

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Four

The Fire of the Gospel

Have you ever considered what it takes to become more effective in gospel preaching? You may have asked, “Should I pray more? Do I need more of the Spirit? More joy? Do I need to be trained in speaking? Do I need more planning, better methods – what?”

Is it possible to be an effective gospel preacher by simply praying, relying on the Spirit, and speaking of the Word of God, or is there more involved? If you have pondered these matters, you are not alone; many believers – past and present – have asked similar questions.

Today, in this podcast in the *Great Resolutions* series, we will consider a man who, by his example, may help us learn to be more effective in the gospel. We may be surprised at what we learn. We hope this brother’s testimony will encourage us as we endeavor to be witnesses of Christ and fruitbearing branches in the Vine.

James M’Kendrick

Although James M’Kendrick is not that well known, he was greatly used by the Lord in preaching the gospel for almost half a century in the late 1800s. He was a coal miner with little education. He lived in a poor Scottish village. He was not eloquent or especially gifted. He was an ordinary brother.

What was it then that made him so useful in the gospel?

The reason was his burning heart for lost sinners! From the time that James began to open to the Lord he had what Watchman Nee refers to as “the spirit of the gospel.” Let’s consider his testimony, as recorded in his book *Seen and Heard*.

Joy of Salvation

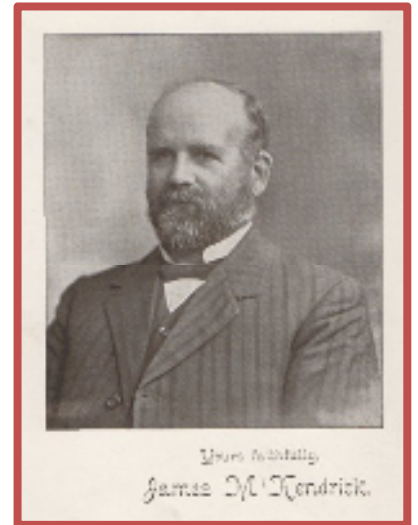
James grew up as an active boy in Scotland, especially loving the outdoors. He was taught to observe the Sabbath, went to Sunday School and memorized portions of catechism and Scriptures. Although he

believed there was a God, he knew he was not saved or ready to face death and eternity. Looking back, he recognized the irony of that situation: he knew God’s plan of salvation in his head, but was still living as a lost sinner in his experience.

Before the age of twenty he almost drowned in two separate incidents and once narrowly escaped death when a roof collapsed in a mine. What finally brought James to salvation, however, was not one of his own brushes with death, but an accident that claimed the life of his beloved father. The props in the coal mine gave way and a several-ton stone fell upon him, killing him instantly. This shook James to the core. Preparing for his father’s burial, James considered (M’Kendrick 19):

As I gazed upon my father’s face, and thought of the terrible calamity that had befallen him, more than once the searching question pierced me—If that had been you, where would you have been? I always did my best to dismiss this unpalatable question as speedily as possible, but uninvited it would again and again confront me.

The Holy Spirit continually convicted him with the fact that—“*If I die as I am, I shall die without Christ.*” As he was in anguish regarding his state and questioning how he could be saved, the Spirit of Reality brought to his memory the familiar verse of John 3:16 that he had earlier learned. Finally



the light dawned upon him and he rested by believing God's Word. On the dark night of his father's burial he was eternally saved. At a time of deep sorrow, he found great joy.

Not a Secret Disciple

James immediately became a witness for Christ. In fact, on the very evening of his conversion, he had occasion to pass by a place where his companions were gathered. Immediately he felt that he must tell his companions that he was saved. James said (M'Kendrick 25),

I called the ring-leader aside, and began to tell him how the Lord had saved me that afternoon, and as I did so, tears of joy and peace ran down my face. I felt greatly helped and strengthened as I related to him all the experience of that afternoon, and ere I had finished the tears were running down my companion's face as well. He was deeply impressed with all I said, and rejoining the others, he related to them as best he could what I had told him of my new experience.

