

H. G. Appenzeller, "Sermon #109. The Power of the Cross"

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"And I, if be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:28).

Scripture Lessons: Psalms 72, John 12:23-36.

Hymns: 66, 211, 204, 248.

Where and when preached

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Introduction.

A certain architect having planned a great cathedral building was not granted the small boon of a place for his name. With great ingenuity and skill he contrived to so arrange the ceiling that the beholder after considerable attention could without any difficulty see a name no matter from what position he looked at it. So I come to this temple, and I need not look long until I see "Jesus, the name high over all." Or as in Italy "All the roads lead to Rome" so in the Bible all the prophesies and promises lead to and speak of one viz. of Christ crucified. Of him spoke "Moses and the prophets." Our first parents through disobedience fell from their pure and holy state. God was sorely displeased at this, they were driven from the Garden of Eden, but even in that dire hour the faint voice of a promised Deliverer was heard saying "The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head." Eve knew whither this pointed and when her first son was born, thinking of its fulfillment, so great was her joy that she did not distinguish between the Redeemer of the world and the first murderer. The voice is silent, the people increase in wickedness and become so corrupt that it repented God that he had made man, and with the exception of Noah and his family, the human race was swept from the earth by the flood. Then to faithful Abraham the voice whispers, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." With prophetic vision the dying Jacob says "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law giver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Genesis 49:10. Here mention is made of the drawing power of the uplifted Saviour. Then Balsam "I shall see him, but not now, I shall behold him but not nigh; there shall come a Star out of Jacob, a Scepter shall rise out of Jacob." The prophet takes up the refrain when he sees the "man of sorrows." But the scene changes, the hour is come and the prophet bursts forth in full and exalting chorus. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, the Almighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." "But thou Bethlehem Ephraim, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." The

scene is the joyful son of the angels over Bethlehem manger. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace good will to men."

Thus we see that "it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance" that even as "Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so the Son of Man was lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." And he suffered being, conscious all the time of his fate, for he knew what was in man. He knew that through persecutions, betrayal, and Gethsemane he must pass in order to be lifted up.

I look to the cross with my heart burdened with sin and there see the greatest exhibition of love ever seen; there I see "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself;" there I see the just dying for the unjust; there I see the innocent expiring for the guilty; there I see my Saviour's heart bleed until my heart is melted in love, until the weight of sin is removed and then with deepest feelings of gratitude I can look up and say:

"There for me the Saviour stands, / Shows his wounds and spreads his hands;
God is love! I know, I feel; / Jesus weeps, and loves me still."

II. The Fact that the uplifted Saviour Does draw all men unto Himself.

Here theorizing ends and we must appeal to history. We are at a sufficient distance to form something of a correct estimate of the power of the Saviour to draw all men unto himself.

To judge from a merely human point of view and only glancing at the surface, one is not favorably impressed with the Gospel's power to attract men. The very things they love to do, it forbids. Mohamed had some reason to expect success. "When the sword was to hew down the refractory, and the faithful were promised a paradise in which the wine-cup should sparkle and the cheek of beauty smile, it required no vast shrewdness to calculate that the pretensions of the false prophet were likely to be favorably received."—Dr. Melville. But the Gospel offers no such inducements. It says, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Isaiah 55:7. The carnal eye sees nothing at Calvary but a man dying between two thieves, so the "Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ through power of God and the wisdom of God."

And here let me state in passing that God ordained has the power of human speech as the instrument for the evangelization of the world. This instrument is so simple that men have not yet gotten over scoffing at it, and our conscienceless papers and not too scrupulous publishers are talking a great deal about the decline and insufficiency of the pulpit and magnifying the power of the press as supplanting that of the pulpit. But God has not so ordered, for it "pleased him by the foolishness of preaching (not foolish preaching) to save them that believe." You, in erecting this beautiful chapel, show that you believe in lifting up the Saviour by the living preacher; and one branch of the Protestant Church does the sane by erecting on an average more than one church for each day of the year.

