

## Paul the Ready.

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

"I am ready."—Romans 1: 15.

I think Paul might have used these words as his motto. We had once a Saxon king called Ethelred the Unready; here we have an apostle who might be called Paul the Ready. The Lord Jesus no sooner called to him out of heaven, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" than he answered, "Who art thou, Lord?" Almost directly after, his question was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He was no sooner converted, than he was ready for holy service; and "straightway he preached Christ" in the synagogues at Damascus. All through his life, whatever happened to him, he was always ready. If he had to speak to crowds in the street, he had the fitting word; or if to the elite on Mars' hill, he was ready for the philosophers. If he talked to the Pharisees, he knew how to address them; and when he was brought before the Sanhedrim, and perceived the Pharisaic and Sadducean elements in it, he knew how to avail himself of their mutual jealousies to help his own escape. See him before Felix, before Festus, before Agrippa, he is always ready; and when he came to stand before Nero, God was with him, and delivered him out of the mouth of the lion. If you find him on board ship he is ready to comfort men in the storm; and when he gets on shore, a shipwrecked prisoner, he is ready to gather sticks to help make the fires. At all points he is an all-round man, and an all-ready man; always ready to go wherever his Master sends him, and to do whatever his Lord appoints him.

Here we have Paul's readiness to work. "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." He had preached the gospel in a great part of Asia, he had crossed over into Europe, he had proclaimed the Word through Greece; and if ever an opportunity should occur for him to get to the capital of the world, whatever might be the danger to which he would be exposed, he was prepared to go. He was ready to go anywhere for Jesus, anywhere to preach the gospel, anywhere to win a soul, anywhere to comfort the people of God. "I am ready." There is no place to which Paul was not ready to go. He was ready to make a journey into Spain; and if he did not come to this island of ours, which is a matter of question, undoubtedly he was ready to have gone to the utmost isles of the sea, and to lands and rivers unknown, to carry his Master's mighty Word. Are we as ready as Paul was to go anywhere for Jesus, or do we feel that we could only work for Christ at home, and that we should not dare to go to the United States, or to Australia, or into some heathen land? Oh, may God keep us always on tiptoe, ready to move if the cloud moves, and equally ready to stay where we are if the cloud moveth not!

If you will kindly turn to Acts 21: 13, you will read, in the second place, of Paul's readiness to suffer. "He says, 'I am ready not to be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'" This is perhaps a greater thing than the former one; to be ready to suffer is more than to be ready to serve. To some of us it has become a habit to be ready to preach the Gospel; but here was a man who was ready to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus; so ready that he could not be dissuaded from it. He must preach the Gospel; but why must he go to Jerusalem? All the world was before him; why must he go to that persecuting city? Everybody told him he would have bonds and imprisonment, and perhaps death; but he cared nothing about all that; he said, "I am ready, I am ready."

Beloved friends, are we ready to be scoffed at, to be thought idiots, to be put down amongst old-fashioned fossils? Perhaps so. Are we ready, if we should be required to do so, to lose friends for Christ's sake, to have the cold shoulder for Christ's sakes? Perhaps so. Are we also ready, if it be the Lord's will, to go home, to be carried upstairs, and to lie there for the next three months? Are we as ready as that poor woman, who said, "The Lord said to me, 'Betty, mind the house, look after the children,' and I did it. By-and-by, he said, 'Betty, go upstairs and cough twelve months.' Shall I not do that also, and not complain, for it is all that I can do?" "I am ready." You remember what is on the seal of the American Baptist Missionary Society, an ox with a plough on one side and a halter on the other, ready for either, ready to serve, or ready to suffer. You have not come to the highest style of readiness till you are ready for whatever the will of God may appoint for you. Unreadiness from this point of view is very common; but it shows unsubdued human nature.

