

Paul H. Dixon
First Century Message
circa 1980

Unedited Transcript

Paul H. Dixon:

Thank you, Dr. Good. Really appreciated that song, Lynn. You know, that is one of the most talented men I know any place, he preaches and he preaches well, and he's done an excellent job in his church for many, many years, pastoring. And, he sings like George Beverly Shea, and he's an artist. Did you see those pictures he drew, those stick pictures? He even had their dresses down. Did you notice that? I don't know how I'm follow this act tonight. Don Moffitt gets up and falls off of his crutches. Brother Brock gets up and takes an offering for the septic tank. Len and Bob start singing and then have to start over again, so I can't wait till I get into this mess. I didn't do it, but I knew of another young fellow who was preaching, had his heart into it. He said, "Mercy, the mercy of God, mercy, M-E-R, Mercy, M-E-R, I don't know whether it's S or C, but mercy." Oh yeah. I can't wait.

Paul H. Dixon:

As I said last night, a ministry for God is God's man getting out God's message, using God's methods. And last night we looked at a first century man, and what a man of God really should be in the light of these early apostles. And for those of you who are not here since this is a series, and I think it's profitable to try and tie it all together, I'll just briefly review what we're we shared together last night.

Paul H. Dixon:

First of all, God's man is a convinced man. And we saw that the apostles were convinced, first of all, that God is God. They had no doubt as to his sovereignty, as to his power that he was still on the throne and we need to be convinced of the same. They were convinced that they had a living Savior, and the emphasis placed on the resurrection in the book of Acts. And then they were convinced that they had the answer for their world. And we saw that there really isn't that much difference from our day and their day. We complain about the difficult days we live in and tend to want to sit back and wait for Jesus to come, but they didn't approach it that way. The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:30, buying up the opportunities because the days are evil. Since they lived in evil days, they said these days present day of opportunity. Then they were not only convinced men. They were controlled men.

Paul H. Dixon:

And We went through the book of Acts and noted some of the references to the filling of the Holy Spirit. And we saw that there are over 40 references in the first 13 chapters of the book of Acts to the Holy Spirit. And because these men were controlled and filled with the Spirit, it says in Acts chapter 5, verse 28, they filled Jerusalem with their doctrine. And if we become filled men, we will fill our cities with the doctrine of Jesus Christ. They were not only convinced and controlled men. They were committed men. Totally. They were one eye, their whole lives totally devoted to knowing Christ, and living Christ, and sharing Christ.

Paul H. Dixon:

Now tonight, the message is on the first century message. And I'm sure, and I bring this up again because I think it's so important. I believe the man supersedes the message. Now you may differ with me there, but I believe there are many men today who have a good Bible message, but they do not have the blessing of God nor the power of God, because they're not the right kind of man. Just having the

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message, just having the content, just having your sermon or somebody else's sermon is not going to get the job done unless we're the kind of man that God wants us to be.

Paul H. Dixon:

Now, when I talk about the message, I believe that there's, first of all, the spoken message that every preacher and every layman has to share, of course. And we're all to take this message out day in and day out. But there's also the preached message. And since I believe that, especially this gathering for these three days is a fellowship of many, many pastors. And I don't know about you, but I find that I need to be preached to. Maybe you don't, but I do. And I find, I listen to cassettes frequently of other men and my heart is blessed with their messages, but I still don't get the same from a tape that I get from listening to a man in person and just being there. And so I want to especially talk about the message that the first century men preached.

Paul H. Dixon:

There are 20 sermons in the book of Acts, the apostle Paul preached nine of them, Peter preached nine, James preached one, and Steven preached one. There, of course, also other instructions by brief statements as to what the message contained. And I believe all of the epistles of course give us the message of first century men. But I want us tonight to direct our attention to one sermon and more or less dissect that sermon to see what that message contained. And I think that we would do well to study the message Peter brought in Acts chapter two, if you'll turn there with me, please.

