

"The Ambassador of Christ."¹

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."—
2 COR. V. 20.

ST. PAUL was in no doubt as to his commission. "We *are* ambassadors;" we *are* "in Christ's stead." Nor was he uncertain as to his task. The word "beseech" occurs twice: "as though God did beseech you;" "we beseech you in Christ's stead." His task was to speak to men as if God who loved the world was speaking, as Christ who died for all would do if He was there, and to urge, as both would do, everyone to be reconciled to God. At the close of his life, although he declared himself as "the chief of sinners," and as one who had nothing to glory in "save the Cross of Christ," yet he could say: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

Here we have presented to us three thoughts on which it may be well for us to dwell:

1. St. Paul's certainty as to his commission as an ambassador of Christ.
2. The great task entrusted to him "to beseech men in Christ's stead," to be reconciled to God.
3. His retrospect at the close of a long life.

First, St. Paul's certainty as to his commission as an ambassador. Can anyone who studies his life and reads his words doubt for a moment that St. Paul had received a commission—not from men, but from God? It is impossible to conceive such a life without the heavenly vision. He had surely heard a voice saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" and his whole soul responded: "Here am I, send me." *And he was sent* of God and of Christ, *and he went*. So it was with all the Apostles. They knew, not only whom they believed, but *by* whom they were *sent*. It was this which gave them confidence, courage, and power. They always saw the "In-

¹ A paper read at the Islington Clerical Meeting, January 11, 1916.

visible" who had sent them. Brethren, is it so with us? Do we merely in an ecclesiastical sense believe that we are ambassadors, or do we so believe that we are so distinctly and so separately sent of God that it is "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel"? Unless it is the latter our ministry will be a failure. The sense of God "thrusting" us out into His vineyard must be felt at every step. Is it so? Is the response to God's call the overwhelming response of our life? Let me put it wildly, extravagantly, if you will. If to-morrow we became a Carnegie in wealth, should we go on "preaching the old, old story," because we could not help doing so any more than we could help breathing? Is it with us morning, noon, and night? "I am sent of God." I am here "in Christ's stead." An English Ambassador at a foreign Court can never forget that he is not a private person, but must always remember that he is there in his King's stead, to represent his King and country, and not himself. But he is there in times of peace. The moment war is declared he is withdrawn, but we are ambassadors in the enemy's country in the time of war. Our path is never smooth, our task is never easy. We can never be on terms of intimacy with those around. Our citizenship is above, and we are sent to win the allegiance of the whole world to our Sovereign Lord the King, to beseech men to be reconciled to God. That is our one object in life. It is not one among many things. It stands alone. It *is* our life. For me to live *is Christ*. Christ who died for men. Christ in whose stead I beseech men to turn to God. How many of us live in that sense of God's presence, of God's communion? We believe in the Real if not the Local Presence in the Holy Communion, and we also declare that He is present in the Word. But do we feel His presence? Is He in the pulpit with us? Is He in the preparation for the pulpit? St. Paul, as he besought men in Christ's stead, felt the Christ Himself within. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Are we sure of the Real Presence within? Do we remember that our commission to "Go" is bound up with "Lo, I am with you alway."

Brethren, forgive me if I press once more: "Are you living as ambassadors of Christ?" Let each man answer before His Lord.

Secondly, think of the great task entrusted to St. Paul "to beseech men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God." In Low Latin we find the word "ambasciator," a waiter. St. Paul glorified in the title "servant," slave of Jesus Christ. In Christ's stead. Our Lord Himself had said: "As Thou hast sent me, even so have I also sent them." God's purpose in sending the Christ was also the purpose of Christ in sending the Apostles. That the world might be won to God through the Cross. That was how all the Apostles understood their commission and their message. We are in the true Apostolic Succession when we proclaim "the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God." It was their one theme. They had no other. "They ceased not to preach Jesus Christ." "The Jesus whom I preach unto you." "But we preach Christ Crucified." "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord." "That I might preach Him among the heathen." "Preach the Word." "Preach the Gospel." "There is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "Preach the Kingdom of God." "That remission of sins might be preached." "Preached through Jesus Christ the forgiveness of sins." "He preached Jesus and the Resurrection." "Jesus who was preached among you by us."

The message of the Apostles was always the same: "We preach Christ and Him Crucified." Is this the one message of the Church to-day? Alas! is it not true that the Church has been largely led aside from her message and her task? She has thought and taught too much about herself, the Bride, and this has frequently obscured her Lord. She must get back to her One Message: "We preach Christ." The less we hear to-day of the Bride, and the more of the Bridegroom, the stronger will the Church become. "Preach the Word" is the exhortation in the Ordinal, and "the Word" is Christ. If Science or Philosophy or Politics invite your attention, tell

