

J H Jowett-Daily Meditation 4

PREVIOUS

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MY DAILY MEDITATION for the Circling Year by John Henry Jowett

APRIL

APRIL The First

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Luke 23:33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47.

LOOK at our Lord in relation to His foes. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!" Their bitterness has not embittered Him. The "milk of human kindness" was still sweet. Nothing could sour our Lord, and convert His goodwill into malice, His serene beneficence into wild revenge. And how is it with me? Are my foes able to maim my spirit as well as my body? Do they win their end by making me a smaller man? Or am I magnanimous even on the cross?

And look at our Lord in relation to the penitent thief. "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." There was no self-centredness in our Saviour's grief. He was the good Physician, even when His body was mangled on the cross. He healed a broken heart even in the very pangs of death. When "there was darkness over all the earth," He let the light of the morning into the heart of a desolate thief. And, good Lord, graciously help me to do likewise!

And all this amazing graciousness is explained in our Lord's relation to His Father. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!" Yes, everything is there! When I and My Father are one, my spirit will remain sweet as the violet and pure as the dew.

APRIL The Second

"ON HIM!"

"The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

—Isaiah 53:4, 5, 6.

LET me tell a dream which was given by night to one of my dearest friends. He beheld a stupendous range of glorious sun-lit mountains, with their lower slopes enfolded in white mist. "Lord," he cried, "I pray that I may dwell upon those heights!" "Thou must first descend into the vale," a voice replied.

Into the vale he went. And down there he found himself surrounded with all manner of fierce, ugly, loathsome things. As he looked upon them he saw that they were the incarnations of his own sins! There they were, sins long ago committed, showing their threatening teeth before him!

Then he heard some One approaching, and instinctively he knew it was the Lord! And he felt so ashamed that he drew a cloak over his face, and stood in silence. And the Presence came nearer and nearer, until He, too, stood silent. After a while my friend mastered sufficient courage to lift the corner of his cloak and look out upon the Presence: and lo! all the loathsome things were on Him!

"The Lord had laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

APRIL The Third

THE STONE ROLLED AWAY

Mark 16:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

I AM always wondering who will roll away the stone! There is a great obstacle in the way, and my frailty is incompetent to its removal. And lo! when I arrive at the place I find that the angel has been before me, and the obstacle is gone! And I would that I might learn wisdom to-day from the miracle of yesterday. Let me not be confounded about a new stone when I know that my fears about the old one had no foundation.

And then the young man at the sepulchre! He is a type of eternal youth, and he is sitting serenely in a routed grave. He represents the unwithering in the very home of corruption. And this, too, is my hope! It is mine in Christ to put on incorruption, and through a brief sleep to become clothed with immortal youth. "There everlasting spring abides, and never withering flowers!"

And I may have the assurance of the coming glory even now. Even now may I taste the heavenly feast, and wear some of the unfading flowers of the glorified. Yes, even now my leaf need not wither, and my hopes may remain unshaken through all my troubled years.

APRIL The Fourth

THE RESURRECTION MORNING

Matthew 28:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

LET me reverently mark the happenings of this most wonderful morn. "It began to dawn." Yes, that was the first significance of the resurrection. It was a new day for the world. Everything was to be seen in a new light. Everything was to wear a new face—God, and heaven, and life, and duty, and death! "All things are become new."

"And there was a great earthquake." Yes, and this was significant of the tremendous upheaval implied in the resurrection. The kingdom of the devil was upheaved from its foundations. All the boasted pomp of his showy empire was turned upside down. "I beheld Satan falling!"

"And the angel rolled away the stone." And that, too, is significant of the resurrection. The awful barrier was rolled away, and the grave became a thoroughfare! "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

And there was "fear and great joy." And mingled awe and gladness, a reverential delight.

APRIL The Fifth

THE EMPTY TOMB

Luke 24:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

THAT empty tomb means the conquest of death. The Captive proved mightier than the captor. He emerged from the prison as the Lord of the prison, and death reeled at His going. In the risen Saviour death is dethroned; he takes his place at the footstool to do the bidding of his sovereign Lord and King. And that empty tomb means the conquest of sin. Sin had done its worst, and had failed. All the forces of hell had been rallied against the Lord, and above them all He rose triumphant and glorified. A little while ago I discovered a spring. I tried to choke it. I heaped sand and gravel upon it; I piled stones above it! And through them all it emerged, noiselessly and irresistibly, a radiant resurrection!

