

Thanksgiving for the Privilege of Service.

I thank him that enabled me, even Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service, 1 Tim. 1: 12.

A sermon preached by Rev. Z. L. Fash at a Union Thanksgiving service in the Tabernacle church, Halifax, N. S.

Man shall not live by bread alone, said the Great Teacher. In this surging, struggling, sinful world our thanksgiving is in danger of not getting beyond what we eat and what we wear. We should devoutly thank God for these, but they are the low ground and not the heights of Christian thanksgiving. When man stops there he is little in advance of the cattle of the fields and the beasts of the forest, who wait upon God and receive their meat in due season. Bowed to earth with pressing toil, perplexed with business uncertainties, racked with pain and sorrow, the toiling, troubled, tearful child of God faintly thanks for daily food but forgets to pause beside the way to hear the angels' song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased." Thanksgiving merely for bodily wants fails to satisfy the soul. Neither can praise for the reception of spiritual food give peace unless the strength derived is used in the service of Christ. The very task is ennobled, every care lightened. Instead of looking at work as drudgery it becomes joy and culture because it is done in his name and for his sake. Our task has become sanctified, our thanksgiving heaven like. Paul gives us the keynote of gratitude. Our text rings with thanksgiving for the privilege of service, "I thank him that enabled me, even Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service."

I. First, thanksgiving for appointment to service.

It is a high honor to be selected the ambassador of a king. When an official goes from Washington to represent the President of the United States at a foreign court, he feels the dignity of his position. Paul, too, received an appointment. While it brought no earthly emoluments except danger, persecution, peril, death, he gloried in his embassy. The representative of an earthly king is most jealous for the interest of his Lord. Paul had a higher commission. He was the representative of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He was appointed in the service of the King of the universe. With such distinction what wonder he was unceasing in his endeavors. Paul knew that he was appointed for service, he was thankful for the privilege. But just as Paul was called to service, so every one of the redeemed is called. You are called, not to the same service, but to service. Devoutly should we thank God for this appointment. Highly has he honored the fallen sons of Adam.

Appointment to Christian service comes through the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ our Lord. It was Jesus who spoke to Saul in heart-searching words. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" The dazzling light of heaven quenched the rays of his earthly vision. But with blindness came prayer, and then Paul became a Christ filled apostle. Once appointed for service he let the Christ light shine. The roadside near Damascus was holy ground, because there he met Christ and received his commission. We are beginning to touch the secret of Paul's success. Martin Luther feared not to face popish error at the Diet of Worms. He was the appointed ambassador of Jesus Christ to preach justification by faith to waiting, enslaved Europe. When formality and stagnation of religious life had nearly stifled religion in England, Wesley kindled a spiritual fire which inflamed the English speaking world. So powerful was the preaching of Whitfield that he is said to have received in a single week no less than 1000 letters from those distressed in conscience under his preaching. Truly these men received appointment from the Lord Jesus. Carey, the cobbler, burning with a desire to give the gospel to the heathen, found that his fire met ice, but persistently he kept up the contact, and then began the great work of modern missions. Spurgeon keenly felt, and men felt that he had a message for sinful London and for the world. Thus it is with every true child of God. He is commissioned.

The apostles were delicate about receiving Paul as a fellow worker. But he affirms he received his commission not from men but from Christ. In due time they acknowledged the sign. The Christian receives his commission, not from the pastor, not from his dear friends, who has been solicitous for his salvation, but from Christ. There are far too many whose allegiance is to the church building, or to a certain pastor, or to sentimentality rather than to God. Once appointed by him nothing should move us. Our allegiance is not to man but to Christ.

But while we are selected by him, it is upon the ground of our faithfulness, "for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service." Daniel as a faithful child of God dared the lions' den. Far from Jerusalem his prayers went to the city every morning, heavy with the dews of heaven. God used Daniel because he was faithful. It was on these terms that Paul was sent to the Gentiles. It is always the same. The one who is faithful in little is made ruler over much. He that keepeth his own heart is greater than him who taketh a city.