The third passage I must now quote is not exactly the same in words; but it means the same as the others. It tells us of Paul's readiness to do unpleasant work. I am afraid many of God's servants fall short here. The passage is in 2 Cor. 10: 6, "And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." The church at Corinth had sunk into a very sad condition. It was a church that did not have any minister; it had an open ministry, and nobody knows what mischief comes of that kind of thing. Paul recommended what a minister could do for them; for he said,

"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) that you submit yourselves unto such." They were too gifted for that, and everybody wanted to speak. When a church is all mouth what becomes of the body? If it were all month it would simply become a vacuum nothing more; and the church in Corinth became very much that. It was nobody's business to administer discipline, for it was everybody's business; and what is everybody's business is nobody's business, as we well know; so no discipline was administered, and the church became what we call "all sixes and sevens." It stands in the Scriptures forever as a warning against that method of church government, or, rather of no church government at all.

Paul, when he went among these people, determined to administer discipline, and to try to put things right. He was not going to Corinth with a sword, or with any carnal weapon, or with anything of unkindness or hasty temper; but he was going with the Word of God. He wrote, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;" and he meant to go among the Corinthian professors and pull down the stronghold of heathen vice that had entered the church to such an extent that even at the Lord's table some of them were drunken. Paul meant to deal honestly with all who were dishonoring the name of Christ. Now, dear friends, I speak especially to brethren whom God has put into the ministry, or put into office in the church, are you ready for this unpleasant duty? Oh, it costs some of us a great deal to say a strong thing! Perhaps we cannot say it at all without getting into a temper; and we had better not say it at all. It is not easy to have firmness in the language combined with sweetness in the manner of uttering it. It is easy to congratulate friends, it is not difficult to condemn them in the gross; but it is another thing to speak personally and faithfully to each erring one, and to be assured in our own souls that, as far as we have any responsibility in the matter, we will not tolerate an Achan in the camp, and will not have evil done knowingly in the house of God. It should be our endeavor, as God has made us overseers, not to overlook things that are evil, but really to oversee everything that is committed to our charge, and to try to set right whatever is wrong.

Now, once more, will you kindly turn to 2 Timothy 4: 6, where you have a verse well known to you all, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." Paul was ready to die; he was ready to loose his cable from earth, and to sail away to the haven of the blessed; and well he might be, for he could add, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Beloved friends, we cannot be ready to die unless we have been taught how to live. We who are active, and have talents to use, and health and strength with which to use those talents, must go on with "the greatest fight in the world" till we can say, "I have fought a good fight." We must go on running the Christian race till we can say, "I have finished my course." We must go on guarding the Word of God, and holding fast the truth of God, till we can say, "I have kept the faith." It will be hard work to lie dying if we have been unfaithful. God's infinite mercy may come in and forgive and help us; and we may be "saved; yet so as by fire;" but if we would look forward to death with perfect readiness, having no dread or fear about it, but being as ready to die as we are to go to our beds tonight, then we must be kept faithful to God by his almighty grace. The faith must keep us, and we must keep the faith.

Thus, you see, Paul was ready for service, ready for suffering, ready for unpleasant duty and ready to die. If I were to go round this tabernacle and ask of every one, "My friend, are you ready in these four ways?" how many would have to shake their heads and say, "I do not know what to say; I am doing my best in some style, but I cannot say that I have the readiness which the apostle claimed."

Let me show you now that Paul's readiness arose from excellent principles.

As for Paul's readiness to preach, I should trace that to his solemn conviction of the truth of the gospel. If a man only thinks it is true, he will not care whether he preaches it or does not preach it; but if he *knows* it is true, then he must preach it. I do not think we need find much fault with people now-a-days for being too positive and dogmatic about the truth of God; the present current runs in quite another direction. A feeble faith, which might also be mistaken for unbelief, is the common thing; and hence there is no great readiness to speak. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "As it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." If I get a grip of a thing, and know it is true, then I must tell it to others. The backbone of the preaching of Christ is a conviction of the truth of Christ.

Paul also had a dauntless courage in this matter. He

said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!" Whatever happened to him if he did preach it, he had counted the cost, and he was quite ready for all the consequences of his action. He had a holy self-denial; so that he put himself out of the question. "I am ready for anything; I am ready to preach this gospel, if I am stoned, if I am thrown out of the city as dead, if I am imprisoned, if I am sent into the den of Cæsar at Rome." Paul was ready because his courage had been given him of God.

