

SUBSTANCE OF SERMON PREACHED BY MR. C. HEMINGTON, AT
GOWER STREET CHAPEL, LONDON, ON SUNDAY EVENING, 14th
DECEMBER, 1890

Text: "And by it he being dead yet speaketh." (Heb.xi.4).

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Hundreds of thousands of God's saints lived, died, and went to glory under the Old Testament dispensation whose lives, names, work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope were buried for the most part in obscurity after their departure out of the world. So that it could not so emphatically be said of such that, "though they be dead, yet they speak to us", as it could be said of others - others, I mean, whose lives by the grace of God were more particularly distinguished and whose names were handed down to posterity by their public works and experiences. During the Old Testament dispensation God did call thousands by His grace, brought them through all their trials, afflictions, and temptations; and took them to heaven when they died, of whom we, who are now living as God's children, know nothing at all. And we never shall know anything about them until we meet them, as I trust we shall, before the throne of God.

So, again, consider the vast number of the Lord's children who have lived, died, and gone to heaven since the apostles' days, of whom we know nothing whatever, do not even know that such saints have ever lived in the world.

Once more, consider the vast number of God's precious saints that have lived, been called by grace, died, and have gone to heaven, as belonging to our own nation, since we came by a natural birth into the world. If I think, for instance, of my own native village (Over) in Cambridgeshire, and of what has taken place since I left there at nine years of age (fifty-one years ago)* I just know this - a great many have been born into the world, called by grace, baptized in the same river in which I was baptized, worshipped God in the same chapel where I sat under the gospel in my boyhood, and they have died and gone to heaven, yet I have known nothing personally about them. It could not, then, be said of any such saints - either under the Old Testament dispensation or the New - that, being dead, yet they speak to us: I mean, of course, in the same emphatic way as it can be said of those who are mentioned in this chapter and also of others after them.

* Mr. Hemington was born at Over, Cambridgeshire, on 30th July, 1830.

We see, then, that God, during both Old and New dispensations and in every age and period of time, has seen fit to single out some and to set them apart for His service, one generation after another (Psa.cxliv.4), to be His witnesses (Isa.xliiii.10). So that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jephthah, Samson, Samuel, David, and others still speak to us.

And the Reformers speak to us. Martin Luther, that bold and intrepid defender of what we now call Protestantism, that man who defied the anti-christian hosts in his generation, who said: "By the grace of God, were there as many devils as there are tiles upon the housetops in Worms, I would go to the Diet there!" - he still speaks to us.

And our English Reformers, - Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, John Knox - still speak to us. Many dear servants of God, with whose lives and works we are better acquainted - some of them in the Church of England, such as Toplady, Newton, Berridge - still speak to us. I might also mention others who have laboured in the gospel as Nonconformists - they were certainly honoured and blessed of God in their lives. They will speak to us in their works, even though they themselves are dead.

Well, beloved friends, the important point that I wish to insist upon is that the faith of God's dear people has always been one and the same faith - right down from the days of Abel, through the patriarchal, Levitical, prophetic, and apostolic ages to the present time; and always will be the same faith until Christ shall come to fetch His ransomed people home (938): "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph.iv.5). Paul himself was a poor, lost, ruined, undone sinner; but God called him by His grace, gave him spiritual life, made him a real believer in the Son of God, and led him by His Spirit to embrace the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The faith of Abel. What a wonderful thing for our consideration! Here was a man born into the world very early indeed, not long after the creation, when there was not a scrap of revelation, so far as I am aware, beyond that one promise which the Lord God spoke in the garden immediately after the fall: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen.iii.15). I know of no other revelation besides that to guide the faith of Abel. He was inwardly and sacredly taught by the blessed Spirit, and was just as much led, in his sacrifices and offerings, to look

forward to that glorious revelation of the atonement of Christ which we have been enabled to embrace by looking backward. He was made by the Spirit of God deeply to deplore his own sinfulness, to cast away his own righteousness; and he was brought to believe in the great propitiation of the Son of God for salvation. Abel might have offered there and prayed all his life long; he might have slain all the firstlings of all the flocks in the land until he had filled all the rivers with blood by killing them; but this would never have availed to put away sin (Isa. lxxvi. 3; Heb. x. 4) if he had not been made, by the grace of God, a spiritual man and the possessor of a divine faith in the propitiation made for sin by the Son of God.

