

Belfast Easter Conference 1964

by Tom Bentley

Tom Bentley's sermon at the Belfast Easter Conference 1964 emphasizes the importance of evangelism, support from the church, and the challenges faced in ministry in Malacca.

Duration: 31:12

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 29:5, Psalm 37:5, Matthew 6:33, John 3:7, John 10:16, Romans 12:1-2

Topics: "Apologetics", "Evangelism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker recounts a challenge he received from a young Chinese student who questioned the reality of the living God. The student pointed out that believers in a dead God would not be able to walk across fire, as some devotees of a particular God did in their religious ceremony. The speaker reflects on how to respond to this challenge and convey the truth of the living God and the gospel. He also expresses gratitude for the success of their gospel meetings and the conversions they have witnessed. The sermon concludes with a discussion of the Lord's work in Bolivia and the importance of consecrating oneself to the service of the Lord.

Transcript

Prady, we're going to hear from Mr. Tom Bentley, who went out from Ebenezer Assembly to Malaya in 1956. Mr. Tom Bentley. Shall we turn to the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to John? John's Gospel, chapter ten.

One verse will suffice for our reading just now. It is verse number sixteen. John chapter ten and verse sixteen.

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. I do trust that the impact of this verse will be manifest in the life of every young person present in this vast audience at this moment. Possibly similar as it reached my heart many years ago when my dear brother, Mr. J. M. Davies, read the same verse in somewhat similar circumstances from this very platform.

And I sat down to the left of the building here, quite near to the pillar, and I suppose it will be the judgment seat that will reveal the full effects of that ministry that evening when he brought before us the necessity of the new verse, John three, he must be born again, and the essentiality of the Lord's increase. He must increase. But then he brought us to the responsibility of believers as seen in verse sixteen, them also I

must bring.

And I felt that evening, along with other exercises, that that verse had found a place and a par in my experience. Mr. Ray mentioned to me just at the beginning of the meeting that I think there were more men than women in the present audience, and somehow I was impressed by his observation that there seems to be. So, beloved, there is ample material in the building tonight for the Spirit of God to work upon, particularly in the hearts of young men and young women whose lives are before them, shall I say reverently, to assist the Blessed Lord in this, the bringing of His love.

The figure that our dear brother just reminded us of has been the figure of the pair. Here is the figure of the flock, the scattered sheep that He, the Savior, must bring that there will be, like the pair, completeness and eternal life. I use my privilege this afternoon to return my indebtedness of sincere thanks and appreciation to the saints present and to the assemblies which represent it, for their extreme kindness and consideration over the years of our service in the Far East.

We thank God for your constant remembrance and for those clear evidences of your kindness and kindness. I must also thank you for granting us the privilege of being housed in the new missionary home in Moncton, which in itself is a testimony to the industrious and kindness of the people of God in this province. And I still, even though the audience is greater than before, I still offer a very open invitation for any of the saints to come and visit the new home.

It will do your heart good to see the thought and the consideration that has been put into that building for the comfort of His servants. And my wife and family wish to tender their warmest and deepest thanks for this great and most comfortable privilege. You know, there's another thing I'd like to mention when I think of my indebtedness.

And that is the personal remembrance that certain brethren have of us. We're not privileged to attend conferences such as these where we are. And speaking personally, we miss them, the fellowship and the ministry.

How so thrilling it is to be present today. But you know, through the kind ministry of one brother that's before me today, I receive at almost every well-known conference, from every well-known conference, a complete report of speaker, of passages read, of ministry given. And I think tonight, today, that that is a singular ministry which we appreciate above many other things.

And I pledge every day that if there are others like Brother Mr. Joe Fallon in the audience, it will do the servants of God good to have such an account of the conferences as he sends me from the day I left these shores over ten years ago. Sometimes Brother Knox writes to me, and that's a great honour. The only thing is this, I have to give it to my wife, who has more patience than I have, and she reads it two or three times, and then at the next meal, she interprets the writing thereof.

But we appreciate very, very much the kindness of Brother Knox in writing to us, as he has done these many years. Speaking of letters, in the Ebenezer Assembly, from which I've been commended, as you know, there was a brother who wrote me once a month. I could count on that letter coming without fail for the first four years of my ministry and service in Malaya.

I had the unfortunate experience of standing at his grave site when I returned home in 1961. And I cannot tell you the loss that I felt when I saw my dear late brother, Mr. Lomé, laid to rest, because that ministry

was faithful and most rewarding in my soul. He's gone today.