This initial confession of Christ inspired him with courage and confidence to speak of God's salvation instead of being afraid of others. The Lord rewarded his boldness. Just four weeks after his conversion, the Lord saved his principal companion. And two weeks later James had the joy of seeing another of his companions come to the Lord. The three then began to spend times together in earnest prayer for their other friends as well. From the beginning James found a real joy in prayer and seed sowing.

A Fire Beginning to Blaze

In Mark 12:49 the Lord said that He came to cast fire on the earth. We know that this is a fire of love which originates in the God of love who gave His only begotten to come to earth as Man's Savior. The Lord Himself is the real fire. Those whom the Lord touched became burning with the same zeal He had – a zeal for God, His purpose and the gospel. This fire of love led the Lord to the cross in order to bring us to God. After the Lord's death and resurrection, this fire

entered into the apostles and into many saints. From that time on this fire has been burning in many, causing them to be beside themselves to live for the Lord and the gospel.

This fire is the spirit of the gospel. It imparts a sense of God's love for the perishing. It has given many a heart full of love and eyes full of tears. This is the fire that began to burn in James M'Kendrick.

Within a short time, others began to see the Lord's love in James and his companions. One godly missionary who was serving in the mining villages asked for their help. These three went door to door to urge many to come to a special service. Many came and packed the meeting place. James tells what happened (M'Kendrick 28-30):

I was standing close up against the missionary, my soul on fire for the salvation of the people. The missionary preached in the usual orthodox fashion, with four or five heads to his discourse, as well as several other stages before he reached the finish. I had little sympathy with his style of preaching, and was longing for him to make a direct personal appeal to the people and beseech them to be saved. I cannot remember what his text was, or what he said, though no doubt it was all sound and good, for he was a good man. But to me it all seemed wide of the mark, and my patience became exhausted, so I gave his coat sleeve a gentle pull. Still he continued preaching, as far from the point as ever. I pulled his coat sleeve a second time more forcibly. He paused, and stooping down, for he was a tall man, he whispered, "What is it?" I said, "Man, stop and let me speak." He only spoke a few words more, and then said, "James M'Kendrick will now address you." Immediately he said that, my mind seemed clean swept and garnished. I was speechless, and could not find a word to say, I could not even say, "Dear Friends." Yet my soul was on fire for their salvation. My first relief was a flood of tears, not words. At length I cried out: "All

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unsaved in this house are going to hell. Life is just like a decayed limb of a tree to which you are clinging, and if it breaks, you who are unsaved will be in hell.”

At that time accidents, and many of them fatal, were almost of daily occurrence in mining districts. The Blantyre explosion, by which 250 men were killed, was fresh in our minds, as also a later accident whereby 50 men were killed. My own father’s sudden death nine weeks before was so intensely real to me that the uncertainty of life was a tremendous reality. I therefore urged all to receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour, or else they would assuredly perish.

Never was there a more imperfect attempt at preaching; but never was there anything more sincere. Tears were many—words were few; but the results were marvelous. The Holy Spirit of God filled the place; the people were convicted of sin and their lost condition. The missionary was quick to detect the Holy Spirit’s presence and power, and overjoyed he kept shouting, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord.”

The Spirit of the Gospel

This was just the beginning. In his book, James records many of the things which he had seen and heard while he cooperated with the Spirit, traveling and preaching the gospel throughout the British Isles, Australia, and in America and Canada.

It is worthwhile for us to consider this testimony and specifically as it concerns the spirit of the gospel. Watchman Nee testified that he was deeply touched by this book (Nee vol. 55):

I have read the biographies of many evangelists, including Finney, Moody, and Stanley. They all had the spirit of preaching the gospel and the gift of preaching the gospel. Their biographies can encourage us, but we cannot imitate them, because we do not have as great a gift as they did.