Paul had, besides, such love for men, whether they were Jews or Romans or any other people, that he was ready to go anywhere to save them. He had also such zeal for God that it was a happiness to him to think of going to the furthest region if he might but preach Christ where he was not known; not building on another man's foundation, but laying the first stone of the edifice himself. This, then, accounted for his readiness to preach, and of the need of preaching it.

But how ever did Paul screw himself up to be ready to exercise discipline? That is, to me, the ugliest point of all. How could he bring himself to be able to do that? I think it was because he had not received his gospel of men, nor by men; and he had learned not to depend upon men, nor to look for their approval as the support of his life. He was able to lean on the Saviour and to walk alone with his Lord. So long as he had Christ with him he wanted nobody else. Paul had learned the fear of God, which casteth out the fear of man. "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" Remembering man leads to the forgetting of God. If we learn to speak very plainly, yet very lovingly, habitually cultivating frankness towards all Christian people, and even towards the ungodly, and do not know what it is to ask of any man leave to speak the truth, how much better it will be all round! May the Holy Spirit deepen in us the fear of God, and so take away from us the fear of man! Then, with Paul, each of us will be ready to say even concerning the most unpleasant duty, "I am ready."

But how came he to be able to say that he was ready to die? I will not dwell upon that. I have already told you that he felt ready to die because he could say that, as far as he had gone, he had finished the work God gave him to do, and he had kept the faith. Ah, dear friends, it is nothing but keeping faithful to God that will enable you to treat death as a friend! One dereliction of duty will be sufficient to rob you of comfort. When a traveler is walking a very small stone in his shoe will lame him; and a very small offense against the integrity that God requires of his servants may do us great mischief. Did you ever notice in Gideon's life that he had seventy sons, his own legitimate sons, and that he had one son who was the child of a harlot, and that one, Abimelech, killed his father's seventy sons? So it may be that a good man has seventy virtues, but if he tolerates one wrong thing it will be enough to rob him of the comfort of all the good things of this life, so when he comes to die he may go limping and lame. Ay, and all his life long he may go, like David did, halting even to the grave. May the Lord in mercy and love keep us right! If he teaches us how to live we shall know how to die.

It is not dying that is the great difficulty; it is living. If we are but helped to fight the good fight of faith, to finish our course, and to keep the faith, we shall die right enough. As Mr. Wiseley said when the good woman asked him, "Do you not sometimes feel an awe at the thought of dying?" "No," he replied, "if I knew for certain that I was going to die tomorrow night I should do just exactly what I am going to do. I am going to preach (I think it was) at Gloucester this afternoon and this evening; and I shall go to lodge with friend So-and-so, I shall stay up with him till 10 o'clock, and then I shall go to bed; and I shall be up at 5, and ride over to Tewkesbury, and I shall preach there, and shall go to friend So-and-so's for the night, and I shall go to bed at 10 o'clock, and whether I live or die, it does not matter at all to me, for if I die I shall wake up in glory. That is what I am going to do, whether I live or die." It was said of Mr. Whitefield that he never went to bed at night leaving even a pair of gloves out of its place. He used to say that he would like to have everything ready in case he might be taken away. I think I see that good man standing with a bed-room candle in his hand, at the top of the staircase, preaching Christ the last night of his life to the people sitting on the stairs and then going inside the room and commending himself to God, and going straight way to heaven. That is the way to die; but if you do not live like Wesley and Whitefield lived you cannot die like Wesley and Whitefield died. May God grant us grace that we may be perfectly ready to die when the time for our departure is at hand!

Dr. Watson ("Ian Maclaren") makes a fine beginning of his "Life of the Master" in McClure's Magazine for January with chapters covering the period of youth and childhood. His method is to make full and coherent record of the outer, material facts, but at the same time to make plain all of the inner, spiritual significance; and the result is a presentation interesting as pure narrative and yet of high poetic and devotional quality. The same aim appears also in Mr. C. K. Linsou's pictures. Of these there are eight beautiful full-page pictures in color—a feat in color reproduction beyond anything previously attempted in magazine work; and a number of smaller, but scarcely less beautiful, pictures in black and white.

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