them that you have a greater message to give than theirs, and you cannot come down to them. In the lower sphere they may do good, but all of them combined cannot save a soul, purify a heart, or make a single sinner fit for heaven. "It is," said Mr. Gladstone, "the preaching of Christ our Lord which must be the secret and substance, the centre and heart, of all preaching." He was right. To-day we are meeting under the shadow of this mighty War. Day by day our lads are leaving this country to take their place in that fighting-line from which every hour souls pass through the Valley of Death into the hands of God. This is not the time to discuss prayers for the dead, but when I read, as read I do, letter after letter protesting against any such practice, I ask: Does the writer of this letter realize that his disbelief in the efficiency of prayers for the dead throws upon him a great and overwhelming responsibility regarding the living? If there is *no* hope hereafter, if no prayer can avail after once the soul has left the body, how awful is the position of the ambassador of God who strains not every power he possesses to beseech men to be reconciled to God! Upon Evangelicals who hold these views there rests more than upon any other class responsibility to preach a present, full, and free salvation. But, my brethren, are we doing so? This is a time when we must not mince matters or hesitate to use plain language. I think I have had opportunities such as are given to few men to know the position of the Evangelical school of thought throughout the world, and I say, with a due sense of responsibility, standing as I do in this church, which in a sense may be called the Mecca of modern Evangelicals, that the old Evangel is not being preached as our fathers preached it, or as St. Paul preached it. What are the texts chosen to-day? When were the texts I read a short time ago the substance of our sermons? Some time ago I heard a sermon in a C.P.A.S. parish in which the words God, Christ, Jesus, Sin, Salvation, Faith, Heaven, were never once used. This, no doubt, was an extreme case; but do we, as Evangelicals, determine when we ascend the pulpit "not to

know anything save Jesus Christ and Him Crucified?" The pulpit may be the centre of overwhelming power, and it may become the scene of tragic disaster. Now, brethren, if last Sunday night, as we ascended the pulpit stairs, an angel had challenged us, "What is your aim to-night? What do you *expect* to be the result of your sermon?" what *should* we, what *could* we, have replied? Go back to Sunday night. What was your text? What was your sermon? What was the result? Was it a sermon to save souls? The title of one of Newman's addresses was: "The Salvation of the Hearer; the Motive of the Preacher." Was that your definite motive? If some recruit had come into the church for his last Sunday night in England before going to the front, and perhaps to his death, with the thought in his heart, "What must I do to be saved?" what help would your sermon have been to him? Spurgeon, when he preached, always remembered that hearts might be changed for ever as he preached. Did you and I so remember? Henry Ward Beecher, on his deathbed, said: "The greatest object of the preacher is not to teach theology, is not to engage in controversy, but it is to save souls." We believe that; but do we preach that kind of sermon? Moody on one occasion said to Dr. Chapman: "You are making a mistake in your ministry. What you are doing does not count for much. Your preaching, I say it in all kindness, does not save souls." Would anyone be justified in saying the same words to us. Do our sermons save souls? If they do not, what are they worth? Such sermons are nowadays looked down upon. I remember some years ago I was asked to preach at a certain church, and, on hesitating, was told: "You need not really preach; a simple Evangelistic address will do." What would St. Paul have thought of such a statement? Is a sermon one fit to be preached by the ambassador of Christ in the house of God unless it is really and truly Evangelistic? Unless it not only contains, but *is*, the Gospel, and the Gospel is Christ, and the centre of it all is the Cross. Ought we not to be ashamed to preach the sermons we do when we have such a

glorious Gospel to proclaim of a salvation without limit, or extent in power? The Arabians have a proverb, "He is the best orator who can turn men's ears into eyes." The best preacher is he who can make his hearers "see Jesus only." The famous preacher Jowett tells how one Sunday he went out to a prayer meeting at a camp meeting outside New York, at which he was to speak, when one engaging in prayer said: "O Lord, we thank Thee for our brother. Now blot him out. Reveal Thyself." Sirs, we would *see* Jesus—preach Christ. If the Apostles of old would not leave the preaching of the Gospel even to "serve tables" on which provisions were laid for widows, how closely ought we to keep to our one text, "Jesus Christ and Him Crucified!" As Bishop Wilberforce said, "Get unto the Cross of Christ, look at those wounds, see in them what sin is! See in them the greatness of your Master's love! And as a ransomed sinner minister to ransomed sinners! Take your censer and run in and stand between the living and the dead, for verily the plague has begun."

But, lastly, St. Paul had a wonderful retrospect in his old age. Churches planted—souls saved. What is our retrospect? This may appear a strange Islington paper, but I am not going to apologize for it. There is something wrong with the Church, for her ministers are not winning souls, and I pray that from this gathering to-day there may go forth a band of men determined to "win souls." I know some may be called teachers, others evangelists, but, by whatever name he is called, every minister of the Gospel is called upon to "win souls." A clergyman said to me one day: "My temperament is such that I could not preach an Evangelistic sermon." My reply was: "Christ, who could turn a Boanerges into the Apostle of Love, can make you a soul-winner if you wish to be one." Such preaching may disturb your congregations as they are at present. It was to the Greeks foolishness, and to the Jews a stumbling-block, but it saved souls. We clergy have to make our choice. We have to decide whether we will be what are known as "intellectual preachers," "popular preachers," or "soul winners." Which