Paul H. Dixon:

Now I've chosen this with two considerations in mind. I believe we should study the sermon of Peter because it was the first sermon after Pentecost. Surely God would have it to be a model of sorts or he would not have placed it first. Secondly, I would have us to consider this sermon because it was so successful. I mean, after all, a man who preached one message and brought so many thousands to Jesus Christ had to have something in that message. Again, we recognized that he was controlled by the Spirit of God. He had the unction of God upon him. And of course, this is what it's all about. You and I both know that there are times when you preach a message, and it's really not the best of messages and it's possibly even lacking in content. And maybe you don't even feel especially close to the Lord that day. But, God in his sovereignty just moves in and blesses that message in a wonderful way. So we know that God is the one who does the working. But, I think we still do well to study the content of that message. And there are many things that we might share from this sermon, but a few things I would especially point out.

Paul H. Dixon:

Number one, I believe that Peter made much of simplicity. Peter was a simple preacher. Now you'll notice in Acts chapter two when he begins to preach in verse 14, it says, "But Peter, standing up with the 11 lifted up his voice and said unto them." Now I think that's interesting the introduction to a sermon. The first thing it tells us is that he stood up. Now that's unusual. The rabbis always sat down. Peter stood up. I think it's interesting that Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not allow men to call you rabbi." And I think with Jesus was saying here, he is saying, "Men, I don't want you just to be teachers. I want you to be heralds of the gospel. I don't want you just to instruct people. I want you to herald this message out to people and preach this message." And I can just see Peter must have probably been taller than the

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average Jewish man. I visualize him as being much more of a man's man than the apostle Paul. And just him standing there, immediately a hush must have come over that crowd as he stood to bring the message.

Paul H. Dixon:

Then I think it's also interesting that it says he was standing up with the 11. They must have stood with him. You who are lay people here tonight, we cannot impress upon you enough the importance of you standing with us when we preach. We do not mean that as they did on that day, perhaps to stand up with us on the platform, but please with us in your prayer support. Please stand with us, not only before the services, but during the services, and after the services. Stand with us, brethren, hold us up in prayer. We need it. Tomorrow night many of these things that we just touch on tonight, we're going to go into in detail as we look at first century methods. But the 11th stood with him.

Paul H. Dixon:

And then it says he lifted up his voice. Two things impressed me. Number one, he had to lift up his voice because there was a crowd of people and he had to speak loudly. Now, I don't think most of us as preachers need to be told this, but brethren, if they don't hear us, what's the purpose of preaching? I don't mean that we all have to shout and that we all have to be the exceedingly emotional type of an individual. But brethren, I believe with the message we have, we better lift up our voices. The second thing that impresses me, not only did he speak loudly, but he spoke with authority. He lifted up his voice and just the way he was saying it, he was speaking with authority. Now here's the paradox. The apostle Paul says, "When we preach the message, we should be in fear and trembling." We're not putting confidence in ourselves, but as we start that message, we should speak with authority because of bringing the Word of God. That's the way Peter spoke.

Paul H. Dixon:

And then it says, he said unto them. Now I'm like you, I would tend to slide over the word said, but we can't because it's a rare word that is found in the New Testament, the way that is found here. This particular word, in fact, I think the New ASV and several other translations give it, instead of said, he addressed himself to these people, and it means to speak forth clearly. In other words, when he spoke, I think we could apply this, he annunciated his words. It's not just speaking loud and it's not just speaking with authority. It's enunciating your words so people can hear you and understand what you're saying, but there's something more to that. He put it out there so they all could understand it. That's what it means. They got the message. It's quite evident. In fact, as you know, these people cried out, Watch shall we do with the message you preach?" They evidently got a hold of it. That's the way we have to get this message out, brethren. We have to make it simple.

Paul H. Dixon:

Someone has said, the outcome of culture is simplicity, and that's right. I'm not going to take the time tonight. I would just, perhaps maybe you'd like to study it for yourself. It's interesting. The apostle Paul, you might just want to note it in Acts 17:3, tells how he opened the Word of God, alleging certain things. And the word opening means making plain, expounding, the same words that are used in Luke 24, when the men walked along the road with Jesus and their eyes were opening, it was suddenly plain to them. They could see who Jesus was, who they were talking to. And they said, "Did he not wonderfully open

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up the scriptures unto us?" He made the scriptures plain to us. That's the way Paul presented the word of God. Alleging means he set things in order. Brethren, there's nothing especially spiritual about hiding what you're trying to say. I think sometimes we would do well to go home and ask our kids, what did I say? Really. Peter and Paul were not interested in being performers. They were interested in being preachers. Like this, it says here in Acts two, "He lifted up his voice and he said it forth. He addressed it unto them." He wasn't preaching before them. He was preaching to them.

