

The Place of the Evangelist in the Life and Work of the Church.

*An address delivered to the Ministers' Bible Fellowship,
Metropolitan Tabernacle.*

THAT place is a very lowly one. It would scarcely be possible for language to put the evangelist in a more humble position than that in which the Lord Himself places him in John iv. Christ's words are: "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours." The figure here, of course, is the method used by the farmer in sowing and reaping. He will take great care into whose hands he puts the precious seed at the time for sowing: but when the harvest has grown any passing tramp can take a sickle and help to reap it. The skilled and trustworthy hands into which the seed is committed are not so necessary in the reaping. If ever an evangelist is tempted to pride, this passage in the Word alone is quite sufficient to keep him very humble in the presence of his Lord. A further passage, almost depreciating the ordinary work of an evangelist, is found in the words of the Apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians x., "Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours, but having hope . . . to preach the Gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in any man's line of things made ready to our hand." Paul desired the work of the pioneer rather than that of the evangelist supplementing the labours of the ordinary ministry.

But while the evangelist is thus to be kept in a lowly position, his work is fully recognised in the Word; in fact, the first words of the Master, as quoted above, may be taken as His commission, even where the Gospel seed has been plentifully and wisely scattered: "I sent you to reap." In Ephesians iv. 11, he is given a place with other appointed messengers of Divine Truth. "Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers." Though the texts quoted above remind the evangelist of his humble place, the last quoted puts him before the pastor and teacher, lest perhaps the pastor should be tempted to "exalt himself above measure." Timothy, the young minister, is exhorted to "do the work of an evangelist." Where a pastor feels other pressing duties make obedience to the exhortation a virtual impossibility for himself, it is evidently wise that he

should secure the services of another to take up the task. Neither is special training for the work of an evangelist greatly emphasised in the Word. In Acts xi. 19 we read, "They that were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled . . . preaching the Word." These were evidently persons untrained for the ministry, and in the ordinary walks of life.

In modern days the visit of an evangelist to a Church, as a general thing, represents a certain period in the Church's history. The ideal, of course, is, when the officers and people believe that they can say: "The fields are white already unto harvest." Faithful preaching and teaching have been owned by the Divine Spirit, and there are indications of His work in the desire after better things. There may have been a number coming forward to confess Christ before the Mission commences; or, the hanging back of those who seem interested but make no decision. In either case, when the pastor and Church are convinced there are many undecided ones, who appear to be on the verge of yielding to the Saviour; then it is indeed the grand opportunity for successfully holding an aggressive Evangelistic Mission.

But sometimes the case is different. The pastor has faithfully taught the Truth, but has not taken any special means for a length of time to lead his hearers definitely to accept the Saviour; neither have Sunday School workers made any such special effort to lead their scholars in numbers to confess Christ. There is to-day at the head of one of our Colleges an esteemed Principal, who is also a well-known author, who, when pastor of a small church in Yorkshire, invited the writer to conduct evangelistic services. He met the evangelist at the railway station, and on his way to the Manse, where the visitor was to be entertained, he said: "I know how to teach my people, but I do not feel I can lead them to decision for Christ." It soon became evident that the faithful work of this pastor in teaching the Truth had been owned by God to create a desire for salvation in the hearts of many. The enquiry room was visited by numbers who came burdened, but went out happy in a new-found Saviour.

Still another crisis may call for a special missionary and his testimony. The Church may, alas, have receded from her first earnest efforts to bring the neighbourhood in which she is placed to the feet of the Saviour. Still more, there may have been actual backsliding in the Church to mourn over. Now the word "revival" is very often misused. Life can only be revived where it has already existed. It is not strictly correct to speak of the conversion of souls as a revival: but there is

such a state of things, as has just been hinted at, when the Blessed Spirit may be called upon to revive His work, and the visit of an evangelist may be His means of so doing. Of course, the evangelist should be informed when this special state of things is in evidence. Evangelistic services in general are not to be entered upon unless the Church is in a state to work with the visiting preacher: still, there are exceptions, and where the pastor and evangelist have considered the matter, and believe that a Mission may be the means of bringing the church to increased consistency and consecration of life to the Master, the effort may be largely rewarded.

