

# Westminster Pulpit-G Campbell Morgan-1

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## Genesis 1:1 - "In the Beginning God"

I am quite conscious that the text is not a complete statement. It does not give us the full affirmation of the writer, but it reveals his assumption; and the affirmation is valueless apart from this assumption. To the affirmation itself, I do not propose to give anything more than passing reference by way of illustration of the larger subject suggested by and included in the assumption, "In the beginning God."

That phrase takes us beyond the seen to the unseen, behind the sensual to the spiritual, beneath the passing to the permanent, before the temporal to the eternal.

If then, I am charged with mutilating a text, I shall reply that the murder of the letter is in this case deliberate in order to the liberation of the spirit.

Let us consider the general spirit or atmosphere into which we are brought by these words. They constitute, first, the recognition of a starting-point. The phrase may have reference to matters of time or of place, to the subject of order or of rank. If you think of time,

"In the beginning." If you think of place, "In the beginning." If you think of order, consecutive and regular movement, and progress, "In the beginning." If you think of rank, dignity, position, precedence, "In the beginning." This recognition of a starting-point is in perfect and absolute harmony with science.

The phrase is also the recognition of a cause; and the cause is written for us here in that old Teutonic form which defies the attempt of philologists to place it or explain it, "God." On the page of the Hebrew Bible the word is Elohim, the plural form of El. The word stands essentially and simply for might. There are three numbers in the Hebrew—singular, dual, and plural; and the plural is constantly made use of to indicate intensity. When some thought possessing the mind of a writer could not be expressed for very greatness by the singular number, he would employ the plural.

That in this connection is the suggestiveness of the word Elohim. It is used here not to define nature, or to unveil character; not even to solve the mystery of personality; it is used rather to indicate the recognition of a cause at the beginning of time, place, order, or rank. The phrase thus recognizes a Being separate from everything hereafter to be described, and yet sufficient for everything hereafter to be described.

If the recognition of a starting-point indicated by the words "In the beginning" is in perfect harmony with science, the recognition of a separate, sufficient cause transcends the demonstration of science. Science has never yet found its way to the honest possibility of making the declaration with which this Book of Genesis opens. Science has at times been compelled to say there must be a first cause: but there is a very distinct difference between that affirmation and this "In the beginning God created." The one is the admission of an apparent though not demonstrated necessity on the part of men of sincere investigation; but the other is the quiet, dignified affirmation of a Person and a fact. Thus the Divine Library in its present arrangement opens with a phrase which is a voice from without, speaking to the deeps within, and its message when perfectly and earnestly considered is found to be in harmony with everything around.

Here is no apology for God, no argument for God, no defence of God, but the opening affirmation, which for the moment may be received as an affirmation and not necessarily believed; then, as we take our way through page after page, and book after book, of the library, it will be for us to say, when that work is completed, whether the revelation of the library, the revelation of the facts and forces within and around us, harmonizes with the great opening assumption of the Book, "In the beginning God."

It is not my purpose this evening to defend the accuracy of this assumption. I accept it as true, and, proceeding from that standpoint, submit that it is axiomatic, that courses and consummations must be related to causes. If I can find a beginning, then that which begins must inevitably in all its course and in its consummation bear some relation to that which was its cause. The deduction in the present case is self-evident. If this opening affirmation of the Word of God be true concerning creation, concerning the Library itself, concerning man, that the first originating cause is God, then there surely can be no escape from the fact that all the course of creation, all the course of the Divine Library, all the course of man, that crowning fact and wonder of Creation, must inevitably be in some form or fashion, in some way or other related to the original cause; and that the consummation of creation, of the Divine Library, and of man must also be related to that originating cause, God.

Thus we are confronted in this first verse in the first book in the Divine Library with a fundamental truth that has its bearing on all life, "In the beginning God." At the back of all the forces in the midst of which we live, forces blossoming in beauty, moving in rhythmic order, even startling us by their differentiations and changes and new manifestations and developments; at the back of everything is God. Therefore, all these forces, in their movements and in their working, and in what they produce, are related to God, and are moving toward a consummation which must in some way be related to Him.

Let us then attempt to give ourselves first to some considerations, and finally to some applications.

Let us consider our phrase in its relation to the actual affirmation of the writer, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Let me quietly, earnestly, and solemnly warn my young friends especially that in the study of the Bible we need to disabuse our minds of all human interpretations, ever remembering that not what the Fathers thought, or the schoolmen taught, or the theologians held, is necessarily true; but what the Word itself declares. The first fact declared concerning the creation is that the potential stuff—call it matter, if you will—is God-created. For the moment we are not considering the process by which the work was done, nor the processes which followed that initial act of God, through which the thing first made has come to be the things we now know and touch. The fundamental declaration, that with which I am now dealing, is that "In the beginning God created."

What is your particular theory of the origin of the things in the midst of which you live? Do you believe still that this universe came into being suddenly; that God, by some sudden, immediate act, made everything as you find it? I dismiss that as being utterly out of harmony with the first chapter of Genesis. Or, do you say, I have been compelled to the acceptance of what is known as the evolutionary theory? Then remember that the evolutionary theory postulates perpetual beginnings. What is its last product? Its last product is something self-evident. Whence came it? It is the product of something lower. Whence came that? From something lower still. Whence came that? From something still lower. In each case there was a new beginning; call it differentiation if you will. It was a

new start, a fresh development, a coming of the new out of the old. Trace this process back and back, and where will you end? Thirty years ago the scientist would have told you, in the primordial protoplasmic germ. The scientist now says nothing of the kind; he whispers electrons, and then speaks of a psychological fact beyond. The scientist, with honest integrity and splendid heroism tracking his way back, finds ever a beginning proceeding out of something which also has a beginning, until at last he arrives where there is no place on which to step off; his last word has been said, and, beyond, the scientist of today tells us he hears whispers, thunders of mind, and is conscious of psychological mysteries. In that strange, magnificent gap my text stands, and out of it comes the word "In the beginning God." Let that be granted, and that which I have already declared to be axiomatic follows. All the developments, all the processes are related to that first cause from which everything sprang. All that which science has discovered is the method of God. Between the first and second verses of this chapter there is a great gap, so great that we cannot bridge it, a mystery so dark that we cannot explain it. "The earth was waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." That is not how God made it. That is not the suggestion of the first verse. The suggestion of the first verse is that of perfection, harmony, a cosmic order. What happened between the first and second verses? I do not know. There is no solution anywhere in the Word of God; but God did not create a waste. La Place's theory of nebulae is exploded. He declared that everything might be explained as proceeding out of nebulae; but when Rosse turned his reflector upon those cloudy masses, which even Herschel had described as nebulae, and had scientifically declared as impossible of resolution into order, they were seen to be perfected systems of stars. The first verse of the Bible declares that God did originally create, and from the third verse to the end of the chapter we have the account, not of original creation, but of the restoration of a lost order, the bringing of cosmos out of chaos. How the chaos happened none can tell, for the Bible has no whisper of the secret, and science has as yet not attempted an explanation, perhaps because it has not recognized the fact. Yet the marvel of scientific investigation is that it is going behind that chaos of the second verse, and is discovering the footprints of God in that earliest method of creation, in fossil remains which must have been lying hidden for millenniums. The testimony which it bears is that all the way, through all evolutions or devolutions, through all developments or progress, God Who started has accompanied. Paul, speaking of the Son of God in that marvelous Colossian passage, says not only is it true that by Him were all things created, but also that in Him all things consist, are cohesive, hold together and march forward in rank and order and rhythm toward the ultimate consummation.

If this great assumption be accepted as to the cause of creation, then the consummation is assured as being a consummation related to the God of creation and according to the purpose of the God of creation. I am not now speaking of man, but of creation itself. This Bible is not the Bible of creation; it is the Bible of redemption, and the story that we often speak of as the story of creation is in reality the story of the starting of redemption—that is, of reconstruction. The gospel flames upon the first page of the Bible, not perhaps in the terms in which we know it, the terms of our human salvation, but in terms that reveal the heart of God. That is the thought of the second verse, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" for reconstruction, not for first creation; for renewal, not for origination. This is the gospel fact revealed to those who have eyes to see. That which he created, being ruined in some dark mystery unrevealed, He will make again a second time. Even though in this process of second making there shall come a catastrophe somehow growing out of the first, yet He will move forward toward the establishment of a new order, "Behold, I make all things new.... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." So that from the first page to the last the consummation is set in relation to the first cause; and if that first cause be God, the courses are under His command, and the consummation must harmonize with His will.

For second illustration, which of course must be dealt with in the briefest way, let us take the divine Library.

What is the story of the Bible? The cause is again the same: "In the beginning God"; holy men of old spoke, as they were moved by God.

The course of the Bible is that of the chronicling of actual events and spiritual interpretation of their meanings. As to the story of their writing I use three words—selection, advancement, incompleteness. That is true from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible is perfectly complete in its revelation of all that man needs to know; but there are things about which the Bible never says the final word; it never finally explains the mystery of the Divine Being, it never attempts the solution of the problem of evil in the universe, it never explains the part that pain is playing in the economy of God. Then it is the result of a method of selection. There has been a great dispute about the first chapter of Genesis, as to who wrote it, and how he knew what he wrote. Hugh Miller suggested, as you remember, that visions were granted to Moses or some other, in the same way as the visions in the Book of Revelation were granted to John. I should describe that as a pious hypothesis having no foundation in fact. It has been said that it is now established beyond a doubt that the man who wrote this, whether Moses or not, owed very much to Chaldean inscriptions, and we are perfectly certain that there is an element of truth in that declaration. Today we are in possession of Chaldean inscriptions in the reading of which things stated in the Book of Genesis are to be found, but it is interesting to note in passing that in no inscription yet found has the first assumption of this Book been discovered, "In the beginning God." What shall I say, then, when I am told that some of these things are found in Chaldean inscriptions, believing as I do that Moses wrote this book? I remember Moses' relation to Abraham, and I remember that Abraham came from Chaldea, and I have no doubt that he brought with him legends, traditions from Chaldea, which legends and traditions contained elements of truth, and Moses' account is the result of selection from the mass of material. The process was that

of God revealing to this man the element of truth in the midst of the darkness in which he found himself. The true missionary ever comes, not to destroy but to fulfill, to find the gleam of light without which God has never yet left a people, to destroy the accretions, the things of evil that contradict the essential light. The Bible is the result of that Divine presidency over human thought through which there has been the separation of the true from the false. In poetic statement we have the account of that process by which the chaos became the cosmos. There was reconstruction, and as I read that first page, and watch the process described, I see also the process by which man wrote the story; it was accomplished by the presidency of the Divine mind over his mind, leading him to the selection of the thing that is true from the mass of false; and the result was that he wrote in such a fashion that while millenniums have passed he who considers the story in the light of advanced science finds how absolutely accurate it is. This element of growth and development runs through the processes.

The consummation of the Bible is found in the One to Whom the Bible leads, in the central Person Who is not merely the One Who speaks the Word, but the Word of God, the expression of God, pronouncing in human history the final, inclusive truth. The Bible leads at last to the Spirit Who interprets that Word. Jesus Himself declared that the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Our final illustration of the things suggested by this phrase is that of man; and now we may leave behind us those dim distances full of light and glory, and think within the sphere of our own personality. What is the truth about man. "In the beginning God." Every man is the creation of God. In that fact the race is unified, in spite of all its apparent division. There is nothing in all Scripture more remarkable than what may be termed an incidental word in the letter to the Hebrews, in which the writer says: "We had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" It is incidental, but it is a word flaming with light showing that every individual man is related to God in his first creation, that the spirit-life of a man, which is his essential life, is not the creation of his father after the flesh, but the creation of God, the Father of the Spirit. In that spiritual fact, I repeat, lies the unity of the race, not the uniformity of the body, for we are differently formed and fashioned, not in the unanimity of the mind, for our mental outlook and temperament varies infinitely and gloriously; but in the unity of the spirit the race is united. Black and white, high and low, these are the incidental differences of the physical, and sometimes of the mental, but beneath the whole of them, unifying into the magnificent solidarity of the human race, is the spiritual nature which every man receives individually as the creation and gift of God. So that the essential truth concerning every man is, "In the beginning God." In a great and wonderful mystery, with which I cannot attempt to deal in this presence or time, God has linked Himself to the human race, so that in the creation of individuals He is forevermore in fellowship with man, even though man may have fallen and have sinned. The essential, central fact in the life of every individual is this, "In the beginning God."

If that be the true cause of every individual life, I pray you remember the course of every individual life is held in relationship to that cause. All the course is under His government. How often shall that be stated? How often shall I declare that which has become a great conviction to my soul? No man ever escapes for any five minutes of his earthly career from the government of God. A man may be in rebellion against that government, but he lives in the grip of it. By the laws of God each man is made or marred; which, depends upon his attitude toward those laws. It is impossible for humanity to separate itself from God. Take the lowest method of illustration; I breathe His air; I trample upon His earth; I derive the sustenance of the physical from the forces which have emanated from Deity; I employ mental powers which are the reflex of His own infinite knowledge; all my aspirations spring out of my spiritual being. I may degrade them, prostitute them, but they are all things which I am, and have, from God, and I cannot ultimately escape the touch of the government and law of God, the rule of God in my life. All the course of every human life is related to the originating cause of every human life.

The consummation of every human life must therefore inevitably be related to the originating cause. No man can escape God here or hereafter. I am not now dealing with the experience of the man. Let me only say the experience of relationship may be blessing or blasting, according to whether our yielding to Him is the yielding of sane, spiritual loyalty, or our rebellion against Him is that of insane, carnal disloyalty. But escape Him we cannot; not for this evening, not for the hour in which we sin, not for the time in which we have tried to forget Him that we may indulge the passions of the flesh; never! The touch of God is on our spirits, and the hand of God is holding us even at such times. Never can I escape the originating cause, present in the course, and there in the consummation.

Already I have merged from consideration to application. Let me close by the enforcement of one or two matters. What is our relation to God as Cause? That is a fact, and there is no escape. I am His stuff. I take the old Hebrew figure of the clay in the hand of the potter; I am the potter's clay. The Hebrew figure breaks down, for no potter manipulating clay originated the clay; but this great Potter originated this clay, this stuff of my substance. The figure is a very beautiful one. Remember, the potter can never make a vessel either for use or ornament out of steel filings; he must have clay. Man is the very stuff God wants in order to accomplish His work. God is the originating Cause; man is His stuff, His design, His workmanship. These are the things from which I cannot escape. I live and move and have my being in Him, whether I will or not; the beating of my heart, the throbbing of my nerves, all these things are of Him.

If the fact of the originating Cause is settled, what shall I say concerning the course? That is forevermore the opportunity for my

choice, the point of my responsibility. Write it as a motto everywhere "In the beginning God." In veiled language let me utter it in this assembly. With regard to the birthright of the bairns, fathers and mothers, "In the beginning God"! Then when the children are coming to adolescence, boys and girls, write over that sweep period, "In the beginning God." Help them to make their choices in relation to Him. Instead of asking your boy whether he has made up his mind what he wants to be, ask him if he has found out what God made him to be. A little further on, the great moment of human life, that of love's dawning, comes. Alas and alas! that we have trifled so long with the sacred subject of the love of youth and maiden. There also let us say, "In the beginning God." If the writing over that dawning wonder of love reveals something that is unlike Him, contrary to Him, banish it, though it be as dear as the right hand or right eyes. In the beginning of vocation, when looking to the future, choosing a calling in life, deciding what you will be, "In the beginning God." Then when in marriage a new world opens, you are to live no longer in your heroic and pure loneliness, but now and for tomorrow in association; then inscribe over the portal of your new home "In the beginning God," erect a family altar, and observe the same, upright recognition of God as interested in and presiding over all the affairs of home life. In other words, set the course in right relation to the Cause.

If you will, what then? Then in the consummation the relation will be one that results in crowning, in the ultimate fulfilment of life, in all spaciousness of being and of doing.

My brother, "In the beginning God," you are God-created. Submit yourself to Him so that your whole life may be God-governed, and that at last you may come to the full infolding of your own life, and be God-crowned.

I dare not finish there. Someone is listening, and saying, "Yes, I think you are right, but it is all too late. 'In the beginning God,' but I broke His law and set Him at defiance, spoiled my chance; I am waste, void, a ruin and a wreck." Is that so? Thank God the chapter is not ended, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light." O'er the waste and ruin and wreckage is seen the brooding Spirit of God, bringing back order. So that if you say you have no chance in the first verse, you have in all the rest of the Bible that follows! He can come to you in healing restoration as surely as He came to the scarred earth in the dim and distant past, and make you fair and beautiful as His own heaven. Let him. May God help you.

## 002 - Genesis 2:15-17 - What Is Man?

The Jehovah God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Genesis 2:15-17

This passage of Scripture includes terms which demand the context if we are to understand them or gain the full value of the statements made. The terms "Jehovah God," "the man," "the garden," "every tree," all demand the context for interpretation.

I have selected this particular paragraph, because it presents before the mind a simple picture of primitive conditions; the picture of a virgin garden, and of a man, perfect in condition of body, mind, and spirit.

These first two chapters of Genesis deal with Divine activity. The first activity is that of primal creation. There is no description; no account of the method; and no portrayal of the final issue of that primal activity. In a brief and comprehensive declaration, the fact is broadly and inclusively stated, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." What that earth was, what its form and fashion, what its peculiar characteristics, who were its inhabitants; these are things not revealed. We have no story beyond that declaration of a primal creation. Then, with startling suddenness, the whole scene suggested to the imagination is overclouded, and instead of a creation fresh and bright and beautiful, and full of splendour, we look upon the earth void and waste, desolate and dark.

Then that which is the particular story of this second chapter commences, the account of another Divine activity, the activity of God in the restoration of a lost order. We know nothing of what happened between the facts chronicled in the first verse, and those described in the second; but we have the story of reconstruction, of the renewal of a lost order. All the processes of this restoring activity of God culminated in man. Everything moved toward that consummation. Everything was in preparation for the advent of man. The coming of light, the redistribution of land and water, the restoration of the earth to its solar relationships, the creation of new forms of life, vegetable and animal; all these prepared for the coming of another; and all culminated in man.

In this paragraph which I have read, that man is seen in all the strength and beauty and simplicity of his manhood. He is seen in a garden, a garden not yet cultivated, but a garden potential, and presently, under the touch of his hand to be prolific. It is the simplest of all scenes; it is the most primitive of all pictures.

According to the teaching of these Scriptures, this man is the father of the race, the progenitor of that humanity which in the process

of millenniums has multiplied and divided into the strange and bewildering complexities of races, temperaments, and accomplishments, in the midst of which we live today. We turn to the picture, that we may escape for a little from the bewilderment of the complex and find the illumination of the simple, in order that by the blessing of God we may presently return to the complexity and live therein the true life of simplicity, and make our contribution toward the working out of the Divine consummation for the human race. It is difficult to escape from the complexity of the life of today; how complex it is, yet in the complexity I see no reason for grief or complaint. Let me say at once, that we are not now dealing with the subject of sin. We are dealing with essential humanity, and in doing so, it is difficult to escape from the complexities of life, complexities which are the outworking of the marvelous potentialities of the simple as we see it in the garden; for every city is the result of a garden. London is a garden, or it is on a garden! It is a long time since we saw it, but right underneath this great city with its appalling multitudes there is old mother earth, and flowers once bloomed and blossomed, and the harvest was reaped. London is humanity's complexity. By the inspiration of the Spirit of God let us get behind these complexities; away from the multitudes to the individual; away from all the marvels of humanity in its toil, and suffering, endeavor, defeat, accomplishment, back to this simple picture and see man as he is there revealed to us.

There are four things for our consideration. They are recognized in the text and explained in the context. First, the being of man; secondly, his true circumstances, surroundings, environment; thirdly, his vocation in the economy of God; and finally, his limitation.

As to the being of man, the context teaches us three things. First, it reveals his origin; secondly, it declares his substance; and finally, it unveils his nature.

It first of all declares that this being is the creation of God. In the declaration it makes use of two different terms to describe the Creator. In the first picture one name alone is used; in the second two are employed in conjunction. In the first chapter the name used is God, or—and I am bound to use the Hebrew word because of its values—Elohim; the Hebrew word in the plural number, signifying not two or three, but intensity, a method adopted by Hebrew writers when some fact is to be expressed, and the singular form will not convey all the strength and glory of the thought. This name stands for might, essential, sufficient might.

The second chapter of Genesis gives an explanatory account, in order that we may more perfectly understand the nature of the man described as the culminating glory of the process of restoration. Now the same word, Elohim, is linked to and prefaced by that word which we have translated and which has become familiar to us as Jehovah; a word suggesting voluntary and sufficient resource at the disposal of man. We see then that man, according to Scripture, was created by the God of all-sufficient might; and by the God Who in the interests of that man He has created is Jehovah, the becoming One, the One Who voluntarily becomes everything that man needs, or ever can need, for all the processes of his being to consummation. Man is the definite, direct, immediate, voluntary, creation of that Being.

The second teaching concerns the substance of man. He is of the dust of the ground; but as dust he is not man; even as dust when formed and fashioned into some external shape or manifestation, he is not man; he becomes man only when enswathed, enwrapped, permeated by the breath of lives. Man then as to substance is a mingling of dust, and the essential spirit-life of God.

Finally then, emerging from that declaration concerning the substance of man, we have the revelation of the nature of man. Because he is of the dust and of the very essence of the Spirit of God, he is, in the whole creation, the only link between the material and the spiritual. He is not material alone, and not spiritual alone; no man is a man as a disembodied spirit; no man is a man as body minus spirit. Every man is at once of the dust, and of Deity; of the material, and of the spiritual.

The final fact as to the nature of man is that he is made in the image and likeness of God. That is not the same thing said twice over. By the words "image" and "likeness", two separate ideas are conveyed. "Image" suggests the fact that he is the one by whom God is represented. "Likeness" suggests the fact that he is in himself like God. There may be an image which is unlike. A man may set up as representative of himself a sign or symbol which may not be in the least like him. Only yesterday, moving along one of our streets, I saw upon a waggon a vast block of stone, and one sign upon it, the broad arrow. Whose image and superscription is that? The king's. The broad arrow is the image of the king, but not the likeness of the king. Man is placed in creation as the image of the King, the representative of the King to all creation beneath him. He stands in the midst of the earthly order as the representative of God to everything beneath him; to all beasts, and fowl, and fish; to all fruit, and flowers, and trees. But man is not merely a broad arrow, something unlike God, nevertheless representing Him; he is in the likeness of God, modeled upon the pattern of the infinite mystery of the personality of God. Personality is not perfect in man; but perfect in God. Personality is perfect in the infinite God, but man is in the likeness, though he is finite. In the great essentials of human nature, intellectual, emotional, volitional, man is not only in the image of God, he is in the likeness of God; only it is necessary to remember that I am speaking of man as I see him in this garden, and not of man as I meet him in London. The image has never been entirely defaced, but the likeness has been almost entirely lost.

Now let us consider the simple suggestion of this passage concerning man's surroundings, his circumstances, his environment. We see him in a garden with—what for lack of a better term I will describe as a double environment. As he is dual in his nature, material

and spiritual, so also his environment is dual, material and spiritual. His material environment was that of the garden. We have all sorts of foolish notions about the garden of Eden, notions unwarranted by the actual facts of the story in Genesis. I have seen pictures of it, and they were mostly pictures of Italian gardens. Genesis gives the picture of a garden uncultivated, in which God had planted trees; none of which had yet appeared, because there was no man; but they were there, in the soil, scattered there by God—and I hope that term does not suggest anything capricious, "I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love, yet all's law!"

The garden was potential. There was potentiality resident within the garden, not merely of tree and flower and fruit, but of the city which has never yet been built; for not only is it true that London today stands upon a garden; it is equally true that everything in London has come out of a garden; all the stones, all the woodwork, all materials have come from a garden. The garden was imperfect; the flowers not yet blossoming, the final issues waiting for the touch of power, waiting for the guidance of the hand of the man God made. Into that, man was placed. Materially, that was his environment.

But that was not the closest fact of his environment. There was a spiritual environment. This man was living in the midst of the very spirit life of God. That spirit life which being inbreathed had made him a living soul was that in which he lived and moved and had his being. Man lived in the deepest fact of his nature in immediate touch, and connection with God. Man as I see him here in the earliest picture of the Divine library was not only in immediate contact with God, he was in conscious contact with God. There was speech between this man and his God. There was, to use our great evangelical word, communion between this man and his God. The agonized cry that perpetually breaks from the lips of sinning and fallen humanity, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him" is the natural, and necessary outcome of the very nature of man himself. Here in this garden was a man conscious that the nearest fact of his environment, from which he never could escape, and from which he did not in these early days desire to escape, was not that of the garden which in some senses was outside him, but that of the God of the garden in Whom he lived and moved and had his being, and with Whom he had communion.

Let us take the next step, and notice what this picture teaches us concerning primitive man, original man, as to his vocation. There are two little phrases, how easily we read them, how glibly we pass them over, how little we understand them. His vocation was to dress and to keep the garden. The whole vocation of man in this temporary and probationary life in the economy of God stands startlingly revealed in that sentence.

What is this word, to dress? Quite simply the Hebrew word is one which in a score of instances is translated to work. If you feel after the heart of the word for its true significance and original intention, when the verb is transitive or causative, it means to enslave. We must not abuse that word by thinking of slavery as something cruel; man was put into the garden to capture it, to discover its secrets, to lead them out to fulfilment, to lay his hand upon its potentialities and guide them into generous realization. To dress it, to work it, to capture it, to realize it. Ponder that conception long enough, and you will see that the ultimate completion of it will be the city of God. As I have already said, there is more in the garden than flowers and weeds, all the potentialities of material life lie slumbering in any garden covered with green grass. Charles Kingsley manifested a fine instinct when in effect he wrote to his friend, "Don't be anxious to entertain me. Put me down under any hedgerow and in two square yards of mother earth I can find mystery enough to keep me occupied for all the time I stay with you." In the garden were all the potentialities. The vocation of man was to discover what God had hidden there, and in cooperation with God to lead it toward its ultimate blossoming and fruitage; and to its final, glorious perfection.

Not only was he to dress it; he was to keep it. I confess that to me is a startling word. What does it mean? Literally to hedge it about, figuratively to guard it. In that little word there is the suggestion of the fact that whereas this is the picture of a restored order, and whereas man is seen in all the primitive strength and simplicity of his new-made manhood, he is in a universe in which there are forces that threaten. He is not merely to capture the garden, he is to guard it; and his very vocation, as here revealed, is suggestive of the fact that somewhere, not clearly defined, there are forces that threaten his garden; that there is possibility of blighting, possibility of these forces spoiling the best fruit. He is therefore to capture and develop the garden; and to guard it against attack.

Once again, what does this simple picture of man in a garden say to us concerning his limitation? You will notice that the symbols here are trees. What else would you have in a garden? If I am asked if these trees were real trees, I ask, "Was the man a real man, and was the garden a real garden?" The symbols of this man's limitation were in the realm of the sustenance of the physical; for the physical is always in the economy of God the symbol of the spiritual. The outward signs and tokens of limitation were in the realm of the material, but they were the signs and symbols of limitation in the spiritual. I pray you mark the first fact, it is not that of narrowness, but of breadth; not that of restriction, but of infinite possibility; the first fact is not that of bondage, but of liberty. The word limitation does not necessarily connote narrowness; it simply indicates a bound and a boundary. Where is the boundary? Of every tree he might freely eat, of all the trees, including the tree of life. Surely you say, that is a figure of speech. By no means. You have here the picture of primitive conditions, and there was one tree the fruit of which was peculiarly good for the maintenance of life, that is for its sustenance. Of all these trees he was allowed to eat, and he had to cultivate them and keep them and find his sustenance therein. The material fact was the symbol of the spiritual fact. This man in material surroundings was a spiritual being, and the nearest fact in his surrounding was spiritual, and so the spaciousness of spiritual possibility was revealed; of all the great spiritual

sources of strength this man might partake. It is a picture of wide and glorious liberty.

Then we come to the word "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." What was this tree? I do not know. It might be quite helpful to us if we cease talking about an apple tree; there is no warrant for it in Scripture. The fact as declared is that there was one tree which was made the symbol of man's limitation in the economy of God. One tree was marked off, looking upon which, man must remember that his moral life could only be led to perfection, and his spiritual life to glory, as he lived in relationship to God. In the activities of his finite life in that garden, that tree was the sacramental symbol, for which he must care, and which he must tend and guard, but of which he must not eat.

Such was his limitation. First the spaciousness "Of every tree"; then the boundary which indicated that he was not supreme but a subject; just one tree that reminded him of his relation to God.

Let it be remembered that this is a picture of primitive man, potential, imperfect, but sinless; elemental man. The only adumbration or shadow of sin or evil that I find in all the story is in the revelation of vocation in which he is told to guard the garden, and in the indication of his limitation, the one tree of which he must not eat. This man is sinless in his nature, perfect in his being; not perfected, not completed, because his work is waiting for him, and the essential glory of man is not that of his being, but that of his vocation. Until he had fulfilled his vocation, until by dressing the garden and guarding it, he had produced results, until he had become a worker with God, producing results after which God was seeking, he was not perfected. No man is perfect because he is a perfect being. It is only by fulfilment of function that man can be absolutely perfected.

These then are the simple facts of every human life. I say simple facts; these are not, in some senses, the facts of your life and mine; but these are the facts of our life, fundamentally.

In its being, human life is of God and like God. That is the profoundest truth concerning every human being.

In its environment, human life is placed among the things of God; this world is God's world, the seas are His, the hills are His, the birds are His, the flowers are His; all the mysteries and forces which men today are discovering and harnessing for the accomplishment of their purposes in the world, are God's forces. The environment of every human life is that it exists among the things of God.

As to vocation, every man is made to be a fellow-worker with God. By cooperation with God, man perfects Creation.

As to limitation, according to this picture, human life is absolutely free within the government of God.

All this is strange to us today and one of the reasons men are so anxious to get rid of these chapters of Genesis is that they do not suit the facts of human life as these men know it. This is not a picture of human life as we know it. This is not even a picture of human life as we have found it in our own experience. Superadded to these things are other things with which we shall have to deal presently; swelling rivers of poison that desolate the life, great forces and fires that burn the life; great foes of evil that are against the life. We have not reached that point in this evening's meditation. We are simply considering what the Bible says about our nature in the economy of God.

Men do not start today where this man started. This man was innocent knowing neither good nor evil. Today innocence is only true of infancy, and ah me, how soon it is gone! How soon? I do not know; but ah me, how soon! Neither is the man in Christ standing where this man stood in the garden. The man in Christ is not innocent. The man in Christ knows good and evil; but blessed be God, he is made able to choose the good and to refuse the evil.

We have been turning back to elemental things. I have been trying to bring this life of mine, so full of mystery, to the measurement of this picture; and in spite of all the changed conditions, in spite of all the forces of evil, the presence of which we shall attempt to understand in the progress of our studies, in spite of all, I find that my own life beats true to this revelation. The very mystery of my being makes me believe I am after all of God. Dust is not the final word concerning me. Yes, I believe I am in God's garden even yet. I wander a little away from the place where man has bunglingly attempted to realize the city, and has always realized sorrow, and I know it is God's garden. Yes, I am among the things of God. Somehow I am coming to be quite sure that I am intended for cooperation with Him, for my life rises to highest heights, and feels the largest ecstasy, and becomes conscious of the greatest things, in those moments when I know I am doing something with God. I am not speaking only of Christian service—that ultimately, that is the crowning glory—but of the smallest things. When you are really in your garden, doing the thing in the garden that presently will smile back at you in all the colors and beauties that come out of God's earth, those are the days and moments when you live. Ultimately, when we are dealing with the spirit of man or woman, helping to lead such into realization of relationship to God, these are the moments, of all moments, the greatest. There is nothing like it. I believe I am intended to cooperate with God. Then as to limitation, how spacious it is. Would you have the story in the terms of the New Testament? "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." That is the spaciousness of life. Yet, how definite it is; not a tree always, but that which is of your position, of your calling.



For a man in a garden, it is a tree. You know what it is for you; your ledger, something else! As you turn your way back to tomorrow, to the office, or shop, or store, you know it, there it is; not some mystic heavenly vision, but simple and natural, close at hand, something reminding you of your relationship to God. These elemental things are still with us; we are of the first man, and of the God of the first man; sons of Adam, "the son of God."

### 003 - Genesis 13:14 - Faith's Outlook

Lift up now thine eyes; and look from the place where thou art. Genesis 13:14

This was the word of Jehovah to Abram under strange circumstances. The point and the power of the particular words are found when they are placed in contrast with an earlier statement of the chapter, a statement found in the tenth verse. "Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan that it was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt."

After that survey of the land, and after the choice he made, Lot moved east to the plain of the Jordan, to the circle of the five cities: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, Bela. Abram remained at Bethel, as it was subsequently called, the historian here using the later name, Luz, which, in all probability, was its name at the time. Abram remained in that neighborhood, where later Jacob arrived as an exile from home; it was a place that offered practically no hospitality to him in his wandering, a place where, after the long journeyings, it was necessary for him to pillow his head on a stone in order to rest, a neighborhood at that time undoubtedly characterized by its rocky fastnesses and its barrenness. Abram remained there, and there the word of the Lord came to him, introduced by the words of my text:

Lift up now thine eyes; and look from the place where thou art.

Let us consider the story and attempt to deduce some of its values for ourselves. In the light of these particular words there are three matters of interest to me in this story: first, the command itself coming to this man to lift up his eyes and look from the place where he was; second, I am necessarily interested in what he saw when he obeyed the command, and, finally, I am interested, therefore, in the results which followed that uplifting of the eyes and the vision which greeted him when he obeyed the Divine order.

In regard to the command itself, you will at once see that it was perfectly simple. Abram was told to look north, and south, and east, and west. We immediately see that he was told to look in every direction. In imagination, we see him looking away to the north. His vision would not penetrate far, for the mountains would be in front of him; but they would suggest the things that lay beyond them. He looked to the south. There, perchance, he could see farther, and he knew that beyond what he could see lay Egypt. He looked to the east, the very direction in which Lot had traveled. He looked to the west to what remained of the land until it came to the uttermost confine, from where the great sea stretched beyond. Thus he looked north and south, and east and west.

But the command becomes more than simple; it becomes significant if we lay our emphasis on two points. First, on the little word "now"; and, second, on the final phrase: "from the place where thou art." These indicate a particular time and a particular situation. "Now!" And immediately we begin to remember the things behind the point at which this man had now arrived in his life. Away there in the back, how far none can tell, was that mystic experience in which at Ur of the Chaldees Abram had heard in exile the Voice of God. In all probability the voice had first been a whispered suggestion. But we know certainly that there in Ur of the Chaldees Abram had become discontented, discontented with the conditions in the midst of which he found himself, discontented with the splendor and the glory of that city, discontented with it because he had discovered its hollowness, its emptiness; discontented because he had learned something of the infinite glory of a better order of things. This discovery was born of his knowledge, through mystic intercourse, of the one God. At last, that whisper in the soul, perchance, as I have said, long continued and persistent, became a clarion trumpet call commanding him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and to travel long, long distances across the desert lands until he arrived almost at the confines of things in this strip of land which we now call Palestine. He had arrived at Shechem, the valley between Ebal and Gerizim, from which, perhaps, the grandest views of the land can be obtained. There he had pitched a tent and built an altar.

Then there had come famine in the land, and the man who had dared to leave everything for God became fearful; there was deflection from faith, and hurriedly he passed south, and crossed the borderland into Egypt. The man who was able to trust God with his whole destiny when he left Ur of the Chaldees was not able to trust Him when there was famine in the land. There had been strange experiences in Egypt, in which even this great soul had descended to deception, but there had been restoration, and he had come back again, back to his own land, back to Bethel. So we come to the immediate circumstances.

A vulgar household quarrel had been an occasion for the manifestation of two men, Lot and Abram. To Lot, the man seeking his own, first choice had been given, for faith is ever able to be magnanimous in its dealings with men; and he departed to this well-watered plain, choosing it because it was well watered. Mark the significant word: like the Garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

Lot, pausing in that particular situation of possibility to compromise between his faith and his selfish desires, saw a region like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. The Garden was near to the cities, where he might seek for his own enrichment. He had pitched his tent toward Sodom, and Abram was left—a man declining to be progressive, a man having learned a lesson through past deflection from faith and his sojourn in Egypt. Now, said the Lord, look in this hour; from the place where thou art lift up thine eyes.

Lifting up his eyes that day, what did Abram see? In the first place he saw, north and south and east and west, lands which belonged to others. There on the east was the land which now, in some senses at least, belonged to Lot, for Lot had chosen it, and Abram had handed it over to him, so that he could not travel there, nor take his cattle through. He must keep away from the circle of the cities. The Canaanites were then in the land, says the historian. That place where Abram stood was in the center of territory that belonged to others. No foot of land belonged to him. That is what he saw by sight.

What did he see that day as he looked by faith? The whole land as belonging to him. It was all given to him, even the land that Lot had chosen for himself belonged to Abram; those lands stretching away to the north that were possessed by strange and strong and warlike tribes belonged to him. Those lands stretching away south, leading on to Egypt, from which he had traveled, were his. The rich and fertile borderlands, down to the margin of the sea, all belonged to him.

What were the effects produced in this man as the result of his obedience to the Divine command, as the result of the things on which his eyes looked that day?

The first result was the march from Bethel to Hebron. The Lord said to him: "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it"—a poetic way of saying walk through the central strategic points of this land—and walk through the land as its proprietor and possessor. Bethel was nearly as far north of the site of Jerusalem as Hebron was south thereof. Of course, Jerusalem was not there. The stronghold probably was there even then, the fortress of Jebus which presently became the City of the great King. But Abram walked from Bethel to Hebron through the strategic center of the land, and he walked through it as its proprietor.

Suppose that we could have communicated at the time with any of the possessors, and told them that the man walking from Bethel to Hebron was the owner of the whole land, they would hardly have taken the trouble to oppose him. Probably, they would have smiled at his unutterable folly. Yet this is the picture of a man marching over a land that he does possess because God ordains it so.

Arrived at Hebron, he settled down, so far as settlement can ever be consonant with loyalty. He pitched his tent and he erected an altar, the two abiding symbols of his relationship to the land and to his God, the tent forevermore a symbol of his readiness to obey the Divine command to remain or to move; the altar surely the symbol of his relationship to God through sacrifice, and the Divine grace. This man moving down through the land owned by others was the owner of it; this man journeying through a land that other people possessed was the possessor of it. He pitched his tent and erected his altar as the sign and symbol of the fact that he owned the land by the deed of God and the gift of the Almighty.

Then I glance on. I cannot go far. One page will suffice, half a page in the Bible, the next chapter. What is the next recorded activity of this man? There came news to him that the opposing kings had taken Lot captive with all his possessions, and had carried him and his possessions away to the far north. Immediately, this man, who by Divine deed possessed the whole land, went forth to restore the land, the things that really belonged to himself, to Lot. Struggling with the opposing kings, meeting them in battle, mastering them, he brought Lot back. He traveled over 150 miles in pursuit of those kings. He mastered them and came back. He restored to another man the things which God had given him. When he had done his work the king of Sodom offered to give him presents, and he declined. He would receive nothing from any other than the One by Whose deed he possessed everything.

But let us go a little further, and we will do so by turning to a New Testament letter and reading some sentences:

By faith Abraham became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise....

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

So far, that was the end of it all. This man never possessed anything in the land except a grave. He heard the Divine covenant which set aside every other right of possession; he walked through the length and the breadth of the land, and pitched his tent and erected his altar; he greeted the ultimate realization from afar with a song in his heart and confidence in his soul; but he died never having possessed; and yet, by faith, he possessed from the moment of the Divine covenant until the day of his passing.

Such briefly is the story. Now, from that story I want to deduce some of its lessons as I see them. Here is a wonderful revelation of the true outlook of faith in an hour of darkness. I may condense the whole thing into a very simple phrase: when faith looks, things are seen to be not what they seem to be. Faith sees farther than man's sight can perceive. The vision of faith is a clearer and more penetrating vision into the very heart and essence and truth of things than is ever possible to sight and to calculation. When faith

looked out on the land on this occasion, it was seen that the land did not belong to those who were in possession, but to God, and to whomsoever God chose to make it over in the covenant of His great and sacred will. I am not proposing to delay to make any detailed application of this. It is the great conception that I would fain pass on to you at this hour. If, however, I make any application, let it be along these lines.

This is an hour when civilization is at an end. This is an hour when the very props and foundations of order seem to be shaken, to be going down in catastrophe and clash. To faith this is an hour when true civilization is seen producing the shaking and the catastrophe, and the things that are true and abiding are seen deeper down than all the things that shake and tremble and totter and fall. The vision of sight fills the soul with fear. The vision of faith fills the soul with songs. I choose my words carefully. He giveth songs in the night. Because, even in this terrible hour, the men of faith see God, endure as seeing Him Who is invisible.

I will make the illustration somewhat more personal. Take the kind of experience into which we all come ever and anon in our pathway through life, a situation created in a thousand varied ways, and yet a situation in which we are inclined to say, looking at things as they are, The bottom is gone out of everything. I have heard that said more than once this week. Faith knows that it is not so. The foundations are unshakable. If we seem to have lost the sense of foundation, it is only that life may become better, profounder, and that we may pass down to the things that never shake, that cannot be moved.

Let us clearly understand that this outlook on life is created by the Word of the Lord, and by human confidence therein. This outlook is not created by our own desires. Again and again, our desires are in conflict with the things which by faith we see. Again and again, our desires, if they were granted to us, would ruin both ourselves and all those with whom we are associated. Not according to our desires. If I simply take up an outlook on life which is inspired by my desire, then I have no peace, and no sense of rest, no quietness, no assurance, no authority. Neither does this confidence spring from our own conclusions. This man did not move with quiet, kingly dignity through the length and breadth of the land and pitch his tent and sustain his heroic soul in patience because he had concluded thus and so, and knew presently what the issue was likely to be and was assured that things would work out all right. By no means. This man heard the Word of God in his own soul clearly in spite of all appearances, and so he knew the final abiding truth concerning the things in the midst of which he lived. That is always the secret of quietness and peace.

I want to emphasize at this point the duty of this outlook to the man of faith. This was a command which God laid on Abram, "Lift up now thine eyes from the place where thou art." It was Abraham's duty thus to look, and his duty to look in the light of the word that God spoke in his soul. Here faith might have halted, here faith might have wandered from its right relationship to God. Had this been so, then there had been no quiet triumphant march through the neighborhood, no pitching of the tent and the altar, and no conflict presently to restore the possession to another, no travail, no holy prayer after a while that Sodom might be saved. The great nation would have failed if faith had failed at this moment. Of course, this is our difficulty. There are days when faith is a march with banner and song and joy; there are days when faith is a march into the mists, into the darkness, with no glimmering light except the assurance within the soul that God is right and God is truth.

In the second place, observe what this story suggests as to the activity suggested by the outlook thus inspired. Life will now be conformable with the truth which it receives. In all the attitudes of the life there will be evidences of the conviction that possesses and masters the soul. Here perhaps is the point when faith becomes most difficult. I have referred more than once to this man moving down from Bethel to Hebron along that central tract of the land now given to him. Look at him again. It was the march of proprietorship. I think there is a word that we often have need of: "Strengthen the hands that hang down, confirm the feeble knees." There should be to the man of faith no trembling, no feeble knees, no yielding to the pressure of circumstances, but the courageous definite positive authoritative triumphant march that is conformable with the inner, sacred, deep conviction between the soul and God.

But if the activity is that of conformity to the truth it is that also of submission to the Revealer. There must be a pitching of the tent, and it must be a tent of submission, an erection of the altar, and it must always be the altar of sacrifice. Finally, here must be an activity which is the activity of cooperation with the patience of God, getting things ready for others, the ability to do without things. This is the picture of Abram to the end. Further on in the story, Lot is dwelling in the city, and, more, he is raised to a position of eminence, he is the chief magistrate, for that is the meaning of the Hebrew phrase, "sitting in the gate of the city." What influence had he in the city of which he was chief magistrate? None morally, none spiritually; in the day of Divine wrath not ten souls could be found that he had influenced. Yonder was the man who had pitched his tent and built his altar and walked, a lonely pilgrim, in the unfathomable comfort of the comradeship of God. He very nearly saved Sodom by his prayer, and would have, if Lot had created just one vantage ground from which God could move. So we see a man co-operating in the patience of God, enabled to wait, without ever possessing the things which were his own, and content to be without them, because of his comradeship with God Himself.

The last thing I learn from that story, coming naturally and simply out of the things already said, is a lesson concerning the results which we may expect when we obey the Divine command and lift our eyes and see, not the things which are seen, but the things

which are not seen. What may we expect for ourselves? Nothing! Everything! Nothing of the land of promise, nothing of the success desired, nothing of the business which we toiled to do. Yet everything of the land and the fulfilment of high desire, and the ultimate glory, and the work accomplished in the God with Whom we work, and Who, when our pilgrimage is over and our day of toil is spent, will take our little things and link them with His eternal might, until the final goal is reached and the ultimate glory is obtained.

So, then, for the future we are to expect victory and realization, and for today the honor and the joy of cooperation with God.

Therefore we may draw these simple conclusions of faith. It is never important that we should get anything we desire. It is supremely important that God should get what He purposes. It is glorious to do without, and still to have by sharing in the process that moves toward God's final victory:

Others shall sing the song,  
Others shall right the wrong,—  
Finish what I begin,  
And all I fail to win.  
What matter, I or they,  
Mine or another's day,  
So the right word be said,  
And life the sweeter made?  
Hail to the Coming Singers!  
Hail to the brave light-bringers!  
Forward I reach and share  
All that they sing and dare.  
Ring, bells in unreared steeples,  
The joy of unborn peoples!  
Sound, trumpets far off blown,  
Your triumph is my own!  
I feel the earth move sunward,  
I join the great march onward,  
And take, by faith, while living,  
My freehold of thanksgiving.

## 004 - Genesis 28:16 - The Nearness of God Discovered

Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. Genesis 28:16

Last Sunday evening I preached from this text, leaving my message unfinished. I return to it tonight that I may say some things which were then omitted.

In order to have sequence of thought I must briefly summarize what already has been said. The words of the text reveal the walking consciousness of Jacob after the dream in which he was brought to first-hand, practical consciousness of the omnipresence of God in discovering in that barren place and in unexpected circumstances that God was actually with him. Said he in the waking hours of the morning, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." In that confession two matters arrest our attention: first, the man's unconsciousness of the nearness of God; second, the discovery of the fact of God's nearness, its method and its meaning.

The first of these occupied our attention last Sunday evening: man's unconsciousness of the nearness of God. In the case of Jacob it was confessed in the hours of the morning as he looked back, "I knew it not." In all likelihood, and almost certainly, Jacob believed intellectually in the presence of God everywhere; and yet when he arrived that night after the long journey and chose for himself the only pillow available, a hard stone, and laid his head thereupon to rest, he was not conscious of the nearness of God, had not thought of God, was not engaged on a quest for God, was not seeking Him. In the morning, looking back, he said, in effect, I arrived here last night, tired and weary, chose my stone, pillowed my head thereon, and went to sleep with God; but I did not know it. This unconsciousness of God is patent in the ordinary life of men, and in the life of men who intellectually believe in the nearness of God, men whose conception of God is the Biblical conception, the Christian conception, that wherever man is found, there also is God, and that man cannot escape from Him. If a man shall ascend into heaven, God is there; or if he may descend into hell, God is there; or if he take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, even there God's hand holds him, supports him; if man shall say, The darkness shall hide me, even the night is light round about him, for he has to do with a God Who seeth in the darkness as well as in the light. Nevertheless, in spite of intellectual conviction, men live unconscious of the God in Whose presence

they ever are.

The reasons of this unconsciousness of God are intellectual limitation, spiritual dullness, and moral failure. Intellectual limitation, for no man by searching can find out God unto perfection; He must be apprehended of the Spiritual sense, and where that spiritual sense is dead, atrophied, inactive, man is unconscious of God. He may affirm the fact of God's existence, believe in His nearness, and yet never touch Him or be conscious of His touch on his own life. Man is unconscious of God because of spiritual deadness, and all spiritual deadness in human life is the result of moral failure. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God," said God to His people in the olden days. Because of moral failure there is spiritual deadness, and because of spiritual deadness men live and move and have their being in God, and never touch Him consciously or see Him or know Him. "Surely God is in this place; and I knew it not."

The second fact suggested by this text is the method and the meaning of discovery of the fact of the nearness of God to the soul of a man. These things are illustrated in the story in the midst of which the text is found, and for that purpose we shall again this evening make certain references thereto.

As we approach this part of our theme we have to remember not only the fact of man's prevalent unconsciousness of God, but the issues of that unconsciousness. Unconsciousness of God shows forth in the dwarfing of the life and in the corruption of the life.

Unconsciousness of God means, first, the dwarfing of the life. A man unconscious of God sees only what is near. Peter, writing to Christian souls who had deflected from the straight course, said that if a man lack the graces of the Christian character, it is because he is blind, "seeing only what is near." That is the perpetual outcome of lack of consciousness of God: man sees only the things that are near; his life is horizoned by the material; his outlook is horizontal, not vertical, as Dr. Jowett has expressed it in his recent lectures on preaching; the outlook is upon the level on which the material stands, and he sees only the thing that is near. I know well that we speak of men in the commercial world and in the world of statecraft as far-seeing men. It all depends! How far can they see? If they see but the bounds of the present world, and understand no more than its methods and its markets, its policies and its arrangements, then they are nearsighted men. Yonder old woman, poor in this world's goods, entirely illiterate, who for forty, fifty, sixty years has lived in the light of the uplifted face of God, sees farther than all commercial princes and statesmen whose outlook is bounded by time and sense and things material. The man who has lost his consciousness of God sees nothing beyond the near, the things of today. If a man sees only the near he can become only the little. He has lost that which appeals to life so as to lift it: the sense of the things that lie beyond the sense of the ages, of the eternities, and of the spiritual. If a man lives hemmed in by the things of today and the things of the material world, he himself becomes of today and of the material world; his long gazing thereupon, bends and stoops him downward until he is dwarfed because he is unconscious of God.

Unconsciousness of God, therefore, issues in corrupting life. Life without God is life lacking its true quality, the atmosphere for which it was created, to which in the mystic fact of its being it does finally and actually belong. It is indeed true that in trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home. It is not only true that in Him "we live and move and have our being," as Paul declared on Mars Hill; it is also true as Paul also proclaimed, quoting from the Greek poets and declaring the truth of their affirmation, "We also are His offspring." To live apart from the fountain of life is to know the corrupting of life. To attempt to satisfy life on the level of the material is to debase, to degrade life. If men have no consciousness of God they are dwarfed, and presently corrupted; for there must forever remain within them the clamant cry for that for which they are made, and of which in the mystery of creation they form a part. If there be no answer to that cry, then the life is dwarfed and withered, and becomes corrupt because it turns to other sources, which do but destroy the life.

Twenty years later Jacob turned his face back again to his own land, and on his way home he had another spiritual experience. God met him in some form and semblance by the running brook Jabbok, and, wrestling with him through the night, mastered him and so changed him from Jacob, heel-catcher, to Israel, ruled by God. When the light of morning broke, Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is healed." Men read that verse and imagine that Jacob meant, I have seen God face to face, and I am not destroyed. He meant something far finer. I have seen God, and my life is healed. Wherever the vision of God is lost the people perish. Wherever a man lacks the consciousness of God his life is dwarfed and corrupted; and as the vision heals, the absence of it destroys life.

