

“READY UNTO EVERY GOOD WORK”

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on July 1, 1956 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC.

Paul wrote to Titus, “Put them. in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work. “(Titus 3:1). The last part of that expression caught my attention. “Be ready unto every good work.” I have chosen it as our text for today, for the words that the apostle Paul wrote to Titus are for all Christians of all time.

Some months ago it was my privilege to have a part in extending an invitation to a faithful Christian man of this city to serve on the Board of the Gospel Press. You recognize the name of the Gospel Press as that organization through which Christians buy space in national magazines for the advertising of Christ and his church. When we asked this man to serve on the Board of that group he began, “Well, I am already busy “ We know that to be a fact, for he is engaged in numerous other works, many of which are works for the Lord. But, then, he went on to say: “ ... but it is a good work, and I would like to help.” He has been helping, and is helping in carrying the gospel message to the millions of people who read the magazines.

When I read our text I thought of many of you in this congregation and of others whom I have known in other congregations throughout our brotherhood who are always ready unto every good work. Occasionally, when a need arises, someone comes to Nashville and calls a group of people together to hear about the need and to help supply what is lacking. He calls on those who have proved themselves ready unto every good work.

Revelation 14:13

Our study today is simply the idea of being ready unto every good work that comes along. In presenting this idea I want to use four special passages from the New Testament. We will have occasion to refer to additional passages, but these four are the key passages in this presentation. First notice Revelation 14:13: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow after them.”

While I was reading this passage last week in anticipation of this study with you, my mind went immediately to the person of Brother G. C. Brewer. I thought about those last weeks and months that Brother Brewer lived in which he looked back over his lifetime. He had lived a little beyond his three score years and ten, and he knew that he could not live very many more months. There must have been times, as he wrote his autobiography, when he lived again some of the things he had accomplished for Christ.

I have heard him tell of some of the issues that once were warmly discussed in the brotherhood. I remember his telling about how there was a time when almost no preachers were supported full-time to work with the local congregations. The first time he ever worked with a local church was at Columbia, if I remember correctly, and the brethren did not think it right in those days to take funds from the treasury to pay the preacher, in spite of some of the statements of Paul on that point. He had to go around each week to see the families that had pledged themselves to pay his support. He led in establishing the idea, originally set forth in the Bible, that the laborer is worthy of his hire. Another of the causes which he championed years ago was the idea of a congregation having a budget. Before that time whatever came in was spent and there was no special plan for the spending. In those days some thought it was sinful to have a budget toward which you aimed. Of course, in our time elders sit down and plan the work a year or more in advance and then call on us to supply the funds to meet the necessities of the budget.

Debate on Free Love

Brother Brewer could also look back to that time when judge Ben Lindsey from Denver was touring the United States, speaking in favor of free love. He advocated letting a young man and a young woman live together for a period of six weeks or so. If they found that they were compatible, then they should marry. Judge Lindsay was doing it as a means of lowering the divorce rate, but it didn't square with the Bible. Brother Brewer met Ben Lindsay in public debate in the city of Memphis. The debate was so decisive, as reported by a Jewish reporter, that after the debate Ben Lindsay no longer advocated his theories of free love publicly.

Brother Brewer could look back to books that he had written and to hundreds of articles that he had written on important issues of the day. In his declining years he edited the Voice of Freedom, a magazine dedicated to presenting the full truth about Communism and Catholicism. It must have been some comfort in his last days to be able to look back and see all of those good works. He could think of great meetings that he conducted in which many people had become Christians. He could think of great congregations that came into being while he was working with them. I know it must have been some pleasure to look back to the Broadway church in Lubbock and to know that he was with it through many of its most difficult years. Our text says, “That they may rest from their labors, for their works follow after them.”

Changing to another example, we go to J. P. Sanders, Norvel Young, J. C. Moore and others who helped them start the *20th Century Christian* in the basement of this building nearly twenty years ago. When these good men lay down their pens and cease their works on this earth, I think there will be a great deal of satisfaction in looking back and thinking of the *20th Century Christian* and its sister magazine for family devotion, *Power For Today*. These magazines reach into thirty-five to forty thousand homes every month. Families all across the continent daily sit down to read from the Bible and have family worship, whereas they did not have it before *Power For Today* came into their homes. "Their works follow after them."

Changing the illustration again, let us look at a fine father and mother who have brought children into being and have nurtured them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord until they have grown up to be faithful Christians. Not long ago I talked briefly with a man who has eight children, all of whom are now grown, and all of whom have married Christians. Rearing a fine family is a great work that will follow after that good man and his good wife. Is it not wonderful to be ready unto every good work so that when our time on earth is finished our good works follow after us?

Galatians 6:6-10

The second of the four passages that I want to use in developing our theme is from the letter that Paul wrote to the Galatians. Paul wrote, "But let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith." (Gal. 6:6-10).

