

Preface

REPEATED and insistent demands for a new volume of evangelistic sermons have been coming to me from pastors, evangelists and publishers. I have felt the force of these demands and at last am yielding to them in publishing this new volume of sermons.

These sermons were, for the most part, preached to my own congregation in Los Angeles in the past few months, and God, in His wondrous condescension, has seen fit to bless them to the conversion of a good many persons, the great majority of whom have been men from the ages of twenty-five up to fifty; but there have been some men of riper years converted, even up to seventy or eighty years of age. There have also been some notable conversions among women. We have been greatly interested in the number of Jews and Roman Catholics who have recently made a public profession of accepting Christ in our after-meetings, many of whom have afterwards united with our church, the Church of the Open Door. Not a few of those converted were formerly sceptics, agnostics, infidels and atheists, and quite a number of “Christian Scientists.”

The Gospel presented in these sermons is the same Gospel of a crucified Christ, a Saviour from the guilt of sin, and a risen Christ, a Saviour from the present power of sin, that we have been preaching throughout our entire ministry as pastor, and as evangelist in all parts of the world. We are certainly living in a New Day. The War and its after-results have worked a radical transformation in the ethical and religious as well as social and economic outlook of the minds of the men and women of the present day; nevertheless, we find that the same Gospel that was “the power of God unto salvation” before the War, and from the days of the Apostle Paul (Rom. 1: 16), is the Gospel that men will listen to and yield to today. All of these new gospels, “The Social Gospel” with the rest, are proving utterly ineffective in saving individual men or in lifting up communities. The Real Gospel, when preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, produces the same effects in individual lives today, and in the transformation of families and communities, that it has produced throughout all the centuries since our Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross of Calvary and rose again and ascended to the right hand of the Father and poured out His Holy Spirit upon His people. Practical results prove that that Gospel does not even need to be restated, though of course it is desirable to adapt the illustrations and method of argument to the thinking of our own day.

There seems to be a great religious awakening in Scotland and in some parts of Ireland and England, and there are indications here and there of an awakening in our own land. It cannot be denied that many pastors who are

thoroughly evangelical and many of our most intelligent laymen are tired of some of the methods of evangelism that have been in vogue in our own country during the past few years; but this does not mean for one moment that they do not believe in evangelism or in true revivals. We seem to be ripe for a revival now, and it is hoped these sermons may prove helpful in promoting that greatly longed for and earnestly prayed for genuine revival. It is hoped that they may be helpful to pastors in their desire to become their own evangelists, that they may be helpful to those evangelists whom God has chosen, and that they may be directly used to the salvation of many souls, by being put in the hands of men, women and children who are unsaved and need a Saviour. It has been a great joy to the author of this book to receive letters from different parts of the world, from all classes of people, saying that they had been led to Christ through reading printed reports of his sermons.

In our own church, we have found that it has not been necessary to introduce movies, or other sensational features, to draw the crowds. We have never had a movie, or anything of that kind in our church, and never expect to have; and yet our Sunday evening audiences at which these sermons were preached were probably larger than those of any other church in the community, even those resorting to the movies as a means of drawing a crowd; in fact, we think there is no other building used for religious services in the city that would hold the thousands of people who Sunday night after Sunday night have listened to these sermons. What the great attraction is to bring men and women to the house of God, as well as to bring them to a better life, is stated in the fifth sermon in this book.

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A CONVERTED INFIDEL'S PREACHING

“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.”—ACTS 9:20.

YOU will find the text in Acts 9:20: *“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God”* The Revised Version is even more suggestive, *“And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God.”* There was perhaps never a more amazed audience than that one which heard Saul of Tarsus preach his first sermon in Damascus. Saul was known far and wide as a hater of Jesus Christ and as a persecutor of Christians. He had come to Damascus for the express purpose of laying waste the church, arresting all believers in Jesus Christ, and dragging them to Jerusalem for punishment and death. There is not on earth to-day, and has not been for centuries, so bitter an infidel as Saul of Tarsus; and yet on his first public appearance in Damascus, this same Saul of Tarsus preaches a sermon of tremendous power, declaring and proving that Jesus is the Son of God. Will you please look at two things tonight, and if you will look at them earnestly and honestly, it will result in some of you being converted tonight. The first thing I wish you to look at is the preacher in the text, the second thing I wish you to look at is the preacher's message.

