

PETER'S SERMON AT PENTACOST.
Acts. 2.

There is no day in church history that Christians have looked upon with more veneration than that memorable Pentacost, when the disciples of our Lord received their baptism of fire. There are many great days in church history. The day the children of Israel crossed the Red sea, the day good king Josiah found the Book of the Law in the temple, the day Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms, were all great days in the history of God's people. But none of these approach in importance the day the followers of Christ received their high commission from Heaven to take a world for Christ. A power and an influence has gone out from that little prayer meeting out of all proportion to the numbers engaged in it. With only one hundred twenty present a power went out from that little band that shook the world.

Some have tried to minimize the importance of this spiritual baptism. Critics have said that legend and tradition have thrown a halo of glory around this little meeting out of all proportion to its real importance. They have described the spiritual feeling here as nothing more than a highly emotional type of religious enthusiasm such as we see in almost every age. If this was all this meeting represented why were the results so different? All great revivals are emotional in character. But if the results of a revival

are to be permanent something must be touched besides the surface emotions. We have seen many times in late years the superficial type of revival, when men without any ground or reason, imagined themselves the peculiar objects of God's favor. We know how quickly such religions die. Why have the results of this one lived on and grown stronger for nineteen centuries? Why has every revival in the Christian church since that day claimed this one as a pattern? Why have men for centuries looked back with such reverence and veneration to the experience of this little prayer meeting? Why has every religious movement since tried to copy this one?

I think the answer is, These men and women touched hands with God. For some reason their heart strings were in tune with a divine will and purpose. A Master hand touched the keys of their hearts that day and the music has gone on for nineteen centuries. The divine strains of that melody have found an echo in every faithful heart since.

The success of Peter's sermon on this occasion shows the dynamic power of this divine touch. Peter was an unlettered fisherman. If he possessed any of the magic power of a great speaker's art it must have been given him at the moment. It had never shown itself before. Most of the times before this he had said the wrong thing. The few fragments we possess of his bland-

ering impulsive speech show none of the strength or beauty of a Cicero or a Demosthenes.

Then how are we to account for the conversion of three thousand souls at one service? We know it is a hard thing to turn men from their sins. It is so difficult that most preachers of our day have given up trying it. Very little of the preaching of today represents a serious effort to turn men from their sins. Some of it is instructive. A large part of it, and the part that most people seem to like best, is merely entertaining. For the most part it is wholesome and innocent entertainment, and may have its uses in our daily life. But the primary purpose of preaching, to turn men from sin is almost a lost art.

Is it because the preachers no longer see the evil consequences of sin? Were the wages of sin any more deadly in Paul's day than today? No. It is because men and women do not like to hear it. The preachers, like all other men who have to eat, are playing on the instrument that people like best. Even those who would do good are discouraged. Like the prophet of old they come back, saying, "Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

One subterfuge we practice is to skip over the sins of those present and preach against the sins of some one in another city. We are like Will Rogers in the "County Chairman." When we are with the sheep men we tell them they are the hope of Wyoming, then when we are with the

cattlemen we tell them they are the hope of Wyoming. Peter did not go off to Athens or Rome to find a sin to preach about. Like Naham of old, he said, "Thou art the man."

And Peter went straight for their greatest sin. If we have the courage to preach against sin, how often we pick out the one that would be easiest to give up. Like Tom and Huck and Jim. They had been stealing watermelons and apples. They all admitted it was wrong to steal. So, for conscience sake, they decided to leave off stealing, at least one article. But they found it too hard to leave out either watermelons or apples, so they struck off strawberries. For, as Huck explained, "They were about all gone anyway" It is much easier to preach against the light and frivolous sins of the young people than to mention these deadly viper-like sins of the church members. It is much easier to preach against those open careless sins of the worldly minded than to preach against the sins of the Amen-corner-brethren.

Most of us have the weakness of the old colored minister. He was holding a revival on a plantation and the Negroes were warming up to his preaching. It looked like all the Negroes were going to be converted. The white man on the plantation thought he would offer a little friendly advice. He said, "Tom, you are having a great meeting. Your influence is pretty strong with the Negroes and I hope you will use it for good. But there is a lot of stealing going on on this plantation. I

which you would preach a good strong sermon on stealing." Tom answered, "Bess, I would like to, but subjects like dat puts a pow'ful coldness on de congregation." We avoid the subjects that put a coldness on the congregation.

Peter went for the sin that was doing the most damage. The greatest sin of the Jewish people of his day was a religious bigotry, a proud pharasaic self-righteousness. They believed themselves to be, not only the best people on earth, but the only good ones. And all their goodness rested solely in a legalistic obedience to the law of Moses. This religious bigotry was the root of the sin that crucified Christ. Peter went straight for this sin.

He couldn't have mentioned a sin that would have been any harder for these people to give up. If Peter had had any weakness of the time serving preacher he would have put on the soft pedal here. If he had been preaching his trial sermon, and thinking more of the job than he did of the souls of men, this is one subject he would not have mentioned. Had he come to these men in his own strength, with no authority but his own word, and reprov'd them so boldly, he might have been stoned. Then, how do you account for the amazing result when three thousand were cut to the heart and cried out, "What shall we do?"

There is but one answer. His heart was on fire with that strange power of a divine messenger. His hammer

was white with the heat of love and every blow struck fire. When a frail man can win three thousand souls from their most besetting sin in one service we know he has his weak arm connected with some source of divine power. It cannot be done by any purely human means.

How can we obtain this priceless gift? How can we work the works of God? There has never been a time when such preaching was more sorely needed. If we do not have a revival of genuine religion soon God only knows what will be the outcome. I shudder to think what will be the consequences if the world goes on many more years without some deep and solid religious movement. There is no use flattering ourselves. Religious thought and religious faith no longer hold the sway in men's lives they once had. When I say this I am not referring to the power of a priest-craft. I am referring to the power of the commands of God. They are not held in that fear and obedience they once were. The channels of grace in our day have almost run dry.

How can we turn back the floods of wickedness and save a world that is almost ready to plunge over the precipice? We can not blow on our hands or repeat some magical formula and do it. But one thing is certain. We cannot do it in our own strength. To attempt such a work with purely human means would be like trying to extinguish the fires of mount Vesuvius with a glass of water.

What is wrong with the church today? For one thing, we have lost our faith. We no longer expect great things of a religious faith. We are like a poor ragged dispirited army, that has been beaten so many times it expects nothing but defeat. Our faces turn white at every threat of opposition and we run at the snapping of a twig. We no longer expect to see hardened sinners brought into the church. We are well satisfied if we can keep our own children, and we know we are losing these by the thousand.

We expect but little of those who have religion. If we can save a man from the grosser outward sins we are well satisfied. We no longer expect those precious fruits of righteousness that were once the glory of Christianity, holiness, patience, gentleness, meekness, love. If Christians live respectable lives today we think they are doing well. Is this the faith of the little band that challenged the wickedness and might of the Roman Empire?