When I set again for Malaya, I wondered if God would supply such a personal interest. He didn't do it from anyone in the north of Ireland. But in Scotland, a dear brother that I met through the instrumentality of my dear brother, Mr. Cundick, that dear brother, Mr. Fred Stalin, who has spoken from this place, has not failed within the space of three weeks over the last five years to send me a warm-hearted, encouraging, and instructive letter.

I mention these things as practical observations, as well as reminding you that this is a very practical and important contribution to the comfort, to the strengthening of the servants of God in isolated and in difficult places. I might also mention that during our time in Malaya, and particularly in Malacca for the last five years, we have been very much encouraged by the visitation and help of several brethren from the north of Ireland. They have come to Singapore and other places to labor in their secular calling.

And from time to time, it has been our privilege to have their help and service in the gospel and in the ministry of the Word. Our brother, Mr. Saunders, and his wife and family were of inestimable comfort to us in days when we were passing through great difficulty during a very severe and rather sudden illness of my dear wife. I shall never forget the last moment that brother Saunders stood in my home before I took my wife to the hospital when she was going to face a very severe operation.

I shall never forget the strength and the comfort derived from that dear brother and his wife as we bowed together in prayer and commended up to the Lord. Brethren, we thank God for the support of brethren such as these who have been so much to us when so many would stand apart. Brethren, God is not dead.

God is faithful, however unfaithful we may be. We thank God today for His resources that come to us as gracious and as softly as the snow will fall. And today, I want to raise my Ebenezer to the kindness of our God and to the grace of His people.

In the audience just now is my dear brother, Mr. Jim Allen, who has been of great service to us in the country from which we have come. I shall not ever forget the many hours we have spent together in the service of God. The need of support morally and spiritually has been my experience many times, and I thank God I have found it in that dear brother and his wife.

When he left our shores, I didn't even have the strength to go to the boat and bid farewell because I felt the loss so keenly. There was so much going away when Brother Jim Allen left the shores of Malaysia. It is our desire that exercise will bring such brethren back to us, for we need them very much.

The work of God in Malacca has received divine blessing over the last five years. We thank God for every token of His saving grace that has been our experience to receive, both in the work of the gospel and in the development of the assembly in that and other places in the state. The state of Malacca is one of thirteen that now comprises the Federation of Malaysia.

Malacca has a population of 330,000. The town itself has about 80,000 people within its boundary. The assembly there is about 120 in number, divided into two sections, a Chinese-speaking meeting and an English-speaking meeting, the second section being the larger of the two.

We thank God today for the blessing that He has given us in our service in that town, in association with the assembly there. I'm glad to say that in those last five years, there has been a marked increase in the work of salvation in conversion. The work is difficult and, as you know, our service is limited to the Chinese

and Indian populations of the country.

Like Malacca, like other parts in Malaya, Malacca has its three main races and the 50% of the population is untouched with the gospel because they are Muslims. Not because we don't want to touch them with the gospel, but because we are hindered by law in evangelizing the indigenous race of the country. So, our efforts lie along the line of the Chinese and Indian populations, which, of course, provides a very open, wide field for the work of the gospel.

There is plenty of scope, plenty of opportunity, no limitations whatsoever as far as the activity of the gospel is concerned. Although in the last three years, open-air work has been brought to a standstill due to the state of emergency that has prevailed for the last three years owing to the Indonesian period of confrontation. We feel that with the settling of that issue, it will be possible to recommence our open-air work, which we have had in Malacca for quite a long time.

We have had very many efforts in the gospel. Quite apart from the forthright and direct efforts by the way, house to house, personal contacts, and through the various little, small approaches in schools and in other places. We have, in Malacca and in the States, two assemblies that are open and ready for the work of the gospel.

In those assemblies, we are glad to say the saints of God are alive to their responsibilities. When we have a special series of gospel meetings, I would say that by far the greater number of the company of believers are active in their work for the gospel. Therefore, though we have about only 60 to 80 in the English speaking meetings, we can fill the Malacca town hall at a given period and see anything up to 500 people gathered for the preaching of the gospel.

So we thank God for the efforts of those dear young men and women. They're not very old. They're not very long in the way.

But I want to pay tribute to those tiny brethren and sisters today. When it comes to a special effort, it is with them an effort in a very special sense. Otherwise, we would not be able to see the numbers in under the sign of the gospel that we have seen.

