





LIBRARY  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF ILLINOIS





*Wm. M. ...*

*St Paul's Cathedral as a Witness for Christ*

---

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST PAUL

ON THE

FEAST OF THE CONVERSION OF ST PAUL

1880

BY

ROBERT GREGORY, M.A.

CANON OF ST PAUL'S

---

*PUBLISHED BY REQUEST*

---

LONDON

NATIONAL SOCIETY'S DEPOSITORY

BROAD SANCTUARY, WESTMINSTER

1880

LONDON : PRINTED BY  
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE  
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

# S E R M O N .



*For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.* ACTS xxii. 15.

ST. PAUL, in his speech to the excited crowd at Jerusalem, from whose murderous hands he had been rescued by the chief captain and a band of Roman soldiers, tells us much concerning his conversion that is not recorded in St. Luke's account of that important event. Our text supplies part of the omitted narrative. It describes part of the great office to which Saul of Tarsus was called. He was to be a witness for Christ. Whether men would hear or whether they would forbear; whether they would believe to the saving of their souls, or reject the counsel of God against themselves, his office would be equally fulfilled, his responsibility equally discharged. As to his great Master had been applied the words of Isaiah, 'Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?'<sup>1</sup> so he must expect that his witness to that Master would meet with blind eyes and hard hearts. But nevertheless, whatever the issue, his witness for Christ was certain to accomplish that thing whereunto it was appointed, whether that issue proved a savour of life unto life or of death unto death in those that heard it. This office we know that St. Paul fulfilled; he went everywhere preaching the word; his witness for Christ led multitudes to a saving knowledge of the truth; whilst still

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah liii. 1.

greater multitudes who heard that witness practically said in their hearts, 'What doth this babbler say?'

In dedicating this great Church by the name of St. Paul we can well imagine that our forefathers hoped that it would prove to this chief city of the land what St. Paul was to many countries and nations—a witness for Christ—a witness by its size and majesty to the greatness of Him whose glory and honour it was to forthtell; a witness by the character and excellency of its services to the beauty of holiness; a witness by the frequent proclamation of the gospel within and without its walls to the truths of our most holy religion; a witness by the zeal and devotion of those appointed to minister at its shrines to the love and the tender compassion of the great Master whose servants they are. And as the witness of the great apostle only partially profited the multitudes to whom it was addressed, so in like manner it was not to be expected that the witness which the Cathedral of London would make for good to the still greater multitudes who would gaze upon its fair proportions, or take part in the services within its walls, would be more successful.

And, moreover, however sanguine its founders might be, they could not hope that there would be a never-failing succession of men, endowed with the purity of heart, the singleness of purpose, the devotion of life by which the great apostle was distinguished. It was to be expected that those who occupied the seat of authority in this cathedral would share to some extent, at all events, in the foibles and frailty of the men by whom they were surrounded, in the errors or superstitions or tendencies to unbelief by which the face of the Church might be defiled in the course of ages. The Cathedral of St. Paul was to be Christ's great witness in this city; but as such witness had to be heralded by men, it has at times been feeble and imperfect, and has sounded forth the weaknesses and the errors and the unworthiness of the witnesses, as well as the glory and excellences of Him to whom they were to witness.

It is interesting for us who have entered upon the labours of those who have preceded us to take account of what those



labours have been, and of the successes and failures with which they have been attended. Upon what varied scenes of zeal and apathy, of earnestness for God and indolent self-seeking, of devotion and neglect, of joy in triumph and of sorrow in defeat; of all that tells of a nation's greatness and of that which bespoke this nation's degradation; of supreme efforts to surround the worship of God with all that could impress the senses, and of a determination not less resolute to manifest its scorn and hatred for what had once been considered holy, have the walls of the Cathedral of St. Paul looked down. Nor have the changes in the circumstances and condition of those who have dwelt around them been less varied or striking. The first Cathedral dedicated to St. Paul, we are told by the Venerable Bede, was erected on this site very shortly after the arrival of St. Augustine and his companions at the close of the sixth century, and tradition asserts that one of the estates still belonging to the cathedral was the gift of Ethelbert, King of England and Bretwalda, to whom Augustine preached, and who was the founder of the cathedral. Whether he was the donor of the manor which I have just named cannot be positively proved, though it is highly probable, but this is certain, that all the estates of any size or value which remained in possession of the cathedral until this generation were given before the Norman Conquest, as they appear in the records of the time. It is then to the piety of our Saxon forefathers, and not to any later benefactors, that this cathedral is indebted for the funds by which its fabric and services are sustained. The gifts of a later age were confiscated by that which succeeded it, and the costly offerings which were made by the devout or the superstitious in the middle ages were ruthlessly seized and squandered by an unscrupulous king and his rapacious courtiers and nobles. And as the advancing tide of prosperity has flowed in upon this great city, and the value of property within its borders increased, some of the cathedral estates have shared in the prosperity; but by such increase the wealth of the cathedral itself has not been added to, inasmuch as five-sixths of what was dedicated to the

maintenance of this cathedral and its services by our Saxon forefathers has been wisely diverted to the support of clergymen in poor and neglected districts, whilst only so much has been left to the cathedral as was absolutely required for its fitting sustentation.

