IF I HAD BUT ONE SERMON TO PREACH

(Sermon preached at Berney Points Church of Christ May 5, 1974 by Farris J. Smith.)

It would be impossible for me to find words to tell you what it means to me to be able to come here this morning, to stand before this group to try to preach the gospel again. There have been a number of times in the past few months when I despaired of ever preaching again, I doubted I would ever walk in another pulpit and try to preach. It is therefore worth much to me to be able to come here and do the best I can to preach the gospel. Brother Overturf (incidentally we had a wonderful meeting last week with him and I hope he comes our way again) made a suggestion to me that I not try to preach more than twenty minutes. Now don't you get any of those twenty minute ideas in your head because it would be hard to get me to quit preaching in twenty minutes.

I do not mean to announce when I announce that I am able to preach again that I am well. In fact the doctors give me very little hope of ever being well again, and If I should be it will be eighteen months before I know it. So, the only thing I know to do is to live each day at a time and to be grateful to God every morning that he has spared me another opportunity to serve him while I dwell here below. To work as if I will live forever and to live as if I will die tomorrow.

I have no disposition to be a tear jerker. I do not feel sorry for myself and I do not want you to feel sorry for me. I want to preach a sermon this morning which I have preached before but I think I can preach it with more meaning now. The subject is "IF I HAD BUT ONE SERMON TO PREACH." I have often wondered what I would do and what I would say if I knew I was preaching my last sermon.

I stood in this position to some extent one time. When I lived in Pensacola, Florida a man and his wife were burned on a Sunday afternoon. They were supposed to be members of the church but I didn't even know them. They called me to the hospital and I learned on my way downstairs to see the woman that she was going to die. As I went into her room, stood and looked at her skin, you couldn't tell what color it was before she was burned, the thought came into my mind that this is possibly the last message she will ever hear, that she will possibly go into eternity with this on her heart and what I have to say to her now may have something to do with where she will spend eternity. I don't mind telling you that I literally trembled as I thought of the responsibility resting upon me as I tried to talk to her about the salvation of her soul and tried to pray with her. I preached her funeral in a few days.

Tile never know when we are preaching our last sermon. Every time you hear a sermon and walk out of the building there is the possibility it is the last sermon you will ever hear. If you need to respond to the gospel invitation, every time you hear an invitation song and turn the Lord down there is the possibility that you will never hear another; that you will never hear another preacher say, "Won't you come?" that you will never have another opportunity to walk down the aisle and do what God would have you
to do.

But what would I preach if I had but one sermon to preach? I think I could cover quite a lot of what I have to say in these words; If I had but one sermon to preach I would preach Christ as I have never preached him before. We talk about the importance of the Bible, the importance of reading and obeying it and I believe in that. I love to talk about this Book, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. I love to talk to people about this being the only message we have from Almighty God, that we must obey this if we expect to be saved. Yet, I am fully conscious of the fact that we can be converted to a plan without actually understanding the fact that he left the courts of glory, came to earth and died that we might have life and that more abundantly. In John 3:16 it is said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life." In the course of our recent gospel meeting brother Overturf pointed out that one of the reasons for Christ coming to earth was to show the love of God for man.

I know of a lot of things I would give a thousand dollars for, there are things I would give ten thousand dollars for (if I could borrow it) but there is not a thing in this world I would give one of my boys for. It is indeed wonderful that God thought so much of us that he gave his only begotten Son, that he permitted him to come to earth and become a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. To live the kind of life that he could say "the foxes have holes, the fowls of the air have nests but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." And to die the death he died on the cross in suffering so terrible that he cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If I had but one sermon to preach I'd try to get people to see that and understand that without the blood of Christ there can be no salvation. Heb. 9:22 "...and without the shedding of blood there can be no remission." Heb. 10:4 "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin." Rev. 1:5 "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." I would love to emphasize the fact that unless you have the blood of Christ applied to your life you are not going to be well pleasing to God when you come to the judgment. You may think you can by-pass him and God will say, "Well that is alright." I remind you that Jesus said in John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth and the life; No man cometh unto the Father but by me." If you believe you can come unto God without the blood of Christ, you just remember that without the shedding of blood there is no remission.

