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One letter
Ordination Certificate

Delivered by
Rev. Edward B. Meafe Ph.D. D.D. April 14
Lafayette Ave Pres. Church
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Charge to Elder J. Will Harris
and Mr. William McCoy. Coy. num 23
cont. pages 3
Doc. 2

My brethren, you are now ordained ministers of the gospel of Christ, set apart by the Presbytery to an office of which neither you nor any other man is worthy. My first word in this charge must be to warn you of the danger of getting yourselves and the gospel reversed in your thought. You are not sufficient for the thing to which you are called. Your sufficiency is of God. One of your perils is that you may grow into a sense of personal merit and worthiness. John Knox said on his death-bed that all his life the devil had tried him with the sense of his own sin, but that now he had changed his method and was trying him with a sense of his own merit, making him feel that such a one as he deserved the recognition and honor even of God Himself. It takes a certain measure of bravery to realize that.

There is another side to it. While you are not worthy of the ministry of the gospel, the gospel is worthy the best of your efforts. And because it is the will of God that His gospel be preached by such men as ourselves you become by His grace worthy of the service. A minister's sense of his personal fitness is generally in inverse ratio to his real power. His real power is in direct ratio to his sense of the value of the gospel which he is to preach. I beg you never get that reversed.

You are ministers. The word has come to have a kind of dignity about it now, issuing quite certainly from the gospel of which you are ministers, and from the men who have magnified the office in the past. Remember, however, that a minister is a servant, and you are servants, not of the people, not of the church, but of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are not to seek your own things. If you begin looking for your rights or privileges, and worst of all for your dignities, then may God have mercy on you! If, on the other hand, you should fail to realize the rights and privileges and dignity of that gospel which you are to preach, His mercy again be upon you! A servant of the Lord must not strive. He must realize that he has voluntarily laid down his life for the gospel's sake. He has no personal rights nor privileges, which are to be considered when they can be sacrificed for the sake of that gospel. You are ministers, servants.

I trust you will each for himself review the steps by which you have come to this turning point in your life course. Doubtless you are now in the ministry because you personally wish to be. You take a great interest in your work. You enjoy preaching, you enjoy dealing with your fellowmen. The current of your life runs naturally into this line. This I think I understand. And yet you are here as the result of two influences. You have had a double call. First, and more

important, your call has come from God. You have had what the apostle calls the Heavenly Vision and have sought to be obedient to it. It is true in a very important sense that you have felt that a woe would be upon you if you did not preach the gospel. You are here because you feel God calls you here. If I thought you were not, I would urge you to ask at once to be put back into your old station of life. You would be fore-doomed to failure if God had not called you to the ministry. A man in the ministry for selfish reasons, or social reasons, or any other than reasons of service is pitifully out of place. But there has been another reason for your coming into the ministry. You have felt the need of men. One night an American hostess of John G. Paton heard him speaking and went to the door, thinking he might be in distress, and heard him saying in his sleep, "Yes..Yes..I hear you.. I am coming." The voice of the islanders yonder in the South Sea had sounded to him in his dream and called him back. Such a call, clearly or indefinitely, you have heard. You are in the ministry, I am saying, by reason of the push of God and the pull of men. Let me lengthen the saying. You are in the ministry because of the push of the love of God, and the pull of the need of men. I charge you make full proof of your ministry by keeping true to both those parts of your call. The call is supremely of God to meet the need of men—find in that your chief joy.

There are three scripture words which describe you and lay out your work for you. The words are very familiar in the English, but you will need to go back to the Greek for their full meaning. You will let me urge, by the way, that you do not too soon drop your technical studies of the Seminary life. You will be very busy men, but you must remember the chances for carrying on your Greek, and your Hebrew, and your church history, and your systematic theology, and all that, will lessen steadily as you go on. Make the most of these first years by fixing the impressions of your technical study. Well, these three titles, which cover your work, designate you as apostles, prophets, and teachers. Let us look at each of them a moment.

