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LaD389

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Richmond on 20.4.56

Hymns: 361, 683, 667  
Reading: II Timothy 2  
Text: I Timothy 4 v.6.

(10: MR. NEVILLE - APPOINTMENT  
as PASTOR) \*

"If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, where unto thou hast attained."

We have assembled together this evening, I hope and trust, with a desire that the Lord may be honoured in this service and that it may be for His glory in the church here. There is no substitute for that sacred presence that He has promised to His church and which He has in His great mercy fulfilled. I hope that will be the first thing in our hearts, but we have also gathered in the interest of our beloved brother, and, by the providence of God, the appointment of him as pastor over this church. It is therefore an important occasion, and a very heavy matter to him and his beloved wife, it will also have its issues with his family, but we have cause for great thankfulness in that there is confirming evidence that the hand of the Lord has been in this leading, so that we have this evening, an answer to the prayers of some here for many years, very many years; and indeed at times it has appeared almost impossible but nothing is impossible with God.

Now I believe, speaking for all who have thus gathered together, we have a heart felt desire that the Lord will be with him in his labours here, to supply his need, set his tongue at liberty, and grant his soul's desire. Also that the pastor and church may be preserved in peace and union together. As to this settlement, it may be relevant to say that we believe it has been brought to pass in the fear of God and in tender affection. My own church and myself felt convinced that the Lord had raised up our brother for the ministry, and were united in our vote to send him forth, believing that the Lord had separated him unto this end; it was a unanimous vote, and an affectionate one, and so with the church here in inviting him to become their pastor they gave him a unanimous vote and I believe also an affectionate one. When we think of this we have to say, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" May the Lord in His great mercy confirm this step in future days and give cause for thankfulness that He has thus directed this church.

The Apostle Paul is writing here to Timothy, for whom he had a very tender affection, and he advised him upon many important matters - matters concerning the church of God, the ministry, the office of deacons, how ministers and deacons are to deport themselves under their solemn responsibilities, what is required of them, and what is requisite to the office they sustain. Moreover many things are recorded in these two epistles that are full of timely instruction to us all who have made profession of the Lord name. In the verse I have read the Apostle writes, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of

Jesus Christ". To put the brethren in remembrance of these things is to declare them, to set them before the people, to proclaim them in the discharge of the ministry, for that is what the Apostle here refers particularly to. Timothy was directed to remind the brethren or put them in remembrance, of these things, that is in the first place the things the Apostle refers to in these epistles, these things, as that "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men the Man Christ Jesus" who "gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time". Here is the doctrine, the doctrine of Christ, put the brethren in remembrance of these things, of this faithful saying, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom said he I am chief. Beside this there are many things recorded in the epistles of which Timothy was to observe for himself as well as to bring before his hearers, in relation to the office of a minister; put the brethren in remembrance of these things. Now a minister or a pastor, particularly here, your pastor, has a duty, a labour, an office to fill, a burden is laid upon him, he is to put the brethren in remembrance of these things; and these will concern himself in some particulars as the need is felt of grace and ability. The Apostle Paul in the chapter that we read exhorted Timothy to "study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth." O how many times I have looked at that word and have felt to come painfully short. I have sometimes thought of what my late dear pastor used to say with respect to preaching, he used to say, "enter the pulpit on your knees and leave it ashamed", not ashamed of the truth, of the gospel, of the doctrine, not ashamed of these things but ashamed of the poor way it has been set forth. O how many, many times have I known that shame! But here it is, here is the office, the duty, the labour. "Put them in remembrance of these things," that is the things that accompany salvation, the gospel, these precious things, these heavenly things, these eternal things, these things that make for our eternal peace and salvation, "put them in remembrance of these things." After all, it is a blessed labour, and often I believe the Lord's servants have felt their souls refreshed when they have been ministering unto the needs of their people, their hearers. These things that concern eternity, these all important things are to be brought before the people in all affection and faithfulness, with a single eye to the honour and glory of God in the church. It is a labour for which there is need of much light, grace and teaching, for often a minister may feel his own ignorance of God and of the truth, but has to preach. He will have to mourn sometimes under a painful withholding of that liberty and unction and authority that he may desire to feel, but still he has to preach the word, irrespective of how he may feel, whether or no at that particular time he feels the sweetness and blessedness of the truth he preaches. A minister, and a pastor particularly as labouring continually before one people has to come in and out to find pasture. He has his times of conflict, trial and temptation, bitter assailments of the enemy, and sometimes a great battle within, while all may seem calm without. But in order to be a good minister of Jesus Christ, he must pass through these things, know these conflicts, trials and