Of what kind or character was the first cathedral that stood on this site we know little or nothing. It was probably what would seem to us a small and rude structure, fitted to the wants of those who built it, corresponding to the ideas of beauty and suitability entertained at the time; and possibly regarded by the men of the period when it was erected with as much reverence and affection as is felt by us towards the glorious building in which we are now assembled. What is really known about it is that 'when this province received the word of truth by the preaching of Mellitus, King Ethelbert built the Church of St. Paul in the city of London, where he and his successors should have their episcopal see;' and that London, the metropolis of the province of the East Saxons, was 'the mart of many nations resorting to it by sea and land.'<sup>1</sup> To attain to this character at the beginning of the seventh century was easier than it would now be; and it is probable that we should look upon the London that then was as little more than a village or small town. But from what the chronicler says it is clear that it was a most important matter for Christ to have a witness in the cathedral church of this mart of commerce, and that it would attract the notice, and we hope lead to the conversion of many, of the heathen people amongst whom it was placed.

For nearly five centuries this cathedral fulfilled the great end for which it was erected, but of the manner in which this was accomplished we know little. It was probably used not infrequently for state ceremonials until Edward the Confessor reared his noble church of St. Peter, Westminster. But this first St. Paul's did not long outlive the conquest of England by the Normans. In the last year of the reign of William the Conqueror it was destroyed by

<sup>1</sup> Bede's *Ecc. Hist.* book ii. c. 3.

fire. And then in that age for building magnificent churches a second cathedral quickly arose, worthy of the city whose spiritual centre it was to be, and of the site on which it was to stand. Extensive purchases were made of houses near the site of the old cathedral, so as to secure ample space for the vast and costly structure which the Bishop of London resolved to have erected, and which was largely built with money furnished by the self-sacrificing liberality and zeal of more than one Bishop of the Diocese.

This cathedral was to be the spiritual centre of more than the diocese of which it was the head. Once within the walls of the recently destroyed cathedral there had been assembled under Archbishop Lanfranc a great council of the bishops and abbots of the realm; but from this time forward for many centuries St. Paul's was to be the ordinary meeting place of the bishops and the Convocation of the southern province. To St. Paul's the two houses of the Convocation of Canterbury are still summoned, and until the middle of the reign of Henry VIII. the business of Convocation was transacted in its Chapter House. Since then Convocation is appointed to meet at St. Paul's, but after listening to a Latin sermon and electing its prolocutor, it is adjourned to Westminster, where its ordinary sittings are held. But it was in St. Paul's that many of the earlier canons affecting the doctrine and discipline of the Church were ordained by the bishops and clergy; in St. Paul's that the papal legates fulfilled the commissions entrusted to them by their masters; in St. Paul's that the clergy, led by the Bishop of Worcester (Walter de Cantilupe) in the reign of Henry III., successfully resisted the demand of the Pope to secure increased authority for his dispensations, and afterwards rejected the Pope's demand for a third of the ecclesiastical revenues of the country; in St. Paul's that in the days of the Lollards many were summoned to answer for their departure from the faith as popularly held; in St. Paul's in the early days of the Reformation that several witnesses to the reformed tenets de-

livered their testimony when called upon to answer for the errors with which they were charged; and it was, I fear, in St. Paul's that some of them were condemned to a cruel death by fire in the neighbouring open space at Smithfield. Most, if not all, the important proceedings in Convocation at the Reformation period were transacted at Westminster, whither the two Houses had recently transferred their sittings. It is a matter for regret that we no longer possess the very buildings which were connected with what was thus interesting and important in the history of our Church, and it is one of the many reasons for lamenting the ravages which the great fire of 1666 inflicted on this great city, that we have thereby been deprived of the interest which must ever attach to places where important events have happened. It is true that our cathedral stands very nearly on the site of the cathedral by which it was preceded; but it is not less true that not one stone was allowed to remain upon another of the building which then was.