The moment that a subdued sinner cries, "O, Christ save me, I cannot save myself, I give myself to thee," that moment he has expressed the desire to be a child of God. If the cry is sincere before the last word has fallen from penitent lips God has adopted him as a son. Then in his new relation the "new man" will show his love by faithful attention to every duty. A true son will not be disobedient. His one desire will be to express the depth of his love. A Russian man of war lay in the harbor of one of the American cities. On board was the Czar's son, the Grand Duke, heir to the throne. The Admiral was asked how the Grand Duke was addressed by the officers and men. "Just plain lieutenant," was the answer. "Does the Duke do the work of the ordinary lieutenant?" "Yes, only he is more faithful in every duty." The child of a king is more faithful than the ordinary officer because he knows a father's love. Adopted because of the possibilities of faithfulness, we are now sustained in the exercise of that faithfulness.

But Christ adopts us into his great family for his service, "appointing me to his service." The work is not done when we have surrendered ourselves to him. It is not completed when we have united with the church. Then we have just begun his service, and the vow we take is life long. But someone says, "The young and enthusiastic ought to be thankful indeed for this privilege of service but my days are over. The past will have to suffice. Those who have years and cares must be excused." It was Paul, the aged, in fetters who preached Christ in a Roman prison. Never did he give up one privilege of service to his Lord. Our text forms part of his song to the youthful Timothy. Listen to the melody of the dying apostle and judge whether he desired to be free from his Master's work: "I thank him that enabled me, even Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service." Still he felt young and enthusiastic. We cannot grow old in Christian desire. The service of Jesus Christ is youth preserving. Some of the most youthful and hopeful Christian workers have the snow of age for a crown, and a face radiant with joy, expressive of the purified, rejuvenated heart within. Every year makes us younger in the service of Jesus Christ. Here we find the elixir of life. Ponce de Leon sought in vain for the fountain of perpetual youth in the forests of Florida. He carried it with him and knew it not. We have discovered the secret of turning dross into the finest gold. Paul knew the secret, you know it, service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

While he expects of every follower personal service, this finds expression in service for the salvation of our fellowmen. When he has filled the heart with love, the recipient is sent to bestow that love upon others. God has thus ordained to save the world. Men are to be saved through men filled with the word and led by the Holy Spirit. A Christian cannot live to himself. He has a debt to Greek and barbarian, to wise and unwise, and he must be anxious to pay that debt. Troubled hearts are waiting for sympathy. If God has put any music into your soul it is for them. Your harp must not stand unstrung. It should be ready for the gentle touch of the triumphant strain. A German Baron stretched wires from tower to tower of his castle to make a great aeolian harp. Then he waited for the music. For a while the air was still and no sound was heard. The wires hung silent in the air. Then came gentle breezes and the harp sang softly. At length blew the stern winter winds, storm-like in their forces. Then the wires gave forth majestic music which was heard near and far. There are human lives that never in the quiet days yield the music that is in them. When the breezes of ordinary cares sweep over them they give out soft murmurings of song. But it is only when the storms of adversity blow upon them, that they give answering notes of noble victory. It takes sore trouble to bring out the best that is in them. God may have made your life just such a harp to gladden the lives of those in sorrow. Refuse them not the music.

Emerson says, "If our lives flowed with the right energy, we would shame the brook. The stream of zeal sparkles with real fire, and not with reflex rays of sun and moon." Ever singing, ever flowing, ever refreshing, joyfully it goes "to join the brimming river." The brook is a living example of service.

Did you ever try this life of grateful service for the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, begin to live in God's appointed way. Thank him for this glorious privilege.

But with throbbing heart and quivering nerve you look at your duty and say, "who is sufficient?" Certainly you are not in your own strength alone. But God says, "Fear thou not for I am with thee; be not dismayed for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. . . . For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand." That should still every doubt. The child does not fear when the father holds its hand.