And there has been blessing. All we thank God today for His divine blessing from heaven, not only in the larger meetings where we have seen the work of God manifested, but in the ordinary Sunday evening meetings. We buy weeks to see the little hall on Tranquilla Road filled every Lord's Day with many unsaved people listening to our young Chinese brethren preaching the gospel and declaring the glad evangel of God.

I want to mention just one or two conversions before I vacate this position. One young man came to me one evening, and he challenged me in a very entertaining way. Then he got round to asking me why was it that I did not or could not and would not walk along the fire when it is in progress, the fire-walking ceremony, a few yards from the place where we live.

The Indians were gathered together at a particular festival, and an area larger than what is before me enclosed in this rail is alit with charcoal. The wind fans it into a mighty flame, and then it is spread right out over that area. And the devotees of the particular god that is raised at the other end come in, totally in possession of evil spirits, and walk barefoot right across the fire to their gods.

This young man, a young Chinese student, came and said, Mr. Bentley, you believe in the living God, and you say that these men worship a dead God. Well, then why is it you can walk across the fire and demonstrate that you believe in a living God? Now, that was a pretty good challenge to an Irishman, a pretty good challenge, and I wondered how I could answer him and at the same time convince him of the reality of the living God and the saving grace of the gospel. I looked at that young man in the face at the close of the gospel meeting.

A very brilliant young man he was, for we thank God for the very high standards of literacy in Malaya. I said, my dear friend, the God that I trust doesn't ask me to walk across the fire. The Savior that I trusted endured the fire for me, and because of that, he doesn't ask me to do what he has done.

That young man went home, and I didn't know until a few weeks afterward, in the quietness of his home, he took the answer to his soul and was gloriously saved in the quietness of his own home when he trusted the Savior that endured the fire for him. We thank God for the simple token of his saving and delivering power in the gospel. It's not all like that.

We represent today a work that has been the butt of persecution. We have all blessings come, but remember, I often look at those saints and my wife and I often ask ourselves the question, if some of our young people in Belfast were placed in the circumstances of our Malacca brethren and sisters, we wonder would they stand the test. Think of those idolatrous homes today.

Think of the idol that sits in every Buddhist home, before which every young man and woman vows, before which he offers his bowl of rice. 1 Corinthians 8 in Malacca is not a point for discussion and argument in the Bible reading. It's a point.

It is a truth that deprives many a devoted child of God, of his very bowl of rice, for how could he partake when it has been first offered to idols? And under those circumstances and in those trying conditions, the work of God is being developed. There are even those represented in the building today who for their fidelity to Christ have been beaten, have suffered privation, because they choose to give allegiance to the person and the truth, which we lovingly adore. Pray for that work today.

Pray for our brother John Stubbs that's with us in Malacca, our young brother from Shipley. I'm not making an appeal because it's well now impossible to enter Malaysia. A new order has been made.

Anyone coming in will only be allowed to stay 10 years. And as far as I'm concerned, I couldn't possibly go to the immigration officer in Malacca again and ask him to admit a worker from these or other parts. The situation is grim as far as addition is concerned, but God is able.

And my chief aim, my earnest prayer, the full endeavor of my labors for the last number of years has been to see to it the development of local gifts so that the work will be independent of the person that stands here and of any other who comes from other places. There's much to say. Keep praying, and God will ward you abundantly.

We sing the fourth verse of number 464. 464. In the midst of opposition, let them trust, O Lord, in Thee.

When success attends their mission, let Thy servants humble Thee. Never leave them till they, by faith in heaven, they see. 464, verse 4. In the midst of opposition, let them trust, O Lord, in Thee.

When success attends their mission, let Thy servants humble Thee. We come again to South America, to the land of Bolivia, where Mr. Edward Jemison went in 1962 from Armor Road Assembly. Mr. Edward Jemison.

We shall read a few verses, please, in Romans, chapter 12. The official to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 1. I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Now, one other verse in 1 Chronicles, chapter 29, the verse we had brought before us this morning. 1 Chronicles, chapter 29. 1 Chronicles, chapter 29, and the closing section of verse 5. And who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord? Now, first of all, I want to present to you at the close of the meeting a few thoughts relative to the Lord's work in Bolivia and then we refer back to Romans 12 and 1 Chronicles 29.

I wonder, are we all aware this afternoon that Bolivia is a country open to the gospel? Secondly, that Bolivia is in South America.

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