But there was another way in which St. Paul's exercised an important influence over the whole Church of England. Shortly after it had been rebuilt, probably during the reign of one of the earlier of the Angevin kings, there was reared near the north-eastern corner of the choir Paul's Cross, which soon became the great pulpit of the metropolis. The exact date of the cross I am unable to give, but it must have been very near the time I have named, as we find it in full use about the end of the twelfth century. It seems strange to us, perhaps, that with the vast cathedral close at hand the people should have preferred sermons in the open air in such a climate as ours, even though they were protected by the covered galleries which were ranged along the wall of the choir. But of the sermons preached at Paul's Cross we hear more than we do of those preached within the cathedral, though some of these latter attracted a good deal of notice. Possibly the preacher might feel greater freedom when speaking in the open air than when he was surrounded by the sanctity of a consecrated building; and in days when there were no newspapers, and none of the many ways we

now possess of placing the knowledge of passing events before the people, the utterances at Paul's Cross might in some measure have been made to fill up the void. For at Paul's Cross there were other gatherings beside those for hearing sermons. It was here that in times of great political excitement popular assemblies were held; 'here that Papal Bulls were promulgated; here that excommunications were thundered out; here that sinners of high position did penance; here that heretics knelt and read their recantations, or, if obstinate, were marched off to Smithfield.'<sup>1</sup> At the approach of the Reformation the sermons at Paul's Cross became specially important. 'For the whole seven years during which the divorce of Henry VIII. from Catherine of Aragon was in agitation, the pulpit of St. Paul's and the pulpit of Paul's Cross rang more or less loudly with the arguments and invectives of the disputants on either side.'<sup>2</sup> And 'when the final determination to abrogate the Pope's supremacy had been arrived at, and the Act of Parliament passed to that effect, care was taken to secure the pulpit of Paul's Cross in favour of the Royal Supremacy.'<sup>3</sup> Throughout the reign of Henry VIII. and his three children Paul's Cross was a centre of religious excitement. Sometimes freedom was given to the advocates of the opposite principles to set forth the cause which they espoused; more frequently, and especially in the reigns of Edward VI. and Queen Mary, no voice was heard but that which upheld what the Court approved. In the former reign the destruction was urged of all that was prized in the later one. As in the reign of Edward the cathedral authorities retained with difficulty a sufficient supply of necessary articles for divine service, so from the pulpit of Paul's Cross would resound furious denunciations of whatever was rich or costly in the cathedral, in order that it might more easily become the prey of the greedy and sacrilegious hands which destroyed much that was beautiful, and ministered to edification and piety, together with what tended to superstition and error. It was reserved for later iconoclasts to destroy Paul's Cross; and during the

<sup>1</sup> Milman's *Annals of St. Paul's*, p. 164.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Great Rebellion, when it was proposed to sell St. Paul's to the Jews for a synagogue or a mart of business, and when the horses of the Parliamentary army are said to have been stabled within the cathedral and skittles to have been played in its neglected aisles, Paul's Cross was utterly demolished, and it remained for our own day to expose the exact site on which it stood.

But St. Paul's has been mixed up with the civil life of the people who dwelt beneath its shadow as well as with their religious life. It was within its walls that the Papal interdict against the whole realm of England was read in the days of King John ; there, too, that the interdict was removed upon the King shamefully humbling himself before the Papal legate, and doing homage to him as a vassal of the Pope. In the same reign there met within the cathedral the prelates, abbots, deans, priors, and barons of England, to pledge themselves to support the liberties of England as set forth in an old charter of Henry I. ; and there in the next reign the great charter was solemnly published. After the battle of Agincourt a *Te Deum* was sung in St. Paul's as an act of national thanksgiving for that great victory. During the Wars of the Roses St. Paul's was the scene of several important events. There Richard Duke of York swore fealty to Henry VI. ; there, after the first battle of St. Albans, there was a solemn procession by the leading personages of the opposing parties in token of reconciliation ; there Henry VI. and Richard Duke of York a few years later appeared, when the humbled king recognised the duke as his successor to the prejudice of his own son ; and there, too, after the second battle of St. Albans, Edward IV. was received and acknowledged as king. In St. Paul's was solemnised the marriage of Prince Arthur and Catherine of Aragon, which was to lead to so much trouble to that unhappy lady, and so much anxiety to the kingdom. It was at St. Paul's that Queen Elizabeth returned solemn thanks after the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