II. There should be then, second, thanksgiving for sustaining strength in service.

God has not left us alone to battle in his service. The strain may be severe at times, but quickly we hear the promise, "my grace is sufficient for thee." Man is not

dependent for support upon himself, but upon God. That source is never-failing. We may draw continually and yet the supply is inexhaustible. Not only does he provide man with strength to labor, but he gives the impulse as well. The circuit is complete only when it comes from God to man and thence back again to God. As long as man breaks not the connection, he has the current directly from the eternal throne of God. With such power nothing can resist. Like Paul we should be thankful that our appointment to service means the sustaining and quickening strength of God.

Now just as the appointment came from the Lord Jesus, so it is he who sustains those called to this noble life.

It was Christ who infused strength into the Apostle to bear up under the severest trials. What wonder, then, that the Christian looks toward Christ for help in times of struggle. The rose in the darkened room turns its face towards the least ray of light. The golden daisy crowned with snowy petals, lifts its head to kiss the rising sun, and droops not till the dew of evening chills its upward gaze. Flowers turn to the sun for life. God is our life. As instinctively as the daisy turns to the great sun in the heavens, so does the earnest Christian heart look up to God for strength. He is our confidence.

In a humble cottage in the little Saxon town of Pulnitz, near Dresden, about the close of the 17th century, a Christian mother had gathered her children about her deathbed to bid them farewell. The family was of the poorest, but the dying mother astonished her children by saying: "I have laid up a great treasure for you, a very great treasure." Impatient to possess it, one of the little ones asked, "and where is it, mother?" "Seek it in the Bible, my children, and you will find it; there is not a page which I have not wet with my tears." In that household group there was a lad to whom that mother's tears and prayers were the beginning of a childhood pentecost. He passed through the deepest spiritual struggles till at last, "the joy and comfortable light of the gospel shone into his soul." We next meet him at Berlin and Halle, training under the powerful spiritual influence of Franke, and Lange, till, with whatever other university honors he gained or lost, he went forth with the noted degree of "Pietist," attached to his name with all the spiritual power for which that name stands. Bartholomew Ziegenbalg is the renowned name by which we know this young man. He was the first Protestant missionary to step on the shores of India. After 13 years of missionary activity he passed away, singing "Jesus Meine Zuversicht," "Jesus my confidence." That is strength which Christ gives in his service. It may be yours.

It is possible, however, to have strength and yet be without power. Strength must be utilized. "I thank him that enabled me," that is, empowered me; filled with spiritual power. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came down from on high; now he is among men, waiting for them to allow him to manifest himself. Paul refers to this enabling power of the Holy Spirit. That spirit made him the mighty preacher. Chrysostom, the golden mouthed orator, was carefully educated, a man of culture and devoted to his calling, but the early years of his ministry were not a success. At one time he had what seemed to be a vision. He thought he was in the pulpit. In one chancel round him were holy angels. In the midst of them and directly before him was the Lord Jesus Christ. He was to preach to the congregation assembled beyond. The vision affected him deeply. The next day when he ascended the pulpit he became intensely earnest, and from that time forward a wonderful power attended his ministry. He was endowed with power. Martin Boos was the Luther of his period. He lay for weeks upon the cold ground for penance, clothed in hair cloth and scourging himself in blood to attain a holy life. All was in vain, till the secret of justification by faith alone was discovered to him by a pious woman. Then came peace and such an anointing of the Holy Ghost, his biographer tells us, that as he began to preach "flames of fire darted from his lips and the hearts of the people kindled like straw." The prayer of Bishop Simpson was, "O God give me power; give me power." Brethren that is what we need in the pulpit and in the pew. He has promised to give it to those who ask. Let us thank God for such glorious possibilities in service.

Here we find God. By coming into closer relations with those around us in terms of kindness, politeness, truth, sacrifice and service, we find ourselves growing rich in sympathy and tenderness and love. At first we have to do with persons, but they are infinite, spiritual facts. Persons are the children of God. Serving them, denying ourselves for them, we find when the days of childhood are over that we have come into something more than human sympathy. Our hearts have come through the process to be large and wealthy in the possession of infinite love. Serving God's children we have come into spiritual commerce with the good Father of us all.

The universe is one great loom which God has produced for weaving a marvellous fabric, a perfect and holy humanity. Human beings are the threads of which this