

Thou hast given a Banner

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The Psalmist speaks of a banner which the Lord has given to His people. It is a banner that is to be displayed because of the truth. It is to be held aloft by the Church of God and the Lord's people are to rally round it. It is the gospel banner setting forth the glory of the Divine Redeemer and it is founded upon the Word of God.

It is to those who fear Him that the Lord has given this banner, a people who in the mercy of God have been delivered from the bondage of sin and Satan and have become living followers of the Saviour. The Lord will have such a people in the world as long as sun and moon endures. At times they may be so few and be in such a low condition that it appears as though the banner of the Lord has fallen and that His enemies are triumphing. But the triumphing of the wicked is short and the Lord raises again that fallen standard. This has happened again and again throughout the history of the Church of God. Noah raised the banner on the side of truth after the flood when he re-established the worship of God in offering sacrifice to God. So did the judges whom God raised up to bring the children of Israel back to God. So did Elijah when on Mount Carmel he faced the prophets of Baal. So did Hezekiah and Josiah and other reforming kings of Judah. At the Reformation in the 16th Century the Reformers raised aloft once more that banner so that men might be delivered from the thralldom of Romanism. These things were the doing of the Lord and to Him is all the glory due.

Seeing that we have entered a year in which the centenary of our Church is due to be commemorated, we are reminded of the Lord's goodness to us as a people. The Lord has preserved among us the witness on the side of truth which was raised in 1893 when Rev Donald MacFarlane protested against the Declaratory Act and left the Disruption Free Church. It was to maintain inviolate the constitution of that once noble Free Church that Mr Macfarlane took the action that he did. His aim was that generations following should receive a full-orbed testimony to the truth of God's Word. When the banner was ready to fall through the declension of the Disruption Free Church, Mr Macfarlane took hold of it and raised it aloft for his own and succeeding generations to see. He followed in the line of Knox, Melville, Henderson,

Gillespie, Rutherford, Welsh, Blackader and other Covenanting Worthies, and the Disruption Fathers. It is a line of notable worthies whom the Lord raised up at different times to hold aloft His banner.

To us as a people is bequeathed a priceless inheritance. This ought to humble us in the dust before the Lord. It ought to make us realise also what a responsibility lies upon us to maintain that banner given to us, and to hand it on to the generations following as we have received it. If we weaken our hold of it in any way, or if we deviate from it to the right hand or the left, we will have failed in our duty and have rendered a disservice to the rising generation. A mere intellectual attachment to the testimony for truth embodied in our constitution will avail nothing unless we are bound by spiritual ties to the One whose testimony we bear. In view of this, what need there is in the hundredth year of our history as a Church to look anew to the Lord who wrought such great things for us in the past and who is able to do great things for us in the days that are to come.