It is just as if Abel and all those Old Testament saints mentioned in this chapter had spoken to us in this way: "You, brethren, in your day look backward; we in our day looked forward. You have no ritual ceremonies that you are called upon to perform; you are not in your day commanded to bring bullocks, rams, or turtledoves and offer them as sacrifices to God. We had to do so, for it was our duty and a divinely appointed part of our religion. The object of our faith was the same as yours; we needed the same fountain of blood as you need, the same righteousness of Christ for our justification before God as is needed and looked for by you." It is one glorious, divine salvation that all God's living children in all ages of time are brought to seek and to rely upon.

The Finished work of Christ. Why, my dear friends, if Christ had not died, risen again, and finished the work which the Father gave Him to do (John x. 18; xvii. 4), then even Christ's desertion by His own friends, His persecutions by His enemies; all the bitter pains which were heaped upon Him; that fearful and awful cup which was put into His hands in the garden of Gethsemane; the mockery of His trial, the cruelty of His crucifixion, His bitter pangs, His streaming heart's blood - would not have been sufficient to save a single sinner.

Concerning this finished work of Christ, Abel still speaks to us - though he is dead, though his mortal body has for thousands of years been mingled with the dust, though his natural voice is silent in the dominions of death, yet spiritually he still speaks to us.

So with all those other saints of God, and so with numbers of blessed men whose names I could mention. It is very remarkable to me how many times good men have spoken to me, how often they do speak to me now by their works - I mean,

how often have I sat down with a book in my hands! Sometimes it would be one by Huntington, another time one by Owen, on another occasion one by Thomas Goodwin - so I might go on. And I am sure I can unwaveringly say before my God that He has many a time made those sermons of theirs to be to me just as if they had come as living men into my house and talked to me about my sorrows and my cares - penetrating into and unravelling the glorious mysteries of Christ far beyond what the Lord has given me the capacity to unfold for myself. In my favoured moments, I have plunged into the spirit of their work; the dew of heaven has come down upon me; God has been with me as well as the good men. And thus, in this way, those servants of God speak to us. They were all sinners. Oh, may we never get above that - that we are nothing in ourselves but wretched sinners! They were sinners saved by grace. Salvation by grace was their theme.

Immortal Toplady shows *that, right down from the first persecution that ever broke out in God's church, Calvinists (so-called) have made a grand and steadfast defence of these doctrines. All our forefathers who went to the stake for this opinion (salvation by grace) might have saved their flesh from the flame if they had been willing to renounce their belief and cast the truth away. But, rather than compromise with error and give up the truth of God, which was the foundation of their hope, they yielded themselves to the stake. They did so with more joy, because of their anticipation of immediate glory, than if God had left them to their own weakness to deny Him.

All these blessed saints of God, at the beginning of their profession, were brought by God's grace, like Abel, before Him condemned in their consciences as sinners. They were all led to the fountain of Christ's blood, where, by faith, they washed and were made clean. They all came as beggars, penniless, to the door of mercy, and they were made willing to receive salvation as a free gift of God. Though they never heard these actual words, yet in spirit these words were theirs:

"Black, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

Afflictions sanctified. In all their distresses of conscience and great conflicts with the enemy, in all their afflictions, in all their darkest moments - the devil stirring

* In his "Church of England vindicated from Arminianism."
1769.

up their unbelief, God hiding His face (and I make a great point of this: I would if I could bring you to this) - nothing whatever gave them a gleam of hope but the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Has the Lord brought us to see that our afflictions, since we have been making a profession of the Lord's name, are driving us closely up to the Lord Jesus Christ? My dear friends, I do feel to hope that that has been the case with me, and that all my trials have been sanctified trials. Never did I stand, in the feelings of my mind and conscience, nearer to an eternal world than I do now. This feeling is increasing in me every time I leave home - soon my engagements must terminate. I have, on this occasion, felt what a solemn thing it is that I - and you - must soon know what it is to go into an eternal world. Since I was here in October, one whom I have known for many years has passed away.* Others in Wiltshire have gone, God is taking away His people in all directions, and we are like the traveller going down the hill, threading his way, until he arrives at the base. So we are fast going down to the grave. Here are your deacons in hoary hairs, especially the senior deacon,[♠] he will not be here much longer; the minister speaking to you will not preach to you much longer; ⁺and you will not be hearers of the gospel much longer.

