

FORWARD WITH CHRIST

"And he said, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."
Mark 16:15.

Before I deliver this anniversary sermon, I trust that you will be kind and gracious enough to allow me the privilege of a personal word. Let me thank those of you who were here, when I was pastor of the church, for the opportunity of serving in this pastorate. I shall never cease to be grateful to the members of this church for their confidence, hospitality, love, devotion, prayers, inspiration, and encouragement.

Through the intervening years I have followed your work with genuine interest. I have rejoiced with you in every blessing of God upon you and in all the progress which the church has made. I congratulate you most heartily upon all of your worthy achievements.

Through these years God has been very gracious to me. I have tried to be faithful to Him, to His Word, and to His churches. While serving in various positions of trust and responsibility, at the request of both Kentucky and Southern Baptists, I have diligently sought to do so in such a manner that no one in any of my pastorates would ever be embarrassed to say, "He is one of our former pastors."

Words are inadequate to express my sincere appreciation for the cordial and gracious invitation to address you on the memorable one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the organization of your church. I am grateful God has permitted me to be with you in this delightful service and to speak to you on this significant, historic and memorable occasion.

I certainly rejoice with you in every blessing of God upon you in all of the progress which your church has made and in all of the service it has rendered. I congratulate you most heartily upon all of your noble and worthy achievements. I trust that you will continue to go forward with Christ in an even greater way.

We now join in thankful commemoration of the founding of this church an hundred and twenty-five years ago. As we stand on the historic summit of these fruitful years, emotions too deep for words stir our hearts. Of old, when the people came to make a record of an unusual and worthy deed or important event, they said "This is the day which the Lord hath made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24) You can truly say, in the words of Samuel, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us" (I Samuel 7:12). Each of you may well utter, in an especially earnest manner, a prayer similar to that of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple. After he had given thanks and praise to God for His wonderful goodness to the people, and had ended his direct supplications to the heavenly Father, Solomon expressed the wish and hope that God would continue to be with them as a protector and a bestower of grace. He prayed, "The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us" (I Kings 8:57).

It is my candid opinion that a twofold purpose should characterize the appropriate observance of the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of your church -- appreciation and anticipation. Around these two ideas we shall center our thoughts.

I. Appreciation

This church owes her origin to God's appointment. As we think of His goodness and graciousness in guiding, blessing and using the members of this church through these one hundred and twenty-five years which have slipped by with such amazing rapidity, you can say with David, "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6). It is our pleasant privilege and delightful duty to recall the unselfish service of your godly forefathers whose intelligence, vision, dedication and zeal made possible the glorious heritage which is yours,

It is not easy for us to visualize the manner of life of the majority of the people who resided in this community a century and a quarter ago. They lived in very modest and mostly log houses, without any of the conveniences which we enjoy today. Most of their clothes were made with their own hands. A number of them carried water from springs. From fireplaces for which they cut the wood they obtained the heat with which their bodies were warmed. Light was obtained from candles or lamps. Much of their food was cooked in the open fireplaces. Most of them produced or hunted and killed the food which they consumed. Some of them may have been like Mrs. J. R. Tuggle who inherited a small farm in Knox County, which her husband called a "fruit and stock farm." A man asked him what they raised on it and he replied, "blackberries and rabbits." Your early forefathers had dirt or mud roads. They traveled by riding horses or oxen, by sled or wagon, or by walking. For them life was far from easy.

One hundred and twenty-five years ago there were men and women in this community who believed in God, in a redemption from sin wrought out by Christ upon the cross, and in their own personal participation in the benefits of that redemption through the faith awakened in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. These people were characterized by an unflinching loyalty and an unwavering devotion to the Holy Scriptures, a firm belief in the competency of the individual soul to deal directly with God by and for itself, a knowledge of the fact that salvation is by grace through faith plus nothing, a conviction that the church is a divine institution, and a belief in absolute religious liberty for all men.

