thou opener of Lydia's heart. I fear Thou wilt not bless my preaching, until I am brought thus to hang on Thee. Oh keep not back a blessing for my sin! Afternoon-On the Highway of the Redeemed, with more ease and comfort. Felt the truth sometimes boiling up from my heart into my words. Some glimpses of tenderness, yet much less of that spirit than the last two Sabbaths. Again saw the dying woman. Oh when will I plead, with my tears and inward yearnings, over sinners! Oh, compassionate Lord, give me to know what manner of spirit I am of! give me thy gentle Spirit, that neither strives nor cries. Much weariness, want of prayerfulness, and want of cleaving to Christ." Tuesday the 5th being the anniversary of his licence to preach the gospel, he writes: "Eventful week; one year I have preached Jesus, have I? or myself? I have often preached myself also, but Jesus I have preached."

About this time he again felt the hand of affliction, though it did not continue long. Yet it was plain to him now that personal trouble was to be one of the ingredients of that experience which helped to give a peculiar tone to his ministry.

"July 8-Since Tuesday have been laid up with illness. Set by once more for a season to feel my unprofitableness and cure my pride. When shall this self-choosing temper be healed? `Lord, I will preach, run, visit, wrestle,' said I. 'No, thou shalt lie in thy bed and suffer,' said the Lord. Today missed some fine opportunities of speaking a word for Christ. The Lord saw I would have spoken as much for my own honor as His, and therefore shut my mouth. I see a man cannot be a faithful minister, until he preaches Christ for Christ's sake-until he gives up striving to attract people to himself, and seeks only to attract them to Christ. Lord, give me this! Tonight some glimpses of humbling, and therefore some wrestling in social prayer. But my prayers are scarcely to be called prayer." Then, in the evening: "This day my brother has been five years absent from the body and present with the Lord, and knows more and loves more than all earthly saints together. Till the day break and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved!"

"July 10-I fear I am growing more earthly in some things. Today I felt a difficulty in bringing in spiritual conversation immediately after preaching, when my bosom should be burning. Excused myself from dining out from other than the grand reason; though checked and corrected myself. Evening-Insensibly slid into worldly conversation. Let these things be corrected in me, O Lord, by the heart being more filled with love to Jesus, and more ejaculatory prayer."

"July 17, Sabbath-Oh that I may remember my own word this day: that the hour of communion is the hour for the foxes-the little foxes-to spoil the wine. Two things that defile this day in looking back, are love of praise running through all, and consenting to listen to worldly talk at all. Oh that these may keep me humble and be my burden, leading me to the cross. Then, Satan, thou wilt be outwitted!"

"July 19-Died, this day, W McCheyne, my German cousin, Relief minister, Kelso. Oh how I repent of our vain controversies on Establishments when we last met, and that we spoke so little of Jesus! Oh that we had spoken more one to another! Lord, teach me to be always speaking as dying to dying."

"July 24-Dunipace Communion-Heard Mr. Purves of Jedburgh preach, 'Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.' The only way to come to ordinances, and to draw from the well, is to come with the matter of acceptance settled, believing God's anger to be turned away. Truly a precious

view of the freeness of the gospel very refreshing. My soul needs to be roused much to apprehend this truth."

Above (July 3) he spoke of "mingling experience with the genuine truth as it is in Jesus." It is to this that he refers again in the last paragraph. His deep acquaintance with the human heart and passions often led him to dwell at greater length, not only on those topics whereby the sinner might be brought to discover his guilt, but also on marks that would evidence a change, that on "the glad tidings." And yet he ever felt that these blessed tidings, addressed to souls in the very gall of bitterness, were the true theme of the minister of Christ; and never did he preach other than a full salvation ready for the chief of sinners. From the very first, also, he carefully avoided the error of those who rather speculate or doctrinize about the gospel, than preach the gospel itself. Is not the true idea of preaching that of one, like Ahimaaz, coming with all important tidings, and intent on making these tidings known? Occupied with the facts he has to tell, he has no heart to speculate on mere abstractions; nay, he is apt to forget what language he employs, excepting so far as the very grandeur of the tidings gives a glow of eloquence to his words. The glorious fact, "By this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins," is the burden of every sermon. The crier is sent to the openings of the gate by his Lord, to herald forth this one infinitely important truth through the whole creation under heaven.