temptations, as well as the blessed authority and inshinings and saving power of the Gospel in his soul.

Here is the word then, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ". What is a good minister of Jesus Christ? He is in the first place one whom the Spirit of God has separated to the office. We find in the case of Jeremiah, the Lord said to His servant "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." The appointment, therefore, of a minister is in the divine decrees of God, that is, in the case of a good minister of Jesus Christ. The Lord separated Jeremiah, and we may hope and believe that the Lord has separated our brother unto this end, and that moreover, in the order of His providence, which was all appointed before the world was, he has raised him up for this people.

A good minister of Jesus Christ is one not only who is in the purposes of God separated unto this office, but, that which necessarily follows, one who is commissioned by the Holy Ghost to preach the Gospel, and moreover has a measure of grace and ability to declare the things that he feels in his own heart and which are opened to him in the exercise of the ministry. Very varied feelings indeed are those known by a minister that are not known by the hearers. But here it is. We read that the Lord Jesus Christ was anointed without measure. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound". There is a measure also of this anointing in the case of a divinely appointed minister of Jesus Christ.

But there is another point in this, and that is, a minister, a good minister of Jesus Christ, must first be partaker of the fruits. He must know in his own soul, by divine teaching, the truth he declares to others and therefore speak that which in his measure he has tasted, handled and felt of the good word of life. In this case then, as helped and enabled, one may be a good minister of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful mercy this is. And this is our desire, it is our united desire, that the Lord may, as we believe He has done, continue to make our dear friend and brother a good minister of Jesus Christ. We believe this has been so, and that his ministry has been commended to those who have heard him, and particularly to this people here.

But I desire as helped, to enlarge a little on this particular point. To be a good minister of Jesus Christ one must preach Christ, and indeed this appears to be the main point with the Apostle Paul. Writing to the Corinthians he said "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Oh what a blessed subject is this! It is the Gospel, and generally speaking,

the nearer a minister, by the grace of God, keeps to the cross of Christ, the more unction and authority there will be in his ministry. This is the main theme. It is true there are matters attending this, but here we have the one foundation upon which everything stands. To be a good minister of Jesus Christ is to preach the person of Christ. Oh, what a glory there is here! In writing to the Hebrews the Apostle Paul opens up in a very striking way the Person of Christ, His glorious Godhead, His divine and eternal personality as a Person in the Godhead from everlasting. The Lord Jesus Christ is to be preached, He is the main theme of the ministry, and a good minister of Jesus Christ will, as helped by the grace of God, lift Him up in his ministry. The Person of Christ is all-important, and it is well to realise that we cannot over-emphasise the vital nature of this doctrine. It is, as it were, the ground and foundation on which the Church stands.

But not only so; the Lord Jesus Christ is to be preached in relation to His complex Person as God and Man. He was and is eternal God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God". What a vital truth is this. But in the fulness of time, according to the purposes of the blessed Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ assumed human flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary at Bethlehem. What amazing condescension! "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich". He appeared on this earth to fulfil His Father's will. He took up our nature, sin excepted, in union with His divine Person, and a minister has to preach Him. And not only so; he has to preach the work He has accomplished, that He laid down His life, paid the ransom-price, suffered, bled and died, in order to remove the curse that lay upon His people. That He became responsible for their liabilities, cancelled the debt they owed by shedding His own most precious blood, fulfilled the Law and made it honourable. This is to be preached. This is the Gospel, which a good minister of Jesus Christ will preach. He must preach the atonement that He made for sin by bearing it away in His own body on the tree, appeasing thereby divine justice, whose sword was unsheathed and thrust, as it were, through His very soul when suffering the penalty of sin. Although He was without sin, yet He was made sin, that His people might be made the righteousness of God in Him. This is to be preached then, though we have to say "Living tongues are dumb at best". But we fail to set Him forth as we would and feel often to come painfully short in the discharge of this labour. But here it is; "if thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ".

