

HIS TOUCH HAS STILL ITS ANCIENT POWER

by

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CHAPTER FIVE -

TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save . . . but your iniquities have separated between you and your God..." (Isaiah 59:1, 2).

"THINGS are in rather a low state at our church. Members are slack and indifferent. I think we need a mission to wake us up." So said the minister of a church to me. Can you imagine the general of an army saying, "My men are in poor condition, morale is low, we have little ammunition, and no reserves. We had better make an attack." Yet how many times has a preacher been invited to just such a church for a mission.

For the first week many professing Christians are, if not actively opposing the effort, frankly disinterested. By the second week, things are warming up, there are a few more at the prayer meeting, and some souls find CHRIST in spite of the lack of power. By the end of the mission, things at last begin to happen. The erstwhile indifferent Christians come to life, and say, "This is grand, just what we need. We must go on for another week, we can't stop when the work is just beginning."

And so it is, just beginning at the end, when three-quarters of the time has been spent in warming up those who should have been red hot at the start, and who have been like cold water on the effort all the time.

Roger B. Lloyd in his book, "*Crown Him Lord of All*," tells a delightful story which he has graciously given me permission to repeat here. A vicar was trying to excuse the failure of a badly prepared mission at which Canon Peter Green, of Salford, had been the missionary. "At any rate," said the vicar, "our own people have been greatly refreshed."

"Refreshed! Refreshed indeed!" replied the Canon. "By this time they should have been exhausted!"

It is for this reason that I only accept an invitation to conduct a mission on the condition that I devote the first week of the series to addressing professing Christians on their responsibilities to CHRIST and a needy world. A multitude of unconverted people cannot hinder the victory of the HOLY SPIRIT, but often one "Achan" can spell defeat. How often we have heard people say, "The days of big missions are over. GOD doesn't work that way now. There are no Wesleys or Moodys to-day."

They must have been saying such things since the time of Isaiah. We need the prophet's word to us to-day, "**Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save: neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God.**" Surely the source of the trouble is often to be found in our own prayerlessness and inconsistent lives.

I was thinking along this line during a mission in Northern Ireland, and while preparing the message for the next day's prayer meeting, the words of John 16:8 struck me forcibly.

"**When He** (the HOLY SPIRIT) **is come** [unto you] (this is understood from verse 7) **He will reprove** (convict) **the world of sin.**" When He is come TO YOU in all His fulness, those you meet with day by day will be convicted of sin. I gave my message at the early morning prayer meeting the next day. On returning to breakfast I found a letter from my friend Arthur Willis, of Portsmouth, waiting for me. He had added a P.S.: "I have just been reading John 16, and have discovered that it is when the HOLY SPIRIT is come TO YOU the world will be convicted of sin." The Lord must have been revealing this truth to us both at the identical time!

This truth was demonstrated in the case of two Christian girls who had attended one of the opening meetings of a mission. As they were walking home together afterwards one of them said, "I have been a Christian for some time, but I really can't say that I have ever crowned CHRIST Lord of all in my life."

That night alone in their rooms, they both yielded themselves to CHRIST, and asked the HOLY SPIRIT to fill their hearts and lives.

They were employed at the same factory, and between them there worked another girl who was not a Christian and who had not yet attended the mission meetings. Neither of the Christians girls spoke a word that morning concerning spiritual things, but suddenly, without warning, the girl between them fell on her knees and cried to GOD for mercy. The power of the HOLY SPIRIT in the unspoken witness of those two girls was so great that without words this girl was convicted of sin and converted to CHRIST there and then.

Those who have read the autobiography of that great man of GOD, Charles G. Finney, will be reminded of a similar incident. How one morning, after spending the night in prayer, the HOLY SPIRIT came upon him with such tremendous power, that as he walked through a mill, although he did not speak a word, the convicting presence of the SPIRIT was so overwhelming that the operators fell down on their knees, seeking the Lord.

If the SPIRIT of GOD can work miracles such as these in a busy factory or mill, apart from preaching, what can He not accomplish in a church when the local Christians are yielded fully to Him.

During the first week of one campaign, the Christians readily responded to the challenge, "**Sanctify yourselves: for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you**" (Joshua 3:5). Many who had not spoken to one another for years made up their differences, letters of apology were written, and long-standing wrongs were put right. One tradesman came to me with his face

beaming. "As a result of your meeting last night," he said, "three different people came into my shop this morning and paid bills that had been outstanding for months."

