

“ALL THINGS ARE YOURS”

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on October 31, 1954 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC.

Sometimes I like to sit back and think about how wonderfully blessed we are. Do you ever do that? Do you ever sit back and let the world pass in review, while you think about your own home, your own family, the city in which you live, and your fine country? Do you sometime stop to remember all the blessings and the good things that God has sent your way? It does me a great deal of good to remember. My only regret is that I don't do it more often. Most of us spend too many of our waking hours thinking about the problems that we must face, the bills yet to be paid, or the work yet to be done. We spend too few hours thinking about the things that have already been accomplished, the encouraging achievements of the past months or years, and the positive constructive things in our lives. It is good for a man to turn around and look back to see at least some of the encouraging things, for these give him strength to move on against the things to come.

Think of the Good

If that's good for an individual, I think it is also good for a group of Christians. I feel that we, too, are sometimes too exclusively occupied with the problems that we face or the work that lies ahead of us, or the besetting sins so constantly around us. Most of our preaching is along this line. The preacher normally directs his comments against those things that need to be improved, the places where we are weak. In a sense this is regrettable because many, many times we need to think about the good that is about us, the encouraging things of our work.

It is a wonderful thing to be a Christian. First of all, it means that God, the creator of the universe and all that's in it, loves us. He is so concerned about us that he even knows the number of the hairs of our heads, as Jesus said. Then, Christ has come to the earth, lived and died, in order that we might be redeemed from our sins. Then, too, the Holy Spirit has given us a perfect guidebook to tell us how to live in order to be happy here and saved hereafter. It's grand to be a Christian.

All of this leads me to choose as our text on this particular Sunday a passage of scripture that is wonderfully encouraging. It is one of those optimistic passages which sends you on your way with a song in your heart. The passage was originally written to encourage the Corinthian Christians, who faced a number of very severe problems. It is also for us: “All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.” (I Cor. 3:21-23).

“Paul, Apollos, Cephas”

To the Corinthians Paul mentioned three persons: himself, and Apollos, the eloquent preacher from Alexandria, who had crossed the Mediterranean and was now preaching at Corinth, and Cephas, or Simon Peter, who played so great a part in the beginning of the church. He says, “All things are yours”--all three of them. Go back to the first chapter of Corinthians where near the beginning he says, “Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?” (I Cor.1:10-13)

Paul's message is “Whatever else you may do or think, remember your religion is centered on Christ.” These people had made the mistake of thinking in terms of their belonging to their leaders. If you think of it this way a man does have to choose sides. “I belong to Paul, or I belong to Peter, or I belong to Apollos.” But what they should have said was, “These men all belong to us.” They had really turned it around, for everything Paul taught was for all of them. There was nothing in the teaching or in the examples of Apollos or Cephas that was not for every Christian at Corinth. Instead of thinking of their belonging to their leaders, why not appropriate every good thing in every leader for themselves?

Speaking in the same vein we might include the names of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and Alexander Campbell. “All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, Or Cephas, or Luther, or Calvin, or Wesley, or Campbell, or whoever it may be.” From each of these men take whatever good there is but remember your life is centered in Christ. For the courageous stand of Martin Luther every one of us ought to be deeply grateful. There are some good things in all of these men, but only in the sense that they learned them from the Lord. I like the way Abraham Lincoln said it on one occasion: “Go along with the man who is right and leave him when he goes wrong.” That is what they needed to say back at Corinth. Paul said it best of all: “Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.” (I Cor. 11:1). We belong to Christ.

In a practical way our text means to us that there is a procession of great lives, back through all the centuries to Christ and even beyond. They belong to us. Abraham is ours, Joseph is ours, David is ours. The apostles and all the rest are ours. From them we learn God's truth and by them we are inspired to be better than we would otherwise be.

"World, Life, Death"

Notice the text again: "All things are yours ... the world, or life, or death." A few years ago I used to listen quite regularly on Sunday to a program called "The World Is Yours." Each week it opened up some realm of scientific achievement. It told about inventions that had been made. It told about developments in the battle to extend the span of man's life through the use of new drugs. It told of the latest accomplishments in the fields of transportation and communication. Truly, the world is ours. There never has been a time in the history of the world when people have been so challenged or so blessed as now.

Life is also ours. I listened the other evening as a newscaster told that the life expectancy of an American man is now sixty-nine years. American women can expect to live seventy-one years, so the average is seventy years. That is higher than it has ever been since the time of Christ. Think of life as a great reservoir of hours and minutes which you are given when you are born. You can spend them here or there, on this or that. You have a life, and that life is certainly a great blessing.

Death is also yours. Think of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Think of James, the first apostle to be martyred, and the others who followed later. We are told that Paul was killed by the sword, and that Peter was crucified head downward. The story of Polycarp's courageous stand for Christ is more fully told in secular history. There is also the story of Ignatius, an elder in the church at Antioch, who was arrested and taken to Rome for martyrdom. He wrote letters along the way, urging the Roman Christians not to try to secure his release. He actually desired to die for Christ. Since in our generation we are not called upon to die for Christ, let's hope that we will live for Christ.

