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"It Commenced with God."

By W. T. P. W.



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“I Commenced with God.”

“I COMMENCED with God in that theatre on Sunday night.” The speaker was a tall, powerfully built, and bald-headed gentleman of about sixty, who, with hat in hand, stood in the central aisle of a large public hall, in which I was speaking, one Tuesday night in the suburbs of London some years ago.

Unable to procure the hall, a large unused theatre had been obtained, and on the previous Sunday evening it had been densely packed from floor to ceiling. My theme had been that glorious scripture, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John iii. 14-16) —divine resting-place of the souls of countless thousands, who from these charming words have learnt that God loved them, and that to trust His Son was to become the possessor of everlasting life.

The Spirit of God had greatly helped me to unfold this precious scripture. We beheld the lifted-up Son of Man, object of the faith of the perishing sinner. That Son of Man was unfolded as being God’s only begotten Son. We saw God *loving*, and *giving*, and man *believing*, and *having*. All flowed *from* God, and *for* man. Many a precious soul that night, for the first time, learnt the unspeakable blessedness of being

loved of God, and of becoming the possessor of eternal life through faith in His only begotten Son.

During the after-meeting which followed a gospel address in the public hall on the succeeding Tuesday evening, I observed a stranger walking slowly up the aisle, evidently with the desire to speak to me. Extending his hand, he said, in accents which revealed his American origin, "I should like to shake hands with you, sir, before leaving this meeting, and to thank you for the entertainment which you have afforded me."

"Entertainment, sir," said I, rather taken aback by the word; "what do you mean?"

"Oh, do not misunderstand me, sir," he replied. "I wanted just to express my thankfulness for what I have heard and received."

"Sit down," said I, "and tell me all

about it. You seem to come from the other side of the Atlantic.”

“ Yes, sir, I am a stranger in a strange land. I come from the western coast of North America, where the waters of the Pacific lave the shores on which my little house stands. I am staying now at N——. A lady there gave me a notice of your meetings. I came first on Sunday night, and I came last night, and to-night ; and, oh, I am so thankful I have been directed to your meetings.”

“ And may I ask, my dear friend, Are you a Christian ? Are you converted ? ”

He paused a moment, thought, a tear fell from his eye, and then with bated breath he replied, “ Yes, I think I can say I am a Christian now. I believe I am converted.”

“ And how long since you were converted ? ”

“ I commenced with God in that theatre on Sunday night.”

" Ah, that was good," I replied. " You learned the love of God to your precious soul there, did you ? "

" I did. I saw what I had never seen before, that He had loved the world—and I am of it. "

" And that ' As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ' ? " I added.

" Yes, I saw the meaning of those verses as never before. I believe now in God's Son, I have eternal life, and shall never perish, thank God ! "

" And what has your life been before ? "

" Oh, just one of toil and care, money-making and pleasure-seeking. But now I know God ; I have found His Son as my own Saviour. "

" And are your sins all forgiven ? "

“ Yes, I know that now. They are pardoned, and I have peace with God. I know His love, I have believed in His Son, and I have eternal life. I am profoundly happy. Thank you, sir, for your words. They have been God’s message to me. I am leaving for my home very shortly, and I shall carry with me over the water, the sense of the love of God in a way I never knew it before. His Son has saved me, and I am now a child of God. All is changed, and I go home a new man.” With a firm shake of the hand, he bade me Adieu. We parted, and I suppose I shall never see the dear fellow again, till I meet him in glory.

“ I commenced with God ! ” Four wonderful words for a sinner to say. What a good commencement for any man to make, “ for this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou

hast sent" (John xvii. 3). To be ignorant of God is moral death. To know God is to have life, and enjoy it. Every unconverted man has to say like Pharaoh, "I know not the Lord." And this confession is often coupled with the query, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" (Exod. v. 2).

Now blessing always lies in obedience. This stranger, of whom I write, having obeyed the gospel, which he heard in the theatre, was brought to the knowledge of God, and, to use his own striking language, there and then "commenced with God."

Dear reader, have you yet commenced with God? Has the moment come in your history, when, broken down with the sense of your sins, you have believed the love which God has to the world? Has the statement, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus

came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. i. 15), ever obtained credence in your heart? If not, do you not think it is time you turned to the Lord? Could you ever have a better moment for the blessed commencement, of which I have been writing, than the present?

January 1st is the first day of the first month of the first year of a new century. What that century shall bring no man knows. That it may witness the return of the Lord, the rapture of the Church, and the recall of all heaven’s ambassadors, I verily believe to be most probable. Let its birth mark the moment of your soul commencing its knowledge of God, if until now you have been a stranger to Him. Then indeed for you, through all eternity, it will be a memorable century, and its opening hours be ever remembered with joy as the time of your salvation.

When God was bringing Israel out of Egypt upon the ground of redemption, He said, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exod. xii. 2). Time had a new start. As slaves of Pharaoh it was of no account. But brought to God, sheltered by the blood of the lamb from the righteous judgment of God, and placed before Him on the ground of redemption, Israel stood upon new ground, and commenced a totally new history.

The blood of the slain lamb they sprinkled in faith. They obeyed the gospel of that day. It ran thus:—
"And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and *dip it in the blood* that is in the basin, and *strike the lintel* and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.

For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians ; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you ” (Exod. xii. 22, 23). Convinced of the importance of God’s behest, if they were to escape judgment, they did as they were told. In the obedience of faith they *sprinkled* the blood, and rested upon God’s Word, which was the basis of their peace. God had plainly said : “ And *the blood* shall be to you for *a token* upon the houses where ye are : and when *I see the blood*, *I will pass over you*, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt ” (Exod. xii. 13). They sprinkled the blood, and God passed them over. They were divinely sheltered from certain and righteous judgment.

Friend, Christ has died for sinners, and for their sins. Believe in Him. In faith use the bunch of hyssop. The blood in the basin, that is merely believing in a general way that Christ died, brings no salvation. Sprinkling it on the lintel and the two side posts of the heart by faith, *i.e.*, believing that He died for *you*, ensures salvation. In that day Israel commenced with God by the sprinkling of the blood. To-day you may commence with God by trusting His Son and His shed blood.

Let me urge you again with all affection. Start this New Year with God, by believing His blessed gospel, trusting His dear Son, and resting on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then will your soul have peace, rest, and joy. From this day forth may you be able to say, "I commenced with God on the opening day of the twentieth century."