

**First of All.**

SUBSTANCE OF SERMON, PREACHED BY REV. L. D. MORSE, AT THE OPENING OF HIS MINISTRY IN WOLFFVILLE, JAN. 17TH, 1904.

"I delivered unto you first of all . . . how that Christ died for our sins." 1 Cor. 15:3

More conspicuous than Blomidou, is to us, shooting abruptly into the sky, there towered above the apostle, on his approach to his new field of labor, a rugged colossal citadel of solid rock. He knew that at its base, surged the swarming population of the busy, motley, wealthy, leuciscent city of the two seas, the gate of the Peloponnesus. —Corinth, politically and commercially, "The eye of Greece." For many a league, as the messenger of grace was journeying hither, he could behold this lofty cone shining in the sun; and it was the first spire of the city to greet his sight. Rising nearly half a mile above the level of the sea and the classic shore, its summit affords one of the grandest and most celebrated views in the world. The sublimest portion of the magnificent prospect is neither Salamis nor the Athenian Acropolis nor snowy Parnassus; but a trembling stranger entering the gates of the city at our feet, aglow with love like an angel from heaven, announcing to the vile inhabitants the startling tidings that the Son of God has become a member of their race and died for their sins. Behold the man sent from God laying the foundation and "Other foundation can no man lay." "All other ground is sinking sand." Nobody can read Denny's masterly book on "The Death of Christ" without being impressed afresh with these familiar but striking words, "I delivered unto you, 'First of All,' how that Christ died for our sins."

"First of All." Well begun is half done. Putting first things first is half the battle. Paul begins at the beginning. He builds from the bottom. A mechanic once asked his nine-year old son how he would commence to build a house. The boy replied that he would, first of all, put in the windows. But this wise master builder, like an architect who understood his business, first of all, laid the foundation. On this solid bottom are built all attainment and achievement in the Christian life, just as in this church building, the windows and galleries, the pulpit, the people, the steeple and even the weather-vane upon the top of the steeple all rest their weight upon the foundation.

This man of God did not appear upon the scene as some great orator, the charm of whose eloquence would disenchant licentious Corinth from her foul iniquities. Who has not felt the magic might of both music and eloquence? Our melodious poet has ascribed to sacred song even the potency to conquer the corruption of sin:

For if such holy-song  
Inwrap our fancy long,  
Time will run back and fetch the age of gold,  
And speckled Vanity  
Will sicken soon and die,  
And leprous Sin will melt from earthly mould;  
And Hell itself will pass away.

But this student of human nature knew there was a leprosy fastened upon that population, as upon all the race that would never melt nor pass away beneath the spell of any melody or rhetoric, however holy or angelic. "I came not with any surpassing skill of eloquence." His hope for the regeneration of Corinth did not rest in his conscious ability to win the laurel wreath in a match with the best orators of Greece. Even if this new arrival should tower above Demosthenes as far as you lofty crag over-tops the Jewish synagogue he would still be merely unto them, "As a very lovely song of one that had a pleasant voice and could play well on an instrument." For they (would) hear his words and do them not. Therefore he did not come saying or thinking, Behold a greater than Demosthenes is here. The source of his high hope for this rank spot was in a fount which their eye had not seen nor their ear heard nor their loftiest imagination ever framed.

He did not arrive laden with some few and sublime system of philosophy, which had in itself the might to raise Corinth from the mire. I came not unto you with some superior wisdom, the rare quality of which was able to effect your redemption. Paul was indeed a theologian. He did have a rich and profound philosophy of Christianity, but the efficacy was not in the excellency of the philosophy. "Knowledge is power," but there is no knowledge either from beneath nor above which has in itself the might so save from the meshes of sin. There is no philosophy, however sublime or celestial that has intrinsic puissance to convert the shrine of painted and deified, lust into an habitation for Jehovah. God's ambassador did not stride into the streets of that bad town expecting redemption in Corinth because a greater than Socrates or Plato had alighted there. He did not stand himself up side of them at all.