"Things Present, Things To Come"

The next phrase of this inspiring text is: "Things present or things to come." There are so many encouraging things in our present age. The newspapers told us only last month that the largest crowd ever assembled in the history of the state of Tennessee came together for a religious service. People are now more interested in religion than for many generations past. In our best-seller book lists books with religious emphasis are taking a more and more prominent place. More Bibles have been sold in the last ten years than in the previous forty years. There are more people who call themselves Christians now than in any time in the history of the world. In many respects it is an encouraging age. It's encouraging even in little facets like the banding together of the people who publish comic books saying, "We will screen what we publish more carefully." There is now legislation on the law books that did not exist a few years ago because the moral principles of Christ are seeping down where people live. In many, many respects it is an encouraging world. People are more interested in religion.

If you want to put the matter to the test think for a moment about this congregation. Some of you can go back in your memory twenty-five to thirty years. Twenty-five years ago this was a vacant lot. A few years later a basement was put here, but it was not full of people. Then a few years went by and this superstructure was put on, but it was not filled. In fact no seats were put in the balcony for a good many years. As the years have come and gone, however, more and more people have become interested in becoming New Testament Christians, so that today the building is filled twice each Sunday morning. These are encouraging times.

I made a list the other day of a few things for which I am grateful as a Christian:

- (1) There are more members of the family of God today than ever before. We are not interested in numbers except that each new number means another person is on his way to heaven, which means that we are vitally interested in numbers. There are more than a million people who are now trying to reproduce New Testament Christianity to the best of their ability. One census reports the church to be the fastest growing religious body in America.
- (2) There is more home and foreign mission work going on now than for many centuries. More has been done in the last ten years than in the previous one hundred years. I am thinking of Germany where more than thirty German speaking congregations have come into being. In addition there are many English speaking groups for our occupation service personnel. I am thinking of Italy, Korea, and Japan where New Testament Christianity has also made great strides. Too, there are many places in between like Maine, where today there are from fifteen to twenty congregations whereas a few years ago there were only two or three.
- (3) There are more young people getting a Christian education than ever before. It thrills me to know that tomorrow morning when school time comes that in the colleges conducted by New Testament Christians more than 7,000 young people will sit down to study. Each will have a Bible class along with his secular classes.
- (4) More benevolent work is being done than ever before. Homes for old people have come into being, like the Lakeshore Home for the Aged here in Nashville. Orphans' homes are stronger and also more numerous. The latest is a new one at Valpariso, Indiana. I

have seen the picture of a fine looking \$100,000 building soon to be occupied. That means more children will be taken care of in the name of Christ.

(5) More and better church buildings are being constructed throughout the land. Although buildings are only tools, they are encouraging factors. Buildings like our brethren have built on West End and Granny White Pike will do much to hasten the growth of the church. This is progress of a material nature but it shows something deeper. It could not happen if people were not consecrated to the Lord.

(6) More extensive use of radio and television is another encouraging item.

(7) More effective use of printing is still another. I am thinking of improved Bible School literature, as well as books and magazines. I am thrilled to know that the 20th Century Christian publishes not 3,000 copies as it once did, but 35,000 every month. Some months it goes to 50,000.

(8) Still another encouraging factor is the fact that more money is being given by all of us than ever before.

(9) I genuinely believe that there is a greater breadth of vision among Christians right now than at any time in many generations. Since the war we have been aware of the needs of the world, whereas we used to be aware of the needs of our own community. This greater breadth of realization of what needs to be done is most encouraging. The Christian is one who cares. You can't be a Christian and be concerned only about yourself and your own family or your own neighborhood.

(10) Too, if I am not mistaken, there is a deepening spirituality among us that emphasizes the letter of the law, but not the letter only. There is emphasis, too, on the spirit of the law. Christ taught both the letter and the spirit. A deepening spirituality that makes us all pray more, read our Bibles more, and feel more as Christ felt is a most stimulating factor. These things are fundamental. That is what I see when I read the expression, "things present." These factors suggest the next expression, "things to come." We have a wonderful future if we center our lives on Christ.

"Ye Are Christ's, and Christ is God's"

The last expression in this great text is one which is truly inspiring. The apostle repeats the expression "All things are yours," and then he gives the reason why, "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." The future belongs to us because we belong to Christ. It is only because we have embraced those truths which Christ came to teach that we have a confident expectation of future good. If you take Christ out of our lives, our house is built on sand.

The future belongs to Christ and his disciples because he belongs to God. Exactly what does Paul mean when he says, "And Christ is God's?" Can you for a moment go back nineteen centuries to the time when Jesus was living upon the earth? Imagine that you are walking down the street. You stop a man and ask, "Who of our time will the future historians remember? To whom will the future belong?" The thoughtful person will wait a moment and then reply, "Oh, I suppose Pilate will have a page in history, after all he is the governor of the province." "Who else do you think will be remembered when the historians write?" "Perhaps Herod, he is the king. And surely Caesar will be remembered." Maybe he would go on to mention some of the more prominent merchants, or some of the more notorious bandits of the day. But he would never, never name Christ. The carpenter from Nazareth would not have a chance. Yet the future did not belong to Pilate, nor Herod, nor Caesar. In fact, most of us do not know which of the Caesars was on the throne when Christ lived. Pilate would have been completely forgotten except that he played a one-day part in the story of Jesus. The future belonged to Jesus because Jesus belonged to God. Christ lived a life perfectly in accord with the will of God, and the impact on the world will never be forgotten. When you and I belong to Christ we live our lives "with the grain" of God's truth rather than against the grain. That is what Christianity is all about. Give your life to the Lord and follow him that you may be happy here and in the life to come immortal.