

NOTES OF ADDRESSES

BY THE LATE

REV. WILLIAM C. BURNS,

MISSIONARY OF THE ENGLISH PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH TO CHINA.

EDITED BY

M. F. BARBOUR,

*Author of "The Way Home," "The Child of the Kingdom,"
"The Soul-Gatherer," &c.*

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I.

PRESSING INTO THE KINGDOM.

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“THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PREACHED, AND EVERY MAN PRESSETH INTO IT.”—*Luke XVI. 16.*

WITHOUT detaining you by noticing a number of things to which it would be necessary to allude, in order to show the exact meaning of the expression, *Kingdom of God*, as considered with reference to what precedes or follows it in the passage, we shall consider the words of the text in their simple meaning.

First, What is meant by the kingdom of God? And second, What is meant by pressing into it? The kingdom of God is preached when Christ is preached, and then only. Wherever Jesus Christ is shown to be the Son of God with power, to be an all-sufficient Saviour, a glorious Redeemer: wherever he is preached as Christ crucified, as Lord over all, as King: wherever His authority is supremely acknowledged, wherever He is adored as a Sovereign ruler, His kingdom is preached, and men are invited to enter it.

When the kingdom of God is preached to *you*, you are invited to subject yourselves to Christ's authority, and to become faithful and devoted servants of Emmanuel.

And now, what is meant by *pressing into* the kingdom? Let us seek to have a simple, but exact and spiritual view of this. Some persons find that their faith is darkened, and that difficulties are raised to their believing in Christ by the figures which are often employed. They say, “I know I am to press into the kingdom, but what does this mean? I see no open door before me.” My dear friends, it simply means that, overcome by a sense of your own weakness, and feeling that you cannot have any hope of salvation from yourself, nor from any other, you throw yourself entirely on Christ's power, acknowledging yourself a willing subject of the King of kings.

You know what it is to press into any place where there is a great crowd; you do not stand listless at the door, you push your way, you press in and you enter. So it is with the kingdom of Christ; you see and feel that you must be in or you are lost, out for ever, banished to eternal darkness and torment, and therefore you press, you fight, till divine grace has subdued your proud spirit, and made you to enter into Christ's kingdom by Christ, the way, the truth, the life.

We shall now mention one or two things which ever distinguish this pressing into the kingdom. First, there is a *supreme desire* to enter. The Christian has many pursuits in which he must engage; but when a man begins to feel the necessity of being into the kingdom, these at once take a subordinate place, and become of very second-rate importance. His choice is to be saved, to enter, to belong to Christ.

Many make this a desire among other desires. They say, "Well, we wish to be saved, we wish to get an interest in Christ;" but then that is not their *only* wish. They wish to be rich and great, to be esteemed and honoured, and—they wish to have Christ too. Dear friends, that will not do. No, if you wish to have all these things, and after them to have Christ, or if you wish to have Christ just in the same proportion, or even still, if you wish to have Christ as a first object, but *must* have these other things along with Him, Christ will never be yours. You must either desire to have Christ before all, above all, alone, or you must be contented to do without Him altogether. Now, I am sure there are some of you, who, if you could get a half Christ, Christ's merits, and a few of your own along with them; if Christ would but take a middle place, would consent to reign with other kings, to divide the government with Satan, with riches, with man's good opinion, or even with your own, *you would have Him*, and gladly give Him a second, or even an equal place in your heart with the world and vanity. Christ will not consent to this. He must be *all* or *nothing*:—king, sovereign, ruler, governor, or absent altogether. Now, what is He to you? Is He on the throne? or only on the footstool? This is a question which may show you whether you are really pressing in.

Would you be contented to give up all for Christ, and take Him alone? If possessing Him were to deprive you of all you have, and all you hope for, would you bid adieu to that *all*—and to the Christian it is a *little* all—and say, "Come, Lord Jesus, Thine be the kingdom?" if not, it is because you know nothing of Christ, His character, His person, or His love. He is nothing to you. The believer, who has begun to learn the value of Christ, does not find difficulty in determining whether to give up one thing, or two things, or many things for Christ, and whether he should still be repaid for so doing. He is not always hesitating and calculating whether Christ will make this or that loss to him. He has Christ, thrice blessed portion, and in Him, all. He would not seek earthly riches or honours, even if he could get them. All he has, all he is, is already Christ's—by purchase—by free surrender—and by wonderful, glorious exchange. All that Christ has is his too, he is a joint-heir with Christ. He gets all *from* heaven, returns all to heaven, and the heart that is already at home there, has not much time for earthly pleasure.