Characterized by genuine Christian experience, thoroughly evangelical doctrines and self-sacrificing devotion those faithful people organized this church. Even though they did not possess riches, they bequeathed to you a legacy which money cannot buy. As we think of their vision, hardships, devotion and sacrifices, there wells up in our hearts the emotion of gratitude, immeasurable and inexpressible. They labored and you have entered into their labors. They became what they were and accomplished what they did because God was with them and blessed their efforts. They have gone to be with their Lord, Whom they loved and served, and we should be grateful for their services, and rejoice in the splendid heritage they have bequeathed to you.

As to your heritage, a fourfold obligation rests upon you:

1. You must properly appraise it.
While you enjoy it, remember what it cost those who went before you.
2. You must earnestly guard it.
3. You must enlarge it.
Each generation has some contribution to make to the heritage which is handed down to it.
4. You must share it with others.
The needs of others, the command of Christ and your own spiritual welfare impel you to share your heritage with others. The mission of your church from its establishment to this good hour has been to make Christ known to lost sinners, to introduce them to the Saviour, to baptize the saved, to teach the saved, to train them for service, to enlist them in doing the will of the Lord and to glorify the Master.

It is always easier to extol the past than to appreciate the present. The present makes big things look little and little things appear large. But the golden age is ever now. This celebration will certainly be in vain without the proper appreciation of the past. With genuine gratitude to God for His marvelous blessings upon His people who have worked with Him here during the past one hundred and twenty-five years, we now turn our attention to the present and the future.

II. Anticipation.

The most significant single fact of our age is change. Never has change been so rapid, so radical or so universal. Startling and unimaginable changes occur overnight. Bewilderment, confusion, apprehension and uncertainty are evident on every hand. No area of human living is exempt from revolution. Nobody knows what a day will bring forth.

It is encouraging to recall that in the midst of all these rapid changes there stands the unchanging Saviour — "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Throughout the centuries He has been sufficient inspiration to the demands that faith makes upon life in the heroism of its struggle, in the sacrifices of its service and in the sufficiency of its reward.

But there is nothing about Christ which would make us leave Him to the past. He is the Christ of today. Yesterday is history and today is experience. We match our Christ against everything today can be. Whatever our situation, whether bane or blessing, pain or pleasure, problem or perplexity, He is adequate for the needs of every individual, whether the need be that of a Saviour, an example or a teacher. He supplies the grace that is needed for

every experience of life. He is also the Christ of tomorrow. As time passes you will discover that the living Christ is the only inspiration to holy living, to heroic endeavor and to high achievement. He will be able to strengthen your courage, to brighten your hope, to illumine your faith and to warm your heart. Christ is the same in His work yesterday, in His grace today and in His glory tomorrow.

As you think of what Christ has done for you in your community, as well as for others elsewhere, through this church, thank Him for it, take courage for the future, and give yourself anew to His service. Firmly believing that the greatest days of this church are in the future, I challenge each of you, her members, to give the peerless Christ His rightful place or prominence, but give Him the pre-eminence. Place him above self, above family, above friends, above business and above everything else as He wants you to do. If you will only place Him first in your living, in your giving, in your working and in your hoping, you will discover that your life will be one of boundless possibilities, unspeakable joy and unending victories.

Unquestionably Christ deserves our recognition of His Lordship in all realms of life, and it is to our infinite advantage to give Him the place which He is justly entitled. What a pity that there are those who hail Christ as Saviour and attempt to ignore Him as Sovereign! These claims are presented with equal force in the Scriptures.

When Garibaldi, at great personal sacrifice and suffering, had delivered Italy from her aggressors, he was hailed by all as the saviour of the nation. No flattery was too fulsome, and no praises were too extreme for the national hero. One party suggested that the logical recognition of such service was to place him on the throne, believing that his saviourhood entitled him to sovereignty. Others, however, although glad enough to enjoy the blessings accruing from his saviourhood, disputed his right to sovereignty, and for a few days he was actually imprisoned by those whom he had saved from annihilation by the invading hordes. Garibaldi was later banished to the island of Capri, which was presented to him in recognition of his services to his country. What a recompense for self-sacrificing heroism!