It is a blessed thing if trials and temptations, if all the things that take place in our lives from day to day, bring us to realise, make us deeply conscious of our hell-deserving state, and cause us to fall upon our knees before God - to cry out that there is nothing that gives us a gleam of hope but the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"My soul looks back to see
The burdens thou didst bear,
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there."

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- * Jabez Pearce died October 25th, 1890. He was a member at Gower Street for over sixty years; joined in Mr. Fowler's time.
- ♠ Mr. Robert Link died October 15th. 1898, aged 84.
- + Mr. Hemington died April 30th, 1904, aged 74.

The Means of Grace. Once more, we have every reason to believe that Abel used the means of grace. I have no doubt he made the offering when he was a young man. "It came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect" (Gen. iv. 3-5). God grant that neither you nor I may ever try to worship Him otherwise than He has expressed in His holy word. No doubt Cain thought he was doing his best, but it was contrary to divine appointment. And, with regard to Abel, it was not simply because he brought the firstling of his flock; it was just because Abel was divinely led and taught, and Cain was not; Abel had a God-wrought faith by which his mind was directed from the firstling of the flock to Christ the great sacrifice. That accounts for the difference. "And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? " Here God speaks to him on the ground of the law.

Similarly, Christ spoke to the young man in the gospel - on the ground of the law - saying to him, as it were: "Young man, hast thou kept the commandments?" And He mentioned some of them. The young man said: "All these things have I kept from my youth up." The Lord seemed to say, "You have done very well" - that is, as a man; and he went, in some respects, further than many can go in his obedience to the law. But, without dealing with every detail, we know that Christ just touched him where he could not bear the probe. "Young man, you have a good many riches; now go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor. Then, if you come back and say you have done that, I will say something more to you." But he could not bear it.

Returning to our point, the Lord said to Cain: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." Now the enmity of Cain's heart rose up, he watched his opportunity and slew his brother Abel. Why? "Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (I John iii. 12). Abel was a righteous man, and Cain was not.

The Spiritual Application. The spiritual application is this - that, though the real child of God may have a very trembling faith, may have little gift in prayer, may not have confidence to stand up in the vestry before the brethren, and

even if he does he may be short and disconnected, yet the Lord would have respect at all times. On the other hand, no matter what the gift of another might be, however fluent his expression, however great the opinion of the brethren as to his ability, yet, if he had not the grace of God in his heart, the Lord would have no respect whatever to his offering.

So it is with regard to the ministry. A minister may have little gift; he may be what you as a church would call a small preacher or minister, but if he is an honest man, if the Lord takes the truth from his mouth and conveys it into the hearts and consciences of His people; if the Lord brings forth fruit from that man's ministry to His honour and glory - that man stands in the eyes of God as an acceptable servant of the Lord through Jesus Christ. He might have the eloquence of Demosthenes, and yet, if he had not charity, he would be no better than "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" (I Cor. xiii.1).

We believe that Abel was a dutiful son and diligent in business as well as fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (Rom.xii.11) - in simplicity, not in vain words, but in practical godliness.

Therefore, to conclude, by his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; by his justification through the righteousness of the Son of God in His glorious obedience to the law; by his finding God's grace all-sufficient for him in all his trials; by his constant reliance on the infinite merit of the Lord Jesus Christ - he speaks to us. So it is with all the other servants of God mentioned in this chapter. Therefore it is an unspeakable mercy that we, through faith in that one offering, shall inherit glory (Prov.iii.35).