The call for an evangelistic mission is very clear when the neighbourhood around the church has been greatly increased by new dwellings; or when a new church has been formed in the midst of such surroundings. The writer was invited a few months ago to hold a mission in a School Chapel which had been opened but two months before his visit. The wisdom of such a course was made very evident, when folks who had come in for the first time from the new neighbourhood, walked forward to claim the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour. Both ordinary church work and missions are the urgent need now all over the land, in these new neighbourhoods; and where such an effort is commenced, whatever the building to which the people are invited, there is perhaps nothing more likely to stir the interest of the community in the things of God than for a few nights to carry on special evangelistic services.

Again and again in the history of the Church, the time for an in-gathering of souls is indicated by the Spirit's working in the hearts of individuals amongst His people. Sometimes it is the pastor himself, sometimes an official, or Christian worker, at other times a humble member of the church, who may be burdened with the spiritual destitution around, and so made prayerful and earnest to stir up fellow believers to make the effort to win souls. C. H. Spurgeon often told of a blacksmith who thus was led into the travail for souls. He went to his pastor and urged special services. The pastor did not feel the need of such, but appointed a few nights. The humble child of God was right. The time had come for an in-gathering. It was soon evidenced that the burdened soul was precursor of the heavenly showers. The story of Elijah upon Carmel is much the same. He was burdened with the thought of the Godless nation, and had his prayer answered by the fire from heaven.

In some cases the Church makes a yearly mission a part of her annual programme. This is the case at Spurgeon's Tabernacle in connection with the Sunday School. Every

October a special missionary is invited, and after special prayer has been offered by the church and the school, he conducts a series of services extending over a week or ten days, especially for the young people. Probably not a year, of late, has gone by without the church being increased by the addition of some from the ranks of the scholars through the agency of this regular aggressive effort. The writer has been acquainted with at least one church where the same course has been pursued; but with the special aim of in-gathering to the Saviour the elder folk as well as the younger; and again a regular harvest has been reaped through the yearly effort. It would be a sad mistake for any Church to include a mission in its yearly programme unless it feels that it is definitely called upon to do so. The multiplication of agencies increases the machinery, that is already large enough. But at the same time, so many of the institutions do not aim definitely at bringing souls to decision for Christ, which the evangelistic effort does, if it is worth the name. This extra endeavour for the spread of Christ's Kingdom might be annually made by many Churches.

These are practical considerations concerning the evangelist's work, but it yet remains to justify his office.

It will help us to take up the subject more easily and memorably if we first consider the work of the evangelist himself; secondly, that work in connection with the Church; and, thirdly, his association with the ordinary pastor.

1. *The Evangelist.* He is privileged with special advantages. He is unimpeded by the many cares of a settled pastor. After spending forty-two years in preaching to the same people, with only occasional visits to other churches, the writer of these lines found the change great indeed, when free from local ministry he found himself unencumbered with details, which pastoral work must always involve. He comes to the church to bring souls to decision for his Lord, and the work is plain and straightforward.

He comes with a single aim. The ordinary evangelist is not a Conference speaker. The work of the latter comes under the office of teacher. Of course, he will seek by an address or two wisely to prepare the Church for co-operation with him in soul-winning; but still he does not come with aim for the spiritual uplift of the people of God excepting as that is needed by the Church to fit her to be a channel of blessing for the Holy Spirit's saving grace.

What are called intensive missions have not generally succeeded in the increase of Church Membership. The term is not analogous with evangelistic services; but, at the same time, it must be remembered that in leading the membership in a line

with his work of soul-winning, he has often provided the people of God with the richest means of sanctification. Proverbs xi. 25 reminds us: "The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he who watereth shall be watered also himself."

