

The Experience of One Church

A Word of Witness

By
CHAS. EDWIN BRADT
Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church
Wichita, Kansas



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THE experience of a particular church is simply of local interest as long as it remains purely local in its enterprises. But given a church that views its local parish as a place to plant the lever of a faith with which to move the world, and you have a church that is sure to come into world-wide prominence, and one in which will be interested all who are praying for the kingdom of God to come on the earth.

To tell the experience of such a church is not to boast with Nebuchadnezzar: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?" But it is to bear witness to what God hath wrought; how he can take the weak things of the world and confound the mighty, and the things that are

not and bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his sight. For, "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." (Psa. 127. 1.)

Several years ago conditions prevailed in Wichita, Kansas, which made the continued existence of any institution, however free from internal embarrassment, more or less precarious. But the First Presbyterian Church was burdened with many thousands of dollars of debt, with no assets that had any marketable value. The members, though heroic and generous, had personal obligations and responsibilities which taxed them almost beyond the limit of endurance. These conditions made the problem of a bare existence as a church organization and the maintenance of the stated services of the church a great question. The fact is, such an existence had not been financially sustained for some time previous, and in consequence a floating indebtedness, rising higher and higher each year, was threatening to submerge the church, and extinguish the lighted candlestick, or cause its removal. When, added to this state, they looked not upon a fair harbor

in which they might anchor for a time until the storm was passed, but upon the frowning cliffs and rocks of a large bonded debt of \$18,000, for which they had nothing to show, and with which they had no means, apparently, to grapple, it is not surprising that they were well-nigh discouraged.

At this time, however, the Lord appeared unto the church, as truly as he appeared unto Paul of old, and said to her what he said to Paul:

“Rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, 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 alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

In the face of these facts the doctrine was preached, that Christ had conditioned his presence and his almighty power, the Holy Spirit, upon practical willingness, on the part of his people, to obey the great commission. One cold bleak January morning the pastor crossed the threshold of the church with this conviction in his heart, prepared with a message for his discouraged people, that their salvation as a church, financially and every other way, depended upon their taking the little flour they had in the barrel and the little oil they had in the cruse and undertaking to feed first of all the starving millions of heathen souls with the bread of life. From the sacred precincts of the empty pews and galleries of the church that pastor seemed to hear whispers as he passed along the aisles of the church to the session room to meet the elders for prayer before the service. The import of those whisperings seemed to be that the pastor had gone crazy, that he had lost

his mental balance. But at every step a voice within said, "Lo I am with thee." And he knew it to be the voice of the Son of God. When he reached the session room he looked in the faces of those men of God for encouragement in the delivery of his message. As they prayed eyes were filled with tears, and as the pastor turned his face to the wall to hide their flow, through his tears he saw the Son of God, and again he heard him say, "Lo I am with thee." And the Lord did stand with him while he delivered his message that morning, and Christ revealed himself as a world Saviour to the people. Whereupon this church was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but undertook to show unto them of China, as well as at Wichita and of our own land, that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance. That very day the church took for support a missionary pastor on the foreign field, Dr. Hunter Corbett, of Chefoo, China. And that very year, too, the church closed its books without a deficit in its current expenses, and with its floating debt removed—a condition it had not enjoyed for ten years previous, according to the showing of the treasurer. The next year

the church more than doubled the amount contributed to foreign missions the previous year, and added to its pay roll a home missionary; and that year it removed its bonded debt, closing the year with money in the treasury and all financial obligations met.

The philosophy of the church's salvation at that time was this: the church became enamored with Jesus Christ and the work for which he gave his life, and in consequence she entered upon a life of faith to give even the little meal she had in the barrel and the oil in the cruse for Jesus Christ, and to go with Christ even unto the uttermost parts of the earth to help save lost men. In consequence Christ verified his promise to be with the church.

The foreign pilgrimage has cost the church during the past eight years about \$20,000, with which she has sustained and is sustaining four American foreign missionaries and about twenty-five native pastors and assistants, and much other work. The church last year contributed an average of about four dollars a member to foreign missions.

But the fact that the church went so far away from home in her interests and

with such an increase of contributions is not the only thing that has caused comment, or awakened curiosity, not to say wonder, in the minds of some people. This, to be sure, was done at a time when the church was financially embarrassed at home, and her very life and existence threatened. Hence it seemed to some suicidal and foolish. But during this very time, by reason of this same love for Jesus Christ, born of a fresh vision of the Son of God, revealed through his Word in the clear light of the great commission, the church has been enabled to do as much for home missions as for foreign, and upward of \$20,000 during the past eight years has been put upon the altar of God for this work also.

But this is not yet the most astonishing result of becoming enamored of Jesus Christ when the church perceived the heavenly vision and received the great commission. So greatly was the church wrought upon by the Spirit taking the things of Jesus and showing his attractive beauty unto her, namely, his self-denial for the lost world, that she has been enabled to contribute not only thus to further the gospel at home and

abroad, but out of what seemed her poverty she has brought so generously that during the past eight years upward of \$60,000 has been contributed by her to sustain the preaching of the gospel and establish the kingdom of God in Wichita. So that to-day the church has not only no debt, but she has and maintains in Wichita one of the largest plants doing business for God anywhere in the United States, with a pastor, assistant pastor, minister of music, two office assistants, a city missionary, a central church of 1,300 members, a Bible school, about one hundred officers and teachers, seven hundred scholars, a men's department, with a men's club and two boys' clubs, a girls' industrial department, a girls' club, two Christian Endeavor Societies, two Ladies' Societies, a Young People's Missionary Society, a Junior Missionary Society, a Children's Mission Band, a Bible training department, three prayer meetings, a printing department, issuing many thousands of pages of printed matter each year, and a missionary magazine.

Such is the effect of a true vision of Jesus Christ. We think we see Christ sometimes when we do not really see him, at least not in his real character as

a Saviour. A true vision of Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Word of God is to see him with his pierced hand outstretched, pointing to the unevangelized, starving millions for whom he died, saying with eloquent words of tenderness and love, "Go, preach the gospel to them! Give ye them to eat." This is truly for God to make his glory pass before us. To see Jesus Christ thus is to believe in him and obey him, which means to receive his Spirit and the verification of his promise to be with us with his almighty power and superabounding blessing.