We do not mean to say that the Christian refuses this world's comforts or enjoyments when they come in his way. They, too, are sweet, and why? Because they are a proof of Christ's goodness, love, and tender care. But we do say that the believer will not be very anxious or careful about them; nor will he have either pleasures or profits which Christ does not give him. He will not receive gains in a business unlawful, or in ways disapproved by the Lord. He asks for nothing, but *what Thou wilt*; can enjoy nothing, but what he can enjoy in Christ, because without Christ it were no enjoyment to him. Does he receive any temporal gift,—an estate for instance—he does not rashly give it up, he takes it back to Christ, and says, Thou hast sent this, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do with it?

The difference between his unconverted and converted state lies here. Before, he considered himself master of all he possessed. "I have earned this; I have laboured for it, I have got it, and *it is mine*, for my gratification, my amusement, my use." But now, he is changed from a master into a servant, he looks on himself merely as a steward, who has received so much, whether it be fortune, time, or talents, from Christ, to be used for His glory; and his only wish is to be a faithful, prudent steward, serving Christ in all things. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee?"

And now, no false friend, no open enemy, neither a lying devil, nor a hostile world, neither terror without, nor treachery within, shall be able to take Christ out of your heart, nor to prevent your entrance into the celestial city.

Choose Him alone. This is what Enoch did, what David did, for he desired none in heaven but Him, what Peter did, for he said, Lord, to whom shall we go? what every saint is joyfully constrained by his love to do. Some would take Christ if they might even be allowed to choose the time when he should be their all, if they might do it in the church and the closet, but not in the world. But if you are His, you will choose Christ tonight, Christ tomorrow, Christ for ever; Christ in the closet, and in the family; Christ in the shop, and in the market; Christ in the church and in the world; Christ when you are with the godly; Christ when with the ungodly and profane; Christ in the hour of prosperity, Christ in the hour of adversity; Christ, when the world smiles, and says, as it sometimes seems to do, that *Christ is good*; and Christ when the world frowns, and says that Christians are mad, and that Christ hath a devil. You will take Christ with you to the humble cottage, and to the lordly mansion; Christ among your poor and despised fellow-sinners; Christ with the nobles of the land; Christ in the drawing-room—I do not say Christ in the ball-room, for if you go there, you must leave Christ behind—I do not say Christ in the theatre, for you must get Satan to go with you

there—but Christ in life, Christ in death, Christ in the day of judgment, and then—ineffably glorious hope—Christ to all eternity.

We have tried to show you that to have Jesus for a portion is the believer's ruling desire. Secondly, a *firm resolution* is necessary to the attainment of this, as well as of every other great object. When a crowd is rushing into this church, for instance, and you stand aloof, and make no exertion, you must remain without. But you try to be first, you force your way, you succeed, and secure a place. If you would enter by the golden gate of mercy, you must *resolve* to enter, and not to be disappointed. Some say, "I wish to get in, but I need not go to the entrance, it is closed up, *there* is one barrier, *there* is another impassable." Now, such a wavering, doubting soul as that will never enter: *that* is not pressing into the kingdom. No obstacle must terrify you, or drive you back. They are not of *His* creating whose it is to open, and no man shutteth. Submit to Jehovah Jesus; will He disappoint you? No, He will direct your way, support, strengthen, comfort you. He will guide you through the narrow straits of repentance into the open sea of faith, with its widespread views, its gilded distance, its boundless prospects. Nor *there* will He leave you, but traversing its waters along with you, and pointing your course to yonder brilliant coast, He will at last bring your little bark into the haven of eternal rest.

