

Westminster Pulpit- G Campbell Morgan-7

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215 - 1 Timothy 3:15 - The Church the Pillar and Ground of the Truth

The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 Timothy 3:15

This is a text. It is not a statement. It makes no definite declaration. It is, nevertheless, full of light and suggestiveness. The words constitute an arresting figure of speech, setting forth inclusively the function of the Christian Church in the world. Paul was writing to Timothy concerning his responsibilities in the city of Ephesus. He had exhorted Timothy to tarry there for a very definite purpose. This purpose is found in the opening of the letter in these words: "As I exhorted thee to tarry at Ephesus, when I was going into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine, neither to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, the which minister questionings rather than a dispensation of God which is in faith."

The passage from which the text is taken contains Paul's statement of the reason of his writing yet more particularly: "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

Let us glance at that paragraph in reverse order. It concludes with a declaration of the whole content of Christian truth: "Great is the mystery of godliness; He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

The mystery of godliness is the truth of which the Church is the pillar and the ground.

I have said that this is an arresting figure. Let us, first, then, briefly but carefully consider the figure in itself, in order that we may proceed to examine the function of the Church as it is set forth by the figure.

It may be that when Paul wrote these words, he was looking out on the monuments of some city. It is almost certain that when Timothy read it, it would be easy for him to look out on Ephesus. Here and there in the city in the day of its wealth, great memorial columns were to be seen. Let us have the structure clearly in mind. The word "pillar" describes an elevated column, sometimes one solid block of masonry, as for instance, Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames Embankment; very often one column built of many parts, of different stones or bricks. The idea is that of an upright column giving elevation.

The word "ground" simply refers to that on which the column rests—what an architect would probably describe as the plinth. It may be well to say that the foundation is never the final thing in a building. The Church is not built on a rock foundation, in spite of all our hymns and our expositions. The Church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, and that foundation is based on rock, which is the eternal underlying strength. Paul was dealing here with the foundation, and not with that on which the foundation rests. Such is the structure.

Given any such structure, what is its purpose? It is always the instrument by which some object or truth is elevated in order that it may be clearly seen, in order that the attention of men may be drawn to it. Sometimes what is to be seen is a statue, as, for instance, in Trafalgar Square, where the great column is the pillar and the plinth, elevating Nelson.

Sometimes it is not the statue of a person that is to be seen, but a light. Those of you who have passed along our southern shores in the dark and seen the flashing light of Eddystone will have an illustration. The building is a pillar, erected on a foundation, resting finally on the rock; but the purpose of elevation is the flashing of a light. Sometimes both ideas are combined. Those who have sailed up the Hudson into New York City have looked at the Statue of Liberty facing out toward the ocean. It was some very unkind Englishman who said that Liberty had turned its back on America and was looking homeward again. As you looked at that statue, two things arrested your attention. First, the figure of Liberty; and when the night came, lo, from the brow flashed an electric light. There we have the two things, the elevation of a person, the flashing of a light. Sometimes the purpose is the proclamation of a truth, a historic truth, as in the weird and wonderful Cleopatra's Needle to which I have already made reference, whereupon is written the

history of ancient kings and dynasties and deeds of prowess. The idea is always that of the elevation of a person, of a light, of a truth, that these things may be seen.

Mark, then, I pray you, still thinking of the structure in all simplicity, the interrelationship. First, the pillar and the ground are of no value apart from what they reveal. Second, the statue, the light, the word, need the pillar, the ground, in order that they may be seen. A column built for a statue is a laughingstock if the statue is not placed on it, and seen. When Eddystone ceases to flash its light across the waters for the sake of mariners it may be destroyed. When the writing of the pillar is obliterated, though out of sentiment we may still keep it there, it will have no real value. But it is also true that the statue cannot be seen unless it be elevated. Place it on the level, and only a few can see it. It must be lifted up, if it is to utter its message. The light on the ground flings no radiance to the distance, and the mariner will not be helped. It must be elevated, if the light is to be seen. The word simply written is of no value. It must be proclaimed, published.

Such is the figure in itself, and I am inclined to think that this simple and childlike examination of the figure has already preached the sermon. "The Church of the Living God, which is the pillar and the ground of the truth." Immediately, we see how the figure illustrates, in consonance with other Scriptures, one phase of the function of the Church.

The first mention of the Church in the New Testament is found in those inclusive words of Jesus, so brief and yet so full of meaning, spoken at Caesarea Philippi: "I will build My Church." A structure which the Lord Himself builds is suggested. When, later on, Paul came to write of the Church he made use of the same figure: "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Chief Corner Stone." Here he speaks of that structure, as the pillar and the ground of the truth. The Church is the medium by which the truth is to be proclaimed, to be elevated to a height that men may see it, to be published to the city, to the nation, to the world at large. In the Christian Faith we have centrally a Person, resultantly a Light, finally a Word. If the Person is to be seen He must be lifted up; if the light is to flash across the darkness it must have height; if the word is to be proclaimed it must have an instrument for its proclamation; and the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth; its one business is to reveal the Person, to flash the light, to proclaim the word.

Passing from the figure to the fact, mark the interrelation between these matters. The Church of God apart from the Person of Christ is a useless structure. However ornate it may be in its organization, however perfect in all its arrangements, however rich and increased with goods, if the Church is not revealing the Person, lifting Him to the height where all men can see Him, then the Church becomes an impertinence and a sham, a blasphemy and a fraud, and the sooner the world is rid of it, the better. The Church, apart from the shining of a light, is a lampstand, dark, valueless, effete. The Church that fails to proclaim the Word is a sound, a voice without articulation, sounding brass and a clanging cymbal; of no value.

With all reverence, let me state the other side, which is to my own heart full of grave solemnity. That supernal Person, apart from the Church, is hidden. Jesus Christ has no means of showing Himself save through His Church. The light that flashes from His eyes cannot be seen save as it beams and shines and burns and flashes and flames from the eyes of His people. The tenderness and strength of His teaching can be felt only as the Church becomes the instrument through which He speaks to humanity to direct, instruct, and bless it. The great central Person is hidden unless the Church reveals Him. The Light that lighteth every man, and which came into the world, and was focused, centralized for a brief period in a Person, has passed out of human sight, and is no longer shining save through the Church. The Word of God today has no voice apart from the Christian Church.

Now, from these more general statements let us come to particular considerations. The moment we do so it is necessary that we remember that, finally, the figure must be interpreted by the fact. A fact is always greater than the figure that represents it. We may take it as an axiom that whenever we have a figure it is because a fact is so fine that there is no apprehending it apart from the figure. Consequently, the figure presently must vanish away in the presence of the fact.

In this case it is pre-eminently so. This is seen in Paul's use of the figure. He had already defined what is the pillar and the ground of the Truth by two words: "House" and "Church." In each case, moreover, he had qualified his definition: "The House of God," "the Church of the living God."

Paul first called it "The House of God." This word "House" means, first, a dwelling place; then, a family; then, a householder; and, finally, a dynasty; the word is employed in all these senses in the New Testament. It is God's dwelling place, family, household, and Kingdom. That is the pillar and ground of the Truth. Paul also called it the Church of the living God. The Church is the theocracy, the whole company of souls governed by God; and, consequently, it is God's governing body in the midst of human history, that through which He makes known His will, enunciates His law, reveals His purpose, communicates His life, marches ever onward toward the ultimate goal of His determined purpose. Paul, in his last letter concerning the Church, the letter to the Colossians, speaks of a mystery, the Church; and, a few sentences later, refers to "the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory"; and yet a few sentences later, speaks of "the mystery which is Christ." To reverse the order. First, there is the unfathomable and infinite mystery of Christ Himself, God manifest in the flesh, the One in Whom all the fulness of Godhead dwelt corporeally. Then follows the mystery of Christ formed in the heart of individual souls. Multiply the number of such units and we have the mystery of the Church; and that is the

pillar and ground of the truth. The Person can be seen only through that company of men and women; the light can flash only through them; the Word of God can be proclaimed only through them. Their one responsibility in the world, then—individually and in their corporate capacity—is the revelation of the Person, the shining of the Light, the proclamation of the Word. When we pass into our New Testament and breathe its rare and spacious atmosphere, the trivialities that divide us perish, and we gain the sense of God's great Church of all souls that are born anew, that share the Life Divine, in whom Christ is formed, the very hope of glory; upon that multitude of every tongue and kindred and nation rests one supreme responsibility; that Church of the Living God is the pillar and the ground of the Truth.

How is the Church to fulfil that responsibility? The Church is to fulfil the responsibility of revealing a Person, flashing a light, proclaiming a word, by Incarnation, and by proclamation. In considering these we must remember the Divine order: that the whole Church is called to the ministry; and that within the Church there is a ministry, the business of which is to perfect the whole Church that it may fulfil its ministry.

First, the Church of God is to fulfil its obligation by Incarnation. In one of the very last conversations I had with D. L. Moody, in his own beautiful home in the Connecticut Valley, we were talking of the Bible, of its importance in the life of the nation, and in the life of the world; and with that short, sharp, quick manner in which he often said great things, he said this: "Never forget that the Christian man is the world's Bible, and in the majority of cases a Revised Version is needed." I am not proposing now to discuss the second part of his declaration. I am afraid it is too true, but I leave it. I am interested in the first part of his declaration. The Christian man is the world's Bible. How is this nation of ours to know this Bible? The printing of it, and the scattering of it is not enough. That is most important, most valuable; but the letter killeth; it is the spirit that maketh alive. The spirit of the Bible is never revealed to the unregenerate man until it is incarnate in the lives of men and women who believe it. That is the perpetual principle of God's methods with men. God might have adopted some other method; but God has chosen this method, and I believe that His choice is based upon infinite wisdom. Man hears the Word of God through man. That tremendous truth underlies the central mystery of our holy faith, that of the Incarnation. God had spoken to the fathers in times past through their prophets in divers portions, by divers methods; but there was no final, prevailing and pervasive power in the Word of God until He spoke in His Son. It was when the Word became flesh and tabernacled among men, and men beheld His glory, that the Word of God became prevailing. There is a sense in which that great Incarnation of God and of the Word of God in Jesus of Nazareth was central and final and inclusive; but the principle obtains, and persists. Ere He left the little group of men that had gathered about Him, He said to them, Ye shall be My witnesses. By this, He did not mean merely, Ye shall be men who talk about Me; but ye shall be My evidences, My credentials, My examples. The early victories of the Church were won by men who believed the story of Jesus, by men telling the story of Jesus; but also by men illustrating the story that they told in what they were in themselves. In proportion as the Word was incarnate, the Word ran and had free course and was glorified. This is persistently so. It is so today. The Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Through her, the Person is to be seen, the Light is to shine, the Word is to be proclaimed; but she can fulfil her sacred duty only as the word which she hears, the light which is granted her, the Person known to her, is revealed in her individual members. The Church is in the world to proclaim a great Evangel. The Church is in the world to make protest against all things that are unlike God. The Church is in the world to be the instrument of the Divine philanthropy. The Church is in the world to pronounce the ethic of heaven and to insist that men shall hear it and obey it.

How is the Church to proclaim her evangel? She will send her evangelists; but the evangelists have no power in their message save as that message is backed by the testimony of men and women who are pardoned. It is the pardoned man who preaches the Gospel, the man who lives in the power of God's forgiveness; the man who is forever humble, never forgetting the hole of the pit from which he was digged, marching to the end of life's journey with the subdued and reverent demeanor of a man who owes everything to the Divine grace; and yet, marching with his head erect, knowing the forgiveness of his own sins. That man is proclaiming the Word, is flashing the Light, is revealing the Saviour. That man is preaching the Gospel, and it is by that preaching that the evangel is to be proclaimed.

The church is in the world to make eternal protest against all the things that spoil humanity. How is she to do it? By preaching? God has chosen the foolishness of preaching for the accomplishment of His great and infinite purpose; but preaching is powerless save as it is reinforced by the lives of men and women whose lives are a perpetual protest against evil things. God's Church sends out to every Pool of Bethesda where are gathered the withered and the maimed, men and women who are against the things that wither, that maim, that spoil; Crusaders that have lifted their hands in the sight of heaven, and sworn beneath the Cross of Calvary, that they will make no truce with evil. As the Church sends these men and women out, she is making her protest.

The Church is in the world, a great instrument of Divine Philanthropy. There is a great word of the Church that we Protestants have nearly lost: Mother Church! She is, or ought to be, the great Mother, picking up the crippled child and nursing it back to life, finding the starved and feeding them, taking hold of the imbecile and saying: We will see to it that you are guarded while life's lamp still burns. That is the Church's business, and, thank God, she has done wonderful work. All the great philanthropies that care for the unfit have resulted from the incarnation of the Love of God in the Christian Church.

The Church is in the world to proclaim the great ethic of God. How shall she do it? By enunciating moral codes? No, they have been enunciated once and forever, and we can add nothing to the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount. The Church is to proclaim the ethic by sending into the highways and byways, into the places of commerce, and the places of professional life, men and women who themselves observe the Divine Law, and reveal to men the infinite love that has inspired it.

But there is also a corporate revelation by incarnation. By her fellowship with God and by the consequent fellowship within her borders the Church of God ought to speak to the whole world of the realization of the Divine ideal. The Church ought to be revealing to the world the Kingdom of God and the will of God for humanity. In order to do this, the Christian Church has a ministry, a ministry of those on whom God has bestowed His great gifts. "He gave some apostles,... some pastors and teachers." The business of those within the Church is to teach the word of truth in such form and fashion that the Church will be able to incarnate the Word, and flash the light on the world's darkness. The apostolic function, which, technically is expressing truth in its balanced form and proportion, is always to that end. The pastoral function is breaking the Bread of Life, feeding the flock of God, leading individual souls to new appreciation, in order that by obedience thereto they may proclaim the truth. These gifts within the Church are bestowed in order that the Church may fulfil her function of being the pillar and the ground of the truth.

The Church must not only fulfil its function by incarnation, she must do it also by proclamation. In order to do this, she has her prophets and evangelists. The function of the prophet is to proclaim the evangel, call men to repentance and faith. The prophet and the evangelist must speak on behalf of the Church, explaining the secrets of the Church's experience. If there be no experience to explain, the declaration of a theory is of no avail. For one brief moment let us go back to the Day of Pentecost. Think of the significant and important fact, that Peter's preaching was made possible by the Church's enthusiasm. What attracted the crowd? A Church with its eyes aflame with light and its lips filled with song! All Jerusalem gathered together, and they were amazed, and they were perplexed, and they said, What meaneth this? The Church attracted the crowd by its enthusiasm, and so the opportunity of the preacher was created. This is the supreme work of the Christian Church, and it is only as she does her work that men and nations and the world will live by the Bible.

In the midst of the chaos and the uncertainty and the perplexity there is nothing at this moment more important, than that the Church of God should proclaim the Word of God to the nation. This she must do by life in harmony with the Word, by the messages of her apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers. The message lacks all force, unless it have behind it the witness of the souls that have proved its power.

The Church of the Living God is the pillar and ground of the truth. If the Church is to do this work she must know the Word of God for herself. If the men appointed to minister within her borders are to assist the Church to the fulfilment of her function, they must know the Word of God themselves.

There is a Person the world needs to see. Am I helping to show Him to the world? There are dark and troubled and storm-tossed waters on which mariners are being wrecked, and there is a Light for them. Am I helping to flash the light across the dark waters? There is famine for the Word of God everywhere, and men are wandering away and dying, and there is a Word of God that meets the need of such hungry souls. Am I doing anything to make it known?

216 - 1 Timothy 6:5-6 - Godliness and Gain

Godliness and Gain

Supposing that godliness is a way of gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain.

1 Timothy 6:5-6

The arresting word of the text is "godliness," for it is twice repeated. The word becomes more arresting when this letter is read through in close relation and connection, and it is discovered that it occurs therein no less than ten times.

What is godliness? is a question preliminary to our meditation. The word "godliness" in my text and throughout the whole of the letter to Timothy is not really a translation of the Greek word, but it is a fine interpretation of the value of that word. Yet I think we cannot rightly understand its value save as we take a little time to consider the word of which it is a translation. The Greek word, literally translated into our common speech, would be good reverence. One is immediately conscious of the insufficiency of that translation to convey any particularly illuminative idea to our minds. It comes from a word meaning well reverent, and that again comes from a root which means to revere, to worship. In our word godliness the first syllable is our supreme word for the Almighty, God. That particular word is not suggested by any part of the Greek word, but it is suggested by the whole fact of the Greek word, for it describes that attitude of reverence which is born of the consciousness of God. The godly man is the reverent man, the revering man, the worshipping man. Godliness is that poise of the spirit, that attitude of the soul which is the true outcome of a perpetual recognition of God, and realization of His presence.

There are those, then, who suppose that the attitude of reverence toward God is a way of gain. That it not so, it is a heresy, it is a false conception. Nevertheless, reverence toward God in the true, deep sense of the word is in itself a gain that makes man independent of all other gain or loss. We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. So much for the word itself, and the general thought it conveys.

The letter to Timothy was written to him during the period in which, in obedience to apostolic instruction, he was exercising the oversight of the church in Ephesus. We have to remember the condition of Ephesus at this time; it was the center of abounding commerce; its citizens were mastered by a passion for wealth. The supreme ambition in the activities of the city was that of getting gain. There was, moreover, a strange religious aspect of all this, using the word religious in its lowest sense, speaking not of the Christian fact within the city, but of the pagan fact. It was the place where the temple of Diana stood, and that temple had become to the merchantmen of the city both sanctuary and bank; it was the place of their worship, and it was the place where they deposited their gains. Thus, the worship of Diana not merely permitted, but had become in itself the very essence of devotion to the getting of gain. Ephesus was in the grip of what today we would describe as the lust for gold. In that city of Ephesus there was a church of Christ. You will remember how, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, a letter written some time before this one to Timothy, a letter written during his first imprisonment, as this was written during the period of his last imprisonment, he charged the Christian people in Ephesus that they should buy up the opportunities, seeing that the days were evil, and in that description of the days he revealed the fact that the spirit of Ephesus was a peril to the church of God in the city. We find constantly in these apostolic writings that Christian men and women in the Greek cities were affected by the spirit of the age, and were therefore in peril. The church of God is always in peril when it allows itself to be affected by the spirit of the age. There is no heresy more subtle and dangerous than the somewhat widespread one which charges us that the church of God should catch the spirit of the age. The business of the church is not to catch the spirit of the age; but to correct the spirit of the age, and bring the spirit of the age into harmony with the mind and will of God. It is quite evident as we read carefully this letter written to Timothy exercising the oversight of this church that the peril to which I have referred had affected certain teachers of the Christian religion as well as members of the church. It is with this fact that Paul was dealing in this particular paragraph. "If any man teacheth a different doctrine, and consenteth not to sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is puffed up, knowing nothing, but doting about questionings and disputes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, wranglings of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth." He then touched on the inspiration of such false teaching in the case of the men of Ephesus, "supposing that godliness is a way of gain." It is a very severe paragraph, a terrible indictment, an awful condemnation of the men who were in the mind of the Apostle as he wrote to Timothy. They were teaching some other doctrine than the form of sound words, the words of Jesus Christ, and there was biting satire as he described them as "doting about questionings and disputes of words"; he then described the effect produced, disputations, "wranglings of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth"; finally, he touched the inner secret of the whole thing, "supposing that godliness is a way of gain," and immediately proceeded to correct their heresy by enunciating the truth that godliness in itself with contentment is great gain. So much for the word, and so much for its setting.