And so the empty tomb becomes the symbol of a thoroughfare between life in time and life in the unshadowed Presence of our God. Death is now like a short tunnel which is near my home; I can look through it and see the other side! In the risen Lord death becomes transparent. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

APRIL The Sixth

FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

"Last of all He was seen of me also."

1Corinthians 15:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

AND by that vision Saul of Tarsus was transformed. And so, by the ministry of a risen Lord we have received the gift of a transfigured Paul. The resurrection glory fell upon him, and he was glorified. In that superlative light he discovered his sin, his error,

his need, but he also found the dynamic of the immortal hope.

“Seen of me also!” Can I, too, calmly and confidently claim the experience? Or am I altogether depending upon another man’s sight, and are my own eyes unilluminated? In these realms the witness of “hear-says” counts for nothing; he only speaks with arresting power who has “seen for himself.” “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?” That is the question which is asked, not only by the Master, but by all who hear us tell the story of the risen Lord. “Has He been seen of thee also?”

My Saviour, I humbly pray Thee to give me first-hand knowledge of Thee. Let me be a witness who can say, “I know that my Redeemer liveth!” Before all the doubts and hesitations of man enable me to answer, “Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”

APRIL The Seventh

IF CHRIST WERE DEAD!

1 Corinthians 15:12, 13, 14, 15, 16 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 25, 26.

“If Christ be not risen!” That is the most appalling “if” which can be flung into the human mind. If it obtains lodging and entertainment, all the fairest hopes of the soul wither away like tender buds which have been nipped by sharp frost! See how they fade!

“Your faith is vain.” It has no more strength and permanency than Jonah’s gourd. Nay, it has really never been a living thing! It has been a pathetic delusion, beautiful, but empty as a bubble, and collapsing at Joseph’s tomb.

“Ye are yet in your sins.” The hope of forgiveness and reconciliation is stricken, and there is nothing left but “a certain fearful looking-for of judgment.” Nemesis has only been hiding behind a screen of decorated falsehoods, and she will pursue us to the bitter end.

“We are of all men the most miserable.” Joy would fall and die like a fatally wounded lark. The song would cease from our souls. The holy place would become a tomb.

“But now is Christ risen from the dead!” Yes, let me finish on that word. That gives me morning, and melody, and holy merriment that knows no end.

April The Eighth

MY INHERITANCE IN THE RISEN LORD

1Peter 1:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

IN my risen Lord I am born into “a living hope,” a hope not only vital, but vitalizing, sending its mystic, vivifying influences through every highway and by-way of my soul.

In my risen Lord mine is “an inheritance incorruptible.” It is not exposed to the gnawing tooth of time. Moth and rust can not impair the treasure. It will not grow less as I grow old. Its glories are as invulnerable as my Lord.

In my risen Lord mine is “an inheritance ... undefiled.” There is no alloy in the fine gold. The King will give me of His best. “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.” The holiest ideal proclaims my possibility, and foretells my ultimate attainment. Heaven’s wine is not to be mixed with water. I am to awake “in His likeness.”

And mine is “an inheritance ... that fadeth not away.” It shall not be as the garlands offered by men—green to-day and to-morrow sere and yellow. “Its leaf also shall not wither.” It shall always retain its freshness, and shall offer me a continually fresh delight. And these are all mine in Him!

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want.”

APRIL The Ninth

THE EVER-LIVING LORD

Revelation 1:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

LET me take the simple words, and quietly gaze into the wonderful depths of their fathomless simplicity. An old villager used to tell me it would strengthen my eyes if I looked long into deep wells. And it will assuredly strengthen the eyes of my soul to gaze into wells like these.

"I am He that liveth." What a marvellous transformation it worked upon Dr. Dale, when one day, in his study, it flashed upon him, as never before, that Jesus Christ is alive! "Christ is alive!" he repeated again and again, until the clarion music filled all the rooms in his soul. "Christ is alive!"

"And was dead." Yes, the Lord has gone right through that dark place. There are footprints, and they are the footprints of the Conqueror, all along the road. "Christ leads me through no darker room than He went through before."