Paul H. Dixon:

Spurgeon said, and of course as only Spurgeon said it, I was telling Pat my wife today, I was showing her some of the things that I reviewed that Spurgeon had to say on preaching. And I wish he were around today. I really do. I don't think anyone is saying what Spurgeon said. He said it in such a unique way. And he wasn't afraid to say anything right where people were. He said, "Brethren, shake yourselves up. If you are too precise, may the Lord set you on fire and consume your bonds of red tape." If you have become so improperly proper that you cannot commit a proper impropriety, then pray God to help you be less proper. And that's right. It's possible to be a proper preacher and have all homiletics and everything else. And yet are the people getting the message here was a simple preacher, Spurgeon said, and I like this. He said, "When God got ready to feed Elijah, he didn't send a peacock. He sent a Raven."

Paul H. Dixon:

I'm reminded of the story of A.T Pearson, and Pearson one day, he had a great church, a big church. The Presbyterians were flocking to hear him. No one getting saved, but they were coming to hear him. Incidentally, Charles Spurgeon had such an impact on Pearson that he renounced infant baptism and was immersed when he was in his sixties. That's right. Pearson finally went up to P.P Bliss. We sang the song, And Can It Be, like you said, real content there. And if you notice P.P Bliss died when he was 38. And he was traveling with an evangelist by the name of Major Whittle, and Pearson was attending the meeting and he couldn't get over how many people were being saved. And these were just common, ordinary folks. They weren't great theologians or anything else. They were just singing the gospel and preaching the word of God.

Paul H. Dixon:

And P.P Bliss and Major Whittle were in a room. And A.T Pearson went in there before a service and Pearson said, "What's wrong? How come I can preach such great sermons and nothing's happening, and you fellows preach those sermons and things are happening? I don't get it." And P.P Bliss looked at him and said, "Well, Pearson, if you ever surrender your all to God, God will use you." Pearson didn't get over it. And for two years, every day at a certain time in the evening, he would go to a room in the top of his church and he would just pray, "God, I don't know what it is that isn't surrendered. Would you show me?" For two years he prayed like that. One day it hit him. He ran downstairs, called up his deacons, met in one of their homes for a deacons meetings. He said, "Men, God showed me what's wrong." He said, "I have been trying to be a sensational, cultural, polished preacher. God has showed me that's not what he wants me to do."

Paul H. Dixon:

And about that time there came a knock on the door. Someone said, "Dr. Pearson, the church is on fire." And he ran down to see his church in flames. All of his library, all of his sermons. Incidentally, no

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reflection upon Dick Snavely and the work there in Calvary. You know what Dick told me? He called me. He said, "Paul, you won't believe this." He said, "I lost practically my whole library. When I finally got in there though," he said, "God, had spared 13 years of my sermons." He said, "I have them all. Thank God." He said, "Also the church records were spared." A.T Pearson had to move into another building. He started just preaching the word of God, not trying to impress anybody. He said, "I saw more people saved in the next 15 months than I'd seen saved in 15 years." Peter made much of simplicity.

Paul H. Dixon:

I think we also ought to note, brethren, that be a simple preacher means many times being a short preacher. I don't mean in stature. I mean, in length of sermon. And some of you may be saying after a while, "Well, I wish he'd practiced what he preaches." But I don't know where we got the idea that God's blessing comes with length of sermon. Spurgeon said, "They used to listen to three and four hours of preaching back in the days of the Puritans." And he said, "They could take 16 ounces of theology," but he said, "Today, they can only take about an ounce." And if they could only take an ounce in Spurgeon's day, we'd better it in half in our day. Brethren, let's be simple preachers and get to the point and say what we have to say and make much of simplicity.