He seems invariably to have applied for his personal benefit what he gave out to his people. We have already noticed how he used to feed on the Word, not in order to prepare himself for his people, but for personal edification. To do so was a fundamental rule with him; and all pastors will feel that, if they are to prosper in their own souls, they must so use the word—sternly refusing to admit the idea of feeding others, until satiated themselves. And for similar ends it is needful that we let the truth we hear preached sink down into our own souls. We, as well as our people, must drink in the falling shower. Mr. McCheyne did so. It is common to find him speaking thus: "July 31, Sabbath-Afternoon, on Judas betraying Christ; much more tenderness than ever I felt before. Oh that I might abide in the bosom of Him who washed Judas' feet, and dipped His hand in the same dish with him, and warned him, and grieved over him—that I might catch the infection of His love, of His tenderness, so wonderful, so unfathomable.

Coming home on a Sabbath evening (Aug. 7th) from Torwood Sabbath school, a person met him who suggested an opportunity of usefulness. There were two families of gypsies encamped at Torwood, within his reach. He was weary with a long day's labor; but instantly, as was his custom on such a call, set off to find them. By the side of their wood-fire, he opened the parable of the Lost Sheep, and pressed it on their souls in simple terms. He then knelt down in prayer for them, and left them somewhat impressed, and very grateful.

At this time a youthful parishioner, for whose soul he felt much anxiety, left his father's roof. Ever watchful for souls, he seized this opportunity of laying before him more fully the things belonging to his peace.

"Larbert, August 8, 1836 "My dear G.-. You will be surprised to hear from me. I have often wished to be better acquainted with you; but in these sad parishes we cannot manage to know and be intimate with every one we would desire. And now you have left your father's roof and our charge; still my desires go after you, as well as the kind thoughts of many others; and since I cannot now speak to you, I take this way of expressing my thoughts to you. I do not know in what light you look upon me, whether as a grave and morose minister, or as one who might be a companion and friend; but really, it is so short a while since I was just like you, when I enjoyed the games which you now enjoy, and read the books which you now read, that I never can think of myself as anything more than a boy. This is one great reason why I write to

you. The same youthful blood flows in my veins that flows in yours, the same fancies and buoyant passions dance in my bosom as in yours; so that when I would persuade you to come with me to the same Saviour, and to walk the rest of your life 'led by the Spirit of God,' I am not persuading you to anything beyond your years. I am not like a grey-headed grandfather-then you might answer all I say by telling me that you are a boy. No; I am almost as much a boy as you are; as fond of happiness and of life as you are; as fond of scampering over the hills, and seeing all that is to be seen, as you are.

"Another thing that persuades me to write you, my dear boy, is, that I have felt in my own experience the want of having a friend to direct and counsel me. I had a kind brother as you have, who taught me many things. He gave me a Bible, and persuaded me to read it; he tried to train me as a gardener trains the apple-tree upon the wall; but all in vain. I thought myself far wiser than he, and would always take my own way; and many a time, I well remember, I have seen him reading his Bible, or shutting his closet door to pray, when I have been dressing to go to some frolic, or some dance of folly. Well, this dear friend and brother died; and though his death made a greater impression upon me than ever his life had done, still I found the misery of being friendless. I do not mean that I had no relations and worldly friends, for I had many; but I had no friend who cared for my soul. I had none to direct me to the Saviour-none to awaken my slumbering conscience-none to tell me about the blood of Jesus washing away all sin-none to tell me of the Spirit who is so willing to change the heart, and give the victory over passions. I had no minister to take me by the hand, and say, 'Come with me, and we will do thee good.' Yes, I had one friend and minister, but that was Jesus Himself, and He led me in a way that makes me give Him, and Him only, all the praise. Now, though Jesus may do this again, yet the more common way with Him is to use earthly guides. Now, if I could supply the place of such a guide to you, I should be happy. To be a finger-post is all that I want to be-pointing out the way. This is what I so much wanted myself; this is what you need not want, unless you wish.

