

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

NOTES OF A MEMORIAL SERMON FOR THE LATE JOHN ALEXANDER CAMPBELL.

PREACHED IN COTE STREET CHURCH, MONTREAL, SABBATH MORNING,
JAN. 20TH, BY THE REV. PRINCIPAL MACVICAR, LL.D.

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."—ROM. x. 9.

This is the text which on the 29th Feb., 1876, brought the light of eternal life clearly to the soul of the late John Alexander Campbell. I have selected it for a few moments' meditation this morning in the hope that its saving truth may be carried by the Holy Ghost to the hearts of some, and especially of his young companions now assembled in God's house.

Our first business is with the text, but we shall not have time to deal with it all. We must leave what is said in it respecting the confession of the Lord Jesus with the mouth to be inferred simply by the example of the young disciple to whose memory we intend to refer. With this understanding, let us look at the two remaining points in the text.

I. TRUST IN THE LORD JESUS—THE TRUST OF THE HEART.

Observe (1) that this is a belief, or trust, based upon the most intelligent exercise of the understanding. Christianity is not a mere superstition or blind devotion, resting upon, or springing out of, a gush of ardent feelings. It rests upon eternal facts, and squares itself in all respects, in every particular, with the highest reason and most critical research. It offers strong and irresistible evidence to every soul. It is not without reason, but for the most sufficient and clearest of all reasons, that you are asked to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the text one great fact, His resurrection from the dead, is singled out, and the belief of it is made equivalent to the acceptance of the whole gospel. Grant this great central fact and you cannot, you dare not, deny the rest of God's revelation of mercy and love. It is most essential, therefore, that we should ask, on what evidence does our acceptance of this fact rest? We answer, upon the very strongest you can imagine or desire. What evidence would satisfy you in such a case? Assuming the reliability of history, and especially history which has been sifted and tested in the most hostile spirit ten thousand times, and which has not been shown to be untrue, to say nothing of its Divine inspiration—assuming this much, would you be satisfied with *direct* and *circumstantial* evidence? We have both. Are you accustomed in the greatest issues to be thoroughly satisfied with the testimony of two or three reliable witnesses? In this matter, so deeply affecting the weal of the world and the eternity of immortal souls, it is not surprising that we have far more than this.

Would you like some of the witnesses to be critical, and even sceptical, until most thoroughly satisfied of the truth of what they testify? This is precisely what we have. Would you like to guard against all possibility of witnesses being biased in favor of this fact, and receive the evidence of foes rather than friends? This, too, we can furnish you. Do you demand that the witnesses should be examined under a proper sense of their responsibility, under the solemn pressure of an oath. We can assure you that they even went further than this, and many of them were examined under pressure of the severest ordeals that pagan courts, and emperors, and tyrants could invent; and that many of them sealed their testimony with their blood, and preferred to be burned in the flames and to be devoured by wild beasts rather than fail to testify to this great fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

Do you insist upon it that the witnesses must be intelligent men and fully cognizant of what they testify, having enjoyed ample opportunity of observing and verifying what they declare? This condition, too, we are ready to satisfy. They were men whose intelligence is put beyond doubt by the fact that they wrote essays, treatises, which show more intellectuality,—a deeper insight into things human and divine, than anything that came from the pens of Socrates and Plato. Men who knew this same Jesus most intimately for three years before His crucifixion, and who talked and lived with Him, and heard Him teach, and touched and handled Him during forty days after His death and resurrection, they could not possibly have been deceived or mistaken.

Do you demand that the thought of bribery and cor-

ruption, of self-interest and ulterior gain or advantage, be thoroughly guarded against in the case of the witnesses? This demand we are at once able to meet. This man had nothing to give his followers. He was, in this respect, not half as well off as the poorest of you. He owned no property, no real estate, no money. He said of himself truly: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." And one of the foremost among these witnesses said, as you remember, "Silver and gold have I none."

But who are these witnesses? All the prophets who foretold his death and resurrection. Jesus himself, who foretold his own death and resurrection. All the apostles, and especially the critical Thomas, who at first refused to believe,—all these intelligent, honest men who lived with him forty days after he rose from the dead and till they saw him ascend publicly to heaven.

Surely this is enough of *direct* evidence to satisfy any candid mind.

But do you ask for the *indirect*, or *circumstantial* evidence to which we referred? Here it is.

Friends and foes agree unanimously that Jesus was put to death by crucifixion. They agree also with equal unanimity that his body disappeared from the tomb. The question then is, How did it disappear?

Not by the hands of his friends, for they *could* not have removed it—they had not *power* to do so. The military force of the Romans was against them, and they were but a feeble, unorganized handful, and timid at that—they all forsook him and fled when a panic arose—and the skill and malignity of the Scribes and the Pharisees would have frustrated any attempt on their part. Besides, they *would* not, if they *could*, remove the body—they were too honest, as all their previous and subsequent record shows, to have been guilty of any such theft. And what is far more, they were too deeply interested in the issue to have fallen into any such folly. They, above all others, wished to see, and were bound to see, whether the words of their Leader and Master were to prove true. If not, their hopes, and standing, and all their prospects in the nation are blasted forever, and they, with him, are covered with everlasting ignominy. But if, on the other hand, his words should prove true, then they are armed with irresistible moral power, with which they can do what we know they did, "turn the world upside down." It was, therefore, their interest to scrutinize this matter to the utmost, and not to attempt any shallow fraud which would be sure to be exposed, and even punished, at once. Hence we conclude with certainty that the disciples *could* not, and *would* not, remove the body of Jesus from the tomb—yet it disappeared.