Now I leave the context and the peculiar application which Paul made to the Christian teacher, in order that we may consider together the proposition involved in our text, and make the broader application which it warrants.

First of all, I shall ask you to think with me of the atmosphere in which a warning such as this and a declaration such as this became necessary. Our text presupposes that the main passion characterizing the age was a desire for gain. I shall ask you, in the second place, to consider with me the heresy which is suggested by my text, "Godliness is a way of gain." Finally, we shall observe the truth declared in my text, that godliness in itself with contentment is great gain.

In my introductory words I have referred to Ephesus, and by so doing I believe have brought this congregation face to face with the fact that the conditions in the midst of which we live are very similar to those that obtained at Ephesus. While there is a very remarkable contrast between all that was merely local and incidental in Ephesus and in our own cities and our own age, the essential matters, the attitudes of mind, and the master inspirations of human life are identical. I think that the man must be wilfully and blindly optimistic who will deny that the master passion of our own age, in this our own land, is a passion for possession. I am prepared to admit every exception that may suggest itself to your minds at the moment, and yet admitting all the exceptions, I affirm that the great inspiration of activity in our age is not that of conquest, is not that of discovery, is not that of learning, but that of gain. We can look back in the history of our own land, to hours in which the master passion of the people was conquest. I am not discussing its worthiness or unworthiness. But that is not so today. There was a time when the spirit of the age, expressing itself, not in the voice of the multitude, but in the sympathy of the multitude with certain outstanding men, was a passion for discovery. There was a wonderful period, short though perhaps it was, in the history of our own people in the last century, when a consuming passion for learning took possession of the nation. But I very much fear that in the day in which we live these things master men only as they may contribute to that more subtle passion for gain. I find that policies and governments are inspired by markets. I discover that even until this hour we are still as a nation in the presence of great national and international complications because of revenue. You hardly need that I illustrate. If I do, I shall give you the old illustration which has passed my lips so often in this place: we are still dallying with opium because of revenue. If I read that there is some kind of threatened international crisis which I do not profess to

understand, and the interpretation of which I decline to take from yellow journalism, I nevertheless find, whatever paper I read, that the main thing involved is the protection of interests, and when I analyze the revealing words I find that the interests are those of markets, methods of getting gain. We are appallingly mastered today by the passion for gain. I should not mention these things if I had not higher business on hand, that of reminding you that subtly, yet surely, this master passion has commandeered religion, and that today there are many people—I will not say teachers, I am not dealing with teachers, I am making the broader application—living and acting under the impulse suggested by these apostolic words, "supposing that godliness is a way of gain."

I pass from that attempt to speak of the atmosphere which makes the warning necessary, to the warning itself. What is this mental attitude which the Apostle describes in the words, "Supposing that godliness is a way of gain"? Here, let me say in parenthesis, is one of the supreme cases in which the Revised Version has delivered us from one of the most serious blunders. I pray you, mark carefully this translation and the way in which the word is put. "Supposing that gain is godliness" is the old form. No man ever imagined that gain is godliness; that is not the trouble, the peril, the heresy, but something far subtler. "Supposing that godliness is a way of gain." I sometimes think an idea like this is best illustrated by a concrete case. You will at this point understand my reason for taking you back to Genesis, and reading that very brief paragraph in the history of the dealing of Laban with Jacob, in which, in passionate protest, Jacob referred to the methods of Laban for twenty years. I am not going back to the paragraph. In returning to the story I am trusting to your perfect familiarity with it, for, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, Laban stands out as a man who looked on godliness as a way of gain. Laban was perfectly willing to use Jacob because of Jacob's godliness, to make use of him because of his belief in the God of Abraham and of Isaac, to squeeze out of him everything to his own advantage and then to fling him away. That is the supreme concrete illustration I find in the Old Testament. I am not going to deal with Laban, but I ask you to consider this type of character as it exists in our midst today. This is not the man who despises religion, and sets himself in opposition to religion. This man will never try to undermine the faith of another man. This is the man who appreciates to the full the social values of Christianity, who is perfectly well aware that the Christian, the truly godly man, is a true man, a temperate man, faithful in all his duties and in the fulfilment of his obligations. The man to whom I am referring is the man who will carefully select those with whom transactions are to be had upon the basis of their religion. He will be very eager to know that the man he appoints to a place of trust in his office is a godly man. He is not himself a godly man, in any sense of the word, sees no good in prayer, worships never, in his inner soul he may even scoff at the thought of godliness, but he knows the moral, social, commercial value of godliness, and he will be very careful, so far as possible, to realize on the godliness of others.

Let me be concrete; he will let his house to godly people rather than to ungodly people. Why? Because he knows they are far more likely to care for his property than ungodly people. A man who looks on godliness as a way of gain is, in municipal and parliamentary matters, Christian in sentiment, he will take his stand on the side of everything that is in the nature of truth and righteousness; but when you touch the personal note, when you come to deal with the man himself, when you come to see the man under the awful searchlight of the Divine thought of him, or see him weighed in the infinitely just balances of the sanctuary, you will find that his godliness is nothing more than something which he practices in the hope of gain. This apostolic description is the most searching and the most appalling to be found in the whole revelation of the New Testament. The peril described is at once the most subtle and the most blighting and blasting of any. That man is almost beyond hope who will maintain external rites, and traffic with the principles and practices of godliness while the motive is gain. That is the heresy of all heresies the most terrible. A man who will employ the language of the sanctuary, wear the livery of the temple, pronounce the creeds of the church, to maintain a position in society and commercial life that will enable him to satisfy his lust for gain is of all men most hopeless.

I turn from that consideration to the corrective truth, for after all is said and done, there is an element of truth in the idea that godliness is a way of gain. There is an element of truth in it, while it is a heresy. Just as there is an element of truth in that phrase that some of us remember having seen at the head of our copybooks when we were learning to write, "Honesty is the best policy." The man, however, who is honest only because it is the best policy is a rogue. That is the very heart and center of this business. The man who is godly only because godliness is a way of gain is ungodly at his heart, and is rejected of heaven.

Yet, in order that we may understand the subtlety of this peril it is necessary that we should dwell for a few moments on the truth. We notice with what immediateness the apostle proceeded from graphic description of the peril to enunciation of positive truth, "godliness with contentment is great gain."

Now, the ultimate definition of godliness is found in the first great chant or anthem of the Christian Church, which the Apostle either wrote for the first time, or which he quoted.

"Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

According to that revelation, godliness with contentment is indeed great gain. "Great is the mystery of godliness," which I understand to mean: Great is the mystery which is the final inspiration of godliness. Then that mystery is described: "He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory." We are

at once conscious that the Apostle had in his mind the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Leaving the descriptive phrases, and speaking only of the Person Who was described by the Apostle, let us put the statement thus: Great is the mystery of Him, Who in Himself was the incarnation of godliness, and Who in the fulfilment of His mission is the inspiration of true godliness in others. We immediately see the reason for another passage, which we read as lesson, the one in Colossians, that great passage in which this same Apostle deals with the mystery. There he first spoke of the mystery of the Church, further on of the mystery which lies within the mystery of the Church, "Christ in you the hope of glory," and still a little further on, of the final mystery, which is Christ Himself. As in that Colossian epistle he traced the secret back into its innermost marvel, let us take it in the other order: the first mystery is Christ; the consequent mystery is Christ formed, fashioned, in the life of a man; the final mystery is the whole Church, consisting of all such as are indwelt by this Christ. Great is the mystery of that Christ and all those in whom He is formed, and ultimately of that Church in which the glory of the revelation shall be included and revealed.

This seems to wander a great way from the text! Not a hairsbreadth. In this light the unworthiness of the former conception is immediately seen, "supposing that godliness," the attitude and externality of reverence, "is a way of gain." "But godliness"—and we must still think of the spaciousness of godliness—let it be understood according to the interpretation of the sacred writings, let it be recognized in its marvel, in its light, love, life, liberty, glory; godliness, as revealed in the incarnation of the Son, as realized in the soul, of a man who has been brought into relationship with Christ; that godliness which is infinitely more than a pose or attitude of external reverence; that godliness which is the perpetual attitude of external life, after the pattern of spiritual worship, that godliness is great gain.

Mark carefully the juxtaposition of the terms, "Godliness with contentment." Contentment is an essential concomitant of godliness. Where there is real godliness, the attitude of the life well reverent, there is perpetual contentment. I venture with reverence, and may I say with some reticence, to appeal again to the supreme example of godliness received in the revelation of Jesus Christ. According to the New Testament revelation of Him, do you know of a more radiant revelation of perfect contentment than that of Jesus Christ, perfectly at peace, perfectly quiet and at rest, never disturbed, always calm and dignified? Why? Because His spirit was adjusted to the will of God, the poise of His life was well reverent toward God, meeting the stress and strain, even of the last darkling hours of the final tragedy, in a calm, contented manner.

The man who makes godliness an appearance of his life in order to gain, is forevermore characterized by lack of peace and by unrest. The man who has seen the vision, and whose soul has answered it; the man who has found God, and who has forevermore a sense of His glory, and is submissive to the call of His will, that man is quiet. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

I find in this same letter another statement: "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." I pray you do not minimize that, do not attempt to qualify it. Let it sing its own song in your heart, "Godliness is profitable for all things." Godliness is profitable for physical life. It is enough to say that surely, now; I need not argue it. Godliness is profitable for mental life; true godliness never blunts the intellect or stifles the voice of reason; it creates the atmosphere in which it is possible for a man to prosecute investigation; it gives him the right to ask questions, says to him in infinite wisdom, Secret things belong unto God, but revealed things are for you and your children; admits the right of inquiry, quickens the intellect, makes keen, alert, alive the mental powers. When I pass beyond the physical which I do not argue, and the mental on which I have uttered some few sentences, to the spiritual, again, argument is unnecessary.

Godliness is profitable in every human obligation, in social life, in political life, in all human interrelationships. Let two godly men deal with each other in business, it is a profitable transaction. Let a godly man stand by his godliness six days a week in the market place, it is a profitable thing. I am not so sure, you say. I have a business man listening to me who says, I am not so sure. I have attempted during the past week to live the life of godliness, and if I could have sacrificed it I would have been a wealthier man tonight! Would you? Would you change the wealth of a clear conscience for the gain of gold? You know you would not. Godliness is profitable for all commercial transactions.

Godliness is gain in wealth, for the man whose wealth has been gained in a godly fashion, and who is living a godly life, will always understand that he is but a steward of the God Who has prospered him, and he will make to himself friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it shall fail they will receive him into the everlasting habitations.

Godliness is gain in poverty. I am not defending poverty. It is a very long time since I have been guilty of declaring that poverty is a blessing. God overrules it, and makes it a blessing; but poverty is outside the economy of God. It is not His will that a man or woman should feel in the rush of human life the grind of poverty. Let us understand that God in His provision for humanity has provided for humanity; if man has lost the key to the situation, and does not know how to manage the gifts of God, the blame is on man. While that is so, and while the conditions in which men live today are conditions which bring poverty to some, I still bring you to the poor man or woman in this city, fine in character, godly in poise of spirit, who is struggling for bread; and I will let you talk to that man or woman, and you will find that he or she knows the gain of godliness: all the sackcloth is transfigured, and loneliness is canceled, and the bare and frugal meal becomes a sacrament of heaven when the soul is truly godly.

"Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." I need not argue Paul's final words, the life which is to come, all the afterward of revelation, explanation, compensation; that richer life we are sure of if we are godly.

Make the comparison between these two things. One man says that godliness is a way of gain, and one man knows that godliness in itself is great gain. They use identical words when they are talking, they recite similar creeds, they are not like the people in the Old Testament, one party saying shibboleth and the other saying sibboleth. They both say shibboleth. You cannot tell the difference between these two men by looking at them or listening to them. How shall we find it? It is in one quantity; contentment, rest, quietness, peace. Are you making godliness a way of gain? It is revealed by the feverish unrest of your life that you are. Are you finding godliness gain? It is revealed by the quiet dignity of your life that you are.

Let us try to feel our way into the heart of this. What is the supreme heresy in the first case? That this man puts gain first. What is the essential truth in the second case? That this other man puts godliness first. The master passion in the one case is gain, and godliness is looked on as a means to an end. That is heresy. The master passion in the other case is godliness at all costs, and that godliness is gain in itself. That is the way of God. Remember that to say that godliness is a way of gain is essential godlessness. Christ will not allow us to crown Him, because He feeds us with material bread. The multitudes would fain make Him King. Why? Because He had fed them. He would not take the crown on those conditions. Godliness is in itself essential wealth. Here were other men, who crowned Him, not because of gain, but because of the supreme necessity of the case, because He had captured them; then He became to them all they needed in things material and moral, and spiritual and eternal. That is infinite wealth!

Which is your conception? May I urge the question? Are you simply religious because it is respectable so to be, because by observing the externalities of religion you gain some advantage in society? That is, of all blasphemies, the worst. On the other hand, do you desire to be godly as the deepest passion of your life? Knowing, as you do, that you are full of failure, do you desire that you may be well reverent, submitted to this God, under His will? Then you are already possessed of undying wealth.

Let the last note of this message be that of the gain of godliness. Be right with God, and you will be right with every other personality in the universe, right with every other relationship of human life. Be right with God, and you will be right with the devil, you will master him, and be safe in the hour of temptation! Be right with God, and you will be right with your fellow man, loving him, and expressing your love in integrity, justice, honesty, mercy, benevolence. Be right with God, and you will be right with your possessions, you will not say that anything you have is your own, but that it is His, and you are His steward. Be right with God, and you will be right with the powers of your being; be they what they may, they will be realized, fulfilled. Be right with God, and you will be right with death, enabled to face the hour of dissolution with a song and a shout of triumph, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory."

Godliness is indeed great gain.

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The Fight of Faith

Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal.

1 Timothy 6:12

We are accustomed to speak of the Christian life under different figures. Sometimes it is described as a pilgrimage in which, staff in hand and equipped for long and continuous marches, the pilgrim sets his face toward the country where he fain would be. Sometimes it is described as a voyage over seas in which today the blue of the sky is mirrored, and which tomorrow are swept by storm. Sometimes it is described as a race, to run in which the competitor must strip himself, lay aside every weight and set his face toward the goal, perpetually forgetting the things behind. In all these figures of the Christian life there is the suggestion of effort and of difficulty. I know there are those who speak of this Christian life as though it were easy, soft, weak. As a matter of fact, it is indeed, as the text suggests, a fight, fierce and terrible oftentimes, a constant warfare from beginning to end. It is a fight which requires all a man's grit and force if he hopes to win. It is in that way I desire to represent it to you, my brothers, to whom principally I speak this evening.

The words of the text constitute a part of the final advice of the aged Paul to his young friend and fellow minister, Timothy.

The text is really a part of a threefold injunction which may be expressed by the three words which indicate it, "Flee," "Follow," "Fight." The first of these three words indicates what Timothy's attitude should be toward the evils which the apostle had been rebuking. The second affirms the true ambition of his ministry; the third indicates at once the strenuousness of his life, and by its connection with the latter part of the text, "lay hold on the life eternal," indicates the strength in which he will be able to fight his fight

as he follows after righteousness and flees evil things.

I take the text away from its setting, and I do it no violence thereby, for while this is the word of the apostle to one who is called into the sacred and special work of the ministry, it has to do with life, and every man who is a Christian is in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Every man who has yielded himself to the King is called upon to fight the battles of the King in his own life and wherever he may be. Turning aside, then, from all its immediate and local application, I bring the text to you tonight as indicating this fact of the strenuousness of the Christian life.

What, then, is the fight to which men are called who follow Jesus Christ? Two forces are at work in the world. The force which gathers to the center and the force which drives from the center. First of all, the gathering force brings a man within his own personality into consistent life, and then brings man to man, heals the breaches and the wounds, and makes for a society which is pure, noble, self-sacrificing. The scattering force breaks a man up within his own personality, and drives men apart, severing man from man, brother from brother, the wide world over. The force of right and the force of evil are in array against each other. If I may express the warfare in another way I would say that there is a perpetual battle in the world between faith and fear. If, for a moment, you do not follow me in the antithesis, I pray you think that at the center of all evil as its inspiration is fear, at the center of all right as its inspiration is faith. If you take the Bible and trace your way through from beginning to end you will find these two principles are forever revealed as in opposition. You find men attempting to combine on the basis of fear, fear of each other, of some ultimate evil; and also men combining on the basis of faith in the unseen and eternal. Faith and fear are in perpetual opposition. All that which drives men to evil courses, and all that which divides man from man is based upon fear. All selfishness expressing itself in harm to other men grows out of the heart's fear. All self-sacrifice expressing itself in helpfulness to other men grows out of the heart's strong, firm courage and faith. In the world these two forces stand opposed. Every man is ranged on one side or the other. Every man's life is either a part of the force which scatters, or a part of the force which gathers. Every man's effort in every day of his life is a contribution toward the victory of evil at some point, or else it is a contribution toward the victory of good. I grant you that at the back of all expenditure of human effort by which we are surrounded, and of which we ourselves contribute a part, there is an infinite hunger and craving after God. The difference between faith and fear is the difference between attempting to satisfy this deep craving and hunger in the right and true way and in the wrong way. The wrong way is the way of evil. The right way is the way of good. These two forces are opposed even in a man's own life. A young man facing life sees before him some goal to which he desires to come; some ambition inspires him, prompts him, drives him. This in itself is not wrong. It is as it should be. God has made every young man capable of seeing lights in the eastern sky which lure him to endeavor. It is of human life, according to the plan of God, that young men should dream dreams and see visions, and build castles in the air, and aim at success. Every man who is a man has such visions and such desires. How are you going to gain your goal? By what way are you traveling toward your mountain height? How do you propose to translate your castle in the air into a solid piece of work squarely set on the earth? That is the question of importance. The suggestion that is made to the young man facing life is, on the one hand, a suggestion that he should take short cuts devoid of principle toward the goal he desires to reach. The other suggestion is that he shall find the one highway of stern duty and true principle and tramp it at all costs. The battle begins in his heart between the allurements and enticements of the short and easy method—as it appears to be—of evil; and the long, stern, and arduous method—as it appears to be—of good. In this great city at this hour the two forces are at work. The battle is set in array. Whoever may lead the hosts on the side of evil, the fact remains that through this city there are forces of evil waiting to lure men into ways of evil on the basis of fear, and other forces drawing men into the paths of righteousness on the basis of faith.

