

## AMBASSADORS ON BEHALF OF CHRIST

BY REV. ALEXANDER FALCONER, D.D.

The following is the sermon preached by Rev. Alexander Falconer, D.D., the retiring moderator, who took for his text:

"We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating by us;—we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5; 20. (K.V.).

Many and important are the questions bearing upon church life and work in general, or upon the immediate interests of our own church operations in particular, that might suggest tempting matters for discussion on an occasion such as the present. But we prefer looking rather at some of the great elements of the gospel, divine and everlasting; at some of the truths involved in the ministry of reconciliation, in the hope that a mutual meditation upon these high themes, may be helpful in quickening our faith, inspiring our hope and stimulating and encouraging us, while as ambassadors in behalf of Christ we continue our work of proclaiming the gospel of reconciliation.

Paul would here emphasize the fact that the preacher of the gospel is an ambassador, sent forth as the representative of the ever-present, though unseen king. He comes forward upon Christ's behalf. He must not therefore depart from his instructions but communicate the mind of Him that sent him. His object must be the furtherance of Christ's interests. He must make his master's business pre-eminent. All other aims must occupy a secondary place. He is to realize that he owes his importance not to himself but to the power he represents and the message he bears.

Let us now look at some of the characteristics that are necessary as qualifications in the true ambassador of the gospel in a ministry of reconciliation.

### A Great Message and a Sore Need.

He must come to his work with a deep sense that those to whom he brings his message are in sore need. "The Christian gospel has absolutely no meaning or power apart from the assumption that men have sinned." And it assumes that sin is not merely an accident, a mistake, or something inevitable in man's moral development, but a tremendous evil power that has entered into the life of the race, by which man is weakened, morally and spiritually enslaved. This is the Bible view of the world. It describes it as utterly discomfited by sin. It portrays humanity as completely ransacked in its entire nature, as on the verge of despair—sinful, sorrowful and undone. Such is the scripture portrait of man; and it reiterates this testimony with melancholy similarity from the moment of human transgression till the last lines that are written in the book of life. And what is the heart of sin? We can never understand what it really involves until we see it in relationship to God. It can be defined only in one way not as a mere negation, but as positive rebellion against God, and estrangement of heart from Him in whom we have eternal life. It is the will of God we violate, and He is eternal life. Sin therefore carries death with it. "By sin came death." It is rebellion then that makes the tragedy of human history, and always prevents human sin from becoming an insignificant and trivial affair. The creature left in a state of utter separation from God must be regarded as having sustained an infinite loss, and as having brought upon himself the very essence of misery. Whatever the infatuated

sinner himself may say, to have all evil passions and affections and desires summed up in enmity against God, wrought into the very texture of the soul for ever, is beyond question the most terrible curse which the mind properly enlightened can imagine to itself. No one will ever understand the true nature of depravity until he sees it as a guilty state of mind, estrangement from the living God, involving death; until he looks deep down into the heart and there discovers fixed opposition to all that is good and holy. Why do we dwell thus upon this matter? For two reasons:

1. Because unless we feel that it is a life and death concern with which we are engaged, when we come before the people as ambassadors for Christ—that our work is preaching salvation to lost men, we are likely to proclaim but a fragmentary gospel—a broken and soulless message. A firm conviction of the existence and virulence of a disease, lies at the very root of all attempts to effect a cure. One reason why the disciples failed in casting out the demon was, because they underrated the power of the evil spirit, forgot that "that kind went not out but by prayer and fasting." So it is only when our own conceptions of sin are vivid, and we realize man's deplorable condition, as "dead in trespasses and sin," that we will comprehend the weightiness of our commission in undertaking to stand as ambassadors for Christ before dying men: only then will the agonizing cry from the burdened spirit go up, "Come from the four winds O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live."