Is Christ not frequently treated in a similar manner? His Saviourhood is gladly welcomed, but He Himself is banished to some back room of the heart, while self fills the throne which is His by purchased right. Our Lord wants to be trusted implicitly, loved supremely, and obeyed faithfully. Before you or I can experience the noblest, the highest, and the best in life, a dedication of self and substance to Christ is necessary.

"Forward with Christ" is God's constant injunction to all Christians. They very law of the Christian life is "Advance". The Captain of our Salvation never orders a retreat. He never brings His people into the position from which retreat is necessary, or from which advance is impossible. We may bring ourselves into such positions, but our Lord never leads us into them. Nowhere in the Bible can you find a case where retreat had to be made while God's guidance was being followed. In proportion as we surrender ourselves to Him and His guidance we can depend on being conducted forward. The Christian life should be marked by constant forward marching. Our marching orders are to go forward.

To your church Christ is saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." That is the most militant command that ever sounded in the ears of man. It has in it the ring of challenge, the fire of compassion, the vision of a world, the spirit of conquest, the call of sacrifice and the abandon of devotion. Christ has saved us in order that He may, through us, reach others. From this obligation to preach the gospel there is no evasion or exemption.

In the proclamation of the glorious gospel of Christ, there is no substitute for a heart of love and tenderness. The German philosopher and poet, Heine, one day stood in the Louvre before the statue of Venus of Milo. He was in a mood of disillusionment and despair, and said to Venus, "Ah yes! I suppose you would help me if you could, but you can't. Your lips are still and your heart is cold." Isn't that an accurate description of many Baptists today? Millions are looking wistfully to us and saying what Heine said to that marble statue, "I suppose you would help me if you could, but you can't. Your lips are still and your hearts are cold." And in this matter of witnessing to the lost, if our lips are still, it is simply because our hearts are cold.

An artist once was asked to paint a picture of a decaying church. Instead of putting on the canvas an old tottering ruin, he painted a stately edifice of modern grandeur. Back of the open portals could be seen the richly carved pulpit, the magnificent organ, and beautiful stained windows. Just inside the entrance, which was guarded on either side by a "pillar of the church" in spotless apparel and glittering jewels, was an artistic shelf containing an offering plate of goodly workmanship for the offerings of the fashionable worshipers. Directly above the offering-plate there hung a simple painted square box, bearing the words, "Collections for Foreign Missions." But right over the slot through which contributions ought to have gone, he had painted a huge cobweb. The fullest and richest joys of church membership will never come to those who have no prayerful or practical interest in taking the gospel of redeeming grace to the uttermost parts of the earth.

THE CALL

"The great world's heart is aching,
aching fiercely in the night,
And God alone can heal it, and God
alone give light;
And the men to bear that message, and
to speak the living Word,
Are you and I, my brothers, and the
millions that have heard.
Can we close our eyes to duty? Can
we fold our hands at ease,
While the gates of night stand open
to the pathway of the seas?
Can we shut up our compassions?
Can we leave our prayers unsaid,
Till the lands which sin has blasted
have been quickened from the dead?

"We grovel among trifles,
and our spirits fret and toss,
While above us burns the vision of
the Christ upon the cross;
And the blood of God is streaming
from His broken hands and side,
And the lips of God are saying, 'Tell
my brothers I have died.'
O voice of God, we hear thee above
the shocks of time.
Thine echoes roll around us, and the
message is sublime;
No power of man shall thwart us, no
stronghold shall dismay,
When God commands obedience, and
love has led the way."
--Frederick George Scott

For the glorious privilege of marching "Forward with Christ" in this church in the unknown future, thank Him with the gratitude of your heart, with the praises of your lips, and by the obedience of your life. As you go your way rejoicing in Christ Jesus, let Him smile through your face, speak with your tongue, work with your hands, walk with your feet, and love with your heart. Let Him seek sinners through you, inspire believers with you, and comfort saints through you until the day breaks and the shadows flee away. Sincerely say, in the words of Isaac Watts,

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."