Whether it be in a profession or in business, here or there, the deepest thing in all your life story will be the contribution you make toward this great battle between evil and good, fear and faith. This battle is not one which is fought by preachers or teachers only. It is not a battle fought only by men who are openly vulgar, and are attempting definitely to demoralize human life—would God there were none such, but there are such! The battle is not one between the leaders merely. Every man in this house is in this great fight. You are fighting the battle in every hour and every moment of your life, as your life's force is being exerted on the side of good or of evil, according to whether the underlying inspiration is that of fear, which attempts to save self, or faith, which attempts to glorify God. That is why the apostle charges Timothy to "fight the good fight of the faith."

The leader of the forces of faith is Jesus Christ Himself. In the letter to the Hebrews the writer describes the heroes and heroines of faith through the ages. At last, passing from the eleventh chapter into the twelfth, you read these words which describe the One who is "The Author"—and now allow me to offer you a more literal and immediate translation of the Greek word—"the File-leader of faith." That is to say, the writer of this letter to the Hebrews puts Jesus Christ at the very forefront of the army that fights the good fight of the faith. Although in point of time and in appearance in human life He came long after the men already mentioned, Abraham, Moses, David, and the rest, yet Jesus Christ is the File-leader, the one moving first. The whole life story of Jesus, on the human side, is the life story of One who lived by faith. He saw the ultimate victory. He believed in the triumph of righteousness. He wrought with God along the mysterious way of human life and by victory gained over all temptation, and testimony borne in His own age, and at last by the infinite revelation and mystery of His passion, fought "the good fight of the faith." He it is who leads the armies of the faithful.

If a man is to fight this fight of the faith where is he to begin? He must begin with definite and personal submission to the great Leader of the army of the faithful. Every soldier in this fight must be enlisted of his own will and must yield his will to the will of the Commander. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." The personal application of that is that if a man would gather he must be with the Christ, and that if he is not with the Christ he is therefore scattering. You cannot "fight the good fight of the faith" until you have crowned the Christ. The first thing, then, in Christian warfare is enlistment under the leadership of the One who stands in front of us, the File-leader of faithful souls.

Then follows a statement of the all-inclusive equipment for the fight. The charge of the apostle here is not that a man shall fight to lay hold on eternal life, but that a man shall lay hold on life eternal in order to fight. I am afraid that has not always been the interpretation of this passage. We have very often read it as though the apostle meant that a man is to fight the good fight of the faith and presently to lay hold on eternal life. If that has been our interpretation it is because of a common mistake which postpones the possession of eternal life to the ages beyond. Eternal life is something for today.

What is eternal life? Some recent translators have, as I think, very beautifully expressed the thought in the words "age-abiding life," or the "life of the ages." Eternal life is not a condition to which a man comes after death. Eternal life is that mystic and wonderful life which is in all the ages, past, present, and to come. It is the infinite force at the back of everything. Now, says the apostle, in the midst of things present, in the midst of the battle against evil, in all the fierceness of the conflict, fight, laying hold on eternal life. The force in which man is to fight against fear and on the side of faith is that of the appropriation of this eternal life. Let me express this in a slightly different form. Eternal life is not merely a quantity. It is a quality. A man can live eternal life here in London just as well as in heaven. Unless he live it here how can he live it there? It is the life which defies change, the life which abides when all its varied expressions pass away. "Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal." Take hold on this principle of life and in its power fight the fight of the faith.

How shall I find eternal life? The answers are as familiar to you as is the Book of God. You have heard them from childhood. Hear the words of Jesus, "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." Yes, but how am I to know the only true God and Him whom He has sent? Hear another of the statements of the New Testament, "He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them which believe on his name: which were born"—there is the beginning of eternal life in the soul—"not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." When a man sees Jesus Christ and obeys Him, yields to Him, in that moment he has taken hold on eternal life. He has put his own life in all its meaning into immediate connection with the life which abides, the life of the ages, and in that strength he is called on to go forth to this warfare.

What is to be the soldier's spirit? First of all, the man who fights after having crowned Christ fights in perfect confidence because he knows His leader and is convinced of the ultimate issue. In the letter to the Hebrews the writer says, "We see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold... Jesus." The victory is not won. The final crowning of Christ Himself has not come. He is still waiting in the hidden mystery of the heaven until "his enemies be made the footstool of his feet"; but we have seen Him and to have seen Him is to be perfectly assured that He must win. It is impossible once to have looked into the face of the Son of God, to have seen Him in all the radiant beauty of His purity, the matchless majesty of His victory over sin, and believe that at last He can be defeated. If I am in the fight against evil in my own life and in the fight against evil in the world as a soldier of Jesus Christ, I fight in perfect confidence.

The man who fights under the direction of Jesus Christ fights not only in confidence but in cautiousness. The great word of one of the Old Testament writers is forever true in his experience, "Happy is the man that feareth alway." There is a foolhardiness which names itself courage, but is not courage. There is a species of pious blasphemy very much abroad in the world today about the power of the grace of God. I have heard men say that if they have once given themselves to Jesus Christ the grace of God is able to keep them in all sorts of places and conditions. It is not. The grace of God is able to keep a man in any place into which God brings him, however grave and perilous; but the grace of God is not sufficient to keep a man when a man deliberately puts himself into a place of peril outside the pathway of the Divine will for him. I have heard men say with regard to strong drink that the grace of God is sufficient to keep a man. So it is, if that man will obey the law of God and abstain absolutely and utterly from the thing that has marred him. If a man plays with fire he will be burned, notwithstanding his relationship to Jesus Christ. If a man attempts to try his courage by putting himself into a place of temptation he will fall, notwithstanding the fact that he has crowned Christ in his life by some act of submission in the past. The soldier who is to fight the good fight of faith is to "flee" from all evil. I pray you remember that there are moments in this great conflict of faith as against evil when you will demonstrate your courage more surely by using your spurs than by using your sword. There are places to which no man can go who is to fight this fight. The place of peculiar peril is to be avoided. The good soldier of Jesus Christ is the man who fears, and fears always. Not confidence merely, but caution also.

The good soldier of Jesus Christ is one, moreover, who understands that there must be conflict unto victory. That the victory is possible he believes. Then if it be possible, however stern, however strenuous, however terrible the conflict, he is to press right through until the end. You have heard the story of the Spartan son who returned home and said to his aged father, scarred by many

a battle, "My sword is just a little too short for me." Said the old man, "Add a step to it." You tell me your sword is just a little too short for you to win. One step more, and one thrust harder. The last five minutes win the fight, not the hours that have preceded them. Some man here has been fighting his fight for weeks and months. You tell me you are just giving up. In God's name I charge you, fight through. It is the last five minutes that mean victory. There must be perseverance.

The soldier of Jesus Christ is not only a man having confidence and caution, and determined perseverance which issues in victory. He is a man who will endure hardness and so himself become hard, in that sense of the word hard. Hardness is a quality which comes only through enduring hardness. By hardness we mean not that hardness against which we are warned in the New Testament, the hardness of conscience and heart, but the toughness which enables a man to "stand... to withstand... and having done all, to stand." Hear one word as an aside. Some man says, "I lack that hardness. That is where I fail." I say to you, "Once more out upon the field, one more campaign, and you will be harder. Another victory and the fiber of your moral courage will be tougher." It is by fighting on until the victory is won by strong endeavor that man gains the hardness which makes him at last a valiant and victorious soldier of Jesus Christ. All these things are necessary if we are to "fight the good fight of the faith."

Where is the fight to be fought? In the first place, in secret. You will never be able to fight the good fight of the faith in London until you have fought it, and are fighting it, in your own heart and life. There are many ways of stating that truth. It is an old, a commonplace truth, yet one which I feel needs to be restated. There are so many men who desire to have something to do in the general moral uplifting of society who have never yet enlisted to fight against evil in their own hearts and lives. The first battle is the battle within, against wrong in the heart and life. Yet remember, as I have already said, this battle also, first and fundamental, can be fought only under the leadership of Christ. My trouble in dealing with young men is that so many of them misunderstand Christianity. They imagine that all they have to do is to make some confession of loyalty to Jesus Christ and that He will nurse them over all the way. Nothing of the kind. Crown Him. Follow Him. Fight under Him. The severest battles of a man's life are fought out in secret and in his own individual soul. Temptation to evil in its varied forms comes far more subtly to a man when he is alone than when he is with others. I begin my fight inside; in the secret recesses of my inner life, in the hall of the imagination, in the chamber of the affections, there the fight must first be fought. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." I am not anxious to make any appeal to young men to fight the fight in the city. I am perfectly convinced you will be bound to do that if once you have fought in the fight in your own life. Your whole life, if that life be homed in the will of Christ winning His victory, will be part of the force by which He lifts and purifies the city. The fiercest battles of the individual life, the longest, the most strenuous, are the battles fought in absolute loneliness. May I, with all reverence, illustrate what I am thinking from the life story of Jesus? Do not forget that in the will and economy and purpose of God He lived longer in private than in public. Think you there was no significance in that? Three years of public life, and, reckoning from twelve years of age, when He was a boy coming up to the Hebrew confirmation, eighteen years in quietness, hidden away. Where do you suppose, so far as the manhood of Jesus is concerned, the fiercest battles were fought, in the presence of the crowd or in Nazareth? I tell you, in Nazareth. There were battles to be fought in the presence of the crowd.

It is not particularly heroic to do right when you are in the midst of people who applaud you. It is easy for the men of this brotherhood to be pure on Sunday when they are in the brotherhood, and I am not at all sure that it is particularly difficult to be good in the midst of opposition. I tell you frankly, I have never quite understood the young fellow who does not love to put up a stiff fight for God when men are against him. It calls out the fiber that is in him. But, ah, me, my masters, when the comrades in the Christian war are not with me, when the soldiers who would oppose me and make me fight are away and I am alone, then the fiercest fight of my life is fought. There are curious notions abroad in the world as to ministers of the Word of God. Some people seem to imagine we are free from temptation on account of our calling. I tell you we are the special objects of the devil's attack. In the loneliness and seclusion of the study, with only books of religion about a man, oh, the temptation to sloth, to indolence, to pride, to fear, to traffic with the Word of God for some subtle motive. It is there, when I am alone, that the fight is fiercest. Unless a man wins there he will never win anywhere.

How shall I win there? By laying hold on eternal life. This Son of God who is the Leader of the hosts laid down His life in the light and the darkness of the cross—and let no man tell me there is no mystery in the cross. In that infinite hour of His agony He made it possible for me to lay hold on life, and if a man will lay hold on life by crowning Him, he can fight alone and win, he can fight with his comrades in arms and win, and he can fight against opposition and win. The first battle is ever in loneliness. That is the thought I desire more than any other to impress on you.

What is to be the final issue of this fight to which we are called? The triumph of right in our own lives and in the world. On that I am not going to dwell.

How are you fighting? Take the week that is gone. You have spent so much of thought, so much of energy. On which side has it all been exerted? Have you helped, by thinking and speaking and working, the victory of evil? Did you think and speak and work last week so that God Almighty got some help out of you toward the ultimate victory?

I call you in the name of the great Leader of faithful souls to fight the good fight of the faith, and I say to you tonight, you can fight that fight only as you lay hold on eternal life. I say to you finally, eternal life is yours here and now if you are His. It may come silently, gently, so much so that you hardly know the moment of its coming. When you take your life and hand it over to the great Captain of Salvation, you lay hold on eternal life, and in the power of that life you may begin your fight and win in secret and in public, in your own life and in every endeavor for the Kingdom of God.

218 - 2 Timothy 1:10 - Death Abolished

Death Abolished

Our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who abolished death.

2 Timothy 1:10

We come to Easter morning with joy and gladness, and with a great sense of triumph filling our hearts. We have been treading the shadowed way that led to Calvary, and standing in awe and amazement in the presence of the infinite mystery of the passion of our Lord. This morning in our hearts there is the assurance that the winter is over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds is come. The storm has spent itself, the great Master Mariner is triumphant, and the Ark rides upon the waves of a sunlit sea. Egypt is behind, the exodus is accomplished. Death is abolished, life and incorruption are brought to light.

It was the brilliant German critic of Christianity, Strauss, who declared that of the Christian faith the resurrection is the center of the center, and that is true. "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain... ye are yet in your sins... if in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable," for our hope has been the greatest of hopes, and our despair must be the most unutterable of despairs.

Christ is risen; and His resurrection was first of all, as to His own mission, perfect vindication of Himself, the proof, in the cosmic order, of His sinlessness. It was also the vindication of all His teaching; He had affirmed through the days of His public ministry—and men had listened to the affirmation and had refused to believe it and had crucified Him eventually for making it—that the supreme thing in human life is the spirit, "Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and have no more than they can do"; speaking out of His own essential spirit life He said, "I lay down My life, that I may take it again," "I will go up to that which men call death, and you shall see Me die, but I, the essential spirit will take hold of My body, and bring it back again that you may behold it." When He was laid by loving hands in the grave, His enemies said, "We remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, 'After three days I rise again'"—and if He never rose they were quite right, He was a deceiver; but the resurrection demonstrates the truth of His own teaching, that in the economy of God the spirit life is independent of the body, is able again at the time appointed to reclothe itself with the body, because it is the dominant factor in personality. The value of the resurrection in the mission of Christ is that of its perfect vindication of Himself, of His teaching, of His power.

The value of the resurrection to the sons of men is, therefore, necessarily that of demonstration. By that resurrection I know that my sins are forgiven. Blot out that historic resurrection and the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins is a sigh of hope without foundation in fact upon which faith can fasten. By that resurrection I know that the Cross is the means by which my sins may be forgiven. That resurrection is the demonstration of the possibility of a holy life, for He Who said, "I lay down My life, that I may take it again," said "I lay down My life for the sheep." In the energy of that communicated life we live that we may become holy. If He rose not, it is a false dream. By that resurrection there is assurance of the life beyond, and illumination thereof for all time. It is to that last thought that we turn this morning.

The text appears in a paragraph, the burden of which is Paul's appeal to Timothy to be brave and true in the testimony of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole paragraph makes perfectly clear that the central fact of the gospel, that which indeed is the gospel, is the fact of the appearing, or the epiphany of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the gospel which Paul preached, the gospel committed to Timothy, the gospel of the Church.

The central fact of that manifestation or appearing is that of the resurrection. Here the apostle describes the resurrection as the abolition of death, victory over death. He moreover declares that, by the way of the resurrection, life and incorruption were brought to light in the gospel.

Death is abolished by that illumination. That illumination results from that abolition.

Let us remind ourselves briefly, and with all patience and sympathy, of the fact that the fear of death is not only widespread but it may be described as universal. Man does fear death. You remember the words in which Shakespeare describes death:

Death is a fearful thing.

The weariest and most loathed earthly life,

That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what men fear of death.

Or the words in which Young describes it,

The Vale of Death! that hushed Cimmerian vale,
Where darkness, brooding o'er unfinished fates
With raven wing incumbent, waits the day,
(Dread day!) that interdicts all future change.

Or to go back to literature more ancient than either, more sublime than either, the literature of our own Bible. Listen to the voice of perhaps the oldest book in the Bible, and hear how Job in the midst of his agony thus describes death:

... The land of darkness, and of the shadow of death;
A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself;
A land of the shadow of death without any order,
And where the light is as darkness.

I quote these not as illustrating the lower manifestations of fear, but the higher; they are records of this universal fear, from the highest of men.

This fear of death still abides very largely, even among the children of God, the children of light. Perchance it is the last fear to be overcome in the heart of the trusting saint, as death is the last enemy to be overcome. We are conscious of the chill of it even though we live in the warmth of the risen Sun of righteousness. There is a sense in which this fear haunts us and abides even after we have seen life and immortality brought to light in the gospel.

May we reverently ask the reasons of the fear? What fills the heart with fear in the presence of death, either our own death or that of our loved ones? First of all, let us remember that even if we believe man is immortal, it is still true that death is the passage from the familiar into the unfamiliar. We do not know what lies beyond; it is the bourn whence no traveler returneth. We have all felt the terror of that as we have stood by the side of the loved one about to cross over. It is the leaving of the familiar and the reaching of the unfamiliar. It is the severing of associations, and the ending of fellowships. It is the interruption of plans and purposes, and the cessation of endeavor. These are things against which men find themselves in revolt. These are the things which make men afraid. These are the reasons why man does so perpetually and so persistently fight against death.

What is the reason of these reasons? What lies behind all this? How are we to account for it? This same apostle in his Corinthian letter dealing with the subject of resurrection, makes this affirmation, "the sting of death is sin." The fear of death is the last activity of conscience. Conscience, deadened, hardened, seared, acts in the presence of death. Conscience asserts continuity, and in a moment fear takes possession of the soul. Do not misunderstand me at this point. I do not say that fear of death is the fear of punishment for sin in the next world. That is not my argument now. Conscience asserts continuity, and when the spirit contemplates continuity after this strange dividing line of death, and believes that death is but the passing on from the familiar into the unfamiliar, the severing of old associations, the ending of old fellowships, the interruption of plans and purposes, the cessation of endeavor, then the soul is in revolt, the emotions are stirred with fear, but why? Because through sin man has lost his vision of himself, of the meaning of his life, and of the things that lie beyond; because man looking out at death is blind and cannot see death as it really is in the economy and purpose of God. All the reasons which I have assigned for fear, which are true reasons, are, nevertheless, false as in themselves. Death need not be, nor ought to be, the passage from the familiar to the unfamiliar; Death is not the severing of association, the ending of fellowship; it is not the interruption of plan and purpose, and the cessation of endeavor; unless all these things are out of harmony with the ages and with the God of the ages, and the purpose of the ages. If a man shall live out his life of three-score years and ten simply in the realm of the dust, or even if a child, or a youth shall so live, as the result of faulty teaching of fathers, mothers, teachers, all these reasons for fear are there.

Now the declaration of this text is not that Christ destroyed death, but that He abolished it. The declaration is that He made death idle by bringing life and incorruption to light through the gospel. This Greek word is translated in other places in the New Testament, "made of no effect." That is the true thought here. He has made death of no effect. He has made death void, empty. He has emptied death of all that which filled the heart with fear.