He did not come as some great magnetic personality, almost almighty, having in himself the mystic force to draw the mad multitude back to their senses and their God. A young man tall and lithe, came down one time from the hall of learning to a lowly country village to preach during his vacation. He came blooming and steaming with self sufficiency. He wrote a friend that he found the village in a very bad state, but he intended to make it a different place before he left. He seemed possessed with the happy confidence that he himself, by dint of his right arm and stout heart, his trained mind and silver tongue, would be well able to drive out the devil and all his works. But

when our apostle found himself in the midst of all this mighty wickedness, he was overwhelmed with a sense of insufficiency. Amid those sons of Belial, "flowing with insolence and wine," he trod "in weakness and fear and much trembling." He became prostrated with a consciousness of utter helplessness. "O, my God, I have no might against this great company . . . but my eyes are upon thee." "The battle is the Lord's." He died and rose again. He sank in quivering strengthlessness at the feet of him who had sent him, and arose like a giant refreshed, glorifying in his own infirmities that the power of Christ might rest upon him. With shining face he met the suicidal crowds, gave utterance to the message which he was sent to deliver and found it winged with the powers of the world to come. In the forefront of his advance upon that stronghold was neither the conquering might of oratory, philosophy, nor magnetic personality, but a message—a message from the Eternal and with the Eternal at its back. Only a message.

Not first of all, a reformer nor an iconoclast, but a messenger. He did not begin the campaign by opening fire upon their false religion, their idolatry and adultery, lifting up his voice like a trumpet. He was a reformer indeed and his gospel wrought unprecedented reformation; but a volley of reform was not his first shot nor their heinousness his first target. It was not, first of all, a flash of lightning to smash their idols and a crash of thunder to arouse them to arise in their might and do what they ought to do and stop doing what they ought not to do. His first word was the cross. He came not with mere directions what to do and what not to do; but with good news of something that had been already done for them by another. He stood there before the ungodly for whom Christ died, saying, "Fear not! Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy." The first sound of the gospel in Corinth was not "Do" nor "Stop doing," but "Done!" The subject of the preacher's first verbs was not "You" nor "I" but "He." I delivered unto you first of all . . . how that Christ died for our sins."

It was not, first of all, the ethics of Jesus that he taught. If this had been his theme he would, indeed, have brought them something as far above anything they had ever heard before as the blue Grecian sky was above their city slums. No less a teacher than the same, learned, fair-minded Marcus Dods declares that to go from Plato to the gospel of John is to "pass from darkness to light." Moreover the teachings of Jesus on the duties of life would have been pre-eminently practical, not dealing with hair-splitting metaphysics, as if life were all in cloudland or dreamland, nor divorcing life and religion as if a man might be very vile and yet very religious. Furthermore the moral teachings of the Nazarene could be couched in childlike language, and through his abounding illustrations meant for the common people, made intelligible to the meanest capacity. But no! These sublime ethics were not in the front rank of the apostle's advance upon the powers of darkness there. What blessing do you bring to a man when you tell him he can be saved by doing a certain thing which he cannot possibly do? Such a message would be mockery and not gospel. As well promise the Ethiopian if he will change his skin, or the leopard his spots, that they shall become, for hith, shining archangels in glory. If the ethics of Jesus be all Paul had to preach in Corinth, he might as well go back to Tarsus. If Jesus be only a teacher of morals, the greatest teacher beneath the stars, he is nothing to me. If he has nothing for me beyond the Sermon on the Mount, I must die in my sins. No matter how correct, clear, comprehensive and divine the teachings may be, if Jesus has sent Paul merely to tell the Corinthians what to do and what not to do, he is nothing to them. They cannot do it. They must die in their sins. He might as well have told them to stand at the base of their statue of Venus and leap two thousand feet in the air to the top of their Acrocorinthus in order to be saved, as bid them bound from their deep debauchery to the height of the Sermon on the Mount. If Jesus be only a teacher, he is not a Saviour.

Nor was it the example of Christ that he presented, first of all. He could bring to them, and did bring to them in its proper place, the only perfect model of a human life ever lived on earth. This pattern would have been a new power in that city. Example is mightier than precept. Nevertheless if the example of Jesus, however inspiring, be all he has to offer, he is no Saviour for me. He has not come down low enough to meet the depth of my need. If Paul had announced, "O, ye Corinthians! Here is your pattern! Be like him, and you shall live," he might as well have bidden them leap into the Saronic Gulf and swim the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas to the land of Canaan, in order to be saved. He did not bring them a model something for them to copy in their native strength and resolution; but just a costly something for them to receive in their poverty and guilt.

