

Our Great High Priest Is Sitting

A. P. Cecil (1841–1889)

Our great High Priest is sitting
At God's right hand above,
For us His hands uplifting,
In sympathy and love;
Whilst here below, in weakness,
We onward speed our way;
In sorrow oft and sickness,
We sigh and groan and pray.

Through manifold temptation,
My soul holds on its course,
Christ's mighty intercession
Alone is my resource;
My gracious High Priest's pleadings,
Who on the cross did bleed,
Bring down God's grace and blessings,
Help in each hour of need.

'Twas God's most gracious favour
Gave Thee, His Son, to die;
To live our Intercessor;
To plead for us on high.
O Jesus, blessed Savior,
Who soon for us will come,
Redemption's work completed,
Our battle fought, and won.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Lessons from a Visiting Missionary

Jeff Straub

One of the real delights of working at the seminary is the opportunity to hear the visiting chapel speakers. Our students get the privilege of hearing from some choice servants of the Lord. A recent missionary was no exception. It was a special blessing for me to hear him, as the brother who spoke was in my graduating class at Detroit back in 1994. Since that graduation, we have had little communication, serving the Lord in two geographically remote worlds.

As my friend shared his testimony, I smiled a good bit listening to him tell of the influence of his pastor who served as “the voice of the Holy Spirit” in this brother's life. When I came to Central Seminary in 2004, then-president Kevin Bauder introduced me to the new students at orientation as “the voice of the Holy Spirit for missions.” It's a title I happily wear as I recognize that I (and the other professors) can be, and often are, the means through which our students discover the will of God for their lives—both in the short term and for the long term.

Our speaker recounted several times when his pastor, working as an agent of the Holy Spirit, told him what he should do. The first time regarded his education: “If you are going to serve the Lord, you need a seminary education.” By his own account, he wasn't the academic type, that quality belonging more to his brother. But he heeded the “suggestion” and went to Detroit (his pastor's *alma mater*) and earned the MDiv. My friend was glad he did. He went on to challenge our students about thorough academic preparation for serving the Lord, particularly if they are headed to the mission field. My friend eventually earned a ThM and a DMin. His training has stood him in good stead as he has worked at training national pastors in several places in Asia. You can only give out what you have taken in. “Get your education, then go serve the Lord” was his counsel.

Sadly, some men think that they need to shorten their preparation to get to the field. I am told that Dr. Richard V. Clearwaters, our founder, often said that if he had but four years to live to serve God he would spend the first three in seminary preparing. I have been known to suggest to a few would-be missionaries that they weren't sufficiently prepared to do what they were planning to do. No man with a Bible institute or Bible college degree should



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think that he has the training to teach in a pastoral training ministry at home or overseas. We can only teach what we know and what we have done. Fruitful service requires adequate preparation. The more you want to do, the more your need for training.

This brought the conversation to a second “Holy Spirit” moment through my friend’s pastor. After his seminary training was over, my friend thought he was ready to go to the mission field. “Not so fast,” was his pastor’s reply. “You probably should get some local church experience first.” My friend again bowed to the pressure of the pastor’s importunate suggestion as the Spirit’s voice and took a pastoral staff position. He was glad he did. His pastor had given him good advice, and as a young man eager to do well in the Lord’s work my friend submitted to the counsel.

There were other occasions when his pastor counseled him. My friend recognized the divinely placed voice in his life and has had a blessed ministry thus far. The end of the story, at least to date, is that my friend has had a fruitful ministry in several countries. He prepared himself for a lifetime of ministry and God has moved him around the world to fulfill His divine work through this man and his family. It was a blessing to hear his testimony and to have him lead a conversation for my students in our missions class.

There was another lesson or two our brother shared with us about his life. Following Christ may come with adversity. Along his journey, my friend has had some real challenges not of his own making. Twenty-three years ago, my friend’s first child was born prematurely. It was discovered that she had a heart defect that would require surgery. The surgery was scheduled and performed. It seemed to go well, but a few days later tragedy struck and his daughter had a complication that has left her needing a lifetime of care. It was a deep sorrow but one in which my friend and his wife turned to the Lord in their hour of grief. Moreover, it did not deter their determination to follow Christ. For more than two decades, they have borne their burden with Christ’s strength and served the Lord in Asia.

Were things difficult? Undoubtedly. But they handled their situation in the strength of Christ. Then tragedy struck again. My friend’s wife was diagnosed with cancer—and she was listed as terminal. The doctors could not cure the disease; they could only hope to extend her life a bit. My eyes well with tears even writing the story. First a disabled child, and then the thought of losing his wife of twenty-five years.

Remarkably, my friend, despite this heavy load, was able to minister to our students cheerfully about the needs of the world and the journey the Lord has brought his family on. I paused the conversation at one point to comment to my students on the ways of God. We have our plans for life and God has His. We must be careful to bow to His will always and not simply

wish for our own will. When we set out on our journey by faith to follow Christ, we never know just where that journey will lead us, even through the “valley in the shadow of death.” We need “fear no evil” because He is with us! Even the difficult paths become occasions for us to shine as a light in the darkness. I would wish my friend’s journey on no one. But I would hope that if we go through a similar path, we will find God’s strength even as my friend has found it. Thanks, dear brother, for your testimony. Praise be to God for His faithfulness through it all!



This essay is by Jeff Straub, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