"And, behold, I am alive for ever more." "Jesus has conquered death and all its powers." Never more will it sit on a transient throne. Its power is broken, its "sting" has lost its poison, there isn't a boast left in its apparently omnivorous mouth! "Where's thy victory, O grave?" And here is the gospel for me—"Because I live ye shall live also."

APRIL The Tenth

RESURRECTION-LIGHT

"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again..."

1Thessalonians 4:13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

THAT is the eastern light which fills the valley of time with wonderful beams of glory. It is the great dawn in which we find the promise of our own day. Everything wears a new face in the light of our Lord's resurrection. I once watched the dawn on the East Coast of England. Before there was a grey streak in the sky everything was held in grimmest gloom. The toil of the two fishing-boats seemed very sombre. The sleeping houses on the shore looked the abodes of death. Then came grey light, and then the sun, and everything was transfigured! Every window in every cottage caught the reflected glory, and the fishing-boats glittered in morning radiance.

And everything is transfigured in the Risen Christ. Everything is lit up when "the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in His wings." Life is lit up, and so is death, and so are sorrow and daily labour and human friendships! Everything catches the gleam and is changed. "We are no longer of the night, but of the day." "Walk as children of light." "Awake, thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee."

APRIL The Eleventh

THROUGH DEATH TO LIFE

Romans 5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

THE Lord went through death to make a path to life. He descended into shame and suffering, and appalling desolation in order that He might "open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers." And the way is now open!

Therefore, "let us have peace with God." Let us reverently and willingly tread the heavenly road, and seek the King's presence, and gratefully accept "the everlasting covenant." Let us go, as once rebel soldiers, and let us surrender our arms, and at His bidding take them again, to fight in His service.

And let us "glory in tribulation." If we are in the King's road, at peace with the King, every stormy circumstance will be made to do us service. Yes, all our troubles will be compelled to minister to us, to robe us, and to adorn us, and to make us more like the sons and daughters of a royal house. "Out of the eater will come forth meat, and out of the strong will come forth sweetness."

And, therefore, let us "joy in God." Don't let us be "the King's own," and yet march in the sulks! Let us march to the music of grateful song and praise.

"Children of the heavenly King,
As ye journey, sweetly sing."

APRIL The Twelfth

THE LAMB ON THE THRONE

"In the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as it had been slain!"

Revelation 5:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

HOW strange and unexpected is the figure! A lamb—the supreme type of gentleness! A throne, the supreme symbol of power! And the one is in the very midst of the other. The sacrificial has become the sovereign: the Cross is the principal part of the throne. "I, if I

be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.”

Yes, this sovereign sacrificial Lord is to receive universal homage and worship. “Every creature which is in heaven and on the earth” is to pay tribute at His feet. And this, not by a terrible coercion, but by a gracious constraint. We are not to be driven, we are to be drawn; we are to move by love—compulsion: the Lamb in God is to win the wills of men.

And I, too, may take my harp and make melodious praise before my King. And I, too, may fill the “golden vials” with my grateful intercession, and heaven shall be the sweeter for the odour of my prayers. And I, too, may sound my loud “Amen,” the note of gladsome resignation to the sovereign will of God. Yes, even now I may be one of “the multitude whom no man can number,” who, in a new song, ascribe all worthiness to “the Lamb that was slain.”

APRIL The Thirteenth

PURE GOLD

“Thou shalt overlay it with pure gold....And there I will meet with thee.”

Exodus 25:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22.

MUST put my best into my preparations, and then the Lord will honour my work. My part is to be of “pure gold” if my God is to dwell within it. I must not satisfy myself with cheap flimsy and then assume that the Lord will be satisfied with it. He demands my very best as a condition of His enriching Presence.

My prayers must be of “pure gold” if He is to meet me there. There must be nothing vulgar about them, nothing shoddy, nothing hastily constructed, nothing thrown up anyhow. They must be chaste and sincere, and overlaid with pure gold.

My home must be of “pure gold” if He is to meet me there. No unclean passion must dwell there, no carnal appetite, no defiling conversation, no immoderateness in eating and drinking. How can the Lord sit down at such a table, or make One at such a fireside?

Let me present to Him pure gold. Let me offer Him nothing cheap. Let me ever make the ark of my best, and the Lord will meet me there.