I. THE PREACHER

Look first at the preacher. The preacher was Saul of Tarsus. As you look at him, I wish to submit three good reasons why this particular preacher's message should command attention, and should be accepted. Taken together, these three reasons prove that the message is beyond an honest question true.

1. The first reason why this preacher's message should command attention and should be accepted is that *he had been a hater of the Jesus whom he now proclaimed.*

Saul had not been brought up to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and therefore he did not keep on preaching it because it was what he had been taught to believe from childhood. There are many who say of our modern preachers, *“Oh, he believes that and preaches that just because it is what his parents and early teachers taught him to believe.”* But no such charge can be brought against Saul of Tarsus. The doctrine that Jesus was the Son of God was not something Saul had taken up without any due thought, not something that he had inherited from his parents and early teachers. Saul had opposed this doctrine with all the vigour of an intense soul; he had gone up and down the streets of the city of Jerusalem, in and out of the houses, arresting men, women and children, for no other reason than that they believed

that Jesus was the Son of God, and confessed their faith in Him as such. He had attended their trials and voted for their death. Nothing seemed to cause him greater joy than the violent death of some Christian. He had had a part in the murder of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Not only so, but when he had exhausted all his opportunities of manifesting in violent ways his hatred of Christians in Jerusalem, his hatred of Christ and Christianity was not satisfied, and he had sought and obtained authority to go to Damascus to carry out a similar work of opposition and destruction there. Now when a man like that turns completely around and says, "I was wrong, I was utterly wrong, I was awfully wrong, in my denial that Jesus was the Son of God," then we ought to give his change of opinion careful attention; he must have had some good reason for it.

2. But Saul's testimony ought to have great weight for another reason, and that is *because of what he sacrificed for his change of opinion*. Saul's change of opinion cost him much. It cost him everything of a worldly character that he possessed. It cost him the loss of a position of great influence and promise; it cost him the loss of all his old friends; it cost him the severest persecution; it cost him arrest after arrest, and imprisonment after imprisonment, and scourging after scourging, and stoning and insult, and attempted assassination. It cost him wandering, and hunger and nakedness; it cost him suffering of the most intense kind, and dangers of indescribable magnitude. When a man of standing and education like Saul of Tarsus makes sacrifices like that for a change of opinion, his new opinion must demand great consideration.

Of course, men are constantly changing their opinions because they are going to gain something by the change. Many a Republican becomes a Democrat, and vice versa, many a Democrat becomes a Republican because of some personal profit that is to come to them in one way or another from the change, and of course a change of opinion in a case like that is not worthy of much consideration. There are professed Christians who have become infidels, outspoken infidels, because they could make money by the change, or because they had sinned, and the truth of Christianity was causing them pain of conscience, and they wished to save their consciences, or because of some other low end that was to be gained by the change of opinion.

When I was in Sydney, Australia, a man was urged to come and hear my address, but he replied that he took no stock in that sort of thing, that he himself had been a preacher once, and a missionary, and had found that the whole thing was a humbug. I took occasion to look into the man's history, and I found that he had been a missionary, but that his change of opinion was not due to the fact that further information and study had shown him that

Christianity was untrue, but because as a missionary he had gotten into trouble for his immorality, and that he was expelled from the mission, as he should have been, and in that way was led to change his opinion about Christianity and to accept infidelity. But when a man of great intelligence changes his opinion, and sacrifices everything that men hold dear, for that change, and is transformed in character by the change, and when the man who does thus change is a man like Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the Apostle, any honest man will hesitate a long time before he says Saul was mistaken in the change.