And it is even more certain that his enemies did not rifle the tomb. It was their interest to do what they did, to take every precaution and use every exertion to retain the body. Accordingly they set their strong guard of tried and trusted soldiers, they rolled the great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and sealed it with Pilate's seal—precautionary measures which prove their great anxiety to be in possession of the body after the third day, as well as their painful apprehension that what he had said might prove true, and that he might rise from the dead.

Besides, we may be perfectly sure that had they possession of the body when his disciples went about the very streets of Jerusalem and in all parts of the world publishing the fact that Jesus was alive, and that he remained with them forty days, and then, from a spot near Bethany, ascended to heaven in full view of a great company,—I say that if they possessed the body, these Jews, these old Pharisees, were keen and bitter enough in these circumstances to have produced it, and thus to have silenced and overwhelmed all his friends forever. But this they never did; yet the body disappeared.

Viewed, then, from every standpoint that we can look at it,—from the standpoint of *direct evidence*, from the testimony of prophets, apostles, and of Jesus himself; or viewed from the standpoint of *circumstantial evidence*, from a most critical analysis of all the circumstances—what conclusion shall we adopt?

We are forcibly shut up to one of two. We must either believe that these prophets, and these apostles, who suffered martyrdom in confirmation of their testimony, and this Jesus who testified to the same thing, were all impostors and utterly untrue, and that the mass of circumstantial evidence at which we have glanced is of no force or value—we must come to this astounding and irrational conclusion; or else, as a mat-

ter of intellectual or rational investigation, *believe* that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. So much for one step; now take another.

(2) *Not only is this trust one based upon the most intelligent exercise of the understanding, but it is specifically and pre-eminently the trust of the heart.*

Now, understand distinctly that nothing less than this will do if you are to be saved. The satisfying of the demands of your reason is not enough; the mere intellectual apprehension of the facts of the gospel is within the reach and the ability of the *worst man* that lives. Nay, the Bible goes even further than this, and declares that in this sense "the devils also believe and tremble." But both they, and bad men, are thoroughly destitute of the trust of the heart in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the promises of his word. It cannot be otherwise, "for the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Hence we must add that this trust of the heart is wrought in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. O, brethren, we cannot do without the work of the Holy Ghost. I know that it is lamentably common to ignore both the existence and the work of this Divine power. But just as you cannot be saved without Jesus Christ, without his sacrifice, his righteousness, his intercession, his life in your behalf in heaven, no more can you reach eternal glory without the work of the Spirit of God. He, and he alone, can kindle and sustain this saving trust in your soul; for faith is the gift of God in the sense of being wrought in the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost. And, brethren, let us rejoice in the fact that in this respect the promise is to us and to our children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Let us set no limitations to the love and the saving power of God's Spirit. Let no one presume to exercise the sweeping, awful, and unscriptural act of excommunication, by which he places little children, for example, beyond the reach of the Holy Ghost. The Bible and our own observation clearly reveal the fact that he works, and works effectually, in the heart in childhood as well as in advanced years; and good had it been for many here, perhaps, had the Holy Ghost gained possession of their hearts in childhood—their career would have been very different, and the Church of God would have enjoyed the services which she has lost, and their path would have been like that of the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. But it is not yet too late. Here is the Divine promise still; grasp it now. Believe in thine heart that God hath raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and thou shalt be saved.

Pass with me now to the second point in the text:

II. INSTANT SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

"Thou shalt be saved"—saved at once; saved now, the very instant you believe, without a moment's delay. I know that there are some very good people who have very grave doubts about this doctrine of *instant* salvation. Do not be surprised if these doubts should turn out to be, like a good many others, more *grave* than *scriptural*. The people referred to greatly prefer the doctrine of salvation by slow degrees, with many delays, many postponements, giving men time to go aside and sport themselves a good deal in the world—a salvation characterized by much uncertainty, and which leaves the issue very much in the hands of men, so that when they become serious before death they may, by a grand effort of will, put it all right. Well, the only question is, which view is scriptural? Which does the Lord provide and offer? A salvation which can be applied and enjoyed at once, or a salvation subject to delay and postponement for days and weeks and years? If the latter, it is manifestly a most imperfect salvation, and one which in many cases must prove utterly useless. If years and months, or even hours, are needed to grasp it or to have it rendered efficacious, what is to become of the vast number to whom such time is not allotted? Is this the sort of gospel with which to enter the cell of the criminal who is to be executed to-morrow, or with which to go out into the world full of men dying on every side? But what saith the Word of the Lord on this matter? How readest thou? Are sudden, or quick, or instant conversions unknown in this inspired record? Are they out of harmony with what we know and believe of the efficiency of sovereign grace? Or should we not unhesitatingly look for men's hearts being changed, quickened in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye? How quickly the shepherds of Bethlehem and the wise men who travelled so far to see Jesus yielded to the power of Divine grace, and opened their treasures as