APRIL The Fourteenth

RELIGION AS MERE MAGIC

“And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout.” 1 Samuel 4:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

THEY were making more of the ark than of the Lord. Their religion was degenerating into superstition. I become superstitious whenever the means of worship are permitted to eclipse the Object of worship. I then possess a magic instrument, and I forget the holy Lord.

It can be so with prayer. I may use prayer as a magic minister to protect me from invasive ills. I do not pray because I desire fellowship with the Father, but because I should not feel safe without it. The ark is more than the Lord.

It can be so with a crucifix. A crucifix may become a mere talisman, and so supplant the Lord. I may wear the thing and have no fellowship with the Person. And so may it be with the Lord’s Supper. I may come to regard it as a magic feast, which makes me immune from punishment, but not immune from sin. It may be a minister of safety, but not of holiness.

So let mine eyes be ever unto the Lord! Let me not be satisfied with the ark, but let me seek Him whose name is holy and whose nature is love.

APRIL The Fifteenth

DEGRADING HOLY THINGS

1 Samuel 6:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

I MUST remember that a holy thing can be the minister of a plague. Things that were purposed to be benedictions can be changed into blights. The very ark of God must be in its appointed place or it becomes the means of sickness and destruction. So it is with all the holy things of God: if I dethrone them they will uncrown me.

It is even so with music. Unless I give it its holy sovereignty it will become a minister of the passions, and the angel within me is

mastered by a beast. Let me read again Tennyson's "Palace of Sin," and let me heedfully note how music becomes the instrument of ignoble sensationalism, and aids in man's degradation. "But exalt her, and she shall exalt thee."

It is even so with art. It is purposed to be the holy dwelling-place of God, but I can so abuse it as to make it the agent of degradation. Instead of hallowing the life it will debase and impoverish it.

I will therefore remember that, if I infringe the Divine order, I can turn the sacramental cup into a vehicle of moral poison and spiritual blight. "They must be holy who bear the vessels of the Lord."

APRIL The Sixteenth

PRIESTS OF THE LORD

"None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites."

1Chronicles 15:1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

THERE are prepared people for prepared offices. The Lord will fit the man to the function, the anointed and consecrated priest for the consecrated and consecrating ministry.

But now, in the larger purpose of the Lord, and in "the exceeding riches of His grace," everybody may be a priest of the Lord. "He hath made us to be priests and kings unto God." And He will prepare us to carry our ark, and to "minister in holy things."

I can be His priest in the home. He will anoint me as one who is to engage in holy ministries, and I shall be serving at the altar even while engaged in the lowly duties of the house. The humble meal will be sacramental, and common work will be heavenly sacrifice.

I can be His priest in my class. The Lord will clothe me in "linen clean and white," and in my consecrated spirit my scholars shall discern the incense of sacrifice. And woe is me if I attempt to fill the godly office without my God.

And I can be His priest in my workshop. Yes, in the carpenter's shop I may wear the radiant robe of the sanctified. And I, too, as one of the priests of the Lord, can "bear the sin of many, and make intercession for the transgressor."

APRIL The Seventeenth

GREAT PRAISE

1Chronicles 26:7-36.

"GREAT is the Lord!" So many people have such a little God! There is nothing about Him august and sublime. And so He is not greatly praised. The worship is thin, the thanksgivings are scanty, the supplications are indifferent.

All great saints have a great God. He fills their universe. Therefore do they move about in a fruitful awe, and everywhere there is only a thin veil between them and His appearing. Everywhere they discern His holy presence, as the face of a bride is dimly seen beneath her bridal veil. And so even the common scrub of the wilderness is aflame with sacred fire: the humble "primrose on the rock" becomes "the court of Deity": and the "strength of the hills is His also"!

Yes, a great God inspires great praise, and in great praise small cares and small meannesses are utterly consumed away. When praise is mean, anxieties multiply. Therefore let me contemplate the greatness of God in nature and in providence, in His power, and His holiness, and His love. Let me "stand in awe" before His glory: and in the fruitful reverence the soul will be moved in acceptable praise.

APRIL The Eighteenth

MECHANICAL PIETY

Philemon 1:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

THE Apostle Paul declares that benefits may be given in one of two ways—"of necessity" and "willingly." One is mechanical, the other is spontaneous. I once saw a little table-fountain playing in a drawing-room, but I heard the click of its machinery, and the charm was gone! It had to be wound up before it would play, and at frequent periods it "ran down." A little later I saw another fountain playing on a green lawn, and it was fed from the deep secret resources of the hills!