"Tell me, dear G., would you work less pleasantly through the day-would you walk the streets with a more doleful step-would you eat your meat with less gladness of heart-would you sleep less tranquilly at night-if you had the forgiveness of sins, that is, if all your wicked thoughts and deeds-lies, thefts, and Sabbath breakings were all blotted out of God's book of remembrance? Would this make you less happy, do you think? You dare not say it would. But would the forgiveness of sins not make you more happy than you are? Perhaps you will tell me that you are very happy as you are. I quite believe you. I know that I was very happy when I was unforgiven. I know that I had great pleasure in many sins-in Sabbath-breaking, for instance. Many a delightful walk I have had-speaking my own words, thinking my own thoughts, and seeking my own pleasure on God's holy day. I fancy few boys were ever happier in an unconverted state than I was. No sorrow clouded my brow-no tears filled my eyes, unless over some nice story-book; so that I know that you say quite true, when you say that you are happy as you are. But ah! is not this just the saddest thing of all, that you should be happy whilst you are a child of wrath-that you should smile, and eat, and drink, and be merry, and sleep sound, when this very night you may be in hell? Happy while unforgiven! a terrible happiness. It is like the Hindoo widow who sits upon the funeral pile with her dead husband, and sings songs of joy when they are setting fire to the wood with which she is to be burned. Yes, you may be quite happy in this way, till you die, my boy; but when you look back from hell, you will say, it was a miserable kind of happiness. Now, do you think it would not give you more happiness to be forgiven,-to be able to put on Jesus, and say, 'God's anger is turned away?' Would not you be happier at work, and happier in the house, and happier in your bed? I can assure you from all that ever I have felt of it, the pleasures of being forgiven are as superior to the pleasures of an unforgiven man, as heaven is higher than hell. The peace of being forgiven reminds me of the calm, blue sky, which no earthly clamors

can disturb. It lightens all labor, sweetens every morsel of bread, and makes a sick-bed all soft and downy; yea, it takes away the scowl of death. Now, forgiveness may be yours now. It is not given to those who are good. It is not given to any because they are less wicked than others. It is given only to those who, feeling that their sins have brought a curse on them which they cannot lift off, 'look unto Jesus,' as bearing all away.

"Now, my dear boy, I have no wish to weary you. If you are anything like what I was, you will have yawned many a time already over this letter. However, if the Lord deal graciously with you, and touch your young heart, as I pray He may, with a desire to be forgiven, and to be made a child of God, perhaps you will not take ill what I have written to you in much haste. As this is the first time you have been away from home, perhaps you have not learned to write letters yet; but if you have, I would like to hear from you, how you come on-what convictions you feel, if you feel any-what difficulties, what parts of the Bible puzzle you, and then I would do my best to unravel them. You read your Bible regularly, of course; but do try and understand it, and still more, to feel it. Read more parts than one at a time. For example, if you are reading Genesis, read a psalm also; or, if you are reading Matthew, read a small bit of an epistle also. Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you were reading the 1st Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel, and pray, 'O Lord, give me the blessedness of the man,' etc. Let me not stand in the counsel of the ungodly,' etc. 'This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible, and of learning to pray. In prayer confess your sins by name going over those of the past day, one by one. Pray for your friends by name-father, mother, etc. etc. If you love them, surely you will pray for their souls. I know well that there are prayers constantly ascending for you from your own house; and will you not pray for them back again? Do this regularly. If you pray sincerely for others, it will make you pray for yourself.

"But I must be done. Good-bye, dear G. Remember me to your brother kindly, and believe me your sincere friend,

R.M.M.

It is the shepherd's duty (Ezek. 34:4), in visiting his flock, to discriminate; "strengthening the diseased, healing that which was sick, binding up that which was broken, bringing again that which was driven away, seeking that which was lost." This Mr. McCheyne tried to do. In a later letter to Mr. Somerville of Anderston, in reference to the people of these parishes, whom he had had means of knowing, he wrote, "Take more heed to the saints than ever I did. Speak a word in season to S.M. S.H. will drink in simple truth, but tell him to be humble-minded. Cause L.H. to learn in silence; speak not of religion to her, but speak to her case always. Teach A.M. to look simply at Jesus. J.A. warn and teach. Get worldliness from the B.'s, if you can. Mrs. G. awake or keep awake. Speak faithfully to the B.'s. Tell me of M.C., if she is really a believer, and grows. A.K., has the light visited her? M.T. I have had some doubts of. M.G. lies sore upon my conscience; I did no good to that woman: she always managed to speak of things about the truth. Speak boldly. What matter in eternity the slight awkwardness' of time!"

It was about this time that the managers and congregation of the new church, St. Peter's, Dundee, invited him to preach as one of the candidates; and, in the end of August, chose him to be their pastor, with one accord. He accepted the call under an awesome sense of the work that lay before him. Hewould rather, he said, have made choice for himself of such a rural parish as Dunipace; but the Lord seemed to desire it otherwise. "His ways are in the sea." More than once, at a later period, he would say, "We might have thought that Godwould have sent a strong man to such a parish as mine, and not a feeble reed."

