

The Abiding Word

(1 PETER I. 23-25)

THE Bible is our contemporary. It is as up-to-date as the stop-press column of a modern newspaper and more pertinent than the leading article.

The present age is marked by uncertainty and insecurity. Man's latest major discovery has robbed us of the last crumb of comfort. The fear prevails that the worst—if there is anything worse than the present suspense—may happen any time. As with existence so with values. The absolute standards have departed. Man is cut adrift from his former anchorages and is cast upon a tractless ocean without chart or compass. Good and evil, truth and error, are only relative terms. Everything is open to doubt or denial.

But this condition of things is not wholly new, nor are we left entirely without illumination amidst the thickening gloom, or completely bereft of rock under our feet amidst the universal shaking. God has spoken, and His Word, written *for* such a time as this—and frequently *in* similar circumstances—offers sufficient light and a sure foothold on the pathway that leads to the City which has foundations, whose builder and architect is God.

Concerning this abiding Word St. Peter says that *it abides because it is wholly other than all other "words"*. It is God who is shaking the nations. Therefore it is evident that when all things tremble and disintegrate He is immune who Himself shakes all things. The Word which He speaks is settled in heaven, above and beyond the devastations of earth. It comes to us as something wholly other than our own best thought—as far removed as heaven is above earth and as east is from west. It comes *to* us but it is not *of* us. It is not merely our sense of what is fitting dressed in a religious euphemism. It is the declaration of Him who is the Lord and who changes not. It emphasizes its uniqueness as proceeding from Him who is Lord, and beside whom there is no other. Quoting a prophet who witnessed in circumstances strikingly similar to our own, the apostle sets forth the abiding quality of God's utterance in contrast to the transitoriness of man's words and works. The one withers and fades whilst the other remains eternally stable. From the disappointing "word" of power politics and the frightening "word" of modern science we turn to the heartening and strengthening Word of the Lord which alone bears authentic "good news". To seek our salvation in a Rock that is higher than our best self is a wisdom that has been attested by those in every age who have confessed, "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted. I have never been confounded".

Furthermore, he says that *this Word of the Lord receives its fullest expression in the Gospel*. God has spoken on many occasions and in a variety of ways (Heb. i. 1). These fragmentary words have been true expressions of His mind and will. Their incompleteness and the earthen vessels in which they are brought to us must not blind our eyes

to the inestimable worth of the treasure they contain. They were, and are, authentic words of God. But they were incomplete, and were constantly stressing their own incompleteness. They were ever looking forward to fulfilment in the final Word. In God's Son this word of fulfilment and finality has been spoken. He is God's last word to man. The Written Word becomes fully articulate in the Living Word, who is Himself the unchanging Word, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever. The eternal Word comes to us as flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. *God* was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. In Him *all* the promises of God are yea and amen.

Again, *the Abiding Word is mediated to us in Preaching*. The mysteries of incarnation and atonement are not merely historic facts and abstract doctrines, but immediate and living realities. They are carried forward into our present situation and confront us in the word of the truth of the Gospel on the lips of its living witnesses. The Living Word, portrayed in the Written Word, comes face to face with us in the Preached Word. Here, perhaps, more than elsewhere do we approach the idea of an extension of the Incarnation. Christ is present in the Church's proclamation of the Word. Herein is the dignity of the preacher's calling revealed—not to spin fine webs of human thought but the offering of Christ to sinful men by a sinful man. Moreover, in this we also recognise the solemnity of hearing the Word preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is imperative that we should take heed *how*, as well as *what*, we hear. It was in this light that the Reformers saw what constituted true apostolicity, and thus they set the preached Word at the very centre of worship. "God was in Christ"—that is the essential Word. "We beseech you in Christ's stead"—that is its present expression.

Finally, *the Word authenticates itself in the believing heart*. Eternity is the true home and the native air of the Word. But in incarnation the Word became flesh and made this sin-stricken earth His home. By Death and Resurrection and Ascension and by the gift of the Holy Spirit He is present wherever the Word of the Gospel is preached. From all who hear the message He demands a response, and to all He offers a gift. Because begotten of corruptible seed, man by his first birth is doomed to die. In receiving the Abiding Word he is begotten again unto a living hope, being born a second time of incorruptible seed. Thus in the process of salvation the Word comes out from eternity into time, and through the medium of preaching enters into the inner man of the heart. Here the Word of Christ wills to dwell richly, and in the present distress to bear witness to the fact that *nothing* can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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