There is a generosity which is like the drawing-room fountain. If you listen you can hear the mechanical click, and a sound of friction, arising from murmuring and complaint. And there is a generosity which is like the fountain that is the child of the hills. It is clear, and sweet, and musical, and flows on through every season! One is "of necessity"; the other is "willingly." And "God loveth a

cheerful giver.”

And prayer can be of the same two contrary orders. One prayer is mechanical, it is hard, formal, metallic. The other is spontaneous, forceful, and irresistible. Listen to the Pharisee—“Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are.” It is the click of the machine! Listen to the publican—“God be merciful to me, a sinner!” It is the voice of the deeps.

APRIL The Nineteenth

UNION IN HARMONY

“Be ye all of one mind.”

1Peter 3:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.

BUT this is not unison: it is harmony. When an orchestra produces some great musical masterpiece, the instruments are all of one mind, but each makes its own individual contribution. There is variety with concordance: each one serves every other, and the result is glorious harmony. “By love serve one another.” It is love that converts membership into fraternity: it is love that binds sons and daughters into a family.

Look at a field of wild-flowers. What a harmony of colour! And yet what a variety of colours! Nothing out of place, but no sameness! All drawing resource from the same soil, and breathing the vitalizing substance from the same air!

“And ye, being rooted and grounded in love,” will grow up, a holy family in the Lord. If love be the common ground the varieties in God’s family may be infinite!

And so the unity which the apostle seeks is a unity of mood and disposition. It is not a unity which repeats the exact syllables of a common creed, but a unity which is built of common trust, and love, and hope. It is not sameness upon the outer lips, but fellowship in the secret place.

APRIL The Twentieth

THE JOY OF THE LOVER

Romans 12:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

LOVE finds her joy in seeing others crowned. Envy darkens when she sees the garland given to another. Jealousy has no festival except when she is “Queen of the May.” But love thrills to another’s exaltation. She feels the glow of another’s triumph. When another basks in favour her own “time of singing of birds is come!”

And all this is because love has wonderful chords which vibrate to the secret things in the souls of others. Indeed, the gift of love is just the gift of delicate correspondence, the power of exquisite fellow-feeling, the ability to “rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with them that weep.” When, therefore, the soul of another is exultant, and the wedding-bells are ringing, love’s kindred bells ring a merry peal. When the soul of another is depressed, and a funeral dirge is wailing, love’s kindred chords wail in sad communion. So love can enter another’s state as though it were her own.

Our Master spake condemningly of those who have lost this exquisite gift. They have lost their power of response. “We have piped with you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned with you, and ye have not lamented.” They lived in selfish and loveless isolation. They have lost all power of tender communion.

APRIL The Twenty-first

LOVE AS THE GREAT MAGICIAN

1John 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

A NEW commandment! And yet it is an old one with a new meaning. It is the old water-pot, but its water has been changed into wine. It is the old letter with a new spirit. It is the old body with a new soul. Love makes all things new! It changes duty into delight, and statutes into songs.

What a magic difference love makes to a face. It at once becomes a face illumined. Love makes the plainest face winsome and attractive. It adds the light of heaven, and the earthly is transfigured. No cosmetics are needed when love is in possession. She will do her own beautifying work, and everybody will know her sign.

What a magic difference love makes in service! The hireling goes about his work with heavy and reluctant feet: the lover sings and dances at his toil. The hireling scamps his work: the lover is always adding another touch, and is never satisfied. Just one more

touch! And just another! And so on until the good God shall say that loving “patience has had her perfect work.”

Love lights up everything, for she is the light of life. Let her dwell in the soul, and every room in the life shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.

APRIL The Twenty-second

SPEECH AS A SYMPTOM OF HEALTH

“The tongue of the wise is health.”

—Proverbs 12:13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22.

OUR doctors often test our physical condition by the state of our tongue. With another and deeper significance the tongue is also the register of our condition. Our words are a perfect index of our moral and spiritual health. If our words are unclean and untrue, our souls are assuredly sickly and diseased. A perverse tongue is never allied with a sanctified heart. And, therefore, everyone may apply a clinical test to his own life: “What is the character of my speech? What do my words indicate? What do they suggest as to the depths and background of the soul?” “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

God delighteth in truthful lips. Right words are fruit from the tree of life. The Lord turns away from falsehood as we turn away from material corruption, only with an infinitely intenser loathing and disgust.