I think about the many services which we can render to Christ and his church. There is a family in East Nashville, in which the mother has through the years been devoted to the Lord's cause and devoted to her children. She has brought her children to the services with phenomenal regularity. Barbara, who is eighteen now, has for seven years attended every Sunday morning Bible study without a single miss. Perfect attendance over a seven year period. Donald, who is 15, has missed one Sunday in seven years. Patsy, who is thirteen, has missed one Sunday in seven years. Harry, who is only twelve, has missed seven Sundays in seven years. Ronald, who is ten, has had perfect attendance for seven years. Then, there is James, who is only seven, and who for five of his seven years has not missed a single Sunday morning. Think about all of those mornings when one of the children did not feel well or when the mother was tired or when other things hindered. This attendance record is a great achievement.

Last year when I was in Miami in a meeting I met a lady from Denver who said, "I want you to look especially at the picture behind the baptistery. "I looked and it was beautiful. It was hand painted--by her hand. This year in Shepherd, Michigan I looked at another baptistery painting and there was her name. By it was the number 112. From Denver she had gone many places to paint pictures to make baptisteries more beautiful.

When I was in Lubbock not long ago they told me of a family who had in another way served Christ and his church. They had a "prophet's chamber." It is actually a bedroom attached to their garage, and it is available to anyone who may need it. While I was there a letter came from a man in New Mexico saying, "My wife is to have a baby soon and we are coming to Lubbock. If the 'prophet's chamber' is not already spoken for I would like to occupy it." You recognize the reference, of course, to the passage in II Kings 4:8 where we read about a woman of Shunem who knew the prophet Elisha to be a man of God. She and her husband built on the wall of their home a "prophet's chamber" and put in it a bed, a chair, a table and a lampstand. Whenever the prophet came their way he shared their hospitality. Think of the good works that we can do. Think of the consideration that we can give. I have only suggested a few of the avenues through which we may serve. Let us not be weary in well doing, but let us do good unto all men, especially they that are of the household of the faith.

Titus 1:16

The third of the passages that I wish to refer is in the book of Titus. "They profess that they know God; but by thy works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate." (Titus 1:16). Now across the page is "Be ready unto every good work." (Titus 3:1). Paul recognizes that there are some who are "to every good work reprobate," meaning "to every good work unfaithful." It is easy to be passive; it is easy to be negative.

When I think along this line I remember the big sign that goes up on many an old building, "Burke wrecks another one." As the wrecking crew comes along with its trucks and its cranes brick walls crumble into rubble. More than once I have driven down a street in Nashville to discover a gaping hole where once there had been a building. Someone had come by with a wrecking crew and power equipment and carried it away in piles of rubble. It is so easy to be destructive and critical. It is so much better to be constructive and helpful.

It is easy to sit back and see the faults and mistakes of others, but it is hard to do better than they have done. Along in the fall we will all be interested again in football and there will be some Monday morning quarterbacks at work. It is easy, in the quiet of a living

room, to recognize the mistakes that the coach made, but it is quite a different thing when you are sitting on the bench with all of the pressures and all the excitement to be sure you make just the right decisions. It is easy to be critical of those who are trying to do, but it is more important that we get in and help. Be ready unto every good work.

I remember Sam Walter Foss' famous poem, "The House By the Side of the Road," in which the second stanza goes as follows:

Let me live in a house by the side of the road
Where the race of men go by,
The men who are good and the men who are bad,
As good and as bad as I.
I would not sit in the scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban,
Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

An Affirmative Disposition

An affirmative disposition is a wonderful asset in Christianity as well as in life. The other day I was riding down the street, in a decidedly negative mood. As I rode along I found myself critical of nearly everything I saw. Then, consciously, I realized, "This won't do." I turned the dial of my mind, as it were, and for a while I played the game of trying to see something good in everything. It is a game that I have resolved to play again and again.

All of us remember the famed Will Rogers. We could learn a great deal from him, for he learned much from Christ about dealing with his fellowmen. Do you remember his famous line, "I never met a man I didn't like." Because he never met a man he didn't like, there were very, very few people on earth who didn't like Will Rogers. When the word came that summer day in 1935, that his plane had crashed off Point Barrow in the Arctic Sea, it was a sad day for everybody, because Will Rogers was a man everybody liked. Go about doing good; go about thinking good of everyone. When men fall, help them up. As you do, good men will bless you. More important, God will bless you, too.

Matthew 7:21, 24-27

Finally, the fourth of these passages which present our theme is found in the sermon on the mount. Near the end Jesus said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven ... Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock ... Everyone that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand." (Matt. 7:21, 24, 27). Here we are, a great body of people. Let us go about doing good. The emphasis is upon doing; the emphasis is upon good. There is a passage in the book of James which says, "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding your own selves." (James 1:22). Before us lies a summer that can be filled with good things if we want it so. There are three requisites: (1) Ability. God has taken care of that, for he has given it to us in abundance. (2) Willingness. That you and I must handle in our own hearts. And (3) Training. That we have already received, at least in part. Some men live most of their lives on the sidelines, watching others work for the Lord. Don't let that be you. Move out into the main stream, by becoming a Christian. As you give yourself to Christ and take his banner you will follow his great leadership in doing good. Someday when life is over he will say, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." (Matt. 25:24).