3. But there is a third reason, and a better one yet, why Saul's opinion must have great weight. Indeed this reason is so absolutely conclusive, if we are thoroughly honest, we must say that Saul was certainly right in what he says, and that Jesus is as Saul said he was, "the Son of God." *That reason is found in the way in which Saul of Tarsus came to change his opinion.* Why did Saul change from the opinion that Jesus was an impostor and blasphemer to the opinion that Jesus was the Son of God? Saul himself tells us why he changed his opinion. He says it was because as he drew near to Damascus whither he was going to arrest the Christians and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished; at the noon hour suddenly there shone around about him from Heaven a great light, above the light of the noontime sun, and that in that light he saw the face and form of Jesus who was once crucified, now risen and glorified, and that he heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and that when he inquired who was speaking to him, the form there in the glory said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest" (Acts 22:6-8, 16-18; cf. 9:5, 6).

Now if Saul of Tarsus really saw Jesus there in the glory, and if Jesus said to Saul what Saul reports that He said, and if Saul was commissioned at that time, as he said he was, to be the authoritative representative of this same Jesus, then Jesus certainly is the Son of God. There remains no room for debate about that. But the question arises, Did Saul really see Jesus in this way and hear Him say the things he said He did? He either did, or else Saul was a liar and made the story up, or else he was mistaken and had a sunstroke or something of that sort that he fancied was a reality.

Did he lie and make the story up? Such a supposition is incredible; there was no object for the lie, there was nothing to be gained by the lie, there was everything to be lost by it. Men do not manufacture lies for the sake of sacrificing position, home, money, comfort, ease, reputation, love of friends, and everything dear to them in life. The supposition then, that Saul of Tarsus lied in this matter, is ruled out. Was Paul the victim of delusion and fancy through sunstroke or a flash of lightning and peal of thunder (which he mistook for the voice of Jesus) or overwrought imagination, or something of that

kind, so that he imagined that he saw something he did not see, and heard something he did not hear? To this we would say that the record, and well attested facts in the case, make this explanation impossible. Not only did Saul see the light, but those who journeyed with him saw the light, so it could not have been Paul's imagination. And not only did those who journeyed with him see the light, they heard the voice also, though they did not distinguish the message that was spoken. Furthermore, Paul was blind for three days, and that was no fancy. Further, there was another man, Ananias, who saw Jesus in a vision, and this Jesus whom he saw in the vision said, "Arise and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus: for behold, he prayeth; and he hath seen a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight." Ananias protested against going, saying, "Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name." But the Lord who appeared to him in the vision insisted upon his going and he obeyed. He found Saul where the Lord Jesus had told him in the vision he would find him, and he "entered into the house; and laying his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord *even Jesus* who appeared unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." And immediately there fell from Saul's eyes the scales and he received his sight. There is absolutely no room for the theory of delusion and fancy on Paul's part here. Does some one say the whole story in Acts is a fiction? Let them study it. I challenge any honest lawyer or historical critic to study this story carefully and candidly, with the desire to find out whether it is truth or fiction, and see if this story does not bear the unmistakable marks of truth.

In the eighteenth century rationalism had swept everything before it in England. There were very few, even among the clergy, who still believed in the supernatural, but there were some remains of faith in the miracles and in the historic accuracy of the Bible, so the rationalists of the day appointed two of their ablest reasoners to undertake a campaign for the destruction of what remained of faith in the supernatural—Lord Lyttleton, an able lawyer, and Sir Gilbert West, Clerk of the Privy Council. These two men planned a campaign for the destruction of belief in the supernatural. One of them said to the other, "If we are to destroy faith in the supernatural, there are two alleged incidents in the Bible that we must prove to be legend or myth. One is the alleged resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the other is the alleged conversion of Saul of Tarsus."

Lord Lyttleton said to Sir Gilbert West, "Well, I will take the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and

show it is not historic fact but legend.” And Sir Gilbert West replied that he would take the story of the alleged resurrection of Jesus Christ, and show that that was not historic fact but legend or myth. Then West turned to Lyttleton and said, “I will depend upon you for my Bible material, for I must confess that I am somewhat rusty in the Bible.” Lyttleton replied, “I was intending to depend upon you for my Biblical material, for I also am somewhat rusty in the Bible.” Then one of them said, “Well, we must be candid and therefore we must carefully study the records in the Bible.” They met a number of times while they were preparing their books. On one of these occasions Lyttleton said to West, “West, as I have been studying the record in the Bible, I have become somewhat shaken in my position.” West replied, “Well, I am glad to hear you say it, for I confess that as I have been studying the records regarding the resurrection of Christ, I have become somewhat shaken in *my* position.” But they went on and completed their books.