It is the privilege and great advantage of a wise evangelist to bring back his audience to the first principles of the Faith. The pastor has wisely dealt with a number of doctrinal or practical truths from the Word of God, suited for those who have made progress in the divine life, or are already matured saints; but such are not the subjects with which an evangelist is called to deal. He brings the message of repentance, giving a whole discourse to the subject, whereas it may only have been referred to casually in the pastoral preaching before he came. He will deal faithfully concerning punishment of sin in the world to come. Here is a subject so seldom dealt with now in the ordinary ministry. He will wisely and scripturally picture the last judgement, seeking to bring his audiences, in imagination, to stand at the Bar of God. He will depict the atoning Cross in details, from the arrest in the Garden to the closing scene on Calvary. He will give, at all events, one address entirely to the doctrine of the New Birth. Saving Faith will be pictured by him in as many types and parables as he can find time to use. Instead of "leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ"—as a wise pastor must do, who will lead his church into the deeper experiences of the people of God—the evangelist must return to those first principles. It is through them the Spirit works conviction and regeneration in the sinful soul.

Another great advantage for the evangelist is being enabled to use personal methods more freely than the settled pastor is likely to feel it is wise for him to do. The writer of these lines cannot soon forget the conversation at the door of a Baptist Chapel, in a provincial town one Sunday morning, with a young man of evidently cultured mind. The talk was so lengthy that no one was left in the building, excepting the two engaged in conversation and a gentleman who was going from pew to pew busying himself amongst the books. When the young man had ultimately decided to yield heart and life to the Saviour, and had bidden the evangelist goodbye, what was the delight of the latter to find that the gentleman remaining behind was an officer of the church and the father of the young man who had just yielded. The ordinary minister would probably have felt it was out of place for him to keep his valued deacon so long from returning home, and he might also fear that the young man would consider a personal talk at that time was not appropriate: but such considerations do not hinder an evangelist in his work. Reference might be made here to far more public

and general methods of seeking the decision of souls for Christ than the personal conversation with one here and another there. However urgently the appeal for decision is needed, perhaps the generality of our ministers would have their reasons for not calling upon their congregations for a public avowal of deciding for the Saviour. But such manifestations of the soul's decision are the very motives for the invitation of an evangelist, and for the arranging of evangelistic services. It would take far too much time just now to describe the various methods by which the avowal of faith in Christ is to be sought. The point here is simply to emphasise the fact that it is almost to be expected that the evangelist will use methods of his own which few, if any, pastors would think of introducing into the ordinary services.

If the evangelist succeeds early in the mission in securing the trust and respect of the church and congregation to which he ministers, he is likely to be the recipient of confidences which are withheld from the pastor because of the latter's familiarity with the history and circumstances of his flock. This is a great advantage to the visitor. He is enabled, from these private conversations, to see where the difficulty lies between the soul and its response to the gospel; oft-times, in the course of a few minutes, obstacles are swept away.

We have said nothing here concerning the spiritual preparation of the soul of the evangelist himself. Our subject is his place in the church life and work. But let the occasional preacher take warning that no blessing will be brought to the community unless he himself is in all respects right with his God. It has been well said: "Our influence over other souls entirely depends upon the state of our own." All Christian workers would do well to memorise such a sentence. Christian biography is a mine of spiritual instruction concerning preparation for soul-winning. Varying gifts of evangelists do but very partially account for their success in God's work. The secret is found in their times of private devotion; in the state of their hearts; in their victory over self and the world; and in the measure in which they are possessed by the Spirit of God. Let those who believe they are called to this special branch of Christian service solemnly consider the words of Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy iv. 16, "Take heed to thyself and unto the doctrine; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." The attention to preparation of the heart is put there even before a correct creed.