The supreme note of the text, however, is that to this man, unconscious of the nearness of God, there came the discovery of the fact of God's nearness. Having the story in mind, let me, first of all, observe that the discovery of God to the soul of a man is always the act of God. Not only is it true that no man by searching can find out God to perfection; it is also true that man as you find him today is not consciously seeking God. Unconsciously, yes; in every enterprise of his life, in every enthusiasm that he allows to master him, in all the things that drive him, he is, without his knowing it, following after God if haply he may find Him. But not consciously, not willingly, does man set his face toward the face of God in the hope that it may shine upon him through the gloom. Wherever there comes to a man the actual revelation of the fact of the nearness of God, it is by the act of God. By that I do not mean to say that men may not come to intellectual apprehension of the fact of the Divine existence as the result of their own investigation. I believe

men may come to that apprehension in that way. I am speaking of something more personal and immediate, more vital in the matter of life. I am speaking of the consciousness in the soul of a man of the positive fact of God; and I affirm that wherever the discovery of God is made to the soul of man it is by the act of God. God uses many ways of discovering Himself to the souls of men. I like this particular story because here it was through a dream. We emphasize the value of this story when we remember it was but a dream; there was no actual ladder, no actual angels visible to sight, no actual form of Deity standing by the side of the man: it was a dream, to be accounted for, in all probability, quite naturally. Nevertheless, through that dream of the night God made Jacob certain of Himself, so reaching Jacob's inner consciousness, so appearing to his spirit life, that when morning came—and morning is the time of disillusionment, morning is the hour in which you laugh at your dream and see the unreality of it; but in this case the man came to the morning and when the mists melted from the rough and rugged hillside and light was everywhere, and no actual thing in nature had the strange, weird appearance of something supernatural—when the morning came he said, "God is in this place; and I knew it not." So by way of a dream, explain it as you will, God rode into the consciousness of this man, and He made the dream of the night the vehicle of His approach. He came to the soul of a man by way of a dream. Let me assure you that the day for even that method of God has not passed away. Even in these days of ours, if we did but understand it, God will ever and anon appear to men in dreams, natural dreams, and through them speak to the souls of men. If you are not of that particular temperament, then God has other ways of speaking to you. The thought of God comes to you in an unexpected place and moment: some arresting thought in the midst of the busy rush of life in the city, some startling thought that possesses you while the train is bearing you sixty miles an hour to your destination, some thought born within your mind as the result of some remark made by a friend on a totally different subject. In these ways God approaches the soul. By a word spoken, by some deed, in an hour of peril, in an hour of catastrophe, in an hour of high ambition and noble aspiration, in a moment of supreme joy, God makes Himself known. These are but faulty, halting illustrations. What I would emphasize is that God discovers Himself to men, directly, immediately, setting aside the priest and the prophet and the preacher, and Himself coming to the soul. God does this in the case of every human being. The trouble is, we do not always recognize that it is God. We treat the illumination as though it had been some will o' the wisp, some wild fantasy; yet in the moment, howsoever it came, from whencesoever it came, God was a reality; and God was a reality because He Himself was breaking through upon the consciousness of man.

We of the Christian faith, of the evangelical faith, and of the evangelistic method, are greatly in danger of imagining that God comes to men only through our preaching, and because we have such vain imaginings we lose many an opportunity of leading men to walk in the gleam of light that has come to them until they find the perfect day. God makes Himself known sooner or later, most often in childhood's days, and with greatest clearness; as the years pass, the sense of God recedes, until we still intellectually affirm our belief, but emotionally and volitionally deny it. Even then God ever and anon breaks through upon us. In such hours of breaking through, an opportunity is created for the soul of man. In that hour, come when it may or how it will, whether in the sanctuary or in the market place, whether in the loneliness of our own inner chamber, or amid the multitudes of men, in that hour, in that moment, God by that breaking through creates for a man an opportunity; and in that moment the man will seize his opportunity and follow the gleam, or else refuse to walk in the light until presently—not immediately it may be, but after a lapse of time—he will laugh at the idea that God ever did speak to him. It was not very long ago that a man in public life in this country said to a great company of men in a Northern town, in what he thought was a humorous vein, You know, many years ago, I was almost converted myself! Oh, God, that he might have known the tragedy of his own confession! Many years ago God broke through the mists and shone on his soul, and he very nearly answered, but not quite; until, after the lapse of years, he looked back and laughed at the folly of the idea, the infatuation of the notion that God had touched Him. Are not some of you very nearly in that condition? God broke through when He took your child away. God impressed Himself upon you in the hour of your new joy; almost involuntarily you found yourself desiring to be a priest, that you might offer the sacrifice of praise. God broke through in the midst of tragedy, or in the rapture of the comedy. What did you do? If you followed the gleam and worshiped, then there were other revelations for the path of the just man: the true man "shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Let me speak of such as obey after discovering this fact of the nearness of God as a great reality. What does this discovery mean to the soul of the obedient? It is, first of all, a new interpretation of life. All life is different when a man is conscious of God. I do not think we can do better than go back to the old story and take the whole of that dream, for in that dream of the night great things were suggested to the soul of the sleeping man, the power of which abode with him as the morning broke and day succeeded to day.

The ladder which he saw was a ladder whose foot was set solidly on the earth and whose top reached the heavens. These are all figures of speech, but the facts they suggest are perfectly patent. In that night Jacob saw that wonderful suggestion of interrelationship between heaven and earth, of mediation between heaven and earth. He saw angels ascending and descending, and there came to him the conception of this life, this present life, with its wounds and weariness, as ministered to by angels. The supreme fact in the new interpretation was the nearness of God and the interest of God in him, the perfect knowledge of God concerning his immediate position, and the awareness that God committed Himself to his need.

When a man becomes conscious of God he becomes conscious of the relationship between heaven and earth, conscious of the spiritual ministries all about him of which he had never dreamed, conscious of the interest of God. Two men are in a beleaguered

city; without are their foes, waiting for them. One of them cries to another, Master, what shall we do? The other said, O Lord, open his eyes, and

Lo, to faith's enlightened sight,  
All the mountain flamed with light.

He saw on the mountain heights, gathered about the place of peril, the angels of God. Someone is saying, Of course we do not believe in that! Of course not, because you do not believe in God, and you do not know God; and therefore you limit your own life to this little world, and trust to your own wit and cleverness and your own manipulation of dust; but the man who has seen God knows not only that God created us, but that other worlds and other beings are round about us, and that in the mystery of His unfathomable and unquenchable love He sends angels and spiritual forces of which we had never dreamed to minister to us and to help us. In the light of the Christ revelation the writer in the New Testament catches up the great thought and expresses it in infinite music as he says of the angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service to the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?"

To be conscious of God is immediately to have a new interpretation of life, to discover that the earth itself is more than dust, that all flowers are more than the operation of blind force; to believe with Jesus that God clothes the grass, and robes the lily as Solomon was never arrayed, that He is with the birds, and remains their comrade in their dying. All creation utters forth this great evangel when a man is conscious of God. "This is the age-abiding life, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him Whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." All life becomes new, so that the apostle will write, "If any man is in Christ,"—which is the Christian way of saying, If any man has come to knowledge of God—"he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new." To be conscious of God, to know the fact of Him, to obey the revelation and to walk in the light of it, is to see every human face changed. We can no longer look with contempt on the bruised and battered face, for beneath the bruising and the battering we see the image of God. The measure in which we become conscious of God is the measure in which we cease to be narrowly patriotic, for we have come to the consciousness that "He made of one every nation of men." So flowers, birds, the sky, the earth, man, everything, becomes suffused with the glory of God when a man himself is living in the consciousness of God.

This necessarily means that a man comes to a new standard of action. His standard of action henceforth must be that of obedience to God, of co-operation with the angels. A man conscious of God has as the standard of his action the inspiration of his endeavor, a passion, all-consuming, to make this earth like unto His heaven; or, to express the thought in the older way, his passion will be that God's Kingdom shall come, that God's will shall be done, that God's name shall be hallowed on earth as it is in heaven.

This consciousness of God means not only a new interpretation of life and a new standard of action, it means also a new enablement, and that is the supreme matter and the supreme value. "God is in this place; and I knew it not."

Why? Because of some moral failure and consequent spiritual dullness, whereby I am precluded from finding God. Then God, in infinite grace, and in ways that I know not of, breaks through upon my soul, and does that for me which I never could do for myself, and I, obeying, find moral enablement. There comes to me a sense of His great mercy and His great compassion. There comes to me a sense of the forgiveness of my sins, and out of that sense, if it indeed be a true sense, there springs a hot resentment against sin, a passionate endeavor to master it; and as I start on my crusade against sin in my own life, and in the world, I find I am being empowered by mystic forces of which I never dreamed, by spiritual might which is from God. He works in me to the willing and the doing of His good pleasure. When there is moral enablement there is spiritual quickening, and I come to know the Lord, "growing up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ," the horizon being put ever further back, all life widening, broadening, becomes more and more glorious. The intellectual limitation is negated by the spiritual apprehension, and there comes that abiding certainty of God which no argument can destroy.

Finally, let us remember that of this great fact of the nearness of God the incarnation was the final unveiling. Surely that is what our Lord meant when speaking to Nathanael, the Israelite in whom there was no guile, he said, "Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." In other words, all that was suggested to Jacob in the dream of the night is vindicated, and verified in the Lord Christ Himself. By incarnation God revealed His nearness to men. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from a Father), full of grace and truth." So opens this gospel of John in which alone is recorded the story of Christ's employment of the vision of Jacob for the suggestion of this truth. If in that incarnation the fact of God's nearness is interpreted, in what sense is God seen to be near to men? In the life of Jesus it is revealed that He is near to human circumstance and human experience of all kinds. Immediately following on the employment of the ancient story in the conversation with Nathanael three days afterward, He went to the house of joy to attend the wedding. God is near man in the hour of his joy, interested in his joy—I will say it reverently but I will say it—laughing with human joy, the merriment of the human heart causing gladness in the heart of God! Take the keynote of the Manifesto of Jesus, "Blessed," and it misses some of the music, or "happy," as some translate it, and even then you have not caught all the significance of the word the Lord did use. Not that the word "blessed" is wrong, not that the word "happy" is wrong, but that we are using them in peculiar ways; happy has become almost a flippant word,

and blessed has become almost a sanctimonious word, which is worse. I venture to affirm that the word Christ used meant, Well-to-do, prosperous. "Well-to-do are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." "Prosperous are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." The word insufficiently translated by our word "blessed" or "happy," and ill-translated by the phrase I suggest, is a revelation of God's purpose for man, it is that of joy, gladness. The Bible tells us that He will wipe all tears away, and that sorrow and sighing shall flee away. It never tells us that He will stop humanity's laughter, or end its merriment. There is no parable in all the New Testament finer in its revelation of the Father than the parable of the prodigal. The language of the father when the son comes home is this, "Let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Jesus first went to the house of joy, near to human joy; but the last of the seven signs which John records gives us Jesus in the house of death, in the house of sorrow, God drawing near to the broken heart of humanity, and telling it the secret of the resurrection life, and illustrating the joy of the knitting up of severed friendships and reunions that are yet to be, as He gives Lazarus back to his brokenhearted sisters. Between that first sign, and that final sign, all the gamut of human emotion and experience is illustrated. The nobleman's son is sick, and God in Christ will heal him. In Bethesda's porches lies a man, eight and thirty years in the grip of an infirmity, and God in Christ will break sabbath to give that man sabbath. Five thousand folk are hungry for bread, and God in Christ knows that hunger, and supplies bread. A few souls are full of terror as the storm sweeps the sea, and God in Christ will hush the storm and give them comfort. One man blind blunders on his way, longing for the light of day, and God in Christ will open the blind eyes. Incarnation is the revelation of the God in Whose hand our breath is and Whose are all our ways.

By that incarnation He has revealed to us the purposes of His nearness. He is near to save—a great word, the most gracious word of all—to save men, to remake them in their spiritual life, and by that means to renew them in their moral life and ultimately to perfect their entire being. He is near man to save, and in order to do it He is near men to govern them.

The discovery of the nearness of God, come when it may or how it may, creates responsibility. It is possible that even now, in this evening hour, God has broken through in some life, and the sense of His nearness has come to the soul. If it has been so, follow the gleam, adjust thy life toward that light, take up the poise of soul that answers the call out of eternity, consent no longer to think of thyself as of the dust and as of today alone. Follow the gleam. To obey is to follow on to know more perfectly. To follow on to know more perfectly is to come to enlargement of life, and is to come ultimately to the perfecting of life. "Surely God is in this place," and let us say, We know it. If so, if ye know this thing, happy are ye if ye do all that the great truth suggests!

## 005 - Genesis 28:16 - The Nearness of God Unrecognized

Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. Genesis 28:16

A preacher of a generation ago introduced a sermon on Jacob's dream by saying, "A long journey, a hard pillow, an uneasy conscience, and a heavy heart. These are the things that make men dream." If that be the natural explanation of the dream of Jacob, the supernatural value of the story is that through the medium of the dream God impressed Himself on the mind and the heart of this needy man.

I see no reason to doubt the suggestion that the dream of Jacob was very natural. After the long journey he was weary; the locality in which he halted for the night was characterized by lack of beauty, by rocky fastnesses, and barren, almost desert, expanses; the hillside swept up in terraces. As the man laid his head on the hard pillow of stone, the only kind available, what more natural than that, as he fell asleep, the strange stuff that dreams are made of should borrow the appearance on which his eyes would most likely last rest, and people the terraced hillside with angelic beings? And what more likely than that a man who believed in God as Jacob did and never ceased to do, whose father had believed in God as Isaac did and had never ceased to do, and whose grandfather Abraham had been a man of venturesome and heroic faith, what more likely than that such a man in such an hour in such a dream should imagine that God Himself stood by his side?

I say the dream is perfectly understandable and quite natural, for in every dream there is the foundation of previous experience and an added something that we cannot account for by previous experience. We can always find the first reason for our dreaming in the things through which we have been passing, and in our dreaming we always find matters introduced which seem to have no relationship to anything through which we have passed.

That recognition of the naturalness of the dream does but make it the more remarkable that God used that which was thus a perfectly natural process of the human brain, and made it the medium through which He impressed Himself on the soul of a man, and brought him to new comprehension of the fact which I venture to say he had always believed in intellectually.

It is not with the dream itself that we are proposing to deal now, but with the waking consciousness of the dreamer, especially with that aspect of it which was new and resulted from the dream. If, however, you will allow yourselves to call up this old story, which I



venture to imagine is one of those which you remember most clearly, because in all probability it formed one of the foundation stones of that Biblical structure which your mothers gave you in the days of long ago—if you will recall the circumstances, you will see what I mean when I speak of the new consciousness of the man. When Jacob lay down to sleep that night he had no immediate, direct, actual consciousness of the nearness of God. When he woke in the morning he said, "Surely the Lord "is," not was, "in this place; and I knew it not," not I know it not. Mark the tenses, they are all suggestive. The new consciousness was of the fact, not that God had been there the night before, not that God had visited Jacob in the night, but that God was there at the moment: "Surely the Lord is in this place." The new consciousness, moreover, was one of Jacob's past ignorance, "I knew it not." On arriving here last night after a long and weary journey, tired and lonely, homeless and exiled, wondering and perplexed, I did not know God was here. I lay down to sleep without knowing it, without any thought of it, without it playing any part in my final resolutions or adjustments of life. "I knew it not."

Now let me invite you to follow me in a meditation on some of the thoughts suggested by this exclamation of Jacob when he awoke in the morning after the strange and wonderful dream of the night. First let us consider the fact which Jacob discovered that night, "The Lord is in this place." Second, let us consider the unconsciousness of the fact which he confessed, "I knew it not." Third and finally, let us think of the discovery of the fact to him, how it came about, and what it meant.

First, then, as to the fact discovered. The whole matter may be stated in a very brief sentence. That night, by the impression made on his soul in a given locality and in certain clearly defined circumstances, Jacob came to discover what we speak of as the omnipresence of God. That is a phrase with which we are all familiar. It is a phrase of the theologian which has become a commonplace phrase in Christian experience. This was the hour in which Jacob came to actual, practical consciousness of the fact of the omnipresence of God, and it found expression in his case in language that spoke of God, not as omnipresent, but as being right there where he was.

That is the Biblical doctrine of God. It is impossible to conceive of the God revealed in the Bible without at once admitting the fact of His omnipresence. As is the case with every great essential truth of revealed religion, there is one classic passage in the Bible in which it is most clearly set forth. All the great doctrines and truths of revealed religion are expressed somewhere specially in the Bible; if we desire to know poetically and truthfully the relation of God to creation we turn to the book of Job and read there the theophanies of its later Chapters; if we would know the value of the whole revelation of God in the sacred writings we study Psalms 119; if we would know all that can be said concerning love we turn to the thirteenth Chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians; if we would comprehend the full force of faith in the affairs of men we study the eleventh Chapter of the letter to the Hebrews. So the great doctrine of the omnipresence of God is declared in that psalm which constitutes our lesson:

Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?  
If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there:  
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.  
If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;  
Even there shall Thy hand lead me,  
And Thy right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, Surely the darkness shall overwhelm me,  
And the light about me shall be night;  
Even the darkness hideth not from Thee,  
But the night shineth as the day:  
The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee.

And so on through all the majestic language of the psalm as it sets forth the omnipresence and the omniscience of God, that He is everywhere, and that no secret can be hidden from Him.

I repeat, this doctrine is the common faith, not merely of definitely Christian men and women, but of all those who intellectually receive the Christian faith as the Divine revelation to man. Yet it is a truth which men are not easily mastered by. It is a truth which is held in the upper reaches of the intellect, but which strangely fails to reach down to the volitional powers of the life, and rarely affects, even among Christian people, the emotional capacities of the life.

This fact of the omnipresence of God, what a fact it is! To state it in general terms like this is to fail to make it impressive. Even the reading of Psalms 119 is too mighty an exercise for the mind of man, and the only thing that any man can say who attempts to read that psalm is what the psalmist himself does say in the midst of its rhythmic beauty:

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is high, I cannot attain unto it.

To speak in general terms of the omnipresence of God, even though the mind accepts the truth, is to fail to be impressed by it.

Let us take two Biblical illustrations as illuminating the Biblical doctrine. I take the two which perpetually impress my own heart and soul. The first is in Daniel's prophecy, the story of Belshazzar's feast. It is the story of a night of carousal, drunkenness, debauchery, and ribaldry; the story of how in the midst of revelry there came the semblance of a human hand and the mystic writing on the wall, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." Then I listen to the prophet's interpretation of that great message to the king, and among the things he said this arrests my attention: looking fearlessly into the eyes of that drunken, debauched king, the prophet said to him, "The God in Whose hand thy breath is, and Whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." I do not quote the passage at this moment to deal with the declaration that the man had failed to glorify God, but to ask you to observe the conception of God that filled the mind of the prophet. "The God in Whose hand thy breath is, and Whose are all thy ways." Belshazzar's breath at that moment was foul with drunkenness and obscenity; nevertheless, that breath was in the hand of God! To speak of the omnipresence of God in all its vastness is to declare that which must be accepted intellectually if the doctrine of God which the Bible presents be true; but it does not impress the individual, it is too great; but when I see a drunken king, obscene and vulgar, and I watch the heaving of his breast and recognize the operation of his frame fearfully and wonderfully made, fashioned according to the plan of the most high God, and when I recognize that man's breath is in the hand of God, then I begin to understand the doctrine of the Divine omnipresence. Passing from the Old Testament into the New, I find myself in Athens with Paul and hear him saying to those Athenians—those decadent philosophers who knew nothing of a living philosophy or a vital idea, but were trading on the memory of past philosophies—that he has come to make known to them the God they ignorantly worship, and then declaring that "He is not far from each one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being." Thus in language of the simplest I am brought face to face with the sublimest of all truths, and am brought face to face with that truth in such a way that the general doctrine becomes a personal arrest. It is that great doctrine of the nearness of God which became reality in the life of Jacob through that dream. How, then, do men come to the consciousness of this truth which makes it powerful and prevailing in their lives? Take the case of Jacob. It was the consciousness of the presence of God in an unexpected place. I have already hinted at that. Let us consider a little more carefully the unexpectedness, first, as to the place itself. Jacob was near Luz. Hugh Macmillan has described Bethel thus: "At Bethel the natural landscape is so bare and exposed, that it opens no door into the supernatural." There was nothing there to suggest God to man. It seems to me there are signs in nature that must suggest God to the mind of the intelligent man. During the past week, in different parts of this country, I have looked at the autumn tints and felt as though in spite of myself I was being reminded of God, for the flaming fires of autumn, cleansing the floor and preparing for the new springing of life, seemed to me to suggest the altar fires of Deity. But there are places so barren that no such suggestion seems to be made, and Bethel was such a place. Jacob was far away from his home, far away from anything that spoke to him of religion. He said presently, "This is... the house of God"; but there was no temple there, for the temple was not yet erected; no tabernacle was there, for the pattern had not yet been given; there was no shrine, no altar; these he had left behind in the tents of Isaac in Beersheba. He was away from the things of worship and religion, away from everything that would be likely to suggest God to him. Yet God was there with him. That is the truth to which he awoke in this place near Luz, away from Beersheba, a place barren and bleak, away from the fruitfulness of the valley and the beauty of the hills. In this unexpected place he found God.

Take the case of Belshazzar: in the hall of sensuality and carousal God was present; He could not be excluded.

Take the parable of the rich fool, which came from the lips of the Lord Himself. He said, My fields, my fruits, my barns; and suddenly, in the midst of his calculations and his commercial enterprises, all perfectly legitimate (for I pray you notice whenever you read the story that this man was not guilty of fraudulent getting), God said, "Thou fool." God broke in upon him suddenly. Where was God? Right there in the man's fields, and in his harvests, enwrapping him more closely than the atmosphere he breathed, enabling him to get wealth. God was forgotten, but He was there.

This truth of the omnipresence of God means that God is where man is; man never escapes. My brother, you faced some stern duty today, and you were obedient thereto with a sense of almost unutterable loneliness possessing your soul until, perchance, you said, with Elijah, I only am left true to the ways of God. But you were not alone in that hour. When you stood firm, four-square to every wind that blew, God was with you. It may be that even today you have come to the sanctuary hot from sin; when you sinned you were not alone; God was with you. He is the God in Whose hand your breath is, and Whose are all your ways. There are those tonight who are in the midst of pain and suffering; they are not alone. "In this place," the chamber of physical torture, God is. "In this place" of mental anguish God is. Someone has come into this congregation lonely. Oh, the tragic, agonizing loneliness of London! Hardly a week passes over my head in this ministry but that someone talks to me of loneliness. You are alone; you know no one who sits by you tonight, you are away from home and friends and all old associations, apparently you are alone; but God is with you!

Jacob did not say, God came to me in the night, God has visited me, God was here yesternight and now has gone. He did not awake to the consciousness of a visit; He awoke to the consciousness of a presence. The thing that he found out that night was not that God visits man, but that God is with man wherever he is. We expect to meet Him in the sanctuary; but He is near us in the market place. We look for the gleaming of the glory of His face at the holy shrine; but he is as surely with us in the den of

wickedness. Not alone in the sanctuary, but where the multitudes gather in defiance of His law, He is there. This is the truth to which Jacob awoke.

Consider, in the second place, this man's unconsciousness of the fact of the nearness of God. The note of tragedy in my text is this, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." God is here, but I did not know it. How are we to account for the fact that Jacob did not know that God was there? It may be accounted for by intellectual limitation. It may be declared that he had not come to the consciousness of this great truth of the omnipresence of God. It is said by some that to these men of the past Jehovah was merely a tribal deity, one of a number of gods. That I will not argue. It may be true; but I do not believe it for a moment. I believe that what took Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees was a conception of God as One, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.

I think we must go deeper if we are to find out why this man was not conscious of the presence of God. Not intellectual limitation only, but spiritual dullness. Remember, a man never finds God intellectually if he be spiritually dull. Man is more than matter. Man is more than mind. Man is spirit. If the spiritual fact in man's life be atrophied, dead, inactive, he cannot find God. He may be an intellectual giant. His mind may be trained perfectly, it may act with remarkable precision in every department of human life; but he never finds God. The great inquiry of the book of Job can be answered only negatively until this hour:

Canst thou by searching find out God?

Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

As I look back at Jacob on that night I see that he was spiritually deadened, dulled. God was there when he chose the stone on which to put his head. God was nigh when he rested his head on his chosen pillow. God was with him, but he did not know it, he had no sense of it. Intellectual limitation. No, something profounder: spiritual deadness.

But why the spiritual deadness? Because of moral failure. In the past lay trickery and baseness, meanness and deceit. Remember, this was not a man whom you can describe as godless. He was a godly man. He believed in God. The trouble with Jacob was never that he did not believe in God. The trouble was that, believing in God, he did not believe God could manage without his help. He was always trying to hurry the Divine economy by his own wit and wisdom and cleverness. That is the story of Jacob: in doing that he had descended to baseness, meanness, evil courses; and moral depravity had dulled the spiritual sense. That night he was not conscious of God.

This unconsciousness of the Divine nearness is widespread—how widespread who shall tell? In the case of men generally it is true that they do not know the presence of God. There are thousands of men today who, if you were to ask them as to their belief, intellectually, in God and His omnipresence, would affirm both; but they do not know God as near, they have no immediate consciousness of God, they have no commerce with God. The scientist as a mere scientist is unconscious of God. I want that statement to be correctly understood. It is quite possible for a man to be a Christian man and a scientist, and to have perpetual consciousness of God. When I speak of a scientist merely, I mean a man who is dealing with things that are of this earth, and who has no traffic with heaven. Here is the marvel of all marvels, that he will touch and handle, analyze and synthesize, examine and re-examine, investigate and reinvestigate, and continue to investigate the stuff which has come from God, and yet never recognize God, never find God. We have had a remarkable exhibition of that during this autumn in the meeting of the British Association in Dundee. If anyone shall ever refer to what President Schafer then said, let it be remembered, whatever he may have meant by it, that he declared he was dealing with life and not with soul. I think that he should always have the benefit of that admission, though I do not profess to know what he meant, and I have a shrewd suspicion that he did not know himself. One of the most highly trained scientific minds of the present day, a man of intellect, culture, refinement, reverence, is seen dealing with matter itself, recognizing the marvel of it, observing its mutations, changes, differentiations, and yet never finding God, having no consciousness of God.

It is equally true of the philosopher. That is why that man is sorely mistaken who finds his refuge in modern philosophy. The most modern philosophy will be the laughingstock of the philosophers of a generation yet to come. I make that affirmation in the light of the history of philosophy. Every philosophy has made its contribution, and has at last broken down, and been respectfully dismissed, while new philosophies have been introduced. This will continue so long as man is simply thinking on the level of the finite and the immediate and material. Yet here is the marvel of marvels: men will attempt to deal with wisdom, and yet be quite unconscious of God. They will argue for Him or against Him, but they do not feel Him, do not know Him, have no sense of Him.

Come to quite another illustration. There are men and women to whom I am preaching tonight to whom travel is a perpetual revelation of God; they cannot stand and gaze on the sun-capped heights of Alpine splendor without being conscious of God; they cannot cross the mighty sea and look at the wide expanse of rhythmic, orderly waters without feeling the presence of God. But there are multitudes of men who see no gleam of God's glory in the light of Alpine snows, and hear no thunder of His presence in the roar of Atlantic billows. I have crossed the Atlantic now forty times, and often have I stood and gazed over the sea, and always as I have done so, sometimes in the silence of the night, able to see little in the darkness, or at other times able to see much by the light of the moon and the stars, or as in the day I have looked at it stormy, or lying sweet and placid as though kissed to sleep—always the great word of the Bible has come back to me,

Thy way was in the sea,  
And Thy paths in the great waters.

Then I have turned from the contemplation of the sea to the contemplation of men and women, and I have found people who have never looked at the sea for six days, they have been so busy playing bridge! God is close at hand, but they do not know it, they have no sense of it, no consciousness of it. They burn incense on Sunday, not to God, but to the respectable notion that they manifest their belief in Him by attending morning service; but they do not know Him. Yet He is there—in the sea, and in the ship, and in the cabin where they play bridge, the God in whom they live and move and have their being. Their breath is in His hand.

Closer is He than breathing,  
Nearer than hands or feet.

But they never know it.

It may be equally true of the statesman. He may deal with national things and international things, and be busy with policies, diplomacies and arrangements; with frontiers, and readjustments, and partitions, even today at this very hour, and yet be entirely unconscious that God is abroad in the Balkans, and that business long deferred is being done in the resistless will and economy of God, Who will not be trifled with forever! No consciousness amid the clash of war of the presence of God and the overruling of God! "I knew it not!"

Or a commercial man watching the markets, lamenting the fall of consols, speculating on the effect that war will produce, waiting for news of the success or failure of the harvest in the distant parts of the world, may have no consciousness of God. God is there, but he does not know it.

Or even a physician, passing in and out of homes of sickness, and perpetually in the presence of pain, may not find God. God is there, but he does not know it.

Men everywhere, busy here and there through all the busy days, and wherever they are, God close at hand; but they do not know it. That is the tragedy of all tragedies. The supreme, ultimate tragedy of human life is unconsciousness of God. The supreme fact of human life is that in Him we live and move and have our being. The supreme tragedy is that we do not know it.

"I knew it not." Why not? We speak of intellectual limitation, that we cannot comprehend the fact. That is not the answer. The answer is spiritual deadness, spiritual dullness, the atrophy of the essential glory of life; for if man be spiritual he will discern the spiritual. There are very many who do discern God. In science and in philosophy and in statecraft and in every other walk of life there are men who have "endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." In these lives God is seen, and God is known, and God is recognized.

Behind all spiritual dullness are moral perversity and failure. It is sin that dims my vision of God. It is sin that atrophies my spiritual life and makes me unconscious of the nearness of God, so that I may live and move and have my being in God and yet not know Him. This is of all tragedies the supreme tragedy, that men live and move and have their being in God and do not know Him.

There for tonight I leave my message, broken off and unfinished for lack of time. We will attempt to return to it, that we may consider what that forgetfulness of God really means in human life, that we may speak of His method of discovering the fact of Himself to the soul of man, and also of what that means.

## 006 - Genesis 32:28 - The Crippling That Crowns

And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed. Genesis 32:28

Taken in all its simplicity, it will readily be granted that this old and very familiar story is, nevertheless, most remarkable. To summarize with almost brutal bluntness, it is the story of God crippling a man, the story of God Himself taking the form of a man in order to lay His hand on a man, and that in order to cripple him.

This is not the story of Jacob's triumph over God, save in a secondary and yet a very spiritual sense. This is primarily the story of God's triumph over Jacob. Old as it is, familiar as it is, I propose to give a little careful attention to it, for it is one of those Bible stories which have made a most profound appeal to the heart of humanity. I venture to suggest to you that our very fondness for it has led us to accept interpretations which I cannot characterize in any way but as superficial. Gradually, by the transmission of these interpretations, slightly modified as they have been transmitted, we have been in danger of missing the deepest thing in the story.

Just a word in an aside; perhaps this word is a sort of open secret for my brethren in the ministry who may be here. I suppose that at some time or another all of us who have been preaching for any number of years, say a generation, have preached from the words, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me," in order to prove what wonderful power there is in prayer. I certainly have done so. Now, I do not think that idea is here at all. I have no doubt the sermon on prayer was true, but it did not properly belong to this text. That, I fear, is rather a common trouble with sermons. That confession, which is good for my soul, if not for yours, will help me to say that I have returned to this story, and after further consideration, I want to utter, so far as God shall help me, the things it has been saying to my own soul.

Let us first remind ourselves of the story of this man up to this point. I will omit all the things of his earlier years, and simply take the happenings of the twenty years prior to this event. At seventy years of age Jacob left home, a keen, hard man, intellectually convinced of God, but self-reliant, and at that moment defeated and disgraced. After twenty years, the story sees him returning wealthy, embittered, hardened; still intellectually convinced of God, still self-reliant, but afraid, haunted with a strange sense of fear. This particular day, to which we are brought in this Chapter, and the happenings of which are so closely related to our text, was a day of hosts. Behind Jacob was Laban's host departing, returning after a bitter interview between the men. Then, somehow, to Jacob, in that very day, there came a vision of angels; he saw hosts of angels passing before him. It does not at all matter for the moment whether we say that this was simply a reminiscence of the days when he started away, and had a dream of angels and a ladder; or whether we believe that God in that moment gave him an actual vision of some great company of angels. The fact that abides is that to this man, hard, astute, by no means emotional, there came the sense of the angels' presence. He saw a vision of angels, and said, This is Mahanaim, or, to translate, The place of two hosts. And, moreover, there was another host. His servants returning to him, brought him this news, "We came to thy brother Esau, and moreover he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." Thus it was a day of hosts, the hosts of Laban returning from him, the hosts of Esau approaching, and God's host of angels round about him.

Jacob set himself with characteristic carefulness to arrange for the coming of Esau. He was still the self-reliant man, arranging for the presence of Esau by sending him presents. We see the man if we read the story fully and carefully. See how he arranged. He divided his present into parts, and gave his servants strict instructions, When you come to Esau, if he receive you, well; if not, give him the first instalment of the present, but do not give him more than you can help; if that does not help matters, bring up the next instalment, and so on.

That is the revelation of the man, a wonderfully clever man. I am perfectly sure he would have been a most successful business man in London or New York!

But there was more in the man than all that cleverness. There was haunting fear, a fear which would not have been there if he had not been a man of faith. Contradictory as that may appear, it is certainly true. There was a feeling in his heart that everything was not done, although he had done everything. There was a consciousness that something was left unattended to, something which he could not do alone. Therefore, as in that Eastern land the sun suddenly sank to its rest, he sent across the Jabbok the vast companies of his household, and he was left alone. That which happened in the hour of that loneliness is the theme of our meditation; that which led up to the word spoken to him as the next day broke, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed." No more Jacob, heel-catcher, but Israel, governed by God. What led to that word spoken to the man?

We shall notice three things. First, Jacob's need as he himself felt it and his need as God saw it. Second, the struggle of the night, that strange happening, which always fascinates us, however often we may return to the story. Finally, the blessing as it is crystallized into speech in the words, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel."

The need: first of all as Jacob saw it. We have tried to pass over the ground and to watch him up to that moment of loneliness. We have spoken of a haunting fear, a mystic sense that everything was not done, that took possession of him. Let us look a little more carefully at the man, and attempt to enter into his consciousness at that moment. I think we may do so by saying that he was looking back, and looking on, and looking round about, at the immediate. As he looked back, what did he see? Those twenty years. There can be no question but that as he looked back over those twenty years he had a sense of great satisfaction. They had been years of wonderful success. I am warranted in saying all this by the prayer which he had offered earlier in the day, when in the presence of the God of his father Isaac and of Abraham, he had recognized how wonderfully successful he had been. To our Western ears the words "With my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two companies" have very little of meaning; yet we know, if we take time to think, that in these words we have the expression of great and wonderful success, of a fortune twice amassed in those twenty years. As he looked back Jacob was conscious of victory, of success. I cannot help saying—for I am trying to understand the man on the human level, on the level of my own humanity—that he was conscious of a pardonable sense of satisfaction in that he had proved himself too strong for all the cunning of Laban. Read at your leisure the story of the conversation with Laban. Jacob reminded Laban that during those years he had ten times changed his wages, yet, nevertheless, in spite of all Laban's trickery, this man had moved through to a great and assured success, and such a success—do not forget this—that when

talking to Laban about it he could say that Laban could bring no charge of dishonesty against him; he had never robbed Laban; he had only outwitted him. He had the knowledge of twenty years of success wrung out of adverse circumstances. A man is always permitted some amount of satisfaction as he looks back over twenty years of that kind. That was the backward look.

Ah, but that is not quite far enough back! Why those twenty years in Laban's country? The answer would remind him of that business of the blessing, and that business of the birthright! Over all the twenty years of success was the haunting shadow of meanness and baseness and wrong. Jacob knew those years. There in the loneliness of that night, with the Eastern sunset and darkness round about him, or only the light of the stars overhead, while the little Jabbok murmured on its way down to the Jordan, he was thankful and pleased about the success; but there was Esau! Phantoms of the past were floating in front of him. He shook them off and looked on!

What was ahead? The land, the land promised, and therein faith was operating. That land was not fairer than the land he had been dwelling in. Why did he desire it? Because God had sworn to give it to Abraham and to Isaac and his seed, because the possession of that land was within the Divine economy, because Jacob knew, however much through base deceit and meanness he had interfered, hindered, postponed the Divine purpose rather than helped it, Jacob knew that in the purpose of God he was a link in the chain of the Divine economy, moving ever on toward high purpose. He returned to the land because God had called him, because it was in God's purpose to create a continuity: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; but the phantoms of the past were the terrors of the future. Esau was in possession in that land, and was traveling toward him with four hundred men.

After the backward look and the forward look, the look around at circumstances followed. Everything was done that could be done; presents were sent to Esau which were in themselves confessions of a sense of wrong done in the long ago and evidence of Jacob's desire to placate his brother. The mother and the children were guarded, so far as he could guard them. What now? One thing he needed, he thought, and what was it? That God should help him. Is not that perfect? Is it not exactly what a man ought to feel at such a point? Let us leave our inquiry and find our answer in the sequel.

Now, with all reverence I approach what seems to me to be, in the way of exposition, the more difficult part of the subject, that which must be approached with reverence. As I read the story itself, up to this point I see Jacob's sense of need. How did God see that hour? What was God's vision of that man? How did God understand his need? How near together, or how far apart, were Jacob's sense of need and God's knowledge of it? I affirm that God saw a man whom He knew to be a believer in Himself. It is impossible carefully to study this story of Jacob without seeing that. Criticize him as we may, and we surely shall do so, as we find out how much he is like ourselves; nevertheless, through the story from beginning to end we are conscious of the fact that deep down in the profoundest things of his life this man believed in God and never wavered in that belief. God saw him as a man profoundly believing in Himself. He saw him, moreover, as a man who believed in the Divine purpose, and who desired to come into line with the Divine purpose, to cooperate with the Divine purpose. He saw him as a man who, in a wonderful degree, had entered into the appreciation of the master principle of faith in the spiritual, which had made his grandfather Abraham a man of strong initiative, and his own father Isaac a man strong in the quietness of passive faith. He had entered into this great inheritance; he believed in God and His purpose, and he passionately desired to be in line with it, to cooperate with it, and so to fulfil his destiny.

God saw this man not only as a believer in Himself, not only as a believer in His purpose, and not only desiring to cooperate therein; He saw him self-reliant. He saw this man as one who felt himself able to help God, who felt that it was necessary in certain conditions for him to manipulate events in order to bring about the Divine consummation. That had been the story of all the past, the story of every blunder he had made. There is no single tale of infidelity in the life of Jacob. There is no story of hours of deflection from the pathway of desire to cooperate with God. His failure lay in the fact that he had said, in effect, It is God's desire that I should have the birthright; I will help God by taking advantage of Esau's hunger to obtain it; it is God's purpose that I should have the patriarchal blessing; I will clothe myself in these skins and go and help God by cheating my father. Every blunder had as its motive the desire to help God. This self-reliance made him imagine that it was necessary for him to hurry God, to manipulate events so that they should minister to the speedy realization of the Divine consummation.

God saw that what Jacob supremely needed was first to discover his own weakness, and that in order that he might discover, as he never had done before, the power of the God in Whom he believed. On the threshold of possession of the land he must be brought to that attitude of soul in which he would be willing to receive the possession as the gift of God rather than imagine that he had gained it by his own cleverness and his own wisdom.

I believe there are those who are listening to me, brethren and sisters in comradeship of faith, who are really in revolt against this presentation of this story, those who are saying, Is it not the right thing for a man to work out his own destiny on the basis of his own belief in God? There is a sense in which that is true; but there is a deeper truth, and in order to discover it we need to ponder this story most carefully in the light of the whole movement of this man's history. In order that we may be preserved from the crippling, it is good that we should do so in the days before we come to the sense of weakness that will drive us back to it. Let it not be forgotten, Abraham was never crippled. With all reverence, if I may say it of One Who was more than man and yet was very man,

Jesus never passed through such an hour as this in order to perfect His faith. However much we may be in revolt against this way of stating the story, let us consider it before we dismiss it. This is the lesson that God would teach Jacob, this is the need as God saw it: that Jacob should understand that a man can enter into possession of God's inheritance and destiny only as he receives it as a gift from God. He never can enter on the Divine destiny merely on the basis of intellectual assent to the fact of God and by means of his own cleverness.

That will be further illuminated if we take a step forward and glance, in the second place, at the story of the struggle. "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." That is so easily read, and yet it is so impossible of interpretation by a preacher in the pulpit; but I know that there are men and women in this house who in their own experience understand it. Through the long, long night there wrestled a man with him. God was limiting His own strength in order to create a consciousness of it to Jacob. God incarnate, that is the story. God—to use Charles Wesley's daring phrase—was contracted to a span, limiting Himself to the level of humanity, a man facing a man, yet infinitely more than man! God stooped to the level of man and put on the man Jacob the hand of man in the night. What for? To bring into play all Jacob's force, that it might express itself to the uttermost, and so learn its limit and its weakness.

As I watch the long struggle of that night I am more than ever amazed at Jacob; how wonderful a man he was. He knew, of this there can be no doubt, that the touch was supernatural, even though it was the touch of another man. As I watch him through the night I see the old character manifesting itself, the determination to make the most of an opportunity. It is not said that Jacob wrestled with the man, but that the man wrestled with Jacob. There is no question that Jacob wrestled too; but the beginning of the struggle was on the side of God: it was the man who wrestled with Jacob.

When the first sudden flush of the new day shot up the Eastern sky the man who had wrestled said to Jacob, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." This was said after that strange, and wonderful, and appalling touch which crippled Jacob. I cannot explain it any further. The man might have crippled Jacob at the beginning of the night; but he did not. He might have done it at any point; but not until Jacob had wrought out all his own strength in answering the strength of God did God touch him and cripple him. It was when Jacob discovered that his strength was ebbing away, and that he could no longer resist the power that was laid upon him that the strange, wonderful thing happened. Jacob replied to the voice of his Master, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." We could not know what the man said unless we heard him say it, and caught the tone and accent. The spirit of a man is never in the words he utters, but in the tone in which he speaks. How did he say it? I am always so thankful that what seems to me to be the Divine interpretation of the story was given long centuries afterwards. I turn to the prophecy of Hosea and listen to the great prophet as he was denouncing Ephraim for his sins, and from that denunciation I am going to read only a few words:

Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he continually multiplieth lies and desolation; and they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried into Egypt. The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will He recompense him.

So far, the prophet was dealing with the people about him; then in a flash he went back to the actual Jacob of long ago: "In the womb he took his brother by the heel; and in his manhood he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angels, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him." It was not by tremendous courage that he won the victory, but by the sob and sigh, by the agony and the utter sense of defeat. It was an appeal out of helplessness. He said it with tears, with a sob, in a moment when all the resoluteness of the years was breaking down. He came to a sense of weakness and inability, and out of that hour of defeat he rose into higher strength and greater majesty than he had ever achieved: "I will not let thee go,"—he hardly had strength to finish it; I think his voice was choked with tears—"except thou bless me!" It was the last sob of a defeated man. The last sob of the defeated man, the man defeated by God, is the first note in the triumph song of the selfsame man: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." "What is thy name?" My name is Heel-catcher. That is not so poetic as Jacob; but it is well to be truthful. Every Jew will read that every time he reads Jacob. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed," so reads the text. We discover that there is difficulty in this text; the translations of the Revised and Authorized versions are different. I venture to suggest to you that the words may have meant, as I certainly believe they did mean, not that Jacob had struggled with God and had prevailed over God—there is a secondary sense in which that is true—but rather that Jacob had striven with God and God had prevailed, and therefore that God had striven with man and God had prevailed. I do not believe that the reference was to past victories over men; but rather that it was a prophecy of the new type of victory over man in that hour when, paradox of the faith-life, he had won his victory over God through defeat by God. If a man will prevail with God he will do so in the hour in which he is mastered by God.

What was the blessing? We have already touched on it; let us but return to it for a moment. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power," said the old version, and that has been the reason of the persistent declaration that Israel means prince. It means nothing of the kind; neither does it mean one who has power with God, save as that may be a deduction from what it really does mean. These Hebrew words occur all through the Bible, made up in some way with the name of God ending them. Isra-el means God-governed, a God-mastered man.

The sun had risen now, and Jacob was going back to join his company. I cannot help it if you charge me with imagination. I never go back with him. I prefer to be with the company that met him. On the other side of the Jabbok I am waiting in imagination with his friends, wondering what has happened, why he does not come. At last, there he is, he is coming. See him? But can that be the man who went down last night? He has had an accident; he is limping; he is a cripple! I hasten to meet him, and I ask, What has happened? Why are you limping? I think he would have said, Do not call me Jacob, I have a new name; and there is no need for anyone to draw any special attention to this limp in the way of commiseration or pity; this limp, this halt as I walk, which will go with me to the end of my days, is a patent of nobility.

Presently he entered the land. And how did he enter the land? what of Esau? Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him. "Thou hast striven with God; and with men hast prevailed." Because in the strife with God thou hast been mastered, Jacob, therefore hast thou risen into co-operation with the forces of God that can disarm your brother and bring him to you with kisses and tears. That is the lesson of all lessons. Do not misunderstand me. This man had a great deal to do and a great deal to learn, as subsequent history teaches; but he had learned the central lesson, and all its values and experiences would now be wrought out into his own experience, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.

You say that this is a very old story, and that times and customs and conditions are all changed. Why bring this story to men in these modern times? Why go back there? For the simple reason that if it be true that times and customs and conditions have changed, God has not changed, and man has not changed. If for a moment you were inclined, in a kindly way, to criticize me for leading you back to Genesis, you have surely discovered that there is wonderful comradeship between you and Jacob. God has not changed, man has not changed; therefore the values are permanent. What are they?

Let me attempt to gather them up. Granted the principle of faith—and I am speaking only to believing men and women—then God will perfect it by teaching us our dependence on Himself. Happy indeed are we if we yield to the truth at the beginning, as did Abraham; or as did Joseph even more perfectly; but so many of us are like Jacob, we struggle independently of the God in Whom we believe. We do believe in Him. We do desire to be conformed to His will, and to cooperate with His purpose; and then we struggle and make our plans and we succeed wonderfully; but inevitably, sooner or later, there comes a crisis, not necessarily in circumstances, though sometimes in circumstances; but some crisis, in which by the direct act of God He lays His hand on us and we are brought to the appalling sense of our own incompetence and weakness. That is a great hour, an hour of overwhelming disappointment merging to despair; to some, let it be carefully said at once, an hour of actual, personal affliction as the result of which we shall never again be what we were, but shall go softly all our days, shall always halt by the way, and in certain senses be cripples.

Let us look carefully at such hours. I may be speaking to some man or woman in the midst of such an hour. Consider it carefully, and try to find out what God means. Is He not saying to thee this morning, clever, astute, capable man: Always hast thou believed in God, yet always hast thou manipulated thine own life, made thine own arrangements with wonderful success; suddenly thou art crippled, broken? God is saying to you, What is thy name? Is there not the strange, new light on the eastern sky that foretells a day of triumph? You may go softly all your days, you may never walk quite as you walked before. Shall I ever forget that hour when I heard a friend of mine, whose name I will not mention here, preach as I had never heard him preach before; when, going into the anteroom afterwards, I took him by the hand and said, Man, what has happened to you? Quite literally he walked his vestry with a limp, and as I looked at him I saw that this magnificent man was crippled for life, and he said, By that limp I live! In that hour of his unmaking he was made.

To gather up everything as I see it and feel it, let this story say this one thing: When God cripples, it is in order to crown. May we learn the secret and rise to the place of power by yielding ourselves to Him.

## 007 - Exodus 20:20 - Grace and Law

Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you, that ye sin not. Exodus 20:20

In those wonderful days of the emancipation of the Hebrew people and their realization of the constitutional national life Moses twice uttered these words, "Fear not." In each case they were addressed to the people when they were filled with fear. In the first case the fear was fear of Egypt; in the second, it was fear of God.

The fear of Egypt was born of what appeared to be imminent and inevitable destruction. The Hebrews were encamped before Pihahiroth, caught in a trap, the sea before, the foe behind, and they themselves unarmed and undisciplined for war. In their terror they cried out against Moses, and complained that he had brought them away from Egypt, and he replied, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them



again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

In the second case, that of our text, the Hebrews' fear was fear of God. After three months' journeyings they had encamped beneath Sinai. There God had spoken to them through Moses, first in terms of tender grace and then in terms of law. The giving of the law had been accompanied by manifestations of majesty and might, thunders and lightnings, a thick cloud covering the guarded mount, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud. The people trembled and stood afar off, and besought Moses that they might not hear the voice of God, and to that sense of fear he uttered these words, "Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you, that ye sin not." These words, then, are supremely valuable in revealing the meaning of law.

First, they describe the true attitude of men toward the law in the words, "Fear not," which relate the law of God to the grace of His heart; second, they describe the method of the law of God in the words, "God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you"; and, finally, they reveal the purpose of grace and of law in the words, "that ye sin not." This is a consideration full of importance. Innately man is an anarchist; experientially, that is as the result of observation, he admits the necessity for law, and he is always anxious that the other man should submit to it. But for himself he desires freedom from it. Restraint is irksome. We would fain go our own way without any reference to law. This attitude of mind colors our thinking of the law of God, and strangely persists even in the life and the experience of Christian men and women. Unconsciously to ourselves, we think of the law of God as hard and severe, the opposite of love and of grace; and we perpetually quote certain words in the New Testament in a tone of voice which reveals a false conception of contrast between law and grace. I refer to words occurring in the first Chapter of John which we render thus: "The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." That intonation—which by the way cannot be printed—is a commentary on the text and a revelation of our misconception of it. We read the earlier declaration, "The law was given by Moses," in a tone of thunder and severity; then suddenly our voice melts into tenderness as we read, "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." In doing so we prove that we understand neither the law which came by Moses nor the grace and truth which came through Jesus Christ. The law of God is the expression of the love of God, and its giving, even in the midst of the old economy, was as certainly an activity of the grace of His heart as was the coming into this world of His Son. Law expresses the rules of conduct for a man and for all time; truth is the essential integrity out of which all such expression comes. It is in the discovery of this fact, that law is the expression of grace, that is found the inspiration of obedience which prepares the way for that final and further operation of grace whereby a man is enabled to obey the law. To know that the law of God is the language of love is to exclaim, "Oh, how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." Until a man is brought to recognition of the excellency of the law of God he will never yield himself to the redeeming power of God. In this sense also it is true that the law is our custodian to lead us to the faith; for it arrests us, and compels us toward God, and so prepares the way for that activity by which He rescues us and enables us to do His bidding.

Our theme this evening, then is the relation between grace and law; and I propose that we consider law, first in its inspiration, which is grace; second, in its method, which is that of revelation; finally, in the purpose, which is purity; and all this as preliminary to a consideration of the fact that there are things that the law cannot do, but which grace is able to do.

That grace is the inspiration of law cannot be more perfectly illustrated than in the context. Everyone knows the content of the twentieth Chapter of the book of Exodus. But how many are familiar with the nineteenth Chapter? The twentieth Chapter cannot be accurately read unless the nineteenth Chapter has been read. They are closely and intimately related; they form parts of one great whole; they constitute a contrast and a harmony. To read the nineteenth without the twentieth is to read an unfinished fragment; to read the twentieth apart from the nineteenth is to read that which standing alone is indeed full of error. "In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai." So the nineteenth Chapter begins. It is the story of Pentecost, that is, the story of fifty days after emancipation. Fifty days after emancipation the children of Israel found themselves in the wilderness of Sinai. There they pitched their camp, and God, through the mediator Moses, began to deal with them in order to give them their national constitution. Now let us summarize Chapter nineteen. We have, first, the terms of grace. These were immediately followed by the answer which the people gave to the message of grace. The Chapter closes with the response of law to the answer of man. In the twentieth Chapter the order is reversed. It opens with the terms of law, the Ten Words of the Decalogue. Immediately following we have the answer of man to these terms of law. The Chapter closes with the response of grace.