Let us see how this has been done. What was the way of His victory? First of all, in His own personal resurrection He abolished death. I am not dealing at all with that infinite mystery of the Cross which preceded resurrection. It was not in the hour of resurrection that He made atonement. It was in the act and article of death that He atoned. In His resurrection, He, the permanent, the continuous, the spirit, the essential, took His body out of the tomb, leaving the graveclothes absolutely undisturbed, and leaving the stone still in its place. The graveclothes were not, as we have sometimes interpreted the story, folded up tidily in one place; they

were in the actual wrappings in which they had been about His body; the napkin was not with the graveclothes, but in a place by itself, apart, exactly where it had been about His sacred head. He had left the graveclothes unmoved, every fold as it was around His body; and the stone still there. It was when John and Peter saw those undisturbed graveclothes that they believed He had risen. If they had seen the graveclothes carefully folded and smoothed, they would have thought someone had stolen the body; but when they saw them wrapped as they had been about the body, still there and the body gone, they believed. An angel rolled back that revolving stone that men might see that He was not there. In that article of resurrection He, the permanent, persistent spirit, the essential Jesus as Man, took again that body, and by the touch of His spirit so transformed it that it was no longer subject to the laws which are only of the material, but became the spiritual body of which Paul speaks in his great Corinthian letter. Thus in resurrection He abolished death, made it null and void, made it of no effect. He demonstrated for all time the fact that there is a life than can and will master death eventually, even on the physical plane.

He tarried for forty days, showing Himself as alive from the dead. Have you studied the brief story of those forty days? It is a wonderful unveiling of life and incorruption. He merged the familiar and the unfamiliar. We are afraid of death because we are leaving familiar things and going to unfamiliar; and for forty days He merged them in each other, perpetually comforting, startling, satisfying, and surprising. The doors are locked for fear of the Jews, no bolt is shot back, and He is there, and you can put your finger in the print of the nails. He merged the familiar with the unfamiliar.

He demonstrated identity, continuity, mastery over death. They had seen Him die, they knew He was dead upon the Cross, but He is alive. There He is, and in His feet and hands are woundprints, and His side; but doors cannot retain Him. He can walk by their side, so close to them that they can listen to Him but do not know Him, all the way to Emmaus; then He will break bread and they will see Him, and just as they would hold Him, He is gone. Do not try to get rid of these last two chapters of John. The light is never clearer than in these two chapters. He is merging the familiar with the unfamiliar. He is saying to us, "You speak of going to unfamiliar things, just over the line they are there, all the old things, but there are other things you cannot quite understand, I will give you glimpses of them that you will never forget when your loved ones go; strange mysteries of being you cannot understand, but they are the same; even the woundprints are there."

He demonstrated the continuity of association and fellowship: There are things I dare not try to say, as I think He said them; I have to say them roughly, for imitation would be sacrilege. I can always hear how He uttered that woman's name that morning, "Mary." She knew Him then. "Rabboni, Master, it is Thou! Yes, you have not lost Me." She would have clutched Him, but He said, "No, Mary, you will have to learn to depend not upon the touch of flesh, but upon communion of spirit. The associations are not broken, My Father and your Father, My God and your God. You will have to learn to do without the touch of the flesh, Mary; that is all."

He revealed the unity of plan and purpose here and beyond. What was the passion of His heart while here? The Kingdom of God, the salvation of men. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." He stayed long enough to say to His disciples, The plan is the same, the purpose is the same, the endeavor is the same; I out of sight, you in sight, are going into partnership. "Ye shall be My witnesses... to the uttermost part of the earth."

If that was the personal action in the abolition of death, what was the relative action? Again I quote from the Corinthian letter, for in these words the whole argument is stated more briefly and forcefully than I can hope to state it, "The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." In the darkness and mystery of His Cross He so dealt with sin as to be able to whisper to my sinful soul the word of absolution and the word of peace, so as to give me a conscience void of offence toward God. Directly, you have a conscience void of offence toward God; you have a new vision of God, a new vision of yourself and a new vision of the hereafter; and death who had stood before you stern, hard, iron, brutal, cold, is as you look transfigured into an angel of mercy whose kiss is the kiss of love, the porter forevermore at the gate of life, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory."

What is this victory in our outlook on death? Christ put Himself where death had been standing. This is His word to the Christian, "Till I come." This is His word to the Christian through His servant and by inspiration, "Absent from the body, at home with the Lord." We looked for death, but we are not looking for death today, we are looking for Him, and even if, presently, by the weakening of this mortal tent in which I dwell, the loosening of its bands, my body becomes, to use the magnificent description of Longfellow when he wrote of the slave, "the worn-out fetter which the soul had broken and flung away," I shall meet my Lord. Never was finer thing written about death than that. The spirit conscious of the worn-out fetter, breaks it, flings it away, and then is at home with the Lord. So Christ stands there, where, I know not and care not, whether near or far, just over the borderline of this service, perhaps ere it is done the flaming glory of His advent feet, or perchance after a long, hard day's work, there stands, not death, king of terrors, but Christ, the King of love, and He has abolished death. Death is unemployed, idle. Christ has taken his place.

Mark the effect of this upon fear. Again you may express it in words not usually used in this connection, but I think accurately used in this connection, "Perfect love casteth our fear." The reason of the reasons of fear is gone.

My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought,

My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Was nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, Oh my soul.

"The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

With the passing of the reason of the reasons, the reasons also go. Men fear death because the beyond is unfamiliar; but the beyond is not unfamiliar to us. We know the country well to which the loved ones go. But you say, that is the difficulty, we do not. Think again. I am afraid the Church of God is losing that great and gracious art of contemplating the country beyond. I know that it is out of fashion to teach even children to sing about a heaven beyond the blue. It is certainly quite out of fashion for Christian people to talk about heaven. We are told to make heaven here. I believe that with all my heart. We need have no anxiety about the heaven beyond, but it is good sometimes to contemplate it. As the saintly Rutherford said, "it is good to climb and look in advance upon the home of the soul forever; to observe its buildings, its furnishings; the country, the hills and valleys." We do it all too little. This is the thing I want to say. We know the country for we argue of the country from the country's King. If you really want to know what heaven is like, get any little bit of earth where Jesus is King, and you will see it. Do not be afraid of your imagination. Flowers? Oh yes, immortals, Asphodel, never fading. Birds and animals? Surely yes; armies of white horses for the saints to ride upon. You say, "You are talking figures of speech." Quite probably so, but figures are used to help people to see facts that are too brilliant for their seeing. Facts are always finer than figures. I argue the country from the country's King. No, the country beyond is not unfamiliar. I not only know it, I am learning its language, I am gradually coming to understand its very accent. I know men and women, saints of God, who have walked and talked with Him for fifty years or more, and their accent is so much the accent of the other side that men call them foreigners. We know the country to which the loved ones have gone because we know the country's King.

We were afraid of death because death meant severing of associations and the ending of fellowships. I bring you back to this great word of the catholic Church, and I use the word in its true sense, the universal Church, the peculiar word of an older day, the communion of saints, which does not merely include the fellowship of the saints who are in the Church on earth, but the communion of all saints who have entered into rest and are beyond the vision of the senses. The communion abides; we are not divided. We are waiting, so are they. We are not yet perfected, neither are they. They are in the Paradise of God where the vision is clearer and temptations are over, and the battle is won, but they are not yet perfected. "God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." We are united in our waiting. They are waiting for that for which I am waiting, the resurrection. We cannot visit them. They cannot talk to us, and we violate the whole order of revelation when we try to do it. They cannot revisit us, I do not know that they can watch us, except perchance now and then by some special permission of heaven. There is a unity and affinity which defies and laughs at absence of articulate speech and the vision of the senses. I pass no day that I am not conscious of the nearness of at least one who entered within the veil sixteen years ago, my first lassie; but I never try to bring her up to mutter to me. I never insult the high and holy revelation of God by making use of some fleshly medium that I may hear a whisper that is from hell and not from heaven. But I know the touch of her spirit upon mine, for the spirit life cannot be measured by the dimensions of the material. I know though she cannot come to me, I shall go to her.

Not as a child shall we again behold her;
For when with raptures wild
In our embraces we again enfold her,
She will not be a child;
But a fair maiden in her Father's mansion,
Clothed in celestial grace;
And beautiful with all the soul's expansion
Shall we behold her face.

I have not lost my child, she is mine as she never was before.

Did we say that death interferes with plans and purposes, and endeavor? No, there is continuity of service. They are not idle. It is death that is idle. What are they doing? I only know one thing, they are praying; what else I do not know, I will not pretend to say. This I know, They rest from their labours, but their works have gone out with them; and while the heart of their Lord is restless because His work is not completed, their hearts are restless with His restlessness. They are in perfect fellowship with Him. They have not grown callous about this world of ours, they pray. Oh, it is a great theme, I cannot exhaust it. The Lord is risen indeed, Hallelujah.

This is not the gospel of callousness. We still miss our loved ones, and we still shed tears. Our sense of loss is the result of what God made us emotionally, and we should be less like God if we did not miss them. Our tears He never rebukes. I miss the loved one who is leaving my home and crossing the ocean for a little while, and I have even known tears shed on such occasions. The sense of loss is not wrong when the loved one passes on, and I know I shall never again touch that dear hand until the morning of

resurrection. This is not the gospel of callousness. Christ does not rebuke your tears. It is the gospel of comfort. The boy you have let go far away across the ocean, you miss him yet, but he is not as safe as the child Jesus took to be with Himself, not nearly as safe. Tears there are, but the rain of our tears in the light of the resurrection creates the rainbow which arches all the sky and is the perpetual witness to the ultimate victory.

But if Christ did not rise, all this is unutterable nonsense. Do not imagine you can retain this verse if you deny the historic Christ and the historic resurrection. It is a miracle in the midst of the ages, not natural evolution. That is not resurrection. It was triumph over tragedy, mastery over death by life in the supreme act of God for man. Deny it and you have no comfort—the thud of the clod upon the coffin and that is all. But blessed be God, He is risen, we know He is risen.

There is no song before Calvary. That is, there is no Easter song for me without Calvary. "How am I straitened till it be accomplished," that is before Calvary. Let me say this other thing. There is always the Easter song after Calvary. You cannot prevent it. You may have Pilate's mandate, and Herod's soldiers, and all hell's opposition; but the song will laugh at your opposition.

What was true in history is true of your life. You will never sing the resurrection song until you know Calvary; but to know Calvary is to know resurrection and the Easter song.

May God, the God of all comfort, send you home, especially you my beloved who are bereaved, not to be callous or indifferent, but to know that He gilds the teardrop with His smile and makes the desert garden bloom awhile; to know that He has your loved ones safe, and that when God comes, He will bring them with Him.

219 - 2 Timothy 2:8 - The Supreme Inspiration of Faith

The Supreme Inspiration of Faith

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...

2 Timothy 2:8

This is an hour peculiarly trying to the young people of our church. The child, thank God, has no consciousness either of the suffering of the hour or of the problems by which we are confronted. It is wonderful how God fashions the heart and does not allow a little child to apprehend agony until it is strong enough to face and bear it. A sweet little girl this week said to her uncle when he came into the house, "How many Germans have you killed?" He, wise man, understanding the child-heart, said, "Not more than twelve!" She hugged him and kissed him! Dear child-heart, knowing nothing of the agony, knowing nothing of the problems. God help us to guard our children from understanding.

In all probability, those who are older have had to face these very problems before in some other guise, and they are affected, chiefly, by the tragedy of the suffering.

To the young, that is, to those who believe and who think, this is a critical hour. The problems they are called upon to face concern the goodness of God and the government of God. Believing and thinking young life is compelled today irresistibly and in spite of desire to ask whether God can be good, whether God is really governing at all. How can belief in the goodness and government of God be reconciled with all that is going on in Europe today? That is peculiarly the problem of believing and thinking young life. The difficulty is created because the facts remain too well authenticated to be doubted. The fact of the goodness of God and the fact of the government of God as well as the appalling facts of the suffering and wrong of the hour are certain.

I have selected this text because it reveals a principle of life and action, steadying, inspiring, strengthening. It does not solve problems. Indeed, it brings some of them yet more acutely to mind. It does, however, remind us of a fact in history, stupendous, mysterious, assuring, which makes it possible for us to wait for the hour of solution in the sure confidence that there are explanations. How it does this I think we shall see as we proceed.

First, let us give ourselves quite simply to the text itself without any further reference now to the problems of the hour. To these we will return briefly in conclusion.

These words are found in the last writing of Paul preserved for us. When he wrote them, he was in prison and facing death. He was charged with crime; mark the significance of his own words, "... in bonds as a malefactor." What the charge was specifically we are not told. Different conjectures have been made; that he was arrested and imprisoned on a charge of sedition, on a charge of having complicity in the burning of Rome, on a charge of treason. Most probably it was this latter charge of treason which was preferred against him on the ground of his preaching of the Kingdom of God and the Kingship of Jesus. In Thessalonica they charged him with acting "... contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another King, one Jesus." His trial had two stages. The first was over when he wrote this letter. In it he had been deserted. Listen to his pathetic words, "At my first defence no one took my part, but

all forsook me...." He seems to have expected some delay before the second stage of the trial for he urged Timothy to hasten to him bringing Mark with him. He charged him also to bring a cloak, a suggestive revelation of his physical suffering in the chilliness of the dungeon, and also some precious parchments. The probability is that there was not the delay he expected and that Timothy never again saw him alive. Mark it well, in those days of loneliness, in the grip of a hostile world-power, forsaken by his friends, suffering the chill of the dungeon, and anticipating the end, he wrote, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David...."

Timothy almost certainly received this letter in Ephesus. The first letter was sent to him there, and the probability is that he remained there having the care of the churches. Tradition has it that he was martyred in Ephesus. Ephesus was the capital of Pro-Consular Asia. It was the child of Athens with its culture, and Asiatic paganism; a strange mixture. It was the center of the worship of Artemis or Diana, and it was also a commercial center. Wealthy, superstitious and corrupt, it was a place of grave peril to the infant church. The man in oversight of that church held a position of peculiar responsibility and subtle peril. The struggle against almost overwhelming odds must have been fierce, and to that man in those circumstances these words came: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David...."

It was the charge of an old man in the darkest hour when all the reward of fidelity to Christ seemed to be the dungeon and death. It was a charge to a young man called upon to live and exercise his Christian service in a city where the forces opposed were mighty, subtle, and apparently overwhelming; "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David...."

Let us, then, consider these words in the simplest way; observing in turn, first, the meaning of the injunction; second, the reason of its giving; and third, how it may be practiced and what is the value of such practice.

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...." In the Authorized Version the text reads thus: "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead...." When we put the two versions together, we recognize the fact that they both say the same thing in different ways. The Authorized Version is strictly accurate in interpretation in that it fixes attention upon the main thought of the apostle. The main thought of the apostle here was that Jesus Christ rose from among the dead. The Authorized Version is faulty in that it deflects attention too much from the Person. It need not do so; when once we have begun to think, it will not do so; but the first sense of the soul in a natural reading of the text in the Authorized Version is to have the attention fixed only upon the Resurrection. That is the ultimate value, but it is not all the value. The Revised Version rendering is far more literal and direct, and I venture to say far more helpful and accurate.

There are two possible mistakes that we may make in the reading of our text. We may over-emphasize the abstract idea of resurrection, as though all the apostle charged Timothy to remember was the Resurrection. We may over-emphasize the fact of the Person, making Jesus Christ supreme apart from the fact of the Resurrection.

There is a twofold thought here; first, remember the actual Man, and remember that He was an actual Man. Mark the balance of the apostolic writing for there is great care evidenced in it; "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...." That is the central thing, there the light is focused, from there it flashes, but that there might be no mistake, he added, "... of the seed of David." Let me miss out the central thought—to which I am bound to come back. "Remember Jesus the Messiah... of the seed of David." Immediately we are brought back to recognition of Christ's actual, positive humanity. He was "... of the seed of David"; a Man descended from and related to humanity and knowing all human experience.

We must keep this fact central to our thinking of Him. "... risen from the dead...." Necessarily that involves the actuality of His death. It has been asserted that He never really died but swooned and was resuscitated. The actual Man of our humanity did most actually die, but we are to remember Him as risen from the dead, not "raised from the dead," but "risen from the dead." The apostle was fixing attention not upon the act but upon the fact. Paul said in effect: "Let your last thought about Jesus Christ, and your perpetual remembrance of Him, fasten Him upon your mind as alive, though having been dead." That is Paul's more logical way of saying that which John said more poetically, quoting the words of Jesus as he heard them in the Isle washed by the sea, "... I am the first and the last, and the living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore." "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David...."

Having realized the importance of the central note of the injunction, we may fasten our attention upon the Person. Necessarily we think of more than the Resurrection, but in the process of remembering Jesus Christ, we shall qualify everything by the final fact of the Resurrection. So let us think of Him, of His Person, of His teaching, of His Cross.

Think of His Person. John the Apostle of love said concerning Jesus: "... we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." "Remember Jesus Christ..."; and in so doing we think of incarnate grace and truth. There are no better words than these, and if for a moment I borrow other words, it is only that we may catch some of the splendors focused within them. "Remember Jesus Christ..." and remembering the Person of Jesus Christ, we remember sweetness and strength; light and love; justice and compassion; righteousness and mercy; the merging in a personality of those qualities and quantities which sometimes seem to be in antagonism but when perfectly blended are seen to present the true man. "Remember Jesus Christ...."

Yes, but He was murdered; those hands that were ever doing good were nailed to the Cross; those feet that were ever hurrying upon errands of mercy were transfixed with brutal and bloody nails; He was mauled, spit upon, done to death! I remember Him! Then remember Him risen! Grace and truth cannot be finally crucified, it must rise again. All the high things that make humanity beautiful cannot forever be laid in the dust spattered with blood. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...."

Remember Him again in order to listen to His teaching. How shall I summarize the teaching of Jesus? I will do it by the use of three words; righteousness, peace, joy. I wonder if I have put them in the right order. It is the apostolic order, yet listen to the teaching of Jesus; remember the keynote of His great Manifesto, the first note. Presently, as you read that Manifesto through, you hear the deep and awful tones of stern denunciation, and you hear again and again the infinite music of perfect tenderness, each marvelous strain blending and merging into the ultimate and final harmony; but the first note of the Sermon on the Mount is "Happy!" "Blessed" as we read it, but it is far more accurately, "Happy!" Before He is through with that great ethical enunciation, He will make you shake and tremble and shiver with fear if you are a man at all. He will probe the innermost recesses of your soul and bring to bear upon the secret things of your life the white light of the eternal throne; but the keynote is "Happy." That is the ultimate purpose, but happiness must be based upon righteousness. So He went about teaching.

Have you ever taken time in your busy lives to write out for yourselves all the words of Jesus? When you do it some day—and it is a good exercise, only do not in God's name buy that red-letter Testament to do it by, that is laziness—get a small practice book; you will not want more, the recorded words of Jesus will not fill an ordinary practice book. Having thus written them, read them through, forgetting the context just for once and the occasion on which they were spoken. Read them again and again. Ponder them and you will find three notes running through them: righteousness, peace, joy. Yes, but they silenced Him; they buffeted the mouth that had uttered the words; they murdered Him so that the dear, sweet lips could say nothing else. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...!" You may for a while silence the voice, but you cannot silence the Word of the living God. After the drear, deep, dense darkness of those days and nights in which the world and heaven were without Christ, His body in the grave, His spirit descending to Hades, behold Him risen! Now He will speak not with one human mouth, but with twelve, with five hundred, with ten thousand, until today the speech of the risen Son of God is being proclaimed by all the sacramental host who are born again of His Holy Spirit. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...."