It was nothing at all, first of all, for them to do or not to do, to be or not to be, to become or to leave off. His sermon was "not good advice but good news." It was glad tidings of great joy to those who had who had no money nor might nor merit. The figure in the foreground was not any one of themselves nor himself but another. Nor was the foremost theme concerning some divine operation the

Saviour would perform within them, creating within them clean hearts, and making them new creatures, although these would follow in order. The truth that came as the foundation of everything was not about something to be done in them at all, but something done outside of them, outside their city, outside their country, far away from their shores, across the great sea, in another land. "Christ died for our sins." Again, it was not something that the Saviour was going to do for them in the future; but something he had already done and would never do again. Some fifteen years or more ago, it had been done, once for all, one for all. It was a finished work, the great coming event which had cast its shadow before through all the preceding history of redemption and which should tower over the wrecks of time through all the generations yet to come.

He wrote to them, afterwards, what he preached to them now. "Him who knew no sin, he made to be sin for us." If I were a murderer, sentenced to die for my crime, and my brother, out of great love to me, comes forward and dies in my place, this innocent man dies like a murderer for me. The term grates on our ears; for we like our sins and even the sufferings of our substitute expressed in euphemistic terms. Sin is the large, energetic term that covers all specific crimes. When it is written that he was made sin for us, it means that he was made a malefactor for the malefactor, a robber for the robber, a curse for us all to redeem us from our curse. Who is this, arrested like a felon at midnight, bound, buffeted, flogged, spit upon, crowned with thorns as the arch impostor and hooted through the streets to the place of skulls to be executed as a monstrous enemy of the race, sunk by the weight of his crimes, below the level of humanity? He is my substitute. He is made that for me. To our modern ears, it would seem insulting to the Lord of glory and humiliating to ourselves to put in plain English the shame and anguish to of the cross. No human tongue has ever yet expressed the awful depth to which he stooped when he was made sin and a curse for us.

Lo, here I fall, my Saviour!  
'Tis I deserve thy place."

All Paul's Christian life and character were built on this foundation. This salvation free as the air to him was yet the costliest gift of heaven. He considered himself and all that was within him "bought with a price" and was no longer his own. Unceasingly, reverently, penitently luxuriating in thoughts of that inimitable, illuminable love, all the current of his being turned to Christ. When he viewed one dying for all, so in that him, their penal dying was done, their crimes were expiated, it set his heart on fire; it made him a flaming seraph. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge that one died for all!" The apostle was charged with preaching antinomianism.—"Continue in sin that grace may abound." One fine day, when we were preaching these glad tidings ten thousand miles from here, on the corner of the street in a village named Reddinilly Agrabaramu, suddenly in the middle of the sermon, the head man in the village sprang to his feet, and shouted in fierce mockery, "O, sinners come! Come on! Sin all you like! Be not afraid! God will forgive! No matter how much you sin, God will forgive!" But who, that has not tried it, shall say what effect the hearty reception of this free salvation will have upon a sinner? "My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways." What effect did its full reception have upon the chief exponent of this gospel for the ungodly? Did he continue in sin that grace might abound? To ask the question is to answer, with overwhelming might! Let his whole life answer, and let presumption stop its mouth. "The love of Christ constraineth us." It is the word that is used for one being seized with a fever. The love of Christ seized him. It held him. It possessed him. It monopolized him. It transfigured him. It lifted him and bare him on eagle's wings to the utmost bounds of the known world. Henceforth all he did was done out of love for Christ. That love was shed abroad in his heart. It was no longer he that liveth; but Christ that liveth within him. But he paid nothing for his salvation either in the beginning, the middle or the end. He had nothing to pay. Jesus paid it all. It came to him free and set him free. It is the same yesterday, to day and forever. It is glad tidings to those who have nothing to pay. It is "not good advice but good news." A very precious piece of property that shines, in the celestial light of earliest recollection, was a crossbow made for me by my father. Great was the sport it afforded in those halcyon days. A cousin came down to visit me and he fell in love with my crossbow and arrow. He wanted to buy it. My father gave me permission to give it away, but forbade me selling it. If I gave it to my cousin, he would make me another; but if I sold it, he would not. But my visitor would not take it as a gift. He wanted to buy it. So we sat down to fight it out, with our older brothers for seconds. He wanted to buy it and I wanted to give it. He was trying to keep the price up as high as possible and I was trying to get it down as low as possible. With my brother's help the figure got down to five cents. The other side contested the ground every fraction of an inch, but we forced them down to four cents, three cents, two cents, one cent, half a cent, for it was in the days when we had half