This is the account of God's first messages to this emancipated people, half vulgarized as the result of the long process of slavery. They were now to be organized into national life, a life of peculiar character. In God's dealings with the world they were to constitute a theocracy, a nation through which He would reveal Himself to other nations for their healing and blessing. The story records, first, God's terms of grace, the Hebrews' answer, and His immediate response in law; then His terms of law, their answer, and His final response in words of grace.

The terms of grace in Chapter nineteen are remarkable:

Thou shalt say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel, Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall

be a peculiar treasure unto Me from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine.

Mark that interjection. At the very beginning of their history God reminded this people that they were not His peculiar people in the sense of the rejection of other peoples: "All the earth is Mine"—and "ye shall be unto Me a dynasty of priests, and an holy nation." These were the terms of grace. I think no one will quarrel with that definition when I remind them of the fact that we find in the New Testament that when Peter wrote his letter for the strengthening of trembling souls, he climbed no higher height in his description of the Christian Church than that of these words. The words thrill with the tenderness of a great love. They constitute the revelation of the infinite purpose of the heart of God.

They answered, saying, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." Then, if we were reading this Chapter for the first time and could have that inestimable blessing of coming to it with a fresh mind, we should inevitably be impressed by the change in the language. The Lord said, "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee." Let the people not come nigh! Set bounds and fences round about the mountain so that no beast shall touch it! This was God's response to man's answer to His terms of grace. Then followed the giving of the Ten Words, the terms of law amid the thunders and the lightning, out of the darkness and the cloud; and then men answered, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." To that cry of fear the response of God through Moses was, "Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you, that ye sin not." This was followed by instructions concerning an altar, and sacrifices, and the promise of God, "I will come to you."

The opening note was that of grace: I have "brought you unto Myself"; the final note was also of grace: "I will come unto thee and I will bless thee." Between the two we find man's arrogance, God's unfolding of law, and man's trembling. Fear not! God's purpose is that of grace, and therefore His plan must be that of law.

Let us glance at this matter from a slightly different standpoint, that of law as a method of grace. The ready answer of these people, which I have already described as the answer of arrogance, demonstrates to us how little they knew of their own hearts. They said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." This is not to condemn them for saying this. I hope nothing I have said, even this description of their words as words of arrogance, would convey that impression. When these people said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," they were uttering the deepest thing of their lives. They were speaking out of the very depth of their souls. Surely He had brought them out of Egypt, surely He had borne them on eagles' wings, surely He had shown His power, and now in terms of infinite grace He had spoken to them: I have brought you unto Myself, to make you a dynasty of priests, for all the earth is Mine, and you are to be a blessing to all nations. To this they replied, Yes, we will fulfil that high vocation, we will be obedient, and do anything that God says. This was the voice of noble aspiration, but they did not know what lay between them and realization; they had not found the measure of their own incapacity; they had not learned their weakness. Therefore law was given, revealing God to them, and themselves to themselves as in the presence of God. The function of law was that of revelation, never that of salvation. In the words of Paul in his Galatian letter, one little sentence reveals the truth concerning law, "The law is not of faith."

Law is a revelation. It was a revelation to these men, first of life according to the will of God. It was a revelation to men of the standards of life in the economy of God. As the first ten words were uttered they constituted a revelation of holiness in human life. They are words which define man's relationship to God and man's relationship to his fellow man: broad foundation words, on which all future codes were to be erected. They discovered God in His purity, in His holiness, in His justice, in His righteousness. The first four revealed man's relation to God as the foundation of all morality; the last six revealed man's relationship to his fellow man as the expression of his obedience to the first four. From these words of the law there shone upon men the light, the awful light of the holiness of God.

That revelation of holiness was in the hearts of the men who heard it inspiration, the creation of desire, or of admiration of the ideal. Perhaps as Paul became the most remarkable illustration in the apostolic records of incarnate Christianity, so also Saul of Tarsus was the most remarkable revelation in the Bible of incarnate Hebraism. In his Roman letter Paul declared that after the inward man, he delighted in the law of God; he knew its glory, he knew its beauty. That is the first thing that the law does for a man. Men who break the law with apparent ease and wicked persistence, nevertheless do know in the deepest of their lives the glory and the beauty of the law they break. The most depraved and immoral man—and herein lies the heinousness of his sin—knows the excellency of the ideal to which he will not conform. Strange paradox of human consciousness, but undoubtedly true. The law reveals God and reveals holiness, and carries to the souls of men inevitable conviction as to its height, its nobility, and its grandeur.

If the law is thus a revelation of God it necessarily becomes to the men who receive it a revelation of themselves. When the light of the law flamed on these men they knew their failure, and they knew their weakness; and so while it is true that law becomes an inspiration, the final word is that law becomes a condemnation. It is the revelation of failure. Because in the light of the requirement of the law I learn how I fail and how weak I am, it rests on me as a perpetual condemnation and denunciation. The law, then, is a revelation which inspires and creates admiration for goodness in the soul of a man; but as it reveals it condemns, making a man conscious of how far he has come short and of how appallingly weak he is. Grace declares a purpose beneficent and beautiful, and

man says, I will obey. The law then reveals to him the conditions on which he may enter on the purpose beneficent, and he is filled with fear; but the language of law is the language of grace.

Thus we come to the final note: "That ye sin not." There are many words in our Bible translated "sin" in both Hebrew and Greek, but the common word in the Hebrew and the common word in the Greek have exactly the same significance. Sin is missing of the mark, failure to realize; and that whether it be wilful or ignorant. If we are dealing with sin as guilt, then the sin of ignorance brings no guilt with it. It is wilful sin that brings guilt. But if we are dealing with man, and attempting to see his place in the economy of God and the purpose of heaven for the true realization of life, then sin is failure. If a man comes short of the highest fulfilment of his own life, that is sin. The law was given that men may not sin, that they may not miss the mark, that they may not fail to realize the real meaning and purpose of their own lives. In what sense does law minister to that end? Only as it reveals to man the standard, as it brings to him the measurement of his own life, as it unfolds before him the possibilities of his life, and reveals, to him the conditions on which it shall be possible for him to fulfil those possibilities.

In this connection we must take a wider view of law than Exodus affords. We go back to the beginning of human history as the Bible records it, and there we find law, not the law which was here uttered, but human life conditioned in the will of God, God uttering His own word, a commandment laid on man as a safeguard and revealing to him his relation to a supreme authority. That is law. Leave these earlier records and come to the New Testament, and in the teaching of Jesus we find law; but the Master goes to deeper depths, searching the profound things of human life, no longer merely conditioning external conduct, but setting up His standard in the inner recesses of motive and desire. The broadest conception shows that law is a revelation to man of himself, made by the grace of the Divine love; a kindly and tender declaration of the path in which he should go, that he may not miss his way; statement of the principles that govern his life, that he may not violate them. In Christ men are set free from the law which is Hebrew; but they are brought under the law of the Spirit of life. Thus in the new economy we have a yet clearer unfolding of the truth that law is the language of love. God bending over a nation or bending over a man says to it or to him, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." That is not the language of hardness, of severity, of unkindness. It is love showing the nation or the man that life must be adjusted to the supreme things in order that it may rise to the height of its possibility.

This is true of every one of the ten words; and it is equally true of the words of Jesus. They are severe, they are awe-inspiring, they search and scorch and frighten the soul, if men will listen to them. Nevertheless they are the words of infinite compassion, of infinite tenderness; they are words uttered to my soul in order that I may know the way wherein I should go, if I am not to miss the meaning of my life, if I am to realize it in its height, its breadth, its depth, its glory. Jesus said that He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might have life. Bear in mind that great declaration, and then hear me while reverently I say that He did condemn the world. That is not to contradict the word of the Lord, it is to attempt to understand it. Jesus is not in this assembly to condemn; but how He does condemn! The purpose of His heart is not condemnation; but if I remit my soul to His inquiry, to His investigation, then I lay my hand on my lip, and say, Unclean, unclean! He condemns me.

That, however, is not the ultimate fact. The condemnation of His scorching law is in order that I may be driven closer yet to Him for salvation. Grace utters the law, that man may discover sin, and, remitting himself to its measurement, may find his failure.

If law is the expression of grace, it is not its final word. Law brings man to a consciousness of his sin, and has no more that it can do. What will grace say to a man who stands condemned by this uttering of law? Let us first remember this. Grace does not deny that man's sin. The business of grace is not to hide sin or cloak it over or deny the reality of it. Let us remember, in the second place, that grace does not excuse the sinning man. Nevertheless, in some infinite mystery of love, grace operates in such a way that the sin of sinning man may be forgiven and the sinning man himself be conformed to the very ideal of purity and beauty which the law has revealed. To go back to the illustration in Exodus, grace first says God's purpose is to bring man to Himself, and man agrees. Law then discovers to man his own weakness, and man is afraid, and says, "Let not God speak." Has grace no more to say? Grace then says, "Fear not." There is a way of approach. It is the way of an altar, the way of a sacrifice. The central word of grace is that of God, "I will come to thee." That is what grace says to the man condemned under the law; it draws near with healing, with renewal.

If you ask me how grace can accomplish this, I point you to the Cross and ask you to listen to the words of inspiration as you gaze on the profound mystery. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses." Or again, "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died." By an infinite transaction in the very Being of God, grace, having spoken in the law and thereby revealed to me my failure, reaches me, captures me, holds me, remakes me, energizes me; and all this in order that I may become that which law has revealed to me I have failed to be.

If again you ask me for an illustration of how this can be, I shall take you to the simplest figure in the New Testament used by Christ and His holy apostles, realizing that it is but a figure, realizing that it is a figure that we do not often make use of in this regard, and yet convinced that it is one of the most illuminative in all the New Testament. I mean the figure of the forgiveness of debt. What is it to forgive debt? Remember, in the first place, that no man can forgive debt except the man to whom the debt is owed. Let me reverently place the illustration on the commonplace level of the currency. Here is a man who owes to another man a hundred

pounds. He has nothing to pay, he is bankrupt. The man to whom it is owed, in grace forgives it. Has he a right to do it? No one will question the right. How does he do it? By himself suffering the loss. That is the principle of the Cross. He bore our sins, He carried our sins, He made Himself responsible for our moral debts. He Himself took over our suffering. Grace is set upon the perfection of man. Grace initiates the law whereby the man may be made perfect, and reveals to man his imperfection and his weakness. Then grace confronts the bankrupt soul and says, I forgive by suffering the loss. I know the frailty and the imperfection of all this illustration. I would not use such a figure if it were not a figure in the New Testament. Yet this is exactly what God does. He forgives by suffering loss. The very grace that is set on my perfecting and has given me the law that I may know what perfection is, and thereby has revealed to me my imperfection, steps into the breach, gathers into itself the infinite loss, cancels the bond, and so gives me forgiveness and life.

Think once more in the realm of that illustration. On the level of human interrelationships the illustration may break down in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, but in the one-hundredth it is fulfilled in the sense in which I now use it. Let us go back to the two men. The one owes the other. The other forgives his debt, himself suffering the loss of that which is owed. What happens? The forgiven man goes out to begin again, freed from encumbrance, freed from the burden. In the passion born of gratitude for the act of grace he gives himself no rest until a day comes when he pays his debt.

I do not hesitate to use the illustration now. So will it be with all the truly ransomed. He Who met me, and revealed to me my failure, and made known to me how far I am in debt, He Who then in infinite grace bore the loss Himself, and uttered the word of freedom, He, at last, by the inspiration of the love and gratitude of my heart, by an operation of power given to me in the economy of that grace, will present me faultless before the throne of God; He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

Law is beneficent, the language of love, and yet it condemns. The grace that utters law has other things to say, and by virtue of what it is in itself brings to men more than law. It brings the pardon and power by which at last, measured by the standards of law, they will be perfect in the sight of God.

## 008 - Exodus 23:15 - The Presence Needed

If Thy presence go not... carry us not up hence. Exodus 23:15

In the history of the world there has been nothing comparable to the creation of the Hebrew nation and its attempted realization of the theocratic form of government. Moreover, in the history of that nation no time was more wonderful than the period during which Moses was dictator. He was a man of vast learning and singular force of character. To him the greatness of the nation consisted in its relationship to God, and his greatness as a leader lay in the wonderful way in which he was able to keep alive among the people during the period of his oversight this conception of their greatness.

The occasion of the words of my text is to be noted, and that with some care. Three months after the exodus the people came to the wilderness of Sinai, and there encamped, and Moses ascended the Mount. In those lonely heights he saw and heard that before which all former sights and sounds were as nothing. The pomp and splendor of Pharaoh's court, in which he had been nourished, paled into insignificance before the glory of the great King as it was unveiled before his wondering eyes.

During a period of months he spent his time passing backward and forward between the people and God, and during this time he received the Divine constitution of the nation, its laws and its ritual. The Sinaitic peninsula became the theater of revelations that were to affect humanity to the end of time, and Moses was the medium of revelation.

After his last sojourn of forty days in the Mount, he descended to find the golden calf, to find the people hankering after a representation of God—for the people had made the golden calf, not as an attempt to supersede God, but to represent Him. We know the story of this man's fierce anger and sorrow, how he smashed the tables of stone to fragments and instituted most drastic methods of dealing with the people. Then we see him returning from those terrible hours to God, and in God's presence breathing out his soul in a petition that was never finished, and is all the more eloquent and forceful because it was never finished. He said, "If Thou wilt forgive their sin..." and the sentence is unfinished; "and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." In that hour of solemn and awful communion between Moses and God he was commanded to return to the people and resume his position as leader. God said to him, I will not go up in the midst of these people lest I consume them. I will send an angel. Then follows one of the most wonderful of all Bible pictures, the picture of this man mediating between God and the people, arguing the case with God. We are to remember that the very argument of Moses was inspired by God. At last God said to His waiting servant, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Then all the pent-up agony of Moses' soul expressed the resolution inspiring all his mediation as he cried out, "If Thy presence go not... carry us not up hence."

I want to lead you, so far as I am able, or rather so far as I may be helped, in consideration of this story, and then to leave it to make

its own application, to speak its own message to us. We fix our attention on that word which was the response of Moses to the word of God's grace, that word in which there is revealed all the terror which had assailed his soul at the thought that God was about to withdraw Himself from His people. "If Thy presence go not... carry us not up thence."

Let us inquire, first of all, the reason for that word. Why did Moses say such a thing, and how did he come to the resolution which expressed itself in that word? Then, second, let us observe the definiteness of his decision, and inquire the reason for it.

First, then, the reason for the decision itself, and the way by which Moses reached it. He took this position because he realized that the presence of God met the people's needs. This is the simplest of all statements, and I have made it so, in order that we may come face to face with the great teaching. Let us go back with this man and find out what he had been learning concerning God that made him decide that progress without God was impossible, for that is the meaning of the declaration, "If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." We cannot go back on the past, it is too glorious. We decline to go forward on any conditions other than those which have made the past. Progress without God is impossible; retrogression is out of the question. What revelations had Moses received of God that brought him to that decision? For the moment I am going to confine myself to those latest revelations of God that had come to Moses during those months in which he had been holding communion with God on the height of the mountain. I shall go further back presently to find out the process by which he came to the ultimate decision. What did he know of God as the result of those recent revelations?

He had discovered that God was a God of law. He had discovered that He was a God of order. He had discovered that He was a God of gifts. He had discovered that He was a God of love.

He had discovered that He was a God of law, that He was a God of law because the people needed law. In that wonderful code which, according to this record, he had received in the solemn and high hours of communion he had found a law perfectly adapted and adjusted to the needs of these people. It was a Divine law, coming from One Who knew the whole need of these people, and it was perfectly adjusted to that need. It was a human law in its image of man's weakness. We read these Old Testament Scriptures somewhat carelessly. At least, we are in danger of doing so, and there is a reason for this in that we have grown away from some of the incidental things of these laws; but to read them carefully and intelligently, and in the atmosphere of the hour and in the midst of the conditions of the people, is to realize what Moses realized—as they were whispered in his soul, spoken to him with a voice articulate perchance, or more probably in the high altitude of communion with God—that these were the exact regulations and requirements that these people needed. Think of the people, semi-barbarous, vulgarized by over two centuries of brutal slavery, suddenly led out of slavery into freedom. Is there any more perilous situation? With profound respect, and making no claim to an understanding of the problem, my friends in the United States, men of the North and men of the South, will agree with me that the most terrific hour that came in their history was the hour when the Negroes were freed—and still the problem of the Negro is not solved. Think of these people, then, as freed from two hundred years of slavery. They had never lost the sense of relationship to God and of some Divine purpose in their history; but, nevertheless, they were vulgarized by the brutalities of human oppression. At your leisure, read again the whole code as you find it in Exodus, and observe its perfect adaptation to the needs of these people. Moses had discovered that God was a God of law, adapting Himself to the needs of men, speaking words to regulate their conduct and their relationships, of infinite wisdom.

He had discovered, moreover, that God was a God of order. All this had been revealed in details which seem to us to be so trivial that we read them carelessly. "Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the furniture thereof, even so shall ye make it." Then instructions were given, such as, eleven curtains of goats' hair, the length of each, thirty cubits, and the breadth of each, four cubits; and thou shalt couple them with clasps of gold and loops on the edge! This is the kind of thing which we read hurriedly, and sometimes even smile at, saying, Did God really say all that? He said all that, and I venture to affirm that Moses had been supremely impressed with the orderliness of God, with the fact that when He gave instructions to a people in this stage of development, He descended to the details of loops and clasps and couplings and lengths and breadths and materials. He is not only the God of the infinitely great, He is also the God of the infinitely small, careful not only concerning constellations, but also concerning the order of the leaves on the branches of the trees, so that, if we examine it, we cannot discover anything irregular in nature. If a tent is to be made for a people to worship in, God knows the materials and the couplings. At last, in the final chapter, we find the majestic music of the sevenfold repetition, "According to the pattern."

Moses discovered, moreover, that God was a God of gifts. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by the name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship." What for? "To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood." Men inspired by the Spirit of God to be goldsmiths and silversmiths, workers in brass and stone, and carvers of wood. Moses had heard that wonderful word. God would take hold of Bezaleel and fill him with the Spirit to make him cunning to work a work of delicate beauty to which he was called. Fingers hardened with the brutality of brick-making were to be made delicate enough for fine gold work. Moses had found that if God is indeed

particular that the order He chooses be observed, He is also One Who gives a new and mystic power by which fingers shall become deft to do the appointed work.

Finally, Moses had found in that agony of argument that God was a God of love, for he had heard God say amid the fiery indignation of His holiness against the failure and sin of the people in the valley, "I will not go up in the midst of thee... lest I consume thee by the way." The inspiration of the anger was the tenderness of God's love; the threatened withdrawal was the evidence of His patience and longsuffering.

Thus Moses came into the presence of God knowing that if God remained in the midst of His people to direct, control, suggest, then all their need was met; he was convinced of this thing also, that if God were absent, then only need remained.

There is no suggestion in the story of the withdrawal of God actually, for God never withdraws Himself from humanity, and, speaking within the limitation of human expression, God cannot withdraw Himself from humanity, for in Him men live and move and have their being. The thought is of the withdrawal of the consciousness of God, withdrawal of the sense of His presence. The angel proposed to lead them did not mean the absence of God, but the absence of the consciousness of God in the minds of men; and thus the terror that seized the soul of Moses was that this God—Whose presence had been made known to him, and was symbolized to the people by the thunder and the cloud and the lightning on the Mount, and was now to be evidenced in this very law and ritual—should withdraw the consciousness of Himself, and there should be between Him and His people the intermediation of an angel. This terror was born of his profound conviction of the need the people had of God, and of the fact that God perfectly met that need.

How did this man come to this conviction of the sufficiency of God? My inquiry may be answered briefly by declaring that successive revelations of God had been given to him to which he had been obedient, and by obedience to which the capacity had been created within his soul for new revelations. If the story of this man be pondered, it will be seen that God was ever breaking in on him with new methods and with new light. After forty years of shepherd life, forty years of preparation, forty splendid years of loneliness in the wilderness, God appeared to him. When next you think of Moses do not pity him when he leaves the glitter and gaud of Pharaoh's court. It was a great hour when he left all that behind and reached the essential grandeur of the loneliness of the wilderness, and that high sense of the nearness of God that always comes to a man when it is possible for him to escape from the tinsel and show of earthly things. After forty years, one day, as he was leading his flock as a shepherd, he saw a strange sight, a bush that burned with fire and was not consumed, and he heard within his soul a voice that said to him, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." This was a mystic and inclusive revelation, but not the perfect explanation, of the fact revealed. The suggestion was that God is a fire, which does not necessarily consume, but, drawing near to which a man must put the shoes from off his feet, or, in the language of our own day, recognize the need for reverence and submission and awe. Then Moses heard speech, the condescension of God as He took the speech of man and spoke to Moses' soul, revealing the fact of God's consciousness of what had bruised and broken Moses' heart forty years before in Egypt; "I have surely seen the affliction of My people, which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians." Trembling and afraid, Moses had shrunk from the great mission to which he was called, and said, I am not eloquent; and had been rebuked as God said to him, "Who hath made man's mouth?" Following on blindly, blunderingly, yet heroically, Moses had watched the power of God destroy the great nation and deliver an oppressed people. During those three months between the escape from Egypt and the arrival at Sinai, he had found that this God was a God of resource. Draw a contrast, for the sake of the light that comes from it. Think, first, of that night of the crossing of the sea, the sweeping of the wind of God, the holding back of the waters, the mystic awfulness of the stress and strain and storm, the march of the people through the sea; and the breaking of the morning and the music of the great song of victory. Then think of Marah, the bitter well, of the healing tree close beside it, and of God discovering the natural secret to His servant, so that the water was healed. Thus God was discovered as a God of resource, not merely the majestic might that breaks the yoke of the oppressor and divides the sea, but as a God of hidden secrets of healing, and of springs among the rocks, so that waters gushed forth for the quenching of His people's thirst. At last Moses came to Sinai, the culmination of everything that preceded it, where the burning bush found explanation, and all the secrets that lay behind the operation of the Divine power were unveiled. Do you wonder that in this hour of national failure and national sin, when it seemed as though God would withdraw Himself from the people He had so wondrously made, that this man cried out in the agony of his soul, "If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence?"

Now, observe the definiteness of this position. In an earlier chapter of this book we find the word concerning God's personal guidance of this people: "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light," and, again, "And the angel of the Lord, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them." Such had been the experience of the past, the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night: symbols, merely, necessary to meet the need of that peculiar people. We see no cloud by day, no pillar of fire by night. We have never seen cloven tongues of fire sitting on the heads of assembled saints. Why not? Because we live in a day of greater light and privilege, when signs that are natural are unnecessary because of the fulness of spiritual illumination. Remember, we are now thinking of that dim and distant time, when these people were, as I have already described them, semi-barbarous, vulgarized by slavery. God fulfils Himself in many ways, always adapting Himself to the immediate need of His people. The supreme fact was the presence of God, and this was

suggested to them, and kept before their minds, by that mystic cloud which burned and gleamed in the darkness of the night. The deeper truth is that the Angel of Jehovah was there, not seen but present. We must ever draw a very clear distinction in reading the Old Testament between "The Angel of the Lord" and "An angel of the Lord." Wherever we find the phrase "The Angel of the Lord," we discover that it has quite a separate significance, and refers to an entirely distinct person. It is difficult to say so much without saying a little more. To my own mind, there is no doubt whatever that the One spoken of as "The Angel of the Lord" was the Son of God Himself, Who thus appeared in many a mystic manifestation in the olden days, and Who must never be confused with the angel ministers. Through that figurative, poetic language of the time, the truth is revealed that God had been actually leading, overshadowing with the cloud by day, and shining in the gleaming fire by night.

In this hour of peril and of sin God said to His servant, I will send an angel, and Moses declined to accept an angel, he declined to go forward if there was to be some substitute for God, even in the form of an angel. That would have been retrogression, a going back. That is the meaning of one of the things that Moses said in the course of his praying, "See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and Thou hast not let me know him whom Thou wilt send with me." It is as though Moses said to God, I have come to know Thee, through these unveilings and revelations, but I do not know the angel. I know nothing in all literature more wonderful than this, a man saying to God, I decline angel guidance after having known Thy guidance. God answered this man—appalling as seems his daring, so appalling that we almost tremble to put it in that way—by saying, "My presence shall go with thee."

Observe now, most carefully, that to which I referred by way of introduction. Moses did not suggest that they should go back. Retrogression was impossible, the past was too glorious. A little while after, the people suggested that they should go back: "Were it not, better for us to return into Egypt?" There was no such thought, however, in the mind of Moses. It was impossible to go back on that glorious past. That I do not now dwell on, but this I do want to insist on: he did not dream of progress without God, "If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up thence." Better to die here, underneath all the magnificence of this mountain in the wilderness, and be buried, than to cross the Jordan and enter the land that flows with milk and honey without God. "If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." The deliberate choice of the lawgiver was that, having arrived at that point in the glorious history when the onward march was checked by sin, if God was withdrawing Himself, the best thing was to die in the wilderness. All this is the language of high faith and clear belief.

How terribly we fail here, oftentimes, in individual, church, and national life. If in very deed God has departed from us, then let us cease. Oh, the agony of attempting to go forward along a line of the Divine pathway when God has withdrawn Himself. What insufferable agony—if you will permit me the superlative illustration, as it seems to me—would be that of the preacher who, having seen the vision and heard the voice and known the thrill and power of the Spirit's presence, should try to preach after he had lost his vision and the sense of the presence of God! Can there be anything more terrific, as we look at things in this atmosphere, than a Church of Jesus Christ from which Jesus Christ is absent. That is what Moses meant. The glorious past, the watchfulness over all the long years of slavery, the mighty hand stretched out to work deliverance, the divided sea, and the march, all the glorious past; but if God is going, then let us die here! There lies the land of the future, the program of God, the crossing of the Jordan to the land flowing with milk and honey; but we cannot go if He is going to leave us: "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence."

That supreme conviction and resolution made Moses the man of power that he was, and led him in all the steps he immediately took. I watch the process. What is this strange thing he is doing now? He is striking his tent, the tent of meeting—not yet the tabernacle, that was not yet erected, but his own tent, which had served as a center for their whole life, to which they could come for judgment, the very place from which God had spoken to Moses, and pitching it outside the camp, going away from the people and pitching his tent outside the camp. What was this man doing? Excommunicating a whole nation in order that he might readmit it on true terms! If the people will go back, they must go back by way of confession, and by way of putting away sin. He will receive them in the name of the God with Whom he has been holding communion. That is the way back. Believe me, there are moments when a man can excommunicate a church as surely as a church can excommunicate a man. In this, Moses pitched his tent outside the camp; but the camp was reconstituted around that tent by the way of return and the way of confession.

It was because of his profound conviction of the necessity for God, if the program of God was to be carried out, that he had adopted this method. Notice, again, the argument between God and this man. God said to him: "Thy people, which thou broughtest up out of the land of Egypt," and, reverently yet definitely, Moses flung the burden back on God: "Thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt."

Such a meditation as this enshrines its own application. To-day we face life with its crowding and overwhelming opportunities of service, and, thank God, the past is full of glory and triumph. The present is difficult. Problems are confronting us. I am speaking, not of the larger outlook of the Christian Church, but of the narrower one of this church. We are all conscious that the hour is electric with difficulty and strain, and yet there lies a future before us, a future grand and glorious in the purpose of God, for His Church is to march victoriously until the very gates of Hades surrender. The program is clear and plain and definite, but for the moment we are halted. What is the supreme need? Finances? No! Numbers? No, a thousand times no! What, then? God. He has been with us; we have known His presence, His power; the demonstration of it has been found in lives renewed, remade, desolate men comforted,

hopeless souls made courageous, impure men and women rendered pure. I stand here to-night, ere I go away, saying this: "If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." I am not suggesting that the presence is withdrawn, but I tremble sometimes lest it should be, lest we run for a time by the momentum of past victories while God is absent. If I could lay a charge on my own soul as I leave this pulpit for eight weeks, and if I could lay a charge on my people, it would be this: Discover whether the glory is passing away. Is it moving out from the threshold as Ezekiel saw it go? Is there a danger that God be withdrawn? I am not going to answer the question. I want to find out. I propose to do it. Will you join me? "If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." Let us end there. Blessed be God, the past cannot be undone. The one thing you cannot take from me is yesterday, with its glorious revelations of power. The future can be undone, and it is well for us sometimes to pull ourselves up like this, and to deal with God. There I leave it.

## 009 - Exodus 34:29 - Shining Faces

It came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of the testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the Mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone by reason of His speaking with him. Exodus 34:29

This verse has often attracted the preacher, and naturally so. Almost invariably the attraction has been that of its declaration, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone. This also is natural and proper, for that is the main statement. The verse, from the purely literary standpoint, seems to blunder cumberously on its way to that main declaration. But these very apparently awkward repetitions are of great importance, and, in proportion as we grasp their significance, the main statement will become the more arresting and suggestive.

First and obviously, there is declared in this verse the fact of which Moses was unconscious—that his face shone as he came down from the Mount. Then there are the words in which the writer, undoubtedly Moses himself, accounted both for his ignorance and for the shining of his face, and the very repetitions constitute an emphasis which commands attention.

As to the actual shining of his face, he carefully explains the secret of it—"by reason of His speaking with him." He had been dealing with God, and the glory which consequently suffused his spirit shone from his face.

My purpose is to consider the story that is contained in the verse, in order that we may deduce from it some principles of permanent value, and apply them in the simplest and most commonplace realm.

In the story there are two phases. Of these the first is found last in order of statement. It is contained in these words: "The skin of his face shone by reason of His speaking with him." The second phase is contained in the earlier part of the text: "When he came down from the Mount with the two tables of the testimony in his hand, when he came down from the Mount, Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone."

We are all familiar with the traditional picture of Moses that represents him with two horns or beams of light, for beams of light constitute the significance of the horns. In all probability, that traditional picture of Moses was due to a confusion between two Hebrew words. There is a Hebrew word which signifies irradiation, a general illumination; another Hebrew word signifies to shed forth beams of light. The second of these words is used to describe a sunrise, from the view-point of the rays of light which shoot up the eastern sky. The other word describes rather a general irradiation and illumination. There is no question at all that this latter word is the true word in our text, and not the one that suggests beams of light. The fact thus declared, then, is that Moses' whole face was irradiated in a strange and a wonderful way, in an unusual manner, in a way in which those familiar with him had never seen it irradiated before. His face was transfigured; it was metamorphosed. Just as on the Holy Mount the disciples saw the Face of Jesus transfigured, metamorphosed, made radiant as the shining of the sun in his strength; so in the case of Moses what men looked upon, and looked upon with wonder, was a strange new outshining of glory, through the very form and features of the face with which they had become familiar. The deep secret of that outshining was that the spirit of the man, strange and newly illuminated and suffused with light, mastered in a new way his physical countenance. The material passed under the mastery of the spiritual, and there shone and flashed from his face a new and strange and wonderful glow.

Such an experience is by no means uncommon on lower levels. We have all seen it, more or less often, in the course of our lives, and in hours of communion with our friends. The face of a mother is often transfigured as she looks upon her child. The face of that mother is very plain and commonplace usually; but I have never seen a picture of the Madonna so beautiful as the actual face of some mother brooding and crooning over her bairn. We have seen the same transfiguring of the human countenance in the case of true love, in the shining eyes and face of a man, in the lovelit eyes and face of a woman. It has been seen again and again in the history of the world on the face of the martyr. They looked upon the face of Stephen, and it was as the face of an angel, for the light



of the spiritual joy transfigured the physical countenance. Over and over again high heroism in the place of difficulty transfigures the face of a man until it flames and flashes with the courage of a god. That is what men saw, in a superlative degree, as they looked at Moses on that particular day. He came down from the Mount and they looked, and saw his face shining with a mystic light.

Moses himself in this verse declares the reason of that shining; "The skin of his face shone by reason of His speaking with him." It is very important that at this point we should have these pronouns rightly allocated. The effect produced, this transfiguration of his face, this illumination, this irradiation, was not the result of Moses talking to God; it resulted from God talking to him.

Let us try to see the occasion. In those wonderful days Moses ascended the Mount of God six times, and this was the last descent.

He had first been called to the Mount, and God had uttered to him words of the great covenant which He proposed to establish between Himself and His people, that they should be to Him for a people of His possession. Descending from the Mount, Moses had declared the words of the covenant, and the people had consented, saying, "All that the Lord hath spoken unto us we will do."

On the occasion of the second ascent, God had spoken to him in other language: "Lo! I come unto thee in a thick cloud"; and had commanded him again to descend and to set a fence about the mountain, and to warn the people to sanctify themselves, to stand apart in awe, aloof from that mountain. Going down, Moses had carried out these injunctions, and separated the people.

Again he had ascended the mountain, for the third time, to receive a further command as to the necessity for the sanctification of the people and the separation of the Mount. The third descent was to obey, and thus to make more sure the awful fact of separation between God and the people.

Then came the fourth ascent. Taking up with him Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders, they saw God, and were not consumed. Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu and the seventy elders retired, and Moses was left alone with God for forty days, in the course of which he received the Law, and the pattern of the ceremonial worship and ritual. Then came the fourth descent. He came down from the Mountain bearing two tables, upon which the Law was written. The golden calf had been created; and Moses, hot with righteous wrath, dropped and broke the tables of the Law.

Then came the fifth ascent. Moses went back, bearing the sin of the people upon his heart, and prayed one of the greatest prayers recorded in the Bible. He prayed that God would spare the people, and, if in no other way, that He would blot his name out of His book that the people might be delivered. In that strange and mystic hour of communion, Moses dared to ask that God would reveal Himself to him in some new way. Then it was that God told him that no man could look upon Him and live, but that He would hide him in some cleft of the rock, making His glory pass by him. The fifth descent was a return to prepare two new tables in obedience to the Divine command.

Then he ascended for the sixth time. During the period of his last presence upon the Mount, God wrote again the Law upon the two new tables, and made Himself known to him in a way in which He had never made Himself known before.

We may cover all the ground that is necessary for our present understanding of that revelation by saying that Moses had revealed to him by these words of God, that mystery of the merging of mercy and judgment in the Divine character, and in the Divine being. In words that throb with tenderness, even as we read them, the character of God is revealed as to the compassion of His heart. In words that are still vibrant with the thunder of His holiness, His character is revealed as to His holiness; He could make no terms with sin. With the strange new sense of God upon his soul, Moses bowed his head and worshipped. In response to that worship, God repeated in that hour of communion the terms of the covenant between Himself and His people, and re-uttered the words of the Law which had already been given.

In proportion as we apprehend the mystic wonder of that wonderful hour upon the Mount, we begin to understand the experience of Moses. That new spiritual illumination was so mighty, so powerful, that it irradiated his countenance.

So we come to the second phase of the story, which, as I said, is first in order of statement:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of the testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the Mount... Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.

He had no consciousness of the light which shone upon his face. His spirit had entered into a new fellowship with God. He had fathomed yet more deeply the unutterable abyss of the Being of Deity, and his whole spirit was mastered and held and captured and illuminated by the experience.

Now note the twice-repeated declaration: "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai"; "When he came down from the Mount." That which created his unconsciousness was the Mount, and the fact that he held in his hand those two tables of stone. The Mount was the place of Divine revealing, and that is always the place of self-concealing. The measure in which a soul passes into the presence of God is the measure in which the soul becomes unconscious of itself, and rises to the full dignity of the meaning of its own

experience. The deep secret of the human soul is capacity for God which is always forgetfulness of self. He had been on the Mount with God, and all his consciousness was effaced by the fullness of experience. There were no atrophied powers, there was no loss of personality; but personality rose into full spiritual health; and personality in full spiritual health becomes unconscious of itself in its grasp upon God, for the knowledge of Whom and communion with Whom personality is created.

The introduction of the words, "With the two tables of the testimony in his hand," is a remarkable one. The first two tables of the testimony upon which were inscribed the ten words of the Law had been broken; and when Moses realized that he had two new tables in his hands, a supreme consciousness of God filled his soul. Those tables were the symbols of the whole truth that had been revealed. God had declared Himself a God of compassion and of holiness, and the possession of the newly written tables ratified the declaration. That is the Biblical revelation of God from beginning to end, and here it emerges in an almost unexpected place. He is the God of the second opportunity. The Law is broken! Grace will write the words again, and send them back to men that they may try again. Moses coming down from the Mount was not thinking of himself; he was thinking of God; and the light and the glory that He had given to him changed the fashion of his countenance.

There is nothing that we need today in this land of ours more than faces that shine. We cannot walk our streets today, we cannot travel by railway train without seeing shadowed faces everywhere. The faces that we need are faces that shine, strong in confidence, in hope, in sympathy.

I hold in my hand a clipping from a recent issue of *The Bystander*.

I fear that we English are not religious at all. (A sombre black tie as evidence of belief does not convince me. A dull-dog-look in the face is no proof of Christian conduct.) If we were really religious, we should light-heartedly wear flannels on Sundays (when weather permitted), and be merry and bright instead of hanging about like ticket-of-leave men afraid of being pulled up to report at any minute. There is enough cant and personal cowardice in our Sunday solemnity to convict us all of hypocrisy in every hour of the day. We are afraid of our neighbours, and they are afraid of us. We believe that if we are only sufficiently miserable we shall pass muster as being respectable. I am hoping that when our boys come back this insipid "respectability" will go to blazes.

My only apology for reading so frivolous a paragraph is that there is one sentence in it of which I want to make use. Let me say that this is a clipping from two columns, the whole of which consists of the senseless patter of some writer who knows nothing of the agonies of the human soul or of the holy ecstasies of which the soul is capable. "Flannels on Sunday!" There we have the whole shallow and impertinent philosophy revealed! The one sentence I refer to is this: "A dull-dog-look in the face is no proof of Christian conduct." That is perfectly true. A dull and sombre face is a denial of Christianity. What we need today, I repeat, is that there should be multiplied everywhere faces that are strong, not brutal—there is a difference; faces that shine with confidence, and never are careless—there is a very clear distinction; faces that are radiant with hope, not frivolous or indifferent; faces that are sympathetic, not pitiful. The Christian face will always be a face that has in it evidences of sorrow, but shining through will be a joy that transfigures the sack-cloth. It will be the face of Jesus reproduced in measure; the face concerning which a prophet long ere He came into time had foretold, which foretelling was fulfilled; His visage was more marred than that of any man; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and yet the face of One Who could say to His disciples when the darkest clouds were gathering about Him, and the supremest sorrows were surging upon His soul, "These things have I spoken to you, that My joy may be in you."

It is now five-and-twenty years ago and more since a very simple thing came to my own personal knowledge which profoundly affected me at the time, and from the influence of which I have never escaped. A Yorkshire factory lass had given herself to Jesus Christ; the light and the joy of it was in her soul, and her face became transfigured. She was walking up and down the platform of York Station, waiting for a train. Sitting in a first-class railway carriage was a lady of title and culture. She saw the lassie pass her carriage two or three times, and at last called to her and said: "Excuse me, but what makes you look so happy?" The girl replied: "Was I looking happy? I did not know, but I can tell you why." And she told the woman the secret of her joy. She did not know that her face was shining, but the shining face of the factory lassie arrested the woman who was in agony. The end of the story is that this woman was led to the same Christ, and her face also became transfigured.

Such shining is always unconscious. The effort to look in any particular way is always a failure. All parents know this. There are times when for some reason or another in playfulness they try to look severely at their children, when they are not feeling so. It is never successful. We cannot cheat our children so. It is equally true that when, bowing to the empty conventionalities of a degenerate society, we try and look pleasant at our guests; when we are not feeling so, we always fail, and know perfectly well that we are failing. Perhaps one of the best illustrations may be found in the realm of photography. Is there any agony greater, or any effort more unsuccessful, than that of trying to look as one wishes to look when a picture is being taken? Yet listen to me. A few months ago I was looking at a picture of a beautiful woman, and on that face all the story of her love for her man was patent. She told me that it was taken for him, and that the negative had been destroyed. How had she succeeded? Do you imagine that when she sat for that picture she was thinking about her face? Never for a moment. She was thinking of him, and forgetting herself; and so the light of her love shone upon her face.

A shining face is always the expression of a shining soul; if there be no illumination of the soul, there can be no irradiation of the face. The ghastly smirk that imitates happiness is deplorable; it is tragic. The light within which makes us forgetful of ourselves is the light that transfigures the face. As the spirit is strong in God, the face expresses that strength. As the soul is confident in Him, confidence shines from the eyes. As the spirit is full of hope on the darkest day, hope is seen upon the countenance. As the soul is sensitive to human sorrow and joy, feels the pain and the bliss of others, all the sweet sympathy is manifested upon the face.

What, then, are the secrets of such shining? Let us go back to the story. I admit that times have altered, things are not as they were; but the deep philosophy of the story abides, and its principles are of immediate application.

First, there must be time on the Mount. Time on the Mount is time in which we separate ourselves from all the things of men; time which we give to the cultivation of our fellowship with God and the things of God.

And let us not forget that time on the Mount must be spent in the interest of the very men and the very things from which for the time we have withdrawn ourselves. Moses on the Mount was carrying the burden of the people in the valley. His unconscious shining of face was the outcome of the unconsciousness of himself that made him willing to say, "Blot me out of Thy Book, if only these people can be spared."

Again, there must be silence for God; praise and prayer, but also silence! Is not keeping silence before God almost a lost art among Christian people? "His face shone by reason of His speaking with him." Not by reason of Moses' speaking with God, but by reason of Moses' silence while God spoke to him. To silence, deliberately sought, reverently guarded, God will for ever more speak; revealing to the waiting soul new phases of Himself; unveiling the mystery of His own character; telling of mercy and judgment; repeating the terms of the old covenant that we have broken that we may renew it again, the law of life that we have violated that we may obey it.

These are the secrets of unconsciousness also. We shall return presently to the valley of our appointed task, mastered by the memory of the Mount, carrying with us the things we have heard in secret, strengthened by the revelation in loneliness. All unconscious of ourselves, we shall go, faces shining with the light.

To the Mountains O my soul,  
For fellowship with God;  
To the valleys O my soul,  
In company with God.  
To the Mount of Light ascend,  
For purity of soul;  
To the valley dark descend,  
To make the leper whole.  
To the Mount of Life ascend,  
For energy for toil;  
To the Vale of Death descend,  
The demon's power to foil.  
To the Mount of Love ascend,  
To suffer there for sin;  
To the Vale of Hate descend,  
To succour, and to win.  
To the Mountains O my soul,  
In company with God;  
To the valleys O my soul,  
In fellowship with God.

In the sequel of the story we find our application. Moses had to veil his face. And why? Not because the light was too bright for those people to look upon, but because he knew it was fading, it was passing away. Paul takes up the story, and says that there is no need for the veil now, because the light that shone in the face of Jesus Christ never fades and never passes away. He also says, "We all, with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are transfigured into the same image from glory to glory." In proportion as we know what it is to find our way to the Mount, and to see God in Christ, to hold fellowship with God in Christ, in that proportion the light that comes upon our faces shines with undimmed and growing splendour, and we have no need to wear the veil.

Does the light on our faces fade? Is the glory passing? Has all the brightness that shone from our eyes almost vanished away? Then we ought to veil our faces, or else cease to call ourselves Christians. There will be no need for the veil, if the mountain light of life and love is ever upon us, and, beholding, we reflect. So may we be men and women of shining faces.

## 010 - Leviticus 10:1-3 - False Fire

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire therein, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. Leviticus 10:1-3

To understand the story of Nadab and Abihu, so far as it has any value for us, it is necessary to recognize the situation in its widest aspect. While the preacher of olden times declared that the eyes of the fool are in the ends of the earth, and thereby indicated the unutterable folly of gazing at the far distances while the near and the immediate is neglected, it is nevertheless true that the near things may be most woefully misinterpreted unless we take in the wider range of vision and see them in relation thereto.

That is particularly the case in such a story as that of Nadab and Abihu, intermixed as it is with the code of laws, and being a brief historical narrative telling how, when the people were coming to consciousness of their national existence, and at the very commencement of the observance of all the symbolic ritual which had been provided for them, two men ministering in the holy place were suddenly smitten with death.

We must begin at the Divine standpoint, and in order to understand this swift and fiery judgment we must see not merely Aaron and his sons, not merely the encamped tribes of the children of Israel, but the whole wide world, and we must see that world as loved by God. We must remind ourselves as we approach this Old Testament story that the declaration of the New Testament revelation was as true then as when the New Testament writer penned it, the declaration that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." All the peoples were loved by God, and of all of them He thought, and for all of them He wrought in all His dealings with the Hebrew people.

This nation had been created by God for the blessing of that world which He loved. Through strange and devious ways had the Hebrew people been brought to this hour. With the infinite majesty of perfect workmanship, which we sometimes count almost unutterable slowness, God had moved to that moment; from the hour in which He spoke in the soul of one man in Ur of the Chaldees and called him to the high venture of faith, to become a pilgrim seeking the establishment of the Divine order in the world and the building of the city of God; through those strange and troublous times of the history of his son, through the long sojourn in Egypt, and now in bringing the people unto Himself and so creating a nation, not in order to have some one people upon which to lavish His love, but in order to have a nation through which He might manifest His love for all the nations of the world.

Thus we come to the third circle, an inner circle, the circle of the priesthood, the circle of those who in this wonderful economy had been set apart for specific work, the work of mediating between these people comprising the new-created nation and their God, the men whose work should be that of intercession, the men who were to be admitted to the holy place to stand in the presence of God and there to intercede on behalf of men, the men who were to move out from the holy place into the presence of the multitudes, and there intercede with men on behalf of God. Thus we see the mediating priesthood at the center of the national life, the national life at the center of all the world; the nation created for the world, the priesthood created for the nation.

The world needed one thing supremely, to live by the law of God. "All souls are Mine," said a later prophet of these people: His by creation and by preservation. All men are perfectly known to His heart; His heart is the heart of love; His law for men is the only perfect law of their lives; the world therefore needs, and waits for the law of God. Within that wider world there now existed the nation; its specific equipment for the fulfilment of the Divine purpose lay in the fact that the law of God had been given directly to them, that they might know it, that they might obey it, that they might be transformed by it into the very likeness of their God, and so reveal to the world the breath, beauty, and beneficence of the Divine Kingdom.

Yet, again, at the heart of the nation, associated with its symbolic ritual and worship, there existed this priesthood, having as its final responsibility the necessity for the strictest observance of the law of God, the most entire abandonment to the will of God, in order that it might mediate between God and His own nation, and that in order that the nation incarnating His will might be the means of blessing to the nations lying beyond.

What Nadab and Abihu did that day must be measured by these larger issues, for a disobedient priesthood means a corrupted nation, and a corrupted nation means a wronged world. This indeed is the story of the ultimate temporary failure of the Hebrew people: corrupted in its priesthood, therefore in its national life, therefore failing to fulfil its mission in the world. The final example of the failure is that of the refusal of the Messiah. The whole story of it is written in those brief, striking words of John, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." A corrupted priesthood, Sadducean, demoralized, departed from the place of loyalty to God; a corrupted nation under the influence of such a priesthood resulted in the refusal of the One toward Whom the whole economy had moved, and, therefore, so far as the Hebrew people were concerned, the world was wronged and robbed and

degraded. The world triumph of Messiah will not result from Israel's realization, but from God's overruling grace, whereby Israel itself will presently be restored. The triumph will be the triumph of grace.

In view of these wider responsibilities we can understand the immediateness and severity of this swift judgment at the very commencement of the national life. As to the exact form of the strange fire which was offered speculation is unnecessary and valueless. The facts are sufficiently patent for our instruction. They "offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." Men appointed to the most sacred service, rendered the service, but rendered the service in disobedience, and were consumed.

We are far removed from the Hebrew ritual; the chapter which was read in our hearing was a little wearisome to some of us; it seemed almost meaningless—a chapter of offerings, goats and rams, ritual and ceremonial; and we sighed with relief that we had escaped these things, and in some senses quite properly so; but let us not forget the illuminative word of the New Testament concerning these things, for they were the "shadow of the good things to come." While it is perfectly true that they were only shadows, and that when that is come which is substance, the shadow is of no value; nevertheless, the shadow demonstrates the substance. There can be no shadow apart from substance. The photograph demonstrates the person of whom it is but a shadow; you will hold the photograph and look on it, and love to look on it, until he comes of whom it is the shadow, and then you are independent of the shadow; but the shadow demonstrates the substance, for there could have been no such picture apart from the person. We are living under the Covenant of the Substance. We have nothing to do with this ritual, these ceremonies, censers, fires, and this material incense.

We are unconsciously inclined, it may be, to boast our freedom from these things. Let our boasting be intelligent. We are set free from the shadows only because the substance has come; those who live in the presence of the Substance have a far greater responsibility than those who live in the shadow. All of which means, not that the teaching of this Old Testament story has no application to us, but that the service which we are called on to render is more sacred, and the responsibilities are more solemn, and, consequently, the impact of this story on the soul of an honest man will be a forceful one. As Christ is greater than Moses, so is the responsibility of the priests of the new covenant greater than that of Nadab and Abihu.

Let us, then, with all solemnity consider the teaching of this story in regard to two matters: first, the sin which was thus judged as the fire of the Lord came out and devoured Nadab and Abihu; and, second, the responsibility which that judgment reveals.

Let us consider what the sin of Nadab and Abihu was externally, actually; what it was inspirationally; and, finally, what it was influentially.

What was it externally? Let us at once admit that it is most difficult to answer that question. These men were in the holy place, arrayed in holy garments for actual service, for that is the meaning of the phrase, "they drew near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp"—and they were rendering holy service. It was a great hour in the religious life of the nation, when the glory of the Lord was manifested; and the people were hushed and awed into the very solemnity of worship. It was then, in the holy place, arrayed in holy garments, occupied in holy service, that these men sinned the sin which was immediately punished by deaths. How are we to account for it? Let us glance on to a later chapter in this book of Leviticus.

In the sixteenth chapter we have an account of the ceremonial arrangements for the great Day of Atonement, and in the course of that account we find instructions given to the priests concerning their entering into the holy place and the burning of incense: "He shall take a censer full of coals of fire off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil." A remarkable fact is that the chapter thus giving instructions concerning the Day of Atonement and how the High Priest must enter in and offer incense is prefaced with these words, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord, and died." Here, then, perhaps we have some light on what happened that day. I think it is not an inaccurate deduction that in that hour of religious enthusiasm these men placed on their censers fire that they obtained from somewhere other than the altar of God. They did a right thing in a wrong way. An amazing fact! So amazing that we are at first inclined to revolt against the judgment. Let us, however, ponder the matter more carefully. How came it that these men did a right thing in a wrong way? It is never the act that is the important thing, but rather the reason that lies behind the act. God is a God of justice, and He weighs actions by investigating motives. What lay behind this strange act that seems to be so harmless? The fact that in high enthusiasm these men rushed in their holy garments into the holy place and took fire other than that which came from the altar of God shows that they were yielding to wrong motives. I crave your very patient following or we shall miss the very core of this matter. Was it a wrong motive to desire to burn incense before the Lord? It depends on the reason for the desire. Perhaps it was excitement that made them careless of the moment of the Divine provision and the Divine requirement.