When I remember His Person, I see Him murdered. When I remember His teaching, I find His voice silenced, so that the central, awful, appalling thing I remember is the Cross. Dare to look at it, dare to face it! Here is one perfect example of humanity, of beauty, of strength, of tenderness, of compassion, of clarity of intellect, of marvel of emotion, of balance of volition; dead at the hands of lawless men. Where is God? You have never seen the Cross if you have never been driven to ask that question. When modern philosophers take the Resurrection away from me and leave me only the Cross of such a Man as this, they leave me an infidel in revolt against God, declining therefore to believe that there is a God, or if there is, that He is good. The Cross alone is the place where all hope goes out in hellish darkness, and all faith is eclipsed forever. You tell me the Cross is vulgar! So it is and with a vulgarity too terrific for words. The vulgarity that mauls and puts to death the most beautiful things the world has ever seen. The Cross; oh the brutality, the scandal of it!

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen...!" Then I must look at the Cross again; I must think about the Cross again; I must find some other explanation for it. Now I find that if He was slain by the hands of lawless men, encompassing the men in their lawlessness was the "... determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God..." and the very things I was made to doubt in the presence of the Cross—His government and His goodness—flame out with new meaning. Here is the government of God. Here is the goodness of God. This is a mystery for which you will find no solution in your heart, which the wise men of the world never understood nor do they today. It is the mystery of God, Whose highest exercise of government and authority is put forth for the saving and making again of the men who smote Him in the face and trampled Him underfoot.

Let us now go further and inquire why Paul charged Timothy to "Remember Jesus Christ, risen...." Timothy had been ordained to a life and service which were extremely difficult. There are two notes in this letter which are of supreme importance. The first is: "Be not ashamed of me, and be not ashamed of the gospel." The other is: "Suffer hardship."

Be not ashamed. By that first charge we are imaginatively in Ephesus, cultured Ephesus, and there Timothy was to preach a crucified and risen Christ. It was not easy, or popular. Christ crucified to the Greek was foolishness, and the shame of the Cross was in front of the young evangelist. The apostle knew it, he also had felt it, the shame of the gospel!

"Suffer hardship." The word has in it the actual thought of privation and suffering, pain and agony. Because he had to exercise a ministry and live a life in which these notes were necessary, the apostle said to him, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen...."

Paul used three illustrations in this connection; those of the soldier, the athlete, the husbandman. "No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life... if also a man contend in the games, he is not crowned, except he have contended lawfully... the husbandman that laboreth...."

This is no mere piece of rhetoric; mark the suggestive selection. First the soldier, whose sphere of service is conspicuous, heroic, magnificent; then suddenly, the athlete, who walk in life was one of discipline and training in order to crowning; finally, the husbandman, the notes of whose work are patience and obscurity. The soldier, conspicuous, dashing, daring; the athlete, carefully training himself, contesting for crowns and reward; the husbandman quietly going on from day to day with regular duties. Note the different emphases. The soldier, called to conflict in order to win the approval of him who enrolled him; that is an ancient method of saying a soldier serving king, fatherland, and country. The athlete, contending for the crowning that shall be just and true and honorable. The husbandman, toiling for the fruits without which the soldier and the athlete are no use.

Once again, look at these illustrations, in order to come to the supreme thing that was in the apostolic mind. All this has been incidental; there is a unifying principle, something that is common to each of these illustrations. You may express it in the old way—no cross, no crown; no pains, no gains. It is true of the soldier, of the athlete, and of the husbandman. Did you ever understand this verse so well as you understand it today? "No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life..."! That does not mean that the soldier will not waste time playing; it means that nearer and dearer to the soldier is the call of duty, than mother, wife, sweetheart, child. No cross, no crown! No pains, no gains! The athlete must contend lawfully. Again it is the same principle. No cross, no crown! No pains, no gains! No sloughing off of things unnecessary, no restraint put upon the forces of the physical and mental life; then no crowning, no garland, no winning! Most wonderful of all, and I do not say that carelessly, the husbandman laboreth. We must read into that word laboreth all its full significance. The Greek word means the toil which reduces strength, the toil that brings fatigue, the work that brings the weariness which is the touch of death. That man away back in the country today who ploughs and watches is laboring; putting down into dear old mother earth his own vitality and strength, and if he does not, then there will be no reaping of the harvest and no golden fruitage.

Those are the illustrations. Paul said in effect to Timothy, the young evangelist called to the Christian service and ministry: "You are called to a service and ministry so difficult that you will need the quality of the soldier with its touch of heroism, the severance of every tie that binds to this life; the quality of the athlete, the careful training which refuses the things that hinder and contends lawfully; the toil, the labor, the fatigue of the husbandman." Who is sufficient for these things? Where is there sufficient inspiration to enable a man so to serve, so to live? "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...."

So we pass to the final word, the injunction itself. We have now reached the point where we are very likely to say, "How can we remember Jesus Christ risen?" The word remembrance is very accurate and beautiful, yet unless we are careful we may miss its meaning. Strictly the word does not mean remembrance, recollection; it means fixity, having in mind, keeping it there. The memory is not being referred to as something which works spasmodically, but as a faculty of the soul which is to be charged forevermore with this wonderful image of the risen Christ. How can that be? Bear in mind the memory is not moral, it is not immoral, it is non-moral. Memory has no relation to the right or wrong of a thing. You tell me it is more easy to remember an evil thing than a good thing. No, it is not. That is your fault. The result of the low level on which you have trained your mind! There is no such thing as a cultured memory. Neither is memory automatic, self-acting. As Professor James once said, "Never forget, memory does not act by itself. If I say to you, Remember; you will say, What? Memory will be of no use until I tell you what to remember." It is well to have these things in mind, for by doing so we shall get rid of a good deal of false thinking about memory.

The exercise of memory is scientific, philosophic, pragmatic. It is scientific. The basis of memory is knowledge. You cannot remember anything you do not know. It is philosophic. The activity of memory is thought. You have to think upon the thing you know, to set your mind on it. Finally, it is pragmatic, that is practical. There must be application of the thing you know or memory will become atrophied, paralyzed. I will take three other words. The activity of memory may be defined thus: association, imagination, inspiration. We must know Jesus Christ risen from the dead. That is the basis of association. Then we must think upon Jesus Christ risen from the dead and that imaginatively and not merely logically, allowing our imagination to work and have full play. Finally, let association interpreted by imagination become inspiration. That is to remember Jesus Christ.

Mark the value of that exercise. I go back quite hurriedly to the things I have suggested. In the difficult, unpopular, severe service, "Remember Jesus Christ risen...." Put it in another way, I will borrow from another New Testament writing probably by the same man: "... consider Him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against Himself... Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Is your service difficult, must you endure hardness? Consider Him Who endured the Cross, the ultimate hardness. Is your service difficult, must you be careful not to be ashamed? Consider Him Who despised shame. Never forget the rest, "... and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." "Remember Jesus Christ, risen..."!

"Remember Jesus Christ risen..." in the hour of darkness and mystery. Goodness and truth are violated, they are trampled in the streets; goodness and truth are wronged in reeking tube and iron shard and smoking cathedral; "Remember Jesus Christ risen,..." and be perfectly sure that goodness and truth are not buried beneath the ruins of Rheims, but that they will rise again and their victories will be mightier for the baptism of blackness and blood. Righteousness, peace, joy, are destroyed. "Remember Jesus Christ risen,..." and know that righteousness marches to its last throne trampling down the hosts of wickedness, and that peace finds its

final realization as death is slain in death, and hell in hell laid low, and that joy will come at last even though it finds its way to the ultimate anthem through sighing and groaning and tears.

Where is God? "Remember Jesus Christ risen...." Why does God permit war today? "Remember Jesus Christ risen...!" Why did God permit the Cross? In that Cross His government and goodness were challenged. In that Cross His government and goodness were vindicated. "Remember Jesus Christ risen...!" But Christianity has failed; all its precepts are trampled in the dust! What then? "Remember Jesus Christ risen...." Did He fail? Through suffering and weakness and all that made Him contemptible, He won His victory. That is the story to the end.

I would say to every Christian man today who enlists in his country's service and boldly faces death: "Remember Jesus Christ risen...!"

I would say to every Christian man today who remains at home true to duty's call, in some cases a more difficult thing to do than to go to the front: "Brother, 'Remember Jesus Christ risen....'"

But there is no comfort in this for those who fool in such an hour as this. To the men who are neither going to the front nor doing anything at home there is no comfort. Remember it was Jesus Christ who rose—not Judas, not Herod, not Pilate, not Caiaphas! It is a curious thing that when I searched my New Testament to find some man in the days of Jesus who was a diletant, fooling, I could not find one. When Jesus passes by in any guise or garb, He forces superlativeness, and there is no man in all the story who was fooling! Men today who do not see that the day of the Lord is at hand and drop into line somewhere ready to suffer and die, for them there is no comfort in this.

But to the man, the woman, who faces the problem, the distress, the darkness, and then buckles on the armor and goes by way of the Cross; I say to such: "Remember Jesus Christ risen...."

220 - 2 Timothy 3:2, 4, 5 - The Kingdom: Traitors

The Kingdom: Traitors

Men shall be... traitors... from these also turn away.

2 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:4-5

We have in this letter in all probability, the last words of the great apostle. It is very largely a personal letter. One illustration of that will be discovered in the fact that there are twenty-three proper names found in its four brief chapters. It is the letter of an old man to a young man. It is a letter of an old minister of Jesus Christ to a young man commencing his work in the ministry of the Word. It is the letter of one who has borne the burden and heat of the day to one who stands facing the battle. It is the letter of one who has been careful to lay the foundations, and who charges men to beware how they build thereupon, to a man who is to continue to build. It is impossible to read this letter naturally, as a letter—that is, at one sitting, forgetting those false divisions of chapters and verses—without becoming conscious that the heart of the writer is full of conflicting emotions; full of sorrow, and yet full of joy; full of anxiety, and yet full of courage. He is perfectly conscious, as the time of his departure approaches, of the dangers that lie ahead. The peculiar message committed to him has been the doctrine of the Church; but he has never forgotten the Kingdom. Whereas it has been his work in the course of his constructive and educative ministry among the churches, to declare the truth concerning the Church of God; the passion in his heart has ever burned with vehemence for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

All about him are evidences of the foes, the forces that are against Christ and the Gospel of Christ. In his own personal experience he is conscious of the forsaking of friends. He bears in his body the scars, the stigmata that tell of his own buffeting. He sees ahead of the Church and of the enterprises of the Kingdom of God in the world, great and grave perils; and all these things make him anxious about Timothy, this young man—so dear to his heart, his own child in the faith, the fruit of his own preaching—as he recognizes that the ministry which awaits him will in many particulars be a more difficult one than his own has been. His letter, therefore, is a letter of warning. He says that in the last days perilous times—or, as the Revised Version has it, "grievous times," or as I venture to suggest even more literally, "difficult times"—shall come. Then follows a dark catalogue of evil things. I think I may be allowed to say that a hush of awe, of fear, fell upon this congregation as I read them tonight; one was conscious of it in the very reading—"Men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof."

The one word that I have chosen from the dark and awful list is the word "Traitors." I take it because it suggests peril to the Kingdom. I have already said that this man was specifically, as far as doctrine is concerned, the apostle of the Church. I have also said that there ever burned in his heart the passion for the Kingdom. This man, looking ahead, saw perilous days, days in which evil

men would become increasingly evil; days in which evil men and impostors shall "wax worse and worse." This does not mean that the world is to wax worse and worse, but that evil in itself will be worse and worse, as good will be better and better. The two elements are noticeable in their development in all the centuries, and in the day in which we live. Good is better than it ever was. Evil is worse than it ever was. The wheat and tares will grow together until the harvest, the full development of both good and evil; and then will come God's crisis and God's settlement.

Paul saw the development of evil things, and as he described the conditions of evil, one word passed his lips which reveals the truth of the thing I have already affirmed, that the passion for the Kingdom was still burning in his heart, "traitors." This is peculiarly a word of Kingdom relationship, a word indicating a peril threatening the work of the Kingdom.

This is the last in our series of meditations on the Kingdom. We spoke first of the King, the One upon Whose vesture and upon Whose thigh the great name is written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords"; of the Kingly character, the Kingly qualifications, and the Kingly authority of God's anointed King. In our second study we spoke of the Kingdom over which He is assuredly King, even though at the moment there may be rebellion therein; He is King in the material, mental, moral realms; and all because fundamentally, essentially, He is King in the spiritual realm.

We spoke next of the character of all such as are in His Kingdom; we heard the King standing at the wicket gate, saying, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of heaven." And then we listened to the King, speaking to men in the Kingdom, indicating to them what must be their sacramentum, or oath of allegiance, if they would be His helpers in building and in battle, "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple."

I ask you tonight to think with me of the peril to the Kingdom, indicated in the words, "men shall be... traitors." In advance of our consideration let me say what I shall repeat at the close; that this is the gravest peril that threatens the Kingdom of God. The word indicates an appalling kind of resistance; that which postpones the Kingdom most successfully. "Men shall be... traitors." These are not the men outside, arrayed in battle against the King; but the men and women inside, who are untrue to the King.

"Men shall be... traitors." First, let us solemnly ask ourselves what does this word suggest to us. What is treachery? Let us, secondly, notice the concomitants of treachery; the companionships of treachery, which the apostle describes in these very words that surround the one word of my text. Thirdly, let us attempt to see the root of treachery as the apostle here in passing, and yet, quite clearly, indicates it for us. Then let us consider the punishment of treachery. Finally, let us take our way into the secret place and ask the King to show us whether we are traitors.

What is treachery? The word here translated "traitors" occurs only three times in the New Testament; in this passage, once in the Gospel of Luke, where Luke, giving the list of the men who were about Jesus in the days of His public ministry, writes this very remarkable and appalling word, "Judas the traitor"; and once in the Acts of the Apostles in that magnificent address of Stephen, when charging the men to whom he spoke with sin, he described them as betrayers, using exactly the same word. These are the only occasions where the awe-inspiring word is to be found in the pages of the New Testament. It is a somewhat interesting thing to discover the simple, root intention of the word. A traitor is one who goes before. That, of course, does not express its full significance. We must find, not only the root meaning, but the common use of the word if we are to understand it. There seems to be no suggestion of evil in the word if we simply take its root intention; but when we observe its use, we find that it was always used in this sense; a traitor is one who goes before the enemy, one who leads the enemy, one who surrenders a position before the enemy can capture it. The traitor is one who unlocks the gate of a city and lets the enemy in; one who gives away a secret of the State, and so leaves the State at the mercy of its foes. Thus the use of the word is always an evil use, or rather, a use that always suggests an evil attitude and action; a traitor is one who surrenders a position to the enemy.

In its bearing upon the Christian fact, and in its relation to the great business of Jesus, that of bringing in the Kingdom of God, which He made the very inspiration of prayer when He taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come," and which He indicated as the master passion of life when He said to men, "Seek ye first His Kingdom"; this word describes one who names the name of Christ, but does not share His nature; one who recites the creed of the Church, but does not manifest the conduct of saintship; one who may be, and in all probability is, absolutely orthodox in doctrine intellectually, and absolutely heterodox in attitude volitionally; one who wears the livery of the Kingdom, but is disobedient to its government; one who hiding among the soldiers of the King becomes the vantage ground for the enemy; and, therefore, one upon whom the enemy can most perfectly depend, because he has a false position within; one, therefore, upon whom the King can not only not depend, but one who postpones, hinders, paralyzes the effort of the King most successfully, that effort that moves toward the bringing in of the Kingdom. The traitor is one who breaks the oath of allegiance, who takes the sacramentum in words, but not in deeds.

Said Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, immediately after telling His disciples that He would build His Church, and that He would give to His Church the keys of the Kingdom—mark the intimate relation of Church and Kingdom—"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." The traitor is one within the company of those who are supposed to be obedient; but who reverses the whole process; denies the Cross, asserts himself, and refuses to follow Christ.

You say to me, that that is what the man outside is doing. But mark well the difference. The man inside sings of the Cross and refuses to be crucified; professes to be abandoned to Jesus, and asserts his own will, and his own self-life; lives a life self-centered, and sings a song as though he were God-centered. Traitors are men and women who are in league with the enemy, while to all human appearances they are marching with the soldiers of the King. I need not tarry now to survey human history so far as it has been written, to show how humanity in its deepest instinct hates the traitor. I suppose I am correct in saying that there are names in the history of almost all nations, not very many, but some, that are held in everlasting contempt. We forevermore hold in respect—I am now speaking along the line of broad human illustration—the foes of our national life who have fought us fairly, and whether we won or they matters little as the years go on. On the other hand, we hold in everlasting contempt the men in our ranks who gave away some secret to the enemy. There is no graver, greater peril to the Kingdom of God than that created by traitors in the camp. What then is a traitor? One who tolerates the evil against which the King is making battle; one who hinders the King in His building, refuses to help Him in the building, or pulls down what Jesus builds. He said, I came to build. His mission is destructive. The men within the ranks, those supposed to follow Him who never help in the building, the men who tolerate in their own lives and hearts the evil against which the King is fighting, these are traitors. The men who never help in the building—and I do not propose to speak of the men who attempt to pull down that which Christ is building, I content myself with the other statement, the men who do not help.

There is the great ideal of the Kingdom flaming like a vision before us, the great Kingdom of God for which He taught us to pray, for which we do perpetually pray with more or less intelligence, the one great Kingdom in which one law shall govern all human life, the law of perfect love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There is the ideal—call it what you will, call it Utopia, speak of it as though it were a dream that can never be translated into actuality, I care not. Christ came to realize that dream. He came to build. Here are men and women who name His name and make His sign, and sing His songs, but they are doing no building; men and women who have never lifted a hand to hasten the coming of the Kingdom in the world. Their very neutrality—I am not yet touching the deepest note of treachery—hinders and postpones the coming of the Kingdom. You remember that fine, majestic Hebrew song, the song of Deborah, in which she let loose the splendid scorn of her angry womanhood: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof." Why? Because they fought against the Lord? No! But "because they came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Read the whole song at your leisure. It is a song of infinite sarcasm, of satire—hear me very carefully for there is a very pertinent application of all this to our own age—satire poured upon those sitting by the watercourses of Reuben discussing the situation with great searchings of heart! Conventions, conferences, discussions, resolutions, but no building, nothing done! That is treachery of the worst kind; and every sanctified Deborah will sing her song of satire in the presence of it.