And then, after narrowly escaping destruction by fire in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and after being reduced to a

miserable condition of filth and squalor and decay during its sacrilegious desecration in the days of the Commonwealth, the great fire of London, in 1666, so injured the noble edifice, which had stood for nearly 600 years, that it had to be levelled to the ground, in order that this building in which we are now assembled might be reared to the honour of God, and I trust for the benefit and salvation of His people. It certainly speaks well for the noble devotion of the citizens of London to the interests of religion and the Church, that in the midst of their calamities, when their great city had been reduced to ashes, and when there could have been few amongst them who had not suffered grievously in fortune by that catastrophe, they should have resolved to build a new cathedral which should rival in beauty and in size that which had perished, and that they should have so cheerfully consented to tax themselves in order to furnish a considerable portion of the very large funds which were needed for the purpose.

During the two centuries which the present cathedral has existed, it has been connected with the spiritual and civil life of this great metropolis, as its predecessors were. It has at some times witnessed earnestly for the great Master to whose glory it was erected, and at others to the apathy of those who professed to be His ministers; at some times it has been instrumental, as was the great apostle after whom it is named, in bringing those living within the range of its influence to a truer and better knowledge of the blessings of religion, whilst at others it may have helped to make them satisfied with mere external profession. It was when Dr. Sancroft was dean that its erection was resolved upon and commenced, and he was afterwards, when Archbishop of Canterbury, a staunch witness for the principles which he believed, by first boldly resisting the attempts of the king to weaken the people's hold of the religion they professed, and then by preferring to lose the high position he occupied to trifling with the allegiance to which he was sworn. Since his day men who in different ways have left their mark upon the history of the Church have filled the position of dean—Stillington, Tillotson, Sherlock,

Butler, Van Mildert, Coplestone, Milman, and Mansel—and no doubt under their direction the cathedral assumed its truer position; whilst on matters directly connected with the national life, we find that in St. Paul's Queen Anne frequently appeared to render thanks for the brilliant victories won by British valour under the Duke of Marlborough; in St. Paul's George III. returned thanks for his recovery from the grievous malady which for a time rendered him unequal to discharge the duties of his kingly office; and in our own day it was to St. Paul's that her gracious Majesty came to return thanks for the wonderful restoration to health of the Prince of Wales.

And so, fitfully and imperfectly it may be, but nevertheless on the whole effectively and successfully, has the Cathedral of St. Paul fulfilled the purpose for which it was erected—of witnessing for Christ. For centuries there dwelt almost beneath its shadow the nobles and princes of the land; not only did the great and wealthy men connected with the mercantile interests of the city live within its walls, but also numbers of those who now seek for a residence at the other end of the metropolis. The Cathedral of St. Paul has seen London grow from a comparatively small town, inhabited by a few thousand people, to a vast city with a population more than twice as numerous as that which was to be found in the whole of England when it was first built. And as its surroundings have thus changed, so to some extent has the character of the work which it is called upon to fulfil. For a long time it would regularly gather within its walls for worship many of the more illustrious and noble and wealthy who lived near to it, whilst it exercised great influence upon the *then* resident clergy of the city, by its position and the jurisdiction with which it was endowed. As the exigencies of trade have demanded with ever increasing power that its dwelling-houses should be converted into marts of business, and that its citizens should find residences in the suburbs, it has necessarily followed that those who live by night as well as by day within easy reach of the cathedral have become much fewer in number; but



I trust that it speaks well for the piety and devotion of the people of our own day, that so many are still found who delight to take part in the services of St. Paul's, both on Sundays and week days, and I more than question whether at any time during its long and eventful history so many worshippers were to be found within this house of God as are now to be seen there. And whilst its sanctuary is thus frequented by such multitudes of our own people, there never can have been a time when such hosts of strangers from all parts of the world were being continually assembled in this great city, and to whom St. Paul's must be a witness, either for the great Master and for the truths professed by His Church in this land, or to the apathy and want of fervour of those charged with its administration. For in our own day the claims of the Church of England to the reverence and love of the nation have been much discussed both at home and abroad, and whither shall men so naturally come to satisfy themselves concerning the truth of these claims as to this principal church of the principal city of the empire? Some years since, when I was on the Continent, I was much struck with the interest manifested on all hands about what was being done at St. Paul's, and more than one foreigner assured me that whenever he came to London he visited St. Paul's, that from it he might learn what was now the standard of worship in the Church of England.