You are set to be apostles. I hope you recognize the two Greek words that lie underneath it. . . Apo and Stello. The word means one sent away, one who has been sent out on an errand, away from the place where he was before, to do some fixed thing. Of course the one by whom you are sent is God, not the Presbytery, and not yourselves. You are out on an errand of God. There is a peculiarity about this errand; while you are sent away as apostles, you are accompanied by the Sender. You are sent away from your old life, from your old customs, from your old place, but the Sender goes with you. You must keep in close connection with Him if you are to be ministers of power.

I commend to you a renewed and frequent study of the work of the Holy Spirit. Some of us, looking back on weaker places in our lives, have felt that our defect lay in lack of sufficient communication with God, through His Holy Spirit. By that I mean that you must be men of prayer. In some of the old abbeys we are told that there are paths worn smooth from the great church around to the secret place of prayer, where the ministers and monks have gone in retirement for prayer. You must learn the secret of prevailing prayer, having places that are worn smooth in the eyes of God, paths which you have trod toward the secret place.

You will need as apostles to keep strong sense of God and His right. You are not out on your own errand. You are on His errand. The battle is not yours but the Lord's. You have no message of your own; it is His message. He has sent you. Be men mighty in prayer and rich in prayer. Keep yourselves sensitive to the leading of God. There are two readings of a familiar phrase wherein the promise is, I will guide thee with Mine eye. As I have just quoted it to you, it means that you must watch for the movement of God's eye. That is a very practical necessity. The other meaning has even more inspiration in it. I will guide thee, Mine eye being upon thee. Even so, it would be necessary for you to be sensitive to the leading and guiding of God. First then you are apostles, men sent out.

You are also prophets. I am sure you recognize the two Greek words there--pro and phani--one who speaks in behalf of another, one who delivers a message. It is for that you are sent out. You are not primarily to build up a church; you are not primarily to develop an organization; you are not primarily to do charitable work. That is incidental and important. You are primarily to deliver a message, the message of God in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, which is the gospel. That gospel will grow on you as you study it. We call it a simple gospel. One of the early church martyrs had it thrown up to him by the Roman pro-consul that theirs was a simple gospel. He replied, "Give me time and I will show you the mystery of real simplicity." This duty of yours as prophets throws upon you the obligation of study. First and foremost of course the study of this Book. It is the fountain and source of your message. You can afford to be men of one book in the great sense of being men to whom that Book is first and foremost. You could better afford to study no other book than to let any book take place over it. You will not forget that all truth is of God, and can be used to illumine for men the simple gospel of Christ.

There is nothing of knowledge which comes amiss to an earnest minister of the gospel. You may well find time for the study of philosophy and of science, and history, provided all the while you keep

these subordinate to the essential thing which you are to preach--the gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is found here in the word of God. You may never preach philosophy as philosophy, but I beg you do not be so afraid of preaching philosophy that you preach nonsense instead. Scientific sermons as a rule are neither good science nor good sermons, but the flash light of a settled scientific fact, or even of a well buttressed scientific theory, may often turn a man's mind toward Christ. There is no great danger of your preaching too many outside things if you realize that you have no right to preach anything which does not voice your message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You must know that gospel of course if you are to preach it.

Underneath the word witness, which is so often applied to every Christian, tho not distinctively to the minister, there lies the old word wit which means to know. Every man is a witness, provided there is something he knows which he can testify to some one else. You had better not preach beyond your own experience of the gospel, save as you preach it in its ideal form. You can hold before men the glories of the holy life even when you feel your own defects. But you may as well understand first as last that it will be that part of your message which means most to your own soul which will do most good to your fellows. You will be surprised at the number of persons who will come to you at the end of a sermon which you have preached to yourself to thank

you for helping their own needs. You are then prophets sent out to carry a message, the message of the gospel.

And you are also teachers. I doubt very much if you have thought of the meaning of the Greek word used for teachers. You remember what the word is--Didaskalos. You need not look at it long without seeing what it is. Two Greek roots are there. The verb is Didomi which means to give. The adjective is Kalos which means best. A teacher in the old root meaning of the word is one who gives the best. So among the Greeks, it was a standing injunction that a teacher was to be honored above a father, because while a son owed reverence to a father, both father and son owed reverence to a teacher, since a teacher brought to them, and brought out of them, the very best that he had and that there was in them.