But if I had but one sermon to preach I wouldn't leave it there. I would tell people how to reach the blood of Christ, how to come in contact with it that they might have it applied to their lives. I could stand before you today and cry out. We are saved by blood: We are saved by blood: I could go out here and tell the average individual that without the blood of Christ you are not going to be saved and he would agree with me. And yet, very few actually stop and ask, How do you reach the blood that you might get the saving benefit of it?"

In Ephesians 1:7, talking about Christ, it is said, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." And so
redemption is in Christ through his blood or redemption through the blood of Christ is in Christ. To ask how to reach the blood of Christ is to ask how to get into Christ? Gal. 3:26,27 "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In the 19th chapter of the Book of John the soldiers found Christ dead, they pierced his side and blood and water came out. We may say then that Christ shed his blood in his death. Romans 6:3 "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" But one more time. The church was purchased with the blood of Christ, Acts 20:28 "...To feed the church of the Lord which he hath purchased with his own blood." How does one get into that church which was purchased with the blood of Christ? ICor. 12:13 "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." Col. 1:18 "And he is head of the body the church."

So as we look at it we have this, redemption through the blood of Christ -is in Christ and we are baptized into Christ. Christ shed his blood in his death and we are baptized into his death. He purchased the church with his blood and we are baptized into the church. It does not embarrass me one moment to tell you that when you go down into the waters of baptism, when you are buried with your Lord in baptism, you reach the saving power of the blood of Christ and are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

But to be a little more specific, if I had but one sermon to preach I would preach the plan of salvation as perhaps I have never preached it before. In Matthew 28:19,20 Jesus said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. 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." Mark 16:15,16 "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Luke 24:47 "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." As we read the Book of Acts we see the apostles going out and doing the very thing they were commanded to do. They preached the gospel, they caused people to believe, to repent, and making their faith known by the good confession they went down into the waters of baptism and were buried with their Lord in baptism.

If I had but one sermon to preach not only would I stress that and emphasize the fact that if you have not done that you are out of Christ, you are lost without God and without hope, but I would talk, to that group which did that and wandered back into the world. A statement was made in our meeting a few nights ago about the multitudes of people within a few miles of this building who have been baptized into Christ but have turned back into the world. I sat there and thought of a statement I have made many times that if upon any given Sunday morning every member of the church who lives in Birmingham should decide to worship God the buildings we own would not hold them. People become discouraged, careless and indifferent and wander back into the world. If I had but one sermon to preach I would plead with that person with all the power of my being to come back, repent of his sins, pray God for forgiveness, acknowledge love your
sins publicly if they are public and be restored to the fellowship of the Son of God. These people are hard to reach for they have already tried and failed.

But that isn't all. If I had but one sermon to preach I'd preach on hell fire and damnation and I would try to make it harder than I have ever preached it before. You remember in 2 Thessa. 1:7-9 it is said, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Time would fail me to talk about hell and all of its fury but I would love to say to you now, if you ever allow yourself to be cast into hell there will never be any coming back. There will only be suffering forever and ever and ever. As we sometimes say, ten million times ten million years will roll by and time won't be any shorter in hell. You will be there forever.

But if I had but one sermon to preach I would spend quite a bit of my time in talking about heaven in all of its beauty and glory. In John 14 Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled: Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Heaven, my friends is God's house. Here is that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God, that beautiful home of the soul. Here is that city across which the shadows will never fall, where there will be no pain, no sorrow, no sickness nor death. There will be no tears there for God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

My friends, you may not think much about heaven now. But I want to tell you right now, that if you ever reach that place where it seems that your life is about over you are going to think about heaven as you have never thought of it before. I love to think of the words of the apostle Paul who said, "For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (2 Tim. 1:12) And those words where he said, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. 5:1) And a little further on where he said, "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:6-8) It is not going to be an easy thing to become absent from this body. It is not going to be an easy thing to give up this world. But if I could only reach over and take hold of the Son of God and march safely into glory all will be well. I love the words of David who said, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalms 23:4).

There are people listening to me who ought to respond to the gospel invitation. If I knew this was the last time I would ever preach to you I'd beg, I'd plead, I'd do everything
possible to get you to come. But we always think there will be another time, there will be another occasion. My friends, get me this day, when you walk out of this building, this may be the last-sermon you will ever hear me preach, this may be the last sermon you will ever hear anyone preach. This may be the last time anyone ever invites you to become a Christian. This may be the last time anyone invites you to return to your first love. Won't you think about the salvation of your soul this day? Won't you come while we stand and sing?