It is only the lips that have been purified with flame from the holy altar of God that can offer words that are pleasing unto Him.

“Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.”

APRIL The Twenty-third

MASCULINE FORGIVENESS

Colossians 3:12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.

TRUE forgiveness is a very strong and clean and masculine virtue. There is a counterfeit forgiveness which is unworthy of the name. It is full of “buts,” and “ifs,” and “maybes,” and “peradventures.” It moves with reluctance, it offers with averted face, it takes back with one hand what it gives with the other. It forgives, but it “cannot forget.” It forgives, but it “can never trust again.” It forgives, but “things can never be the same as they were.” What kind of forgiveness is this? It is the mercy of the police-court. It is the remission of penalty, not the glorious “abandon” of grace! It is a cold “Don’t do it again,” not the weeping and compassionate goodwill of the Lord.

“Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” That is to be our motive, and that is to be our measure. We are to forgive because Christ forgave us. The glorious memory of His grace is to make us gracious. His tender, healing words to us are to redeem our speech from all harshness. In the contemplation of His cross we are to become “partakers of His sufferings,” and by the shedding of our own blood help to close and heal the alienation of the world.

And we are to forgive as Christ forgave us. Resentment is to be changed into frank goodwill, and filled with the grace of the Lord.

APRIL The Twenty-fourth

LIMITED FORGIVENESS

Luke 17:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

WE are always inclined to set a limit to our moral obligations. We wish, as we say, “to draw a line somewhere.” We want to appoint a definite place where obligation ceases, and where the moral strain may be released. The Apostle Peter wished his Master to draw such a line in the matter of forgiveness. “Lord, how oft shall I forgive? Till seven times?” He wanted a tiny moral rule which he could apply to his brother’s conduct.

Not so the Lord. Our Master tells His disciple that in those spiritual realms relations are not governed by arithmetic. We cannot, by counting, measure off our obligations. Our repeated acts of forgiveness never bring us nearer to the freedom of revenge. No amount of sweetness will ever permit us to be bitter. We cannot, by being good, obtain a license to be evil. The fact of the matter is, if our goodness is of genuine quality, every act will more strongly dispose us to further goodness. It is the counterfeit element in our goodness that inclines us to the opposite camp. It is when our forgiveness is tainted that we anticipate the “sweetness” of revenge.

APRIL The Twenty-fifth

THE HIDDEN FOES

Matthew 5:21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26.

OUR Lord always leads us to the secret, innermost roots of things. He does not concern Himself with symptoms, but with causes. He does not begin with the molten lava flowing down the fair mountain slope and destroying the vineyards. He begins with the central fires in which the lava is born. He does not begin with uncleanness. He begins with the thoughts which produce it. He does not begin with murder, but with the anger which causes it. He pierces to the secret fires!

Now, all anger is not of sin. The Apostle Paul enjoins his readers to "be angry, and sin not." To be altogether incapable of anger would be to offer no antagonism to the wrongs and oppressions of the world. "Who is made to stumble, and I burn not?" cries the Apostle Paul. If wrong stalked abroad with heedless feet he burned with holy passion. There is anger which is like clean flame, clear and pure, as "the sea of glass mingled with fire." And there is anger which is like a smoky bonfire, and it pollutes while it destroys.

It is the unclean anger which is of sin. It seeks revenge, not righteousness. It seeks "to get its own back," not to get the wrong-doer back to God. It follows wrong with further wrong. It spreads the devil's fire.

APRIL The Twenty-sixth

GOLIATH VERSUS GOD!

1Samuel 17:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

GOLIATH seemed to have everything on his side except God. And the things in which he boasted were just the things in which men are prone to boast to-day.

He had physical strength. "His height was six cubits and a span." Athletics had done all they could for him, and he was a fine type of animal perfection.

He had splendid military equipment. "A helmet of brass," and "a coat of mail," and "a spear like a weaver's beam!" Surely, if fine material equipment determines combats, the shepherd-lad from the hills of Bethlehem will be annihilated.

And he enjoyed the enthusiastic confidence of the Philistines. He was his nation's pride and glory! He strode out amid their shouts, and the cheers were like iron in his blood.