2. *The Evangelist in the Life and Work of the Church.* One of the greatest blessings of special evangelistic work to the local church is that it provides a unique occasion for

heart-searching. C. G. Finney laid great stress upon this whenever he visited a new field. "Breaking up fallow ground" in the church and congregation he rightly considered an essential for the harvest that was to follow. The members of our churches are in great danger, because of their apparent separation from the world, of falling into a careless self-content. Are not their names upon the Church Roll? Do they not sit down to the Table of the Lord regularly? Are not their pew rents regularly paid? Have they not a pastor of whom they are fond, and church institutions which they rightly value? What more can be desired? And so the spiritual life becomes thin, and in cases inconsistent, because too little care is taken concerning the state of the heart. There must be careful preparation in the church if the Spirit of God is to use her as His channel through which His mighty energies are to flow. The little card so often used in Dr. Torrey's Missions is still needed to echo in the heart, if not to hang up in the home, before special services commence: "O God, send a revival, and begin in me." The present writer cannot forget a conversation with the late C. H. Spurgeon not long before his promotion to the glory, when he quoted solemnly the words of Paul to Timothy: "If a man therefore purge himself from these"—sins of creed and conduct are both mentioned in the context—"he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." This calling of the church to care for her own spiritual condition in view of a mission, is the work of the settled pastor, but should be emphasised by the evangelist upon the threshold of his services. Many a pastor has said that this preparation for holy service on the part of the church has produced so much good in the hearts and lives of the membership that the effort was well rewarded before its commencement.

The advent of a missionary is the signal for a new spirit of prayer amongst the people of God. Strange, but true, is it that when the Prayer Meeting has been neglected for months, because the urgency of supplication in the ordinary history of the church is not recognised, the looking forward to a mission often means the return to the Mercy-Seat on the part of the church almost as a whole. A new interest is attached to supplication and intercession. Prayer circles are sometimes formed; private prayer centres itself very much upon the one object; the children of God find themselves burdened with the desire for the outpouring of the Spirit, which they express in silent intercessions, even in their business and in the midst of house-work. It is impossible to exaggerate the lasting good which comes to many a church through this prayerful preparation for

special services, and when the season of the effort is over and the evangelist gone, this spirit of prayer is often maintained to an extent the church has not enjoyed for a number of years.

Akin to this attitude of revived prayer is the subject of special intercession for individual cases. This is very noticeable in the church both before the coming of the evangelist, and during his visit. A prayer list is begun by many of the members; and still more will have an individual case laid upon their hearts to pray about: and in numberless instances that particular prayer is heard and answered. Parents for their children; Sunday School teachers for their classes; neighbours for their unevangelised neighbours; cry to God and are graciously heard. Instances from many missions could be easily quoted to show how repeatedly God will make the prayer for the individual His means for the conversion of that person.

The coming of the evangelist is the signal for the church's awakening to special effort. Very frequently a wise pastor will form a number of committees, each body having some special duty in connection with the mission to perform. This revival of personal service is an untold boon to the church. One will take in hand the advertising; another the open-air work; another the special singing; and yet another—and the most important—arrangements for the invitation of enquirers into the instruction room, and dealing with them therein. There comes a holy "bustle" into the church before the evangelist arrives, which is in itself a sacred preparation for the coming effort.

In fact, the church recovers her taste for soul-winning. A young lady—headmistress of the junior department of a council school—was asked by her pastor to be ready to look out for strangers and undecided persons, to invite them into the instruction room. She replied that indeed she could not undertake any such duty; she had never attempted it, and would shrink from it. The pastor left it as a matter to be settled between herself and God. Timidly she began the work, against her personal wish, and was so useful that, during the special mission there was no one else so successful in leading souls through the enquiry room to the feet of Jesus Christ. The wife of the secretary in another mission told, on the last day, of having led nearly forty persons into the instruction room, over thirty of whom had decided for the Saviour. Seeking the lost outside the church circle becomes a work of peculiar interest. An evangelist was accompanied during a mission by a youthful church member, who had never before done public house visitation. So interested did she become, that the more experienced servant of God looked round for her in the bar of a public house, but found she had gone into another saloon in

her enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of, the work. It is not only the evangelist and minister who taste the bliss of leading souls to the Saviour in an evangelistic effort, but church members who will surrender themselves to the same blessed employment are rewarded beyond all language to express. The experience then enjoyed is a benefit to the future history of the church, as soul-winning once engaged in has always a lasting attraction.