Paul H. Dixon:

One day a mom and dad had been attending a revival meeting with the famous Southern Baptist preacher, Charles Brodman. And they were on their way home and the little nine year old boy looked up at his mom and said, "I don't think he's such a great preacher." She said, "Why not?" He said, "I understood everything he said." Peter made much of simplicity. Number two, Peter made much of the scriptures. Now I said, simple preaching, not shallow preaching. There's a difference. When I say simple preaching, I'm not saying that we stop putting content in our sermons. What I am saying is, brethren, let's take the content and boil it down so people can get it. I suppose, in my mind, the greatest, simple, yet profound preacher in our day as Warren Wiersbe. I think that man must have an unmeasurable IQ. You go to any pastor's conference, sit down with him and just listen to him and ask him about any book, if he's read it, and he has. And you start talking out a certain subject in that book and he'll say, "Oh yes, that's on page 200, about halfway down on that page." And yet when you listen to Warren Wiersbe preach and you realize how fresh this guy is, and he always has something to say. It's always simple, always simple. I'm not saying that it should be shallow. It must scriptural.

Paul H. Dixon:

Notice if you will, in this sermon, as we continue, that Peter beginning with the 16th verse begins to quote from the book of Joel, and he quotes Joel chapter two, verse 28 through 32. And then if you would go on into this sermon, you would find that he starts quoting from David in verse 25, when he quotes Psalm 16 versus eight through 11. There's little doubt that Peter was constantly using the word of God in his sermons. Let's note a few things just about some of these early men. Keep a finger in Acts two, because that's the basis of our consideration. But note Acts 8:25 please. "And they, when they had testified and preached the Word of the Lord, returned, they preached the book." Acts chapter 13, verse five. It says, "And when they were at Salamis, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." Acts 14, verse 25, "And when they had preached the word," Acts 15 verse 36, "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord and see how they do." Acts chapter 17, verse 13, "But when the Jews of

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Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came through there also and stirred up the people."

Paul H. Dixon:

Brethren, let's use illustrations. Let's use humor. Let's use anything we can to make the word of God simple. But after all, what we must primarily do is preach the word. Now I am not of the persuasion that just one particular type of preaching is the only way to preach the word. I appreciate the brethren who are expository preachers. And I must say that I believe that probably that is the best way to instruct people and to get them to know the word it is through expository preaching. I am sold on expository preaching, but I cannot buy the philosophy that's the only way to preach the word. Spurgeon was not an expository preacher. I don't care what anybody says. He was one of the best textual preachers who ever lived. You may want to preach the word topically. You may want to preach the word biography, but brethren, let's preach the word. They made much of simplicity. They made much of the scriptures.

Paul H. Dixon:

Number three, they made much of sin. You'll note back here in Acts chapter two, how Peter began preaching against sin. I mentioned this last night. I refresh the memory of those of you who were here, you begin preaching against sin by preaching a sovereign God. What we need today is for people to see the God of the Bible. And those of you were here last night, we went through this portion and we noticed how many times Peter referred to God. In Acts chapter two, verse 14 through 23, he just keeps honoring God and glorifying God, and telling that God is in control and God has designed this, and God's word is being fulfilled. This is where all evangelistic preaching must start is with God. I am weary of the philosophy that evangelistic preaching must not have doctrine. If there's any kind of preaching that must have doctrine, it must be evangelistic preaching. Could it be that the reason we have such shallow results is because we've been preaching such a shallow God? God help us.

Paul H. Dixon:

Peter started with God. He declared God's greatness, God's power, God's glory. Paul said in Athens, "Him I declare unto you." If you want to read for yourself, the testimony of Paul sometime, look at Acts chapter 20, verse 17 through 21. He said, "I preached unto you God, repentance toward God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ." He said in I Thessalonians chapter one, verse nine and 10, "I rejoice that you have turned from your idols to the living God." When we preach the God of the Bible, people will begin to see their sin, and only then. Then, after preaching God, Peter started zeroing in on their sin with utter boldness. Look at verse 23. "Him, being delivered by the predeterminate counsel and for knowledge of God," speaking of Jesus, "Ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." And he just zeroed in on them. And he said, you murdered Jesus Christ, you standing in the crowd this day. Notice again, if you will, right on down through this passage, how again and again, he accused them of crucifying the Son of God. Verse 36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God had made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Paul H. Dixon:

If you'll look up from your Bibles for a minute, seems like repentance is a missing word in our vocabulary these days. I'm afraid that we have too many people deciding for Christ, who do not know that they've ever been lost. We have too many people who are making decisions and we wonder why they don't live

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for God who do not really know what the grace of God is, because they never knew they were walking the gang plank to hell. I think, as we look at America today, what we are realizing in America today is that America has rejected Jesus Christ. We've rejected Jesus Christ in our homes, and thus the homes have been destroyed. We've rejected Christ in our educational systems, thus the educational system is dominated by this worldly philosophy. We've rejected Christ in our financial matters, and thus the economic problems that we have in our land.

Paul H. Dixon:

Many people today look at Watergate and look at the problems with former Vice President Agnew. And as I mentioned last night, the problems on the police force in Chicago, that's going on right now on the front pages of the Chicago Tribune, every day. And they look and they say, "Isn't that terrible? Look at what's going on at the top." Yeah, but look at what's going on at the bottom. This is just an indication of the utter immorality and the corruption and the sin that prevails in our land. And brethren, if we're going to really preach the message of God, we're going to have to make much of sin and preach sin as sin. Peter did it. We've got to do the same.

Paul H. Dixon:

It's only natural that when you begin to preach God and begin to preach sin, notice what happened in verse 32 through 35. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witness. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, having received of the Father of the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and here." He's the one who did this. He's the one who gave this Holy Spirit you're asking about. "David is now ascended unto the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, sit down on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool." And he got to the judgment of God. And after he preached a holy God, a sovereign God, and started showing them their sin, he then said, this is the God who's going to judge you unless you repent. And the early preacher saturated their messages with the judgment of God, that must be the content of ours as well.

Paul H. Dixon:

Out on the Texas Prairie, a young couple took a lovely little girl and tucked her in bed for the night. She was about six, beautiful with long, flowing blonde locks. And as a they tucked her in and kissed her good night, they walked over to the window, cracked it so she could get some fresh air, closed the door and went to their own bedroom. Sometime in that night while the little girl was sleeping, a rattlesnake crawled through that crack in the window, crossed that floor, and up on that little girl's bed. He was there on that bed coiled, just looking at that little girl. When all of a sudden, as a child will do, she turned during the night. And just that movement caused the snake to respond, and very quickly sank his fangs into her little face. The next morning, the young couple came to get their little girl out. And as they walked into that bedroom, there was their daughter on that bed, her face was swollen and black. She was dead. And on that bed with this head swinging like a pendulum, his tongue flashing in and out, was that rattlesnake. You think about the hatred those parents had for that snake. And that's the hatred God has for sin. And brethren. If we're going to preach the first century message we're going to have to preach again sin.

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Peter made much of simplicity and much of the scriptures, made much of sin. And in conclusion, he made much of the Savior. Verse 21 and 22, he says, "It shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Ye mean of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God." Now that's an interesting phraseology. Jesus of Nazareth. You go through the gospels and notice how many times this occurs, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus of Nazareth. They said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" He preached his humanity. He preached his resurrection in verse 23 and 24. He preached his exaltation in verses 29 through 33. He immediately went to Jesus Christ and looked at him from every angle. This is such a short sermon. We could stand before our people and just read I., And surely it would be over with in five minutes. And yet in those few minutes that he preached, he saturated his message with the son of God. Brethren, let's make it simple. Let's make it scriptural. Let's pray that it'll be with the convicting power of the Spirit of God as we preach against sin. But let's get to Jesus as fast as we can.