At a last conference, West said to Lyttleton, “Have you written your book?” He replied, “Yes, I have, but as I have studied the facts as presented in the Bible and applied to them the canons of evidence received in courts of law, I have become satisfied of the truth of the Bible record, and that Saul of Tarsus was converted just as it is recorded in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.” Then he added, “Have you written your book?”

“Yes,” Sir Gilbert West replied, “I have written my book, but as I have sifted the evidence regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ as found in the Bible, I have become satisfied that Jesus Christ *did* rise from the dead, just as recorded in the Gospels, and I have written my book on that side.”

Any one who will do what this gifted lawyer did, sit down to a careful study of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, as related in three different places in the Acts of the Apostles and as referred to in the Epistles, with an honest desire to know whether it is truth or fiction, will be compelled to come to the same conclusion that Lord Lyttleton did.

We arrive, then, at this point—that Saul of Tarsus changed from a bitter infidel to a believer in Jesus Christ and preached that “Jesus is the Son of God,” because Jesus Christ appeared to him in glory as the Son of God. Saul of Tarsus actually saw him and Jesus Christ appointed Saul His authoritative representative. It has been absolutely settled, not as a theological speculation, but as an established historic fact, established by absolutely conclusive testimony and evidence, that Jesus is the Son of God.

II. THE CONVERTED INFIDEL’S MESSAGE.

We can now turn from a consideration of the preacher to a consideration of the preacher’s message. What was the preacher’s message? What was the message this converted infidel brought to the people of Damascus and brings

to us today? His message can be summed up in one short sentence, "*Jesus is the Son of God.*" Look at Saul as he stands there and proclaims it. There he stands, a man who a few days before had been a bitter hater of Jesus Christ and Christianity, a man who had stained his hands with Christian blood, a man who had come to Damascus for the express purpose of arresting men and women because they believed in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Son of God, and professed their faith in Him. There about him stood Jews and others who had heard of him as the bitterest enemy that the cause of Jesus Christ had, as a man who stopped at nothing in his efforts to stamp out Christianity, and to their amazement, he declares to them that this Jesus whom he had persecuted, he had found upon indisputable testimony to be the Son of God. But God Himself stands in this audience tonight proclaiming this same message. Let us look closely at this message.

1. Note first that *the message is not that Jesus is a good man, or even the best man that ever lived on this earth, no, the message is that "JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD."* That is, that He is a man who stands absolutely apart from all other men, that while He is a man, He is more than a man. He is of divine origin, and partakes of all the attributes of Deity, and is to be honoured and worshipped even as God the Father is honoured and worshipped.

2. Note second, that the message is not merely that Jesus is a great teacher, but that "Jesus is the Son of God."

3. Note third, that the message is not merely that Jesus is a perfect man, and our example, but that "Jesus is the Son of God."

4. Jesus is the Son of God. What does that involve ?

(1) First of all *it involves absolute and wholehearted trust in Him.* If Jesus is the Son of God, then I can trust Him absolutely and whole-heartedly. I cannot trust any man absolutely and whole-heartedly, no matter how good he may be. I could not absolutely and whole-heartedly trust any man. The Word of God is right when it says, "Thus saith Jehovah; cursed is the man that trusteth in man" (Jer. 17:5). If Jesus is not merely man, if He is divine, if He is the Son of God, if He is God manifest in human form, I can trust Him absolutely, and that is what He demands that I shall do. On the night before His crucifixion He demanded of His disciples the same absolute trust in Himself that they put in God the Father. He said, "Let not your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me "(John 14:1, A. R. V.). As He is the Son of God He had a right to make that demand, that men should put their absolute trust in Him. If He had been merely man, even the best of men, He would not have demanded that these men bring the curse of God upon their heads by putting their absolute trust in Him. But because He was the Son of God, and because He was God manifest in the flesh, He could say, "Believe in

God, BELIEVE ALSO IN ME.” And that is what He is saying to each of us tonight, that is what He is demanding of us tonight.