There is a dark hint in this story. I would not care to overemphasize it, but there is no escape from the suggestiveness of the fact that subsequently "the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Drink no wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tent of meeting, that ye die not: it shall be a statute for ever." It is at least significant that the solemn warning is placed in immediate relation with the story of the death of Nadab and Abihu. It at least suggests that when they went in they may have done so under the

influence of some false stimulant; that they may not have been drunk but had been drinking wine, forgetting the necessity in the exercise of their holy office of having their spirits clear of everything that could influence them in any direction, save under the complete control of the God Whom they served. In the excitement of passionate desire to take part in the awful hour of Divine manifestation they snatched strange fire and offered it; and fire from God consumed them. It may be that it was merely carelessness, that they did not pay sufficient attention to the Divine requirements. Or, again, it may be that it was a matter of convenience, adaptation, that word which may tell the story of the ruin of the work of God in the world as well as the story of its victory. All seemed so harmless, whatever the motive, whether of excitement, carelessness, or adaptation and convenience. But these men were acting on their own initiative, and not under the control of God. God was dethroned, all unconsciously to themselves it may be; and self was enthroned, and that in the holy place. At the center of the religious life of the nation the priest himself had failed to believe and obey. It is not said that Nadab and Abihu were lost. In all probability they went straight into heaven. We have nothing to do with the matter of their individual salvation. At the heart of the national life it was necessary that the lesson should immediately be impressed on the priest and on the people, that men must do God's work in God's way; there must be no deflection from the Divine appointment and arrangement.

Sin in the priesthood must produce sin in the people. If the priesthood yield to the false authority of some excitement, some expediency, then they will exercise false authority and inspire false activity. All the subsequent history of these people is full of illustrations of that great principle, and we may tell the story of the Hebrew people by declaring that they sought the Divine goal in a wrong way and consequently never found the goal they sought.

The story speaks eloquently to us. It deals, first of all, with the question of the end and the means. It exposes and gives the lie to the whole heresy which is the heart and soul of Jesuitry, that the end justifies the means, that in order to reach the Divine goal we may travel any way, that in order to accomplish the Divine purposes we are allowed to choose any method. The essential lie of that heresy is that the right end is ever reached by the wrong means. It never can be, it never has been, it never will be. For the moment it may seem that deflection from the strict path of the Divinely marked out economy may not matter much, because we are arriving; but wait the long issues, and we discover that there has been no arrival. We cannot build the temple of truth on a foundation of fraud. We cannot erect the palace of purity on a foundation of corruption. We cannot accomplish the building of the city of God save as we are true to the Divinely prepared plan. We cannot glorify God by incense whose smoke arises from false fire, from fire which has not been taken from the altar of sacrifice. Therefore, to adopt any method in worship or in work which is a departure by a hairbreadth from the Divine is to defeat the purpose of effort.

We learn from this story, therefore, that the test of means is motive. The motive of reaching God's goal is not enough. The motive which permits an action which in itself is born of thinking or planning or arranging which leaves God out of account is in itself untrue, and though it looks toward God's goal it never travels there. There are thousands of men today in England who actually desire the coming of the Kingdom of God, but they are doing nothing to bring it about. They pray for it. They would be willing to vote for it if we could have an election on the basis of its propositions. But in their own lives, in their own planning and arrangements of business, of dwelling places, of friendships, they forget God. Then no voting will help God, and no effort that they may make will bring the Kingdom of God any nearer. God refuses to be distanced to the ultimate from putting forth energy in the life of any man; He must be there at the moment, must be consulted immediately. It is not enough to join with the multitudes on the great day and offer any fire in order to glorify God; the fire must be fire God-appointed, it must be fire that comes from the altar.

To us in this age the will of God is being revealed, not by laws written on tables of stone, not by sign or symbol or ritual, not by an order of priests within the church, nor by an order of prophets. Within the sacred enclosure of the Church today there are those whom God has called to prophetic work, but it is ever that of interpretation of the last and final speech of God to men through His incarnate Son. Therefore, I say, to us the will of God is revealed, not even by the prophet, but by the ever-present Spirit Who takes of the things of Christ which are the things of God and interprets them to us. We are not to be bound by the hard and fast requirements of an ecclesiastical system; we are not to be bound to some particular form of ritual; we are to wait before every action, and before every enterprise, and to inquire in the very moment of our desire to serve God, What is the mind of the Lord? and we are to seek the answer from the ever-present Spirit of God. To us to cease to wait is to cease to go. To go without waiting before the Lord for instruction is never to go at all. Moreover, it is to fall under the displeasure of God and to be in danger of being consumed by fire from God, and that in the interest of the world for which Christ died, and which God loves.

To state the responsibility which that swift judgment reveals to us is to take the story and look at it from the standpoint which is revealed in the last words of my text. This is the lesson which the judgment teaches.

"Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified."

All I have been trying to say is there involved. Before all people He will be glorified; that is the ultimate purpose, and therefore He will be sanctified in them that come nigh Him. Those who stand in His presence for service must be those who have enthroned Him,

those who inquire at His gates, those who obey His behests. He will be sanctified in them. They shall be the sanctuary in which He dwells. Within them He will be sanctified, enthroned, inquired of, obeyed. And for what purpose? "Before all the people I will be glorified." God must be glorified in the priests who represent Him. God must be glorified in the service which the priest is rendering. God must be glorified in His own work, which must be done in His way. God must be glorified through that work which He will most assuredly do when His laws are observed. The teaching of the story of responsibility is that in our worship and in our work, we are not merely to seek for the ultimate, far-distant realization of the Divine glory, we are to seek that glory in the methods we employ. We believe in the "far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves," but it is not enough to desire that event, and then proceed to attempt to realize it in our own way and by our own wit and wisdom. The one far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves can be realized by God only in fellowship with men, by men in fellowship with God. The deflection of the servant of God by a single hairbreadth from the Divinely marked path becomes ultimately an infinite and abysmal distance between that worker and God. When the skilful engineer would drive his tunnel through the mountain, the deflection of half an inch at the commencement, what matters it? Everything! For the next half inch will conform to the first one, and the third to the second. So here, at the beginning, two sons of Aaron, in undue excitement of wine, or carelessly, or for convenience and greater speed, did enthrone their thinking above the Divine command, and fire from the Lord consumed them in order that the priests might know forever that they themselves must believe and obey if the work of God is to be completed work.

This teaching may be applied by all Christian workers. Suffer me the broadest of all applications. The Church of God must not only be true to the work of God in the world as to the general conception; she must also be true to the work of God in the world as to the particular methods which He did ordain. So surely as we imagine that we can improve on the Divine method in the instructions left us by our Lord Himself and by His holy apostles in these sacred writings of the Scriptures, so surely we shall find that while we are desiring the accomplishment of the Divine purpose, yet all the while we are preventing it. That is the solemn lesson concerning our responsibility.

This is without question a story full of solemnity. It gives pause to all who are called to service, as it reminds us of the necessity for a constant and sustained loyalty to God in our methods of service. It calls the Christian Church ever and anon to halt in her progress in order that she may readjust her relationships with her Lord. It calls us to examine every organization that is springing up, lest haply we find that they are not in accordance with the Divine method, even though they desire the realization of the Divine purpose. I am not at all sure that if the Church would give herself to such solemn consideration and readjustment, she would not find many organizations which are merely fungus growths, sapping her life, and contributing nothing to the work of God.

When we turn from the larger outlook to the more particular, with what awful solemnity does this word speak to us of our work for God, and of the sources of the inspiration of our work for God. The dark appalling hint of the story needs emphasizing in all its applications; the worker for God must never touch God's work in the strength of any false stimulant. To attempt God's work under the stimulus of passion for fame, or desire for notoriety, is to burn false fire on the altar. To us, I repeat, prescribed forms are no more; but the living and ever-present Spirit of God is with us, and the greatest matter in all our Christian service is that we seek to know His will and submit ourselves to His direction.

Yet I cannot end at that point. There is one other word that must be uttered. So solemn is the story that not only is it calculated to give us pause, it is liable to make us so full of fear that we hardly dare touch our work. That is exactly how Ithamar and Eleazar felt, that they dared not continue their work. Moses instituted investigation, inquired why they had been disobedient and had failed to observe things of privilege within the holy place; and the answer was that the day had been so appalling that they were afraid; and in grace, on that explanation, they were excused for the failure. But I think the story of Ithamar and Eleazar is told that we may be warned that though it is a terrible thing in many senses to do God's work in the world we must not neglect it. We have no right to say that because the responsibility is terrific we dare not approach it. He has made us a kingdom of priests, and it is not merely the saving of our own souls that is in His view, but the need of the world beyond. Therefore, with all solemnity and with hushed spirits, we must take up our work, praying ever to be delivered from the sin of burning false fire in the presence of God.

## 011 - Leviticus 14:1-2 - Spiritual Leprosy

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Leviticus 14:1-2

Leprosy remains until this hour more or less a mystery to medical science. In the New Year's Honors List a name included was that of Dr. George Turner, now Sir George Turner, whose story is one of splendid heroism and of pathetic interest. In Pretoria he did arduous work among the lepers, and on reaching the age limit gave himself to bacteriological research in the laboratories of this country, inspired by the ambition to find some remedy for the disease. Suddenly he discovered that he had contracted the disease himself, and now for over two years has been working in seclusion toward the same end.

Dr. Gerhard H. A. Hansen, of Bergen, Norway, who died last year, discovered the bacillus of leprosy, which was previously unknown. The exact value of the discovery cannot yet be known, but it is recognized as an important contribution.

These preliminary references are made in order to emphasize the mystery of the disease. It is, to say the least, an interesting fact, to which attention was drawn in *The Times* in an article on Sir George Turner, that the problem of the remedy for leprosy is an exceedingly difficult one because of the fact that none of the lower animals has yet been found to be capable of contracting the disease.

The Hebrew word for leprosy is derived from a root which means to strike down. It was looked upon as a stroke of God. There was, however, nothing in the law itself to give any ground for the view that it was always such. In the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of *Leviticus*, which contain the law of the leper, leprosy is dealt with on the ground of health, simply as a disease; yet it is quite evident that its mysterious character—its unknown origin and its insidious and resistless progress—made it the fit type or symbol of sin.

Lange graphically describes it as "a speaking picture of sin, and of evil the punishment of sin—the plastic manifestation, the medical phantom, or representation of all the misery of sin."

Jewish expositors of these Scriptures were quite explicit as to their spiritual suggestiveness. In dealing with these particular laws, one of them said, "If a man considers this, he will be humbled and ashamed on account of his sin; since every sin is a leprosy; a spot upon his soul."

The study of the law of the leper has for us a twofold value. Its first teaching has to do with the actual fact of the Divine interest in the physical well-being of men. The general good of humanity was sought by the segregation of the leper. The individual interest was safeguarded in the extreme caution observed in order that no person should thus be cut off from communion with the people unless he were actually leprosy. I am not now dealing with that aspect of the teaching of these two chapters. I should, however, like to say so much as this in passing, that in each of these matters we have very much yet to learn. We are a long way behind the Hebrew economy in the recognition of God's interest in the affairs of man's physical well-being, and in the application of the principles to which I have referred—the necessity for the separation of all those in the grip of a disease which constitutes a danger to the community. We are slowly moving toward it, but very slowly. There are some who describe legislation along these lines as grandmotherly. If it be grandmotherly, then may God increase it! We need to learn a good deal also before we arrive at the full realization of the importance of the second of these principles, that there must be strict justice: no person must be cut off from fellowship unless he actually is a peril to society.

However, when we turn from these general principles to the actual disease of leprosy, the only application possible to us is the symbolic, and that is supreme. There can be no reading of these chapters, especially of the fourteenth, without realizing that while in these laws there was provision for the physical well-being of the community, there was also a remarkable recognition of the spiritual.

It is important, therefore, that we consider quite briefly, and yet most carefully, the relation between the two parts of this law of the leper as we find it in *Leviticus*, chapters thirteen and fourteen. The thirteenth chapter is diagnostic. There is nothing more in it than instructions by which the priest was to discover whether what appeared to be leprosy was actually leprosy. In the thirteenth chapter there is no gleam of hope for the leper. The symbolic value of the chapter, therefore, is that sin demands the separation of the sinner, and is incurable by human agency.

Chapter fourteen opens with the words of my text: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing." The careful reader will immediately be arrested by the assumption that the leper can be cleansed. The thirteenth chapter contains no gleam of hope for the leper; but the fourteenth opens in the full flood of the light of hope. In the thirteenth the priest is to distinguish and differentiate and separate, and make possible the return to the camp of the man who is not suffering from leprosy. The fourteenth says, "This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing." This is an admission of the possibility of what is not in the power of man to provide or produce. The chapter then contains instructions for that ceremonial procedure by which the cleansed man is to be restored to the privileges of the camp and of the tabernacle, the privileges of the economy of the theocracy, and fellowship with God in personal and direct worship. So far as the two chapters constitute a part of the *Levitical code*, we see that this code distinctly taught that leprosy is entirely incurable by human action; but it also recognized the fact that it may be cured by Divine action. As these chapters are viewed as symbolic, their suggestion concerning sin is the same: sin is incurable by any human process, but it is curable within the Divine economy.

We at once recognize a gap between the two chapters, and the gap is great. Between the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of this shadow of the old economy stands our great Christ, our great High Priest. In the thirteenth we have the unveiling of sin under the figure of leprosy, and in the fourteenth we have an unveiling of the way of salvation in the picturesque, and suggestive if vanishing, ritual of the old economy.

Let us, then, consider what these chapters suggest pictorially. Our line of consideration will be twofold: first, leprosy as the symbol of



sin; and, second, the way of cleansing from sin as revealed in the symbolic ceremonial.

Leprosy stands as a symbol of sin in four distinct particulars: first, in the mystery of its origin; second, in the method of its manifestation; third, in the nature of its effects; and, finally, in its treatment in this Hebrew economy.

First, in the mystery of its origin. So far as leprosy is concerned, that may be dismissed by the simplest of statements already made, that even until this hour of scientific advancement, man has not been able to discover the origin of leprosy. There is nothing more appalling, shall I say, nothing more perplexing, nothing more certain, than the mystery of sin. I know we have our doctrine of original sin—in passing I should like to say that original sin is not a Scriptural phrase and therefore I hold no brief for it. But, granted the doctrine, believing in the doctrine in certain senses as I most certainly do, let it be remembered that it does not explain the nature of the persistent presence of sin in every human being; it states only the fact that sin is there, that in some form, sin is discovered in every human being. Moreover, it admits the fundamental truth that in human life sin is superinduced. The poetic declaration, "To err is human," is not true, though it is perfectly true if by human we mean humanity as we find it today. But if we think of humanity as in the purpose and economy of God, it is not human to err, not human to sin. Sin is a poison, sin is something within the soul that atrophies its powers and prevents the realization of all the deep and profound meaning of life. It is not part of essential humanity. Whatever terms we may employ in dealing with sin, we must remember that sin is superinduced.

Sin is a spiritual malady, the physical is but the expression of it; behind every physical act of sin is the spiritual attitude. There is no sin of the flesh which is not inspired by sin of the spirit. I cannot sin with my hand until I have sinned with my heart. I cannot sin physically, save as I have sinned spiritually.

Then is it inherited? If so, how? The Bible teaches that every man is offspring of God in his first creation, in his spirit life. Or is the spiritual malady of sin contracted in man? If so, when? I would have you clearly to understand that I am asking questions I do not propose to answer, for the simple reason that I cannot answer them. I ask them in order to affirm that there is no answer. Neither the theologian nor the philosopher has ever answered either of these questions. If sin is inherited, how is sin transmitted in the spirit realm? I am not spiritually the son of the man whose name I bear. "We had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence, shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?" Mark the clear distinction. If sin is of the spirit, and in the spirit, then some evil bacillus has been introduced poisoning the spirit.

The nature of that poison is discovered in Biblical definitions. Paul speaks of "the mystery of lawlessness"; John declares "sin is lawlessness." In the first we have the admission of the mystery. In the second we have a statement as to the true nature of sin. The sins which we denounce are but symptoms; sin lies deeper. Sin is "lawlessness," which does not mean being without law, but being in revolt against law. This evil germ within the spirit of man that affects all his mind and heart and soul is lawlessness; it has a thousand manifestations, but it is always the same in essence. It is indeed the mystery of lawlessness. How is it, why is it, that all men find this principle at work within the soul? I recognize the mystery; but I face the fact. As leprosy is a mystery as to its origin, so also is sin; but it is an appalling fact.

Leprosy is a symbol of sin in the method of its manifestation. The first appearance is at times discoverable only by the trained eye. Dr. Turner was a specialist, having a trained eye, yet the disease was on him and manifesting itself before he knew it. One morning, while shaving, he caught sight of marks on his hands that arrested him; he was a leper! The first symptoms are discoverable only to the trained eye. In the little child there may be a thousand things that you count sin that are not proofs of sin at all; a child romancing up to a certain age is not sinning. It is exercising a faculty of mind which belongs to it.

The time comes when the first sign of sin is manifested in the child; it is lawlessness.

This leprosy of lawlessness is invariably progressive, never halting; it steals insidiously forward with varying degrees of speed, until, at last, the whole man is corrupt, mastered—strange paradox—by lawlessness; the whole life is in revolt against authority, against government.

Leprosy is the symbol of sin in the nature of its effects. It excludes from fellowship with our fellow men. It renders the victim loathsome even to his fellow men. Not always in the more vulgar forms of sensuality, but with cold, hard, cynical, devilish self-centeredness, infinitely more loathsome than vulgar forms of sensuality. Sin, like leprosy, ultimately renders its victim insensible to the pain of his own disease. We have in the Scriptures of Truth such arresting phrases as "hardened," "a conscience seared," "past feeling"! Leprosy ultimately completely destroys the physical frame; so also sin ultimately completely destroys the spirit life, and all its powers.

Once again, leprosy is the symbol of sin in its treatment in the Hebrew economy. Why was the leper separated not only from man but from God also as to outward worship? Surely because that in itself it was a symbol of sin, and there must be recognition of the fact that sin cuts a man off from fellowship with God, dims the vision, makes him insensible to the fact of God. That necessarily means separation from the camp, exclusion from the fellowship of those who see the City of God and strive for its building; and that without respect of persons.

Sin is an appalling mystery as to its origin in the individual soul and life; in itself it is lawlessness, revolt against the law of God; and it expresses itself in a thousand ways as revolt against the law of man. Our age is particularly characterized by the restless spirit of lawlessness. Everywhere there are signs of mental, moral, social, theological, lawlessness; the refusal to recognize authority, or to be bound even by contracts which men make between themselves. Lawlessness is of the very essence of sin, a poison at the heart of man, a virus at the center of human life, that which prevents the realization of high ideals in individuals and in humanity. It is that which ultimately destroys man and destroys nations. I have never yet heard of a person being asked to sign a pledge against it. This is a very significant fact, revealing, first of all, that men do not as a rule deal with sin, but with sins; not with the malady but with the symptoms; we are always in danger of dealing with the surface of things, instead of getting down to the central trouble. On the other hand, perhaps, no pledge has ever been asked against it because of the subconscious conviction of humanity that it is something with which humanity cannot deal.

Is there a way of cleansing for the leper? Is there a way of cleansing for the sinner? Here we turn to the New Testament. I referred to a gap between the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Leviticus, and I declared that Christ stands in that gap, in the spiritual realm. In the fourteenth chapter we have the poetic symbols of His work, quite simple figures intended for that kindergarten period in the history of the people of God, yet all eloquent.

Passing into the New Testament, I find lepers, but I also find Christ; and the first general remark I desire to make is that never under any circumstances do we read in the New Testament of Christ healing a leper; never under any circumstances do we read of any writer describing a leper as being healed. The one word uniformly used is cleansed. That there is a distinction is evident from the fact when John asked, "Art Thou He that cometh, or look we for another?" Jesus said, Tell John the things you have seen, that "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them." At the foot of the mountain of beatitudes, when the Lord had uttered the ethic that remains to this day startling and awful in its white holiness, He was immediately met by a leper, who said to Him, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." The hand of Christ was immediately stretched out, and the leper who could not be touched, was touched, the word was spoken, "I will; be thou made clean," and the leper was cleansed of his leprosy. Exactly the same scene was repeated later in one of the cities to which Jesus went. Again a band of ten lepers came, and He cleansed them all. These stories of the cleansing of the lepers must be interpreted as all the stories of healing are interpreted. According to New Testament teaching, Jesus never wrought a physical miracle wholly within the realm of the physical; such wonders were always associated with a spiritual activity far more wonderful. "Son, thy sins are forgiven," said He to the man sick of the palsy; and the people complained, "Why doth this man thus speak? he blasphemeth; who can forgive sins but One, even God." Jesus replied to them, "Whether is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins... I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house." In the ministry of Jesus there was perpetual relationship between the physical and the spiritual; every physical miracle of healing or of cleansing was an outward sign of the spiritual marvel that He was able to work in the souls of men.

I glance back to Leviticus, to the fourteenth chapter, with which I am not proposing to deal in detail. Therein two great movements are revealed in the law of the leper on the day of his cleansing; they may thus be summarized. First, the priest meets the leper without the camp and leads him back into the camp. Second, the priest within the camp offers on behalf of the leper certain offerings, and anoints him with oil, and sets him at the door of the tent of meeting, the place of fellowship with God. The symbolism is perfect.

In the old economy the priest went without the camp where the leper had been driven on account of his leprosy, to certify the leper's cleansing, not to cleanse him; he could do no more than that. He then observed the ceremony which symbolized the way of his spiritual cleansing, and in doing so employed two birds, one to be sacrificed, the other to be set free, and cedarwood, scarlet, and hyssop. Do not be afraid of these pictures, they are very suggestive. The birds were for sacrifice, the cedarwood was the symbol of strength, for it was incorruptible wood; the scarlet, forevermore the color of earthly glory, spoke of life and health and beauty; the hyssop was the plant of fragrance and of healing. All these things in the old economy were brought by the leper; but none of them cleansed him, neither did the priest cleanse him; but the man, having been cleansed by some act of God, was now to celebrate the physical cleansing, and that by such ceremony as suggested the method of spiritual cleansing. The disparity between all this and the method of Christ is more eloquent than the comparison. Our High Priest does not come without the camp to certify the leper cleansed; He comes without the camp to cleanse the leper. He comes to the place where the leper is cast out, the place where the leper is alone, excommunicated from the holy place, ostracized by all his familiar friends, shut out in his own loathsomeness for the sake of the health of those left behind. Coming to the leper there, in some infinite and amazing mystery, Christ takes into His own heart and nature the virus and poison of the leprosy, cancels it and by passion, by blood, the outward symbol of the profounder spiritual passion makes it not to be; and, lo, the leper is cleansed. His flesh comes again as the flesh of a little child, and the spirit that was lawless utters its first word, and it is a word of submission: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" That is the death of lawlessness and the beginning of the law-abiding life. Our High Priest comes not to certify the leper cleansed, but to cleanse the

leper, and to bring that leper back into the camp, into the theocratic economy, into right relationship with God, into the Kingdom of God.

The priest not only brings the cleansed man back into the camp, he sets him at the door of the tent of meeting. Again we have the pictorial suggestions. In the old economy the priest offered the guilt offering, speaking of the reparation the man was making to God; he anointed the man with oil on ear and hand and foot, indicating his new consecration, then presented the Sin Offering and the Burnt Offering and the Meal Offering for him. Mark again the disparity: in the old economy the leper himself had to provide the offerings and bring the oil. In the new economy the one and only Priest, provides against every aspect of human sin, all which aspects were suggested in these offerings of the old pictorial method. Sin is fraud; the man who is lawless is robbing God, defrauding God of His rights, rights that are always beneficent in purpose toward man himself, so that man robbing God of His rights is destroying himself in the infinite mystery of his being. For that the Guilt Offering or the Trespass Offering was provided. Sin is not only fraud, it is defilement finding its way into the life with its pollution and vileness. The Sin Offering provided for the removal of defilement. Sin is also failure in life, failure in the realization of the real meaning of life. The Burnt Offering suggests sacrifice that puts away the defilement, and issues in new dedication of the life. Sin is also failure in service. The Meal Offering covers it.

Let the shadows pass and summarize the whole suggestiveness by declaring that our High Priest in His one offering for sin meets every aspect of human sin and deals with it. In this strange and wonderful economy of grace the offerings and the oil are provided by the Priest, forfeited life for life forfeit, spiritual power for spiritual death. A man is not a Christian merely because Christ has stood between him and some ultimate punishment. A man is a Christian when he has received from Christ the gift of life whereby lawlessness is checked, halted, mastered, dealt with, and life is related anew to God.

There is another mystery, the mystery of godliness. The New Testament speaks of both. The mystery of lawlessness has many manifestations. It manifests itself in one man in reckless sensuality, in the plunge into the vulgar and bestial. It manifests itself in another man in cynical selfishness, selfishness which is so absolutely selfish that it dare not sin vulgarly, has not the courage to do it. Lawlessness expresses itself in one man in actual murder, and in another man in a cynical contempt for suffering and indifference to the agonies of men. As God is my witness I do not know which is the more terrible manifestation of lawlessness, but the latter I think. I can understand the rush of blood, the red passion that strikes a blow; that is lawlessness, and it is terrible; but, oh, the terror of the form of lawlessness which has so little recognition of the throne of God, and so little recognition of the claims of humanity, that it is content to live for self and minister to self, shutting its doors that it may never see the objectionable things outside. There may be all the perfumes of Arabia, and all the upholstery of Damascus; but in the sight of heaven whose God is love, and Who is prepared to die for humanity, it is the very ultimate of hell, and the most terrible form of lawlessness. The self-centered cynical man will say hard things about the sensualist and the murderer. We still measure ourselves among ourselves, and compare ourselves as with ourselves; and we find satisfaction while thus we put the little measurements of dust on our lives; but all the while God sees the leprosy of lawlessness and the rotteness of our godless culture.

But there is another mystery. "Great is the mystery of godliness; He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels [messengers], preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory." This mystery of godliness is also spiritual. There has been one manifestation of it in human history. Jesus Christ lived and wrought and served, not independently, but dependently on God. He manifested in the midst of human history the glory and beauty of true life, law-abiding and submissive. But He did infinitely more, He went outside the camp to meet the leper, and in some wonderful mystery of infinite compassion to place His pure life at the disposal of the impure man, so that being communicated to him his leprosy may be cleansed, and the man made to live.

That mystery of godliness has been given to us as the norm of life, the type of what God would have other men to be; but more, blessed be God, or I am left a leper: not the norm alone but the germ also, and that communicated to my soul, so that the lawlessness is subdued, made not to be; and my feet are turned into the way of the Divine commandment, and my life at last conformed to the good and perfect and acceptable will of God. There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we can be saved.

## 012 - Numbers 6:22-27 - The Priestly Benediction

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise shall ye bless the children of Israel; ye shall say unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. So shall they put My name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them. Numbers 6:22-27

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

These words constituted the priestly benediction in the Hebrew economy. They were included in the Divinely appointed liturgy of worship, and, in common with the whole of that pictorial system, were richer and fuller than the men who used them knew. It is only in the "grace and truth" which "came by Jesus Christ" that we can discover the full meaning of "the law" which was "given by Moses." Nevertheless, as the component colors of light are seen in the spectrum, so we may often be helped to an understanding of grace and truth by the ritual and formulas of the law.

The priestly office is mediatorial. Its function is twofold, intercessory and benedictory. Each of these functions has a double operation. The priest in intercession stands first in the presence of God pleading the cause of men, and then in the presence of men pleading the cause of God. The priest in benediction stands first in the presence of men pronouncing blessings from God, and then in the presence of God offering the praises of men.

Our present meditation is concerned with the first aspect of the benedictory functions, the pronouncement of the Divine blessing on men by the lips of the mediating priest. This solemn act was a distinct part of the worship of the Hebrew people, and its place in the order of our worship is indicated quite clearly in the twenty-second verse of the ninth chapter of Leviticus, where we read these words: "And Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people, and blessed them; and he came down from offering the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings." Thus it will be seen that in that liturgical service the pronouncement of the benediction followed the completion of the presentation of the offerings. The relation between the suggestiveness of these offerings and the pronouncement of the blessing is quite evident. Sin being dealt with, the priest may say: "Jehovah bless thee and keep thee." Dedication being now complete, he may say: "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." Peace being thus established, he may say: "Jehovah lift up His face upon thee, and give thee peace."

Without any discussion of the mediatorial ministry of our one and only Priest—the Daysman Who stands between us and God, laying His hand on God with the awful, holy familiarity of unity, and laying His hand on us with the equally surprising beneficent familiarity of unity—the work that makes the blessing possible, let us quietly meditate on this ancient formula of benediction as it reveals to us the inestimable advantages of our relation to God in Christ Jesus. In doing so we desire to observe that the whole fact of the advantage is included in the suggestiveness of the Name, while its component parts are revealed in the threefold form of pronouncement.

When this commandment was given to Moses it ended with this injunction: "So shall they put My Name upon the children of Israel." It was an instruction how the priest was to pronounce the Name of God in the hearing of the people, so that they might understand the advantages that came to them from God through priesthood as they were inclusively suggested in the name itself.

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;  
The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.  
So shall they put My Name upon the children of Israel.

If I may fall back upon the figure already incidentally used, the Name is "light"; but, by the pronouncement of the Name in this fashion, light is analyzed and we see its component parts; and the colors that, merging into whiteness, become light are revealed for us in this ancient formula.

Thus let us consider first the revealing Name; and, second, the interpretative sentences.

Now may it be given to us by the guidance of the Spirit of God to approach this subject of the Name as here found, with all solemnity and with all reverence. We shall take time to remind ourselves of some things with which perhaps we are very familiar, but which are so vital to our subject that we must deal with them. We of the Christian age are at least in danger of losing something because of our holy familiarity with God through Christ Jesus. He has made it possible for us to talk with Him, all of us, as Moses did, face to face, as a man talks with his friend. By reason of this privilege I often feel that we use the holy Name somewhat carelessly. Reverence for that name characterized the Hebrew mental attitude. This reverence presently became pedantic obscurantism, and prevented these men from uttering it, and made them refuse to write it. At a later period, some translators substituted another title for the name in many passages, so that in our common reading of the Old Testament we are in danger of missing its revelations. To us the name is Jehovah, or, if some of you have been reading modern theological books, you have seen it spelt Yahweh, which is purely a piece of pedantry, because no one can prove that Yahweh is more correct than Jehovah. It never appeared on the Hebrew manuscript in one form or the other; but in the very appearance of the name was revealed that reverence to which I am making reference. To express it they used the tetragrammaton, YHWH. These four consonants stood on the page, the vowel points being omitted that the name might not be uttered, so great and sacred did it seem to be to these people. This particular name came to have greater sanctity to the Hebrew people than even the name Elohim, which is vaster and more wonderful than the

former in its essential meaning.

It was used from patriarchal times without any clear apprehension of its meaning, but from the hour of the Exodus it was used with a new understanding of its meaning. Such I take to be the meaning of the word which I have already read to you in the book of Exodus, in which after communing with the great lawgiver, Jehovah is recorded as having said to him, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by My name Jehovah I was not known to them." The Patriarchs had employed the Name, were familiar with it, but had not understood it. In the hour of ransom and redemption God began to explain the name by which they had named Him, but which they had never perfectly understood.

What, then, was the suggestiveness of the name? The name "Jehovah" does not stand as the symbol of essential being; the one name which stands as the symbol of essential being is that by which God revealed Himself to Moses in the presence of the burning bush. When fear and trembling possessed the soul of the man called to high enterprise, he inquired of God, Who shall I say has sent me? and the answer of God was this, "I AM THAT I AM." "I AM"—as though He were about to declare some truth concerning Himself, but suddenly limited Himself—"THAT I AM," in order that the listening man might understand that God was not giving him an interpretation of nature or character, but an affirmation of being. God is eternal "I AM." How often in the course of casual, necessary conversation I say, "I am," and yet, as a matter of fact, I have no sooner uttered the word than my tense has become a past. In some true sense, no finite being can say I am. It is the distinct word of essential life, abiding, timeless, dateless, infinite. That is essential being, but that is not the suggestion of the word Jehovah.

Neither does the word Jehovah declare all-completeness or sufficiency of essential being. That is found in the word "El Shaddai," God all-sufficient. In our versions it is translated God Almighty, but El Shaddai, God all-sufficient, is a word including not merely the thought of might, but the thought of wisdom, the thought of all resource; it describes God as the fount of all being and all manifestations, the last, final, ultimate fact out of which everything has proceeded, and of which everything in some form or fashion or sense, is an exhibition, a revelation. Jehovah does not mean that.

Jehovah is a part of the verb which is made use of when essential being is declared; but it suggests, not the being of God, but the adaptation of His being to some necessity, or—and I cannot find any better word, imperfect though it may be—the becoming of God, that He is One Who becomes; not the all-sufficiency of God, but that all-sufficiency is active on behalf of others; not that there is infinite fulness in the sea of Deity, but that the sea flows in and fills the gaps wherever they may be.

Already men had named the Name, already they had entered into the privilege of the fact, already the men of faith had found God becoming to them what they needed. Once the father of the faithful, in language of infinite suggestiveness, broke out into exposition of the word, perhaps hardly understanding the magnificence of his exclamation. In the supreme hour when he offered Isaac in sacrifice, the offering being complete in will, the ram was caught in the thicket, and Abraham said, "Jehovah Jireh," the Becoming One sees and provides, the Becoming One becomes that which necessity demands. But now, with ransom and redemption, the constitution of the nation, and the establishment of the prophetic and pictorial ritual, the name is to be interpreted, unveiled.

Then I take up my Bible, and my eye runs over the panoramic movement, and the story, through hours of faithfulness and hours of failure, is that of God becoming what His people need: fiery judgment in the hour of their unutterable folly, great compassion in the hour of repentance, a mighty fortress when the billows broke upon them; the land of magnificent distances when the heart was weary and tired; always becoming, until, at last, in the fulness of time the great truth sang itself out in the mystic wonder which can find no finer expression in human language than that of the seer of blue Galilee, who, when he would write the story of the central fact in human history, wrote it thus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." That is, God becoming flesh, that through the veil of the flesh Divine might break forth the light that else were too bright for the feebleness of the sinner's sight. Not the I am of essential being, not El Shaddai of infinite, all-sufficient resource; but the I am that bends, bows, stoops and becomes, the infinite unapproachable glory as of a million suns, stooping as a sunbeam to kiss the face of a sick child, the becoming One, fulness of glory, fulness of grace.

We need no longer be afraid of the name. He took the infinite mystery of the name which Hebrew bards and prophets dared not write, and spelt it out in yet simpler speech, and the I am of God become flesh is Jesus. It was a commonplace name when He bore it. I have no hesitation in saying that even in Nazareth scores of boys were called Jesus, for it is but the Greek form of the familiar Hebrew Joshua. The great high priest in the day of restoration was named Joshua, the great successor of Moses, who led the people from the wilderness into the land, was named Joshua. For him the name was made. Hoshea was the name of the boy whose father's name was Nun; but when he entered on his work his name was changed to Joshua, the merging of the name of God with the fact of salvation, so that it means Jehovah, a Saviour. At last the angel said to Joseph, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for it is He that shall save His people from their sins."

When I turn to the other writings in the New Testament I find that, with reverence, He is named "the Lord Jesus Christ;" "Jesus Christ the Lord." Beyond the gospel narratives He was hardly ever called Jesus, except in two great writings, the epistle to the Hebrews,

and the Apocalypse of the seer of Patmos. The writer of the letter perpetually called Him Jesus, and John, when writing of those wondrous visions, spoke of Him as Jesus. In these two writings we find, in some senses, the most resplendent revelations of His personality. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews introduced Him by declaring Him to be the very effulgence of the Divine glory. John gave us a matchless vision of Him.

Thus the name, suggestive, full of glory, was at last sounded in human history in the simplest of all names, Jesus, and the whole meaning of the name is that God incomprehensible makes Himself comprehensible, the Eternal and All-sufficient, bends and bows Himself into such form and fashion and method that humanity may be touched without being crushed, may be touched so as to be healed and helped.

Salvation in His name there is;  
Salvation from sin, death and hell,  
Salvation into glorious bliss,  
How great salvation, who can tell?  
But all He hath for mine I claim,  
I dare believe in Jesu's name.

Reverently, let us turn from the inclusive suggestiveness of the Name to these interpretative sentences of the benediction:

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;  
The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

It is one name, but pronounced in such a way as to suggest three aspects of the blessing for which it stands.

Take the first, "Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee." Here the thought is that of God as the Source of blessing; it is fixed, not so much on the blessing itself, which is not described, not so much on the keeping itself, which is not described, as on the fact that blessing and keeping alike are from God. The terms are general. "Bless thee," that is, quite literally, kneel to thee, in order to serve thee. The Lord kneel to thee, and kneel in the attitude of service! I know how daring the statement seems to be, how amazing it is. Once again, for illumination, the mind travels from the ancient mystery of the priestly formula of benediction to a simple picture of the New Testament. A group of men are gathered in an upper room, shadows are about them, darkness is already on them, and there is the One Who bears the name of Jesus, girding Himself with a towel as a servant and kneeling to wash the feet of these men. "Jehovah bless thee," kneel to thee in order to serve thee! "And keep thee," that is, hedge thee round about so as to protect thee.

If the terms are general, the ideas are of the fullest, suggesting the bestowment of all benefits, and the warding off of all opposing forces. When Paul came to writing the ultimate document of his system of teaching, the Ephesian letter, he opened it with a doxology, "Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing." When he approached the culmination of the same letter he introduced us to the realm of conflict, and makes us conscious of the opposing forces: "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness." What now will he say to us? Stand "in the strength of His might." Thus the essential idea of the Name is expressed in these statements in certain respects. The Becoming One becomes all that is needed in order to reach His people in blessing, to hedge them round about, and protect them from their foes.

In that first movement of the great benediction I find the reason of my faith, the ground of my hope, and the inspiration of my love; for therein I am reminded that the source of all benefit that my soul most needs is Jehovah Himself.

Let us pass to the second phase of benediction. "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." Here the thought is still that of Jehovah Himself, not as the source of all blessing only, but also as the channel of blessing. The terms are now relative. "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee." This is not the same idea as that expressed in the words, "Jehovah lift up His face upon thee." The Hebrew word translated "face" and "countenance" is exactly the same. The difference is not between "face" and "countenance," but between making the face shine, and lifting it up, upon. The thought here is of Jehovah as a channel of blessing. The terms, as we have said, are relative; the face luminous upon thee, Jehovah gracious unto thee. The ideas are the ideas of activity: Cause His face to be luminous; be gracious unto thee, that is, stoop in active kindness unto thee. "Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee" means that all benefit and protection come from God; but "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee" means that the blessing will come, not as a gift separated from Jehovah, but by and through the very coming of Jehovah. It is His face that is to be lifted; it is His grace that is to come to men in their need.

When I turn to the New Testament for the fulfilment of the suggestiveness I find it in another writing already referred to. How will He make His face shine upon men? The writer of the letter to the Hebrews declared that in Jesus was the effulgence of the Divine glory.

Then "Jehovah be gracious unto thee." How is this fulfilled? I turn to the close of the selfsame letter, and I find that the writer

declared that the One Whose face was the effulgence of the Divine glory, that very One, passed beyond the camp to suffer and to die, in order to bring grace to men who are lepers, outcasts, failures. That is the supreme fact of Christianity. It is not merely that Jehovah is the source from Whom all benefits come, or that He keeps men who in themselves are what they ought to be, but who under some evil mastery would fail. It is also true that Jehovah lifts the light of His face upon men who have lost the sense of His nearness. Jehovah follows the man who has left communion and fellowship, and in some great mystery of suffering, cancels the leprosy and takes the man back to Himself. Thus Jehovah in His Son is revealed; His face became luminous through Jesus; and in the graciousness of His stoop He redeems. In Jehovah the Son we have the clear shining of the face of God, and eyesight for eyes that were blind.

If in the first aspect I find the reason of faith, the ground of hope, and the great inspiration of love; in this I have the argument for the reason of my faith. The reason is that God Himself is the source of all my help; the argument that demonstrates the reason is that God became flesh, and so the glory of His face was seen, and the wonder of His grace became operative. In the same way, this is the proof of the ground of my hope, and this the whisper of the word that becomes the inspiration of my love.

So we move one stage further to the final unveiling. "Jehovah lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Here the thought is no longer that of Jehovah as the resource of blessing, or as a channel of blessing; it is rather that of Jehovah as the experience of blessing in the soul of a man, of Jehovah Himself creating a new experience.

Here the terms are final. The luminous face of God is not luminous merely, but it is lifted, so that it shines upon the soul; not merely is He gracious toward me, but this with a grace that fills my heart with peace which He gives, which He conveys, by His own immediate presence.

The ideas are supremely pictorial. The uplifted face suggests perpetual day. The peace is that of abiding quietness and unruffled calm possessing the soul. If I would find the New Testament fulfilment of the suggestiveness of the ancient Hebrew benediction, I turn to the words of Jesus, in His last discourses to His own disciples. I find Him saying, I am going from you, but I will send you another Comforter, and then immediately explaining that statement as He adds, I come to you. God, by His Spirit, so comes as to create within the soul the experience of day. Yet again He says, I will send you the Comforter, and in connection with that declaration the gracious words pass His lips, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you," so that it becomes your peace, My peace is your peace. Our experience is that of perpetual day, for He, the Son of Effulgent Divine glory, is always with us; our experience is that of unruffled calm and peace, because His peace is ours. Thus Jehovah, by His Spirit, causes the shining of His face in Jesus, creating perfect day for man; and by His Spirit He causes His word, His revelation, His teaching, His message to become comfort to the soul so that it has abiding peace.

By the ministry of the Spirit blessing becomes more than a word spoken, more than argument in proof of the word spoken; it becomes experience, so that man living in the communion of the Holy Ghost lives in the daylight of the uplifted face of God, effulgent in the face of Jesus, and in the place of unruffled calm and perfect peace.

When these priestly words were committed to Aaron and his sons, they were to pronounce them in obedience, not understanding all their significance; yet within them, as the holy Name was thus placed on the separated people, there was the suggestiveness of the infinite mystery of the Trinity. Jehovah the Source of all blessing, bless thee and keep thee. That is the love of God. "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." That is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Jehovah lift up His countenance upon thee," so that the light becomes sunrise and day, and give thee peace. That is the communion of the Holy Ghost. These are the aspects of the one inclusive blessing that comes to humanity through the priesthood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This blessing and this keeping, this irradiating of the face of God and this gracious activity of God, this lifting of the face so that sunlight lights up the pathway, and this communication of peace, which makes panic impossible—these blessings come to men only through Jehovah, and the final test of priesthood is the ability to pronounce that benediction.

These blessings can be pronounced in their fulness and with authority and power only by the lips of Jesus. The ultimate wonder and amazement is that He has made us a kingdom of priests. Our business is to pronounce this benediction on men wherever we go. It is not the business of the preacher merely, but of all saints, so that from this hour of worship, if there be any value in it, we shall pass back to our homes, back to the city, back to the place of need and toil and sorrow and sin, saying as we go:

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;  
The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

This is the function of the priesthood of the Church; and the words become dynamic in human history and human life when they are incarnate.

Let us, then, seek the holy shrine, let us worship at the altar, let us come to the place of mediation that He may speak to us the

benediction, and that in order that we may pass out into the highways and the byways, amid the darkness and restlessness and bondage of humanity, fulfilling the high-priestly function as we bring to men this sense of God, this power of God, this gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## 013 - Deuteronomy 1:6 - God-Governed Life

The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain. Deuteronomy 1:6

The sojourn of the people of God at Mount Horeb had been a most vital one. There they had received the law, an expression of the Divine grace. There the national constitution had been perfected, so that they were in very deed a theocracy, a people subject to the throne of God. There the system of worship had been given, a perpetual symbol of their distance from God by reason of their sin and of the possibility of their approach to Him by the way of sacrifice.

All this being accomplished, the word was spoken which called them to the practical realization of the fact that they were a people God-governed: "The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain." They heard the Divine message, obeyed the Divine command, and marched through the great and terrible wilderness to the margin of the land of promise. The sequel, as we know, was one of failure, and of consequent discipline, the story of which is told in the book of Numbers. After forty years they were brought again to Kadesh-barnea, and there Moses, the great leader, ere leaving them, uttered these farewell discourses which have been preserved for us in the book of Deuteronomy. The words of our text were the opening words of the first of these discourses. As he stood and confronted these people whom he had been privileged to lead for forty years through varied experiences, the first words that fell from his lips were those reminding them of that hour when there came to them, in their corporate national capacity, the first command of God, "The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain."

Spoken thus after the experience of forty years, while yet referring to the first command uttered to the nation in its corporate capacity, they introduce us to the subject of the Divine government of human life, help us to understand its method, purpose, and issue, and suggest to us what our relationship to that government should ever be.

My reference to the government of God is not now to that wider fact which embraces all creation. As we have often reminded ourselves, no man can escape from the government of God. No part of the universe is beyond the authority and power of God. That is a wider aspect of truth, with which at the moment we are not dealing. It is well, however, that we remind ourselves of this fact, for both our comfort and our warning. For our comfort let us remember that God has never vacated His throne, never handed over the affairs of the universe, or the smaller matters of this world of ours, to any other authority. It is perfectly true that men and nations may condition their experience of the Divine government by their attitude thereto, but escape it they cannot. A man can fling himself against the boss of the shield of God and be broken in pieces, or he may nestle beneath the panoply of God and know the rest of the heart of God; but he cannot escape God. Lucifer, son of the morning, may say, "It is better to reign in hell than serve in heaven"; but he cannot reign in hell. God reigns in hell. Nations may throw off restraint and laugh at God; but He will have them in derision, and will laugh when their day of calamity comes. That is the wider aspect of this truth of Divine government.

I want this evening to speak more particularly of the government of God in the case of those who recognize it, yield themselves to it. How does God govern in the case of such?

The first matter to be emphasized is that God does govern. I think I need not stay to argue it. I do, however, desire to remind you of it. Sometimes I think that even we as Christian people do need to be reminded of the actuality of the government of God. We are a little in danger of treating God as though He were some infinite, marvelous abstraction; or as though He were seated afar off in some distant heaven, unacquainted with the actual experience of these little human lives of ours; or as though He had formed and fashioned us in some mysterious creation, and one day, at the end of a period of loneliness, he would meet us again and call us to account. All such conceptions of God are unwarranted by the Biblical revelation, and are untrue to the profoundest things of our Bible.

Let us then remind ourselves that the Bible reveals the actual, immediate government by God, of the lives of His own people. Let us further remind ourselves that this government of God is autocratic. He never consults us as to what He will do with us. The government of God is absolute; He permits no compromise. The government of God is inclusive; He exempts no territory. All that produces no fear in the hearts of men and women who know the government of God; for if the government be autocratic, so that He never consults me; absolute, so that He permits no compromise; inclusive, so that He exempts no territory—it is the government of God, and God is love, and God is wisdom. It is the government of the One Who fashioned me in answer to the impulses of His own love. It is the government of One Who knows my thought afar off and understands the sobbing desire that underlies all the failure,



and Who will be infinitely patient with me until He has perfected that which concerneth me. But it is government, direct, immediate, absolute, autocratic.

Let us consider the nature of this government. Falling back on the text, and using all the background of the story for the purpose of illustration, there are three things I desire to say concerning the nature of that government. First, the government of God is a disturbing element in human life. Second, the government of God is a progressive element in human life. Finally, the government of God is a methodical element in human life.

First, then, let us consider the fact that the government of God is a disturbing element in human life, for it always is so. Traveling back beyond the moment in which this word came, take the story to the beginning of the history of that wonderful people. How did the people who were that day disturbed come into being? The nation came into being as the result of one human life being disturbed by God. In Ur of the Chaldees a man saw a vision of God and a vision of the purpose of God, and in some mystic, wonderful communion was brought into the place of great familiarity with God. He was a man of substance and position in Ur of the Chaldees. To that man suddenly there came a voice, the voice of God: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee." "And he went out, not knowing whither he went." He was disturbed by God. The history of the people, from that first movement until this very hour when the voice of God came to them, was a history of perpetual, persistent disturbance. Disturbed in Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham moved into the land. Presently there came an hour when his grandson Jacob and his sons were driven out of the land by the Divine command and sent down to Egypt. Centuries ran their course, and the seventy souls who went down to Egypt multiplied into a great host; and again the Divine disturbance came: they were moved from Goshen and Egypt and encamped at Pihahiroth, hemmed in by enemies and the sea; they were then led out of danger, and across the highway of the dried sea, into the wilderness; they encamped beneath Sinai, a ransomed people, freed from bondage, escaped from slavery, resting at last amid the quietness and peace of the magnificent solitudes of the mountain. For a year and a month, free from all oppression, they realized the peace and blessedness of the Divine government, and then came the voice, "Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain," and immediately all engagements had to be canceled, every tent had to be struck. The next picture we have is that of marching hosts moving forward, leaving the place of peace, tramping the dreary, desolate wilderness with faces set toward the goal of the Divine purpose. They were a disturbed people from beginning to end.

It is ever thus. To be governed by God is to be constantly disturbed, to have human arrangements interfered with. Here is a man whom God has called to some definite piece of work, and in the place of his service, he is conscious of the Divine presence, the Divine blessing. It may be that after a period of toil and travail everything is coming into adjustment and the golden radiance of harvest is on all the field. Then suddenly to the soul of the man comes the voice of God: "Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain"; the work must be left, the location changed, and all the experience of the past apparently contradicted. The man is disturbed, and that by the Divine government. Or in other ways God disturbs us; crosses the threshold of the home of peace and quietness, and breaks it up, and we are no longer in the place of peace as we were, because God has disturbed our lives; some close earthly friendship in which comrade ministered to comrade in all things high and noble, sweet and strong, is suddenly broken in upon, and the friends are separated as far as the poles geographically. God is disturbing two lives; hopes and aspirations that gleamed and inspired, are suddenly put out, and all the movement of the years towards the goal seem to end in defeat. These are the common experiences of the saints. They are the problems of the saints. They are the problems of the men who observe the saints. Again and again they have been made the reason of ridicule of the saints. Along the avenue of these experiences Satan has ridden with all his host to assault the faith of the believer: If God loved you would He allow you thus to be disturbed? If God really loved you, would He not have left you that sacred, holy companionship? If God were really governing your life would He move you while your work seems to be successful? God is always doing it. Divinely governed souls are always sojourners in tents, pilgrims. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord," was the word of the Master Himself, indicating to the men who would follow Him that their true attitude should ever be that of expecting disturbance and change and alteration. Beneath the height of God's mount we are encamped, impressed by its majesty and its glory, comforted by the great words of law which proceed from the heart of grace for the conditioning of our lives, seeing the mosaic of the Divine arrangement manifest itself in constitution and ritual, in beauty and in order. Surely now at last, the long bondage over, we are finding a place of peace and quietness. When, lo, suddenly the word is spoken: Let the tents be struck, the baggage packed, "ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain."

If the Divine government of human lives be a disturbing element, it is a progressive element. Why were these people disturbed? I go back to the actual text, and I will now read a little more than the text:

The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain: turn you, and take your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland, and in the south, and by the sea shore, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.

That reading of the context seems to make a defense of the disturbing almost unnecessary so far as this story is concerned, for thereby the light of the Divine purpose flashes on the fact of the Divine disturbance, and we see that the purpose of the disturbance was the possession of the land. The place of silent solitude is to be left, and the way of the wilderness is to be trodden; but why? That the land which lies beyond may be possessed. Progress is not necessarily pleasant. When Moses described the journey a little later in this same discourse, he speaks of it thus—the first journey, remember, not the subsequent journey of discipline—"We... went through all that great and terrible wilderness."

Here again the picture is a parable and the teaching is patent. God's dealings with a man today are always in the interest of his perfecting tomorrow. God's disturbance of human life is always in order that the life may climb to a higher height and come to fuller realization.

Now let all my exposition end as I take you to another of these discourses, yet hardly a discourse, the great song Moses was commanded to write. Listen to this:

The Lord's portion is His people;  
Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.  
He found him in a desert land,  
And in the waste howling wilderness;  
He compassed him about, He cared for him,  
He kept him as the apple of His eye:  
As an eagle that stirreth up her nest,  
That fluttereth over her young,  
He spread abroad His wings, He took them,  
He bare them on His pinions.