One of the greatest benefits to a church in the anticipated arrival of the evangelist, is the expectation of blessing aroused; and here again is a definite fruit of evangelistic work. Churches which have been content with the sowing of the gospel seed from the pulpit and in the Bible Class and Sunday School, expect that now a harvest will be reaped. That expectation is another spelling of the word "faith." It is always honoured by God. "According to your faith so be it unto you." "O woman, great is thy faith! be it unto thee even as thou wilt." The dear Master has not lost His love for this expectant assurance of the putting forth of His power in answer to the prayer of faith. Alas, for the church and people where there is little hope for result of present labours! Dr. McLaren explained the failure of the disciples to cast out the demon from the boy, with the wise word: "They did not succeed because they were not sure they would." That is the sort of faith which honours God, i.e., assurance resting on "Have faith in God," that is, Divinely created, Divinely strengthened, and worthy of the Divine Being.

3. *The Evangelist in association with the ordinary Pastor.*

The first remark to be made here is, that the pastor should never be put out of his place. For the evangelist to come and at once to assume the chair at every meeting, putting the pastor on one side, has been a means of discrediting the work in days gone by, and should be most rigorously avoided. The old practice too often meant that, with the departure of the evangelist, it has been expected that the ingathering of souls will cease. But if the pastor is rightly honoured by being always left to take the central and leading position in the work, then, when the evangelist goes, the church may hope for the special work of God to go on. The pilot may depart, but the captain remains.

The evangelist is to be regarded as the pastor's ally. As Wellington was never ashamed to own that the arrival of the Prussians turned the tide of battle into sure victory at Waterloo, so the alliance of the missionary with the pastor and church may be made of God a combination to His glory. The pastor is to be consulted constantly by the evangelist to the advantage of both. The information the pastor can give is beyond value; while the hints and advice tendered by the missionary should be for the pastor's encouragement as well as future guidance. In fact, every

mission should be looked upon as a sort of spiritual clinic; the ordinary practitioner and the specialist consulting together about individual cases.

The great advantage to a pastor during a mission is, that he is set free from pulpit duties. How frequently does he wish for an opportunity of getting amongst his people at the close of a service, before this one or that one—about whom he is anxious—leaves the building. But how seldom can his wish be fulfilled. During evangelistic services all this is changed. The writer of these lines can look back upon a church, only lately missioned, where the pastor again and again—almost nightly—during the mission, would go down from the platform while a hymn was sung after the address, and invite dear friends of his in the congregation not yet decided for Christ, to accompany him into the instruction room. Happy man of God! His efforts were well rewarded, as indeed such earnest work is sure to be.

It is impossible to over-estimate the value of the co-operation of minister with evangelist in the matter of visitation. Recollections of devoted pastors who have taken the evangelist to the very houses where his visit was most needed crowd upon the mind. This, of course, is not the ordinary ministerial visitation. Visits to the sick and aged, and such consolatory kindnesses must usually be left to the pastor; but a wise pastor will know where the special spiritual help is needed in a family. All ministers do not feel called to this personal work, and yet they can take the evangelist to houses where the visit may be useful.

The necessary work of the visiting evangelist to the Church of Jesus Christ can never go out of use, although it may be less popular to-day than it was a century ago. The putting of the evangelist aside is the refusal of the use of means clearly appointed as the divine will in the Word, and blessedly used in the experience of the Churches in days gone by. Let the prejudice against missions on the part of the Churches, and any suspicion towards the missionary on the part of the ministers be swept aside, and a return be made to a wise, and not infrequent use of men, who may be clearly appointed by the sealing of the Spirit of God as instruments for aggressive work among the churches.

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