The first day he preached in St. Peter's as a candidate (August 14th) is thus recorded: "Forenoon-Mind not altogether in a preaching frame; on the Sower. Afternoon-With more encouragement and help of the Spirit; on the voice of the Beloved, in Cant. 2:8-17.2 In the Evening-With all my heart; on Ruth. Lord, keep me humble." Returning from St. Peter's the second time, he observed in his class of girls at Dunipace more than usual anxiety. One of them seemed to be thoroughly awakened that evening. "Thanks be to Thee, Lord, for anything," he writes that evening; for as yet he had sown without seeing fruit. It seems to have been part of the Lord's dealing with him, thus to teach him to persevere in duty and in faith, even where there was no obvious success. The arrow that was yet to wound hundreds was then receiving its point; but it lay in the quiver for a time. The Lord seemed to be touching his own heart, and melting it by what he spoke to others, rather than touching or melting the hearts of those he spoke to. But from the day of his preaching in St. Peter's, tokens of success began. His first day there, especially the evening sermon on Ruth, was blessed to two souls in Dundee; and now he sees souls begin to melt under his last words in the parish where he thought he had up until now spent his strength in vain.

As he was now to leave this parish, he sought out, with deep anxiety, a laborer who would help their overburdened pastor, in true love to the people's souls. He believed he had found such a laborer in Mr. Somerville, his friend who had shared his every thought and feeling in former days, and who, with a sharp sickle in his hand, was now advancing toward the harvest field. "I see plainly," he wrote to Mr. Bonar, "that my poor attempts at labor in your dear parish will soon be eclipsed. But if at length the iron front of unbelief give way, if the hard faces become furrowed with the tears of anxiety and of faith, under whatever ministry, you will rejoice, and I will rejoice, and the angels, and the Father and God of angels, will rejoice." It was in this spirit that he closed his short ten months of labor in this area.

His last sermons to the people of Larbert and Dunipace were on Hosea 14:1, "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God"; and Jeremiah 8:20, "Harvest is past." In the evening he writes, "Lord, I feel bowed down because of the little I have done for them which Thou mightest have blessed! My bowels yearn over them, and all the more that I have done so little. Indeed, I might have done ten times as much as I have done. I might have been in every house; I might have spoken always as a minister. Lord, canst Thou bless partial, unequal efforts?"

I believe it was about this time that some of us first of all began our custom of praying especially for each other on Saturday evening, with a reference to our engagements in the ministry the next day. This concert for prayer we have never since seen cause to discontinue. It has from time to time been widened in its circle; and as yet his has been the only voice that has been silenced of all that thus began to go in on each other's behalf before the Lord. Mr. McCheyne never failed to remember this time of prayer: "Larbert and Dunipace are always on my heart, especially on the Saturday evenings, when I pray for a glorious Sabbath!" On one occasion, in Dundee, he was asked if the accumulation of business in his parish never led him to neglect the season of prayer on a busy Saturday. His reply was that he was not aware that it ever did. "What would my people do if I were not to pray?"

So steady was he in Sabbath preparations, from the first day to the last time he was with them, that though at prayer meetings, or similar occasions, he did not think it needful to have much laid up before coming to address his people; yet, anxious to give them on the Sabbath what had cost him somewhat, he never, without an urgent reason, went before them without much previous meditation and prayer. His principle on this subject was embodied in a remark he made to some of us who were conversing on the matter. Being asked his view of diligent preparation for the pulpit, he reminded us of Exodus 27:20: "Beaten oil-beaten oil for the lamps of the sanctuary." And yet his prayerfulness was greater still. Indeed, he could not neglect

fellowship with God before entering the congregation. He needed to be bathed in the love of God. His ministry was so much a bringing out of views that had first sanctified his own soul, that the healthiness of his soul was absolutely needful to the vigor and power of his ministrations.

During these ten months the Lord had done much for him, but it was chiefly in the way of discipline for a future ministry. He had been taught a minister's heart; he had been tried in the furnace; he had tasted deep personal sorrow, little of which has been recorded; he had felt the fiery darts of temptation; he had been exercised in self-examination and in much prayer; he had proved how flinty is the rock, and had learned that in lifting the rod by which it was to be smitten, success lay' in Him alone who enabled him to lift it up. And thus prepared of God for the peculiar work that awaited him, he had turned his face toward Dundee, and took up his abode in the spot where the Lord was so marvelously to visit him in his ministry.

Source:

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