In that exquisite figure we have the merging of the elements of disturbance and progress. May I take it for granted that all the adults in my congregation understand that figure? Well, for the boys and girls here I want to explain it; the others can take a rest. It is a very Eastern picture. We in England can hardly understand this picture of the eagle. Even in Scotland it can hardly be appreciated. We must get right away to the East if we would interpret its suggestiveness. Let us go and see what is happening. Yonder is an eagle's eyrie on the rocky ledge far up the heights. There the eagle has built her nest; there she has brought her young into being by her maternal brooding, and there she feeds them and guards them. The eaglets are in their nest on that rocky ledge, to which none can climb and to which none can descend in perfect safety; and the eagle watches over her young, and broods over them. Living somewhere in the neighborhood, let us imagine, we have watched this process from day to day, until there comes a day when something happens that is full of surprise. The mother bird that has seemed to be so tender and careful is doing the strangest of things. She is flinging those eaglets out of the nest, herself turning them out, beating them out. As I watch, I see the eaglets in the air, struggling, falling in the element which is strange to them. All the peace and safety and the restfulness of the nest is gone. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest."

Yes, but let us carefully watch. What next? The eagle spreads her broad pinions over the birds as they fall, and then suddenly, with the swiftness of the lightning, swoops beneath them and catches them on her broad wings. It seemed as though they must be destroyed. They are not destroyed. She bears them back on her wings to the ledge, and with a great sense of relief the eaglets struggle back into the nest. They are so glad to be back! To-morrow she will do it again, and the next day she will do it again; until one day as I watch I notice that one of the eaglets, perhaps a little stronger than the rest, when flung out of the nest and beginning to fall, puts out its wings and tries to use them. Then the purpose of the disturbance is seen. That will go on from day to day, until one day those eaglets will not struggle in the air, will not fall, but will spread their wings and fly with the mother bird sunward.

As an eagle that stirreth up her nest,  
That fluttereth over her young,

so the Lord disturbs with progressive disturbance in order to realize life in all its fulfilment. Leave the eaglet undisturbed in the nest on the rocky height and it will fail of the very powers that are resident within it. Fling it out into the unaccustomed air, show it how to use its wings, catch it in its falling, bear it back again, give it a rest, disturb it again, and it will fulfil the meaning of its own life.

"Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain." Leave that sphere of work which you love so well; be severed from that comrade without whom you feel you cannot live; know the breakup of home. What is God doing with you? Developing the powers of your own life, enabling you to discover the things in you which are of Himself, bearing you on His pinions in the moment of your utterest weakness, until presently He teaches you to use the wings He has given you. A disturbing element, but a progressive element.

Finally, this government of God is a methodical element in human life. The provision is made. "Behold, I have set the land before

you." The course is marked out. Notice how particular are the instructions. Take your map of Palestine and mark the country out, and you will discover that these people never reached their destination; nor have they yet. God's limit was beyond anything they ever arrived at. Never did they stretch the bounds of their habitation as far as the great river Euphrates. I have read that to show that God had a plan for them which was possible for Him to express in terms of geography.

But there is something else in this Chapter I want you to notice:

Thy God bare thee, as a man doth bare his son, on all the way that ye went, until ye came unto this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God, Who went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in the cloud by day.

There are things in this Bible I would to God I knew how to read as they ought to be read. Oh, the poetry there is in that! There is no poetry in the way I read it. Read it for yourselves and find the poetry. God went before you in the way to seek you out a place in which to pitch your tents. We sing today, and the sentiment is true and beautiful, "We nightly pitch our moving tent a day's march nearer home." Then let us remember that the pitching of the tent at night is not accidental, for God has been before us. Think of it. I arrive nowhere but that God has been ahead of me. It may be that for the moment most of this congregation will be only reverently patient; but there is some man here, some woman, some youth, or some maiden, buffeted, broken, perplexed, lonely, almost mad with the agony of life. Just where you are, God was ahead of you. Out of the terror of the hour He is creating forces of triumph in your life which would always have been missing had you not pitched your tent right there where He has appointed the place. God is not making any experiments with you. There are some texts that we of a weaker generation hardly dare preach about. I will tell you one; you will find it in Samuel, in the last psalm that David wrote ere he died: "An everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." Yes, you say, that is all very well for David. But read more, and you will find that David was describing what God's king ought to be, and he said:

Verily my house is not so with God;  
Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant,  
Ordered in all things, and sure.  
For it is all my salvation, and all my desire  
Although He maketh it not to grow.

When David sang of the "covenant ordered in all things, and sure," he sang out of his disappointment, out of his sense that he had failed. He saw even his failure as within the Divine government. In his great letter to the Ephesians Paul reminds us in infinite music that "we are His workmanship," and not merely that we are His workmanship, but that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." To the man who is truly God-governed the morning breaks and there is in his heart the consciousness that nothing can merely happen, in the infidel sense of the word. There can be no accident. Yes, I may suffer, I may suffer some physical evil, some mental trouble, some assault on the soul; I may pass through the great and terrible wilderness; but the covenant is ordered in all things, and sure. God cannot be surprised. Exigency, contingency, are very useful words for you and for me; but God has no need of them. No exigency surprises Him. No contingency baffles Him. He sees the end from the beginning, and all the affairs of the universe are under His control. The man God-governed is a man who lives at the very heart of method and order.

What, then, is our true relationship to this government? The answer is the simplest of all answers. Our true relation to the government of God is that of obedience, immediate and unconditional. What are the conditions of such obedience? Confidence in the method because it is the method of God, even when I cannot see its value; keeping forever in view the ultimate purpose in me and through me, and being forever ready to be disturbed. I love the paradoxes of faith. Here is one: the only man who is never disturbed is the man who is always ready to be disturbed. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning," ready to be disturbed; then when the call comes you will not be disturbed. It is when I allow my life to be anchored to friend, home, church, that if God wants me to do without this friend, break up this home, leave this church, I am disturbed. When my life is anchored in God, then no disturbance can disturb. That is the philosophy of life of the men who really live in the Divine government.

Oh, the unutterable folly of doing what these people did! They started well, they struck their tents, they came to the borderland; then they appointed a commission to find out about the land God told them to possess. That commission published two reports, the majority and minority reports; and then, as ever since, the minority was right. The people halted with fear, they went back; then they presumed and tried to go in without God, and fought the Amalekites and were defeated. Then followed forty years of discipline. "Forty years was I grieved with this generation." Consider in the light of this history what God does with people with whom He is grieved. He bare them as a man bears his son, with infinite patience and tender compassion, waiting for them.

Someone has heard the disturbing call of God, it may be within the last four and twenty hours. If so, I think this sermon is for you. What are you going to do? Go forward, counting no cost in your obedience? There are giants there. Yes, for you to slay. There are walled cities there. Yes, for you to take. There are rough ways ahead. Tramp them, they lead to peace. But there is awful loneliness.

Welcome it, it admits you to the comradeship of God. The only thing we must not do, if God says we have tarried long enough, is to tarry. Some of you heard that voice long ago, and you disobeyed, and you have had a long weary wilderness; but tonight you are once again on the margin of the land. I pray you remember that all the wilderness has been in His government. This is the method of our God. He ever gives men a second time. The second time on the margin of the land. The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time. If the vessel be marred in the hand of the Potter He will make it again a second time. All the years that the cankerworm hath eaten, He will restore them. He is plenteous in mercy and compassion,

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of man's mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

Some man listening to me quite reverently says, I do not understand all this. I never hear a voice like that disturbing me. No, my brother, you are living in Egypt, in bondage: garlicks, leeks, fleshpots! God-forsaken men are not disturbed. Yet listen. God is calling even you, and at this moment some of you have heard Him asking you to readjust your lives from this moment to make them kingdoms of God. You have tarried long enough in Egypt! At God's call arise and follow, and He will perfect that which concerneth you.

## 014 - Deuteronomy 4:29 – Backsliding

If from thence ye shall seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. Deuteronomy 4:29

This book of Deuteronomy is a singularly beautiful one. It is not a history. Historically, it covers a period of a very few days, for in all probability these final discourses of Moses occupied only a brief time in delivery. The book is more than a code of laws. All it says had been said already by this selfsame man. It consists of the last messages of Moses to the people of his heart. It is prophecy in the deepest and fullest meaning of that great word. It is the forthtelling of the word of God to listening men. It is a poem full of light and full of fire. Here again the words of law are uttered, but in reading one is conscious rather of the driving power of love's great reason than of the binding nature of law's requirement, not that the requirement of law is lowered in one single particular, but that love speaks with wooing winsomeness and tender constraint. It utters the same thunder, but always in the tone of infinite pity. One would be inclined to say that in Deuteronomy we hear the law from the lips of a man who after long years has found his way into intimate communion with the heart of God. It is the Evangel of law. In the pleading tones of the great leader of the people one discovers that the reason of law is love, and if I ever ventured to choose a motto from some uninspired writer to preface so great a book as that of Deuteronomy, I would write Browning's words:

I report as a man may of God's work,  
All's love but all's law.

Law is here, but it is the law of love. The text on which I have chosen to speak to you is a supreme illustration of the consciousness of Moses of the tenderness of the heart of God. He had been supposing the possibility of backsliding on the part of the listening people. In the light of subsequent history his words are seen to have been prophetic.

After describing in detail the process of backsliding until the issue of it is revealed, he suddenly breaks out into these words: "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

My message tonight is to those who are conscious in their own lives of any measure of backsliding. To such persons as the Apostle would address in the words he used when writing to the churches of Galatia, "Ye were running well; who did hinder you?" to those persons to whom Jesus is saying tonight, through the language he used to the Church at Ephesus, "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love"; to men and women who, looking back on their past days, remember the thrill and passion of discipleship as the supreme consciousness of life, but who now are sighing, "Where is the blessedness I had when first I found the Lord?" to men and women who are conscious of backsliding from their loyalty to Christ and relationship to God.

I beseech you to remember that the distance between yourself and your Lord matters nothing. The first cooling of passion is the tragedy. The final corruption is but a sequence to be expected, and which cannot be avoided save as the first love is restored.

I am speaking tonight to some who have traveled a long distance from the Father's house, to some who seem as though they had lost track of the way that leads them home; or I may be speaking to many others who have just lost their first love, who are maintaining all the externalities of Christian relationship, but have lost the thrill, the fire, the passion, the devotion. Whether to those or to others upon the trackless burning desert of degradation my message is exactly the same.

What is my message? It is in my text. Would God I knew how to say it. "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

First, let us put our emphasis upon the word "thence," for to do so will be to be driven to inquire as to the process and issue of backsliding. "Thence." Whence? And we shall answer the question by reverting to Moses' description, which occupies the earlier verses. Secondly, we will lay our emphasis upon another word in the text, "if," for by so doing we shall see the conditions upon which a man may return. "If... ye shall seek the Lord thy God... if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." Finally, we will hear, as God shall help us, the great central song of the text, "Thou shalt find Him."

"If from thence." The ancient message contains striking illustration of the matters concerning which we desire to speak. We may forget all the local coloring and look through to the underlying principles, and in doing so we shall find that a master hand has sketched for us the whole story of backsliding in every successive age of the world's history. There is no man or woman, young man or young woman, away from the Master whom they once loved and served, be the distance great or small, but that the process described by Moses of old is the process through which they have passed to the place of degradation. The issues he describes are identical with those which always follow the path of backsliding.

What is this process? Mark three things: First, "When ye... shall corrupt yourselves." Second, "When ye... shall make a graven image." Third, "When ye... shall do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord."

The first is purely personal, perhaps hidden from men, corruption of self. The second is the sequel to self-corruption, the making of a graven image. Finally, the overt act of evil.

What is self-corruption? It is the devotion of the life to something lower than the highest. The first movement of backsliding may be accomplished without committing any sin which the age names vulgar. In the moment in which a man takes his eye from the highest and sets it upon something lower, be the distance apparently never so small, he has set himself upon the decline which ends in the desert and in the agony of rejection. Self-corruption is the first step in the backslider's pathway, the choice of something lower than the highest. What is the highest? The thing you have seen that is highest. That is the highest for you. To you it was the fair and radiant vision of the loveliness of the Christ in those days when you knew He was fairer than all the sons of men, more perfect in loveliness. You saw that, and you turned your eyes from it to something a little lower, to some ideal you built for yourself out of your own imagining. You corrupted yourself when you allowed the false ideal to intrude into the realm of your own thinking, your own desire, your own choosing. That was the beginning of the whole story. Following that is what always follows, the setting up of a graven image. You say, "Here your message breaks down. I have set up no graven image." Remember, the graven image is always the figure of that which lies behind it. When a man has corrupted himself, the issue is always that he thinks falsely of God. Man is so linked to deity in the very essential of his being that he will form his conception of God upon what he is in himself. There is a sense in which, try as he will, he cannot escape this. He is forevermore projecting his own personality into immensity, and calling that God. That is the whole history of idolatry through all the centuries. Man has flung the lines of his own personality into immensity, and called the result God. In proportion as his own personality has become corrupt and evil, he has projected corruption and evil into immensity, and made that his god. When a man corrupts himself, he corrupts the idea of God by putting something false in the place of God. In the old days it was a graven image, so that, as the prophet said, man took to himself a tree or a piece of stone, and carved out of it a semblance, a grotesque imitation of himself, and called it a god. So when a man has corrupted himself by accepting some ideal lower than the highest he immediately makes a god after the pattern of his own ideal, and descends a little lower on this course of backsliding, until swiftly and surely he descends to a course of evil which a little while ago he would have declared to have been impossible to himself. He does the evil thing who never intended to do it. He started by choosing the lower ideal. He proceeded, in the next place, to corrupt deity, by projecting into immensity the false lines of his own corrupt nature, and worshipping that. Suddenly the light that seemed to lure him fades, and the very ideal which he worshiped fails, and he finds himself doing things he never dreamed he could do.

I am trying, as God shall help me, to set the story of your backsliding in relationship to the spiritual and infinite. Shall I put that story in slightly different language? You corrupted yourself in that hour when you ceased your devotion to the God of your mother, and ceased to hand over your life wholly and absolutely to Christ. Your backsliding proceeded when you put into the place of Christ something else. It may have been your business. It may have been your very passion for knowledge. It may have been a far more mean and paltry thing than either of these, your pursuit of pleasure. You put something where Christ used to be. You who once took of your talents, and time, and strength, and poured them out in sacrificial service in the cause of Christ have been worshipping with all the soul, with all the heart, and with all the mind, wealth, fame, pleasure, I know not what. You know. There is your graven image. The result has been that this week, in the prosecution of your business, in the pursuit of your pleasure, you have done things which, if you thought I could proclaim them in your name from this pulpit, would cause you to blush and hurry from the building. You did not begin here. You began with the lowered ideal. You continued with the false deity, and the hour has come in which your hands in the sanctuary are unclean with deeds of evil, and you know your very heart has become polluted. That is the process of backsliding.

I pray you mark the issue of backsliding as Moses describes it here: "I call heaven and earth to witness... ye shall soon perish utterly from off the land." That is the first thing. "The Lord shall scatter you among the peoples, and ye shall be left few in number among the nations, whither the Lord shall lead you away." It follows, finally, that "ye shall serve gods... wood and stone." I think there is a sacred, and holy, and tender, and burning satire in those words of Moses. "You," he says, "men of highest vision and noblest passion and fair ideals, men who have seen, but have turned your back upon the vision, you shall serve gods of wood and stone, which see not, hear not, smell not, eat not." That is the issue of backsliding. First, lack of possession. In the case of these people, possession of the land; in your case, possession of everything which you ought to possess. The man who turns his back upon Jesus Christ to possess anything inevitably loses it. Take one of the most burning and tragic illustrations in the whole of history, that of Judas. Judas let Jesus Christ go for thirty pieces of silver. Did you ever notice that he never spent one of them? Presently I see him hurrying back to the men who had bargained with him, and in a great intensity of agony I hear him say, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood." And the cruel mockery of hell is here in the answer of the men who say, "What is that to us? See thou to it," as though they had said, "You made your bargain, abide by it." And he flung down the thirty pieces of silver. They bought with them the potter's field. He never spent one of them. You turn your back upon the God of the land, and you lose the land when you lose the God of the land. You turn your back upon the God Who made you and put you with all the capacities of your personality into this world, and you lose the world into which He put you. I know that is a thing which can be said only by experimental knowledge. I pray that God's Holy Spirit may carry conviction to some man here tonight. You cannot see the flowers if your back is toward God. You can botanize, but you cannot see the flowers. The man who has turned his back upon God has lost his land. He may own it under the laws of his country. He may even shoot over it for two weeks in the year, but he has lost it. The man who has turned his back upon the highest ideal has lost every real thing that comes within his reach. There will be many a weary march, many a hot and eager rush over the desert to reach the blossom, the bloom, and the fruit, but when the hand touches it, it is an apple of Sodom. The man who turns his back upon God loses also his influence and his power. May I say a thing that may sound strange and startling, and ask you to think of it. I can imagine that a man who has never been a Christian can exert some kind of pure moral influence upon his fellow men, but the man who has been a Christian and has turned his back upon God cannot do it any longer. The world holds in supreme contempt the man who has turned his back on Jesus. You have cut the nerve of your influence, backsliding soul. You have become lonely and scattered, without power to help in the world, because you have turned your back upon your God. There is nothing more tragic in the whole wide world than the man who once ran well but has been hindered, and has gone back to the weak and beggarly elements of the world. Oh, the tragedy of it! Think of it. You serve the god you have made for yourself. Worship and service are linked. Service is the expression of worship. Worship is the method of service. There is no escape from this. You are serving your God. You turned your back upon the living God, and set up a god of wood or stone, a god of mist, of vapor, of your own imagination, a cloud that rose like smoke from the fires of your own evil doing. You serve it. The tragedy of this worship, of this false service, is here. Your god cannot see, cannot hear. It is an insensate deity. There is no answer from the thing you worship when you cry to it in the time of fear. There is no sympathy, no heart in idolatry. The god of wood or stone gives no answer to the agonized cry of man, and all the false deities of your rationalism never help you in the tragedy of your pain, never soothe or solace you in the agony of your loneliness. You serve a god that cannot see, cannot hear, cannot taste, cannot smell.

There is nothing so tragic in all London as the backsliding soul. Moreover, if that tragedy is more terrible in one place than another it is in the case of the man who is a backslider, and is attempting to go on with work for God. The backslider in the pulpit is the supreme agony and tragedy in human life. The backslider in the Sabbath school class, in office in the church, in the church membership, the man or woman who keeps up the external semblance when there is no fire burning upon the inner altar, who compels himself or herself to the deadly drudgery of worship when there is no voice of the Spirit in the soul—that man is more to be pitied than the man who has cut himself adrift from the church and gone out into the darkness. There is far more agony in the heart backsliding that lacks the courage to be out and open than in the heart of the backslider that passes outside. I sometimes am afraid that our churches today are crowded with backsliders. I remember Thomas Cook saying to me years ago, "It is almost refreshing to have to go in the inquiry room with a man who has never professed belief on Jesus Christ before." Oh, the tragedy of the men and women who keep up the external semblance of Christianity with no virtue, no dynamic, no passion, no fire!

Is not this the story of backsliding? Did not the agony and tragedy begin when you took that ideal lower than the highest, when in your folly you made your own god because you thought the God of your childhood was unnecessary? Is it not true today that, like Samson of old in his agony, you grind for the amusement of mocking Philistines? The god you have made has no heart, no power, no pity.

My message tonight is to be found in these words, "If from thence." Mark this "if," and see the conditions. "If thou shalt seek." Seek what? "The Lord thy God." The search to which a man is called if he would return from the desert of his backsliding agony is not geographical; it is not circumstantial. He is not called upon to search for lost conditions. Moses did not say, "If you will seek with all your heart the land you have lost you shall find it." That would be a hopeless thing. He did not say, "If you will seek to set up again for yourselves the conditions from which you have departed you will be able to do it." That would not be true in human experience. What, then, is man to seek for? The Lord. Seek for your God. Get back to the conditions by getting back to God. If you are at a distance from Him tonight, at a distance from the light and song and glory of bygone days, do not attempt to regain the light and the

song and the glory. Do not waste your time dealing with effects which you cannot correct; deal with the cause. Seek the Lord your God. It was when you turned your back upon Him that you lost your land. It was when you turned your back upon Him that you lost your power. It was when you turned your back upon Him that you became the bond-slave of the things which have no heart, no tears, no pity, no sympathy. Therefore, turn not back to the land. Turn not back to the hope of new influence. Turn back to God. "If from thence," from the lonely and distant place of disappointed hope and agony of spirit. "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God." How am I to seek? "If," says the servant of God, repeating his "if," and emphasizing its true meaning—"If thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." That is, into this search after God, which is to be the way of restoration, man is to put his whole heart and soul. The man who has wandered far away is promised that he will find God, but the conditions are that he shall gather himself up for the business of finding, that he shall put into this search both passion and principle. My brother, are you waiting until some emotion created in a service or a mission, or by some preaching, shall surge upon you? You will wait long and hopelessly, and wait in vain. When you have done with your playing God is to be found. When you have done with your emotional fooling—and I am not proposing to alter that phrase, I am not proposing to take back either the adjective or the noun—when you have done with your emotional fooling, and will put the fiber of your being into the business of seeking God, He will break upon you in light and glory, but never till then. I am not here tonight to tell you that, having wandered away from God, the pathway back home is flowery, easy, or simple. I am not here to tell you that you must be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease. If you are a man you would not thank me for lying to you, even in the name of hope. You must seek God with all your heart and all your soul.

Let us pass to the promise. "Thou shalt find Him." Hear me, and God help me to speak these last few words as I ought to speak them. He is as near to you as He was in the old bright days. It is you who have changed, not He. You turned your back upon Him. He never turned His back upon you. It has often been pointed out that the Scriptures never speak about God being reconciled to men, but always of men being reconciled to God, and the method of the statement is of absolute importance. The moment in which you with all your heart and soul set yourself to seek, you will find God close at hand.

What is this that Moses promises? "Thou shalt find Him!" To find Him is everything. As Philip said long ago, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Find God, and you have found all that your heart wants. You are crying, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him." You are quite right. If you can find Him there is nothing else. If you seek Him with all your heart and soul you will find Him. Find Him where? Just where you are. Will He come with flaming and flashing glory? In all probability, no. Will He come with some new sense of His coming, making you thrill in every fiber of your being? In all probability, no. It is far more likely that He will come with a still small voice. But you will find Him if you seek Him. To find Him is to find all that has been lost by the process of backsliding. Backsliding began with the corruption of self. The finding of God is the redemption of self. I find myself when I lose myself. There was infinite meaning in the word of Jesus when He said, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life... shall find it." It is in that moment when I set myself to seek God as the first matter in my life, when I crucify myself with my affection and my desire, and will no longer ask whether this thing is for my pleasing, but will give myself to seeking God, that I find Him. To the man who finds the true God, God is enough. Dagon falls to be broken in pieces. The lost ideal and the lost joys are found. Instead of outward and external act of evil, the outward and external act of good becomes the habit of the life, but never until God is found.

The issues are changed. If you will find God you will find the flowers and the land, and the possibilities of your own being. All the gray sky will flash with the purple of morning if you will but find God. To find God is to find everything. Instead of serving insensate deities you will reign in life in fellowship with the living and eternal God.

Let me lay my final emphasis upon these words. "From thence." Are you away from God? And, of course, I take it for granted that every Christian in this house who is not away from God is in sympathy with me, and is praying for the man who is away from God. Are you away, just at the beginning of the backsliding process? Have you within the last few weeks or months turned your eyes from the highest to something a little lower, or are you far away from Him tonight, almost in despair? I want to crave the patience of this whole congregation while I speak to one man. I mean that very really. I do not know where he sits, but here is his letter. I do not know his name, and I do not ask to know it. I am perfectly willing to respect his expressed desire that I will not try to find him. Let me say to this man that this sermon was prepared before I got his letter. I say this for his comfort, for if ever God sent a message to one man by a messenger who did not know the man, it is so in this case. I am going to respect this man's confidence by not reading all his letter, but I am going to read a sentence or two, and I am sure he will let me do it, because, as he says in his closing words, there may be numbers here tonight like him. He is a young man, and tells me that he came to London thinking that religion was a prop for weak people, having his own ideal, which he attempted to follow. Then he tells the story of the loss of the land, the story of the loss of influence and power, the story of actual sin. Then he tells me how, not knowing why, he wandered into this building last Sunday morning, and heard me read about the risen Jesus, and he tells me how, in the light of that vision of Christ, he was conscious of his own degradation. Then he says: "I crept home, broken down, broken-hearted. This is my tale. Surrounded by people yet utterly alone. There is no one to whom I can go, though my heart is aching and my mind is sick. Can you give me one word of sympathy, one word of hope, or, better still, one word of guidance? I shall be present at your service tomorrow night and all I ask is that you will say something which I can recognize and seize upon for myself. I do not want to be sought out in any way. Let me remain, as

probably I am, the type of scores of unhappy men similarly situated." Can I give you one word of hope, my brother? Yes. If I could not, I would never preach again. What is my word of hope to you? This is it. "If from thence." God gave it to me before He gave me your letter. He knew you were going to write that letter. He led you here last Sunday morning, and brought you face to face with your lost Lord. He gave me that message for you: "If from thence." Just where you are tonight. How I know what it means, alone in the crowd! "If from thence ye shall seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." "Oh that I knew where I might find Him." Are you saying that?

Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet—Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

Man, I am your fellow man, a sinner like yourself. I cannot show you these things. See the vision of my text. Never mind my sermon. Seek Him, seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. Trample your pride beneath your feet. Crucify your prejudice. Put the whole business of your life into this minute. Trust Him, and for you also, or I could never preach again if it were not true, the day will break, and "He will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." He will restore to you the land. He will put about you the arms of His love, and lift upon you the light of His face, and make you His own. But you must seek Him with all your heart and with all your strength. My brother, I will not attempt to drag you from your place of hiding until you want to come, but though my hand never rest in yours and my eye never look into yours, right there the Christ Whose purity your sin has insulted is waiting to take you back to His heart. Let Him do it. May God bless and help you.

## 015 - Deuteronomy 4:29 - The Possibility of Restoration

If from thence ye shall seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. Deuteronomy 4:29

The Book of Deuteronomy is a singularly beautiful one. It is not a history. It is more than a code of morals. It consists of the last messages Moses gave to the people of his heart. It is a prophecy in the fullest sense of the word. It is a book full of light and full of fire. Here the words of law are indeed uttered and the importance of law insisted upon, but as we read it we are not so much conscious of the binding nature of law's requirements as of the driving power of love's great reason. Not that in this book the moral standards are lowered, but that there seem to be wonderful revelations of the secrets by which men may realize these standards.

Sometimes I have been inclined to call this book an evangel of the law. It is evidently that, as this man spoke for the last time to these people whom he had led through forty years his heart was full of tenderness. These are the words of a man who had come into close association with God Himself, a man who had stood in the awful light in which there is no darkness at all, but who in that light had found that infinite love which goes far beyond our dreams.

In this text we have a beautiful illustration of this consciousness of the man of law of the tenderness of the heart of God. He had been supposing the possibility of the backsliding of these people in spite of the revelation they had received. In the light of subsequent history that supposition proved to be prophecy, for, just as he suggested, they forgot God and wandered from Him, and the very calamities which he described fell on them. After describing in detail the process of such possible backsliding until the ultimate issue of it was revealed, suddenly, and apparently with a sense of relief and gladness, he turned from the fierce denunciations and said: "If from thence"—the uttermost and ultimate place of backsliding—"if from thence ye shall seek the Lord, ye shall find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

My message has to do with this possibility of backsliding, this possibility of turning from the higher to the lower, until, perchance, at last the lowest is reached. I am especially anxious to speak to those who may be addressed in the words of the great Apostle: "Ye did run well. What did hinder you?" Or perhaps to those of whom Christ would say in the language of His message to the church at Ephesus: "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love."

I want to speak to men and women who, in the consciousness of their own secret hearts, know full well that the running is not what it was, who have lost the joy of first love, the love of their espousals to the Lord Christ, and who are lamenting the loss. I am going to ask you, first of all, as you follow me reverently and patiently, as I am sure you will, to let, not what I say about my text, but the text itself, the living Word of God, appeal to you. I am going to ask you resolutely to submit yourselves to its light and its suggestion and its teaching, remembering your splendid isolation, that you are quite alone in the crowd, that no man, not even the preacher, can know what transpires between your soul and God. If you find that the running has slackened, or the love has grown cool, or that there is something of distance between you and the Master, I ask that you will listen to the word of hope. Or if, perchance, by the grace of God, you pass uncondemned from the process of examination, I appeal to you to pray for the man who may be sitting next to you who has fallen somewhat from the high estate. It may be that some man in this crowd is in the depths of degradation because he has turned his back on his Lord and Master. The message is especially for him.



The measure of backsliding matters nothing. The tragedy is not in the ultimate corruption, but in the first cooling of passion. It is the loss of first love that is fatal. Everything else is a necessary sequence, and sometimes the latter stages are almost more full of hope than the earlier ones. I pray that as we come to the consideration of so solemn and important a theme we may be kept by the brooding Spirit of God face to face with the unseen and the eternal things.

The text itself suggests the lines of our consideration. First, the process and issue of backsliding: "From thence," the word "thence" illuminated by the context; in the second place, the conditions on which there may be restoration: "If—if thou shalt seek the Lord thy God; if thou shalt search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul"; and, finally, the great word of the text, "Thou shalt find Him."

First, for a few moments let us quietly and earnestly consider this matter of backsliding. This ancient message contains a very living revelation of it, and although the local setting is not this setting, and the coloring of the details has faded from the canvas, the outline stands clear and plain, a revelation for all time of how men, in backsliding, turn away from high things and descend to low things. Hear these words again from the context: "When ye shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image in the form of anything, and shall do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord..." In them we have a revelation of the whole process by which men backslide. When they shall corrupt themselves, when they shall make a graven image, when they shall do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord...

The first step in backsliding is self-corruption; the second is always making a graven image; the ultimate is the habitual and persistent doing of evil in the sight of the Lord. The first is inward, and consequently unknown to friend or neighbor: the corruption of self. The second is more manifest, and yet not always clearly so to other people: making a graven image, the substitution of the false for the true in worship. The last is the stage in which the inner corruption of self becomes manifest, not only in the sight of God, but in the sight of men.

Self-corruption is devotion of life to any thing lower than the highest. What is the highest? That depends entirely on you. The highest to you is what you have seen to be the highest. I shall presuppose in this presence, and speaking to such a congregation as this, that you have seen the highest in the Lord Christ. That which appealed to you may not have been that which appealed to your neighbor, but you saw in Him something that spoke to the depths within your life; some vision of His loveliness broke on you, you came to some conception of Him that appealed to you, that lured you. You knew perfectly well when the vision came that it was a vision of something high and noble and pure and good. It may have been that in His severe and noble ethic, His strong ideal of life, His fine conception of morality, you saw the height and set your face toward it. That was the highest for you. It may have been that the highest to you was the revelation of His supreme and matchless tenderness, that greatness of heart wherewith He ever traveled forth across the desert to find the lost, that superb compassion that ever made Him willing to sit by the side of sinful men, despising the shame of the Pharisee, while in comradeship with the defiled He communicated first compassion and then purity.

There came a moment when you changed your life to something a little lower than the highest, under swift, sudden, subtle temptation, it may be. You lowered the ethical standard that He had revealed, and for the sake of some advantage offered to you on the plane of the material you denied His call to your soul. In that moment you began the corruption of your life.

It may be that you refused to answer the cry of His compassion to your soul. You did not break your bread with the hungry. You declined to bear the scorn of men while you served the cause of such as were defiled. Remember, this happens to preachers as well as to others! In that moment, when we descended from the highest and refused to answer His call, we began the corruption of self, we were already on a declined plane. In the moment in which a man lowers himself he begins spoiling himself. It is the first stage.

Backsliding always begins there. Take up your newspaper, and you read of some man who held high position in the Christian Church, who is now in the depths. He did not begin with that outward act. There was first a hidden refusal to answer the call of the highest. Almost unknown, perchance, to himself at the moment, he began the descent.

So backsliding begins, begins over and over again in the midst of the Holiness Convention, at the center of a Bible Conference, because there the call comes to the highest; and if we refuse to obey we corrupt ourselves.

What is the next step? Someone will say that my figure of speech will now break down. Men do not now make graven images. I beseech you not to take refuge in subterfuges of that kind. A graven image is a thing that a man creates for himself when he has lost close fellowship with the one true and only God. All idolatry is the revelation of man's capacity for God. In these days men are not making to themselves graven images, as did these men of the olden time; but the moment a man turns from allegiance to God as revealed in Christ he puts something else in the place of God. It may be knowledge, it may be wealth, it may be that which is infinitely more mean and trivial, pleasure; but something steps in so insidiously that a man hardly knows, and it takes the place of God.

How may I know that anything has taken the place of God in my life? To whatever I am devoting my real thinking, my real energy.

Whatever is the supreme and most important thing in my life, that is God to me. I may sing the songs of the sanctuary, the liturgy of the Church may still pass my lips, I may recite with intellectual conviction the creeds; but the God I worship is that to which I am giving the force and energy of my life. Ere a man knows it, when he has turned, be it ever so little, from the highest, he puts something else in the place of that from which he has turned and makes a god to suit the level on which he chooses to live.

Presently—mark the tragedy of it—he will turn even from that to something a little lower, and so, slowly but surely, corrupt the life, until the last step of backsliding is the habitually doing evil things in the sight of men. Then the man laughs at faith, sneers at the very things of religion which once were the supreme things, and mocks at high ideals. This is the ultimate in corruption; this is the stage of definite and open and avowed sin.

And what is the issue of it all? The issue of it all is clearly stated: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that ye shall utterly perish from off the land where-unto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter you among the peoples, and ye shall be left few in number among the nations. Ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell."

These are the issues of backsliding; loss of possession, loss of power and influence, servitude which is in itself degradation.

When a man loses fellowship with God he loses power to possess anything that God gives him. I suppose the most flaming illustration of the thing in all the Bible is the story of Judas, the story of Judas in those last and awful hours. He turned from the highest, and he sold the Highest for thirty pieces of silver. There was no purchasing power in that silver. Judas had it, but he never possessed it, he never changed a single coin. Through the centuries I hear the clamor and the clangor of the silver flung on the halls of the sacred place, teaching this awful lesson, that the money a man gets when he sells the highest will never purchase him anything.

Do not lose this. You own broad acres. You cannot possess them without God. Oh, you may shoot over them two weeks in the year, but you do not possess them! I will come to something far simpler. You cannot possess a flower if you have turned your back on God. You can botanize, but you have no dealing with the flowers if you are away from the God of the flowers. To turn your back on God, Who gives you land, is to lose that land; and to fail to have dealings with God Who has revealed Himself to you and lured you to the highest is to lose the very earth for the possession of which you have sacrificed the highest and the noblest. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that the very things into which you have come, all of them by the goodness of God, you cannot possess if you turn your back on the highest, which, at least, you saw, and toward which you set your affection.

Moses went on to tell the people that they would be scattered through the nations, be held in contempt by the world. I am one of those who never feel that they have any right to speak disrespectfully of the Jew. I believe the Jew is still God's man. But I cannot escape from this tremendous truth, and I had better express it in the language of one of the prophets, Jeremiah, who said: "Refuse silver shall men call them, because Jehovah hath rejected them." Never forget this: deeper than the Nonconformist conscience, deeper than the Christian conscience, is a human conscience which is in perfect accord with God, Who is the unwarped Conscience of the universe. When a man turns his back on God men despise him. The most worldly man holds in supreme contempt the Christian man who once set his face toward the highest and then turned back to the beggarly elements in which the worldly man is always living. Do you not know that there is something profound and searching in the thing the man of the world says to Christian men in surprise: "I did not expect to see you here"? When a man turns from God he loses not only his power of possession, but also his influence. He is despised, held in contempt.

The last descriptive word concerning the issue is the most terrible. The people of Jehovah, the people of the eternities, the people of vision, the people delivered by the high hand and outstretched arm of God, the people who came through the sea, and have been fed in the wilderness, and in all material things have had traffic with the spiritual; the people whom God has been teaching that man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, they are to serve gods without eyes, or ears, or hands, or smell, insensate deities, gods having no answer in the hour when the heart is wrung with anguish and cries out for succor; gods, the supreme helplessness of whom is revealed in one prophetic word: "There is no breath in them."

If we turn from the high to the low, then also will come the hour when we shall serve as slaves the god to whom we have given ourselves; and when our hearts are lonely and we cry for help, there will be no answer. No eye will pity, no ear will hear; we shall stretch out lame hands, and our gods will not be able to put underneath us the everlasting arms. It is not when the sun is shining that humanity becomes most conscious of itself. It is out of the bruising of life that men utter their supreme cries. The last stage of turning from God is the appalling loneliness of the darkling void in which God is not, and from which no answer comes back to the soul in its agony. Is there someone listening to me in that ultimate place of loneliness? I beseech you to remember that you are not alone. "Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet." He and you meet in the depths! Listen! "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him." That is the message of the text.

On what conditions? Notice most carefully these words. The search is not geographical, it is not circumstantial. A man is to seek for

God, and not for the lost condition. Moses did not say to these people, If in that day of ultimate backsliding you shall seek for the land you will find it. Nay, verily! Nor, If ye seek for the lost influence you will recover it. He said, If ye seek for God you will find Him. The search must be for God. Let us solemnly consider this. If, indeed, you have descended from the heights and given yourself to the lower things, and have reached the ultimate, or if you are on the way to the ultimate, it is useless to making up your mind that you are going back to the heights. You won't do it that way. It is useless to determine that you will get back your lost influence. You will never get it that way. What, then, is the soul to do? Search for God, turn back again to God.

Moses repeated his "if" in order that there might be no misunderstanding of his meaning. He not only said, "If thou shalt seek for Him"; he added, "If thou search with all thy heart, and with all thy soul."

I am not going to suggest that if you are at a distance from God the pathway back is necessarily an easy one. I am going rather to say to you: In the Name of God and your own humanity, be done with your fooling, and put blood and passion into the business of getting back. With all your heart, and with all your soul, means bringing resolutely yourself together in your endeavor to seek after God. That is the condition of getting back. It is of no use to sigh for the lost heights, it is of no use to resolve that you will so live as to win back the lost influence and the lost power. Never, never, never! You had better become for a little while—do not misunderstand me when I say it—you had better become for a little while careless about the heights, you had better come down into an appalling loneliness in which you say, O God, if there never be a height again for me, if there never again be influence for me, let me find Thee, let me get into real, living, vital, first-hand relationship with Thyself. That is the true attitude of a seeking soul.

Now, let it be granted that somewhere in this crowd that cry has gone up to God. No human ear has heard it. No human eye has been keen enough to detect a soul's turning back to God; but God has seen it. Now, then, I may come to the last word of the text, "Thou shalt find Him." This is certain, because it is you who changed, and not He; it is you who wandered, and not He; it is you who turned your back on Him, and not He His back on you. The Bible never speaks of God being reconciled to man; it speaks of man being reconciled to God. Oh, if you are going into dialectics, you can prove that one involves the other; but I am going to stand by the language of Scripture, for there is supreme value in it. I affirm to you, and I say it for the comfort of my soul—for I also have known backsliding—God never turned His face from man. Thou shalt find him. Where? Right there, where you are. Oh, but I am out of the land, I am in a foreign country, I am far away from the center of things! Nay, for thou art not far away from God, and He is the center of all things. But I am in the desert! And God is in the desert, and when your face turns back to Him resolutely, He will make the desert blossom as the rose. I have wandered far from the fountain of living waters, and I am on the sandy wastes, dying of thirst! God is there, and in the desert He shall make the springs of water to flow. He has never turned His back on you. I wish I could reach that man to-night who feels he is far off, and that nobody cares, and that even the Christian Church is prepared to give him another push downward in order to be rid of him. Man, God is with you where you are. Turn thy face toward His face, and He will lift on you the light of His countenance!

Thou shalt find Him, and to find God is to find everything. Suppose, for the sake of argument—I shall not end there—but suppose, for the sake of argument, you never win back your influence, you never reach the old heights of experience and ecstatic joy, to have found Him is to find everything. Ah, but that was only a supposition. To find Him is to find all in another sense. Go back over the process of your backsliding. How did it begin? You corrupted yourself. To find Him is to find yourself redeemed in all the full, vital sense of the word; to find Him is to find the One Who heals the life. Old Jacob coming back from Jabbok said a great thing: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is healed"—in our modern sense of the word, infinitely more than "preserved." "Preserved," in our modern sense, suggests to us that Jacob meant, Behold the wonder! I have seen God, and I have not been destroyed! It means infinitely more. I have seen Him, and I am healed. When he finds God, the man who has corrupted himself knows that he is redeemed.

To find God is to be able to use the language of Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols?" What, indeed, have I to do any more with idols after I have found God? Dagon falls and is broken into a thousand fragments when the soul has found God.

Evil ceases to be dominant in the life, the outward habits and activities of evil end; and goodness becomes dominant. There will yet be conflict. That will never end until we pass into the life that lies beyond. But the victorious element will be goodness, and the fall and blunder by the way will be the accident and not the habit of the life. To find God is to find not merely the ideal goodness, but the dynamic for goodness. The paralyzed, powerless, beaten soul that has been for years the sport of lusts and passions and evil things will be able to say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

The issues of backsliding also will be changed. The land will be repossessed. To find God is to find the flowers, and to find the birds; to find the things which you thought were yours, but from which you were excluded by sin.

My mind travels back over forty years. I am a boy again in my father's garden. There comes into that garden a young man who has been brought to Christ in some services that my father has been conducting. I was only a boy. In that garden that young man walked round with me, and his arm was round me, and suddenly he stooped—I see him now—to pluck a nasturtium leaf. He showed it to me, and said, Look at it, look at it! I looked at it. He said, Is it not wonderful? Look at the glory of it. And to think I have lived thirty

years and never saw one till recently. I have never forgotten that. I know now what he meant. To get back to God is to get the key of everything, to enter into the land and to possess.

It is also to find a restoration of power and influence. You need not trouble about the Pharisee who will not receive you. Live your life with God and your influence is going to tell.

And, yet again, instead of being the bond slave of gods having no eyes or ears or hands or feet, insensate deities, the bond slave of dead things, after restoration to God you will find yourself reigning in life, realizing all the meaning that was in the heart of God when He gave you your first breath and your original being.

Are you away from God? Was it only yesterday that you turned from the highest? Oh, back to Him, back to Him! You traveled further than you knew when you said, "No," to the high and the noble thing. Back to Him to-night! Where are you? In the far country? You have lost your reputation, nobody really wants you? Back to God, back to Him now! See Him in the face of Jesus, find Him by answering the call that comes to you when the very Name of Christ is named. Answer Him! After Him! And do it now! Put into the business all your heart and all your soul. Gather yourself up, and now, with all the passion and principle of your life, in the silence, in the quietness, without sign or signal, without human eyes or ear detecting, resolutely break with the past and turn your face to God. In the sight of heaven and of hell act, and act now.

"Thou shalt find Him." Will He come in a flaming glory? Oh, perchance not. Will He come with some trumpet tone that I cannot mistake, a supernatural voice? Almost assuredly no. How, then, shall I find Him? Perhaps your first consciousness of nearness will be the new passion for the high, reborn within you, and the first thrill of power by which you begin to move on toward Him. It may be that your first consciousness of the answer of God will be the sense that you are not alone in the darkness.

So we will end, not with words of exposition, but with this great word of Holy Scripture—and let the "thence" apply to the place where we are if we are at any distance from God: "If from thence ye shall seek the Lord, thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

## 016 - Deuteronomy 8:2 - Thou Shalt Remember

And thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God hath led thee. Deuteronomy 8:2

When these words were uttered, Israel was at the parting of the ways. A change was imminent, both of leaders and of circumstances. Moses well knew that very soon he would lay down the burden which he had borne so long and so bravely, and that another would be commissioned to lead the people. He knew also that they would very soon change the circumstances of the wilderness for those of the land flowing with milk and honey.

In this book of Deuteronomy we have his final charges to the people, charges resulting from experience and expectation. Standing among the people whom he loved so well; with whom he had so patiently borne; with whom he had been so righteously angry; he looked back over the years, and on into all that he knew lay before them, because God "made known His ways unto Moses"; and spoke to them out of the fulness of his heart.

In reading these closing messages of the great leader, one of the most impressive notes is that of his anxiety that the people should remember. He recognized the influence of memory. He knew perfectly well that, properly stored, it is a perpetual inspiration to present endeavour; and consequently one of the great forces that makes the future. He also recognized the subservience of memory to will. He knew that it can be trained in certain directions, and to the retention of certain definite facts. Consequently, he was careful to charge his people with that which they were to remember.

Evidently, there is not only the historic setting, and the philosophic basis, but the religious purpose of this text. Moses was desirous of directing the memory of the people to supreme matters, urging them to look back, but to look back from the right standpoint, and to see things in the right relationship; to see, moreover, the real things, and the abiding things; the things therefore worth remembering.

The word here translated "remember" means quite literally to mark. "Thou shalt mark all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee." The pictorial suggestiveness of it is that of the chart, the map, or the way, on which certain facts were to be marked, and thus fixed upon the memory.

The true backward look is that which sets the past in relation to God; that which lays to heart the lessons God has intended to teach by the experiences of the past; and is that which always has the future in mind. Let us attempt thus to remember all the way along which the Lord our God has led us.

First, then, let us remember the past in its relation to God.

When Moses did this, he was careful to note three things about it. They were: to remember God's deliverance, that He brought them out of Egypt; God's leading, that He led them through the great and terrible wilderness; God's resources, which were placed at their disposal.

These people had been brought out of Egypt and its bondage to God, and to that freedom which was perfectly conditioned within government and within law. This was fundamental, and this they were charged never to forget. Take the Old Testament and read right through it, listening to its teachings; and whether you are reading its devotional literature, or that which is distinctly prophetic in the sense of the forthtelling of the Divine will, you will discover how constantly these prophets, seers, and psalmists, took the people back to Egypt, and the fact of their deliverance therefrom. That was absolutely fundamental.

The history of this people began when they were brought out of Egypt.

And so Moses, charging them to remember, put that as the first fact, "the Lord thy God... brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." They were a special people on the ground of deliverance, and they were to place all the past, the immediate past, the past forty years, in relation to that beginning of deliverance when God broke the power of the oppressor, and led them out into the place where it was possible for them to live the life of faith, the life of direct and immediate obedience to Himself.

In all our backward looking, we are to remember that the life of faith begins in that hour in which He looses us from our sins, and makes it possible for us to obey His Kingship and His government. When we look back, we must put everything in relation to that initial deliverance by which God freed us from sin and its bondage, and brought us into relationship with Himself. That is what we fail to do very often. We look at the incidents of our life, and the happenings of the days, and we fail to set them in relation to that fundamental fact of our redemption by blood, and our relationship to Christ upon the basis of sin forgiven and peace with heaven.

If the Old Testament writers constantly referred the people to their coming out from Egypt, the New Testament writers as constantly refer us to redemption, and to our oneness with Christ by the mystery of His Cross. I can only quote the old and familiar illustrations, and surely no other are needed. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church." "Exhort servants to be in subjection to their own masters... that they may adorn the doctrine of God, our Saviour"; that they may in the obedience of their everyday life show that fundamental fact of their relationship to Jesus Christ.

So we are to remember back far enough, and by so doing, begin to realize the fact that all the details of life are related in the purpose and economy of God to that first deliverance by which He brought us to Himself by putting away our sins.

How often we forget that first thing. God never forgets it; and no day dawns but that the affairs of home, and the affairs of the office, and the affairs of business are, in His economy, being overruled to the working out into perfection that fundamental relationship to Himself that commenced in the hour when He loosed us from our sins, and brought us into relationship with Himself.

Second, he charged them to remember all the way along which God had led them. There is nothing more beautiful in the book of Deuteronomy than the different passages in which Moses insisted upon that guidance of God. "God... went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in." I can never read that without feeling how wonderful a declaration it is. I see that moving camp in the wilderness, for forty years hither and thither, backward and forward; and the movement seems such a haphazard business. It was not so. God always went before them, and chose the place of their camping; and when the sun went westering, and the cloud halted, and they paused and erected their tents, it was always on ground which God had chosen. Moreover, He accompanied them upon the march. They came to no rough and rugged desert but that He was there too. They came to no long stretch of level country which wearied them, but that He was with them. They came to no hour of difficulty and perplexity but that He was there; and He granted them the shining of the fiery pillar at night, and the mysterious mist of the cloud by day, as signs and symbols of His abiding presence.

Through all the way, there was movement toward the purpose that He might "do thee good at thy latter end." They had come forty years before to the same margin of the land, and the book of Numbers is the story of retrogression, and backward marches. Yes, but that is not all the story. God led them back that they might go forward. He led them circuitously that they might go straight. He led them through the terrible wilderness that they might come to the ultimate triumph.

Let us look back. Think of any day you please, the darkest or the brightest, the saddest or the gladdest, and whether it be shadow or sunshine, the rough or the smooth pathway, these same things are true. First, in every day we walked in works which He had before ordained that we should walk. And we found grace to help in every time of need. All things have been working together for good to those who love Him. Delay has been in order to speed. Denial has often been His choicest gift. Or, to borrow that quaint and yet true statement with which you are all familiar, the disappointment over and over again has proved to be His appointment. Look back over the way, and see if these things be not so. If for the moment there may be some who are in the midst of darkness and difficulty, and cannot see the ultimate, then hear the testimony of those who have passed through long and weary marches, and they will tell you

that they would not have missed Marah with its bitterness for all they possessed; that they would not have missed if they could the darkest day, because they have now come to see how God led them that way, and that it was a way of purpose which was beneficent, and out of the darkness has come the light.

Look once again. Moses reminded these people that they had been supplied with necessities. I like the fine discrimination of his method. What are the things he told them that God had given them? Raiment, and bread, and water. They had received a great deal more than these. But what he laid upon their memory was the fact that things absolutely necessary for life God had been providing for them. For forty years, in spite of all their murmuring and unbelief, and difficulty and suffering, there had never been a day when they had lacked necessary things.

May we not look back and say the same. What good things have we lacked? A great many things we have desired that we have not had; but did we need them? There may have been hours in which we felt sure that the supply would fail; but did it fail? There may have been days when we felt perfectly sure that the cause was lost and hopeless, and there could come no succour, not even the bare necessities of the occasion, but did things turn out so? If this congregation could but become vocal with its own experiences, what tales we should hear of wonderful deliverances, of hours out of which we have been brought, in which, as we entered them, it seemed as though we must die; of days when it seemed as though the last prop had been knocked from under us, and all chance of our accomplishing the desire of our heart had gone for very lack of strength. But we are here this morning, remembering the way along which the Lord our God has led us.

And yet there is, I think, a deeper note in the text and in the injunction. Moses attempted to teach these people the necessity for learning the lessons God had to teach them. And these lessons are threefold. Three things he distinctly tells us lay in the purpose of God, as He delivered and led His people, and supplied their need.