But not only so; a risen Christ is to be preached. He died and was buried, but death could not hold Him. He rose again from the dead, appeared to His disciples, proved His identity to them

by showing them His wounded hands and feet and side, and then went up into heaven. He took our nature into heaven, and there He is, exalted at the Father's right hand, a prince and a Saviour, interceding before the throne of God, upon the ground of His all-sufficient merit, sacrifice and blood. He prevails there, He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. And this is to be preached because it is the Gospel. We have no hope whatever, in the prospect of eternity, apart from this glorious Person, and all that He has done. His name is Wonderful indeed. "Put them in remembrance of these things". My late Pastor used to say "I like to keep to the main things", by which he meant the main things of the blessed Gospel, and which relate to the glorious Person of Christ. To be a good minister of Jesus Christ is not only to set these things forth, in their place and order, as grace may be given, but to do it with a single eye to the glory of Christ in preaching. The end of the ministry is the glory of Christ in the Church. "Unto Him be glory in the Church in all ages, world without end". Put the brethren in remembrance of these things."

Moreover this office is to be discharged in all faithfulness, as grace is given, not to please human beings but with a single eye to the furtherance of the Gospel, whatever the issue may be. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, referring to himself and his fellow-labourers, said "We are a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish", by which we understand him to mean that where the ministry is discharged faithfully and in all truth, and where the Gospel is preached faithfully under the grace and unction of the Holy Spirit, the minister, in the discharge of his office, is a sweet savour unto God, whatever the issue of his preaching may be. If men will turn a deaf ear to it, if it raises their spleen, if they resent and despise it, yet the minister faithfully discharging his office is a sweet savour unto God. And then he proceeds to show the two-fold effect of the Gospel in the preaching thereof. "To the one we are the savour of death unto death and to the other the savour of life unto life, and who is sufficient for these things"? What a solemn position it is to hold! But is it not also solemn for hearers? Sad to say there appear to be cases where the Gospel has no effect whatever, as far as can be seen, which is a solemn consideration. But the Apostle in another place, writing to the Corinthians, speaks of being made an able minister of the New Testament, "not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life".

"Put them in remembrance of these things, these precious things, these heavenly things, these eternal things". Dear friends, many of you whom I know and love, in the Gospel, I have sometimes felt it sweet as you know to speak about these things, but if I could preach the Gospel I should be a happy man! Yet here it is, we have a duty, and our brother has a duty here, to put the brethren in remembrance

of these things. And we hope that by the grace of God, as we believe it has so been proved that he may be to this people a good minister of Jesus Christ. If the Lord should be pleased to grant this it will be a wonderful thing for this people, for according to the Scriptures it is right and proper for a church to have a Pastor to minister to them in the Word of God, to preach the Gospel, and to feed the people instrumentally with living bread.

Then there is another point: a good minister of Jesus Christ is to trace out that experience in a believer's soul that flows out of this doctrine, a real experience of the gospel is an application of the doctrine, and it is very, very important. Here much grace is needful rightly to divide the word of truth, to place these different vital points in their right perspective, and not to unduly dilate upon one to the neglect of another. There is experience then, and a good minister of Jesus Christ is to trace out what the Lord's people have to pass through in their souls' experiences under law and gospel, in their convictions, their temptations, their changes, their conflicts, their bondage, their liberty.

Then there is another point, that relates to the fruits of grace in the life and walk and conversation. How closely these things are linked in the Scriptures, and they have to be preached. In the first verse of the 8th. chapter of the epistle to the Romans the Apostle says "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" "Who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit". It is confirming where fruits follow the profession made in a gracious conformity to that profession of faith that is made in the Lord's name.