2. Because there are marks of a weakening of the consciousness of sin in our day. Is it not true that there is a decay in the sense of sin in our time, that our conceptions of its enormity are less rigid, and that there is a tendency to tone down the language in which it was wont to be described? Now it will necessarily follow that if sin be treated as a trifling matter, the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin will no longer be looked upon seriously, but ignored or suppressed. It is morally impossible to accept the atonement of Christ while there is not deep consciousness of guilt. The atonement is addressed to the sense of sin. Indeed our whole conception of Christianity gathers about the place and treatment given to man's sin and God's holiness. A similar statement may be made of repentance. Where sin has become a commonplace thing, or the sense of it has greatly weakened, there can be no true repentance, and of course no earnest pleading for pardon. To quote the words of Dr. Dale: "Not until the sense of the guilt of sin and the craving for the Divine Forgiveness become as general, as earnest and as intense as the desire for moral and spiritual perfection, will the death of Christ as an atonement for sin inspire a deep and passionate gratitude or recover its ancient place in the thought and life of the Christian Church." Hence the preacher must bring his message to man, deeply impressed with his tremendous need as a sinner.

### Weighty Nature of the Message.

The ambassador must come with a definite message to meet this crying need. "God has committed unto us the word of reconciliation." Ministers are therefore God's ambassadors, sent to treat with sinners on peace and reconciliation. The preaching of this reconciliation is the preaching of the gospel; and the gospel is the message of Christ's atonement. "He hath made

peace by the blood of His cross." "He who knew no sin was made sin for us." "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." The death of Christ then is the full exclusive and final efficacy in the doing away of sin. This is the heart of the gospel; and this must be the style of the ambassador in bringing the message in which Christ is reconciler. This message is "the power of God unto salvation." And if that word is suppressed what is left? As one expresses it "It is quite possible to preach with earnestness and even with persuasiveness, from another standpoint. It is quite possible to have a very sincere admiration for goodness, and a very sincere desire to be better men than we are, and to see others better; it is quite possible even to see the charm and beauty of Christ's goodness, and commend it in the most winning way to men, and to want in preaching the very note which is characteristic of Christ and the Apostles." And that note is that Christ made peace by the blood of his cross. If this feature be wanting in our preaching, the core of the gospel is wanting. We may appeal to man's moral, intellectual or physical nature; we may preach to him religion that will relieve the sufferings and miseries of life, and make our appeals to his personal comforts and interests and hopes; but if this be all—we have not faced the real problem of life—we have proclaimed a very inadequate gospel. Christ did indeed come to reach the sinner to the root to heal the broken-hearted to set at liberty them that are bruised; but He was born, lived and died specially to meet man's evil primarily to restore man to his allegiance to God and thus to solve the question of inhumanity. "The Christ of the miserable must not be manifested above the Christ of the sinner." Indeed we cannot greatly help man by our preaching unless we make that central which the word of God makes central viz: the sacrifice of Christ, reconciling a sinful world. The spring of all evil and misery is found in the heart alienated from its God and we must cast the salt in there. In certain quarters the cry is raised against the preaching of the gospel that it has lost its power; that the intelligence of the age has outgrown it, and that it must be displaced by something new; and the newness consists in eliminating what is distinctly propitiatory in the work of Christ. Now if preaching has lost its power, it is because the cross has been thrust out of its true place. Wherever Christ has been lifted up, a powerful spell has gone forth to draw men savingly to Him. Men may talk as they please, but historically it stands clear, that the power unto salvation lies with the gospel of the cross. Past history and present experience alike vindicate it, as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" for the regeneration of man. All the great movements that have led to revived faith, to a renewal of life in the church, have been marked by an intense realization of the deep spiritual needs of man, and the offer of satisfaction in Christ to the incessant cry rising in the heart, "How can I be just with God?"

### Present the "Old Old Story."

Whatever therefore may be new in the form of our teaching, let the great truths of it be old. We cannot attach too great importance to the presentation of the "old, old story." It is the burden of the word of the Lord, the testimony of Jesus Christ; Christ as the revelation of God to man; Christ as the realization of man before God; Christ in His person, in His word, in His life and in His death—this must be the perennial theme as it is the seal and glory of the gospel ministry. And surely no one has a right to stand forth as God's ambassador unless he is pre-