

An Earnest Life

A. B. Simpson

"I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50).

"The love of Christ constraineth us" (II Cor. 5:14).

"I would thou wert cold or hot" (Rev. 3:15).

In the first passage we have a picture of the Saviour's earnestness; in the second, of the earnestness of His great Apostle; and in the third, of the lukewarmness and lack of earnestness on the part of His Church and people, filling His heart with indignation and disgust.

A Great Purpose

In the first of these pictures we see the secret of His earnestness, namely, a great purpose. "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?" It was fitting that He should be Himself on fire for His great object was to set the world on fire.

The fire of which He speaks was the baptism of the Holy Ghost, kindled first in His own heart, and then kindled in the Pentecostal baptism in the hearts of His people. This is God's remedy for all the ills of humanity: the fire of the Holy Ghost burning out the life of self and sin, and burning in the holy character and will of God.

But His words imply that before this baptism of fire could come upon the world, He must Himself go through a baptism of death. "But I have a baptism to be baptized with" implies in the very form of the expression that this was the necessary condition of the coming of the Heavenly fire.

Death and Resurrection

There can be no doubt as to what the Saviour means as to the baptism with which He was to be baptized. The figure means death and resurrection; and as He used it, it was the expressive picture of the death of the Cross into which He was so soon to go down, and also of the habitual death through which He was ever passing in every moment of His self-surrendered life.

This was the first great object of the Saviour's mission, to die for the doomed and sinful race, whose nature He had assumed and whose liabilities He had undertaken.

Fallen human nature was under the curse, and so its representative must die in fulfillment of that curse in all the fearful meaning which the death involved. It was not merely that He was bearing the penalty of sin, but that He was putting to death, as its representative, the sinful nature as our type and representative. Therefore the baptism with which He was baptized must also be fulfilled in us. While He died for us that we might live, He also died for us that we might die.

This is the real reason that the human hearts hates the Cross, because it carries with it the sentence of death upon humanity as well as upon the Son of Man. Therefore it is true for us as well as for Him that before we can receive the baptism of fire, or ever set the world on fire, we must be baptized with His baptism and enter into His death.

A Straitened Soul

But the Saviour's language further implies that in pursuance of this great purpose and in fulfillment of this baptism of death, He was intensely in earnest, and, as He expresses it

in the significant figure of the text, He was straitened until it be accomplished.

This word "straiten" has a very wide and varied use in the New Testament, and we may learn many lessons from some of the passages in which it is employed.

In Luke 4:38 it is used about Simon's wife's mother, who was "taken" with a great fever. The word "taken" is the same as the word "straiten" here. In the light of this striking passage, our Lord would have us understand that the earnestness of His life took possession of Him just as a consuming fever takes possession of a suffering patient. He was taken with it, absorbed in it, possessed by it, and absolutely controlled by the one consuming fire to accomplish His baptism of death and finish His mighty work. Beloved, are we thus possessed with the spirit of earnestness, and on fire with the all-absorbing purpose of a consecrated life? Is it like a fever in our blood, and a fire in our bones?

Again, in Luke 8:45 it is used of the multitude that thronged and pressed upon the Lord. This suggests the idea of the intense pressure of an earnest life, crowding us with its pressing claims of sacrifice and service, and pre-occupying all our powers—a life crowded with earnest thought and prayer and work for God.

Again, in Luke 19:43 the same Greek word is used to describe the Roman armies that should invest Jerusalem and "keep (her) in on every side." The figure is that of an investing army around the beleaguered city, shutting it in from all outside communication. And so the earnest life is shut in upon itself, separated from the busy, gay, and distracting world. It lives in its own circle of intense preoccupation, and its pent-up forces are all concentrated in the one great object of life.

Again, in Acts 7:57 the word is translated, "They ** stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord." It is the dreadful scene of Stephen's martyrdom. The fierce and angry mob, possessed by one intense thought, put their fingers in their ears, refusing to listen to anything that could turn them from their purpose, and threw themselves in murderous assault upon the man of God. And so the figure suggests to us that an earnest life will shut its ears to a thousand voices, and refuse to be distracted and turned away from its supreme and sublime ambition, to live, to die for God and his fellowmen. Like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, who put his fingers in his ears and fled from the entreaties of wife and children who sought to hold him back, crying, as he sped to the wicket gate and the entrance of the narrow way, "Life, life, eternal life!"

Again, in Acts 18:5 it is translated "pressed." "Paul was pressed in the spirit." In II Corinthians 5:14 it is translated, "The love of Christ constraineth us." The thought in the Apostle's mind seems to be that of the pent-up torrent rushing between the narrow cliffs of its straitened channel, and growing in strength and swiftness as its waters are shut in within the boiling chasm of the torrent's narrow course.

In the light of all these figures of speech, what a picture we have of a soul on fire and a life compressed into a single purpose of holy concentration. Is this the picture of our life? Are we thus taken with a holy fever of a Divine enthusiasm? Are we thus crowded with the pressing interests of a life of devotion? Are we thus shut in from the world's attractions and distractions by the one great trust committed to our care? Are we thus pressed in spirit,



Something Achieved

We are grateful to all our people for the splendid response to the Day's Pay Drive. Since June 15, 1953, until the present time we have received a grand total of \$3,829.59. These funds have made possible the exterior repair of the Administration Building and the completion of our heating plant obligations. Again we say thank you, and may the Lord bless you richly.

Something Added

For many years the possibility of adding Grade 12 has been under consideration. We are happy to announce the addition of this course to our curriculum. Grade 9 will be discontinued as we do not deem it advisable to keep such young students in residence. Mr. Douglas MacCallum will join the faculty this Fall to replace Mrs. Laurence Mullen, who has rendered efficient service as teacher and director of the school's social activities. Those interested in attending Bethany should contact the Registrar as soon as possible. The Fall term begins September 22nd.

Something Anticipated

Plans are being completed for the annual school tour. A number of the churches will be visited during the month of May, the remainder following Beulah Camp. The team will be composed of members of the Ambassador Quartet, the same personnel as last year. As an added feature we are preparing colored slides of "Life at Bethany." We are eagerly looking forward to our visit with you in the near future.

Something Announced

Graduation: The crowning days of the year.

Graduate Banquet, Saturday, May 29th, 6.30 p. m.

Annual Sermon, Sunday, May 30th, 11.00 a. m., Rev. F. A. Watson.

Baccalaureate, Sunday, May 30th, 3.00 p. m., Dr. Peter Wiseman.

Graduation, Monday, May 31st, 8.00 p. m. Dr. Peter Wiseman.

"He walks best who kneels most."

A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough today to last him for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at once to sustain life for a week to come. We must draw upon God's boundless stores of grace from day to day, as we need it.—D. L. Moody.

shutting our ears to every other voice, and listening only to the call of God and the cry of a suffering world? Is our life a torrent of Divine intensity and enthusiasm, sweeping through the narrow channel of a single-hearted consecration, and concentrating all its powers on the testimony of Jesus, the evangelization of the world, and the bringing back of the King?

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