The uplifted Saviour has been likened to a lodestone in his attracting power. But this does not express the whole truth for a lodestone attracts only a like substance with itself. But Christ crucified "draws all men" no matter where found or what their position in life is. He is like the earth for she draws all things to herself and, were it not for the resisting atmosphere the feather floating idly through the air would fall to the earth as

rapidly as a mass of lead. Observe a beautiful analogy. All men are drawn to the Cross of Christ but some because of the "carnal atmosphere round them are not drawn so much." Remove or destroy this foul atmosphere and they would rush to Jesus as their center. "All are drawn, but one is inflated with vanity, and ergo floats; another is burdened with sin and ergo falls." Melville. The attractive power is there. There is a mysterious attraction, in the cross and were men to stop and "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world," if they would but look away from the fleeting things of time at the Cross of Jesus that power, that drawing power would be exercised upon many more.

But let us appeal to history to establish the fact that Jesus if uplifted "will draw all men unto himself." After their Lord had ascended, and they had been endued with power from on high, the disciples went forth and preached everywhere. Their labors were blessed "and the Lord added daily to the Church such as should be saved." The persecuting Saul became the heroic and enthusiastic Paul who "turned the world upside down" and thereby incurring the hatred of the evil-doers everywhere. But the Gospel of Christ constrained him and none of those things thrown in his way could change him in his course. He, with many others both in his and succeeding ages, determined not to know anything among me, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And herein laid their great success. Their speech and preaching "was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and the power." A few centuries later when the Church and State were united, when men sought to flatter those in power and cared more for the upper seats in the Church and State, more for the honor of men than the praise of God, when they cared more to lift themselves than to lift up Christ, then it was that the Church like Samson., was shorn of her strength and she became weak like other organizations. She was powerless to "draw men."

In the Reformation, Luther lifted up Christ and pleading the efficacy of the atonement he declared throughout Germany, "the just shall live by faith." Since then the center of Protestant was (is) Calvary. Around it as the central sun, everything revolves. The lisping infant, and the hairy sage; the untutored laborer and the cultured scholar; the dependent poor and the abounding rich; all look reverently to Calvary and with grateful hearts confess that "Christ is all and in all." There is no Church in harvest or city; (on mountain or in valley;) on hill or vale where Christ crucified is not in the midst, to him the guilty sinner looks for pardon and the dying saint trusts him for an entrance into the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Christ does draw men. And yet we are told Protestantism is a failure. Dr. John Hall asks, "How can that be a failure when in A. D. 1500 did not exist, and in A. D. 1683 controls populations to the extent of 408,000,000 while its rivals--the Roman and Greek churches combined--control 280,000,000.

In our day Christ is drawing the masses unto himself. A writer in the N. A. Review for July writing on Church attendance says in his opening sentence. "It is a generally admitted fact that in these days only a small proportion even of intelligent and eminently respectable people, are regular attendants upon religious services on Sunday." Is this statement correct? In 1883 the total attendance in the U. S. was 91,809,521. In 1800, there was 1 Evangelical Church member for 14.50 inhabitants; in 1880 1 for 5.11 inhabitants. The increase of population during the present century is 45,000,000. The relative increase in church members is greater than the relative increase in our population which is not only unprecedented in the history of our nation,

but in the history of Christianity. Think of an increase of 3,400,000 evangelical Christians in 10 years in 1 nation alone. This means including the mortality of that time., more than 1,000 conversions for every day of the entire decade. The gain during this decade alone was more than equal to the entire progress of Christianity during the first 250 years of its existence. "All men seek for thee" may still be said when Christ is lifted up before the world.

But more than this. It is not true that only weak-minded men and women adhere to the Christian religion. The scholarship of today is Christian. Where do we look for it? In our colleges and universities and among professional men who are our College Presidents and who fill the Professors' chairs? Who are the leaders of thought who fill our shelves with the profoundest works of sacred and secular literature? Are they those who sneer at the Bible and deny the necessity of a Saviour? Do they make a mock at sin and jest at death? Nay verily, these are the men who have taken their study to Calvary, who sit at the feet of Jesus, who are looking for "wondrous things out of the law" and yet confess that the half has never yet been told.