The first is this, "That He might humble thee"; and the second is, "That He might... prove thee, to know what was in thine heart"; and the third is, "That He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every thing that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

That He should humble us. How we shrink from that word. Answer my inquiry in your own heart, quite honestly. Do you ever read the passage without feeling some little resentment at the word? "The Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble thee." Do we not feel a little at war with the idea that the purpose of God is to humble us? And yet, my brethren, if we do, it is because we are interpreting the meaning of the word and suggestion by what we know of man's method for humbling other men. Let us interpret the word by the whole economy of God. I ask you to remember this fact, that pride is the most ghastly of all human failures. It demonstrates ignorance. It is not necessary that I stay to illustrate it. You know perfectly well that among your own acquaintances the proud man is an ignorant man, and pride foreshadows ruin. The old Book is still true,

Pride goeth before destruction,  
And a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pride is hated alike by God and man. Then, let us read once again. "He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna." God's purpose is to produce the character which is the opposite of pride. All God's methods tend toward humbling. His deliverance only comes to a man in extremis. It is when the strong and self-contained swimmer is about to sink for the third time that the mightier swimmer has the chance to save him. God only begins His great deliverance when a man says, I can do nothing of myself. "He humbled thee." God's leading of His people is always leading through the pathless wilderness. God's supplies for His people always come out of the unknown. We say that today this is not so. Think again. That story of water out of a flint, and manna raining upon people is of yesterday. Today we know where we get our supplies from. Are we quite sure? Oh this age that thinks upon the surface of things. Get back behind your loaf of bread, and back behind your flour, and you have golden harvest. Where did that come from? Oh, we ploughed and sowed. And then what happened? There is always the touch of God if you will wait long enough to feel it. God is forevermore bringing to His people supplies out of the unknown. If a man is to be delivered, he will be delivered when he feels he cannot help himself. If a man is to be led, he must be flung into the wilderness where there is neither map nor guide post. If a man is to depend on God, and lose his arrogance and his pride, he must receive his supplies from One Who brings them from the unknown resources.

Then remember the beauty of humility. Humility always veils its face and worships. Humility makes friendship. Oh, you can have acquaintances who are not characterized by humility, but that thing in your nearest and dearest friend that makes him or her your friend is humility. Humility serves forevermore. God has been leading you through the wilderness to humble you; not to break your spirit; not to make slaves of you; but to free your character from all the things that He hates, at the root of which is pride; and to make you meek and humble and lovable. That is the first lesson, and God is still doing that same thing; and if we can only see these things in their larger outlook, we shall look back and thank Him for every day when we were at the end of self and compelled to depend upon Him.

The second lesson is that God delivers, and leads, and supplies in order that he may prove. This does not at all mean that God needs to find out what is in us; but that He wants us to find out what we are in ourselves. Therein is revealed a perpetual method of God. God brings us into circumstances which will reveal the hidden facts of our nature to ourselves. Those who know most of the Divine government, will know what I am trying to say. There are incipient forces of evil in our lives. We do not know that they are there, but God knows that they are there. Rebellion lurks in the nature even while I sing the song of loyalty on a sunshiny day. God will put me into a day with no sunshine, and bring the rebellion out, that I may know it. Blasphemy may lie in the depths of my nature, even while I offer praise. Then God will lead me by some pathway where that inner thing shall come out to the light. Cowardice may be in my heart even while I sing, "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the Cross." Then, before many days have gone, I shall be in a place where that cowardice will be manifested. Hatred may be in my spirit while I preach on "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Then He will place me in some circumstance that will manifest it. Dishonesty, impurity, greed; all these may be hidden beneath the surface. Then He will lead me into places where they will be revealed.

If that were all I had to say, it would be too awful a thing to say. But, there is something else to say, and I hasten to it.

The third lesson is that we may "know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every thing that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." "That" is a great word quoted by Jesus in the wilderness, a word constantly spoiled by imperfect interpretation. Do not be alarmed if I say that it does not refer to the Bible only. It includes the Bible, but it is something greater, profounder than the Bible. Let us take the illustration. These people were in the wilderness where there was no bread. How was He going to feed them? They knew how to get bread. They had seen the process in Egypt. They had gone out and flung their corn upon the land when the Nile had left its rich deposit. So they had gotten their bread. But there was no Nile running through the wilderness. They could not fling seed corn there. Or, if these men knew something of the methods of the land to which they were going; there was no yoke and no plough in the desert. God wanted them to know that they never got bread from the Nile, and as the result of their own toil. They obtained it from Him. "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Let a man live in the Divine ordinance, in the Divine government, in the Divine will, and the desert will blossom as the rose, and out of the nothing will come: the everything, and out of the is not will come the is.

Thus, He not only put His people into circumstances to develop their own inner evil and bring it to the light, but into circumstances to bring these men into such knowledge of Himself as would drive them to Him, that He might correct the evil, and put it away, and redeem them, and perfect them.

We have often said that man's extremity is God's opportunity. But I would like to put that in another way, for the purpose of this meditation, a more striking way. Man's extremity is man's opportunity for finding himself, and finding his God, and so finding life. I charge you remember, and if you will do so solemnly, you will come, I am perfectly sure, to agreement with me when I say that the richest hours of the past were the hours of extremity, and the hours of darkness, the hours when we were at the end of ourselves; the hours when we discovered something in us that appalled us, because these were the hours when God came into visibility. No bread, but it rained from heaven. No water, but out of the flinty rock it gushed. No way in the dreary wilderness, but He chose the places where we pitched our tents.

Then God help me, I will put my head on the pillow, and go to sleep. He is always appearing in the hour of man's extremity. I remember the day of desolation, darkness, despair; I was done, I was beaten, I was at the end of everything; and then there came a light, and a glory, and a supply, and a deliverance, and God. Those are the great days in life. It is by these things that men live, not by rose gardens, and not by the hills and valleys to which they are going. There is danger in them, and that is what Moses is going to tell them.

Let us come briefly to the last of these things. The true backward look is the look that looks on. The forward look to these people was one of hope. Better times were coming, better circumstances were coming. They were coming to a garden, and Moses is a poet of no mean order, as he describes the wonderful garden, "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing forth into valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of oil olives and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness." A good time coming? No. "Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God." Oh there is great suggestiveness in this, heart of mine, listen to it. There is graver peril in prosperity than in adversity. The peril of self-satisfaction, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth." The peril of self-righteousness. Lest you shall say in the land, "God has put us into the land because we are such good people." No! Neither by the might of your hand, neither by the goodness of your heart are you the people of privilege.

"Beware." It is when the sun shines that most souls are shipwrecked. In the day of storm we are driven to God and find Him. In the day of calm we trust in ourselves, and lose God. Therefore, remember, if the future has rosy tints upon it, beware. Now do not let anyone misunderstand me. If we remember God we may go into the sunshine, and succeed; and get out of the sunshine its honey and its sweetness and its strength. But, because of the grave peril of prosperity, it is well to remember, and so to remember as to put all the immediate past into relation with the fundamental deliverance; to remember in such a way as to discover the goings of God in

all the past, leading, and guiding, and choosing, and directing, and making us hungry as well as making us full; and to remember the past with the eye upon the future.

So, to remember is first of all to repent. I, this day, do remember my sins. Well, do not shirk the business. Look at the devilish thing, look it in the face. Do not let the devil persuade you it did not matter very much. Oh, it was damnable, it hurt God, it harmed your brother! Look your sin in the face until your heart is broken! It is out of such remembrance that deliverance comes.

But to remember is not only to repent, it is to believe.

His love in time past  
Forbids me to think  
He'll leave me at last  
In trouble to sink.

And I sing the song of deliverance for today and tomorrow whenever I remember.

Therefore, so to remember is to praise, to hope, and to dare.

So let the backward look be one that in its final value is an onward look. Then God will lead us into the land, and He is able to keep us there as well as in the wilderness.

## 017 - Deuteronomy 29:29 - Secret and Revealed Things

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. Deuteronomy 29:29

These words contain one of the most important principles for the conditioning of all life, and one which constitutes a final anchorage for faith in the midst of perplexities and problems and difficulties which constantly confront the children of faith.

Man naturally resents the unknowable, and one of the chief characteristics of human history has been that of man's determination to unlock mystery, and fathom secrets. This is not wrong. It is right. I do not use the word "natural" in the sense in which we so often use it theologically, as describing the condition of fallen nature, but as proper to essential human nature. Quite apart from the fact of sin, it is a part of human nature as God created it that man everywhere rebels against mystery, and from childhood to the grave in every successive century sets himself to the business of attempting to unlock closed doors and to fathom hidden things. As soon as your child has begun to speak so that anyone can understand, he is making use of these words, I venture to say, almost more often than any other: Why? How? What? In the economy of God every child comes into the world a note of perpetual interrogation. Fathers and mothers, I charge you most solemnly never say to your child, "Don't bother me." You are there to be bothered, and the whole system of Divine education is based upon the curiosity of a little child and answering its questions. I must not follow that line, interesting as it is. But it serves as an illustration at this point. The child is knocking at the closed door, is attempting to fathom the secret. Curiosity is part and parcel of human nature, and apart from it the world would have made no discoveries, would have made no advancement. It is a natural principle in all human nature, and is God-implanted.

This rebellion against the unknowable on the part of man being, within certain bounds, perfectly correct, a part of a Divine purpose, where are the bounds and the limitations to be set? The bounds and the limits are fixed by man's ability to unlock doors and fathom secrets. Anything that a man can discover he has a right to discover, and everything that man discovers is in the last analysis God's revelation to him as he persistently knocks and seeks and works. Every human discovery is a Divine revelation also. When men discovered the uses of electricity they did not create electricity; at the fit time in human history God answered their persistent and patient search by revealing the great secret. The limits are set at the point where man can go no farther, and there are such limits. Every man who has given himself to thought and investigation along any line possible to the human mind has discovered a point of limitation.

A mistake man has made too often, and too constantly, and is making still, when he reaches the limit, is that of rebelling against the mystery that lies beyond it; or the more vital and deadly mistake of denying that there is anything beyond that which he is able to investigate and discover. It is against that twofold danger of man, in his asking of questions and making investigation, that man needs to guard. The words of this wonderful declaration of the Old Testament are fundamental and all-comprehensive. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." Shall we first of all, then, examine the principle as declared, and, in the second place, make some illustrative application thereof which I trust and pray may be for the strengthening of our faith. Take out the two descriptive phrases of the text and look at them carefully, "The secret things," "The things that are revealed." They are not named in the order of our



consciousness. We begin with the revealed thing, and discover that there lies behind it the secret thing. The writer here is beginning from the origin, from the cause, and working out to the effect. "The secret thing," "The revealed thing." For the purposes of following his argument we will reverse the order of consideration, and dwell first upon that which is second but which is first in our consciousness, "revealed things."

The Hebrew word here literally translated means things that are denuded, things that are made visible, things that can be seen, things that can be touched and felt, and appreciated by the senses, denuded things. If you keep that in mind for a moment you will see its bearing on that which follows.

Now I need not stay to argue that there are material things, which are obvious. There are mental things we are equally sure of. Poetry, music, philosophy are such. Moral things also we know perfectly well. There are revealed things in the moral and mental and material realms.

Then "secret things." That phrase is exactly the opposite of the other. These words might be translated clothed things, hidden things, things which are, but before which a covering is, so that we cannot see them, or touch them, or handle them, or weigh them. There is no doubt of their existence; but they are hidden. They exist, using the word in its deepest sense, but they are hidden, secret things.

Now let us take the declaration in the order in which it is made here. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God." The thing secret to you is not secret to God. The thing that is so clothed that I cannot see it is "naked and open to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do." The revealed thing in the mental realm is the poem or the song, the philosophy or the book. The hidden thing is the process of thought that produces it. I have the poem, the song, the book; but listen to the old Psalmist, "Thou understandest my thought afar off," which does not mean that God is far away and understands my thought at that distant place. God is not far away; for "in Him we live and move and have our being." I cannot lift my hand save in God's energy. I may prostitute God's energy to sin; but I am atmosphered, homed, centred in God, and I cannot escape from Him. What, then, does the Psalmist mean? "Thou understandest my thought afar off," before it is a thought formed in my mind or expressed in my words. Before it becomes a poem or a philosophy, "Thou understandest my thought afar off." He knows the mystery of its genesis and watches the process of its exodus. Thou understandest thought in the making. The revealed thing is the book, the poem, the song. The hidden thing is the working of the mystery of the mind. The book, the poem, the song are mine. The mystery of the mental working is God's. The secret things are known to God. That is the fundamental rock. What an anchorage for faith when you and I once fasten on it for life! The problem that confronts me, and baffles me, does not baffle Him. The mystery that I am attempting to solve, and cannot yet, He knows. The secret things belong unto Him. This confidence keeps the heart firm and steady in the midst of tumult. Some of our fathers used to sing a hymn. One line comes to me,

Calm on tumult's wheel I sit.

The man who wrote that believed in God. Nobody else could write a line like that. The man who sits calm on tumult's wheel is the man who has the consciousness that over the tumult, around the tumult, knowing it, is the God of infinite peace. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God."

But now, I pray you, take the next declaration in order: "The revealed things belong unto us." The revealed things and the secret things are closely united. Every revealed thing is united to some secret thing that is hidden. The revealed things are one with secret and hidden forces, and the revealed things express so much of the hidden forces as we are able to know at the time. You may lay your hand where you will upon the commonplaces of life, and I tell you the commonplace thing you touch and see is but the outward and sacramental seal of something that will never be commonplace which you cannot touch and see. Christian Scientists are telling us that there is no matter: that everything is mind, that matter is but an expression of mind. And there is an element of truth in it. The absurdity of it I need not argue before an intelligent audience. Christian Science takes hold only where people have nothing else to do. It does not appeal to the average hard-headed Englishman. He has no room for it. Christian Science is characterized by ignorance of science and deficiency of Christianity; but it has elements of truth as has every heresy. When a Christian Scientist tells me that matter is not, it is all mind, what I say to him is this: No, this book is real matter, so are the signs of the music and the letters of the songs, but there is mind behind. This is dust and ashes until mind collects it, and binds, and prints upon it the music. Here is a revealed thing, and a secret thing, and every revealed thing is united to a secret thing. The greater is not the revealed thing but the secret thing that lies behind it.

Have you ever noticed that in our Lord's teaching He made use of figures and symbols, but never hinted that the figure was the fact. He always gives us to understand that, after all, the things seen are only symbols of something else. Let me give you an illustration. He says, "I am the true Vine." Now, we make a mistake if we say that Jesus borrowed the figure of the vine to teach us what He is. The deeper truth is this. God planted the vine in the world and let it grow through the centuries on the pattern of the infinite Christ. Man says, God has taken hold of my name, Father; He has borrowed the human name of Father in order that I may learn how loving He is. Nothing of the kind. God has lent you His name of Father that you may know how loving you ought to be. Do not let us begin

at the wrong end of things. Do not let us treat these things as though when we say bread we had said the real thing. Jesus said, "Bread that perisheth; I am the Bread of life." Every loaf of bread is a sacramental symbol. Learn this great truth, and every trailing vine of glory and beauty of vintage is an unveiling of the Son of God and His Church. You tell me the Cross is wooden. I tell you it is spiritual. You bring me to a Roman gibbet, and some of you have the rough, bloody, brutal Cross made out of gold to wear as an ornament—from which thing may God deliver us everywhere—and you say, This is the Cross of Salvation. No, no; it is not that. What is it? Sin lying across the heart of God and wounding Him. That is the Cross. The revealed Roman gibbet of nineteen hundred years ago is something more than men see and understand. Back of it is the secret thing, the infinite and unfathomable mystery. So that, according to this text, all revealed things are united to secret things, and every blade of grass is child of the infinite, and every painted flower by Divinity's fingers is the blossoming out of the essential beauty of God. Revealed things, secret things! The revealed things are ours. What for? To make us possessors of the secret things, to bring us into living touch with the secret things, with the God to whom the secret things belong.

Such is the principle declared. But there is a purpose in all this. What is the purpose? "That we may do all the words of this law." Leaving the local coloring and setting, and taking the principal thought, you find this great truth enunciated, that everything revealed is, if the man will think deeply enough and consider carefully enough, a revelation of law; and the moment a man discovers the law in the revealed thing, and obeys it, he touches and enters into communion with the secret thing behind it. How better can I illustrate at this point than by referring again to that to which I have already referred? Electricity. How is this building lighted tonight? We say by electric light. But how did we get it? It has been developed. But do you know how you developed it? Are you quite sure that in ten years electricians will not laugh at the word developed? That is only a passing word; but it shows us our ignorance. But what do we know? There were revealed things to men who were watching, results accidentally at first, flashing out upon the imagination of the watcher. What did the watcher do? He set himself to discover the law that operated behind the revelation, discovering and obeying which, he found himself in the midst of forces of which man had never dreamed. If I were to say casually to a boy, as though I were trying to catch him, "My boy, tell me, where is there more electricity, in London or in the heart of Africa?" he might be inclined to say, "Oh, in London." But it is not so, and you know it is not so. There is no more electricity here in London than there is in the heart of Africa; but here in London we light our buildings, drive our machinery, flash our messages. In Africa they do none of these things. Why not? Here we have discovered the law, and, obeying it, harness the force, though we cannot understand it. In Africa they have never discovered the law, and the force wraps them about, and they make no use of it. The revealed thing has a law. Obey the law of the revealed thing, and immediately you touch the infinite force behind it.

That is the philosophy of prayer. You tell me today that I cannot pray, that God is too much a slave of the universe He made, that He cannot hear me. God is revealing Himself in bird, in storm, in sky, in man, and in movements. Watch, and you will discover a law in everything. Obey it, and you will come immediately into touch with the Infinite Force behind, and you will work miracles; not the miracle of the juggler who amuses a crowd. You must discover the law in the revealed thing; obey it, and you can harness the forces that are infinite to the chariot wheels of your own progress.

Now let us pass to some illustrative applications, beginning among the minor matters and proceeding to the highest. I will begin with the flowers. I take a flower in my hand, and I look at it. There are revealed things. What are they? Form, and color, and fragrance. Are there no secret things here? I need not argue. No scientist, and no botanist, nor any of us has ever yet been able to tell me why the petals of yon chrysanthemum are of that particular tint, or by what strange alchemy things there yellow are here red; why the carbon is but jellyfish there and diamond yonder. Did you think of leaving the Church because of mystery? There is as much mystery in that hymn-book as in all theology, and you had better find your way out of the world as quickly as possible, and even then you will find yourself in the home of mystery. Secret things in the flower! It is impossible to take the illustration without recalling that exquisite little fragment of Tennyson's:

Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies;  
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower—but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

That is poetic and beautiful in the language of the dead century; but the great flaming principle Moses wrote long before Tennyson wrote it. How did he write it? "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, the revealed things are for us and our children." Discover the law that lies within the flower, and obey it, and what will happen? The secret will reach you through your obedience, and you will be able presently to work with God in making the old-fashioned garden chrysanthemum into the gorgeous beauty of the flower of today. A secret thing, a revelation of a law; a man obeys it, and he is a fellow worker with God in the cultivation of flowers.

Let me move to another realm, and here borrow the words of my Lord Himself in another connection. "The wind bloweth," the revealed thing. "Thou hearest the sound," the revealed thing. The revealed thing in the wind belongs to me. What is it? Sound,

strength. The secret thing belongs to God. What is it? "Whence, whither?" Find the law that lies within the wind. What then? Then, that law discovered and obeyed, the wind becomes the messenger of health and of motion; and men will now draw you charts and maps showing you the directions and currents, which are all true; but never forget this, that God still holds in love and wisdom the hidden secret of the wind.

The mind of man. What do you know about the mind of man? Capacity, the necessity for training, the great possibilities of mind when properly trained. What do we not know about the mind? Now hear me and be patient if you do not agree with me. We do not know its nature. We do not know its seat. The whole trend of scientific investigation is along that line at this moment. The age of the physical scientist has given way to the age of the psychological scientist, and as yet they have told us nothing about the seat of the mind. You tell me about brain cells and gray matter. Perhaps! Do you think I am very ignorant? It is because I am not sure. I am a great agnostic in some things. Even if you speak of gray matter and brain cells you do not really think that is all there is of mind. I know men who still have brain cells but no mind! I am still inclined to believe that mind continues when brain cells become dust and ashes. The brain cells may be a medium for today, but there is nothing final about them. Let us say we do not know. Let us say the secret things belong to God. Yet discover the law in the revealed thing, and obey it, and you are coming near to the secret thing. And I for one welcome the psychological movement. It is infinitely broader and sweeter and healthier than the dust of thirty years ago; and men obeying law are emerging into new light.

And now, very reverently let me lift this to the highest plane of all. The Christ Himself. Revealed things. Yes. The historic Person, the Actual Presence in every successive century. Do you question it? I cannot stay to argue it; but I do say that it admits of no questioning. I say to you that the direct presence of Jesus of Nazareth in the world is established without possibility of doubt; and even those questioning the accuracy of our New Testament records at least have to make acknowledgment that there has been a Man named Jesus Who did some things, and said some things which affect this hour. That is all I want. That is the fact. No brilliant Frenchman, or lucid German, or hard-thinking Englishman, has been able to take from us the fact of the historicity of Christ. That is the smallest revealed thing. What is the greater revealed thing? The living Christ, the living message through the centuries, the living Christ in England, doing what none other can do, accomplishing what no philosophy was ever able to do, and no system of education can do. The living Christ, Who passes into the slum, and takes hold of your unfit man, and makes him fit. And while you deny His existence, I show you His miracles; and if you are as honest as the Sadducees you will hold your peace. The revealed things. Thank God I am not speaking of a dead and worn-out Christ. Men and women here who a month ago had not seen the vision have seen it. Men and women who a month ago were in the grip of sin have on their faces tonight the very radiance of heaven's own light and the reflection of the Christ beauty. Revealed things. But there are secret things. What are they? These are some: the method of Incarnation, the mystery of Atonement, the method of Resurrection. Doubt, and doubt very earnestly, any man who tells you these things are not secret things, any man who attempts to formulate, or tabulate, who attempts to tell you of the humanity and Deity of Christ where the one ends and the other begins. He was very God and very Man. Very Man, weeping, tired, weary, tempted. Very God, hushing tempests, casting demons out, healing disease, remaking moral failures. Do I understand Him? I do not. I worship Him, and I say in His presence, "My Lord, and my God." I cannot touch the secret things of the infinite Christ save through the revealed things; but if I will obey the law revealed in Christ I shall come into living touch with the infinite mysteries that lie behind, and Incarnation will bring me into relationship with God; and Atonement will cancel my sin and break its power, and Resurrection will be to me the new enablement for which my weary soul has waited.

And reverently, from this great height, let us descend the mountain again, and let me say to you that God's government of human affairs also has within it these two elements. What are the revealed things? The fact that God is governing. Do we ever see this quite clearly at the moment? I am not sure; I think some do, but I think it is always by faith granted to us. Look back over human history, and if you and I are wise, in the day of densest darkness in history, we shall see God is on the field when He is most invisible. Illustrations crowd upon me. Look out for yourselves at the coincidence of the invention of the printing machine and the Reformation of religion. But you say, Where is God now? God is governing, and the secret things in His government belong to Him.

Let me get from these wide reaches of vision, and take my own life. How do I know God is governing in my life? I look back—and my friends will forgive me—I am not looking back as far as some of you; but I look back and I pick out things tonight, things I cannot speak of, days of my life, dark days; for, as God is my witness, He has given me my share of sorrow's sacrament, days of awful heartbreak, when all the lights along the shore seemed to go out. I would not undo one such day for worlds. I have come at last to see the meaning of them. There seems to be a jumble, when a man is laying the pavement with little bits of blue, and gray, and black, and sand and mortar. But when the building is finished, behold the mosaic. There would have been no mosaic if there had been no apparent jumble in the construction. Already some of the mosaic is shining out for me, and when I have done and passed home, then I shall sing of all the pathway.

Right was the pathway leading to this.

Though it was through blood and tears and suffering.

And so I might go on. Is your experience just now one of sorrow? I am talking to some sorrowing heart, some broken heart. Let me leave everybody else, and talk to you. Is the day very dark, and the way very rough? I cannot understand it. Secret things belong to God. Discover the law that lies within the revealed thing; if it be pain it will be the law of lying plastic even though the hand of the Potter press to pain the clay; and presently out of the process and the ordeal shall come the vessel finished to His glory—a thing of use to God, and of beauty for the infinite ages. May God help us if we forget all the attempts to illustrate, to fasten our faith upon, the great declaration, The secret things are God's as the revealed things are ours.

## 018 - Deuteronomy 33:27 - The Faith That Cancels Fear

The eternal God is thy dwelling place, And underneath are the everlasting arms. Deuteronomy 33:27

There are two realms of mystery which persistently assault the soul of man and produce in it a sense of fear. They are the unknown future, and the unfathomable present. It is a little difficult to know which of these is more provocative of fear. We look ahead; we think of tomorrow with fear. We look on to the inevitable days which will multiply into years. Sometimes, when we dare, we think of the persistent years which are running relentlessly on and completing the period of our earthly sojourn. For all of these we have our hopes, we have our ideals; but we see the perils, and the question that perpetually comes to us concerns what will happen tomorrow, in the coming years, and how life will end and how it will be rounded out; whether at eventide there shall be light, or whether the end shall be darkness.

Or at other times we stand still and think, attempting to grasp the present, the present of life itself, of suffering, of weakness, and of that which is always present with us, death. In all these things, life and suffering and weakness and death, there are profound and unfathomable mysteries. We have grappled with the surface of them all; but ever and anon we have become sensible of the deeps, the deeps of life itself at its highest and its best. We are related to these things, and cannot escape them. We lift our eyes and look to tomorrow and say, What will happen? We look within, and attempt to fathom the infinite mystery of the moment, and cry out, What shall we do?

Now, the answer to both these inquiries is found in the text. Of the first, the fear of the future, the text declares, "The eternal God is thy dwelling place." Of the present, with its sense of depth and profundity and unfathomable mystery, the declaration of the text is, "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Let us, then, consider the declaration, and then take counsel with our fears in the light of our faith.

First, then, as to the declaration in itself. It occurs in the blessing which Moses pronounced ere he left the people whom he had led for forty years. This was almost the last thing he said:

The eternal God is thy dwelling place,  
And underneath are the everlasting arms.

Here we have that great name of God by which He is introduced to us in the Biblical revelation, and which we so constantly find: this name Elohim, standing, as it does, for the unfathomable and immeasurable might of the Most High. That is the one thought suggested by the word. In this particular name of God there is really no revelation of His character, nothing that tells us of the motive that inspires Him in His activity, nothing that reveals to us the purpose of all His doings. It is the intensive Hebrew plural, Elohim, speaking of might, and consequently of majesty.

The arresting word in the text is not the name of God, though, of course, that is necessary to our understanding of the declaration. The arresting word is the word which we have translated eternal. It does not mean, for instance, what the word "everlasting" means: "Underneath are the everlasting arms." That word "everlasting" is the greatest of all the words that attempt to express for us what is beyond our calendars and our almanacs—the timelessness of Deity. But the word here translated eternal has another meaning and another thought. Let me say quite simply that the word really has no reference to tomorrow. It has to do with yesterday. It is a word that bids us look on. It is a word that compels us to look back.

Now, immediately we may say, What comfort, then, can there be in that declaration in the presence of the fear of tomorrow? That is the very genius of the text. The word means literally the front, whether of place or of time. Absolutely, it means the forepart. Relatively, it means the east, the place of the sunrise, the place where the day began. The great thought concerning God which this particular word suggests is that He is the God of the beginning. We would do no violence to the Hebrew if we translated the passage, The God of old is thy dwelling place. That would lack the poetry of the word eternal, but it would come nearer to the thought of the singer. The God of old, the God of the beginning, is thy dwelling place. All that was involved in the beginning is persistent through processes to the consummation. The eternal God, the God of the morning, the God of the morning when the

stars sang together over the initiation of a new mystery in the universe on which they had never looked before—that God of the beginning is thy dwelling place.

Out of that interpretation arise suggestions, which, in some senses, are paradoxical and startling. We are ever prone in our thinking of tomorrow to think of it as being in front of us. Tomorrow is not in front of us. Tomorrow is behind us. These are the later days. The earlier days are gone. Tomorrow is still later. In other words, the whole underlying suggestion is that of a great procession. Fasten your attention for a moment on some great procession you have seen pass along the highway. The beginning of the procession is always in front; the end of it is always behind. Yesterday is in front; tomorrow is behind. The whole history of humanity is a procession, and in the beginning is God, leading the procession. We are not moving away from those who went before us, as though we dropped them somewhere behind, and left them. We are moving after them, we are following them. The generation that shall be born will not be in advance of us. They will be behind us. God leads, and accompanies; He is the God of the morning, of the beginning, and He is thy dwelling place.

The description of God, the eternal God, thus interpreted may seem to suggest that every succeeding generation is further away from Him than the first. We may gather the comfort of the fact that He leads, that all those early movements were closely associated with His power and His wisdom and His love, as the Biblical revelation declares to us; but they are far away from us; and even though we follow in their train, we are far distant. But the text answers the inquiry at once. The God Who was at the beginning is our refuge, our dwelling place. God is no further removed from me than He was from the first man in the procession. God is no further distant from His creation after the long ages of its development and continuation than He was from the first propulsion from the night. The eternal God, the God of the beginning, the God of old time, the God of the morning is our dwelling place.

Then immediately the deduction is patent. The future which is behind us is not our care. We have nothing to do with that which follows. We have two things about which we must forever be concerned; those, namely, of yesterdays which are in front of us, and of the today in which we set our faces toward the things that have gone before. We follow God, in company with God. "The eternal God is thy dwelling place."

All that prepares for, and leads to, the second part of the declaration, "And underneath are the everlasting arms," which really is a large interpretation of the truth declared in the first. The great suggestion is made to us that God is the God of the beginning. It is declared that He is our dwelling place on all the march, and then we are told what that really means: "Underneath are the everlasting arms." That is the only place in the English Bible where we find that word underneath. The Hebrew word is found in other places. If we would understand it, we cannot be too absolute in our simplicity. The Hebrew word means the bottom. The root idea is that of depressing, and humbling, and beating down. Underneath is the uttermost limit of the depressing and the humbling and the beating down. How far down can your imagination or your experience carry you? Those depths, those profundities of life are suffering and weakness and death—how far do you know them? How deep have you been into life? How profound has been your experience of sorrow? How far have you sunk in some hour of weakness? How nigh have you come unto death? When you have reminded yourselves of that lowest level—and some soul may say, I was never deeper down than now—then listen, "Underneath," lower than that, "are the everlasting arms."

"Everlasting arms." Arms in the Bible always constitute the figure of strength, and the idea is always qualified by the root meaning of sowing, fructifying, bearing. Motherhood lies in the figurative use of this word in the Bible, as well as Fatherhood. "Everlasting" is the word to which I have already made reference. The Hebrew word is full of poetic suggestion. It means the vanishing point, the ultimate reach of imagination and thought, and that which lies beyond the ultimate reach of imagination and thought, the concealed. There is no exact equivalent in the Bible really for all we mean when we say eternal or everlasting. We are attempting to grasp the infinite, and to express it in a word. The Bible never makes that attempt. The Hebrew and the Greek, by figures of speech, pile suggestion upon suggestion, and leave us with a sense of mystery, of the unfathomable and un-reachable, and of the fact that we have not said the last thing. So it is with this great word "everlasting." The everlasting is the vanishing point, the concealed, that which lies behind and beyond the uttermost effort of imagination and thinking. The everlasting arms are arms that reach to, and exist in, that realm of darkling mystery that baffles the soul and assaults it with fear. All the mysteries of the deeps have beneath them the strength, the enclosing power, the infinite tenderness of God. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Whatever the abyss, however much it seems to be a darkling void, dare it, dive into it deeply enough, and you will find you are falling on the arms of God. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Now, let us consult our fears in the presence of this declaration of our faith, fears for the future, and fears in the presence of present mysteries. What fears for the future we have today! Am I not rightly interpreting the mood of all our minds today, when I say that they are ever with us, fears about the future, fears for the world at large, fears for the Church of God, fears for the very Christ of God, and fears for our own souls?

Fears about the future. When we look out on the world, one word tells the story just now, and that word is the word "chaos." The apparent hopelessness of it all is patent. We cheer our hearts ever and anon because we think we see some gleam of light in the

sky, and it goes out again, and storms sweep up, and the darkness is deeper than ever. We are wondering about the future of the world. Is all the history of the running centuries and the world to end in cruelty, and the victory of wrong, and the destruction of ideals, and the plunge back of a race into a barbarism more devilish than has been known, or the world has ever seen, because wrong is better equipped?

Fears for the future of the Church are with us every day. The hopeless confusion of the Church at the present moment, her inability to realize herself, or the unity of her life, and the catholicity of that life; her inability to deal with the present situation, her poverty as an organized institution on the field of battle and among our soldiers—all these things oppress us, and we wonder what is going to happen presently when the war is over.

And right in the heart of all this, fight against it as we will, protest against it as we may in our higher and nobler moments, there is a haunting fear about our Christ. Not that we doubt Him, but we see Him refused, we see Him put to open shame; and the question comes to us again and again, What next?

Then, to narrow the circle, and we cannot omit this, how perpetually, as we look on to tomorrow, fear assaults us about our own souls; our failures yesterday and in the past, in spite of all our highest aspirations and our most ardent desires after the things that are of God, we know too well. There is the dark way we have come, with its failure, its paralysis, and its folly, and there is the growing sense of weakness, and we are afraid. The future is always fearful, and never more so than today.

In the presence of all these fears, I go back to this old song, and I read: "The God of the beginning is thy dwelling place," and in that declaration I find the one and only answer that silences our fears, our fears for the world. That answer is the God of the beginning. He created this world in its present state of order out of chaos. The earth was waste and void. God did not so create it at the beginning, in that remote beginning which is merely named, and of which we have no detail. Catastrophe had somehow overtaken it. It was waste and void, a turmoil; darkness was everywhere. Then the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters, and the voice of God spake, and there came up out of the darkness, light; and out of the chaos, order; and from the desert, roses. The God of the beginning is thy dwelling place. That cannot end worst which began best, though a wide compass first be fetched. The eternal God, the God of the morning, is the God of the advancing hours; the God Who led is accompanying all pilgrims on the march. If there be a repetition of chaos, a recrudescence of evil that threatens to devastate all order, then He is the God of a new beginning. The very last words of prophetic utterance which I find in my Bible are these: "Behold, I make all things new."

And what of the Church? God created it, and He created it a new order and pattern of life out of the old. Make that perfectly simple by thinking of the material with which He dealt at the beginning to constitute His Church. Think of those twelve men, men of like passions with ourselves in very deed; and yet those men constituted the beginning of His Church. Read with great care the book of the Acts of the Apostles, read with great care this little handful of letters that were sent out to the early churches, and mark, not merely the brightness of the glory shining, but the darkness of the shadows gathering. See how right away, at the beginning of the history of the Church, the heresies that are called new were powerfully operating, the schisms that we mourn today rending the body asunder. All the things that fill our hearts with foreboding were there then. Then remember that He Who created that Church has led that Church through all the centuries and the millenniums; and in spite of her failure, in spite of her recurring powerlessness, in spite of the fact that over and over again she has seemed to miss the moment of opportunity, she has been God's witness through the ages, and her testimony has never failed. Again, I go to the end of my New Testament, and I read a prophetic word concerning the Church, and it is this, He, the Son of God, the Christ of God, God manifest, He shall present her faultless "before the presence of His glory."

When I turn to that third realm of fear that I hardly like to mention, our fears concerning the Christ, it is well that we let Him speak to us again, for His own words are the only words we need to hear, the only words that can be powerful: "I am... the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." Does He seem to be dead again? Does it seem as though this age, with all its vaunted progress, has nailed Him to the Cross anew? Does it seem as though we have wrapped Him in grave clothes, and placed Him in a tomb, and rolled a stone to the door? He is saying, I am alive, I am alive forevermore.... So surely as He came forth from the Syrian tomb in Joseph of Arimathea's garden He will emerge in new light and glory from the hour when we think Him dead.

And what about my soul? The God of the beginning is thy dwelling place, Oh, soul of mine. He Who began a good work in thee will complete it. He is the God of Jacob. He will perfect that which concerneth me. So my fears are silenced. Let us hear Paul once again, and perhaps with an entirely new sense: "Forgetting the things which are behind" (that is, the future), "and stretching forward to the things which are before" (that is, God and all He has done), "let us press toward the goal." I am to forget my yesterday, and remember tomorrow; but that yesterday is in front, and my back should be on tomorrow.

E'en let the unknown morrow  
Bring with it what it may.

Turn your back on tomorrow, face the yesterday, look to the glory of the sunrise, and have no thought for that which is following on, no fear about tomorrow. That is in God's keeping. March, my soul, with strength today, thy face toward the beginning where the glory of God was manifested, knowing that the God of the beginning is with thee now on the pathway.

So we turn to the second realm of fear, fears of the deeps. I said at the beginning that I sometimes wonder which realm of mystery is more provocative of fear, the mystery of the future, or the mystery of the present. I am inclined to think that the present life itself is more terrible, when a man dare face it. And here for the moment I do not mean its weakness, suffering, and death. I mean life, the mystic elements of being, the surprises that come up from within, good and bad and mixed; the sudden breaking out as from within of high aspirations, and sense of ability that I had never dreamed I had, the sudden upspringing from some deep, low level of being of that which is slimy and devilish and hateful. Of these mysteries we become more and more conscious as the years run on. In the dawning, in youth, golden, glorious, beautiful, glad, we are not conscious of life at all. Youth touches only the surface of things.

In later years we are faced also with the mystery of sorrow and of suffering, its reason, and its value; our own suffering, and, principally, the suffering of others. The problem of suffering is created in the human mind in the presence of suffering other than that which is personal. It is not your own pain that causes you so much conflict as the pain of others.

Or, again, there are the depths of weakness, physical, spiritual, moral. So far as I may speak experimentally, I say that there is no experience more poignant in its agony than weakness. In the physical realm I can conceive of nothing more truly hopeless and helpless than the last extremity of utter weakness. As in the spiritual, so in the moral—these deep, deep things of weakness, how they fill the soul with fear!

Finally, there are the depths of death, death which we have observed, but never known. We have watched death, we have seen it, but we have not known it. Death is the admitted enemy. Christianity never calls it a friend. That is Sadducean paganism which affects to call death a friend. Christianity says the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

The answer to all these fears is found in the words: "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Oh for some master of music who shall set that one word underneath to melodies and harmonies that swell and grow, vibrant with tenderness, and mighty with thunder! Underneath life, this mystery of my own life that baffles me, and fills me with fear, and drives me hopelessly along the pathway—underneath it all are the everlasting arms. There is nothing in my life unknown to God. There is nothing in my life outside the compass of that embrace of eternal strength and tenderness. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Underneath all suffering. He encircles our sorrows with His own; but in His sorrows there is nothing of despair, there is nothing of weakness. They are greater than mine by virtue of the strength of God, but there is nothing in them of despair, and nothing of weakness. In the depth of suffering I presently find the arms of God underneath.

Weakness? Oh, yes, that is where some of us found the arms as we had never known them before. In the last reach of the descent we found the arms of God, we fall, and fall, all supports giving way; we sink, sink, sink, until, when no finger can be lifted and no glance of the eye tell the agony of our weakness, we suddenly find we are cradled in the arms of God. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

By these signs and tokens, by these experiences of the soul, we know how it shall be in death. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Death will be the gate of life. Through it we shall find God.

Here, then, is the answer to our fears. We still admit the mystery of tomorrow and of today; but we find our rest in God. He is the beginning. He is always the beginning. He began this day, this very day. This is the day that the Lord hath made. He will begin every tomorrow that shall come, until the cycle of the running days has completed the story of humanity, and it finds itself at the goal, at the destination. He is the God of the everlasting arms. It is impossible to sink beneath them, for they are always underneath. "The God of the morning is thy dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

## 019 - Deuteronomy 32:11-12a - "As An Eagle... The Lord... Did Lead."

As an eagle that stirreth up her nest,  
That fluttereth over her young,  
He spread abroad his wings, he took them,  
He bare them on his pinions:  
The Lord alone did lead him.  
Deuteronomy 32:11-12

These words are taken from the swan song of Moses. In that song there is a remarkable alternation between praise and blame. It celebrates the goodness and faithfulness of God; it chronicles the wickedness and unfaithfulness of His people.

Calling to mind how God had found the people in a desert land, in the waste howling wilderness, and given them among the nations the place of prosperity and privilege, the singer employed this pictorial method of setting forth the way of the Divine government. It is peculiarly a figure of the wilderness, where for forty years Moses had kept his flocks. Probably he had often watched the eagles with their brood on some rocky height or sweeping over the broad and silent expanses. It was a daring figure, but he was warranted in using it, for forty years before he sang this song God Himself had employed it in speaking to him: "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself."

The Bible is full of fine figures of speech and parabolic illustrations of the various aspects of the Divine government; but in all that it is intended to teach, none is more simple and sublime than this. It thrills with tenderness and with strength. It makes us conscious of the passion and power and purpose of God in all His dealings with those whom He loves.

First, let us observe the comparison broadly. In the eleventh verse we have a picture of the eagles in their activities, the mother stirring up her young, fluttering over them, the father spreading abroad his wings, taking the young and bearing them on his pinions. These words reveal to us the activities of the eagles, but they do not suggest their purpose. In the first phrase of the next verse we have a revelation of God's purpose—"The Lord... did lead him"—but there is no suggestion as to His activities, as to His methods. In the figure we discover the activities of the eagles: in the declaration we find the purpose of God. When we allow the first part of the text to be illuminated by the second, and the second by the first, we have the figure in its completeness. The purpose of the eagles is revealed by what is said concerning the purpose of the Lord. Why is this eagle stirring up her nest, fluttering over her young? Why is this eagle spreading abroad his wings, taking them, bearing them on his pinions? In order that they may lead the eaglets, in order that they may guide them. The activities of the Lord are revealed by what is said concerning the activities of the eagles. How does He lead His people? He stirs up their nests, He broods over them, He spreads His wings before them, He catches them on His wings, and carries them.

In the text, then, in its entirety, we have a revelation of God, a revelation of His activities in government, and a revelation of His purpose through those activities.

First, let us consider the revelation of God. There is a touch of genuine Eastern color about this. In the Bible, the eagle is more than once employed as the symbol of Deity. When Ezekiel was in captivity on the banks of the river Chebar he had a vision of God, and in the midst of the flashing glory of the light, and amid the turning of the mystic wheels, he saw faces: the face of the lion, the face of the ox, the face of a man, and the face of an eagle, all being manifestations of life proceeding from God, having its origin in God. Authority was suggested by the face of the lion; service, by that of the ox; the highest form of creation, by that of the man; while the eagle, with unflinching eyes, and wings spread for flight into the abysmal depths of mysteries that are beyond human ken, was the symbol of Deity. When, long after, the seer of the Galilean lake was imprisoned in Patmos, washed by the waters of the sea, he saw a door open in heaven, and round about the throne four living ones having the same faces that Ezekiel saw, the faces of the lion, the ox, the man, and the eagle. The Fathers of the Church interpreted the Gospel narratives by this symbolism, not always agreeing in their placing of the signs, but all making the eagle the symbol of John. For myself, I find in Matthew the face of the lion of the tribe of Judah, the King; in Mark, the face of the ox, pointing to service, priesthood, sacrifice; in Luke, the face of a man, the highest glory in God's creation; and in John, the face of the eagle, the symbol of Deity.

In our text, all the mystic wonder of the symbolism is brought down to simplest terms. Let us watch the scene as therein described. First, the mother eagle is seen doing a strange thing, stirring up the nest, the nest in which the eaglets, having been fed, are sleeping, and will sleep on until they are hungry again. The word "stirreth" is, undoubtedly, an accurate one here, but its root meaning is suggestive: the mother is awakening the birds, disturbing them in their slumber. Next, she is seen fluttering over her young, and the word "fluttering" means—and I prefer to use it—brooding. She is brooding over the birds she has disturbed. Then the father bird is seen spreading his wings in the air. The mother has wakened the eaglets, she has made them conscious of her mother heart as she brooded over them; and now the father spreads his wings, and the eaglets try to do the same thing—they flutter and stumble, and fall. Now the last phase is seen, the father is beneath them, has caught them on his wings, and is bearing them back.

That is God, said the singer of the olden time, and that is how God deals with His people. What, then, does this figure reveal to us of God? It is, first of all, a revelation of His Parenthood, that is, of the Motherhood of God and of the Fatherhood of God. The personal pronoun "He" is capitalized at the beginning of the third and fourth lines of this eleventh verse simply to conform to the rules of poetry, and not to suggest that the figure merges into a direct description of the activity of God at that point. The masculine pronoun is undoubtedly accurate, and thus we see the mother and father, the mother bird disturbing the eaglets and brooding over them, while the father bird spreads his wings, and presently bears them on his pinions. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, the feminine; fluttereth over her young, the feminine; he, the masculine, spread abroad his wings, and he, the masculine, bare them on his pinions. Thus we have a revelation of that supreme and glorious fact, that in God fatherhood and motherhood merge. We have never



grasped the fullest fact concerning God until we have recognized the double truth.

Look at the eagles again as they are seen with their young, and mark them well. The eaglets are of the very being and nature of the eagles, and therefore are the supreme objects of the love of the mother bird as she broods over them, and of the father bird as he spreads his great wings before them. Here also the figure holds good. Man is of the very being and nature of God, and therefore he is the supreme object of God's love. This is the poetic and beautiful suggestion of this picture of the eagles with the eaglets. As the eagles love the eaglets because they are of their very nature and being, so God loves man because he is of God's very nature, of His very Being. This is fundamental. It is only in proportion as we grasp this underlying truth that all the beauty of that which follows will be apprehended. All that we see in the picture, the disturbing of the young birds, the brooding over them, the spreading of the wings, and the carrying on the pinions, all must be interpreted by motherhood and fatherhood.

But, again, as I watch the eagles at their work I am impressed with their strength and the consequent security of the eaglets. Watch the eagles' wings in the storm. They seem to beat back the rushing of the wind and master it, or travel with it in excellency of strength. Watch the eagles' wings in the hour of conflict, and see with what skill they beat down the foe that would harm the eaglets. Watch the wings as they brood over the eaglets, and mark their gentleness. Gentleness is not weakness; gentleness is strength held in restraint. We talk, said George Matheson, of the gentleness of the brook. The brook has no gentleness. It rushes and roars down its way over the pebbles. If we would speak of gentleness let us stand on the beach and see the mighty ocean with silver foam kiss the feet of the little child that plays on the shore. That is gentleness.

That is the true picture of God. Listen to some of the ancient singers:

Hide me under the shadow of Thy wings.

The children of men take refuge under the shadow of Thy wings.

I will take refuge under the covert of Thy wings.

Under the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice.

Or listen to another, who employs the same figure, but in another way. Singing of God, he said:

He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

The wings of the eagle seem stronger than the wind, but when this singer used the figure he magnificently modified it, and made the wind itself the wings of God:

He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

When, then, did He fly swiftly on the wings of the wind? This is what the singer said:

In my distress I called upon the Lord.

That was when "He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind."

The glorious strength of God is such that the figure breaks down, and the metaphor fails, and we are left face to face with the naked fact, and of the consequent security of all those who are underneath His wings as they brood, or over His wings as He carries them.

In the figure there is, at least, a suggestion of the nature of God. What is the nature of the eagle? It dwells on high, and it takes its flight sunward, with eyes that never flinch as they are fixed on the light. But here supremely the figure suggests, and then breaks down; and whenever a figure thus breaks down it is fulfilling its highest function, for it is leading us beyond itself to the fact which it is intended to suggest. The eagle is the mystic sign of Deity because of its flight to the heights; but there the figure halts, for God is the ultimate height. The eagle is the symbol of Deity, because with unflinching gaze it beholds the light of the sun and soars into it, until human eyes can no longer follow it; but there the figure breaks down, for God is the light.

But now let us consider the activities of the eagles as representing the activities of God in His government. The first activity is suggested by the words: "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest"; that is disturbance. The next, by the words: "That broodeth over her young"; that is love assuring the disturbed ones that it is still active. The next, by the words: "He spread abroad his wings"; that is inspiration and illustration in order that those disturbed should be taught to fly. The last, by the words: "He took them, he bare them on his pinions"; that is protection that comes when, essaying to obey inspiration and illustration, the eaglets flutter and fall.

These are the elements of the Divine government of human lives. The first is ever that of disturbance. The life that is never disturbed by God is dying and withering and falling. God is forever more stirring up the nest, rousing us from our lethargy, lest, perchance, we also should become like Jeshurun, who waxed fat and kicked in his sleekness, forgetting not God only, but his own manhood. God disturbs the place of our abode; the home is stricken, and we are flung out. Our plans, so carefully and so prayerfully made, are

broken down. Our very conceptions, the highest and the best, have to be reconsidered, and we discover that somewhere in our highest thinking we were wrong. God plunges us into a maelstrom in order that we may know how wrong we were. Our very service, the highest service we can render, service which He has appointed, is suddenly interfered with by the changing of our strength to weakness, or by a command that we relinquish it for another that seems less important. God is always disturbing us.

There is nothing more perilous than forming a false estimate of the meaning of disturbed life, that we should say of some soul who, through long years has always been tempest-tossed, buffeted, hurled hither and thither by storms, that there must be something wrong with him. It may be that God is preparing that soul for larger vision, clearer seeing of the light, and upward movement toward heights to which we have never mounted. As the eagle stirs up the nest, and will not allow the eaglets to settle into the lethargy of a sleep that follows feeding, so God stirs up the nest, takes away the loved one, brings into the midst of life the pain and shadow of suffering, contradicts our highest plans, hurls us out from the place where we love to be, makes us feel the sweeping of the storm, and so prevents the fatal lethargies that destroy.

But that is not all. The eagle also "broodeth over her young." The figure is the more striking in that it so closely follows the other. Probably, if I had been writing this, I should have put it the other way: first, the brooding, and then the disturbing, and this because I know neither the eagle nor God as perfectly as did Moses. He knew both. He had watched the eagle, and he knew God. The first thing is disturbance, and then the brooding over the young. Here we cannot be too realistic in our imagination. Look carefully at that eyrie on the rocky height. There are the eaglets and the mother bird, and she disturbs them who fain would sleep in the quietness that follows feeding; she will not have it so, she wakes them, she pushes them with her wings to the very edge of the nest, and presently will push them out. Then, as they are puzzled and fearful, she flutters over them, she broods over them, she says to them, in effect: Yes, I have disturbed you, but I am your mother! She broodeth over her young. That, also, is a picture of God. He disturbs, but He gives; to the soul an immediate qualification of the disturbance, not by explaining its meaning, but by assuring the heart concerning Himself. Nothing is more wonderful than this. Souls that are struggling, but who, nevertheless, believe in God, are constantly made conscious of this brooding love, of God. Again and again, during these months of desolation and disturbance, when some loved one has been taken away, plans have been broken up, and all that looked so fair has become desolate, have we heard it said: "I cannot understand it; but I am perfectly sure of His love. It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth to Him good!" What has inspired the word? God—God brooding over the heart, giving the heart that knowledge of Himself, offering no explanation of the meaning of the disturbance, but assuring the troubled soul that there is a meaning in it, that there is wisdom in it. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Why has He taken away? I do not know, I cannot tell, I cannot see the meaning of it; it seems to have no meaning! But "blessed be the name of the Lord." When the soul says that, it is because God, like a mother, broods over the heart, and whispers the sweet secret into the soul: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

But the figure moves on in its revelation of the Divine activity. The mother eagle who has disturbed, and who has fluttered broodingly over the young, now watches; and the father spreads abroad his wings. By this act he is insisting on the fulfilment of the purpose of the disturbance and the brooding of the mother. He spreads his wings in front of them, they being now fully awake, and fully comforted. She waked them when she disturbed them, comforted them when she brooded over them. Now, in effect, he says: This is what we mean. He spreads his wings, and by inherent instinct, the eaglets begin to spread their wings. As in imagination, we watch them, we cannot help laughing at them, their movements are so grotesque. I am sure the mother and the father laugh at them with that tender sympathetic laughter that is always in the heart of parents for the follies of child life.

