

times. It is going to be the favourite theme of Jesus' teaching.

The kingdom of God means God's rule in action. Now for some of his Jewish hearers it would have connotations of political rule over lands and nations. But for Jesus it was God's rule over evil. He explained it himself in the Lord's prayer — those two clauses in tandem: Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. That's what God's kingdom is, it's his rule, his will being done on earth. That's what it is for his kingdom to come. God's will means good triumphing over evil. That's what happens in heaven; and that's what will one day happen on earth, when his kingdom does finally come.

When you and I listen to the passages like the one we are looking at at the moment, it is hard for us not to pass it through a sort of naturalistic sieve, just as those first Jews tended to pass it through a nationalistic sieve. They kept hearing what he said in terms of their own nation's destiny. But we keep asking questions like: 'Is this explicable in terms of modern science? Can my reason make sense of this? Do we have an explanation of this? Can I analyse it with my mind?' We must remember that those are questions imported from our cultural mindset. It seems to me that for Jesus, the divide between what was rational and what was beyond human reason was insignificant. He spans the natural and the supernatural. He moves easily from the one to the other without suddenly heralding the fact — 'I am going to work a miracle, this is miraculous.' 'That wasn't miraculous, that was just normal teaching.' Jesus just seems to flow backwards and forwards between the two. Just as healing and preaching are intertwined with one another in his ministry, so is the kingdom of God. It is natural and it is supernatural, and for you and me grasp it, to come to terms with it, we have got to have a God who is flowing from one to the other in our own lives.

It's got to be worked out in very natural, material, human terms — you and I living as redeemed people. But it's got to have, also, a supernatural, inexplicable, beyond human reason, element to it — or it is not the kingdom of God as preached by Jesus himself. In word and in deed, in public and in private, naturally and supernaturally, it is the triumph of good over evil through the rule of Jesus Christ in your life and in mine — the One who has authority.

If you're a non-Christian this morning, if you're still thinking about these things, I hope you're not still saying, 'Well, that's less important than whether my reason can get the whole thing taped.' I was in that position for quite a time in my own life, when the rule of reason was more important than the rule of good.

But I want to challenge all of us this morning, that good and evil matter more than the rule of my own reason. God does not owe it to you and to me to explain himself to us. But we do owe it to him to let him rule our lives. The demons know that and they despair. I pray that we may know it and we may accept God's rule over us and rejoice — through Jesus' own life and ministry.

Let's pray:

Father God, we thank you for the Lord Jesus. We thank you that we see in him word and deed perfectly combined. that we see one Person in private and in public and we see somebody who spans the natural and the supernatural in a way, that our reason can't fully grasp.

We praise you for him, and we ask that through him we, too, may come to know and to understand your will for our lives.

We ask it in Jesus' name Amen.

Mark Ashton is the Vicar of The Round Church with St. Andrews, Cambridge.

A Tribute to William Still

JIM PHILIP

We gather here today to give thanks to God for the life of William Still, and to pay tribute to, and honour, his memory as a man greatly loved and cherished in the fellowship of God's people in this place and far beyond it, in a ministry of upwards of fifty years. As a congregation, and as individuals, we bid farewell to a loving and faithful friend, colleague, and leader, and praise God for a ministry that has been so signally owned and blessed by him for so long a time.

I first met William Still when we were fellow students here at Aberdeen University in 1940. And I suppose that apart from his own family I have known him longer than almost any one in this gathering today. I was a serviceman in the Forces when he was inducted to this charge in 1945, and I well remember worshipping here in these early days and sensing the pulse of the Spirit as William Still preached from this pulpit at the beginning of a ministry that was to have an

incalculable impact and influence here in Aberdeen and far beyond.

There are times when we are best able, in trying to give an adequate impression of a notable and significant picture of a man of God and his work, to use the words of others, and this I would like to do now, as best I may, to convey just how important and indeed how seminal that work has been.

John Buchan, the late Lord Tweedsmuir, once wrote these words of a great friend of his.

It is not easy to draw on a little canvas the man whose nature is large and central and human. . . . The very simplicity and wholesomeness of such souls defy an easy summary, for they are as spacious in their effect as daylight or summer. . . . His presence warmed and lit up so big a region of life that in thinking about him one is overwhelmed by the multitude of things that he made better by simply existing among them. If you remove a fire from a hearth, you will remember the look, not so much of the blaze itself, as of the whole room in its pleasant glow.

I have used these words on other occasions and of other people, but I can say without hesitation that they have never been more true than they are today in describing this dear man. For that is the kind of man William Still was. He was, as the famous statesman Early Grey once said of his father, 'a man who lighted so many fires in cold rooms'.

Sir George Adam Smith, one time Principal of Aberdeen University, gives a graphic description in his commentary on Isaiah, when interpreting the words of Isa. 32:2, 'A man shall be a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place. . . . and relates something he often saw in his travels in the Middle East:

Where the desert touches a river-valley or oasis, the sand is in a continual state of drift from the wind, and it is this drift that is the real cause of the barrenness of the desert. But (he adds), set down a rock on the sand, and see the difference its presence makes. After a few showers, to the leeward side of this some blades will spring up; if you have patience, you will see in time a garden. How has the boulder produced this? *Simply by arresting the drift.*

'That is exactly how great men benefit human life. A great man serves his generation, serves the whole race, by arresting the drift. Deadly forces, blind and fatal as the desert wind, sweep down human history. . . . But into some soul God breathes a great breath of freedom, and the drift is arrested. . . .

'What has saved humanity has been the upraising of some great man to resist those drifts, to set his will, strong through faith, against the prevailing tendency, and be the shelter of the weaker, but not less desirous, souls of his brethren.