In Yale, Connecticut in 1745 "only 4 or 5 students were members of the Church." Princeton was no better. At Bowdoin College Massachusetts in the early person of the President—the Rev. Dr. Appleton only one student was willing to avow himself a Christian. We are told that "Wild and vague expectations were everywhere entertained, especially among the young, of a new order of things in which Christianity would be laid aside as an obsolete system." Just exactly what our enemies are boasting about today. They are sure our churches will be turned into musical observatories and that Christianity is dead or at least dying.

But the facts are these: "Yale has been favored with 36 revivals resulting in, at least, 1,200 conversions. In Princeton each of the last 25 classes, with but one or two exceptions, has been visited with a gracious revival." The Harvard Advocate says, "Inquiries extending through 1,400 graduates of Harvard College, within the last 10 years show only 2 skeptics, one an Atheist and the other an Agnostic; and never before were there so many evangelical Church members among the students of that institutions." At least 50% of the students in the higher school of learning are Christians. 254 Colleges were founded since 1850, of these 213 are denominational, and only 41 non-denominational. "We never saw it or, this fashion" nay as truly be said of Christianity now as in the days of Jesus on the earth.

But Christ is drawing men and by an influence silent, subtle, and mysterious there has been a decided change for the better in Christian morals. The licentious and degraded must seek the shelter of the night for their work. Liquor men are lying awake at nights mourning over the failure of prohibition to prohibit, while total abstinence has its thousands of followers. Woman is no longer in slavery and degradation, crime we are told is decreasing, law is more respected the guilty are sure to be punished, life and property are more secure than ever of such is the effect of the progress of our holy religion.

He who is drawn by the uplifted Saviour is anxious that others be brought under his magic power. So like the crusaders., he takes the cross and goes forth. It is held up in Utah 11-where Satan's seat is"; it goes down into the mines; defies the papal power in Mexico is planted in Republics of South America; is borne across the waters into Africa; is erected before the false gods of India, China, and Japan which like Dagon fall to the earth at its presence; it is undermining Catholicism in Europe and sure death to all

forms of rationalism and skepticism. Ere many years if Christ is properly “lifted up from the earth

“Satan no longer his kingdom maintains,
Over the nations the Immanuel reigns:
Raised from debasement and freed from his thrall,
Low at his feet self-devoted they fall.”

Thus may it speedily be when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

The prophet saw in his vision of the holy waters a river issue out from under the threshold of the house eastward. This was the “river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” At first measure “the waters were to the ankles.” Next they were to the knees and then to the loins. “Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over; for the waters were risen waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.” Thus it is with this river of salvation. It started at Calvary and as it has been flowing down through the centuries it gradually deepened and widened. It is no longer the sluggish Nile of narrow bigotry but the mighty Amazon of Christian charity. It has burst through the banks of Judaism into the sterile plains of superstition and barbarism. It has changed the whole aspect of the world. The “fountains of Gospel truth are bubbling amid the deserts of Africa and the songs of Zion are circulating through the palm groves of the East.” Melville. The fir tree comes up instead of the thorn and the myrtle tree instead of the brier. Well may we sing,

“Blest river of salvation / Pursue thing onward way:
Flow thou to every nation, / Nor in thy richness stay;
Stay not till all the lowly / Triumphant reach their home;
Stay not till all the holy / Proclaim, “The Lord is come!””

III. Such are the glorious results of preaching Christ crucified.

In him alone is success, either as individuals or as a Church assured unto us. Depending on any other system we fail. In proportion as Christ is uplifted and honored, yea worshipped, in that proportion may we expect spiritual prosperity. Our work is to lift him up before man in our daily lives, in deeds of love and mercy, as much as in the sanctuary on the Lord's day. If we do this faithfully, if we do not misrepresent Him, or lift up ourselves instead, rest assured He will draw all men unto himself. Mr. Spurgeon says, “Thirty years of crowded houses leave me confident of the attractions of divine truth. Published in all its fullness, with a clear statement of its efficacy, it is still the most acceptable news that ever reached the ears of mortals. You shall not in my most despondent moments convince me that our Lord was mistaken when he said, ‘And I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.’”

Transcribed by Sung-Deuk Oak