Of this great cathedral, therefore, it may be emphatically said that it is as a city set upon a hill. It cannot be hid. For good or for evil its influence must be widely extended. As to England has been committed a vast dominion, enormous wealth, great intellectual activity and commercial enterprise, a political constitution which is the admiration of the world, and as much liberty as it is possible for man to enjoy, it necessarily follows that people come from all parts of the globe to study such portions of our material, political, or moral condition as may specially interest them. And can it be possible for them to study these questions without taking into account our national religion? For we have dark spots amongst us, dangerous

and damaging blots upon what is fair and promising, social and moral sores which are eating into our very life. If we have more wealth than any other nation, we have, I fear, deeper and more grinding poverty; if we have much intellectual culture, we have not less degrading ignorance; if we have great commercial activity, we have also an infinite amount of fraudulent dealing, deception, and swindling; if there is much to admire in the theory of our institutions, there is much to deplore in their actual working. If as a nation we may command respect, is it not true that for a fearfully large proportion of the individuals of whom that nation is composed we can entertain only feelings of deep sorrow and profound disgust, when we see them to be the abandoned slaves of vice, of drunkenness, of lust, and of all evil?

It is when such things are witnessed and mourned over that men anxiously turn their thoughts to that which specially represents the religion of the country. and that they eagerly ask what it is doing in order to oppose a barrier against this seething tide of iniquity which floods the land. For of this we may rest assured, that Christianity and Christianity alone can effectually stem the torrent of evil and purify the fountains of life. Special organisations may seek to check this or that form of evil, but without the living power which proceeds from Christ the Lord, and which is communicated through the application of the remedies set forth in the gospel, all will be in vain. Time was when it was thought that the power of the State could assist by its terrors the publication and the acceptance of the gospel. That day is happily passed. But that being so we are thrown more forcibly than ever upon the direct ministrations of religion. It becomes us to be more anxious than ever to secure that they shall be effective and persuasive, that they shall appeal by every means at their command to the hearts and consciences, to the wills and affections, to the sympathies and even prejudices of those who, weary and heavy laden with the load of this world's disappointments and dissatisfactions, vexations and disquietudes, seek for a haven of rest.

And as every church is thus called upon to be a witness for Christ, so and with much louder voice is this great cathedral called upon to fulfil its great office. By what they see here many are drawn to Christ, or repelled from His side ; by what they hear addressed to them from this place many are encouraged to cast their cares upon Him who died for them, or to sunder themselves from His society : by what they see those who minister within these walls to be in their life and conversation many judge of the reality of faith in the doctrines which are professed ; by the conduct of those who worship within these walls many judge of the influence which Christianity, as taught by the Church of England, has upon its people. And still further, as this cathedral is looked up to as a mother of churches, as a sanctuary known and marked of all men, so what is done within these walls by all who assemble here, whether they minister or worship, has a widespreading influence, the full force and extent of which none of us will fully realise until we stand before the tribunal of God, then to be made to comprehend how we have wrought for good or for evil during the days of our probation, and to receive our reward according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

Whilst then, my brethren, this cathedral is a witness for Christ, let us all realise that the fulness and excellency of that witness depends in a measure upon all of us who take part in its services. We who are called upon to minister, whatever that ministration may be, have our heavier share of this great responsibility ; you who worship here have your lighter, but not less real, share also. Would to God that as we this day commemorate the conversion of the great apostle by whose name this cathedral is distinguished, so each and all of us from this day forward might dedicate ourselves by God's grace more completely to the service of our great Lord and Master, and witness for Him more thoroughly and effectually by all we say and do, and so show that we have indeed been converted to Him, and that in Him and through Him we can overcome the embattled hosts of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

PRAISE. A Sermon preached at the Third Annual Festival of the Midhurst Choral Association. 1865.

ARE WE BETTER THAN OUR FATHERS? Lectures in St. Paul's Cathedral. 1871.

SOME OF THE BONDS OF SOCIETY. Lectures in St. Paul's Cathedral. 1872.

THE COST OF VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS AND OF BOARD SCHOOLS. 1875.

IS THE CANADIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION RATES POSSIBLE IN ENGLAND? 1875.

POSITION OF THE CELEBRANT. A Speech in Convocation. 1875.

THE POSITION OF THE PRIEST ORDERED BY THE RUBRICS IN THE COMMUNION SERVICE INTERPRETED BY THEMSELVES. 1876.

THE CHURCH'S NEED OF MORE WORKERS. A Sermon. 1876.

THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION. A Lecture delivered in the Town Hall, Manchester. December 1876.

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL; OR, THE FOUNDATIONS OF UNSECTARIAN AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. A Sermon. 1877.

HOW ARE CHILDREN TO BE TAUGHT RELIGION? A Sermon. 1879.