This has been the measure — and the significance — of what God has done with this man in these years. He has arrested the drift in our day and generation, in the exercise of his ministry in this place. He has spoken a word from the living God, and by that word has arrested a dangerous drift in our national church, and, in doing so, has brought immeasurable blessing in doing our land and beyond it. That is the kind of man he has been!

But there has been another side also, just as significant and important as his prophetic ministry from the pulpit. There has been the man *himself*, and the immense kindness and warmth of his personality. He has been a 'Barnabas' figure to so many. Barnabas in the New Testament was given a 'nickname' 'the son of consolation' — the kind of man you felt it would be good to have around in any time of trouble. There was a kindness that made you feel that he really cared for you in your troubles, and that you would feel free to unburden yourself to, and be sure of receiving understanding and compassion. One would only have to be here on a Sunday evening to realize that invariably there were those who wanted to come up to the table and speak with him after the service. That was the kind of man he was. He had a pastor's heart.

We are conscious that in our sorrow today we are united with his family and their sorrow, and we are grateful for the opportunity and the privilege of sharing that family sorrow today, with his sisters Barbara, and Renee, and his brother David, and their families. What must their sorrow be like, when we know the depth of our own? We pray tenderly for them, and as we know that our citizenship is in heaven, we also pray that the serenity and healing of that blessed place will encompass all earthly grief, theirs and ours, and transfigure it in a peace that passes all understanding.

Finally this: James Denney writes of the apostle Paul in words that move the heart, as he speaks of what our Lord said to his disciples, 'Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or wife, or brethren, or parents, or children for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this time, and in the world to come eternal life'. James Denney comments:

These words might almost stand for a description of Paul (and, we may say, of William Still). He had given up everything for Christ's sake. He had no home, no wife, no child; as far as we can see, no brother or friend among all his old acquaintances. Yet we may be sure that not one of those who were most richly blessed with all these natural relations and natural affections knew better than he what love is. No father ever loved his children more tenderly, fervently, austere and unchangeably than Paul loved those whom he had begotten in the gospel. No father was ever rewarded with affection more genuine, obedience more loyal, than many of his

converts rendered to him. Even in the trials of love, which search it, and strain it, and bring out its virtues to perfection in misunderstandings, ingratitude, wilfulness, suspicion — he had an experience with blessings of its own in which he surpassed them all. If love is the true wealth and blessedness of our life, surely none was richer or more blessed than this man, who had given up for Christ's sake all those relations and connections through which love naturally comes. Christ had fulfilled to him the promise just quoted; He had given him a hundredfold in this

life, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children. It would have been nothing but loss to cling to the natural affections and decline the lonely apostolic career.

That was the kind of man William Still was. We shall not see his like again. Well might we honour him today, and give thanks to God upon every remembrance of him.

Jim Philip was till recently Minister of Holyrood Abbey, Church of Scotland, Edinburgh.

William Still — The Preacher

GEORGE PHILIP

The Rev. William Still was a preacher for over fifty years in one city centre congregation and considered that to be the greatest privilege of his life. His preaching is remembered by a vast number of people as having been used by God to alter the course of their lives. Many found a personal faith for the first time, many learned a new love for and obedience to the Lord, and many heard a call to 'full-time service' at home and abroad. It would be presumptuous to try to assess the value of William Still's ministry. Only God knows what has been accomplished. But it is important that what he did and how he did it should be recorded, not least because during his lifetime it was seldom recognized officially by the religious establishment. Indeed he was often criticized and his work devalued even by the evangelical world.

To give a truly balanced and valid description of such a ministry requires someone who has sat under that ministry for the whole of the fifty years, and there are few who would qualify for the task. The writer of this article experienced only six years in the congregation of Gilcomston South Church, but these years were formative in terms of training and preparation for his own ministry of forty years in one congregation. Many other ministers would bear the same testimony and that alone is a valid comment on the nature and effect of William Still as a preacher.

In 1946, when he was called as minister, the congregation was so run down that it faced closure by Presbytery. At that time there was little preaching in the Church of Scotland concerning the need for personal salvation, and 'conversion' was a rarely heard word. The new minister was fiercely and even flamboyantly evangelistic, with all the elements of his musical and dramatic personality involved and expressed. The atten-

dances rose dramatically and the church was crowded, gathering in many non-churchgoers, many from other congregations who were hungry for the Word of God, and some who were greatly surprised to find such ministry in the Church of Scotland.

When Mr Still had been in Gilcomston for a short time he could have been tempted to feel he was a success, but it was typical of the man to want to please God rather than his contemporaries. He recognized that various expressions of evangelistic preaching had a carnal appeal and even an entertainment element for the evangelistic fraternity. He was persuaded by God that the emphasis had to change radically and the ministry developed into one of systematic, expository, Bible-teaching. The Saturday evening rallies in the pattern of 'Youth for Christ' were replaced by a Prayer Meeting. For the remainder of his ministry, right to the end, the weekly Prayer Meeting and the systematic working through the whole Bible, *book by book*, and *verse by verse*, were the significant elements. When the change took place attendances dropped significantly. It was a token of the disapproval of the evangelical world. But it was out of this biblical pattern that there emerged his wide-ranging pastoral ministry in which his humanity as well as his spiritual wisdom and understanding were expressed for the help and blessing of countless numbers. Right to the end of his ministry, especially addressing gatherings of ministers of various ages and backgrounds, his key exhortation was, 'We will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4 AV).'

A true story highlights both the nature of his ministry and the perplexity of reaction among many traditional evangelicals. A visitor to Aberdeen worshipped on two successive Sundays in Gilcomston. On the second, after