(2) *Believing that Jesus is the Son of God involves in the second place, that we not only trust Him absolutely and whole-heartedly in a general way, but that we trust Him specifically for salvation, for salvation from the guilt of sin, and salvation from the power of sin.* No matter how utterly lost we may be, no matter how many sins we may have committed, no matter how completely we may be in the power of sin tonight, as Jesus is the Son of God, and according to His own word died upon the cross of Calvary in our stead, He could, as the Son of God, make a perfect atonement for sin, and the moment we trust in Him our sins are all forgiven; and furthermore, as He is the Son of God, He has power to save us from the power of sin. Sin may be stronger than we are, Satan may be stronger than we are; they are, but they are not as strong as the Son of God, and this Son of God undertakes to save from the power of sin every one who puts their trust in Him. He also said, “If therefore the Son shall set you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). As the Son of God He has power to set free from the power of sin any one who puts their trust in Him.

(3) In the third place, *a real faith that Jesus is the Son of God involves the surrender of our life to Him.* If Jesus is divine, if He is the Son of God, if He is God made manifest in the flesh, we should surrender to Him all that we are and all that we have. That is what He demands of us and has a right to demand of us. Remember, Jesus is the Son of God! Have you made a surrender of your whole life to Him? If not, will you make that surrender tonight?

(4) In the fourth place, *real belief that Jesus is the Son of God involves the surrender of our thoughts to Him.* If Jesus is the Son of God, He is infallible, He can never be mistaken; therefore if some man, no matter how learned he may be, no matter how high he may stand in circles of education and culture, says one thing, and Jesus, the Son of God, says another, no man who really believes that Jesus is the Son of God will hesitate one moment which to believe. I have surrendered my thoughts absolutely to the shaping and to the control of Jesus Christ; for I am convinced, I am absolutely sure, that He is the Son of God, and I say to any man, “Do you dare to set up your poor miserable opinions against the plain declarations of the Son of God? If you do you are a fool, and however much you may resent the statement the day is coming when you will see that you are a fool. God grant that it may not come when it is too late to repent.”

There is saving power in this doctrine that Jesus is the Son of God. It will save any man who believes it from the heart and acts upon it.

1. *This doctrine will bring eternal life to any one who believes it, really believes it from the heart, and shows that he believes it by acting upon it.* The

Apostle John says in John 20:31, “These are written (that is, these things written in the Gospel of John are written) THAT YE MAY BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD; AND THAT BELIEVING YE MAY HAVE LIFE IN HIS NAME.” We see here that through simply believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, believing it with the heart, believing it in such a way as leads us to take the steps involved in thus believing it, any one who thus believes, obtains eternal life.

2. *Believing in this doctrine will also bring victory over the world.* John in his first epistle says, “Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5). The world has a mighty power, a power to blind our minds, a power to break our resolutions, a power to degrade our lives. The great mass of men and women are yielding to this power of the world, they are giving up their high ideals, they are compromising with things that their own consciences condemn, things that are low and debasing. The world, the spirit of the times, the ideas that rule in this world which “lieth in the wicked one,” are making a mighty assault on the faith and moral principles and the conduct of us all. That assault is too strong for any of us to resist in our own strength, but there is a way of victory, by believing, really believing, that Jesus is the Son of God.

I believe that practically every one in this audience tonight is convinced that Jesus is the Son of God; but being intellectually convinced of a thing is one thing, and really believing it from the heart, yielding our will to that which our mind accepts, is quite another thing. Will you tonight accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God? Will you take that attitude toward Him that you ought to take toward one that you know to be the Son of God? Will you from this time on trust Him absolutely, will you trust Him through His atoning death for the pardon of all your sins? Will you trust Him daily for His divine power for deliverance from the power of sin? Will you surrender your life absolutely to Him? Will you surrender your thoughts to Him, for Him to be absolute ruler of your thoughts? It is up to each one of you to answer the question. You can say “yes” or “no,” whichever you will. Which will you say?