There is then in the duty of a good minister of Jesus Christ this preaching the blessed Trinity, the Trinity in unity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, one God, but here particularly, in relation to the salvation of souls, through the glorious Person and work of our great Redeemer. Sometimes it melts the heart even to think of these things. True experience consists in a knowledge of these things, the knowledge of these things is vitally important; life eternal is here. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine whereunto thou hast attained". The Apostle had confidence in his son Timothy, of his knowledge and experience of these things. He had been nourished up to some point in the words of faith and good doctrine, that is, established in them in his own soul's feelings, from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, they had been as living bread nourishing his soul in the blessed truth, "Nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine", in a knowledge of Christ. Good doctrine is the doctrine of Christ, good teaching and good words of faith refer to the blessed truths of the Gospel and may apply also to a profession of faith - "Let us

hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who hath promised" - also the exercise of a waiting soul in repentance, hope, faith, love and obedience, seeking to be nourished up, established in them by a growth in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. "The words of faith and of good doctrine whereunto thou hast attained." And if I may just make a personal reference, I believe we can say of our beloved friend that, by God's grace he has attained in his measure to these things and has been instructed, nourished and built up in the words of faith and of good doctrine in his own soul.

Now we must commit the matter to the Lord desiring His blessing. Speaking for my own people, we have largely to give him up, and this is not easy to us, for I can say of him that from the first he has been a great comfort to me, he has been an affectionate, loyal friend, member and deacon. I cannot give him up without some mingled inward feelings regarding this, from this point of view, but on the other hand it has been an honour to us to send him forth according to church order which is a good and desirable rule. It was a privilege and honour to do this in the providence of God, believing that the Lord had called him to preach the Gospel, he was instrumentally sent forth in the Lord's name, all wishing him God-speed. When I first began to preach a dear godly Brighton friend, very, very deaf (you could not communicate with him very much, even then) came up to see me and he wrote on a piece of paper this verse, or some part of it, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ". Oh, how I have desired that I might be this for my people! I desire it for you, and as our friends here know, I have for a number of years felt a prayerful, affectionate interest in the Cause here and when the building was opened for worship after the bombing was led to speak from this, "Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice, for the Lord will do great things." There was no evident prospect then of a settled pastor but in this particular matter has not the Lord answered prayer, has He not done great things in raising up one to be a minister of Christ to this people after so many years. Now I must leave it; the Lord grant you much of His presence, blessing, may the Gospel have free course and be glorified here, the church be preserved in peace and the ordinances observed as they have been in a way in which I believe the Lord's presence has been graciously realised. I must leave it now, desiring to commit all into the good hands of a covenant God, and in desire that His blessing may attend this important appointment.

My dear Friends, It was not originally my feeling to speak at all this evening but perhaps I might be allowed a brief word. I feel that in coming here from time to time it has been very much as our Pastor, my Pastor, said in his prayer, in fear and trembling yet with thankfulness, and I believe that is how, by the Lord's help, we have so far come. The matter of the pastorate here was, as some know, a secret exercise with me from the first time of my coming here, indeed the first time I tried to speak at all. No one knew that, but it was somewhat confirming to understand later that there was a similar feeling with one or two in the place here. The Richmond friends have from that time, with myself I believe, sought grace to lay it before the Lord, to seek His direction and intimation of His will and purpose; and that has been in some degree, I trust, made plain, and finally so as I stood here one Lord's day afternoon nearly a fortnight ago. I have ventured to accept their kind invitation in words I would now repeat, "I accept willingly, I accept thankfully, but I accept tremblingly," and I believe that is sincere. What my dear Pastor has put before us is enough to cause trembling and yet a sacred sense of the sweetness of it when the Lord grants His presence. He has made reference to my membership at Clapham but he has omitted to mention the great affection and forbearance he has shown to me through the years, which I trust I shall not forget and I hope in years yet to come we shall still walk, though to some point separate, in that union. May the Lord hear his desires for us here and now help us in closing with hymn 667.

Mr. Neville