Little wonder that in that town the Lord did a new thing.

Scores of men and women turned to Him and whole families were united in Him. Wasters were transformed into useful Christian citizens. Many whole-time workers in the vineyard to-day, both at home and abroad, look back upon that campaign as the beginning of days for them. The SPIRIT of conviction was abroad.

Miracles seemed almost commonplace. Here is one of them:

Two young men were walking home from the Sunday service. They had sat in the gallery, tittering and smirking, showing every evidence of boredom.

"I didn't think much of that, did you, Arthur?"

"Frightful bore. You won't catch me going there again." They separated for the night with a cheery greeting. It was their custom to attend a Monday night dance.

"See you to-morrow night."

"Yes, 7:30 in the market square."

The following night they met as usual, but something unusual happened. Let me explain. The dance hall was situated in the east end of the town, the church where the mission was being held was in the west, and the Market Square was midway between. After greeting each other, as if mutually agreed they turned west and walked in silence away from the dance, towards the mission. After a little while John turned on Arthur, and said, "Here, where are you taking me?"

"What d'you mean, taking you; you're taking me."

"I'm not, you came this way." They argued hotly, while steadily pursuing their way towards the church, until they were right outside.

"Look here, Arthur, are we going to the dance or not?"

"Let's toss for it: heads the mission, tails the dance, here goes."

"Heads it is; come on, it's just starting."

Again they sat in the gallery, laughing, whispering, and trying to look indifferent. At the close of the meeting, they were leaving the church, lighting their cigarettes, when a friend said:

"Aren't you coming to the after-meeting?"

"What after-meeting?"

"The one that's just been announced in the church hall."

"I don't mind," said John: "I'm not afraid of any after-meeting."

They came and sat at the back, making a great show of indifference and bravado. After a number of personal talks with many who had decided for CHRIST, I went over to where these two were sitting and said, "Can I help you?" They looked me up and down, as if I had crawled out of a piece of cheese!

"No, you cannot help us, thank you."

I sat down beside them, and, without even closing my eyes prayed silently, "O GOD, send the HOLY SPIRIT to convict these young men of sin."

We sat in silence for some considerable time. Then suddenly there was a gasp from John. He had turned pale and was trembling. In a voice of terror, he cried, "My GOD, I'm lost, I'm lost!" He sat there repeating this, shaking like a leaf, with perspiration standing out on his forehead. I tried to show him that CHRIST came to seek and save that which was lost, but his agony of soul was so great that he could not hear my voice. I started repeating the text, "**Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.**" John continued rocking himself to and fro, while I kept on repeating the promise. Suddenly he turned to me, "What did you say?" he cried, as if hearing me for the first time.

Jesus said, "**him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.**"

"Who said that?"

"The Lord JESUS said it."

I showed him the verse in John's Gospel, chapter 6, verse 37.

"Give me that Bible," he said, snatching it eagerly from my hand. He read it and re-read it. "**Him that cometh . . . no wise cast out . . .** then He won't cast me out . . .?" Then he deliberately got to his knees. His friend, who had been going through a similar experience, knelt too, and they both prayed.

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of GOD, I come."

"You go home, John, and sleep on the promise in John 6:37," I said, bidding them good night.

John's father, a Christian man who had prayed long and earnestly for his son's conversion, was somewhat surprised to be pulled out of bed in the small hours of the morning to be told, "Father, I've come to CHRIST." His surprise was turned to joy as they both dropped on their knees and

poured out their hearts in thankfulness to GOD.

John was out at the 7 a.m. prayer meeting next day. "Well, John," I said, "did you sleep on that verse?" "I did better than that," replied John, "I put the whole Bible under my pillow, and slept on it."

When Peter preached at Pentecost he was so filled with the HOLY GHOST that the presence of the Lord convicted his hearers deeply of sin. Luke tells us that "**They were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter. . . what shall we do?**" (Acts 2:37).

When Stephen addressed the Sanhedrin he accused them of having resisted the HOLY GHOST, and we read "**When they heard these things they were cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth, but he being full of the Holy Ghost . . . said, Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.**" The HOLY SPIRIT does not always convict men by producing an overwhelming sense of guilt.

Sometimes, as in my own case, He creates dissatisfaction and thirst for that which truly satisfies. Thus conviction of sin is manifest in an inescapable sense of need.

~ end of chapter 5~