All that also is a true picture of God, Who is always going before us, and yet is ever near enough to show us how to do the things He demands if we are but looking at Him. Too often the trouble with us is that we are not watching our God. If we were doing so we should find that when He has disturbed us, comforted us, He will show us what He means, and so help us to spread our wings.

I watch the eaglets doing it, fearful as they find themselves flung out of the nest; in the element of the air, so strange to them, they begin to beat with their wings, but they are going down, they are falling. Now comes the last phase of the revelation. The father swoops beneath them, catches them on his broad pinions. They try and fail, but they never fall! In their trying and their failing he is nigh, and when they fail and would fall, he is beneath them, bearing them on his pinions. That process is repeated until the day comes when the eaglets will not want the father underneath; their own wings will find their strength, and they will fly. So with us. We shall fail, but we shall not fall. Our attempts will seem grotesque to us, and to others who watch us, but our Father will always catch us on His wings, and bear us up.

Finally, let us consider the purpose revealed by the figure. What are the eagles doing with the eaglets? The eagles are developing the eaglets' natural powers. They are eagles too. What is God doing in His government of our lives? He is developing our natural powers. Man is made for God; he is in the Divine image and likeness. By all God's government, by His disturbing of us, by His brooding over us, by His guidance of us, when on His wings He is catching us when we fail and flutter and fall; by all these things He is bringing us to the fulfilment of our own destiny, to the realization of our own manhood. The supreme tragedy of human life is that man thinks so much less of himself than God thinks of him.

Man is not flesh, man is not flesh, but fire!  
His senses cheat him, and his vision lies.  
Swifter and keener than his soul's desire,  
The flame that mothers him eludes his eyes.

That is why God disturbs him. God wakes man from the lethargy which oftentimes comes from overfeeding, from the attempt to satisfy the life with the things of dust. The purpose of the Divine government is to end weakness. Only by flight can eagles fly, only by struggle can strength be gained. That is an illuminative story of the boy who came to his mother with the chrysalis of a glorious butterfly. He knew something of the beauty that was hidden there; he had been told about it. He watched the chrysalis until he saw it beginning to burst; he observed the struggle, and a mistaken pity in his heart said, Oh, let me help it! Then with scissors he snipped the chrysalis, and made it easy! With what result? Those gorgeous wings were never spread! You cannot help the butterfly; from the chrysalis it must struggle to the glory of its final beauty.

So also man can come to the final dignity of his own being and the fulness of the meaning of his own life only as God disturbs him, rouses him from the lethargy which means death. By all the processes of strain and stress and disturbance, by His brooding love, by the inspiration of His outspread wings as He lures us toward flight, by the great strength with which He swoops beneath us and catches us on His pinions, by all this He is perfecting our strength and leading us to the heights as He develops within us His own thought for us.

In its first application, the word of the singer is national. It was to a nation that this thing was said. Oh the peril, the ghastly peril of failing to fulfil national destiny by reason of prosperity! No nation ever failed to fulfil its destiny because of adversity. It is prosperity that blasts a nation. Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. He became sleek and forgot God. That was the trouble threatening our own nation, and therefore I say it with great solemnity, we thank God when He disturbs us. He is waking us from our lethargy that we may find our wings and reach the heights.

But if the first application is to the nation, the application of the song is also personal. Let it sing to us the sacred story of our own dignity. Let it argue His meaning as He disturbs us, and broods over us. Let us trust and obey, knowing that if we fail and fall, His pinions will be underneath; and if we wake with the horror of the disturbance His wings will be over us. The day will come when we shall spread our wings and find the meaning of God and the meaning of our own lives.

## 020 - Joshua 3:4 - The Untrodden Pathway

Ye have not passed this way heretofore. Joshua 3:4

Last Sunday morning we looked back. This morning we look on. The Children of Israel are still seen at the parting of the ways. There is some change of circumstances from those at which we looked before, but it is a slight one so far as the hosts are concerned. They are still on the margin of the land. We spoke then of the fact that change was imminent, the leaders were about to change, the circumstances were about to change, the wilderness was passed, and the land was immediately before them.

When we turn to this book of Joshua, we find that Moses, the servant of God, has entered into rest, and Joshua has taken his place as leader of the nation. Behind the people there is the history, and the great lessons learned through that history.

Among the last words of Moses to them had been those which formed our text last Sunday morning, "Thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God hath led thee." Standing upon the margin of the land, behind them lay the deliverance from Egypt; the guidance of God for forty years in the great and terrible wilderness, and the daily supply of daily need. They possessed, moreover, the lessons learned through the experience of the past; that first of humility, for He led them and suffered them to hunger, and fed them, that He might humble them; that secondly of the discovery of themselves—for I think you will agree when I say that the people who stood on the margin of the land for the second time after forty years had learned a great deal about themselves that they did not know before; and finally that of the discovery of God in many an hour of extremity and many a place of difficulty.

Now before them lay the great unknown. Joshua said to them, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." There were certain things about the future which they thought they knew, but of none of them were they absolutely certain. There were things about the land which had been reported to them as a people forty years before, which, doubtless, many who were then but children would nevertheless remember; facts concerning its mountains and valleys, its rivers and rills, its cities and its people, but nothing was certain, nothing was definite. The future was all unknown.

So this morning we stand at the parting of the ways. We attempted a week ago, as the Old Year was passing from us, to consider the responsibilities of memory. We attempted to emphasize the teaching of that last word of Moses, and to show that in

remembering we must put the past into relation with God; must attempt to learn the lessons He has intended to teach, and must recognize that the true look back is a look on.

I propose to continue that subject this morning, by asking you to consider the responsibilities of anticipation. Here again I shall seek the contextual light of the story, for while we live in other times, and our manners are different, and in many things we have changed radically and completely from these men of a bygone age; yet in all the essentials of our human nature, and in the master principles that govern human life, we are the same as they; and, therefore, from the picture on the old page we may gather light for the new history.

There are two things of which I want you to think with me. First, of the uncertain future; and second, of the certainties of the future.

"Ye have not passed this way heretofore." The future is all uncertain. That is a fact which needs no argument in the case of sane men and women. It is only insanity that gazes into crystals, and examines palms, and seeks to listen to wizards and witches that peep and mutter. If my words in this connection are few, I do not think they are unnecessary, especially in this quarter of London. I pray you remember that it is only insanity which imagines that anybody can discover the secrets of the future. Therefore, with this congregation I will not argue it. The future is unknown, is utterly uncertain.

If the fact of its uncertainty is thus recognized, let me speak of the fascination of that uncertainty. There is to every healthy mind a fascination about the unknown. That explains the perennial interest which is attached to the passing of one year and the beginning of another. As a matter of fact, there is no new year and there is no old year. These are things of human almanacs, human calendars and human calculations. I believe, and I say this quite frankly and of growing conviction, that the nearer we live to God the less we care about times and seasons of any kind. We come to a recognition of the fact that time is eternity. Suns rise and set, and seasons pass; and these are the only marks of time in the Divine economy. Those of our Januaries and Februaries, and Sundays and Mondays, are pagan. When presently the great Kingdom of God comes, we shall never talk of January or Sunday. Our friends, the Friends, are ahead of us when they speak of first day, and second day. Yet there is a fascination in passing from one year to another, and there is a value in our marking of the passing of time in this particular way. We have halted and looked back. Now we are halting to look on. Who of us here this Sunday morning has not been dreaming dreams about the New Year; wondering, with healthy wonder, what it is bringing to us, what the ever receding curtain of mystery will leave revealed in the foreground of experience? There is a great fascination about the uncertainty of the future.

This fascination is born of two things, one lower, the other higher. Let me speak of the lower first. It is born of the passion for the new that ever burns in the heart of humanity. If I speak of that as the lower, it is only by comparison with the other, for it is not essentially wrong. It is one of those master instincts of human nature that we do well to recognize, and attempt to direct along true lines. The passion for the new, for discovery, is in every healthy human heart. What do you mean by a newspaper? What is the fascination of the newspaper? The finding out of things not known, the entering into the discovery of the larger whole. Do you remember Kipling's lines about the explorer? In those lines there lies a philosophy applicable not only to the geographical explorer, but to all human life:

There's no sense in going further—it's the edge of cultivation,  
So they said, and I believed it—  
Till a voice, as bad as conscience, rang interminable changes  
On one everlasting whisper day and night repeated—so  
Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges—  
Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go.

That is the passion of exploration, and it creates the fascination of the unknown in the New Year.

The higher motive, or the higher reason of that fascination, is the desire for the better. The passion for the new is true and right, but it is the lower. The higher is the desire for the better. Oh, those vows and resolutions of the New Year. They are so multiplied that even the newspapers gain some amount of humor out of them. Yet they are tragic and pathetic and human. Promises made with the dawn of the dead year, broken, scattered all along the line, until one is ashamed to look back upon them. Yet they were fine, true, noble; they meant well. Today we are making them all over again. If there is any gladness in our heart about the New Year, it is that we see in the future a chance of being better. The glamour of it, the fascination of it is in all our hearts. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." We pause and listen to the voice that comes singing out of the unknown, and it is the voice of hope.

But think not only of the fascination of the unknown, think also of the fear of it. This is as certain, as positive a quantity in our outlook as is the other. We know not what the future has hidden in the way of opposition; what forces are hiding behind the mountains, or lurking in the mists that lie along the valleys. We cannot tell how deep is the river, how tortuous the path through the mountains, how many robbers lie ambushed, suddenly to swoop down upon us. We are ignorant of the forces that are against us in the coming year. Their number, their nature, their methods are all unknown. So it was with these people upon the margin of the land. They had become accustomed to the perils of the wilderness, but those ahead were unknown. Consequently, there was fear as to their ability

to cope with the difficulties that lay ahead.

And so it is with me. If I do not know the foes, how can I be sure whether my own strength is equal to them. Here I halt upon the margin of the New Year, feeling its lure, its fascination, its appeal; and yet, in an almost greater degree, fearing it, dreading it. If I do not stay for illustration, it is because your minds will act more rapidly than my speech can. In your business, in your home, perhaps in the weakness of your physical frame, or in the trembling mental unrest of which you are conscious, are unknown possibilities of opposition. Are we equal to them? So felt these men on the margin of the land, and so feel we. We have not passed this way heretofore. It is all strange, all new, and while it fascinates us it fills us with fear.

Yet once again. In thinking of the uncertain future, while we admit the fact, recognize the fascination, and know the fear; let us ever remember the force of it, the value of it, the strength of it.

What is the force of uncertainty? It is a force in the life because it is the inspiration of effort; and a call to preparation. If I knew all the facts of the coming year, I might be careless. I do not know them; and out of the mystery and fog and silence there breaks one voice, "Watch!"

Said Joshua to the men encamped near the river, with the land before them and the wilderness behind them, "Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." Tomorrow for God: today for you. Today for you because you do not know tomorrow. Consequently, the force and value of uncertainty is that it compels me to seek to put my life into right relation with the forces that are equal to tomorrow. It compels me to make preparation for effort, to quit myself like a man that I may be strong; for if I am to march one step at a time, one day at a time, in the midst of forces that I do not know, over territory that I have never traversed, and if I have to deal with new unfoldings of mystery, it behoves me to be equipped, and to be ready. Herein lie the values of uncertainty.

But now turn to the second consideration, the certainties of the future. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." If this does suggest indeed, the uncertainty of the future, and remind me that the pathway is an unknown one, I am constrained to inquire whether there are any certainties with which I may take my way into the unknown tomorrow. I want to answer that inquiry in the very simplest way by saying that there are three certainties with which I may face the uncertain future. I will name them. The first is the past. The second is the present. Though it appear a paradox, the third and the most certain is the uncertain future.

The past. Let us get back to this borderland, to this place by the Jordan. Look at these people. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore," but Moses had already said, remember all the way you have passed. Their first certainty was the past.

As you face the new, never forget the old, for the most absolute certainty that we possess as we face the uncertain is that of the things of the past. Deliverance prophesies deliverance. Guidance predicts guidance. Supply promises supply. Let me make this a little more geographical. There is a river in front of us. Then measure the river by the sea. He divided that, He can divide this. There is an unknown land before us. Measure the unknown land by the unknown wilderness. But passing into a new country, we shall need to be fed with bread and water. Measure your hunger in the new land by the manna in the old.

The one thing no man can take away from me as I face tomorrow is yesterday. You may confuse me about the problems of next year, but you cannot confuse me about the solutions of last year. You may tell me of all the perils and difficulties and dangers that are ahead, but on the pathway o'er which I have passed lie dead my foes. I have sung a song on the deliverance side of the Red Sea; Jehovah hath triumphed, His people are free, and I do not think you can frighten me with a running river when I have seen the sea divided. Therefore, I look into the future and it is all uncertain, and I come to it with the certainties of the past, with the deliverances wrought, the prayers actually answered, with the supplies that have come out of the nowhere into the here. That is the first certainty, and it is a great one. Doubt very much the man or the philosophy that asks you to doubt your own experience. There are moments when we are inclined to do it. It is quite a commonplace thing for men to say to me, and to each other, I doubt not when speaking of these things, I am sometimes tempted to doubt whether there was ever anything in it all. Do not be tempted to doubt your past triumphs. Lay hold upon the things that you have in the actuality of your experience. Make them new by remembering them perpetually. Make them forceful by allowing them to become the inspiration of all your endeavour. There are men and women in this house who come to the New Year full of dread. Look back one moment. Yes, it is good to do it in silence, when the preacher has no word to say. I cannot tell you what to look at, but you know. That day when the bitter waters were sweetened, when after the long desert tramp you sat down at Elim. Oh, we have had the experience. That is our one certainty as we look on. You cannot take that away from us. You can mystify us about our theory, but you cannot mystify us about the things we have been brought through.

Then we also have as certainties the lessons learned. These we dwelt upon last Sunday. Let us reckon on them as certainties. We have learned the lesson of humility, learned it through crushing and breaking, sorrow and difficulty, but let us be glad if we have learned it.

Then again, there was the discovery in ourselves of some things that we did not know, and would rather not have known, or so we

think; the startling surprise of the evil thing in us, which some hour of trying circumstance brought to light; that hour, when we who had cursed Peter for his cowardice were cowardly; when we who had denounced Judas for his treachery were traitors. Thank God, as I face the New Year I know it. I have found it out. I am not in half so much danger from that discovered evil as I was before it was revealed. You failed, my brother, in some dire disastrous moment you fell into some gross, venal sin. If you will only live in the light of that warning, you can climb on your dead self to better things. You have learned your weakness, and you will avoid the very street in which you fell! You will be careful to have no business transactions with the man who persuaded you to do the mean thing! You have found out that you could do a mean thing. You did not think you could, but you are safer for having found out. It is a great thing when a man has found out where his weakness is. Where I am weak I become strong, through the knowledge of the fact.

And finally, in the past we have discovered God. Now we are going to abbreviate our dictionaries by cancelling the word extremity, for we have found out that it is when we are at our extremity that the door of opportunity is opened for our discovery of God, and our entering into all the possibilities of His power. These are the things of the past, which are our certainties as we face the New Year.

Then there are the certainties of the present. To these people they were the sacramental symbols, and the living leader.

When Moses passed, Joshua remained, and what Moses could not do Joshua could, and that because Moses was dead. If you question that statement, remember what we read in the second verse of the first chapter, "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan." The death of Moses was necessary to progress into the land.

These then were the things of the living present, the sacramental symbols and the living leader. Why dwell upon the sacramental symbols? Because here was a change. These people possessed the Ark before. Yes, but they had not followed the Ark, but the cloud; and they would never see it again; the cloud of fire by night, and the mist and mystery by day had ceased. They had a new pathway to tread, with a different method of guidance. They who had waited for the moving of the cloud were now to wait for the moving of the Ark and the priests. The cloud was the provision for the wilderness. God was changing His method with them. They were to live not by a particular sign, but by the word of the Lord. They would never forget that the Ark came out of the cloud. It was in the mystery of the cloud that enveloped the mountain that Moses had the pattern of the Ark given to him. But henceforth the cloud was withdrawn, and the Ark remained. It was not for them to question, or to desire to retain the past; but to be thankful for the present provision, and to obey.

What application has this to us? We have the present as well as the past as we come to the New Year. And in the economy of God there remains for His people one visible, tangible, sacramental symbol, and it is the Bible. That is not a subject which I am going to discuss or deal with fully. I make the assertion and leave it for you to think over. The only sacramental symbol God has left in this world is not bread, or wine, or water, but the Word written. We have that still.

To us remains also a living Leader. If we want to understand all that is included in this face, we shall not stay in the book of Joshua. In the letter to the Hebrews the writer says, in effect, Moses led you out, but he could not lead you in. Joshua led you in but he could not give you rest. Now there is one greater than Moses and Joshua Who leads out, and leads in, and gives rest. We must discover Him in spiritual communion.

Do you doubt at that point, my brother, my sister? Nay, do I doubt? Are we in danger of doubting? Let us think once again. The whole superstructure of our moral and spiritual life depends upon the living presence of the living Christ. This Bible is only the sacramental symbol. It is a great certainty, but do not worship it. In the name of God, do not worship it! It is the living Leader Who is the supreme certainty for the days to come. Are you not tempted to say, "If I could but put my hand upon the hand of His flesh I should know Him better." Not at all. The men who did it never knew Him until He withdrew the hand of flesh and came in spiritual power at Pentecost. These frail hearts of ours still hanker after the hand of flesh upon which our hand might rest, something more present, more tangible, of which we might be sensible; but He is as definitely in the midst of us, as positively by the side of every pilgrim of faith, aye, and more so, than was Joshua present to the hosts of old. Thus we have in the present the Word, written and incarnate.

The final certainty is the future. The past is past. I cannot go back. The present is passing, and I cannot hold it. Twenty minutes ago I was talking of the present. That is now the past. We say, "Tomorrow never comes." As a matter of fact we never possess anything certainly except tomorrow. Everything else is shifting, changing, gone. The future is mine! That is the truer word; it is the word of the man who struggles up after his fall; the word of the man who builds his castle in the air; the word of the man who feels the lure of the coming days. The future is mine. That is true.

Thus here we stand, on an ever moving present, between an irrevocable past and a challenging future. I repeat the phrase already used more than once, the lure of the future is on our spirits. How shall we meet it? The answer is in these early chapters of the Book of Joshua. There is a special word here for the leaders, a special word to Joshua. Now for the moment Joshua becomes the symbol not of the lonely and supreme Leader, Christ, but of all those who are put into places of oversight. What is the word to leaders, preachers, teachers, prophets, overseers? "Be strong and of a good courage." If you read all that first chapter you will find that that was a call to Joshua by God and by man. God said to him, "Be strong and of a good courage"; and presently, when he charged the

Reubenites, and the Gaddites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, as to what they were to do, they said, "According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as He was with Moses... only be strong and of a good courage." God said it, and man said it.

It is so today. The appeal of God to those who are charged with leadership is, "Be strong and of a good courage." Let not your heart faint. Do not tremble. Do not play the coward. The appeal of humanity to the leaders of the Christian Church is the same, "Be strong and of a good courage." If you tremble, no victory will be won.

How shall we meet the future? What is the word to the hosts? This also have I recited, "Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." How were they to sanctify themselves? With regard to the past, they were to remember! With regard to the present, they were to see the Ark, to keep at a sacred distance from it, and to follow it; to discover that it was the new symbol of their relationship; to treat it with holy reverence; to follow it. Their relation to their leader was to be that of loyalty, so long as he was loyal to God.

What of the future? With the inspiration of the past filling the soul, with the certainty of the present enabling the life, they were to go in and possess.

Thus let us go forward to face each day in the name of the Captain of Salvation. Oh, but giants are there! To be slain! Walled cities are there! To be taken! Difficulties await us! To be overcome!

So may God give us grace to follow our greater than Joshua into the unknown tomorrow, and to possess it in His name, and for His glory.

## 021 - Judges 7:7 - God's Fighting Forces

By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you. Judges 7:7

In his address from the chair of the Congregational Union last month, Mr. J. D. Jones, of Bournemouth, uttered these words:

Numbers are not the first consideration with the Christian Church. We need to be delivered from the tyranny of schedules and from the craven fear of comparative tables and statistics. It is possible for churches to lose in numbers, as Gideon did, and to gain in strength.

These were courageous words in an hour when the passion for figures is paramount, and when the mention of decrease breeds panic in the heart of the people of God. They were timely words because on every hand we hear of decreases. The returns of church membership come in at this season of the year in many cases, and if one note has impressed me in the meetings of this year which we now designate May meetings, it has been the note of depression consequent upon statistics which declare decrease in church membership. I have not the ear of all the Christian Church, but I have the ear of those who gather here, and I desire to utter a solemn and at the same time, I trust, a sympathetic and courteous protest against this whole business of lamentation.

Yet, we are compelled to recognize the absence of many things which even our eyes have seen in other days and under other conditions, the absence of many things of which our fathers have spoken, and of which we have read in the history of the Church. There does seem to be just now a widespread indifference among multitudes of our people to spiritual things, and an almost appalling lack of enthusiasm within the Church of God. If we are not to be depressed by the story of decrease, we are to be anxious as to our own personal, individual responsibility, not for the decreases, but for the halt which seems to have come in the march of those enterprises of our Lord and Master which are, or ought to be, the supreme things in our thinking, in our life, and in our serving.

I am not interested in the causes of decrease. I believe that the cause—and I draw the distinction carefully between the singular and the plural—is that God is sifting our ranks, revealing weakness as prerequisite to the creation of strength. It is not against the sense that we have been halted, and that there is a lack of spiritual consciousness, that I make my protest. It is rather against the way in which men deal with this sense. It is against the prevalent idea that decrease itself is a sign of the absence of the working of God. Not that we are to be less careful concerning the matters of His Kingdom, but that we should interpret the signs of the times in the light of God's perpetual method with His people. So far as I read my Bible, so far as I am able to read the doings of God in the history of the Church for nineteen centuries, I affirm that sifting and decrease are but evidences of His activity. Let us understand that activity. I have read these words from the address of my dear and honoured friend Mr. Jones, and my business this evening is to take the illustration which he gave in less than half a sentence, and make it the basis upon which we may illustrate and enforce the principle that he laid down in the course of the brief paragraph I read to you. Let us remind ourselves again of this old story of Gideon. Seven and forty years had passed since Deborah had sung her song. After the singing of that song, and the deliverance wrought through the inspiration of the prophetess and the leadership of Barak, the land had rest for forty years. There succeeded to

the forty years of rest seven years of Midianitish oppression. It is not for me this evening to tell the story of that oppression. It is written in the Book of Judges, and you may turn to it for yourselves if you are not already familiar with it. Suffice it to say that perhaps at no period in the earlier history of the people of God was oppression so severe, and suffering so great, and the sense of defeat so overwhelming as during those seven years of Midian's oppression. One instance will suffice. The people were so cruelly treated, so oppressed by Midian that in multitudes they had left their homes and made dwellings for themselves in dens and caves of the earth, hardly daring to show their faces. Then there came the hour, the "set time." The "set time" arrived when the people became conscious that the visitation was a visitation of chastisement and judgment, and affliction of God intended to teach them lessons of profound importance. With the coming of the "set time" there came, as there always does, the providential man. Gideon was discovered, not by Israel, but by God. God almost invariably discovers the man of the hour where no one else is looking for him. He found Gideon, and there were two qualifications in the character of Gideon which fitted him for service. First, that of his personal faith in God; and secondly, that of his fidelity to his own business. With reluctance almost amounting to fear, he shrank from the work to which he was called, and asked tests of God. We may criticize him for so doing. We might be inclined to say that it was evidence of faltering and febleness of faith, and I think such criticism would be perfectly true; but while we criticize, let us remember that God gave him the tests he asked.

Gideon sent his call through the tribes, and in response there gathered to him thirty-two thousand men. As I watch them gathering out of the different tribes around the standard of Gideon, two thoughts occur to me. First, it is a very wonderful response, seeing the terrible condition of the people. Second, it is an utterly inadequate response, if the vast hosts of Midian are to be engaged in battle and overcome. These, I say, would be the impressions made upon my own mind if I watched the movement with perfect naturalness, as one unacquainted with the deeper secrets of the Divine procedure. A leader has arisen, he cries for helpers, and thirty-two thousand marshal to him from among the oppressed people. Only thirty-two thousand! If you can put yourselves back for a moment in imagination in the place of Gideon, and look at these hosts of Midian encamped along the valleys, holding all the strategic positions, hemming in the people of God, and then look at the army of thirty-two thousand as against the unnumbered hosts of Midian, you will discover how hopeless the task must have seemed, to engage Midian's trained, disciplined hosts with only thirty-two thousand oppressed, and broken, and degraded people.

Then the voice of God, speaking in the soul of the man, declared to him that the people were too many. Too many! A very simple test is given. He is to proclaim to the company that all who are—mark the words—fearful and trembling shall return to their tents. Almost immediately we see twenty-two thousand passing back because they are fearful and trembling. Now Gideon has only ten thousand left. Again the voice of God, speaking within the soul of the man, declares to him that the number is too great, and a new test is imposed.

The essential need of the physical life of these men is water. Let them now be tested in the presence of necessities. I watch the procedure. It is purely Eastern, and as such we must look upon it. Of the ten thousand, nine thousand seven hundred kneel, bending over the water in order to obtain that which is a necessity of life; but there are three hundred men who stand, and, bending over, catch the water in their hands and lap it. Three hundred men taking necessary things, but in the evident expectation of the work they had to do. Nine thousand, seven hundred men taking unnecessary time with necessary things. It was a severe ordeal. Nine thousand, seven hundred men go back. Then the words of my text are heard: "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you." That is a story of decrease. It is the story of God's method of sifting a people.

Look over the actual story again. The whole nation is conscious of the oppression under which it suffers. The whole nation desires deliverance, but when the call is given, of the nation thirty-two thousand rise a little higher than the nation, thirty-two thousand are prepared to make some venture, and to gather around the standard that is being raised. Among the thirty-two thousand there are twenty-two thousand who are not quite sure, twenty-two thousand who feel the tremor of fear shaking them, and they are sent home; ten thousand are left who have moved to a higher level. Of that ten thousand, there are nine thousand seven hundred who will take unnecessary time for the supply of the necessities of life. Let them be sent home. There are three hundred only out of the whole nation for God's fight.

There is no more radiant revelation of God's method of sifting His people in the whole Bible. It is a revelation of the fact that with God quality is infinitely more than quantity. It is an explanation out of the Old Testament of the reason of the severity of the terms of Jesus as we read them in the New. It explains that constant habit of our Lord and Master, strange habit that has so often surprised and startled us, of scattering crowds by the severity of His terms. I venture to affirm that there are words of Jesus in the New Testament which if I read in this congregation at this late hour of the Christian era, men would shrink from them as from the touch of fire. This severity of terms was due to the fact that always quality counts with God for more than quantity. That is a beneficent movement, therefore, which sifts the ranks and gets rid of certain classes of men, always because, in order to accomplish any great, mighty work, God must have men upon whom He can depend.

There are two lines of thought that I shall ask you to follow briefly. First, the story as it reveals the men with whom God cannot move to victory. Second, the story on the positive side, as it reveals to us the character of the forces with which God is able to win His



triumphs.

I am not discussing the subject of personal salvation, but that of service. There is no weak, faltering, failing, cowardly heart that God refuses to receive for salvation. Let no man imagine that God demands that any man who is seeking His grace and favor shall be courageous. He may come with all his trembling and all his weakness, meanness, cowardice, and God will make him a new man.

There are two classes with which God cannot proceed to victory—the fearful and the trembling. Who are the men who are fearful—the men in whose vision the foe bulks bigger than God? That is always a cause of fear. It is a perfectly natural thing. I see those massed, mighty hosts of Midian encamped in all the valleys, and I feel that it was a perfectly natural thing that men looking at those hosts, continuing to look at them, beginning to count them, should be filled with fear. The natural outlook in the great conflict of right with wrong is always a depressing outlook. It always has been; it is yet. It is possible for us today to count the forces against us, and gaze upon them until the heart is filled with fear. These twenty-two thousand men who were fearful were men who were looking at the foe. Is there not a deeper reason why they were fearful when they looked at the foe? I think the second word in the ancient record helps us, trembling. Why trembling? They were men who thought more of their own safety than of the great cause. They looked at the hosts, and said: "If this means battle we shall be slain; we cannot win." That was the inspiration of panic. They were not prepared for suffering and death. They were fearful because they looked at the foe, trembling because they were more anxious about their own safety and ease than they were concerning the great victory of the Kingdom of God.

Why is it that God declines to move with such men for the accomplishment of His enterprises? First, because such men create panic in a crisis; fear is contagious. Lead thirty-two thousand men to fight, twenty-two thousand of whom are fearful, and the ten thousand will be afraid in the clash of the conflict and in the hour of battle. Second, because men who are fearful and trembling cannot strike any heavy blow in the hour of battle. Trembling is always weakness.

I am inclined to think the application need not be made in any word of mine. Are we afraid of the issue? Then God cannot work with us. Are we so busy in these days, looking at the foe and counting the forces against the Lord, that in our heart there is the tremor of fear? Then we are not the men God can depend upon. In the day of battle our fear will spread to others; it is contagious. In the day of dire conflict we cannot place any heavy blow upon the foe. Fear paralyzes the arm because it unnerves the heart. All such fear is born of gazing upon the foe. The fearful and trembling man God cannot use. I know the word is a severe one, but it is the word of this story and of the whole Bible. The trouble today is that the fearful and trembling man insists upon remaining in the army. A decrease that sifts the ranks of the Church of men who fear and tremble is a great, a gracious and a glorious gain.

Mark the second type of man revealed. I have twice described this man as one who takes unnecessary time over necessary things. To do that is always to lack a keen sense of the urgency of the mission in hand. This is one of the causes of weakness and failure today, and perhaps a more prolific and widespread cause than any other. Is not this true of many men who have no fear of the ultimate issue, the ultimate victory, who have no panic as regards God's ability; but while they name the name of Christ, and profess to be His crusaders, they take unnecessary time over necessary things? There are things necessary to the physical life, if I may begin on the lowest level, such as eating, sleeping, dressing. There is a vast amount of time wasted by men who name the name of Christ on all these. Or take the mental level. Unnecessary time is spent over reading, unnecessary time over study and investigation. I have in my own mind now a man, finely, wonderfully equipped in mind, who has spent all his life in preparation, and has done nothing—no blow struck, no brick laid in the great building, no serious work put into the business of cooperation with God. Unnecessary time is taken over the most necessary business of personal spiritual culture, reading and study of the Bible, with no application of its teaching in the warfare against sin, seeking for personal enrichment in the spiritual realm, and no output in sacrifice and strenuous endeavor. Unnecessary time is taken over recreation. I think I need not say one single word here to defend myself from misunderstanding. I believe in the necessity for recreation, but how much time we are wasting! Unnecessary time in the matters of the daily calling, the amassing of wealth.

There is no sense of urgency. The idea of Christianity with too many has become that of an opportunity for their own worship and their own ultimate salvation, and they forget that there is a great battle on, and that God is seeking for warriors, and that He does—account for it how you will or leave it unaccounted for, a mystery of His own gracious and perfect will—He does limit Himself by the method of seeking the cooperation of men. He must, as His own economy has arranged, strike the blow for His victory through men. There is no instance in all the history of the centuries of God acting entirely as apart from His own. All this is lost sight of, and we name the Name, and sing the songs, and wear the uniform of the army, but we take unnecessary time over these necessary things.

The urgency of this business of Christ's campaign in the world, His battle against evil, His compassionate regard for men, and His desire to deliver them, His passion for the Kingdom of God; these things are not recognized as urgent. Such attitude is not the attitude of conflict. Such repletion of necessary things unfits for campaigning. If it be that in these days He is sifting, sifting, sifting; and those departing are those who are fearful and afraid, or such as are not prepared to make His business the one overwhelming master passion of all their life, then we gain by the decreases. Even though the numbers be reduced until they be but three hundred out of every thirty-two thousand, God's word to us, as it was to Gideon of old, is this: "By the three hundred men that lapped will I

save you."

Who, then, are the men who constitute God's fighting force in the world? They are courageous men. That is to say, they were men who saw the vision of God, who saw God at the back of national life, and who saw God in the movement to which they were called. They were men who were prepared to venture something in the great enterprise of the moment, men with such a lack of consciousness of their own importance that they were prepared to die. A man never can say this kind of thing in this day without being rebuked for it. I made a reference of this kind in a recent sermon here, and have had several letters protesting against my saying that it is necessary today for a man to die for Christ. I am perfectly aware that every man must be true to the laws of God about his own health in the interest of the war; but all of this lack of conviction about the supreme importance of the things of the Kingdom of God breeds ease and softness, and unfits men for the fight. God does want men today who have such a clear vision of Himself as to have no panic in their hearts and such abandonment of themselves that they have no trembling as they go forth to the war. Such men inspire confidence. Thank God He has many such today, more than three hundred. Such men do exploits; they are winning their victories even in a day when we hear of decrease. He has those upon whom He can depend. They are men of courage, courage born of their vision of God and of their conviction of the supremacy in all life of the matters of His Kingdom.

They are also consecrated men. Consecration means discipline, the ability to do without. Consecration means ability to take necessary things in necessary quantity and in necessary time. This is the practical expression of consecration. Men who realize the urgency, and "use the world as not abusing it." God seeks such men because with such men He can fight, for such men are ready for the fight, and are not seeking merely for parade; and because such men are ready for the fight, they can "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

Turning, finally, from the story itself, and with its teaching in our hearts, let us apply God's tests and act. Are we fearful, are we trembling? How shall we cure this tremor of the spirit, this fear in the heart? Only as we see God. Unless the vision of God be clear to us, it is better for ourselves and for the world, and better for the Kingdom of God, that we retire out of the fighting line. What does the vision of God do for a man? It reveals two things to him invariably. First, his own utter, absolute unworthiness and uselessness. Secondly, God's infinite ability, and his own usefulness to God when once he yields himself to Him.

Mark the stories of your Old Testament. The vision of God was granted to the prophet, and he said: "Woe is me, for I am undone." When a vision of God came, the patriarch who had argued at length against all the philosophy of his friends said: "Behold, I am of small account." Daniel, in the light of that vision, exclaimed: "My righteousness is become as filthy rags." No man ever comes to vision of God without feeling the sense of his own unworthiness and the overwhelming conviction of his own inability. That is the first condition for fitness for fighting. I know how easily it is said, and I know also how hardly the lesson is learned. I speak tonight in the presence of those whose experience in life and warfare has been longer than mine, but I am perfectly sure, if my appeal might be made to them, and their answer given to this congregation, they would all agree that the hour of victorious fighting in the enterprises of God dawned when they found their own weakness and inability. It is out of the "I am unable" that there comes the great "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Gideon saw God, and saw that he could do nothing apart from God, and therein was the first stage in preparation for doing everything. He shrank from his work. Therein was evidence of the commencement of God's making him fit for the doing of his work. Over against the panic to which I have made reference, over against this complaining lament which has run like a minor monotone through the meetings of the past month, there is another tone even more perilous, the tone that affirms our ability to do anything. The courage that can endure fighting and conquer is always generated in a sense of unworthiness and unfitness born of the flaming vision of God. There Gideon began. There Isaiah, Job and Daniel began. There all the men of the past began, and there we must begin. We shrink from it and hold back from it. We will not look toward the glory that breaks upon our lives, will not submit ourselves to the fiery, searching test of the eyes of flame. Hence our weakness and hence our fear. False fear can only be cast out by the birth of the new fear, the fear of God and the fear of our own inability.

Our first business is to inquire in His presence as to whether we are fearful and trembling, and, if so, then what is left to us? I put the whole thing into this brief word. See God, or else retire from the fighting line.

To make application of the second truth both in its negative and positive aspects. Are we kneeling at some stream of personal satisfaction? I am afraid, as I almost invariably am today, to begin to illustrate that question, and apply it. I would infinitely rather leave the question to be answered alone in the presence of God.

Suffer me an impossible supposition. If Christ is to be defeated, how much will you lose when He is bankrupt? That is the test of whether we are ready for God's fight or not. What have we put into this business of time, of toil and serving? When that question is asked, we begin to see where we are, kneeling at some stream simply desiring to satisfy ourselves. Up, men, lap and march, or fall behind! The Christian Church devoted to the Christ of God, having seen the vision that rebukes and heals, having observed the glory that burns and renews; the Christian Church, placing all her resources, the resources of her individual membership at the disposal of Christ; and the Christian Church, conscious that the first business of every believer, not on one day in seven, but on seven days in seven, not in fulfilling the service of the sanctuary, but in all the duties of the hurrying days, is the business of waging

Christ's warfare and winning Christ's victory; that Church will immediately produce the very results that we long to see, arousing the attention of the multitudes, affirming the reality of spiritual things, compelling men—or, if you will take the more tender word, constraining men—to the Lord Christ. All dearth and all death are to be blamed upon our own failure and not upon the withholdings of God. The Midianitish hosts are in all the valleys; the forces against God and His Christ are marshaled, perchance, as they never were before. We are not to be oblivious of the forces of the foe, but in God's name, we are not to look at them so long that we fail to see God Himself.

The true outlook is that of the man who wrote the Roman epistle, who began by looking with such intrepid courage into the heart of the world's corruption as he wrote the third chapter of the Romans. If you want to know what are the massed forces of sensualism and evil, read that chapter again and again, and yet again. Paul began there. He looked straight into the heart of it, but he did not end there. He moved on in argument and appeal until I see him climbing the height, surveying all the field, and saying: "If God is for us, who is against us?" There is a note of laughter in the question, a ring of triumph in the challenge! He saw the forces massed against Christ and His Church—things present, things to come, angels, principalities, powers, all the massed forces of spiritual and material evil—and he said: "If God is for us, who is against us?"

A man with such a vision of God is such a one as Paul, who for at least three and thirty years of Christian service never halted, never wavered, never took unnecessary time even for necessary things, was forevermore a warrior and a pilgrim, a builder and a toiler, in perils oft by land and sea.

We lack this vision, therefore we lack this consecration. Now God is sifting the ranks. Let us be reverent and let us wait, and let us have done with our lamentation over falling statistics; but in God's name let Him have His way with us. Let us at least remit our own lives to Him, and beseech Him to banish the fear and end the trembling by giving us a clearer vision of Himself. Let us beseech Him that He will so reveal to us the urgency of the enterprise that we never again shall bend over a stream and take unnecessary time over even necessary things. Then we shall be among the number of those of whom he will say today, as he said of old: "By the three hundred that lapped will I save you."

## 022 - 1 Samuel 26:21 - Playing the Fool

... behold, I have played the fool....1 Samuel 26:21

That is autobiography; clear, truthful, inclusive. In half-a-dozen words we have the story of Saul, Israel's first king, like the nations. Under stress of circumstances, men often tell truths and whole truths, which, if they had time to think, they would never utter. God's method of crisis is that of the commonplace. His method of examination is that of the unannounced. When for a moment a man is off-guard, in all probability you will know more truth about him than in all his attempts either to reveal himself or to hide himself. The ever-present consciousness, habitually, carefully hidden, flashes forth. Later, he may apologize and say he did not mean what he said, that he was not at the moment responsible. The fact is that he was surprised into saying what he was constantly thinking. In all probability Saul had never said that before and would never say it again; but he had been thinking it for a long time, "I have played the fool." It is an error to suppose that a man does not know the truth about himself. In that sense also, God hath not left Himself without witness. There is no escape for any man as long as reason continues, from the bare, naked, unadorned truth about himself. He may practice the art of deceit so skillfully as not only to hide himself from his fellow men, but in his unutterable folly to imagine that he has hidden himself from God; but he has never hidden himself from himself. In some moment of stress and strain, he says what he has been thinking all the time. So with Saul.

Saul had slept deeply that night, for the record tells us that "a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen" upon him. He was awakened from his slumber by the voice of David calling to him from the opposite mountain. Waking he became keen, acute, neither dulled by food nor drugged by wine; everything was clear and sharp about him, as it so often is in the waking moment. Ere he knew it, he had said, "... behold, I have played the fool...." That is the whole story of the man.

Let us consider then the man who spoke; the opportunities that came to him; how he played the fool; in order that we may finally inquire what this story has in it for us.

Let us look at the man as he is revealed to us in the passage we read, and as he is revealed in all those chapters from beginning to the sad and dire calamity in the midst of which they end.

In the first place, he was a man of good family. His father Kish, a Benjamite, was a "mighty man of valor," that is of substance, wealth. Saul looked upon life from the viewpoint of good family connections, that viewpoint from which every young man would desire to look upon life; a viewpoint which should compel a man to thank God every day he lives.

I observe, in the second place, that Saul was a man of splendid physique, "... a young man and goodly:..." says the record, standing

head and shoulders above his fellows, a man with all the advantages of height, and health, and handsomeness. Let no man undervalue these things. I know perfectly well what may be in the minds of some of you, especially those who lack those qualities. You will remember that Isaac Watts wrote:

Were I so tall to reach the Pole  
Or grasp the ocean with my span;  
I must be measured by my soul  
The mind's the standard of the man.

Quite right; but let no haggard and thin man pretend he does not admire the magnificent physique of his friend!

In the record, I also find that this man was a man of simple life, a yet greater advantage; living at home, interested in his father's affairs, and bound to his father by the ties of very sincere and honest affection. When we are introduced to him, he is about his father's business. In those long wanderings in fruitless search after the lost asses of his father, there is a revealing touch in the fact that at last he said to his servant, "... Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought of us." Saul had all the advantages of actual work and responsibility in rural surroundings. No sane man would live in a city if he could escape it. As Bismarck said, "Great cities are great sores upon the body politic."

Further, he was a man of modest disposition; a man who, when he was saluted by the seer in those remarkable words which suggested to him that all desirable things in the kingdom were for him, replied that he was a Benjamite, the smallest of the tribes, and a member of the family that was least in the tribe. In that answer was revealed the pride of modesty.

Once more, he was a man of slumbering courage. Its manifestation came after a little while, in his action when the nation was insulted by Nahash. The story I am not going to tell for you know it. Simply let me say of the man Saul that he was a man of that courage which farms until occasion demands and then strikes with passion and force in defence of national life.

That is the man who at the end said, "... behold, I have played the fool...."

Let us look again at the opportunity which came to him. It was a unique, remarkable, surprising opportunity. He was called to kingship, to a position of responsibility and authority in the life of the nation. The people had clamored for a king; it was an evil clamor, it was a clamor that proved their degeneracy; it was a clamor according to God's interpretation of it to His servant Samuel, which demonstrated the fact that they had rejected Him from being King. Nevertheless, they had clamored for a king and in working out His own purpose, following that principle which always characterizes the Divine activity, that of giving people what they ask for and thus compelling them to work out their own desires to ultimate manifestation, He granted them a king; but He chose the king, He selected him. The call to Saul was clear, definite, solemn. What a scope for his powers! What a chance to bless men from that high position of authority. What an opportunity to cooperate with God in such a way as to prove to the people that God was still King. What an opportunity to exercise authority under the authority of God in such a way that through his authority the authority of God might be manifested anew, and the heart of the people turned back to Him from Whom they had wandered. It was a great hour and a great call.

Notice further, not only his opportunity in itself, but in its equipment. His first equipment was himself. He was such a man as he was, and in that fact lay great value for the doing of the work to which God had called him. Whenever God calls a man to high vocation, it is not merely true to say He will confer upon him what he needs for the fulfilment of that vocation; it is also true that He has chosen the right man for the work. If God calls a man to preach, it is not merely true that He will give him his message and equip him for his preaching, it is also true that He has called a man who can preach. The call of God is always answered by the capacity that lies within a man; it is made to that. Saul had himself; he was kingly in himself. He was equipped in his own personality, having within it the capacity for kingship which God recognized in the moment in which He called him to the place of kingship.

He had more than that; he had God with him. Said Samuel to him, "... God is with thee," and as he turned from Samuel and went on his way, he was conscious of some strange change, "... God gave him another heart:..." and he became another man. More than that. "... the Spirit of God came mightily upon him,..." and on his journey home he joined a company of the sons of the prophets who were traveling; and lo, the Divine afflatus possessed him, and he saw visions and lifted up his voice and uttered words of Divine truth.

There were other forces at his disposal. He was equipped in the matter of the men who were about him. His preparation for his work is demonstrated by the friends he possessed, and by the foes he discovered. Samuel was with him, and there is no more radiant verse in the story than this, pregnant with suggestiveness, "... there went with him the host, whose hearts God had touched." He was prepared for kingship by the fact of his foes. Who were they? The sons of Belial, worthless, base fellows. You may often know what a man is by discovering who his foes are. When the sons of Belial are against a man, you may believe in him.

This is the man who at the end said, "... behold, I have played the fool...."

Let us now ask how he played the fool. Going over the old, well-known story in the most rapid way, I want to speak of the manifestations of his folly, and that in order that we may try to find the secrets thereof.

The first manifestation came very early; soon after his anointing. When they sought him on that subsequent day of popular election which was to ratify the Divine election, he was hiding away; and in that hiding away there is the first manifestation of weakness, the first evidence of folly. I am going to say to you quite frankly that I know a great many will join issue with me here. I have heard it declared by men for whom I have the profoundest respect, that the hiding away was a new demonstration of his modesty, but I ask you to remember that there is a modesty which is wholly evil. If God has called a man to kingship, he has no right to hide away. If God has called a man definitely, anointed him, equipped him to take charge of the Empire, if that man out of any sense of modesty shall hide away and try to escape the responsibility, therein is the first evidence of his weakness. So it was with Saul.

I notice next that this man manifested a strange new form of military pride. For the first time there was established in this nation a standing army, and I begin to see the line along which his kingship is going to move. Saul created a standing army of three thousand men, he himself taking charge of two thousand while the remaining thousand were with Jonathan. Note the sequence; the whole story is graphically told. Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines and Saul blew the trumpet in Israel. Israel heard that Saul had smitten the garrison!

I watch him a little further and observe that he has become restless, impatient, self-dependent. Samuel has not come; then we can do without Samuel; offer the sacrifices! He violated a principle, and despised a command in the rush of his restless impatience.

I follow him a little further and find another story, the story of his rashness in taking an oath which imperiled the life of Jonathan which would have resulted in his death if the people had not interfered and rescued him.

I go a little further and find another illustration of his failure; his disobedience in the matter of Amalek and his lying afterwards.

The most glaring revelation of his folly is that ruthless, persistent, undying hatred of David; hunting him, as David himself did say, like a partridge upon the mountains.

The last manifestation of his folly is that in which we see him in the night time commerce with the underworld of evil, and trying to find out the hidden secrets through the muttering of a witch. A man with whom God was, who received from God a new heart and became another man, who was mightily clothed with the Spirit of God so that he joined the ranks of the prophets. What a morning of promise! At last, in the darkness of the night he is seen creeping stealthily to find a muttering witch, dealing with evil spirits. He was startled and surprised in the darkness of the night, for there also he found God, and to her surprise, the witch found God for Samuel came. That is the last phase of his folly.

These are but the manifestations, the symptoms, the results. The tragedy of the man's life lies deeper. His hiding away, his military pride, his impatience, his self-dependence, his rashness, his disobedience and lying, his hatred of David, his traffic with the witch; these are all manifestations of something deeper. Wherein then lay the folly of this man? I shall answer my question fundamentally and processionally. I shall speak of that which is fundamental and then ask you to notice how that expressed itself in the man's history.

I am almost afraid to tell you the fundamental wrong because it has so often been said and because the saying of it is not the sort of thing that troubles men as it ought to do. It is so old a story. The fundamental wrong of this man was that he failed to submit himself to the one King. Lack of loyalty to God; that was it. That is nothing new, of course. That is what we hear so constantly; so constantly that all the keen edge goes off the truth, and men are not troubled by it as they should be. In that terrific hour when the prophet told him of his rejection, we have these words, which are quoted often enough, "... to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Therein lay the man's failure, that he had not obeyed, that he had not hearkened; "... I have played the fool...." Created by God, being in myself all that I am by God's creative act, called by God to high, dignified destiny, equipped by God with all that was necessary for the fulfilment of that destiny; "... I have played the fool..." in that I have forgotten God to Whom I owe myself, my destiny, my equipment. He had trusted in his own strength, he had trusted in natural advantages; but he had forgotten that his own strength was God's gift to him, that his own natural advantages came to him from God. He had forgotten God.

Mark the manifestation of it. No longer in the events chronicled but in the processes which are revealed. This man failed entirely to exercise the true function of kingship. This man in his government of Israel was a warrior and nothing more; he was never a shepherd. He manifested from the first only one kind of concern about his people, concern about the frontier, concern about enemies. It had its place; it was necessary that he should make war upon the Philistines, and this he did successfully through a long period. I am not affirming that he was wrong in being a warrior; the times demanded it, and the command of God was that he should deliver his people from Philistia. But that concluded his kingly activity. He had no care for the people; he lacked the shepherd heart. It was Homer who said, "All kings are shepherds." These words of Homer are certainly vindicated by the biblical revelation of what kingship means. Kingship is always shepherdhood in the Divine economy. There is no greater psalm in all the five books, celebrating

the Kingship of God, than that old and familiar one which we so constantly recite, "The Lord is my Shepherd." That is the supreme song of Jehovah's Kingship. This man Saul lacked the shepherd heart and the shepherd quality.

Then observe, as he passed on through the years, his neglect of his true friends; his neglect of Samuel, his cruelty and injustice to Jonathan, and the persistent, devilish hunting of David to which we have already made reference. He became a man, self-conscious, self-dependent, self-assertive, self-centered.

These evidences of the man's folly are simply revelations of the things resulting from that central, fundamental wrong; for if he had not forgotten God but had been obedient to Him, then in communion with Him he would have been not a warrior alone, but a shepherd also. If he had not forgotten God and ceased to be loyal to Him, he would have known the value of Samuel and Jonathan and David. The man who forgets God is self-centered. Every man lives under the government of God or of Himself. The man who forgetting God, neglecting Him, disobeying Him, living without Him, finds his soul circumferences around the center of his own desire, lust, passion, will and waywardness. That man inevitably in some hour of crisis will be compelled to the confession, "... behold, I have played the fool...."

So finally, let us gather from the story some of the things it ought to say to us immediately. I suggest to you, first of all, that the story of Saul teaches us that advantages are not insurances of success. You may have all the advantages and yet at last be a disastrous failure. Advantages as to family, and physique, of natural disposition characterized at once by modesty and courage are all valuable; but a man may have all these and yet play the fool. I say that almost with bated breath lest I be misunderstood. Do not undervalue your family relationships. When next you think of your advantages, head the list, if indeed it be true, with this: my father lived a clean life before me and left me the legacy of his example; and my mother prayed for me through all the days. But remember, your father's example and your mother's prayers are not enough. A man may have had these things also, the highest spiritual family advantages, and yet he may play the fool.

I observe, in the second place, that the story of Saul teaches that opportunities do not crown men. You may have heard the call of God, a kingdom may be waiting for you to govern it, rule it, administer it. You may have with you the comradeship of the good. These things are all valuable, indeed they are all necessary if life is to be fulfilled. But a man may have the whole of them and play the fool. A man may have heard in his soul the call of God to the ministry, to the mission field, to professional life at home, to commercial life at home, for I maintain that in these things God also calls as distinctly as to other things. You may know you are where God put you. Saul knew it, the anointing oil had been upon his head, he had made no mistake. The profound, spiritual conviction is yours that you are exactly where God would have you be. Yet you may play the fool, spoil your life, miss your kingdom, weaken your volition, end disastrously. So thinly separated from opportunities crowning a man, every opportunity for that which is high, noble, wonderful, is an opportunity for terrific failure. The greater the opportunity that comes to you, the greater the possibility of disaster, unless you find the secret of life and obey it.