Paul H. Dixon:

Probably many of you have heard the story, but it constantly challenges me of the young preacher who went on to an old divine, an old preacher in England. And after he preached the sermon, he said, "Well, what'd you think of it?" He said, "It was very poor." He said, "Why?" He said, "No Christ." "But," he said, "The text, Christ wasn't in the text." He said, "Young man, in all of England, every town and every city and every Hamlet has a road that leads to London." And he said, "So young man, every text of scripture is a highway that leads to the metropolis of Jesus Christ." He said, "I'll find Christ in that text someplace. And he said, "If I can't find him there, he said, I'll climb over every hedge, I'll crawl through every ditch to get the Jesus. Because if Jesus isn't in the sermon, then it's not going to accomplish anything."

Congregation:

Amen.

Paul H. Dixon:

They made much of the Savior. We've got to start making more of the Savior in our lives. And we've got to start making more of the Savior in our sermons. When Peter made much of the Savior in his message, he stood there and the people interrupted him saying, "What must we do?" He didn't give the invitation. They gave it. And then he gave them a summon. He said, "You repent. You have a change of heart about your sin. You have a change of heart and mind about this God, this Christ you've rejected. You receive him as your Savior and as your Lord." And they did.

Paul H. Dixon:

I heard a sermon some time ago. It had to be the best sermon on Christ I've ever heard. It was by a black preacher at the Southern Baptist Convention, I believed as they gathered in Dallas, Texas. Bob Harrington, a friend of mine was in that convention. And he said, "Bob Harrington preached first. And can anybody imagine trying to follow Bob Harrington? I mean, he had those preachers laughing and crying and cheering." And of course those Southern Baptist fellas get quite emotional. I have some of these tapes and listen to them. And then of course there were thousands of them there. And he said, "Then this black preacher followed Harrington." He said, "I sat there and thought, oh man, this is going to be terrible. Nobody can follow Harrington." And as the tape goes, the sermon only lasted 22 minutes. I've never heard a sermon like it.

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Paul H. Dixon:

As it comes to its conclusion, It's on the Lordship of Christ. It goes something like this. "He came down, the stairway of heaven. Was born in Bethlehem, brought up in Nazareth, baptized in the Jordan, tempted in the wilderness, performed miracles by the roadside, healed multitudes without medicine, made no charge for his services. Conquered everything that came in his path, went up on Calvary and died. Then he went to the grave, cleaned it out to make it a pleasant place to wait for the resurrection. You can't destroy him because he said, "All power is given unto me." You try to destroy him by fire and he'll refuse to burn. You try to destroy him with water and he'll walk on the water. You try to destroy him with the wind and the tempest will lick his hand and lay down at his feet. You try to destroy him with the law and you'll find no fault in him. You try to destroy him with the steel of an empire and he'll break it. You try to put him in the grave and he'll rise. You try to destroy him by rejection. And before long, you'll hear a still, small voice saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I'll come into him and sup with them, and he with me."

Paul H. Dixon:

He's the pearl from paradise. He's the gem from the glory land. He's the fairest of jewels, times choicest theme, lights strongest cord, lights clearest ray, purity's whitest peak, and glories stainless summit. His name is honey to the taste, harmony to the ear, health to the soul, hope to the heart. He's higher than the heaven of heavens. He's holier than the holy of holies. He's the master of the mighty. He's the captain of the conquerors. He's the leader of the legislators. He's the hero of the heroes. He's the overseer of the overcomers. He's the Prince of prince and King of Kings and Lord of lords." And when he hit that place about here, he had some black preachers sitting behind him and they go got to going. And he started singing this, as only they can do. And those fellas out there, I mean, they started a Amen'ing and praising the Lord and he hit this part.

Paul H. Dixon:

"He's the Prince of princes and King of Kings and Lord of lords." And he said, "He's mine. Thank God he's mine. He didn't have to put his signature in the sunset because he's the owner. He didn't have to put his laundry mark on the Meadows because he's the owner. He didn't have to carve his initials in the sides of the mountains because he's the owner. He didn't have to put his brand on the cattle of a thousand hills because he's the owner. He didn't have to take out a copyright on the birds, the songs that the birds do sing because he's the owner." That's the Savior that we've got to preach.

Congregation:

Amen.

Paul H. Dixon:

What a message. Brethren, the world is waiting for the message that the first century men had. Thank God the same is ours. Would you sing with me? (Singing).