

Thoroughness.

An Address delivered at the London
Missionary Conference at Kingsway Hall,
October 23rd, 1913.

By
HUNTINGTON STONE.

BATH: OFFICE OF "ECHOES OF SERVICE,"
1, WIDCOMBE CRESCENT.

LONDON:
A. HOLNESS, 13 & 14, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

*PRICE post free—1d.; 14 Copies for 6d.;
100 for 2/6.*

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“ Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou *fulfil* it ” (Col. iv. 17). See also 2 Tim. iv. 5 ; Rev. iii. 2.

WE naturally ask ourselves what brings us in such numbers to a meeting like this—a missionary meeting? What is there to justify our devoting to missionary reports the time which might be spent in many other ways? We surely have not come here merely as a sort of pastime, just to spend an hour or two in an interesting way, and perhaps have our feelings excited on more or less healthy lines, and worked up with a little romance? That can hardly be our reason. Is it that we have the impression that missionary work is, after all, a philanthropic agency which does much towards

the civilization of the world ? As a matter of fact, I suppose there is no factor that is half so efficient towards the civilization which is going on around us as this proclamation of the gospel of Christ. But yet that surely is not the chief object, either of the missionaries, or of those like ourselves who have the privilege of being their partners. May I go a step further and ask—Is it primarily a love towards souls and a desire for their conversion ? That indeed is a very high object. But I believe even that is not the highest motive, either for going forth, or for staying here and devoting the energy which God gives us towards helping missionaries forward. For, after all, the heathen never died for us. Our first obligation is neither towards them, nor certainly to please ourselves. The real reason must surely be found in the fact that each of us is a *servant* of the Lord. We have therefore to find out, if we do not already know, what is the Lord's will, both in the matter of going forth as missionaries, and in the subsidiary departments of work which He allots to us in this great enterprise.

First of all, are we sure that this missionary work is the task to which—may I reverently say so—He has set Himself? If so, then indeed we have a motive that far excels any other motive—the motive of walking in subjection to our Lord, and carrying out His will—the purpose which He has in hand, and which He intends to accomplish, either with us or without us, during this present dispensation. We have His example as a Servant, and you remember how He tells us distinctly that the Son can do nothing of Himself, *i.e.*, on His own initiative. He does what He sees the Father doing. It was not, therefore, in His case, that He needed even to be told what to do, but He waited; He was in such close communion with God, as Son in subjection to the Father, that He saw what the Father was doing. Then what things soever the Father does, these the Son also does in like manner. “My Father worketh, and (so) I work.” Presently, He sends forth His disciples. How? “As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you”: and He adds *how* the Father sent Him. He breathes upon them and says, “Receive ye holy breath.”

When the Father sent the Son He came, and He acted in the spirit of the Father, in the Holy Spirit; and all He did was done most perfectly. In sending us forth—marvellous, almost too great to believe—He pours into us His Holy Spirit and condescends to act through us.

In order to be filled with the Spirit, to be constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit, one needs to be in entire subjection, entrusting one's self to Him, not only as Saviour and Preserver, but as Master and Lord. It is to that point that I want to direct special attention, whether it be that of the group of missionaries amongst us, or of the much larger group of us who are likewise called to take some share in this work. It is not for the servant to choose which part he or she shall take. There are many departments of work; there are many diversities of ministry, or service, but the same Lord. Each of us is responsible to find out from that Lord what He would have us to do. If anyone is merely stirred up by the need of the heathen and runs forth, that must surely mean failure. We need

each one to find out, "What has *He* given me to do?" He does tell some to go forth, but He likewise says to the porter, "Watch." He gave to each one his work, and commanded also the porter to watch. If, on the Master's return, that porter had failed, and said it was a useless kind of work to stop in one place until the Master returned, and so he had busied himself with running errands, there surely would have been no great commendation for that servant who had chosen his own path. Similarly, if there be one here exercised by the stirring reports of our brethren, and inclined to run without first being clearly assured that the Lord is sending, he will certainly do well to hold back. The converse, however, is also true. There may be those here whose consciences tell them that there is a call from the Lord, and yet hitherto they have not obeyed it; conscious that that particular work abroad is their department, and yet trying to make the conscience comfortable in some other department which has been assigned to home-workers and can be done most happily by these home-workers, for

they know that the Lord has given it to them. But can you be happy? Surely not, if the Lord is calling and you are hanging back.