I learn, quite simply and finally, from this study that there is one thing necessary. The one thing necessary for the fulfilment of life is that of surrender, loyalty, obedience to God. Apart from that there can be no proper understanding of life. Apart from that there is no wisdom or power to deal with life.

I know full well as I speak to you how the minds and hearts of some of you will rebel against such a statement as that; that a man may tell me he knows himself and his capacities and powers and knows perfectly well the true way to deal with these to assure success to himself. Well, I pray you think again, and think more deeply, and recognize the fact ere it be too late, ere disaster come, that no man knows himself perfectly, finally. If you would have witnesses to the thing I am now saying, they are here; I cannot call them, cannot ask them to speak, but they are here; men who are going grey, men who have been weathering the storms and finding out themselves. They will tell you that the most astonishing hours that have ever come to them were hours in which they discovered in themselves things they never dreamed were there; things sometimes of good and sometimes of evil. The last words of the old Greek philosophy were great words, "Man, know thyself." It was great because it brought every man face to face with himself and so to the discovery that he was greater than he had ever known, so great that he could not know himself. Infinitely more true to the experience of human life was the word of the Psalmist in the Hebrew psalter, in that marvelous one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, opening as it does,

O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me,  
Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,  
Thou understandest my thought afar off.

Then the Psalmist said,

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is high, I cannot attain unto it.

"Such knowledge,..." that is knowledge of myself. I do not know myself. When a man has learned that lesson, then he is prepared to

submit himself to the One Who knows him, and so the great psalm which opens with the affirmation,

O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me

ends with the prayer,

Search me, O God, and know my heart:

Try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any way of wickedness in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

That is the language of the wisdom of the man who realizing God's knowledge and his own ignorance, will submit himself to God at the beginning of life, when the flush of dawn is upon the sky and high hope is singing its song in his heart. The man who will begin there will never end by saying, "... I have played the fool,..." for "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Apart from his surrender, loyalty, obedience to God, there can be no proper understanding of life, no adequate wisdom or power to deal with life.

There are many manifestations of the fundamental folly. I will content myself with grouping those suggested by the story. A man plays the fool if he halts when God calls him to some pathway of service. Has he called you, my brother, did you hear the call? Why are you hiding? End your folly, and march according to the Divine command.

A man plays the fool when he neglects his best friends. What are these new friends that make you neglect the old ones? How is it that we have missed you recently from the fellowship of the saints of God? God set round about some of you a band of men whose hearts He Himself has touched. Why neglect their company? I believe in the communion of saints. I believe in the value of keeping in the comradeship of the saints. I do protest that unless I maintain my comradeship with the saints, I shall wander from the path of the just. I owe more to the spiritual sympathy and help of the children of God than I can ever tell. How many a man have I seen drift out of the Christian church and out of Christian work because he has neglected the friends that God provided.

A man plays the fool if he marches upon the Divine enterprise when God has not commanded him. That is only the reverse of the other truth that a man plays the fool when he halts when God commands. Go upon no enterprise at your own charge. Await the Divine command, for therein is the Divine covenant, and the Divine covenant provides that thou shalt find the resources needed to meet the command. A march without God is a march of unutterable folly toward final disaster.

A man plays the fool if he disobeys in even the smallest matter. To obey is better than sacrifice. The religious excuse is the most damnable of all excuses. To disobey God in the interest of religion is to blaspheme.

A man plays the fool when he attempts to justify the wrong he has done. It is upon the basis of confession that God can forgive sin and reinstate a man in righteousness. That is not merely a Divine enactment and requirement. It is a moral necessity. When a man justifies wrong, tries to excuse it, he is playing the fool; for he is keeping the evil thing that has already threatened to ruin him.

A man plays the fool unutterably when he allows some hatred to master him, as Saul did in the case of David.

There is some man here who is saying, "... behold, I have played the fool...." What shall I say to that man? What that man supremely needs is help that comes down to his level, takes hold of him, touches him in pity but also in power, bends over him in infinite compassion, but also with force that will remake him.

That is what Browning felt when he wrote his great poem:

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh that I seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee: a Man like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever! a Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!

To every man tonight who is saying in the deepest of his soul almost in despair, "... behold, I have played the fool,..." I say, "... See the Christ stand!" He has come to the foolish to make them wise, to the ruined to redeem them, to the lost to find them, to the impure to purify them, to the dis-crowned kings to crown them, to the souls that have unutterably and disastrously failed to realize within them the original intention and lift them into the place of fellowship with God.

How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow Him. 1 Kings  
18:21

Ahab was King of Israel. The kingdom was in a most deplorable condition, perhaps at a period darker than any other in its history. Ahab was a veritable incarnation of evil, and his influence, together with that of Jezebel, had been blighting and spoiling everything of essential greatness. Clouds and darkness were over all the land. Images of Baal and Ashtaroah gleamed in the valleys. Temples of idolatry were erected everywhere, and the altars of God were broken down. Then, while such darkness reigned throughout the land, while it seemed as though no cheering star gleamed through the blackness, as suddenly as the falling of a thunderbolt, there appeared on the scene one of the most remarkable and fiery of all the prophets.

In the previous Chapter we have the beginning of the story of the mission of Elijah. "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the sojourners of Gilead, said unto Ahab." That is the introduction of this man. We know no more of him than this, a Tishbite, and we are not sure even until this day what that may mean. It is even suggested that he was a man of another nationality, not of the chosen seed. Be that as it may, from somewhere, no one knows where, somehow, under what influence none can tell, this man broke in upon the condition of affairs with a message that was fiery and forceful, terrific and timely, a veritable message of God, a message that was brief, a message that was a message of judgment, a message that made no apology, and offered no conditions, and suggested no compromise.

It was briefly this: "As the Lord, the God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word," and, having uttered it, Elijah vanished.

But the Word of the Lord, which is ever powerful, which is never void, but ever thrills with energy, wrought out into actual and terrific fulfilment, the word of judgment, that there should be no rain and no dew for three years, and the people who, in material prosperity, had forgotten God—no, infinitely worse, had defiantly rebelled against God—were brought back face to face with God through the process of a judgment which had been foretold by the prophet. Elijah was cared for, first, at the brook, and then at Zarephath, until the time foretold having passed away he appeared again on the scene, first to Obadiah, and then to Ahab.

Our story is that of the hour in which Elijah faced Ahab. It is a wonderful story, dramatic and startling. Ahab, at last, stood face to face with the man whose prediction, having been fulfilled, had wrought such havoc in the condition of the nation. He asked him, "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" And with quiet, calm dignity the answer of the prophet was given, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed the Baalim." And then addressing himself still to the king, in the language of a superior, with the note of authority, he said, "Gather to me all Israel... and the prophets of Baal." The king, who, in his first words, manifested the anger that was in his heart, and the murder that lurked there, made no difficulty, but, under the tremendous power and will of the prophetic command, backed by the authority of God, gathered the people together.

The story is better written than I can ever tell it. All I stay to do for one moment is to notice the different classes that were gathered on Mount Carmel in that wonderful moment in the history of the people. On the one hand were the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty; and the prophets of the Asherah, four hundred; and all those who followed their teaching and worshiped at their shrines. On the other hand, stood the one lonely messenger of God, Elijah, confronting the prophets of a false religion, confronting the corruption of a corrupt court, confronting that most terrible of all things, an undecided mob. On the one hand, men who are decided in their worship of Baal; on the other, a man who is decided in his worship of Jehovah; and then that great company of the nation, waiting for leading, undecided, a mixed multitude, many of them never having confessed openly their allegiance to God, even though in their heart they were loyal to Him, for while Elijah said "I, even I only, am left," elsewhere we are told that God replied, "Yet will I leave Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." And beside that seven thousand, the great multitude of the people who knew the will of God, who had been nurtured in the very atmosphere and enforcement of His law, but into whose heart there had come the lusting that is at the base of all false worship—a great crowd, undecided, uncommitted, halting, wavering, taking neither one side nor the other.

It was to this multitude that Elijah spoke, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Between opinions, that is, without opinion. A man who is between two opinions is devoid of an opinion. How long halt ye there? said the prophet. Now listen to him. "If God be God, follow Him; if Baal, then follow him." I think I hear the fervor and the passion in the prophet's voice. I think I know how he felt that day. I think, if I may put this old Hebrew and stately language into the language of the present day and the language of my heart, it is as though the prophet said, Take sides at all costs. Let us know where you are by one thing or the other; find your God, and follow. I think I hear the prophet saying, as he looked out on this great crowd, wondering over the discussing and philosophizing and arguing, "If God be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." Build your altar, burn incense, and go the whole way. "If God be God, rebuild His broken altar, and follow Him." It is the prophet's protest against indecision. "How long halt ye between two opinions?"

The times have changed. We do not gather now on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal are not among us as they were there. Our



altars of God are not the same as were the altars raised of old. All the accidental robing has passed, but essential men are still here. All that is merely Eastern has gone out of the story, but the living vital principles abide. And as God, Who alone is able to do it, sifts and divides among us we fall on different sides and into different positions just as did these men of old. The local coloring has passed away, but the central truth abides. There are those who are definitely and openly and positively worshiping God. Thank God for the company. There are those—alas, that it is so, and yet it is true—who are openly and definitely and positively worshiping at other altars, for every man is worshiping, every man has some deity enshrined in his heart and life. Every man has some master passion of his life to which he burns incense as the days come and go. There are those who are worshiping at the altars of idolatry, at the altars of pollution, at the altars of sin. But there are also very many who are not definitely and positively and avowedly committed either to God or Baal, either to purity or impurity, either to right or to wrong. The choice has not yet been definitely made. They have not yet said, God is God, we will follow Him until we see Him. They have not yet said, Evil is God, we will follow it until we see it unmasked in perdition. They have not said these things. They are standing and halting and waiting between opinions, with opinion unformed, with decision unmade.

"How long halt ye between two opinions?" I make the same appeal as did the prophet of old. "If God be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." If the God Whom I declare to you be indeed the One Who can best fill that place in your heart which clamors to be filled, if He be the One Who can best guide, direct life, enoble you, crown you, follow Him. But if evil can best satisfy you, if you have come to the decision that you can best be fitted and fashioned and formed and satisfied by evil, then follow evil. Only do one thing or the other. In the name of God and humanity, for the sake of God and humanity, take sides, and let us know where you stand. The man who is turning his face toward evil and pollution with all his heart and soul and mind is not doing half so much harm in the community as the man who is taking on his lips for discussion the language of sacred things, while in his heart he refuses to follow them to an issue. That is the kind of statement that some of you resent. I shall repeat it and emphasize it. Here is a man who has given his whole life to the clamant cry for stimulants; here is a man who is a drunkard. That man's influence on the children of the district where he lives is not half so pernicious as the influence of the father of the children who plays with the thing that may damn his child. Think of it. I will take my boy in the freshness of his boyhood's days by the hand, and I will lead him along some street, and there in the gutter lies the man absolutely abandoned to drink, bloated, bruised, and degraded, and my boy looks there at that man, and he is warned. But it may be there lies in the life of my boy some hidden fire, which once ignited, will burn him to ruin, and he sees me indulging, not decided as to whether it is right or wrong; he tries to follow me, and may be ruined. I know that is extreme, but it is true.

You are undecided. You have never come to a definite decision either for God or for evil. There is a man in your store, in your shop, in your place of business, who is "going the whole pace," to quote a phrase with which every man here is familiar. The influence of that man on the other men is not half so pernicious as the influence of the man who discusses and does nothing, affects to believe in the Gospels of the New Testament and never obeys them, speaks patronizingly of God Almighty and of Jesus Christ and in life rebels against God. That is the man who is harming others by his influence, the man who drifts and is not decided, and is willing to discuss, but never to do; to philosophize, but never to surrender; to argue, but never to commit his life to Jesus Christ. Oh, these men and women who are uncommitted, these men and women in our churches and our pews and in our services who come and go, drifting, drifting, until they block the river way and hinder others. In the name of God, I appeal to you, do one thing or the other. If God be God, follow Him. If evil be the true master of life, follow it. Let us have the line of cleavage clearly defined.

If you want to form your decision and cease your halting, if you want to decide whether it is to be Baal or God, sin or Jesus Christ, come back for a few moments and look at the picture in the Chapter in which our text is found. If you look carefully you will see the service of sin exemplified in the prophets of Baal; you will see the service of God exemplified in Elijah. I will come, in conclusion, to the same appeal with which I started, I will ask you to halt no longer, to make your choice, and to join with the men who worship Baal or God.

Look at the picture. I never read that story without feeling how graphically it sets before my vision the truth about the men who are serving sin, and serving self, and serving Satan. I look back at these prophets of Baal, and there are different points from which I view them. I see in them, first, a point for admiration; I look at them a little more closely, and I see a point for sarcasm; I look at them again, and I see a point for anger; finally, I look, and I see a point for pity.

I look today at the men who serve sin with high hand and outstretched arm, and I see exactly the same things—a point for admiration, a point for sarcasm, a point for anger, and a point for pity.

A point for admiration? someone says to me. What do you mean? I am not dealing with the halting multitude. There is nothing to admire in them. I am dealing with the prophets of Baal as they exemplify what sin is. What is the point for admiration? It is the courage, the daring, the enthusiasm, the force that these men put into their business. And I do not hesitate to say that I admire it. It was a daring thing for these men to accept the challenge of Elijah at all. And then there was no half-heartedness. All day they cried, "Oh, Baal, hear us." And there was no voice, no answer. And again they cried, and I watch them as the day wears on leaping in frenzy on the altar, stirring up the passion of their inner life with knives. I look at their zeal, at their earnestness, at their

determination, and I admire them.

I look at the men who are sinning hard, and I admire them. I have a great deal more hope of winning that man who serves the devil well than the man who stays half-way between God and the devil, and does not know which to serve. Oh, the passion men are putting into sin!

But I look again, and I see a point for sarcasm. It must be a tender sarcasm. Jesus had a great deal of sarcasm about Him. You cannot read the records of His life without finding it. God grant that our sarcasm may always be like His, very keen, but very tender, based on love, and yet flashing like a searchlight. Listen to Elijah. He looks at the men when the noonday has arrived, and he says: "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." All of which means this, your gods are all very well until you are in trouble. Your gods will do when you do not need help, or to feel a presence, or know a power. Baal is all right so long as you are not face to face with a crisis. But get there, and you will know the folly of the whole business. Cry aloud, perhaps he is sleeping. Think of the sarcasm of it. Men driven wild with a frenzy of desire, and their god asleep!

You who make sin your god, who worship it, and serve it, because of what you get out of it, wait a moment. There is a day of crisis coming. It may come in different ways to you. It may come as bereavement, when the house is darkened, and the heart is sad, and some little child is put down into the grave. It may come as poverty, when riches take to themselves wings and fly away. It may come as death, when you yourself know that you are passing away. Now, oh, bereaved man—think me not unkind, for in God's name I would only drive you to truth—oh, poverty-stricken man, with nobody who cares to help you in the day of your adversity; oh, dying man, with the shadows creeping round you, cry aloud to your god, ask sin to help you now. You see the folly of it. You dare not. The thing for which you have sacrificed your loyalty, the thing for which you have turned your back on God and Heaven and life, cannot help when the crisis comes. Where is your comfort, oh, bereaved man? For your own sake play the man, do not turn your back on Jesus Christ and sin against Him and crucify Him, and then when your child dies want His words to be uttered about resurrection. See this thing through. If you are going to turn your back on my Master tonight see it through. Oh, the unutterable folly of it, that a man will take his life, spirit, soul, and body, and pour all out in worship of the thing that never gives him an answering word of pity or of power when the crisis comes. And yet again I look at these men, and I find there is a point that demands my anger. It is the willfulness of their folly. These people, many of them, who had become the prophets of Baal, and all such in the nation as had listened to the teaching, and followed the guidance of the prophets of Baal, who were they? They were the people who had such a wonderful history, people who belonged to the upper and the nether springs, people who possessed the oracles of God, and yet were deliberately choosing Baal because he gave license to passion and self.

The picture is repeated today. I look out on the servants of sin, and sometimes it seems as though the very anger of the heart becomes hot. Why? For the same reason that God is angry with men, because in their folly and perversity and willfulness they deliberately choose the things that ruin them. Oh, yes, but let the last note be sounded.

I look at these prophets, and I find there is a point for pity. See the effect on them of their own sin. Admire the passion, if you will, as it burns. Be as sarcastic as you will, that in the presence of crisis there is no help. Be as angry as you will over the unutterable folly of wickedness, but look at them after the long, weary day, fainting, wounded men. You cannot look at the prophets of Baal in their weariness and their wounding without pitying them.

You will at once see how this applies to us. The Godly heart, the Christly heart always feels a great pity for the sinner. Oh, these wounded men, these hardened criminals, these ruined lives! Oh, these men, with physical constitution spoiled, and with mind diseased, and spiritual capacity paralyzed and dead! Oh, weep over them! Oh, the pity of it! Oh, dear man, that thou shouldst put passion into the business of destroying thyself! Oh, that thou shouldst take the Divinely bestowed powers of thy wondrous manhood, and burn them up only to burn thyself! Oh, the pity of it! The service of sin, there it is, passion without principle!

For a moment look on the other side, and in that one lonely man, Elijah, see the service of God exemplified.

First look at his boldness. Did we say it was a bold thing for the prophets of Baal to accept his challenge? It was a far bolder thing for one man to challenge eight hundred and fifty. He stood alone. He had an avowed purpose to attack idolatrous worship, and he stood confronting the king whose court was corrupt, and all associated with him.

It is not a blustering courage, a courage characterized by foolhardiness. It is not the courage that whistles in the dark. It is the courage that is quiet and calm and strong, calm when Elijah challenges the king as the troubler of Israel, calm in the waiting of the long day, calm in the final crises and in the midst of all circumstances. But these are only outward things.

Mark not merely the boldness and the calmness of this servant of God; but discover the reason of the boldness, of the calmness. At last the prophets have done, and have failed. At last his own sacrifice is laid on his altar, and with magnificent daring he has saturated the whole sacrifice and altar with water until the very trench is full of it.

If you want really to see Elijah, you must see him now; see him as he comes quietly forward toward that altar in the presence of all those people, and hear him as he says, "Oh, Lord, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou, Lord, art God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again." Then the fire fell. Here we are at the heart of it. Elijah quietly built his altar, placed his sacrifice, and then lifted his voice to God, and the moment the cry of His servant reached the ear of God the fire fell.

I am not surprised that Elijah was bold now. I am not surprised that Elijah was calm now. He is seen now as the man who lived by faith, in touch with the secret forces. He is seen to be a man who had communion with God. He knew how to move the hand that holds the world, to bring deliverance down. He lived, not in the power of things seen, but in the power and possession of the unseen. The prophets had cut themselves, and cried in an agony to a god who did not answer, because he did not exist. In the calm of eventide, without frenzy, with quiet bold dignity, this man spoke and fire fell.

This is the picture of the life of the Christian man. That is what we are asking you to choose. You can be bold, you can be calm, you can be courageous, and why? Because if you worship God your life is linked to Omnipotence, your life is linked to Omniscience, your life is linked to Omnipresence.

I will say no more to you save this: I speak here as in God's presence. I have chosen. I will follow God. I will be a Christian man, and now I know that this life of mine is linked to the infinite wisdom of God, and this, if I will but use it, will guide me until time shall blossom into eternity I, so weak and frail that the slightest breath of temptation will make me sin, if I try to fight it alone—and I speak the thing I know—I am linked to the power of God, and "I can do all things in Christ, Who strengtheneth me." And I that am often lonely if I trust to other friends and other helpers, my life is linked to God, Who is always just where I am. At home, He is there; in the railway train, He is there; in the place of joy, He is there, and His laughter mingles with mine; in the place of sorrow, He is there, and His heart is moved with pity and with help. I am never away from Him.

How long halt ye? How long? How long? I pray you, if sin be the god, follow it. But, oh, if this God be God, if this be life indeed, follow it, follow Him. How long? How long? And why should not the answer be given now, even as my last words are sounding in your ears? God grant that in the hearts of men and women the answer may go up. No longer. Here I choose, and I will give myself to Thee, soul and body Thine to be, wholly Thine forevermore.

## 024 - 2 Kings 18:4 – Nehushtan

He brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan. 2 Kings 18:4

We at once realize what an astonishing statement the Chronicler makes here concerning king Hezekiah. Hezekiah ascended the throne of Judah in the third year of the reign of Hoshea, king of Israel, a young man twenty-five years of age; and immediately—undoubtedly acting under the influence of Isaiah, the great evangelical prophet of the old economy—he commenced a work of reformation. One of the first acts of the reign of the new king was that of smashing to fragments one of the most valuable and historic relics in his kingdom.

So strange an action is in itself worthy of our closest attention, and I think we shall find in our meditation a revelation of some of the great facts of human nature and of some perils threatening men in the region of the most sacred things of their lives; and, consequently, a revelation of principles of perpetual value and of immediate application.

Let us first attempt to put ourselves back into the days when, with what must have appeared to be the strangest disregard of cherished prejudices, Hezekiah commenced his reformation by this act of iconoclasm. I need hardly tarry to remind you of the facts concerning this brazen serpent. In order that we may have our memory refreshed we read the simple story as it is contained in the book of Numbers. However, it may be well to notice one fact. According to the story as there told, it is not suggested, neither was it suggested to the people at the time, if we follow and accept the words as here recorded as being correct, that there was any healing virtue in the brazen serpent. No suggestion was made to the people of Israel that the serpent itself could produce any mystic effect. To read the story simply is to see to its very heart. The sin of the people had been their departure from the attitude of absolute submission to the government of God. In the midst of this rebellious people now punished by God, the brazen serpent was erected, and the word of God which Moses was commanded to speak to them was a declaration that if any man, bitten and in peril, would look at the uplifted serpent he would be healed. That was God's word. No explanation of the relation between the looking and the life was given. We sing, "There is life for a look at the Crucified One," and in so doing we may be singing what is perfectly true, or we may be singing that which is entirely false. What brought these men back to life was the fact that they returned to submission to the

government of God, as, for the moment, that government was focused in that wonderful and yet simple provision. The healing virtue came from God, and was operative in answer to that act of submission in which men, no longer arguing as to the wisdom of the method, submitted to the Divine command. Because men in rebellion must be dealt with as children—there must always be a picture, something that appeals to the eye—God in infinite grace said to these men, Take a serpent of brass and set it on a standard, and let the word of My government for the moment be My command to look. Men looked because God commanded, and looking because God commanded, they turned by that act to the Divine government and were healed. This is the history.

It was in itself a remarkable thing that the serpent of brass should have been so long preserved. Between that event in the wilderness and this iconoclasm of Hezekiah at least seven hundred years had elapsed. Think how carefully it had been preserved—by Moses during all the years he remained with these people, all through those tedious and perilous journeys through the great and terrible wilderness; by Joshua through all his forty years of campaign and settlement as he led the people into the land; during the strange and troubled period when the judges as dictators were raised up to govern the people according to immediate necessities; during the splendor of the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon; and through all the troublous and turbulent times of the kings succeeding to Solomon on both sides of the border, in the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Somewhere this brazen serpent had been preserved. I repeat that for over seven hundred years it had been a relic, historic, interesting, and essentially valuable, in that to illuminated eyes and waiting souls it was forevermore a reminder of their own sin in the past, of the judgment which fell on them in consequence of that sin, and of the deliverance which God had provided for them.

In process of time interest grew into veneration, until this very symbol was set up in the midst of the people as an object of worship. At last they actually burnt incense to this brazen serpent. This was the deification of a symbol, the turning from the veneration of a relic for the sake of its essential values to the veneration of that relic on the supposition that it had some virtue resident in itself.

We immediately see that this story is not old, as at first it appears to be. Indeed, almost absurd as it seems, this very idea persists to this hour under the shadow of what is named after Christ. In the Church of St. Ambrose, in Milan, they will show you this brazen serpent. In the year 971 a Milanese envoy in Constantinople was asked to take some treasure of the city as a gift, and he chose a brazen serpent which the Greeks assured him was made out of the very pieces of the serpent which Hezekiah broke into fragments. That certainly is in a country still enslaved by Roman superstitions, but the same things are practiced among us, if in more subtle forms.

Looking back to the ancient story, I ask you to notice that this deification of the brazen serpent, this setting it up as an object of worship, and this burning of incense to it, was in itself a most significant sign of the condition of the people at that time. It was, first, a revelation of their loss of consciousness of God. These people never could have burned incense to the serpent if the presence of God had been recognized and realized. One goes back in memory to the solemn days in the history of these people in the wilderness, when it was necessary to erect this serpent, days when they had before them the outward symbols of the presence of God in the Tabernacle, with all its suggestiveness, and when they had no right to sin. Yet they had sinned, and had been punished by God, and had turned back to Him. We call to mind also the whole history of these Hebrew people, not to dwell on any single detail, but to make this general statement: in hours when they were supremely conscious of God setting up such an object for worship would have been absolutely impossible. It is patent that the sight of these people gathered together around the brazen serpent for the purpose of burning incense to it, making this particular relic of their past history an object of worship, demonstrated the fact that they had lost the consciousness of God.

Yet their action proved more than that. I see a people hungering after what they have lost. An idol always means this. An idol created by the fingers of men, or chosen by men and appointed to the place of a god, is forevermore a revelation of the sense of need, the sense of lack. It is an evidence that the deepest thing in the human heart is its cry after God. This is not to defend idolatry, not to defend the action of these people in the deification of the brazen serpent, but to say that when people lose their consciousness of God they do not lose their sense of need for God. Whereas I look back on these people in this hour and say they have lost their vision of God, have lost the sense of His nearness, have wandered far away from that spiritual communion with Him which is in itself a fire and a force, I say also that having lost the vision and having lost the sense, they are restless. When the one true and living God, having been revealed and known, is lost to consciousness the heart will clamantly cry for that which is lost. This worship of the serpent was certainly a revelation of the hunger of the people after God.

There is one other matter which I think this event reveals. Having lost their vision of God, and still being conscious of the necessity for some object of worship around which their spiritual life could gather, their deification of the serpent was a revelation of the utmost confusion. It was history misinterpreted. A blessing of the olden days was made a curse in the present moment by that misinterpretation of their own history. Setting up the brazen serpent as an object of worship suggested that the serpent itself had been the means of their healing on the past occasion. Their vision of God lost, and the cry of their souls after such a God, and the blundering confusion of a people who, looking back at their own history, emphasized it wrongly, interpreted it falsely, and treated the serpent as though it had been the means of their healing in the past—such was the abuse of the brazen serpent.

When Hezekiah came to the throne he did two things. First of all, he named the serpent "Nehushtan," a piece of brass, or, with fine contempt, a thing of brass. Then he broke it in pieces.

The naming of the serpent thus was intended to be a revelation to the people of their unutterable folly: they were burning incense to a thing of brass! It was intended to be a revelation to the people of their unutterable sin: These people whose worship had been of the unseen and eternal God, Who had demonstrated Himself to them by all the wonder of their history, were actually worshipping a thing of brass! There was a fine contempt in this naming of the brazen serpent, undoubtedly intended by the king to reveal to men their unutterable folly and the absolute wickedness of their idolatry.

Now, what will this king do with this thing of brass? No blame can be attached to the people for having preserved it; there was no sin in their preservation of the serpent; it was something which, coming up out of their past history, ought to have reminded them of God and the spiritual lessons they had learned in that hour of sin and of judgment and wondrous deliverance.

Hezekiah took this sacred relic and broke it in pieces, its associations notwithstanding. This he did because, with true insight, he understood that it was a source of danger to the people and therefore he could make no compromise with it. It was an act of true reform. It was the act of a man who would make no peace with that most sacred thing, a thing which in itself was not an evil thing, which in itself had no virtue and no vice, but which had become a source of danger to the people. It must therefore be destroyed. That is the story. Now let us make certain applications of it to our own day.

The first I suggest is this: God's very gifts to men may be so abused as to become positively injurious. Anything to which we are burning incense merely because of the sacredness of its past associations is a peril to our spiritual life, and ought to be destroyed. Let me be pertinent and practical. What are some of the things to which we are in danger of burning incense today?

I have known Christian congregations burn incense to the very building in which they assembled for worship, as though it were sacred in itself, as though to pass its threshold and be under its roof were to be in the very house of God and at the gate of heaven. That in itself is idolatry. We may so revere a building as to make a true worship of God impossible inside it. This is a strange paradox, and I shall ask you to bear quite patiently with me as I give you a very simple illustration out of my own past experience. I remember twenty-five years ago it had been arranged that I was to go to a certain church—of what denomination and in what town is of no matter—to conduct special mission services for fifteen days. As the time drew near I had a letter from the officers of the church saying that while they still felt the need of such services, the church had been recently renovated, and they had decided to abandon the mission in case the paint should be injured by strangers coming in! That is cold history. We may say that we should not do such a foolish thing as that; but we need to remember that the attitude of mind which made such an action possible is a perpetual peril. We call bricks and mortar a church. There is a sense in which that is true; but there is a sense in which a material building may become a grave and a terrible menace to the spiritual life of a church. We burn incense to our buildings and imagine that when we have passed into them we are separated to the worship of God. It is possible for a man to sit in this building from beginning to end of the service and never draw near to the true place of worship.

Then there are the exercises of public worship; we may burn incense to them, and make our form of service so ornate, so regular, so beautiful, that the very Spirit of God Who, like a breath of wind, would pass over the congregation, would not be able to find room to enter. We may burn incense to order, and so create the gravest disorder.

We may burn incense to the ministry considered as a caste. It may be that here we are in no danger of doing that. It may be that those of us who belong to the Free Church are in no danger of that particular form of idolatry, yet the peril lingers even among us. I know men who do not care to take the sacrament unless some ordained man preside. That is priestcraft. I would be quite content to take the bread and wine from the hands of some godly mother in Israel.

We still burn incense to the individual man, and though we have never used the word nor do we think of using it, our attitude is that of the deification of the individual. We have an idea that the whole Kingdom of God will fall if a certain man fails us, or moves to some other sphere of work. A subtle idolatry threatens us in spiritual things, sacred things. The danger that threatens us is that we may worship that which is the means rather than the God Who reaches us through those means.

It is possible to burn incense to a creed, to systematized theology. It is possible to crib, cabin and confine spiritual growth by loyalty to some dead hand of orthodoxy. I venture to say with all boldness that I am the right man to say that kind of thing. This Divine Library is final in authority; but not your interpretation of it, nor mine, nor that of any man. No creeds that have been drawn up by honest souls in the past are final interpretations of the literature of the heavens. This Bible is as wonderful as the Spirit of God, forevermore breaking, annulling, destroying human interpretations, and blossoming into new beauty, singing itself out into new poetry, making poor the finest utterances of past interpretation. Yet there are men who ask me to sign a creed, and subscribe to a dogma, and contribute to systematized theology. They are burning incense to a creed. They are making a creed, which is a thing of men's hands, devout and sincere in itself, an object of worship.

I have even known men to burn incense to a trust deed and allow the work of God to be interfered with and spoiled because of the terms that lie within some such deed, drawn up amid some conditions that long since have passed away. There was a need for a certain wording of the trust deed at the time; but that is no warrant for saying that a trust deed must hold men today and prevent them from going forward and doing the work to which God is calling them, work which the age demands and which the mental mood of the hour is calling them to do. In many ways we are doing what these Hebrews did, lifting a serpent of brass and burning incense to it.

It is possible to be idolatrous in the matter of prayer, and in the matter of the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism. It is possible to treat all these things which are means of grace as though they were grace. It is possible to treat these things which are Divinely appointed ordinances, symbols, signs, sacraments, outward and visible signs of the inward and invisible grace, as though they in themselves were channels of the invisible grace. That is sacerdotalism. Not merely the claim of the priest of Greek, Roman, or Anglican ordination, but the worship of the sacrament by men who profess to have escaped from all such bondage. That is burning incense to an idol.

I have known men who were worshipers of the day of their conversion. I know men who tell me that ten, twenty, or thirty years ago, here or there, they were born again; and today they are dead in trespasses and sins, but still burn incense to the old experience, imagining that to be true worship. The memory of an hour of illumination, of clear shining, may change the volition and transfigure the life, I admit it; but such a memory has no value today unless today the light is shining, the soul is poised toward God, and the attitude of the life is what it ought to be toward our fellow men. Yet we burn incense to these dead things. They were living things at the moment, they had their place and their value, they were God's own means of blessing to us; but today we gather about them and worship them and have no dealing with God.

Of all such action, looking back at the ancient story, I will say that such abuse of things in themselves sacred and right and God-appointed can come only out of spiritual degeneracy. Loyalty to God will maintain all these in their true place and true proportion. The serpent was never the depository of virtue, nor is any one of these I have mentioned.

The only way of virtue, using the word in its broadest and best sense as meaning strength and sanctity—the only way of virtue is the way of immediate dealing with God. So surely as men are burning incense to the brazen serpent, to creeds, to human instrumentalities, to ordinances, even God-appointed ordinances, so surely it is because they have lost the power of commerce with heaven and communion with God. No man will ever burn incense to any of these things who lives and works in the light and hears the voice of God within his own soul. The man who hears the voice of God within his own soul can find Bethel in the railway train, on the highway. It is loss of the vision of God that is demonstrated by the deification of anything less than God.

Yet, blessed be God, this deification of the little is demonstration of the fact that man cannot find rest except in God Himself. If you have lost the vision and the true spiritual communion, then you must worship something, you must put something back in its place. That, as I said before, is not to defend idolatry, it is not to say the final word concerning the activity, for if it be true that idolatry demonstrates capacity for God, it is equally true that idolatry ultimately destroys the capacity for God. If it be true that having lost God, I put this idol in His place, so surely as I do I shall presently become like the idol I make, and having eyes I shall see not, and having ears I shall hear not, and having hands I also like my idol shall not be able to feel, I shall become insensate. Deification of anything less than God demonstrates the capacity for worship and is a revelation of hunger; but it issues in the destruction of the very capacity it demonstrates.

What is the right attitude toward all such things? I suggest that our right attitude is first to name the things rightly. Look and see that this cunning artifice of brass is not a serpent, it is brass. Then name it Nehushtan, a thing of brass. Call the church a building of bricks and mortar. Call the minister a man, and remember that he is none other, and if he is other he ought not to be in the ministry. Call the exercises of worship forms, remembering that form without power is in itself a curse. Call creeds and systematized theology human opinion, and respect it as human opinion and in no other way. Call the trust deed paper or parchment, as the case may be. Call prayer words. Call the day of your conversion past.

If any or all of these things are coming between your soul and God Himself break them in pieces. Not merely the idols which your fathers had before the flood, not merely the idols which you found in the land, but the idol which is one of your sacred things which in a past hour of need was God's provision for your well-being. If it has become an idol, then must it be broken in pieces.

Let us bring our most sacred things to the test, and let us remember that to whatever we burn incense we must destroy if the burning of the incense has resulted in the loss of the vision of God and issued in inability to commune with God. Infinitely better to be stripped of every means of grace, and to come to worship as a naked spirit with God alone, than to allow these things which He has instituted to help us to such worship, to stand between us and Himself. That is the teaching.

Yet a final word is this; the true attitude of the soul is that of the retention of all these things in their true place and in their true proportion. The true attitude of the soul is that in which it looks back to the day when life began in Christ and rejoices in it, but

immediately brings that past experience into expression in the living present. The great autobiographical passage of the Apostle Paul in the Philippian letter has often been quoted; let us hear it once again. Writing to his Philippian children from prison and reviewing the process of his Christian life, looking back to the hour on the Damascus road when he was apprehended by his Master, he said, "Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ." That counting was at least thirty years before, but there was no virtue in that. A little further on he added, "Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss." The "I counted" of yesterday is of no value unless it be carried into the "I count" of today. If today I count all things but loss, then I shall never undervalue that past experience on the way to Damascus; but the light that shone on me on the way to Damascus, or in the midst of that revival of thirty years ago, is of no value today unless there shines on my soul this morning the light of God, and I answer it.

So with prayer. Savonarola declared on one occasion that when prayer reaches its ultimate height words are impossible, that when the soul has come to terms of communion with God words are left behind. I think every Christian man and woman who knows anything of the secret place knows how true that is. There is another application of the great truth concerning prayer that we often lose sight of. In my experience the prayers that have most profoundly touched my soul and moved me, the prayers that I have felt have most perfectly taken hold of God, were prayers that broke down in the middle, that could not be continued, but ended in blundering articulation and half-finished sentences, and then a sob and silence. That is prayer. If the sense of God that produces such an attitude in the soul of man is absent, then elegance of diction is blasphemy, and beauty of phrasing is impertinence, and we are burning incense to a thing of brass rather than worshiping God. The true attitude of the soul is that which—to use the word of the old economy—brings with it words, and pours out thought in speech before the throne of God, setting no value on the form of the words, but all value on the grip of the soul on God, and the touch of God on the soul.

Not to proceed further with these things already referred to, the final thing is this; let us keep this serpent of brass, let us learn to keep it by making the necessity for its destruction unnecessary. Let us retain it and let it speak to our hearts its true lesson. Let it say to us forevermore: I remind you of the hour of sin; beware of sin; I remind you of the hour of swift judgment which must come again if you sin; I remind you of the hour of deliverance. If we so keep it, and let it thus speak to us, we shall never burn incense to it, but when it has thus spoken we shall forget it as we worship God.

## 025 - Nehemiah 6:15 - How the Wall Is Built

So the wall was finished. Nehemiah 6:15

These words constitute a declaration of success. They are vibrant with triumph and joy. So far as the actual event to which they refer is concerned, they record what I may term an incidental victory. Nevertheless the story is microscopic. It is suggestive of vaster truths than the actual narrative in this wonderfully fascinating book of Nehemiah contains.

Our purpose is to find out the secrets of that remarkable success. I shall take it for granted that the story is well known. How came it that such desolation was turned into so excellent a construction within seven weeks? What were the secrets of success?

The wall was intended to enclose a Divine idea, and to preserve it until the hour for its development should arrive. Zerubbabel had come back first, and had erected an altar, and immediately following thereupon had commenced building the temple. For long years the temple, rising but a few feet from the ground, had remained until it had become overgrown with weeds, a picture of desolation. Under the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah men had turned again to its building, and it had been completed. Thus life was gathered round the altar and the temple in the city of God. As Paul said long after, in writing to the Galatians, referring to this very fact: "Before faith came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." Within those walls was to be gathered, and preserved, the Divine idea, until after four centuries had run their course the coming of Christ should be the first movement forward to the accomplishment of the Divine purpose.

There arose a prophet in those times, named Zechariah, who saw a young man going up to measure Jerusalem, and heard an angel declare to him that Jerusalem cannot be measured. Eventually, Jerusalem will not be contained within walls; it will enclose villages, and its only walls will be the glory and fire of the Divine presence. Long, long centuries after, another seer beheld the city of God coming down out of heaven to earth, and described the walls as great and high, and made of jasper, the symbol of conflict, including a new order. So the figure of the city of God runs through the Book, and the figure of the walls recurs again and again. In the narrative of Nehemiah we have the account of how in seven weeks walls were rapidly flung round the city, and the deed was celebrated by the writer in the words of the text: "So the wall was finished."

Looking at the work of those seven weeks, observing the man who came up to do it, observing his method with those who surrounded him, observing their response to his enthusiasm, watching them carry out their work, seeing them as difficulties presented themselves and were overcome, I want to find out what were the elements that made for the success.

The first element I observe is that, in the case of Nehemiah and under his influence, in the case of the whole of the people for those seven weeks, there was the element of forgetfulness of self in the presence of the passion for the accomplishment of the great end. When the need for building of a wall was manifested and these people came to an understanding of the need, each sank himself and worked for the common weal. The vastness of the work to be done filled the souls of the people, and created a natural, unstrained spirit of self-abnegation. That is always the first secret of success. It must be by natural, unstrained selflessness. When a great passion fills the soul, when some high, holy purpose is to be accomplished, then a man forgets himself. In working as a community this is very necessary. It is an element that moves to success whether it be for good or evil. Along the line of individual self-denial that became a corporate self-abnegation the men moved to the building of the wall, and so it was finished.

That involves another element. It is unity. Unity was not sought, not mechanically arranged, it was not the outcome of consultation. I read of only one consultation in this book. I will quote it: "I consulted with myself, and contended with the nobles." That is the consultation that arrives somewhere. There is no other consultation here at all. Here each man built over against his own house; every man did the piece of work that was nearest to his own dwelling. As self-denial was unconscious, born of the vision of the importance of the work, so the unity was unconscious as to any effort to produce it; it was born of the passion for the accomplishment of the great object. It is an old saying—but we need to be reminded of some of the trite sayings today—that unity is strength. All the fibrous strands of hemp are of no use, but weave them together, and by their very entanglement, skilfully arranged, you create the cable against which the mighty ship will strain in vain. For the best illustration of unity outside the Bible that I know I recommend that all, young people especially, read Rudyard Kipling's *The Ship that Found Herself*. When that ship started on her voyage across the sea, how the parts talked to each other! The rivets grumbled at the bolts; the planks objected to the upheaval of the beams; but through stress and strain and storm and tempest, at last the ship arrived, and the grumbling voices of the bolts were silenced, the complaints of the rivets were heard no more; all the parts had forgotten themselves in the realization of the unity of the ship that found herself.

Apart from such unity there can be no success in toil. Too often, we have been busy building, and we have tried to build the piece of wall near at hand, but we have been so busy building it high that we have not broadened it to touch the building of our neighbor; and the devil passes through the gaps, and laughs at us and destroys our building.

I look at those builders again during those busy weeks and I am impressed by their consecration. What is consecration? The expression of real consecration is the perfect discipline of life as it submits to the law created by the necessity of the case. These men were doing their work by hard discipline. At the heart of all real consecration there must be discipline, submission to authority.

I remember as a boy how I read with almost breathless interest the story of the taking of Quebec by Wolfe. It comes back to me almost with the scent of the flowers under a Gloucestershire hedgerow, where I sat to read. I remember, too, how vividly it all came back to me when I stood on the Heights of Abraham and saw the place where it was done. How was it done? By discipline. How was discipline expressed at the taking of Quebec? The boats dropped down the St. Lawrence, and the one order issued to every man in every boat was to be absolutely silent, not a word was to be spoken. That army, comparatively small, must climb the Heights of Abraham by way of a narrow defile which could easily be held at the top by twenty men. They dropped down the river without speech, with scarcely the sound of oars; they climbed silently to the heights, and waited in silence until the order to charge was given. That is consecration. "So the wall was finished."

I watch them again, and I am further impressed by their consistency, their cohesion, their holding together. I do not now mean the holding together of all in unity, but the consistency of every man, the all-roundness of them. The whole thing is graphically suggested by the use of a phrase that we always think of when we think of this building of the wall—the sword and trowel. These men were girt with a sword ready for conflict, while the trowel was busy. Every man was building, but every man was ready for battle. That merging of caution and courage, that splendid bringing together of the sense of danger and the readiness to meet it—that is consistency. Under Nehemiah's inspiration these men were ready to bring every part of the forces of their personalities into this one work. The whole thing is condensed into a statement of the book: "We made our prayer unto God and set a watch." These men neglected no side that was necessary to completeness, left nothing undone that must be done. What wonderful cohesion is manifest in the activity of every man, and this consistency within each personality, multiplied by all the workers, made for the finishing of the wall, until Nehemiah was able to write, "So the wall was finished."

But there was something more than all this: there was that indefinable, wonderful force which we describe as earnestness or enthusiasm. That is expressed in one sentence from the pen of Nehemiah: "The people had a mind to work." The work lay near their heart and captivated all their powers, so that it was commenced, continued, and completed. They were men who believed in the possibility of that to which they set themselves. They knew the importance of that completed wall and all that it meant to their city. That earnestness was the central secret of all their success. Men who lack enthusiasm will never do anything for God. Men who lack earnestness will never build any wall for God. Not by the diletante discussions of committees will work eventually be done. I am not undervaluing committees, provided they are small enough! Certainly not by disparaging the work in hand, nor by declaring that the wall never can be built, will the wall be built. It is only when the fire that inspires construction and perfection fills the heart that a man



can do God's work. When the fire in the individual heart is multiplied by the fires of united, consecrated souls, then the work of God goes forward.

Out of the fire of their enthusiasm emerges another quality making for success—stability. When Paul was writing of Christian work he said, "Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." The two words do not mean the same thing. Steadfastness is that square-backed quality of fidelity that stays at work however long it take, however hard it be, however much drudgery there be in it. Unmoveableness is the same thing in the presence of opposition. If ever a man was hindered in his work Nehemiah was. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, sent four times to lure him from his work, but his answer was quick and sharp, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" Opposition arose within the city when Shemaiah advised Nehemiah to hide in the temple. He indignantly refused, "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." The spirit of the leader permeated them all. Nothing moved them, nothing hindered them, because their enterprise was deeply rooted. The secret of stability is to have the life so completely rooted in the Divine enterprise, the Divine will, the Divine power, that life becomes unmoveable in the presence of opposition. By stability of this kind that wall was built.

Yet again, the wall was built, finally, by the sobriety of the rank and file, by the quiet, steady, plodding work of all the men whose names certainly are not mentioned in the record, and probably were hardly known at the time. Great enterprises are always won by that element of sobriety and self-control, with its quiet, steady, plodding work. That is the work that tells in the building of the city of God and the building of the wall around the city of God. It is so everywhere. There is a place in nature for the volcanic; but it is occasional, not regular. Some of you, perchance, have sailed across the great Pacific, and have seen the thousand islands that gem its waters, all things of beauty and joy. How came those islands there? Ever and anon a volcanic island is seen; it was flung up in a night by some convulsion; and it is sure, stable, beautiful; but the majority of the islands were not so flung up, but were formed by the tedious, persistent work of coral insects through long millenniums. When at last God's city is built and the wall is finished, there will be recognition of the volcanic men who did things explosively, and suddenly and magnificently; but if there had been none but they the wall had never been built. It is the quiet, steady workers, going on through what would seem to some of us the hopeless monotony and dulness of days and years who build the wall. How I could illustrate where I stand tonight, as I think of the work of this particular church through all its history. There are those here today who were here fifty years ago, who through stress, and toil, and storm, hoped, prayed, believed, and wrought with God for the building of the wall! These are the men and women that the Church needs if she is to do her work. That is the element that builds. "So they finished the wall."

If we have really seen these things we have discovered that the note on which I began is the note on which I must end. These people had perfect confidence in the work they were called to do. They saw the whole of it. There was one man who went down to the dung-gate and built there, where nobody wanted to go; but he built there until he had finished the work; there was another man who, perchance, had to cover a larger piece of work, and his daughters helped him, they went and built with him; one chapter gives us many such details. The secret of every individual effort was that of the vision of the wall itself, the absolute confidence of the people in its importance, and the integrity of the one appointed to lead them in building the wall. In answer to that vision they wrought, and the wall was finished.

In God's great economy two processes are going forward still, as they have been through all the centuries and all the millenniums: the processes of building and of battle, of destruction and of construction, of the sword and of the trowel. As I said before, this is a story, an incident by the way; but it is microcosmic. The whole Divine process is revealed in the picture of these men and the seven weeks of building the wall.

Are we engaged in this business of God? If we are, how can we prosecute it so as to be perfectly sure of ultimate success? The day will come when the city of God shall come down out of heaven, when its jasper walls shall flash with beauty, and its streets shine with gold—all figurative and symbolic language, figurative because the fact is so fine that it can be expressed only in figurative language. God's victory is yet to be won. That we believe with all our hearts. Are we doing anything to hasten it? Are we engaged in the building? Are we doing anything in the battle?

There are times when the question reacts on the soul and almost scorches us as with flame. There are days when looking ahead to the ultimate victory one feels as though one would be ashamed to share it if one had no scars of battle and had never known weariness in the process of building.

All this is most pertinent today. Surely we have felt as though the walls were broken down and the gates burned with fire; all the fair things that we had hoped and longed for lie about us in catastrophic ruin; but to sit and lament is to be disloyal. Our businesses to hear the cry of the leader, Come and let us build again the walls of Jerusalem. If we hear the cry of the Leader, then with our eyes on Him, and our eyes fixed also on the consummation toward which His lovelit eyes are ever looking, let us hear in mind that we shall do our building only as we learn the secrets of this lesson and yield ourselves thereto.

Self-denial is the first necessity if we are to succeed, and that must be after the pattern of Christ's Cross, which was the supreme

revelation of self-emptying in the interest of God's high enterprise. That Cross leads the sacramental hosts!

We must also know unity in Christian service. Could anything be more ghastly today than that this nation should divide itself as within itself, and begin internecine quarrels in the presence of a common foe? Yet we are in a little danger in that very direction, and I say to you here and now publicly that I would suppress half the newspapers that are keeping up this unholy strife in the national life. At the heart of the struggle today is this supreme spiritual necessity for unity in the Church. I think there can be nothing more disastrous than that the Church of God should emphasize its divisions today. Oh for such a vision of God's purpose and of the necessity for building the wall and the restoration of Jerusalem that would bring every section of the one Catholic Church side by side to stand for the Christian ideal of the compassion and grace, the righteousness and justice, of God. Under the stress of the present conflict we are seeing many things as we have never seen them. We are seeing drink as we have never seen it before, but it has been here all the while. There has been no more drinking in the aggregate, but rather less because of the war; yet if a newspaper refers to the fact that a deputation waits on the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to this question it points out that they were no teetotal fanatics! Is fanatic ever the proper word with which to describe men who see the dire disaster that drink has wrought in the commonwealth? At least there must be no internecine strife. The Church must come into unity for the process of righteousness if the wall is to be built, or perhaps I should say, if the wall is to be rebuilt, for it seems to lie in ruins, burned and blackened with devilish fire.

There must be new consecration under the authority of Christ's Lordship expressing itself in discipline and obedience to every command that falls from His lips or is whispered by His Spirit to the soul of a man.

There must be a new consistency in the communion of Christ's Spirit holding together in balance and proportion. There must be the sanctifying of all life and the secularizing of all religion. Religion must proceed from the high altars of the Church, the cloistered quietness of the sanctuary, into the market place, the legislative halls. Wherever men go they must carry the force of religion in order that the walls of the city may be rebuilt.

We must also know that holy enthusiasm in the enterprise of Christ's Kingdom which may be analyzed by the use of three words: faith, fervor, fidelity.

We must know stability. We must have our lives rooted in the things unseen and eternal, or we shall be entirely unable to touch the things seen and temporal. This we may find in the fulness of Christ's eternity, and only as we live in that relationship with Him can we ever hope to be stable in the midst of the stern and terrible conflict.

We want as we never wanted before all the quiet, persistent sobriety of the unnamed workers. In this hour of national crisis and religious catastrophe we depend most on the multitudes who are unknown and inconspicuous, and on their remaining quietly in the home, the office, or the shop, doing in the strength of Christ's patience the commonplace drudgery of the darkened days.

Mistake me not. As God is my witness, there is no panic in my heart and no fear in my soul. The walls are yet to be built. The city of God is yet to come down out of heaven. The triumph of our God is assured. Whatever Armageddon there may be ahead of us in some dispensational, prophetic sense, the central Armageddon of the ages is accomplished, and the victory was with God. In that hour of loneliness when the universal Man, gathering into His own personality all types and temperaments and nationalities, trod the winepress of the wrath of God alone, in that hour when He bent to death and by dying slew death, in that hour He won the victory. Every subsequent catastrophe is by comparison with that but the administration of victory already won. The ideal of the Christ is the master ideal, the all-conquering ideal, only I want to have some share in the travail that makes the Kingdom come, I want to have some part in building the wall so that when at last He who came first to visit the ruin and inspect it—taking counsel with no man but Himself—when He shall write as the summary of the battle and building of ages, "The wall is finished," I want to have some share in the thrill of His triumph, some partnership in the joy of His victory. These things I can have only as I stand by Him building, and stand by Him fighting until the work is done.