

MAN'S BEST GIFT TO GOD

"And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." II Corinthians 8:5.

This will always be a day of historic interest in the First Baptist Church. For us it should be a day of rare enjoyment. This occasion affords us a splendid opportunity to take a retrospective view of God's dealings with our church, for the purpose of exciting our gratitude towards Him and encouraging us to trust Him for His guidance and blessing in the future.

It was on January 17, 1844 that Murray was incorporated as a town. At least ten Baptists in or near Murray were convinced that a Baptist Church was needed in their recently established town. With a view to organizing such a church, these interested persons assembled on April 18, 1846, to devise a plan for doing so. They agreed to request a council to examine their standing and to consider the propriety of organizing them into a church. On May 23, 1846, the Murray Baptist Church was organized with eleven constituent members.

In 1848 the first house of worship was erected at a cost of \$440. In 1899 it was sold to A. B. Beale and removed to the northwest corner of Fourth and Walnut Streets, and used for storage purposes. A new brick building was then erected at a cost of \$7,550. It was dedicated on January 21, 1900. In 1909 a Sunday School Annex was erected for \$5,500. This building was razed in 1924 to make room for a much larger and better building. A third house of worship was erected in 1924-26. It was finished and equipped at a cost of \$130,000 and without any indebtedness. That building was dedicated on October 25, 1936. Our educational building was erected and equipped in 1949-50 at a cost of approximately \$100,000. It was dedicated on May 25, 1952.

By 1957 it was obvious that we needed a larger building in which to worship God, so a remodeling and enlargement program was inaugurated that year and completed in 1958. Our first services were conducted therein on June 22, 1958. The total cost of this project was approximately \$200,000. The indebtedness incurred was \$130,000. That amount, plus the accrued interest of \$25,053.13, has been paid in full, thereby enabling us to dedicate the enlarged building and its improved facilities on April 10, 1966, the day designated by the church for this service.

I am grateful to God beyond expression for His marvelous grace and goodness in enabling us as a church to complete this worthy building program and pay for it. I want to commend the church for this progressive achievement, and to express sincere appreciation to everyone who has labored or contributed money to make this achievement possible. This building is a splendid tribute to this congregation and an asset to Murray. To our gracious Lord be all the praise and glory for it. He is the One Who has led us and blessed our efforts with success; therefore, He deserves the credit for it.

This house of worship is a place where the Word of God is preached, the power of God is felt, the Spirit of God is manifested, the love of God is expressed, and the salvation of God is received. It is a place to which we come for communion with God, for Christian fellowship, for Bible instruction, for spiritual inspiration, and for the discovery of the will of God for our lives.

Having dedicated this building to God, we shall make a mockery of this occasion unless we personally take a great step forward and upward in the dedication of ourselves to God. In whole-hearted dedication and loyalty to God, and in enthusiastic devotion to His service, is to be found the secret of success for any church; also, the secret of the noblest, truest, and largest growth and advancement in the lives of individual Christians. Such dedication is due to God on the ground of what He has done for us.

Paul praised the Macedonian Christians in words remarkably gracious and heartening. Seemingly they had given more than they were able to give to the fund for the relief of the Palestinian Christians who were subjected to persecution. They gave until Paul was almost ashamed to receive what they gave. They gave voluntarily, willingly, sacrificially, prayerfully, compassionately, and joyfully. The secret of their giving was in their absolute self-surrender and complete dedication. Having given themselves to the Lord, it was not hard for them to give their means. When they gave themselves their gifts followed. That is true of any Christian. When we dedicate ourselves to the Lord and His service, we also surrender our substance to Him. Many professing Christians have never learned that.

Paul made a telling discourse upon the unusual deed of the Macedonians, and paid a tribute to it in a way that made life loom larger and the possibilities of human nature seem grander as we read his tribute. But the point of his praise is what we need to see clearly today; and that is that no man can please Christ and do His will as He wants it done until the supreme thing is done toward Christ and for Him, namely, until life itself is unreservedly laid on the altar for Him. When one's life is fully laid on the altar for Christ, all else in service for Him is easy and blessed, because the greater includes the less. They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and then they gave their money. The one followed the other in natural and vital succession. If the first gift is genuine, the second gift is certain.

The Macedonian Christians are an example because they followed the right order. They did the first thing first. There is nothing like doing things in the right order. What they did, they did because they found that it was God's will for them to do so. They gave themselves to the Lord, which was the best donation they could have made. The best gift that you can make to God is yourself, for until you have given yourself to Him, He will not accept any other gift at your hands. The thing that is paramount and most vital to us is the surrender of ourselves to the Lord. Our first need is to put Christ first. He calls us to do just that. We should hear His call, act on it, live in accordance with it, and relate all of life to it.

It is just at this point that we fail most sadly as Christians. We try to give Christ little compartments in our lives, and then want Him to leave us to ourselves with the larger compartments. Those early Christians did exactly what you and I are in the world for, namely, to do Christ's will. It is not just a theory that we are responsible for doing His will, but it is the pre-eminent fact of life. When any person makes the best gift to Christ, himself, there isn't any problem about his giving his time, his money, or his service to the Lord.

"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee."