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R. Liddell

The Duty of bearing Witness to the Truth.

A

S E R M O N ,

PREACHED ON

SUNDAY THE 24TH SEPTEMBER, 1843,

AT

ST. PETER'S CHAPEL, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE,

BY THE

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TO THE
Clergy, Chapel-Wardens,
AND
Congregation
OF SAINT PETER'S CHAPEL,
THIS DISCOURSE,
PREACHED BEFORE THEM, AND PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
BY THEIR FAITHFUL BROTHER IN CHRIST,
THE AUTHOR.

A

S E R M O N ,

§c.

ACTS i. 8.

YE shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the Earth.

THESE words were addressed by our Blessed Lord to His Apostles, immediately previous to His ascension into Heaven; they contain a promise and an injunction,—the promise, that they should speedily receive a Divine power, by the implantation of His Holy Spirit within them—the injunction that being so qualified for their work, they should go forth as witnesses, in His name, not only to Jerusalem and their own land, but even to the uttermost parts of the Earth. The substance of this same address is given in somewhat different and fuller language at the end of St. Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus is represented as saying to His followers, "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth—go ye therefore and teach, or make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father,*

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and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world—Amen.”

I am not now going to dwell upon the nature and perpetuity of this Spiritual Gift, which our Lord bequeathed to the Apostles, and through them, to His Church: but of this we may be sure, that coupled as the promise of it is with the direction to go forth and bear witness unto Him,—*that duty* must be both an *arduous* and a *necessary* one. It is my intention, then, on the present occasion, my Christian Brethren, to call your attention to this point—the duty of bearing witness to the Truth as it is in Jesus; and may He graciously vouchsafe to us His blessing, while we do so.

First, let us come to a clear understanding of the meaning of the term; it is a very simple one, and none of you will have any difficulty in comprehending it—To bear witness to the Truth, is to uphold or maintain it by our own personal evidence in its favour; it is in this our state of trial upon earth, to range ourselves *on the side* of the truth, because it *is* the Truth, whether it be the strong side or the weak one: whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. It has no necessary reference to our power of influencing others, to our chance of success in convincing *them* of the truth, but it is *our own adherence* to it, as a matter *of conscience towards God*,

in *word* and in *deed*, through life and unto death.

Now, let us next observe how our Lord, and great Example is Himself exhibited to us in Holy Scripture under this particular character of a Witness. First in prophecy, in the Book of Isaiah, lv. 3. and 4. where the Almighty is comforting His people by the promise of “making an everlasting Covenant with them, even the sure mercies of David;” He says, “Behold I have given *Him*,” *i. e.* Jesus the Messiah, and the Son of David after the flesh, “Behold I have given Him for a *Witness* to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people.” And we find Jesus fulfilling this prophecy in the fearless testimony which He bore, not only to all truth, but also to this special truth, of His being “King over all, God blessed for ever,” and that too in the presence of Pilate His heathen judge, and all His infuriated enemies. He denied indeed that His Kingdom was of the earthly nature which they imagined, while He maintained the reality of it. He said on a former occasion, “the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say lo! here, or lo! there, for behold the Kingdom of God is *within* you;” now He declared, “My kingdom is not of this world: if My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered unto the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto Him, art Thou a King then? Jesus answered, thou sayest that I am a King—To this

end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that *I should bear witness unto the Truth*; every one therefore that is of the Truth heareth My voice”*—In reference to this we find St. Paul, in his 1st. Epistle to Timothy,† speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, as *witnessing a good Confession* before Pontius Pilate; and twice in the Book of Revelation ‡ is He styled the *faithful and true witness*. Now what He was Himself, that he ordained His Disciples to be,—*witnesses*. § If the Comforter whom He was to send to them, even the Spirit of Truth, was to give them power, to guide them into all Truth, and *to testify of Him*;—so, He added, “ye also *shall bear witness*, because ye have been with me from the beginning;” and so again in the text, “ye shall be *witnesses* unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.”

We know, my Brethren, how faithfully these holy men fulfilled their Master’s bidding; we cannot read the Book of the Acts, nor the Apostolical Epistles, without seeing how uniformly they bore *witness to the truth as it is in Him*—No opposition deterred them; no persecution daunted them. In the words of St. Paul, when he was warned of the bonds which awaited him, at Jerusalem, || “None of these things moved

* John xviii. 36. and 37. † 1 Tim. vi. 13.

‡ Rev. i. 5. and iii. 14.

§ John xvi. 13. 14. and xv. 26. 27.

|| Acts xx. 24.

them ; neither counted they their lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus, to *testify* the Gospel of the grace of God." And of St. John we are told in the Book of Revelation,* "that he was in tribulation and banishment for the word of God and *the testimony* of Jesus." Moreover it is worthy of observation, that neither our great Example nor his inspired followers seem to have maintained the truth from the prospect of its immediate success, *for they did not immediately succeed* ; but they were rather constrained by the lofty sense of the obligation of personal faithfulness. Amidst all untoward circumstances, they did *their* duty and left the results in the hands of Omnipotence.

And as it has been with our Divine Head, and those immediately commissioned by Him, so ought it to be with all His members. May you then endeavour, my Brethren, at all times as God blesses you with the knowledge of the truth, to maintain it,—in your conversation and in your conduct to bear unswerving testimony to it.

Moreover, as honest men, we should be specially careful not to withhold our witness upon points, which, from circumstances over which we have had no controul, are overlooked, or not duly valued by the mass of society in which our lot is thrown.

Here probably will be *our cross* ; but we must

* Rev. i. 9.

not flinch from it. Yet, understand me, the course I would suggest under such circumstances is not an offensive, but an unobtrusive one; not a conceited, but an humble one; while still, it is not a *negative* line of conduct, but a *positive* one. By which word negative I mean, that we do not advance the cause of truth, or incline people's minds to receive it, if we are more given to find fault with practices that are wrong, than to recommend ways that are right; and that, not only in words, but by the more influential method of deeds and conduct—This I call the *positive* way; this is the quiet, humble, winning way;—and if we love the truth, we ought to wish to win men to it. But, still, the right way to do so, is to begin by thinking more of being *faithful ourselves*, than of *success in persuading them*. Neither must we think it desirable to be constantly arguing with others, but must *ourselves go* in the way which we know to be right; and this, I repeat, will be the most effectual way, in the long run, to carry others along with us, especially, if, while we are firm in holding the unity of the faith, we **“endeavour to do so in the bond of peace,”* and in brotherly love.

But I now come to speak to you of *the means* to which you as private individuals must look for the enlightening of your own minds, and for confirming them in the truth.

All saving truth is, we know, contained in the

* Ephesians iv. 3.

blessed word of God:—"Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth."* *It* furnishes us fully with every principle of doctrine and practice. But in these times of doubt and controversy upon religious topics, by what means, over and above the practise of private prayer for a right judgment in all things, and reverent attention to the instructions of your ordained teachers, are you to ascertain the right meaning of the Bible? How are you to form some estimate as to whether they are teaching you the *true meaning* of the Bible, which, remember, is alone *The Bible*? There is not a Sect, however extravagant its tenets, or however opposed to the real faith of Jesus the Son of God, which does not claim a support for its notions from the inspired word of God. Yet, truth is at unity with itself, and cannot really support diametrically opposite principles. How, then, in essential matters, in what we may call the great landmarks of Christianity, how are you to steer clear of error, and to hold the truth? How may you feel, that, though you are not gifted with any deep learning, you have your feet standing as it were upon a rock, from which, by God's blessing, you cannot be moved? Dear Brethren, I answer, without hesitation, by reverencing, loving, studying, trusting in our Book of Common or Public Prayer, that blessed heir-loom of every true-hearted Churchman. There you have the voice, not only of your *Pastor*, but of the *Church, your*

* John xvii. 17.

Spiritual Mother in God, and *his*,—addressing you in tones of soberness, yet, deep devotion; in fervent Love, yet Parental Authority. She ventures not to put any doctrine before you, which has not stood the test of long trial, which comes not down to us approved by the concurrent Faith of earliest and purest times—She teaches you those summaries of Gospel truth to which you have been pledged, at your baptism,—the “articles of the Christian Faith”—the Creeds; no invention of her own; no innovation upon the original deposit of Truth, as has been the case with the creed of modern Rome—(I say it in sorrow, not in acrimony)—But the Creeds which our Church and our Prayer Book teach us, are the Bulwarks of the ancient and really Catholic, i. e. Universal, Church; the Apostolic form of sound words to which Saints of old have borne their witness,—for which Martyrs have shed their blood.

But not in the Creeds alone, in *all* her Services, you will find that the Church *illustrates* and *developes* the meaning of the Bible, while the Bible *confirms* the *doctrines* of the Church—And if you study them together, my Brethren, if you use them, as they are meant, not to sharpen you in argument, but to *ripen* you in *devotion*, and *strengthen* you in *obedience*; if you try honestly to *practise*, to the utmost of your power, what your Church prescribes, backed as it is by the consistent teaching of those who are set over you in the Lord, you will hold on the even tenor of

your way, ever waxing stronger and stronger in the Faith,* “till you come in the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” While others dispute, you will be in peace; what they discuss, you will realise; while † “they are ever learning, but never coming to the knowledge of the Truth,” because they will not follow it out in deed, you will acquire larger and larger measures of *wisdom*, that gift from above; wisdom which is the *right use of Knowledge*; wisdom which is the blessed indwelling *power* to discern, appreciate, and practice what is holy, and right, and good. And your witness shall not be thrown away. Though you live not, perchance, to see any palpable fruit from it, God will bless you for your sincerity and faithfulness. If you be called to suffer, in your measure, for truth’s sake, to undergo obloquy, to be subject to misrepresentation, and charged with consequences which you abhor,—“‡ in patience possess ye your souls;” “§ in quietness, and confidence be your strength.” Those sufferings are only shadows of your Saviour’s cross, the conformity to it, which you must expect. They shall all be blessed to you, and perhaps to others also—For this is God’s way of dealing with His servants, to make them suffer for His sake, and *through their sufferings* to bring

* Ephesians iv. 13.

‡ Luke xxi. 19.

† 2 Timothy iii. 7 and 5.

§ Isaiah xxx. 15.

about *success to His own cause*. Oh! this is a humbling, chastening view of our vocation; but it is a *real one*. And, my Brethern, it *will support* a good man in his duty, when otherwise he would be driven to despair; it will keep him calm, nay cheerful, while the world frowns upon him, when enemies exult, and even timid friends draw back, and look cold and suspicious. “Fear not therefore;—for whosoever shall *confess me*, before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven.”—Matt. x. 31. 32.

But I must now proceed to shew you how I think this subject is applicable to the present occasion. The object for which our contributions are solicited, this evening, is a double one; partly to go towards liquidating the debt that still remains for the building of this Church; and partly, to defray the current expenses incidental to Divine service.

I shall speak then, First, on the *structure*, and next on the *services* of this sacred place.

It has often forcibly struck me, my Brethren, and never more forcibly than now, that the very structure and arrangement of Churches, ought to be a standing witness to divine truth. And first of all, it ought to be such as to impress one with feelings of *reverence*. Nor should we be deterred by senseless clamour and objections, from consecrating our talents, art, and money in the making them substantial, beautiful, and costly. Why are we to see accuracy of proportion,

chasteness of style, and richness of detail bestowed, at a lavish expense, upon public buildings connected solely with this world's pursuits, upon Markets, Town-Halls, Exchanges, and Theatres; and to see niggardliness, poverty, and deficiency in architectural knowledge in that which should, above all works, absorb our every faculty, and fill us with noble enthusiasm, I might almost add, unthinking liberality, — I mean the House of God, — the earthly Presence Chamber of the most High, of the King of kings, and Lord of lords? Oh! if we loved our God, and were zealous for His glory, as we ought to be, our hearts would burn with a living fire, in all that we did for Him, and for the honour of His great name. If we go to Holy Scripture, as our authority, in the matter of raising edifices, in some degree, worthy of Him whom we worship, how instructive is it to read, that in the Tabernacle, and Temple of Israel, the minutest details in their formation, were previously arranged by the Lord Himself, and specific directions about them given by Him to men inspired for the work! How beautiful, how glorious, must have been the Temple of Solomon! and how touching the lavish zeal with which all ranks poured in their free will contributions towards it!* “The work is great,” said holy David, “for the Palace is not for man, but for the Lord God; and now have I prepared, with all

* 1 Chronicles xxix. i. v. and ix. xix.

my might, for the House of my God, the gold, and the silver, and the brass, the iron, and the wood, onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones, in abundance. Moreover, because *I have set my affection* to the House of my God, I have, of my own proper goods, of gold, and silver which I have given to the House of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the Holy House; even three thousand talents of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver; who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord? And he rejoiced with great joy, and blessed the Lord, because *the people* also, offered willingly, and with perfect heart, unto the Lord." There is our example, my Brethern, of the spirit in which Churches should be raised to God. Let us not pick and choose out of our Bibles, taking what makes for us, and rejecting what witnesses against us. So long as the Bible stands unrepealed, so long does this example say to us, "go ye, and do likewise." Most heartily do I rejoice, that this Church in which we are, is a witness to the truth, in this respect, beyond any thing we have been accustomed to see in our times. No one can come here without admiration; without, I trust, an instinctive feeling of reverence; without the reflection that so much beauty and care have been bestowed on it, for no common purpose.

But next, I say, that this Church is in its structure, a witness to the truth on the score of *piety*, or *devoutness*. Not only are its arrangements according to strict Ecclesiastical rules, but to any attentive observer, it *exemplifies a spirit of Prayer*. Due accommodation has been given for the encouragement of *that posture* in which Christians should always be found, at the worship of God,—I mean *kneeling*. Surely, it has been too much the custom to suppose that public prayer is a mere form, to be *sat* through, rather than a *personal act of Solemn devotion*; and that the sermon was the chief feature in Divine service, instead of a subordinate one. Hence it is a common expression, that people are going “*to hear such an one*,” instead of being content to go to their usual Parish Church, leaving the hearing of this man or that man to the providence of God, and the care of those set over them in the Lord. But how does the Lord designate His Temples? * “My House shall be called *the House of Prayer*, for all people;” *not*, then, the house of *preaching*; but the house of *prayer*. I do not, of course, mean to detract from the great value of preaching, as a means of instruction ordained by God; but let us keep it in its proper place, *secondary*, not *pre-eminent*. Preaching *imparts knowledye*; prayer *obtains wisdom*. † “For the Priest’s lips should keep *knowledge*; and they should seek the Law *at his mouth*.” But, ‡ “If any man lack *wisdom*,

* Isai. lvi. 7.

† Malachi ii. 7.

‡ James i. 5.

let him *ask of God*, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and *it shall be given him.*”

Furthermore, in this Church, due prominence is given, in openness of position, and carefulness of execution, to those parts which are connected with the celebration of *Christ's blessed Sacraments*; to the FONT, round which you are wont to assemble, when you bring your children to Holy Baptism, and to the Sacred TABLE where you commemorate your Saviour's dying Love, and seek more intimate communion with Him, in the participation of His most blessed Body and Blood. The one is not, as has been the custom in modern times, thrust back into a corner, to be used only in a comparatively private way, contrary to the rubrics of the liturgy; the other has not been hidden by placing a high cumbrous Reading Desk and Pulpit immediately in front of it; but all has been here well and decorously arranged.

One more important principle of Christain truth, is silently, yet not less eloquently witnessed to, in the very structure and arrangement of this beautiful edifice. I mean that of *Charity*. Your Seats are open, throughout the Church; here are no invidious distinctions, no temptations to ostentation, no scope for exclusiveness. The right of Parishioners to accommodation, in their accustomed place of worship, is put upon the proper footing, the only one recognized by the Law of the Land. It is a right of *occupation* not of *exclu-*

sion;—a right supported by the local authorities (the minister and churchwardens), for individuals to be assigned their places, if they come regularly, and fill them; but not a power, (for there *never was a right*) to stay away, and yet lock up a pew door, to prevent others from entering it.

But the arrangement here is more than the mere openness of the seats; it witnesses, further, to charity in the uniformity of them. Herein is hidden a deep sympathy for the feelings of the poor and lowly, as noble as it is rare. And truly, my Brethren, if the Gospel is not only to be preached, but also to be practised to the poor, we must try, by what means we can, to show, that honest poverty is an honourable estate; we must welcome the poor man, as our Brother, and every whit our Equal, in the House of God; we must not thrust him away, from all places convenient for sight and hearing, into obscure corners; but we must make him feel at ease, and teach him self-respect, by shewing him respect ourselves; by doing to him, as we would be done by. We must give him the same means of worshipping with reverence, and hearing with comfort, which we ourselves enjoy; or else we must cease to be surprised that the poor leave the Church for the Conventicle.

Oh! if we but remembered, *Who* is represented by the poor; that it is our Lord, and God, and Saviour; that they, in their sufferings, and deprivations, in a lively manner, testify Him,

*“ Who when He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor,” and in His sojourn upon earth “ had not where to lay His head ;” if we but remembered His saying, recited to us in the lesson for this mornings service, † “ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my Brethern, ye have done it unto Me ;”—we should not *dare* in any thing, to despise them, or treat them with inconsideration. We should honour Christ’s poor, and most especially in His House of prayer. And depend upon it, this is the safest, surest way of inducing them to honour us, and to order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters in worldly station, instead of looking upon them with suspicion, envy, and dislike. Acts of sympathy and tenderness will go further with them than arguments. We shall scarcely succeed in convincing their understandings of the evil and dangers of schism, if we do not try to engage their affections and good will, and make them *feel* that brotherly kindness is an essential feature of Church unity.

The second object for which our contributions are solicited, is to defray the current expenses incidental upon the solemnization of Divine service ; and I propose, in conclusion, to say a few words upon the mode in which that service is performed in this sacred place.

Now here, my Brethern, if what I have already said be true, that with us the Church Prayer

* 2 Corinthians viii. 9.

† Matthew xxv. 40.

Book is our authorized manual of devotion, and ought to come next in our estimation to the blessed word of God ; then it follows, necessarily, that they who endeavour to follow out most closely the Rubrical directions of that Prayer Book, in spirit, as well as in letter, are doing their best to guide your devotions in the right way.

In setting before you the authority which is over *them*, as well as over *you*, they are acting more humbly than if they did what seemed good only in their own eyes. In * *magnifying* their *office*, they are taking the surest way to *abase themselves*. In these times, it is very easy for a Minister so to act, and so to preach, as to put himself at the head of a little party, and to make *himself* the centre of attraction to his congregation ; but, † “Thou Oh man of God, flee these things ; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.”—The real Churchman abjures party, for he knows that it is destructive of unity. The posture which he loves best, is not that of *standing above* his flock in the character of a teacher, though he does not shrink from that great responsibility ; but it is rather that of *kneeling with them*, as their fellow-sinner, and their brother, before the mercy seat of the most High God. And I would simply

* Compare Romans xi. 13. with 1. Corinthians xv. 9. and Ephesians iii. 8.

† 1. Timothy vi. 11.

suggest this question to you, my Christian Brethren; Have you or have you not, in this sacred Edifice, more opportunities of prayer and worship than you had before? Is not the privilege of observing the Festivals and Holy Days of the Church, brought more within your reach? Does not the uniform care, the reverence, with which Divine Worship is solemnized, in its every part, impress you more and more with the fact that *Worship* is the grand object for which you come here? Does not the use of chaunting make you feel more and more the congregational character of that service; and the harmony of sacred song engage you to try, and lift up your voices, more and more, to the praise and glory of the most High?—Answer these questions fairly to yourselves; enumerate, in your own minds, the advantages you derive from more frequent opportunities of public Prayer, that blessed *Bond of visible Christian Unity*; and then say, whether the *use made of this Church* does not as much as *its structure*, bear witness to the Truth, and lead you up to God?

And will it be replied, This structure, these observances are, in some respects, *new*? Nay, my Brethren,—*not new*. New they seem to us, because the laxity of later times has suffered them to fall into disuse; but not new in *reality*, if they are only a return to usages prescribed and enjoined in the Prayer Book to which all Churchmen profess an adherence.

As with the structure of this Church, so with its services;—the first is new in material, and new to you in arrangement; but if you could consult the style of architecture, and the forms of Churches in earlier and more devout times, you would find that there was nothing *in these respects* new here;—nothing that has not the authority of ancient models: and in the *observances* of the Church, likewise, you will find nothing but what is sanctioned by the practice of our Forefathers of the Reformed Church in England, before they were infected with the leaven of Puritanism.

Were a person of the present day to purchase a new Prayer Book, the materials of it, the paper, and the binding would certainly be new; but *the matter* contained in these would be no more new, than that in an old black letter edition, of two hundred years ago.

Apply this little illustration, my Brethren; be ready to value the great blessing you have got, by using it to the utmost. And thus, as well as by your quiet, devout, charitable conduct at all times, *bear your witness* to the sacred truths which are here set before you. And, on this occasion, I need scarcely say to you,—Be ready, as in the sight of God, to give what you can of your substance, towards defraying the expences which have been incurred for your sakes. I feel that I have already trespassed too long upon your time; but my interest in this Church, and in you the

inhabitants of my native Town, has carried me beyond my usual limits. I shall only, then, in conclusion, repeat those simple words which have been previously recited to you, as coming from the mouth of the Holy David,—“ Which of you is willing to consecrate his service, this day, unto the Lord ? ”

FINIS.





