

SOME ALARMING THINGS IN TODAY'S PREACHING

Rolfe Barnard
(1904-1969)

There are two things about current Christianity (?) and present day gospel (?) preaching that alarm me quite painfully. First: all of a sudden the gospel? has gotten quite popular. One wonders where the offence has gone. Second: this gospel presents a Christ who does not change and transform lives as He touches them. I wonder if many do not share my concern here. The noble, the wise, the mighty are sponsoring the gospel? now, 'And religious America attends church on Sunday morning and enters Hell that night'. Faced as I am with the burden and privilege of proclaiming the gospel, responsible for tending well my small potato patch, I have been camping for some time in the first two chapters of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. One cannot do this without being brought up sharply against the contrast in Paul's presentation of the gospel and its results and that of our day. For this and subsequent issues of this page I wish to sit with my readers at the feet of Paul praying for a recovery of his offensive but transforming message, for I deeply believe that if such a message is not proclaimed, the world in our own generation is going to get converted and go on to Hell.

Let us graze around somewhat freely in the passage I Cor. 1:17 through chapter 2. Let us for this moment look at Paul's preaching that resulted in changed lives. We read as follows in the Authorized Version, these words: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." A very literal translation of this passage reads as follows: "As for myself, having come to you, brethren, I came not having my message demonstrated by transcending rhetorical display or philosophical subtlety. When I announced to you the testimony of God. For after weighing the issues, I did not decide to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this very One as crucified," or, "This very One having been crucified." Here is a brief commentary on Apostolic preaching. The whole book of the Acts of the Apostles is found here. How was Christ proclaimed? Note carefully that Paul began with a Living Lord and worked backwards. Today most preaching is in the exact opposite direction. Thus the Person who is now alive forever more and Who alone transforms men is lost in the journey and the gospel is well nigh exhausted before His person is proclaimed. A word from another is helpful here. The Scottish theologian, James E. Stewart, of Edinburgh comments here; "Such a declaration might appear to justify those treatments of the atoning work which focus all attention on the earthly ministry of Jesus and the cross in which it is culminated, and either omit the Resurrection altogether or else bring it in only as epilogue not essential nor integral to the drama of redemption. But this would be to seriously misunderstand the Apostle's meaning, for "knowing Christ" means here precisely what it means regularly in Paul: the primary reference is not to the Jesus of history, but to the exalted, ever present Lord. Hence the historic Phrase 'Knowing Christ and him crucified' indicates the direction of the Apostle's thought: it is moving, not as is often supposed, forward through the earthly life to the

final act on Calvary, but backward from the risen life to the sacrifice which lay behind it. Christ alive forever: this is the viewpoint at which Paul takes his stand to gaze upon the cross and to preach Christ, the one having been crucified. It is one thing to preach the cross as the last word of revelation. It is quite another thing to preach it as the road travelled once for all by one now known to be alive forever."

What this man is saying is simply this: Paul went to Corinth and confronted men with a living sovereign Lord, alive forever more, reigning at the right hand of the majesty on High, exalted on a throne forever, given all authority now and forever, having been installed there by way of a bloody tree and in virtue thereof. It is this Jesus that this generation of fact believing church people do not know experientially and thus have not been made new creations in Him.

If we would see lives changed we must recover the proclamation of a Living Lord, raised and seated on the throne of power and authority. It is this one who gives eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him, and this eternal life is to know by experience God through Jesus Christ. Multitudes of sincere people today believe in the fact of the glorious death of Christ but have never by faith laid hold of the Living Lord and been changed by His powerful touch. But Salvation is to be so touched.

We must preach, proclaim, gossip, testify, this Living Lord who got on a throne by way of a cross and who gives life to as many as He will. Let men be shut up to a living, vital union with Him or the pangs of eternity utterly separated from His bliss and blessing.

Compliments of –

Evangelist Rolfe Barnard Library
10205 Brief Rd.
Charlotte NC 28227