Or, will you come from the stately and almost tragic splendour of the song of Deborah, and listen to the quieter, calmer, more intensive word of Jesus, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth"? Mark Christ's implied claim for Himself, He is a Gatherer; to gather in the children of God who were scattered abroad, to heal the breaches, to bring humanity back into a common brotherhood around the Fatherhood of God; to end the strife of nations and of men by restoring them to the beneficence of the Divine government; to gather together; that was His mission. In view of that He said, "He that is not with Me is against Me," and if we are not helping Him to gather we are scattering. If we wear His livery and do not help Him in the building, we are traitors.

There is another form of treachery. He came not merely for building—that ultimately, finally, for that is the purpose and passion of His mission—He came also for battle. No word of inspired Scripture tells the whole truth with more graphic phrasing than this, "He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil." Am I helping Him in that battle? There are things that no preacher can say. There are searchings of heart that cannot find expression in the voice of a man. Am I tolerating—let me speak of myself and of no other—in my inner heart and life, in my thinking, in my living, something against which the King's face is set, against which He makes war; something of impurity, of unloveliness, something of greed? Then am I a traitor! I may sing all the songs of the sanctuary and recite all its creeds, and believe all its doctrines; and yet, if in some chamber of Mansoul, whether it be the chamber of the imagination, or the hall of the affection, or the palace of the intellect, I find house-room and hiding for some evil thing; I am a traitor. Such evil work is always done for a price—for thirty pieces of silver; and often for far less!

Traitors; not the man outside, the roue on Piccadilly; not the poor, sinning thief that we ought to rescue; but the man inside, who listens to the word Sunday after Sunday, and nought that it says touches him or makes him disgorge his ill-gotten gain, or cleanses his heart of lust. That man is a traitor. That man postpones the coming of the Kingdom, as all the forces of hell massed outside the Church can never do.

Look for a moment, now, at the things which surround treachery, the awful companions of treachery. The first two phrases describe the character of such; self-lovers; money-lovers; and immediately following there is a threefold description of the conduct that grows out of that character, "boastful, haughty, railers." Once more Paul describes character, "unfilial, unthankful, unholy," and immediately again the conduct that issues from that character, "unloving, implacable, slanderers." A third time he deals with character, "uncontrolled, fierce, no lovers of good," and a third time describes the conduct resulting, "traitors, headstrong, puffed up."

Or take the list in another way. First we have the personal manifestations of godlessness; "self-lovers, money-lovers, unfilial, unthankful, unholy, uncontrolled, fierce, no lovers of good"; and then the social manifestations of godlessness, "boastful, haughty, railers, unloving, implacable, slanderers, traitors, headstrong, puffed up."

Then at last he touches the deep, underlying root, the very wellspring out of which the streams flow, "Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof." Personal character is ruined, the social virtues are destroyed, because religion is dead. The form of godliness is ritual without religion; and this results in all the things that are unlike the Kingdom.

Now let us inquire, what harm traitors can do to the great Kingdom of which we have been speaking. First of all let me say this; our treachery cannot dethrone the King. It is well that we be reminded of that. What visions of God we have in this great and wonderful literature! Among them all one now comes back to me, that in the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah had never known another king than Uzziah. There came a day when Uzziah died, and Isaiah saw the empty throne and felt the sense of desolation. Then he came to the realization of the one great Throne, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." The empty throne; and the Throne that is never empty! So let us remember, in the midst of this solemn evening consideration, that our treachery cannot dethrone the King; but our treachery can postpone the Kingdom. As God is my witness, I speak to my own heart as well as to yours. The Kingdom of God can be hindered by treachery. Here is the heinousness of treachery; here is the diabolical nature of wearing the livery of the King while playing false to His purpose; we postpone the Kingdom. The sob and cry of creation is a sob and cry for a King. The measure in which I am playing traitor is the measure in which the agony of creation continues; or to put it from the positive side, the measure in which I am loyal to the King is the measure in which He is brought nigh to the suffering creation. I cannot dethrone the King, I cannot finally prevent the winning of His victory; but I can make the road longer and rougher for God and for humanity by my treachery.

Once again, what is the punishment of treachery? Suicide, spiritual suicide! Stephen charged the Hebrew people with treachery. He was speaking to the people of the covenant, to the children of promise, and in his great address, he revealed to them their privileges, tracked the way of God's dealings with them through the centuries, until he came to the Deliverer Whom he described as "My righteous One"; and he said, "You murdered Him." But that was not the first thing; the first charge was, "You betrayed Him," and the word is identical in meaning with the word "traitor." You are murderers: but before that, and this is the deeper matter, you are traitors. Though Roman hands drove the nails, Hebrew inspiration moved the Roman hands to the deed. Roman hands were the hands of lawless men, men who were without the law; but you were men who had the law, and had light, and had the covenant and the word of revelation. You were traitors. You named the name of Jehovah, and when the ultimate Messenger of Jehovah came, you were betrayers, murderers. With what result? By that act the Hebrew nation as a nation committed suicide. I find the selfsame fact of suicide in the case of Judas. How did it all end? You know the tragic story. Thirty pieces of silver! Have you ever noticed the solemn fact that he never spent one of them? He carried them back and flung them at the feet of the men from whom he had received them. There is no purchasing power in the price of disloyalty. What then? By his own act he ended his life. This is a principle of perpetual application. It is not merely the story of the Bible; you may read it in all history. I go back to the history of Rome. You have read "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." Have you ever pondered the spiritual and moral teaching of it? Have you ever discovered the fact that the nation that disobeys law dies by its own hand? All the King's enemies are their own executioners. By the act of my treachery, I strangle my own life. I go down into the darkness which I myself have made. By the act of disloyalty to the King I erect the scaffold for my own destruction.

Our final word is, "Behold the King!" Here once again I see the great ideal. Lift your eyes and behold the city of God, not yet built, the work not yet completed. Then know this, that the men and women inside the Church who name His name and do not help Him build, who tolerate the things against which He is at war; these are the men who postpone the Kingdom. Consequently, my brethren, the thing I have to say to my heart and to yours is this, in the name of God and for the sake of the world; quit the form of religion, or cease to deny its power. Infinitely better to have done with the singing of the song, and the reciting of the creed, and the profession of faith if the life is not in harmony therewith.

My last word is to the man who says, "I have played the fool. I have been a traitor, is there hope for me?" Back to the Cross. The Cross was the outcome of treachery, and is the only remedy for you. Share its deep significance and abandon yourself to its death. If I will but go back to that Cross and take anew the oath of allegiance, by handing myself over entirely; then with infinite pity and in that meek mercy that lies at the heart of His majesty, the King will forgive me, and take me back again, and allow me to build with Him and battle with Him. Oh, Simon Peter, thou didst curse and swear that thou didst not know Him, by the flickering light of the fire His enemies had built; but by the Galilean lake in the dawn of the morning, with the flush of hope upon the sky, He will take thee back and give thee all thy work. Oh, the comfort of it!

The King of love my Shepherd is
Whose goodness faileth never.

Even though I have been a traitor He will take me back. Let us gather about His feet, and from this day be true to Him, and so hasten the Kingdom.

221 - 2 Timothy 4:22; 2 Peter 3:18; Revelation 22:1 - Final Words

Final Words

The Lord be with thy spirit. Grace be with you.

2 Timothy 4:22

Grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

2 Peter 3:18

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen.

Revelation 22:21

Let me say immediately that the texts are chosen for a definite purpose, which has only a secondary association with what they say. It is not my intention to deal with them from the standpoint of their particular teaching. My interest is rather in the fact that in each case they are the last recorded words of the men who wrote them: of Paul, of Peter, and of John. The systematic history of the New Testament ends with the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. That history gathers round a company of witnesses, martyrs, confessors of Jesus Christ the Lord. It covers a period probably of about three and thirty years, and gives some account of the journeyings, doings, and teachings of these persons. Among them, the three outstanding personalities are those of Peter, John, and Paul. John does not appear often in the Acts, and only in association with Peter. The last definite reference to him therein has to do with his journey through Samaria with Peter. It is possible that he was at the Council called to consider the Gentile question about fifteen years later, but it is not definitely so stated. Peter is the most prominent figure in all the earlier part of that history, but he passes completely out of sight after the Council. Paul is the central figure in all the later part of that history, which is occupied with his missionary journeyings up to the time of his first imprisonment in Rome.

Beyond that, we have no authentic history. There are many traditions and legends of the Church, some of them undoubtedly well founded, but many of them quite unreliable. In the group of writings which complete the New Testament we have certain references which carry us a little further than the Book of Acts. These, however, are by no means connected, and are not enough to enable us to follow the story consecutively. It is interesting to observe that all these subsequent historic references are from the pens of these three men, John, Peter and Paul.

Paul, before his first imprisonment, had written of his desire to visit Spain. Writing from prison, he declared his expectation that he would be set at liberty, and would see Philippi again. In his latest letters, he spoke of visits made to Crete, to Macedonia, to Miletus, to Troas, and described himself in the very last letter as a prisoner, evidently again in Rome. Peter makes one historic allusion. He writes his first letter as from Babylon. John tells us the fact that he was a prisoner in Patmos.

The last historic glimpses of these men which the New Testament affords then are these: Paul was a prisoner in Rome; Peter was at Babylon, perhaps the new Babylon built on the Euphrates, perhaps Rome itself. John was exiled in Patmos. Here, then, we have the historic background for their last written words. Paul, from his Roman dungeon, wrote: "The Lord be with thy spirit. Grace be with you." Peter, from Babylon, wrote: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the Glory both now and forever. Amen." John, possibly from Ephesus, but with Patmos as his supreme consciousness, wrote: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints."

Let us think about all this. As I do so, I am impressed with three things. First, with the circumstances in which we last see these men; second, with the one thought that was evidently uppermost in the mind of each of them, that of grace; and finally, with the effect which grace had upon them, as it is revealed by these final words.

We begin with the circumstances. The discussion of differences of opinion as to dates here is unnecessary. I shall proceed upon the assumption of the accuracy of Sir William Ramsay's view as to Paul and Peter; that Paul died in 65, and Peter in 80. I am among the number of those who resolutely put the death of John latest of all, somewhere about the year 96.

Paul was in Rome, expecting his death shortly and violently. Said he in this letter: "I am already being offered." He was tragically alone. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present age." "Crescens is gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me." He was conscious of the grave perils that were threatening the infant Church, as witness the whole of that second letter to Timothy.

Peter was in Babylon. There are those that believe his reference was actually to Babylon on the Euphrates, the new Babylon that

had been built upon the site of the old. There are those who believe that when he used the word Babylon he used it mystically and was referring to Rome. I have no care to discuss the question. Either in Babylon upon the Euphrates or in Babylon upon the Tiber, Peter was expecting a violent death, for in his letter he said, "The putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me." He was far removed from his own land, and from his own people. He also was keenly conscious of the perils that were threatening the Church, for his last letter is full of warnings concerning them.

John, as I have said, when he wrote the Revelation was probably in Ephesus, but the whole temper and tone of it was created by Patmos, the island in the Mediterranean, where he was a prisoner, and severed by the surrounding waters from his own land and all his own people. He also saw the failure of the Churches, as witness the seven letters in the Apocalypse.

From such somber surroundings these men wrote their last words, and each wrote about grace.

Peter was the elemental man; always stumbling; always climbing a little higher as the result of his failure; coming out at last to strong rock character and confirming the faith of his brethren. The last thing he wrote was this: "Grow in grace."

John was the mystic, seeing the unseen, hearing the inarticulate, sensing the infinite. He ended everything by saying: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints."

Paul was the theologian, the philosopher, the mystic, the statesman. He concluded his message almost abruptly, in one blunt, brief sentence: "Grace be with you."

In each case the pen was laid down, for the last thing was said. All these men, the great human Peter; the mystic dreamer, John; the profound thinker, Paul; when they came to the end had one supreme consciousness. It was the consciousness of grace.

It is first interesting to notice how these men employed the term. It is pre-eminently Paul's word. Does that surprise you? Shall I confess that it surprised me? If I had been asked which of these men was the most likely to talk most about grace, I should have said John. It is not so. He mentioned it least. It was the great word of Paul. It abounds in every letter. We cannot read many sentences without coming across it. Peter, when he wrote his first letter, wrote it under the mastery of grace. In every section of the letter the word occurs. In his second letter, he opened with it, and he closed with it. John's use of the word is very rare. He was very reticent in his use of it. He seems to have reserved it for special use, for special occasions; and then to have left it to shed its own radiance over reaches in which he was always thinking in its atmosphere. We find it at the beginning of his Gospel:

We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.... And of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

He never used it again in that writing, but the whole of it shines and shimmers in the light of it. In his first letter, grace is not mentioned. In his second letter, he employed it in greeting the elect lady. In the Apocalypse, the word is at the portal. He greeted those to whom he writes by using it. It is never mentioned again through all the mystic movements of the visions, until he has done, and then he wrote: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints."

Paul, thinker, dialectician, theologian, statesman, must use the word perpetually to keep his spirit right, to reveal to those who should read his writings how he reveled in the glory of the infinite grace. Peter used it as the average man will use it. He is the typical human. John, who, I think, knew more about it than any of them, reserved it, was reticent about it, put it in here and there, so that the light of it flashes everywhere.

In order to gain an impression of what they meant by grace, we will take three passages, one from each of their writings, passages which I think are supreme in the revelation of what each understood by grace.

Let us begin with Paul.

"The grace of God has had its epiphany, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the end that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly... looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

That is Paul's central word about grace. He first declared that grace hath appeared, has had its epiphany. Then he declared three things about the activity of grace, and they are all indicated by participles. The grace of God hath appeared; bringing, instructing, looking! Bringing salvation to men; instructing those who receive salvation, to the intent that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts they should live soberly, righteously, godly; looking for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is Paul's concept of the activities of Grace. It brings salvation to men; it patiently instructs saved men through life; it looks for its issue to the second advent, the epiphany of the glory when God's victory shall be won.

Peter's central word is a phrase: "The manifold grace of God!" That may be literally translated, "The many-coloured grace of God." This fisherman, this practical soul, this man who stood in perpetual contrast to the dreamers, said one of the most poetic things

about grace. The practical man became a poet. Grace made him a poet. When I read this, the word arrested me, and I thought that I remembered that Peter had used it before. At the beginning of the letter I found it. Many-coloured temptations. Over against that, at the close of the letter, he put many-coloured grace. Now where are my artist friends? I want them to think that out, and tell us all it means. I have seen some wonderful colours shining in and through it. Many-coloured temptations. The yellow temptation of jealousy. The red temptation of passion. Many-coloured grace. Heavenly blue shining down upon the yellow. Now, let the artists tell us what happens. When the blue falls upon the yellow we have the green of perfect earthly peace. When the heavenly blue shines on the red of earthly passion, what happens? Then appears the purple of priesthood and of royalty. Many-coloured grace falling upon many-coloured temptations; transmuting the yellow and the red into the green and the purple by the infinite mystic witchery of heaven's transfiguring love. Grace is the eternal rainbow of hope across all the arching blackness of the dark-Vest day.

John, being a poet and a true mystic, wrote so simply, that it is difficult at first to grasp the infinitude that lies within the compass of his simple language. John's great passage about grace is found in the prologue to his Gospel:

"The Word became flesh, and pitched His tent among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."

That is so simple that if we are not careful, we read it hurriedly and miss its sublimity. It is the simplicity of perfect poetry and the uttermost mysticism. John says in effect: Do you want to know what grace means? Look at Jesus! Behold Him, handle Him, listen to Him; and whether it be in the tears and tenderness of His eyes, or in the tones of His voice, or the vibrant holy anger of His accent, you are seeing grace! The grace of God was manifested in the Son of God.

Tell me, Paul, what is grace? Grace is the activity that saves, and instructs, and lights the dark horizon with the victory of the ultimate glory. Tell me, Peter, what is grace? The manifold colours of God, by which in mystic alchemy He transmutes the manifold colours of passion, and makes them contribute to the making of a man. Tell me, John, what is grace? Jesus! There is nothing more to be said.

From all these statements let us attempt to understand what grace really is. Grace is the activity of God. First, it is the activity which is of His very nature, which He cannot help or prevent because of what He is. Grace is love desiring to realize in every life the beauty of holiness, because in the realization of the beauty of holiness life finds its ultimate beauty and joy. Grace is not a quality in God which makes Him want to excuse sin. Grace is that love of His heart that intensely desires the highest, the best, the most glorious for men. Grace, therefore, is that which inspires and dominates His will. His will is inspired by His nature, and, therefore, "He willeth not the death of a sinner but rather that all should turn to Him and live." Therefore, grace proceeds to the accomplishment of its high purpose at all costs, and that means the cross. Oh simple words, so often said; yet what they mean no tongue can tell: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." "He," the Son of God, "loved me and gave Himself for me." That is grace bringing salvation to men; instructing them patiently through the days in which they blunder, fall and fail; all the while lighting the distant sky with the promise of the advent, and the victory of glory.

That is grace, and it is manifold grace. There are colours breaking out from it perpetually. Grace is the rainbow, singing in tones of silent beauty its eternal anthem of final restoration.

Let us conclude by thinking of the effect that grace had upon these three men, as this is revealed in the fact that they wrote, these words under such circumstances. Observe first their perfect personal satisfaction. Paul was in prison. Death was coming, and he wrote about it. "I am already being offered." But that is not all he wrote. He added, "The time of my departure is at hand." Departure is a nautical word. The time of my putting out to sea is at hand! But surely that was a mistake! He surely meant that he was approaching the harbour! He meant nothing of the kind. The Christian view of death is not that of reaching port. It is that of putting out to sea. Do you know Kipling's "Ship That Found Itself"? When did the ship find itself? In harbour? No, but upon the mighty deep. Departure is not running into harbour away from storms. It is going out into all the splendour of life. Is not there a hymn that opens something like this?

Safe home, safe home in port!

and continues about:

Rent cordage, tattered sails,
And only not a wreck.

Miserable hymn! Terrible idea of dying! That is not the way. Paul thought of the end. Said he: "I am already being offered. The time of my putting out to the deep is at hand."

Paul, how are you going to finish this letter? I shall finish on the note of grace! Nothing else matters. But you are in prison? Grace is painting pictures upon the walls of the prison that make it more beautiful than the palace of a king. I am departing and the crown awaits me. I am perfectly content with grace! "Grace be with you!"

Peter also was going. He knew that he was about to die a violent death. Tradition has it that he requested that he might be crucified head downward because he did not feel himself worthy to be crucified as his Lord was crucified. That may be true or not, I do not know. But this I know. Looking on, he said that he was going, and then he added this significant word: "As the Lord signified unto me." When he wrote that, in memory he was back by the sea of Galilee. He was remembering the early morning after the bad night of fishing; and he was listening to his Master saying to him: "Peter, when you were young you girded yourself, and you chose the way which pleased you; but when you are old someone else will gird you, and lead you where you do not desire to go!" John tells us He spoke signifying what death he should die. But the last thing Jesus had said was, "Follow Me!" Therefore, when Peter looked to the end, and saw it coming, he knew he would be crucified, but he knew that his Master had said it, that grace had arranged it! The colours playing out of the rainbow of grace made all the dark and the drab, purple with the promise of the day. He was perfectly content.