Now you are teachers, you are to give to men the best God gives you, and you will in that very act be giving them the best thing they receive. The teacher is not simply one who impresses a certain truth but one who brings that truth so to bear upon men that they take it in and are transformed by it. That is the joy and also the disheartening element in the ministry. There are so many men whom the truth does not transfigure spite of all you can do. They hear it and do not heed it. Now if a man is sure he is doing his part, is putting that truth as it ought to be put, there is no reason for discouragement in that. Even our Lord Jesus did not transform Judas

did not transform Judas. It will be necessary for you, however, to keep constantly asking whether you are putting the truth as it ought to be put for the winning of men. You are so to word it that it will win men to Christ. Preach for souls. Do not fire blank cartridges, do not fire into the air. You are soul seekers. You are to bring men the best thing that can be brought them, the redemption of their souls. Having won them for Christ, you are to undertake the long process of the culturing of them for Christ. The same gospel which wins them will develop them. It will need to have wording, and it will require almost infinite pains and tact to find the way which you can use best for reaching men.

That suggests the especial duty that is yours as teachers to know men. You must have much fellowship with men. You, my brother Harris, will doubtless soon be a pastor, and you will have pastoral responsibilities. You, brother McCoy, will be yonder in South Africa, pastor of a wide parish of souls. I charge you both to understand the men with whom you are dealing. Enter into fellowship with them. Believe in them, not so much in what they are, but in what the gospel you are preaching can make of them. I charge you never grow low-spirited about your fellowmen. They are like yourselves poor specimens, but the grace of God is adequate for their redemption, and it is accomplishing that redemption satisfactorily. Nor ever have any doubt in your own minds of the need of those

men for your gospel. If ever the chilling notion strikes you that there are other means of salvation beside that which you are preaching, it will cut the nerve of your effort. You will not be bigots and declare the angle from which you view Jesus Christ is the only angle, but you will be brave men who realize that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. The thing that you are to give men is the best thing that can be given. Be sure that you give it in the best way in your power. So you are teachers, givers of the best.

Now gather these three into one saying. Each of you is a man sent away by God—to speak the message of the gospel in Christ—and speaking to give those who hear the best God has, the best you can give, the best thing they receive. See how these three duties suggest three phases of your work. You are apostles, men sent away, so you will need prayer and a mighty faith in God. You are prophets, men bound to speak for God, so you will need much study and clear belief in the gospel. You are teachers, men bound to give the best to your fellows, so you will need much fellowship with men, and a clear and sane belief in them and their possibilities through the gospel.

Let me take you back for just a word to our early thought, that the battle is not yours but God's. You have your times of wonder both about the work

and yourselves, whether you really belong to the ministry, whether after all the battle is going to be won by God. You may find it cheaper and easier at times to adopt the language of the pessimist and pretend that you are only trying to save a few out of the wreck--well, keep yourselves humble but keep yourselves brave also. Remember that answer of Alexander the Great when they asked him how he could sleep so quietly ^{away} when there was so much at stake. He replied, "Antipater is awake, and he is always vigilant." Learn to leave your troubles by your bed-side at night. Remember that God is awake and He is always vigilant. When you get blue or discouraged take up some other phase of your work and leave the thing you can't help to God. He will mind it far better than you can anyway. It was the word which our Lord said to the disciples when they awoke Him from his sleep in the storm, and were so distressed, O, ye of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? The Master's aboard. He is running the thing after all. All we have to do is to keep in close connection and fellowship with Him and He will bring the ship through.

Those of us who heard the great charge of Dr. Hitchcock during our Seminary course have never forgotten the way in which he used to give his charge frequently to us as we were going out, ^{what} some as you are going now into your work of ministry. He ended his charge with these words, "Dictate no terms to providence. At whatever cost accept the service offered you, high

--12--

or low, far or near, then burn to the socket." I hope
God will set you on fire, and let the rays of your life
clear the darkness for many souls, and then after a while
gather you back into His glory to catch the radiance

His face on your own faces, and when you
you come in battle scarred like the Tenth Legion, but
marching in the triumphal procession of the King to the
place of coronation.

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