are we? There is a dearth of conversions. Why? The result of Higher Criticism, says one. The growth of Ritualism, says another. While a third replies, The social conditions of the people. Brethren, do not let us excuse ourselves. The dearth of conversions is owing to none of these things. The Apostles had to meet these things in another form, and worse than these things, but they got conversions. Wesley and Whitefield had a Church and a nation worse to deal with than we have, and yet they got conversions. Why do not we get conversions? Do we? How many in this church had a conversion that he knew about last Sunday? How many conversions did you know about last year? It is all very well to talk about the silent growth, but even a Lydia is known sometimes. What about the drunkards in your parishes? How many were saved last year? If Evangelicals cannot save drunkards, harlots, and prostitutes, then I say there is something wrong with Evangelicals, and the sooner we find out what it is, the better. Some would say it is our surpliced choir and semi-musical services. It is not, for I have known good soul-saving work done under those conditions, and deadness and coldness elsewhere. The cause is deeper down than that. We have ceased to regard sin as our fathers did. We have discarded hell. We have not kept to the Cross. We have not a personal experience of sanctification, and we have lost the power of the Spirit. This is a strong indictment, and I would be the last man to make it unless I believed it true. If it is true of our school of thought, it is true of the Church generally. We have built churches, multiplied services, and largely ceased to win souls. In the dioceses of London and Southwark, with all the Church's activity, the communicants only number about five per cent. of the population. Don't let us blame Ritualism, Rationalism, or anything else, for this result. There are sufficient Evangelical churches in both dioceses themselves to show a very different result, if they were alive. Do not let me be misunderstood. I know full well the lives of devotion and whole-hearted service which many of our brethren are living, and yet I ask you, each one of you,

to look round and tell me how many churches you know where there are clear, definite conversions, as you and I understand conversions. Have we not even ceased to expect conversions? If we had an inquirer, how should we deal with him? Do we know how to point a soul to Christ? Have we a doctrine of assurance to preach? Forgive me, what books do we read? Modern thought must be studied, but side by side with it let us keep our Bunyan, our Finney, and such books as "The Cross in Christian Experience," by W. M. Clow; "The Twofold Life," by A. J. Gordon; and even "Broken Earthenware." These books will help us to let our congregations know and feel that God loves them all, that Christ died for them all, and that the Holy Spirit is present to renew and sanctify them all. But above all we must remember that, although in a sense in the Cross we find all we want, there is a sense in which it will not suffice. Christ was on the earth for forty days after the Cross had been lifted up, but it was only after the Holy Ghost had come that we find men saved through it being lifted up. The great need to-day is the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. The Cross can never be fully seen until the light of the Holy Ghost is thrown upon it. That may be one reason why our Church lays down the rule that, when we draw near to the Holy Table, we must not only have been baptized, but also confirmed, so that, coming as men filled with the Holy Ghost, we may see Him. That surely is the reason why, before we are commissioned to "dispense the Word of God," we pray, "Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire." Our Church recognizes to the full what the New Testament so strongly emphasizes: that we only receive power to see the Cross and to preach the Cross after the Holy Ghost has come. Do we believe that? The ambassador's instructions are clear. He must be guided by the Holy Ghost. Are we so guided? What influence has He upon our lives? Are we men sanctified by the Holy Ghost and moved by Him? The other day I heard of a clergyman who was not a great preacher as the world calls preaching, but whose church was packed to the doors, and to whom God gave many souls, and an

old curate surely gave the secret when he said: "We could always hear him saying softly as he mounted the pulpit, 'I believe in the Holy Ghost—I believe in the Holy Ghost.'" "

Some of us, brethren, are nearing the end of our ministry. Is it becoming more spiritual, more powerful, as the physical decays, or do the wells seem to be running dry? No water—no souls refreshed or raised to life. An old man—a castaway—unusable. The saddest picture on earth. Some of us are in the prime of life or just at the commencement of our ministry. What is our ministry like? Is it already a disappointment? Are we already saying, "Why can we not cast them out?" Brothers, old and young, we are here as the ministers of God in a period like unto which there is none else.

"The World's great heart is aching,
Fiercely aching in the night."

What a responsibility! What a privilege to be the ambassador of Christ, beseeching men, *in Christ's stead*, to be reconciled to God! To have the one, the only message which can put the world right; stop all wars; cure all hearts; purify all lives; and save for all eternity the souls of men. Oh, magnify such an office, but magnify it upon your knees. It is not the office that will save you. That can only be the Gospel which you preach to others. Has it saved you? Oh, forgive me if I ask solemnly this question: Do you, who preach to others, know *your* sins forgiven? Do you *yourself* see the Cross? Have *you* received the Holy Spirit? Do *you* rejoice in victory over sin? If not, here is the secret of failure.

Once more, brethren, let us return to the work to which we were called—"to preach Christ and Him Crucified," to aim only at winning souls, and every moment ourselves to realize:

"This is all *my* hope and all *my* plea,
For *me* the Saviour died."

J. E. CHELMSFORD.