John wrote about tribulation. He said: "I am your brother; I am your companion in tribulation." But in that word there was not one note of complaint. To tribulation he added another word—And kingdom! And then another—And endurance in Jesus Christ.

These men had no personal anxieties! They knew the future: a dungeon, and loneliness, and death. But these things did not matter. The dungeon was made beautiful with the light of everlasting grace. Loneliness was canceled by the comradeship of the Lord of Grace. Death was transfigured with the glory of the manifold grace of God.

But again. I see the abounding confidence of all these men in the sufficiency of grace for the people of God.

Paul was writing to one man, a man who was in a place of peril, taking oversight of the church in Ephesus. He was giving him very careful instructions as to how he was to behave; and concerning his work, his church, and his responsibility as pastor. Now he knew that he must leave him in Ephesus, but there was no need to be anxious. "The grace of God be with you." Paul knew that grace was all that Timothy needed in Ephesus.

Peter was thinking in his writing, of the people of God in the time of their trial and difficulty, and his last word to them was this: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." There was nothing else that mattered. He knew that nothing could harm them if they grew in that grace. Peter did not mean that they were to grow more gracious, though that would certainly result. He meant that, being in the grace, they were to grow. They were in grace; now, being in it, they were to grow in answer to it, they were to develop in response to its suggestiveness; they were to walk in its many-coloured light, and they were to do all that, by getting to know more and yet more perfectly Christ Jesus. Peter was perfectly content to leave them there.

John was thinking of all the saints. Grace is at the portal of the Apocalypse, and grace is its closing word. I go through that strange and wonderful book, and I think of the saints, waiting, watching, working, amid the terrific and bestial forces of evil in their dire and devilish conflicts. "John, tell me, how can they endure?" "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints." John is perfectly at rest about the saints if that be so.

If these men had personal satisfaction, and abounding confidence in the sufficiency of grace for the people of God, they were all intensely desirous for the people of God, that grace might be with them, and that being therein, they might respond to its influence, and grow in its power.

And so, the historic references of the New Testament end in prevailing clouds and darkness, but all of them are illuminated by the light of grace. Thus it will ever be, until this period, ushered in by the epiphany of grace, shall triumphantly merge into that new period which will be inaugurated by the epiphany of glory. Therefore, we conclude once more with the wonderful words: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Spirit, be with us now, and forevermore. Amen."

222 - Hebrews 2:3 - The Responsibilities of Salvation

The Responsibilities of Salvation

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

Hebrews 2:3

There are moods and tenses in the practical conjugation of the verb to live in which this may be said to be the central and supreme question of the New Testament. They are the moods in which the soul is acute in its consciousness of spiritual things, and they are the times in which it stands between the appeal and aspiration of salvation on the one hand and the lure and lust of meaner things on the other.

Indeed, so incisively arresting is the question that to read it, or to hear it, is, for the moment at least, to be compelled to think of life in the imperative, and to apply to the present tense the values of the future.

There are three quantities in the question which combine to create this arresting power. Two of these are immediately recognized; the third is, I am inclined to think, not so obvious, but when it is once discovered it becomes the most potent of the three.

The two to which I refer are those of the salvation which is referred to, and the neglect which is suggested. The salvation is described as "so great salvation," and the term in its very simplicity is eloquent of the sublimity of the theme. It is smitten through and through with the glory of the grace of God. It is of the highest height, for it comes from the heaven of heavens. It is profound, for it descends to the lowest depths. It is so vast, so wonderful, that the only final adverb possible for the illumination of its greatness is "so," "so great salvation," the "so" which laughs at logic, defies mathematical exactness, and finds its own best explanation in the equally comprehensive declaration that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." When we can place our final measurement on the "so loved the world" we shall be able to express in final terms the greatness of the "so great salvation."

This conception of the greatness of the salvation gives urgency to the conception of neglect. To neglect is not to deny, it is hardly to ignore; it is rather to recognize, but to postpone; or to know, and to fail to do; or, yet again, to admit, and to fail to administer.

The third quantity is discovered by emphasizing the personal pronouns, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Without any doubt that was the mental emphasis of the writer, for he was comparing the responsibilities of Christian believers with those of the Hebrews under the Mosaic economy.

We may omit that particular comparison as irrelevant to our case, but we cannot escape the fact that the question in its first application is not asked of sinful men, but of Christian men.

That is the quantity in the text which is not obvious, but which being recognized gives startling, searching power to the question. If we, who are subsequently described as "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling," neglect so great salvation, which is already ours in the provision of grace and through faith, then how shall we escape?

In considering the inquiry as addressed to Christian souls we shall first consider the implication of the question as to the responsibility of saved men in regard to their own salvation, and, second, the suggestion of the inquiry as to the peril of neglecting that responsibility.

First, then, as to this matter of the responsibility of such as are saved with regard to their own salvation, let us first of all inquire, What is the spiritual content of the word "salvation"? What does it represent? This word "salvation" is amongst the most familiar that pass the lips of Christian men and women. It is, indeed, central to Christianity. It has a dark background, its presupposition being that of peril, danger, lack of safety. It is a word which, save with reference to such a world as this, and to such men as I am, is without meaning; it would have no place in the language of the heavenly dwellings. The word "salvation" is rich in meaning in the presence of human sin and failure and degradation. Therefore it is the central word of the Church. The mission of Christ in the world was not that of presenting an ideal to perfect men, copying which they might maintain their perfection. If that may seem a dogmatic statement, it is but an attempted interpretation of the truth which found far more emphatic and dogmatic statement in the word of Jesus Himself, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." The presupposition of the word "salvation" is of a race of men and women who have failed, who have not realized the meaning of their own life, who have come short of their own glory. When once that presupposition is recognized, then we may pass to the inquiry, What does the word represent positively?

The New Testament is the literature of perfected salvation. It tells the story of the One through Whom salvation came. It reveals the conditions on which salvation may be obtained. It lays down instructions for such as having obtained salvation are now walking in its power until that salvation be completed, in the glory of the Advent.

This salvation originates in God. Its sources are the love of God, and the wisdom of God, and the power of God. Therein at once is stated that which is peculiar to the Christian religion, that which differentiates it from all other religions. However high and noble they may be in certain respects, they stand distinct from it in this regard. All other religions, the highest and noblest of them, having in them light, walking in which men will surely be acceptable to God, all of them are attempts by man to find God, humanity climbing toward Him. The Christian religion declares that God has come to find man, that He bows and stoops toward man, offering him not an ideal of life to which if he shall conform he shall be admitted to the dwellings of light; but bringing to him salvation, recognizing his degradation and failure, from whatsoever cause arising, and offering him everything he needs in order that he may realize his own life. The teaching of the New Testament is that this salvation has its origin in the love of God, that it has been provided by the wisdom of God, that it is operative in the power of God. It was this conviction that made the great Apostle to the Gentiles, the pioneer missionary of the Cross, declare in his letter to the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It was this that made him declare that the Cross is the wisdom of God and the power of God, these operating under the impulse of the love of God. It is, indeed, "so great salvation," for it is of God, proceeding from His love, conceived in His wisdom, and operating in His power.

In the experience of men this salvation has negative and positive values. The negative values are found in the fact that salvation comes to man in his sin, and deals with the whole fact and experience of sin. It brings man forgiveness of sin, cleansing from sin, and power over sin.

Salvation creates within the soul of man a consciousness of forgiveness, which expresses itself in a new passion against sin and a new endeavor to master that which hitherto has mastered. Forgiveness of sins in the Biblical sense of the word is not merely the passing over of sin, declaring that it shall be mentioned no more; it is loosing from sin, setting free from sin. The man who is forgiven, in the Biblical sense of the word, is the man who is set free from sin; he walks out from it, and escapes from it as to penalty and as to pollution and as to power. Not as to penalty alone, for I do affirm out of my own consciousness, and I believe I express the deep conviction of all who have pondered this subject, that if forgiveness is merely salvation from hell it is not enough; if it is merely that I am loosed from some penalty while I am still left polluted and in the power and grip of sin it does not meet my profoundest need. The more I ponder this question of the spiritual life in the light of Holy Scripture and in the light of my own experience, the more I come to this profound conviction, that the horror of all horrors to the human soul is the pollution of sin. Not the stroke caused by sin that falls on me, but the pollution that remains with me, contaminating me, that, when the spirit has once waked to the consciousness of it, is the final agony of sin. Conviction of sin is not fear that I am going to be punished. There are awful moments in the experience of the soul conscious of sin when the fires of perdition would be welcome if but the soul might hope that they were purgatorial fires, that so it might be cleansed from pollution. This salvation deals with the whole fact of the human consciousness of sin. It proclaims forgiveness, a loosing from the sin of the past; and in that forgiveness a cleansing from pollution and the communication of power in which sin is no longer dominant.

Yet these are but the negative values of salvation; they are but initial values. We pass, therefore, to the consideration of the positive values. These may be inclusively described as a spiritual rebirth, a new beginning of conscious spiritual life, new spiritual intellectual enlightenment, new spiritual emotional inspiration, new spiritual volitional freedom. Salvation brings to man a new birth of spirit, in which he comes to new intellectual apprehension of God, an intellectual apprehension which never comes to man but by this rebirth of his spirit. On the ordinary plane of our human life a man may be cultured, intellectual, and yet never know God; he may live and move and have his being in God; he may walk up and down in this world of ours, among its flowers and its fruits, its beauties and its glories, and never find God. It is the pure in heart who see God, discovering Him everywhere, in all the beauties of nature, and in all human life. In all the apparently chaotic movements of the time God is seen by men who come to new intellectual apprehension of Him by way of the spiritual rebirth that comes to them in this salvation.

There comes to them also a new spiritual emotional inspiration; a love never known before springs within the heart of the new-born man. The first evidence of new birth is the love that drives the soul out on some sacrificial service. The first movement of spiritual life in the soul of a man is a missionary movement. We should read out of the word "missionary" all ideas suggested by the word "foreign." There is no foreigner before the throne of God or to the true Christly soul. In salvation, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, not love for God, but the love of God. The soul new-born of the Spirit is immediately mastered by God's love; the very compassion of Deity touches it to new inspiration and new aspiration, and suggests the pathway of sacrificial service.

Salvation also brings volitional freedom. Is not a man volitionally free before he is born again? In certain senses, yes; in certain senses, no. In what senses no? Let the writer of the Roman letter answer the inquiry. "When I would do good," that is volition, "evil is present with me," that is volition hindered. That is the difference between the unregenerate man and the regenerate man. The unregenerate man admires goodness and even would be good, and makes the attempt but fails; his volitional power is not set free. He is free to choose, but he cannot do the thing he chooses, and so his choosing reacts on him and fills him with despair. When the soul is reborn from above through this great salvation, then not only is it present with that soul to will, but it is present with that soul to do. The thing I choose I can do in the power of the new life communicate.

If, then, we have received this "so great salvation" experimentally we have immediately entered upon grave responsibilities. If the sources of salvation are the love of God, the wisdom of God, the power of God, then we are responsible for the streams of the great river of salvation. They may thus be summarized: the fear born of love must become the law of the life of the man who is saved by love; the consciousness of folly that seeks for the Divine wisdom must be ever present in the man who realizes that he has been brought into salvation by the infinite wisdom of God; the consciousness of the frailty that depends entirely on God must always be present in the man who realizes that the great salvation has been brought to him by the energy of the might of the working of God.

Perfect love casteth out fear. That is true. But perfect love generates fear. That also is true. Perfect love casteth out the fear that is cowardly, but perfect love generates the fear that is in itself love. Until a man is brought into right relationship with God he is afraid lest God harm him; but when a man is brought into right relationship with God he is afraid lest he hurt the heart of God, lest he cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit. That is the true safeguard of life to the man who is saved, and we are responsible for the maintenance of that relationship with God in which fear abides with us as a sentinel, forever watching lest we sin against Him and grieve His heart.

The condition for the maintenance of right relationship with God is the abiding consciousness of our own folly and consequent dependence for all things on the infinite wisdom which wrought for our salvation.

The condition of victory in life is ever dependence on God's might in the consciousness of our own weakness. "When I am weak then am I strong" is the apostolic word. As we become forgetful of our weakness and cease to depend on God we are in grave peril, for we are neglecting the responsibility of salvation.

To put the question of our responsibility in another form. In view of the negative values of salvation we have responsibilities. The first of these has to do with the forgiveness of sins. The responsibility of the Christian man toward that initial fact is abiding recollection thereof. Does that sound obscure? Let me illuminate it by quotation from the sacred writings. Peter, writing his second letter, grouped the graces which every man is responsible for developing in faith, and then said: "He that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from the old sins." To make that more pertinent, practical, immediate, let me say that we are always in danger of forgetting that we are forgiven men and women. One sentence spoken at the Mundesley Bible Conference last year by my friend John Hutton burned itself into my own life. He said, "Christian men should never lose the look of forgiven men." We are always in grave peril when we allow our spiritual attainments to become the foundations of our confidence. We are in danger when we allow ourselves to imagine that because we have run well, and have rendered service to God, we are accepted. As at last, when the day's work is over, we shall expect to enter into light, saying,

Nothing in our hands we bring,
Simply to Thy Cross we cling,

so we are to live each day. That day is always lacking in some measure of strength that does not begin at the Cross and with the memory of the fact that we are forgiven men. He that lacketh Christian graces is blind, seeing only what is near, and one element of his failure is that he has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his old sins.

With regard to our cleansing from sin, our responsibility is that of perpetual appropriation of that selfsame cleansing. Here let me quote from the writings of John: "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." That Christian man is in grave peril who imagines he has arrived at such a state of sanctity that he needs no cleansing at nightfall, who in foolish arrogance declares that he no longer prays the Lord's prayer because he does not need to ask for forgiveness. Such a man has never really stood in the awful light of the Divine holiness. The man who stands there meekly assents to the word of Jesus concerning high Christian service, that all servants must say to Him, At best we are unprofitable servants. In the light of the holiness of God, that God Who chargeth the very angels with folly and in Whose sight the heavens are unclean, we are always conscious of the need of cleansing.

There is no breath of prayer that crosses my lips but that needs the intermediation of the Priest Who beareth the iniquity of our holy things. The doctrine of holiness that lifts Christian experience to a plane on which it has no need of cleansing is a doctrine that degrades the holiness of God and has no conception of its awful solemnity. We need perpetual appropriation of cleansing.

Again, if the negative value of salvation is that we have power over sin the perpetual responsibility is that we employ that power in unyielding, unflinching, unceasing conflict with sin. I am not safe for half an hour save as I put on the whole armor of God and take up the whole armor of God.

Let us pass from these negative values of salvation in order to consider the responsibilities that arise from the positive. If the first positive value is intellectual enlightenment and consciousness our responsibility is to seek the light in all the things of life. If we know God and have become conscious of Him our perpetual business is to seek His face in order that we may know His will.

If the second positive value of salvation is new spiritual, emotional inspiration our responsibility is that we answer that inspiration. We begin our Christian life, and the propulsion of God's love suggests that we should go and seek someone and help someone. Such suggestions must not be refused. Judas will always be somewhere on hand and ready to say, Why this waste? Let us, then, solemnly remember that when we stifle the impulse of the Divine compassion within us we are stultifying our very own life. This is such a common failure. When you began your Christian life, how eager you were to serve! To-day you are content to attend one service, or perhaps two on Sunday, and you imagine therefore that you are religious. You are not! You have lost your religion if you have lost your love! That is the peril with all of us. The love of God is prodigal in its munificence. It pours itself out in service. When that love is in the human heart, the man possessed by it desires to spend and be spent for those who have not yet known the Saviour. But unless the call of love within the soul be answered the call becomes fainter and dies away. We are neglecting our salvation when we are indifferent and unresponsive to the love of God which suggests the pathway of sacrificial service.

If the third positive value is volitional freedom, the responsibility which that freedom creates is that we test our choices with God. Whenever we exercise that high function of human life, election, choosing, we must find our way into the Divine presence, that we may know whether our election is His election, whether our choosing is His choice; and that not merely in regard to those matters of

Christian service which perhaps may be uppermost in our thinking now, but in all matters of life. If you are a Christian man you have no right to choose your profession without God, and if you are Christian men you have no business to elect to live in this or that neighborhood without God. The responsibility of volitional freedom, which is the benefit of salvation, is that all choices, all elections are remitted to God.

So it seems to me that, without very many words of mine, the second part of our meditation lies open and plain before us. If these are the responsibilities of the "so great salvation" the peril of neglect is perfectly patent. What is it to neglect? In hurried phrases in my introduction I attempted some definition. Let us come to closer quarters with the thought. This is a great word of ours, "neglect," meaning not to pick up, not to take hold of, not to gather, but just to let a matter lie, not to touch it. That is perfectly simple and most picturesque, but it is graphically arresting. The word of which it is a translation has in it, I think, even more of arresting power. It means without interest in, without concern. That is what it is to neglect. This is not a common word in the New Testament. It almost seems as though it were reserved for just such a solemn inquiry as this. If we are without concern about so great salvation, if our own salvation, that which is ours, that into which we have entered, no longer concerns us, how shall we escape? It is my very salvation, that which is mine in Christ, but does it concern me? It is there, it exists; but to treat it as something assured and positive which now may be relegated to some distance from the actuality of my life is to neglect it. The man who is so sure he is saved as to be careless whether he will be saved is in grave danger.

Again to attempt to illuminate the solemn word by the lines we have already followed. Neglect in the light of the positive values is indifference to the light that is granted, irresponsive to the call of love when it comes, inactivity in the presence of God in the matter of decisions, elections, choices.

It is being without concern! It is the attitude of appalling triviality toward his own salvation of the man who does not carry it with him into every hour and every transaction.

Negatively to neglect salvation is to neglect in practice remembering the cleansing from first sins. It is to travel to such a distance from the first ecstatic hour when the soul knew itself cleansed that the memory is not a present power. It is neglect of the ordinance of confession and absolution, given and received in quiet loneliness with God. It is neglect of the whole armor and of the fight.

How is it that we begin to neglect salvation, that we do not add to the supply of virtues and graces by diligence? What are the alluring forces that prevent our realization and demonstration of the salvation that comes to us by grace? Our attention to things instead of God, our listening to self with all its demands instead of listening to the cry of need outside ourselves, our giving ourselves to license instead of to liberty.

What is the issue of such neglect? "How shall we escape?" How shall we flee if we neglect? The answer is found in the twelfth chapter of this epistle. There is no escape, and the word there is slightly changed; There is no fleeing. In the word there is the thought of imprisonment. The man who neglects the responsibilities of his salvation becomes imprisoned by the things he chooses and is excluded from all the virtues and the victories of that great salvation.