But all this counted for nothing, because God was against him. Men and nations may attain to a fine animalism, their warlike equipment may satisfy the most exacting standard, and yet, with God against them, they shall be as structures woven out of mists, and they shall collapse at the touch of apparent weakness. The issue was not Goliath versus David, but Goliath versus God!

APRIL The Twenty-seventh

OBSCURE BIRTHPLACES

1Samuel 17:12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27.

GOD'S champion is at present feeding sheep! Who would have expected that Goliath's antagonist would emerge from the quiet pastures? "Genius hatches her offspring in strange places." Very humble homes are the birthplaces of mighty emancipations.

There was a little farm at St. Ives, and the farmer lived a quiet and unsensational life. But the affairs of the nation became more and more confused and threatening. Monarchical power despoiled the people's liberties, and tyranny became rampant. And out from the little farm strode Oliver Cromwell, the ordained of God, to emancipate his country.

There was an obscure rectory at Epworth. The doings in the little rectory were just the quiet practices of similar homes in countless parts of England. And England was becoming brutalized, because its religious life was demoralized. The Church was asleep, and the devil was wide awake! And forth from the humble rectory strode John Wesley, the appointed champion of the Lord to enthuse, to purify, and to sweeten the life of the people.

On what quiet farm is the coming deliverer now labouring? Who knows?

APRIL The Twenty-eighth

PREPARING FOR GREAT ENCOUNTERS

1Samuel 17:28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37.

THIS young champion of the Lord had won many victories before he faced Goliath. Everything depends on how I approach my supreme conflicts. If I have been careless in smaller combats I shall fail in the larger. If I come, wearing the garlands of triumph won in the shade, the shout of victory is already in the air! Let me look at David's trophies before he removed Goliath's head.

He had conquered his temper. Read Eliab's irritating taunt in the twenty-eighth verse, and mark the fine self-possession of the young champion's reply! That conquest of temper helped him when he took aim at Goliath! There is nothing like passion for disturbing the accuracy of the eye and the steadiness of the hand.

He had conquered fear. "Let no man's heart fail because of him." There was no panic, there was no feverish and wasteful excitement. There was no shouting "to keep the spirits up!" He was perfectly calm.

And he had conquered unbelief. He had a rich history of the providential dealings of God with him, and his confidence was now unclouded and serene. He had known the Lord's power when he faced the bear and the lion. Now for Goliath!

APRIL The Twenty-ninth

THE MOOD OF TRIUMPH

"I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts."

1Samuel 17:38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54.

THE man who comes up to his foes with this assurance will fight and win. Reasonable confidence is one of the most important weapons in the warrior's armoury. Fear is always wasteful. The man who calmly expects to win has already begun to conquer. Our mood has so much to do with our might. And therefore does the Word of God counsel us to attend to our dispositions, lest, having carefully collected our material implements, we have no strength to use them.

And the man who comes up to his foes with holy assurance will fight with consummate skill. He will be quite "collected." All his powers will wait upon one another, and they will move together as one. He is as self-possessed upon the battlefield as upon parade, as undisturbed before Goliath as before a flock of sheep! And therefore do I say that, fighting with perfect composure, he fights with superlative skill. The right moment is seized, the right stone is chosen, the right aim is taken, and great Goliath is brought low.

APRIL The Thirtieth

THE TEST OF VICTORY

"David behaveth himself wisely."

1Samuel 17:55-1Samuel 18:1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

THE hour of victory is a more severe moral test than the hour of defeat. Many a man can brave the perils of adversity who succumbs to the seductions of prosperity. He can stand the cold better than the heat! He is enriched by failure, but "spoilt by success." To test the real quality of a man, let us regard him just when he has slain Goliath! "David behaved himself wisely"!

He was not "eaten up with pride." He developed no "side." He went among his friends as though no Goliath had ever crossed his way. He was not for ever recounting the triumph, and fishing for the compliments of his audience. He "behaved wisely." So many of us tarnish our victories by the manner in which we display them. We put them into the shop-window, and they become "soiled goods."

And in this hour of triumph David made a noble friend. In his noonday he found Jonathan, and their hearts were knit to each other in deep and intimate love. It is beautiful when our victories are so nobly borne that they introduce us into higher fellowships, and the friends of heaven become our friends.