I particularly love this book Seen and Heard because we can say that Brother James

M’Kendrick did not have the gift of preaching the gospel, but only the spirit of preaching the gospel. He was an ordinary man just like us. There was nothing special about him, but his heart was melted by the Lord’s love, and he was extremely anxious for the needs of sinners. He could love, and he could cry. He could pray, and he could shout. The Lord’s love was so strong in him that he was not able to refrain himself. Man’s need made him restless day and night. As I read about him, I was often forced to weep with him.

In preaching the gospel, there is the gift of preaching the gospel and the spirit of preaching the gospel. One who has the spirit of the gospel preaches in season and out of season. Only a few people are raised up every ten to twenty years in the history of the church who have the gift of the gospel. These people are few and far between. But everyone who loves the Lord can and should have the spirit of preaching the gospel. It is not limited to special gift.

Everyone who loves the Lord can and should have the spirit of preaching the gospel.

M’Kendrick became a fool for the Lord’s sake. He was beside himself that the gospel could go forth. Not all young brothers have the gift of preaching the gospel, but we must not lack the spirit of preaching the gospel. May this fire burn in us until we can no longer control ourselves. May this fire, because it consumes us, also consume sinners until they have no ground to refuse the Lord.

If this fire does not burn us, it will not burn those in the world. The church can become the hindrance to man’s salvation. O Lord, have mercy on the church! May the Lord have a way in the church so that He can gain access to the world. Fire! Fire! Let the fire of the gospel glow—first kindling us, and then setting the church ablaze.

What was it that caused James to have such a burden for the lost? Surely his absolute consecration to the Lord was the basis for the Lord to be able to use him greatly. But he also had a genuine concern for others. Witness Lee said (Lee ch. 44), *“If we have ability to carry on a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless. As long as we have a proper concern for people, we are well on our way to be qualified to be used of God for their salvation.*

“Eloquence, gift, and power can never touch people as deeply as your concern for them.” James M’Kendrick led a number of people to the Lord for salvation because he had a deep concern for them.

Considering this testimony we may feel exposed. We need the Lord’s unlimited and unconditional heart of love for the perishing! Every time we preach the gospel, we should realize that this needs to be more than just an event or activity. We can learn from the testimony of James M’Kendrick that we should not rely upon any natural ability or gift of evangelism. Rather, we should open to the Lord for the spirit of the gospel. We can give ourselves afresh in our consecration to the Lord, and also pray that our Savior God’s desire for all men to be saved would fill our spirits and hearts (1 Tim. 2:4). O Lord – burn in us today! Give us this spirit of the gospel.

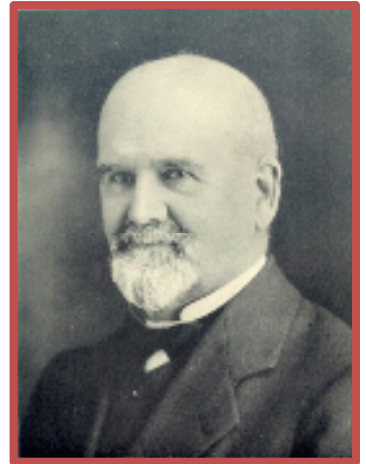
Conclusion

The Lord wants us all to “tell out” the virtues of Him who called us. Though we are short in this, we can also be encouraged by the exhortation of our Brother Nee who said (Nee vol. 61),

A young person may not have the gift of Moody, Finney, or Spurgeon, but he can learn to be a M’Kendrick. A young brother may not necessarily have the gift of the gospel, but he must have the spirit of the gospel. In church history God raises up great evangelists only once in a long while. But every lover of the

If we have ability to carry out a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless.

Lord should and must have a gospel spirit. May the fire of God's gospel continue to burn in us. May it ignite you and me first. May the church not become a hindrance to the world's salvation, but a channel through which the Lord is dispensed to the world.



Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

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