Young believer! that sea is not always smooth; the sky overcasts, and though your course may be for a time through the still cool waters, difficulties will come at last. There are sacrifices to be made, trials to be suffered—sometimes agonies to be endured, for if thy hand offend thee cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. If thy right hand cause to offend, it must be sacrificed, great as the sacrifice may be. Here the religion of many is over, they never get this length. Many would take Christ if they might have Him without His cross. Someone says, "I would accept of Christ, but my business is not a lawful one, so I cannot come;" that man's business is the right hand which he ought to cut off, but will not. Another says, "I would press into the kingdom, but if I were to become a Christian, I should lose all my employment and my customers." "If I were to begin to be religious, I should become bankrupt," as a man said once to me. No man ever became bankrupt by believing in Christ. Such as these have a right hand—a right foot—that they cannot sacrifice. Another says, "I have married a wife, she will not come with me, and I will not go without her." And how many a wife says, "I would go, but my husband will not; I must wait for him."

You see, then, that *all* is to be surrendered for Christ. If any of you who are servants, find it impossible to serve God in the situation you occupy, you should even leave your places to follow him. Specially, any business that is unlawful, or where your gains are got by doubtful means, is to be given up—forsaken; and the dearer such a *right hand*—such an idol—may be to you, the more certainly necessary is it to cut it off. There are some who go a considerable length in this, and yet fall short. They will part with the left hand, but “we *cannot* spare the right,” they say. And so you are to be contented with the loss of Christ, to keep a right hand, a right foot. Oh! what madness. We don’t *deny* that the process is painful—agonising sometimes. Those who have never had to suffer it can scarce be Christians. Who will say it is not painful to give up a darling lust? to lay down at Emmanuel’s cross a long-cherished idol, which has insensibly remained, perhaps when we thought that all our idols had been cut off and died at his feet? To give up the loved society of one who has been ever dear and affectionate, and has stood by us in distress—to give up the favourite companion of early youth, or the friend of riper years, because that companion and that friend refuse to be the friends of Jesus! Trials like these, and there are trials harder still, must be borne, if we would follow Christ.

To break off with a rude shock from a vicious habit strengthened by years’ continuance, to crush a passion which has come to rule us with an iron hand, to be roused by such a sense of coming vengeance amid our follies and our crimes, as tears us from our tyrant’s grasp—feeling that Christ can never come to rule in the same bosom, then to begin to oppose them, to check them, struggle with them, grapple for the mastery,—trials like these are fearful to flesh and blood,—flesh and blood *alone* never bore them. There we feel our weakness, and there it is that we learn to take *all* our strength from the arm on which we lean; encouraged by his promise, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

And those only who have made the proof, have the least idea of the consolations imparted by Christ to His obedient followers. The bitter sacrifice yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Sweet, *sweet*, SWEET to make a sacrifice for Jesus! High, pure, lasting enjoyment flows in. The bitterness soon goes, and nothing remains but a sense of His love, and the peace—passing all understanding, that is attendant on one smile from Emmanuel. Never, never did one of His beloved saints, whom He has purchased with His own blood, undergo the pain of amputating a limb for Him, without also experiencing the abundance of His consolations, and the fulness of His love. The limb is off, the pain will soon be gone; the strength is exhausted by the wound, but Emmanuel comes with the oil of consolation in His hand; He applies the balm of His own eternal love to the afflicted soul, raising it up

once more, and putting a new song into its mourning lips, even thanksgiving to our God.

Has He been thus coming near to any of *you*? Who has been cutting off offending members? Who has been exclaiming with Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols?" I know some present have, within the last few weeks, or even days; and was it not a hard struggle, was it not severe? It was severe. But, dear brothers and sisters in Jesus, are you still weeping, are the consolations of God small with you? No, no. But keep steadfast, keep steadfast, the battle may be nearer than you think; you are not yet in your Father's house; Satan is in that bosom still, he once reigned there; Jesus holds his place now; but though unseated, his malice and his rage burn yet the more, and, though a dying, he is not an inactive foe. He will be all the more anxious to distress and torment you because his time with you is short, and because he has lost you as his prey. The world, though now it seems to have lost its hold, though it no longer entrances you, though you are no more its slave, the world is what it was before, and all too soon will it intrude into the bosom that is now insensible to its charm and tinsel pleasure.