The departments are very numerous. In the Word of God we read of many kinds of service or *ministry*, not only of brethren but also of sisters. Simon's wife's mother, when she was cured, ministered to our Lord Jesus Christ; and there were many other women who ministered to Him of their substance. Paul, too, speaks of Phœbe our sister as a minister of the church at Cenchreæ. We hear of Timothy: we even hear of Mark—yes, Mark—as being useful, profitable to a missionary for helping him on. We are not told exactly what kind of work Mark did; but amongst all these different kinds of work there may be that which fits some of us who are not called by the Lord to go forth, and we either know what is our special work, or we ought to know it by looking into our instructions. We have had given to us the Work Sheet. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, when He was sent forth, used to refer to the roll

of the book. In that roll was written for Him exactly what He was to do day by day, and that is where He received the particular direction as to the work the Father had given Him to do. Where shall we look for our instructions? Are we not content to receive them through the same channel as He our Master did? We can there find out first of all *His* mission and purpose, and what He is engaged in just now—for He is still working. We can also find out the particular kind of work, the particular place, the particular time for doing that work, which He has chosen for *us*; and it is most important not to call Him "Lord, Lord," if we do not the things which He says.

One more point, too, may be gathered from the passages read with reference to ministry or service. Did you notice the word emphasized in those three verses—" *Fulfil* " ? Archippus was to take heed to the ministry which he had received, which he had accepted in the Lord's Name, to *fulfil* it. There is such a thing as leaving work half done, and not fully, completely

done. Most of us know something about that in daily life. Is it possible that some of us are treating this great work—the Lord's work in a very high sense—with such indifference that, although no one could truthfully say that we are not workers, yet, on the other hand, it would be very difficult to describe us truthfully as "fulfilling" the ministry, the service, which we have accepted in the Lord? In the Lord's Name we have accepted it; are we doing it thoroughly? We remember, do we not, the Lord Jesus Christ's way of doing work? He, when He had multiplied the bread, looked after the fragments that nothing should be lost. Nowadays it seems to be regarded almost as a sign of wealth to leave something to be wasted, as though it were a kind of unnecessary surplus. The Lord Jesus Christ was the One who might have afforded to do that; He had the power to go on creating, but He was the One who fulfilled the service that His Father gave Him to do. On that occasion He recognized that it was from the Father, for He thanked the Father before them all, and then com-

pleted the work in a way worthy of God. Later on, one of the last things He did before His death was to wash His disciples' feet. You remember the seven things said about that process, and that the seventh one was not omitted—"He began to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." They could have been left cleansed and undefiled without any such addition, supplement, or complement to the work; but He must act in a way worthy of God, and God's way for His servants is that they should "*fulfil*" their ministry. The lament of the Lord Jesus Christ over the church at Sardis was—"I have found no works of thine *fulfilled* before thy God." Some work appears to have been done there, but not fulfilled. Timothy was to do the work of an evangelist, and *fulfil* his ministry.

The words I would like to leave on your memories, and on my own, are these: "Take heed to the ministry, that thou fulfil it." It may be to go forth. Do not leave that half finished, satisfied because you were almost on the point of going. It may be that you are to remain here to take

a definite part in furthering, and in interesting others in, the Lord's work. Do not then merely take a kind of general, undefined interest in it; let us see that we take heed to that service which we have accepted in the Lord, that we fulfil it. To do that, we must take our eyes off surroundings, neither daunted by difficulties nor made to rest on our oars because others are faltering. Those who are running in a race cannot spare time to listen to the flatterers. In the midst of a race, too, one dare not stop because of those who hiss. Behind us is the Lord Jesus Christ, sending us as the Father sent Him. In front we have the joy set before us. Above us He is looking down and supplying His power. There is every provision made for our carrying out that particular work He has apportioned to us, and we have simply to ask ourselves in His presence—Am I taking heed to the work, the service I have accepted in the Lord to fulfil it? May God help us to do so!