The flesh is not yet dead, though it is crucified. It struggles, and will struggle on till death is swallowed up of life. The evil heart of unbelief, which so long kept you from Jesus, and the passions which have been calmed for a while, will rise again.

Return now to the last part of the figure employed in the text by which we have been illustrating our subject. The plucking out of a right eye, implies that even the most tender and delicate parts of our being are to be sacrificed. The eye being the beauty of the countenance, and the most precious part of the body, its loss disfigures and deforms; and even among inconsiderate and wicked companions, exposes to derision and contempt. The agony, too, attendant on the extraction of an eye, has perhaps more of torture in it than anything that can be suffered; and yet this expression is not thought too strong. Even those *cruel mockings* which are so much dreaded, are to be patiently endured, and even gloried in, for the reproach of Christ is better than all the treasures of Egypt.

Here is another distinguishing mark of the true believer. He alone receives courage to quit himself like a man, and to be strong in the Lord. There are fair weather Christians, who are godly among the godly, but whose devotion disappears when they enter a profane or worldly circle. They set out fair for heaven, as they and others think, but the first time the sky lowers, and the black cloud appears, they recoil from the dangers of the passage, and draw back. At a time like this, especially, there are many such; they present a fair outside, and a deceiving attention to the things of heaven. Friends and relations are setting out for heaven, the day is fine, the sea is

calm, the sky cloudless,—they go on board the vessel that is leaving for a distant shore; they admire it, and think they would almost like to go too; but no sooner is the vessel in motion, than they cry, “Put me on shore, put me on shore.” They are landsmen, and they get afraid. Miserable turncoats, two-faced hypocrites, men that hoist different flags, sailing under English colours when they come near an English man-of-war, and raising another flag when the enemy comes in sight. They have a godly face and a profane face, just as it happens to suit; they assume the one whenever they are with Christians, and talk of sermons and ministers, nay, sometimes talk of Christ; but as soon as the scene changes, they have a suitable face for the ungodly, and join in the jeer and the laugh, mocking and scoffing just as others do. How different do some appear to their minister when they meet him, compared with what they are in the family or the workshop.

In conversing with a stranger one day on the subject of religion, he spoke with much apparent feeling about very serious and interesting things. That man is surely a Christian, I thought; he fears God. Soon after I met him in a shop where he was well known, and where he was transacting business. He immediately spoke to me as he had formerly done. When he left the shop, the master of it said to me, “Is *that* man serious?” I merely answered, “*You* should know.” “I could not have thought it; he seemed till now to be as careless as others, and not more particular about honest dealing, but ready to take an advantage where he might.”

At this very point you will discover a true believer. He does not change his colours. He is the soldier of Christ everywhere. He carries his high character with him, and sustains it all through. When circumstances oblige him to mix with the unconverted devotees to this world’s pleasure, his bearing is the same or even more marked than when among his fellow-Christians. A light word kindles his indignation though he be silent. If the reproach be on the name of his ever dear and glorious Redeemer, he takes no part, he is like an individual unelectrified in a room where all the rest of the party are so. He hasn’t got hold of the *chain*. The scoffing or ill-natured *hit* stops at *him*,—he does not catch the smile that flies round the circle when the name of *saint* is mentioned with a sneer. All his wish is to be a saint. It matters not to him what men say or think, if only he be doing, from love to Jesus, what he believes Jesus would command him to do, so that none can be long near him without perceiving the despised mark of the Lamb. You may sometimes read on his very brow the stamp which the seal of the Spirit has impressed there. Whether does he pray most, think you, when he is going to visit at a house where Christ is honoured, or when he must go to one where the fashionable votaries of this world dwell? Ah! it will be the latter. He will not try how far he can *alter his style* among them; his *look* will speak when his word cannot, for he is tender of his Saviour’s honour among unbelieving

men. He watches for an opportunity to bear witness to Jesus; he would rather bear all the mocking that a *world* could heap on him than let a breath of contempt fall upon his Lord, remembering that *him* will the King of kings confess before his Father and the hosts of heaven.

Dear fellow-believer, who have lately come to know him, the tempter will assail you, in an unguarded hour he will be upon you, and you will deny Christ almost before you are aware, if you do not make up your mind to pluck out this right eye, and so to *press* into the kingdom.