In view of this meditation a passage from the writing of Paul comes back to us with new meaning and force:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.

The working is mutual. Interdependent are these two things. I cannot work out anything save as He shall work in it; but if I fail to work out I stop the operation of His energy within.

Thus the final appeal of that passage from the Philippian letter, illuminating as it does the inquiry of the text, calls for caution on our part with regard to our salvation; we are to work it out with fear and trembling. But, thank God, it inspires with courage, "for it is God which worketh in."

Have we neglected our own salvation? Have we drifted away from these things in any measure? Then I thank God that in this same letter to the Hebrews there is one word capitalized; it is the word TO-DAY! It is a word that speaks of present salvation, and even though I have neglected, even though I have imprisoned myself, excluding myself from the very forces of life, and shutting myself up to the destructive things, yet even now a door is open, and I may turn back again to Him Who has brought so great salvation, and He will receive and restore me.

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The Perils of Procrastination

As the Holy Ghost saith, "Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts".

The letter from which our text is taken differs from the majority of the New Testament epistles in that it was written to people who had been born in the special light of revealed religion, and who had been brought into the larger, fuller, final light thereof as it came to men through Jesus Christ our Lord. It was a letter to Hebrews, the people who had lived in the light of hope and anticipation and confidence in a work of God to be accomplished according to covenants made with their fathers. These Hebrews were addressed by the Christian writer in the course of the letter as "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling," and thus they must be counted among the number of those who had not merely had the light of the Hebrew economy of hope, but also had received that of the Messianic fulfilment of that hope. Every difficulty of those to whom the letter was addressed was one of apparent rupture between the old and the new. Profoundly convinced of the divinity of the religion of their fathers, constrained by the presentation of the evangel of the Christ to accept Him as Messiah, in the early days of their Christian experience they trembled and were afraid lest perchance they had made some mistake. That is quite understandable, for what a change was wrought by the coming of Christ! The types and shadows of the ceremonial law were all fulfilled, and gradually they were withdrawn.

The purpose of the writer of this letter, from the intellectual standpoint, was to show these people that the rupture between the old and the new was but the breaking of the shell so that men might find the kernel, the passing beyond the chrysalis stage, in order that the fully developed life might spread its wings. They made their boast in the ministrations of angels in the leadership of Moses and of Joshua, in a divinely appointed priesthood and ritual; and the writer of the letter declared to them that none of these things was to be denied, but that in Christ all their suggestions had been fulfilled.

The purpose of this letter was far more than intellectual, however; it was spiritual. This wavering of faith, expressing itself as it did in disobedience, this halting in the presence of intellectual difficulty, expressing itself as it always does, sooner or later, in moral deflection, was a grave spiritual peril which the writer of these words saw threatening these Hebrew Christians. In order to bring them back again into living touch with the living forces which alone could realize the deepest in themselves and fulfil the Divine purpose, he wrote this letter; for he knew that unbelief always expresses itself in disobedience and that disobedience inevitably issues in death.

In order to discover the real force of our text it is important that we should observe that it is partly the words of the writer, and partly a quotation from a psalm. The first five words, "As the Holy Ghost saith," are the words of the writer of the letter, while the couplet which follows was a quotation:

Today if ye shall hear His voice,
Harden not your hearts.

The particular purpose of this quotation from one of their own psalms was to urge on these Hebrew Christians the necessity for immediateness, and to warn them against the grave peril of procrastination. That is our theme at this time. I do not propose to dwell any further on the details of the passage of which this word of my text is the keynote. We may take the spirit of it in order to emphasize for our own times and circumstances, and for our own profit, the tremendous importance of immediate response to Divine impulses; and to emphasize also the subtle perils of procrastination in such matters.

This subject is of the widest application and might be illustrated on every plane of human activity. Here we are immediately halted and hindered by the fact that the supreme difficulty of all spiritual consideration is that men do not bring to that consideration the same acumen and earnestness and sincerity as they bring to the ordinary affairs of everyday life. In every realm of serious life we grant the absolute importance of immediateness and the grave peril of procrastination freely granted is the need for caution, that, first there must be careful consideration, the winnowing of evidence. Such sane and calculating caution is of the very soul of courage. While that is recognized in every department of life, it is also immediately conceded in political life, in commercial affairs, and indeed in all active life, that when once conviction is reached, response must be immediate. Some of the most hackneyed phrases of our common speech bear evidence of that widespread conviction: No time like the present, Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today. In these and many other similar proverbial utterances which pass our lips quite carelessly we express our profound conviction on the importance of immediate action in response to complete conviction.

I propose now to confine our attention to the application of this matter to the call of Christ. "Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Is not such a message necessary? What multitudes of men and women there are who lack but one thing, a personal and actual surrender to Christ! What multitudes of men and women there are who have been attracted by Him who do most honestly admire Him, and do most seriously in the deepest fact of their lives desire to be conformed to His likeness, but are disobedient, have never taken the one step of handing over their life wholly and absolutely to His control! I have said there are multitudes of such. I believe that to be true. I believe there are multitudes of such in this audience. I preach as the years run on to multitudes of men and women who I believe are exactly in that situation, reverent in their demeanor, willing to listen to the messages I endeavor to seek from God and bring to them with a patience that gladdens and strengthens my own heart. I have seen their eyes

light up as the vision of the Lord Christ has come to them in many an hour of worship, and yet they are not Christian. Men and women attracted by Christ, genuinely and honestly admiring Him in that inner secret of the heart's depth, desiring to follow Him at some time, yet persistently disobedient! In this message, which it is my responsibility and holy privilege to deliver to this audience, I have but one thing to say. I want to speak of the awful peril of this prolonged postponement of decision. I shall attempt to say it in different ways. I shall attempt to illustrate the theme. By the help of the Holy Spirit, I shall, so much as in me lies, argue for the accuracy of the message I utter. But this is the one thing I now want to say:

As the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.

I want to speak tonight with all love and earnestness of the grave peril of postponing a decision which in the deepest conviction of your life you know ought to be made at once.

In attempting to understand this message, we shall consider first, necessarily, certain assumptions of this text, certain things which the words of my text take for granted. We shall consider centrally, and principally, the inferential warning of the text. Finally, we shall listen once more to the suggested gospel of the text.

First, as to the assumptions. Before I can make any appeal which is warranted by the text it is necessary that we should recognize that two things were assumed by the writer of the psalm, and by the quoter of the psalm in the letter; or may I not say, in harmony with the declaration of the text, these two things are assumed by the Holy Spirit in this text: first, that human responsibility begins with the hearing of the voice, "Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts"; and, second, that when the voice is heard man is left free to obey or to disobey. These are the assumptions of the text which must be recognized, or we shall lose the accuracy and urgency of its appeal.

First, that responsibility begins only when the voice is heard. It is the man who knows his Lord's will and does it not who is to be beaten with many stripes. It is the disobedient man, who is the sinning man. It is not the man to whom the light has never come who is blamed for stumbling through the darkness; it is not the soul who has never heard the call who is accounted a sinner for not walking in the way which the voice indicates. Responsibility begins with the hearing of the voice. Here let us make no mistake. God speaks in many ways to human hearts as God fulfils Himself in many ways in human lives. I can imagine that a reservation such as I have made, a perfectly fair reservation—namely, that responsibility begins when the voice is heard—I can imagine that such reservation may seem to open a door of escape for some who will be inclined to say, We have not heard the voice. I pray all such to think again. How may I know when I hear the voice? It may not come to me with the articulation of human utterance. It may not come to me in any sudden blaze of glory, even mental, intellectual glory. How may I know the voice of God and the voice of Christ? The nature of the message determines the question of whose voice it is that speaks within the soul. The voice may seem to be of the mind alone; the voice may seem to man to come out of a man's own thinking. Indeed, it must come out of his own thinking. There is a sense in which, in a degree which is to my own soul growingly appalling and majestic, every human being stands absolutely separated from every other. There is a value not sometimes recognized in the great apostolic word: "Work out your own salvation... for it is God which worketh in you." These are blessed words of hope, for in them dynamic is added to injunction. They have another value, however: "Work out your own salvation... for it is God that worketh in you"; that means the inclusion of God and ourself, and the exclusion of every other human being. The voice of God never comes finally through human lips. We may have heard the voice of God in the sermon preached; we may have heard the voice of God as we have read the page; the voice may have come to us in the silence of our own home, in the loneliness of our own chamber; but it always comes ultimately in our own thinking. We may discern between the voice of God and the voice of Satan by the nature of the thought and the thing which is spoken. There came to us a call to higher life, to nobler endeavor, to the consecration of the powers of our beings to holy ventures; there came to us the voice that rebuked our sin, there came the moment of illumination when we saw the unutterable folly of our own passionate attempt to satisfy our lives with the things of dust. That is the voice of God finding utterance ultimately, as the voice of God ever must, not through the lips of the preacher, not through the written word, but in our own thinking, in our own conception. So the voice of God sounds in the soul of a man. He does in His great grace consent to use messengers whom He sends to utter truth; but we may hear sermons by the score, and never hear God. It is only when in our own souls we say amen to the truth uttered by the preacher that God has spoken to the soul. God does so speak to men.

Dare any man attempt to escape the call of this text easily by declaring that he has not heard the voice? Let him think again! Let him honestly review the years that have gone. Has not God spoken to him? Did there not come to him in a moment of wrong-doing, a high rebuke out of his own thinking? That was the voice divine. Did there not come to him some great vision of the loveliness of the Lord Christ? Did there not come to him consent of heart to the beauty of holiness? Did there not come to him a great sense of the awfulness of sin? Did there not come to him in some hour the longing to escape its power? Then by all these impressions, aspirations, desire, God has spoken to that man. These thoughts and conceptions of the human mind are divinely inspired; none of them has come from the underworld of evil, none of them has been generated within the heart of man apart from the direct illumination of God. Have not all of us at some time or other, and repeatedly, heard the voice of God speaking thus directly to our souls?

Here is another test. The voice of God always creates in the soul of a man the consciousness of responsibility. Therein is the difference between the voice of God and the voice of man, even at its best and highest. Therein, if I may say this in passing, is one of the final arguments for the divinity of this Biblical literature. We cannot study this Bible without being brought face to face with personal responsibility. I can study Shakespeare without that sense. I can lecture on the moral drift of "Macbeth," and then be immoral; and yet again on the next day lecture on Shylock and the defilement of greed, and continue myself to be covetous. I cannot preach on the word of God out of my own experience, and then disobey its teaching and continue to preach on the Word of God. That argument concerning the Bible illustrates the fact that the voice of God in the soul creates responsibility. A man stands confronting two possibilities of action in his business, in his friendships, in his recreations; a voice within says to him, That way is right, that way is wrong! That is the voice of God compelling him to see two paths stretching out before him, and convincing him that in his choosing he must choose definitely between right and wrong, light and darkness, good and evil. So we hear the voice of God, and we know it to be the voice of God by the nature of its suggestion, and by the fact that it forever creates responsibility.

The second assumption of this text is that of the freedom of the will when the voice speaks, "Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." This assuredly means that we can harden them if we will; we can disobey, we can see the light and choose the darkness; we can gaze on the high and admire it, and then turn our face to the depths. It is equally true that the heart can yield, that there can be obedience. When the vision comes, if the heart of man is set on the realization of it, he will find virtue sufficient to enable him to translate the vision into victory. These are the assumptions of the text: responsibility is created by the voice of God; when the voice of God speaks, man's will is free to obey or to disobey.

Now let us solemnly attend to the warning of the text, "Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." By that initial word, "Today," which is the supreme word of the text, we are brought to a sense of the immediate, and consequently to a revelation of the peril of procrastination. The call is heard, and he who hears intends to obey that call, but other matters are pressing and there is postponement. To obey that call will involve a change of plans. That call came to me three months ago, some man is saying; it came clearly, definitely. I heard it, felt its power, consented to its reasonableness; I determined that I would obey it, but to have obeyed it then would have been to rearrange all my life, and therefore I have not obeyed it yet.

Let us not go back. That call is coming to some man now. It has come already. While the preacher has been only arguing for the fact of the call, the voice has been heard. To obey now will be to change all the plans he has made, even for tomorrow! To obey will be to reorganize all his life around a new center. Therefore he says, There is time enough yet; I will postpone obedience. This thing must be done, it shall be done, but at some more convenient season!

Oh, my brothers, if the material walls of this sanctuary had ears and tongues what tragedies could they tell of that description! I do not think any single Sabbath passes but that within this house men and women go through this business of postponement, procrastination! I want to utter this as a personal conviction; let it be received as such, and weighed, and either rejected or accepted, according to personal conviction; I give it as personal, after over a generation of preaching; I am convinced that in this way, more men miss the highest and descend to the lowest, than in any other way. Not by antagonism to the high, but by admiration, and postponement of decision, more souls are lost, wrecked, spoiled, ruined, than in any other way I know.

In order that we may understand this let us consider carefully what are the perils of procrastination. To refuse to obey is presently to lose the sense of urgency. To fail to walk in the light of the vision is presently to fail to admire the vision. To linger when the gleam would lead us is to lose the constraint of the glory, and at last to imagine that the shining of the gleam was the creation of the imagination. Spiritual tragedies of that kind are to be found all over this land today. There are thousands of men who have come into the presence of Christ, who have felt the attraction of Himself and of His message, who have entertained admiration of His high ideals, who have earnestly desired to follow Him, who have determined that they would; but they have halted, waited, postponed. With what result? The attraction has passed away, and today they see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him; their admiration for Him has ceased, His name is but an idle story, the desire to be conformed to His high ideal is dead within the soul. And sometimes even worse, those old days are laughed at, days when they were moved toward Him.

This attitude is not always the result of the vulgarity that can be arrested by a policeman, of the bestiality which human society casts out. It is produced by procrastination, by postponement; it is the reaction on the soul of a high ideal refused, the deadening influence of disobedience to a high call. Thus the opportunity passes and the voice is no longer heard. There are multitudes of men who once were arrested by the claims of Christ, attracted by the beauty of His ideal, affrighted by the solemnity of His warnings, strangely moved by the infinite tenderness of His wooing; but today they are without any of these emotions; they are even cynical concerning Him, and have descended so low that they can be guilty of the vulgarity of laughing at their own experiences of long ago. In the terrific, appalling, awe-inspiring word of my text they are hardened. That is the peril of postponement, procrastination.

But, finally, let us hear the gospel of this text. If its argument proceeds on assumptions, and if its appeal is in itself the inference of a peril, the whole message suggests a gospel. What is the gospel? It is all suggested in one word, today. There seems to be no music in that word. There is much, to those who know their Bible. The world's dark night is hastening on; but it has not yet come, it is still

today.

When he made this quotation from the psalm, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews was conscious of the glorious light of the day in which he wrote, "Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." The very word is full of hope. Today is a gospel of immediate possibility as well as a warning of consequent peril. Today! The voice of Christ is speaking to the sons of men. His voice is the one voice that comes clear in human articulation out of the infinite mystery of the being of God. His is the one voice that rings down the centuries of time with the finality and restfulness and strength of eternity. It is the voice of essential, eternal wisdom. The things He said are the things He says; and the things He said and the things He says are the things of truth and grace whereby, if a man live, he shall live indeed and not die; by which, if a man obey, he shall come to realization of all the infinite wonder of his own being as he finds himself led into fellowship with God and conformity to His will.

The voice of Christ does not speak speculatively to the sons of men. Christ is not suggesting to men a new philosophy which they may discuss and then receive or reject according to the calculations of their own minds. He speaks the final word with authority, with such inherent truth that when a man ceases to listen to human interpretations of the thing He says, and allows Him to speak directly to his inner life, that man immediately recognizes the authority of His word. The voice of Christ is the voice of all-sufficient might, and of final love. It is the voice which calls men to high duty, and promises the ability to obey. It is the voice which commands men to sacrifice, and provides compensation for all their losses. It is the voice that speaks to men out of perfect love. Oh, this voice of Christ! Do not listen for it from the lips of the preacher. I mean that. I am not degrading my office. I magnify my office. I glory in my office. But do not listen for His voice from my lips. He really begins to speak when I have ceased. When my words are over, and you have properly discounted the accent and intonation of man, then the truth out of the words that gripped the heart and soul and conscience is the voice of Christ to you! The voice that tells you that you dare not do the thing of evil you had intended to do in the coming week! The voice that calls you to something higher! The voice that commands you to the Cross! The voice that says, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off; if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out." The voice that says, in the deepest secret shrine of your inner life, "Come unto Me." That is His voice. Today if ye shall hear that voice, in the name of God, harden not your heart.

These are superlative facts. To parley is to blaspheme. To delay is to deaden the power to appreciate. Therefore there is but one reasonable time for action, and that is today. Oh, there is infinite music in that word today! It is still called today! The voice is speaking; heed it, answer it. Your first steps may falter through mists, but the pathway you begin to tread if you obey that voice will shine more and more unto the perfect day.

You may have listened to me and by that very activity be in danger of missing the Voice. Let Him speak! He is speaking! What He is saying to you generally I know right well. What He is saying to you particularly I cannot tell; but you know. I know what He is saying generally. He appeals to you: "Follow Me." But there is some particular secret between Himself and your soul. To the young ruler it was, "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute to the poor... and come, follow Me." Not to every man does He say that. What is He saying to you? Almost invariably there is at the crisis one last thing between a man and a decision. What is it in your life? I do not ask to know. I do not want to know. I will not be a confessor. Ah, but you know. He has put the finger of His justice and His mercy on the thing that must be abandoned, on the new duty that must be faced, on the new attitude that must be assumed, on the restitution that must be made. "Today if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

224 - Hebrews 3:13 – Hardened

Hardened

But exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today,
lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 3:13

"Hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

The warning of the text is addressed to people familiar with the letter of God's word. Hence its applicability to such an audience as this. Most of us heard the first music of that motherhood which soothed our childhood, expressing itself in the songs of the sanctuary. The vast majority of us were first fascinated by Bible stories told us by those best of all theologians for children—our mothers. We know the things of God, and therefore there is for every one of us here a message of warning: "Lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

No more solemn warning was ever uttered by any of the apostolic writers. No words to which we ought to pay closer attention, and to which we ought to give more earnest heed, are to be found in the whole of the Divine Library. Yet is it not the fact that we listen to

a text like this with something of curiosity, something of wonder, as to what can possibly be said concerning it?

Or if the text does indeed speak to the conscience, is it not because the old word "sin" is to be found in it, which some men are dropping out of their vocabulary today? Yet the word that should startle us is the word "hardened." We are not afraid, I fear, of being hardened. There are people today who are terribly afraid lest they or their loved ones should become drunkards. Better be a drunkard than hardened! There is more chance for the man who is in the grip of some one specific sin, who still retains a heart and conscience, than for the man who is hardened, and yet commits no vulgar sin condemned by the age in which he lives. The peril is of the subtlest, and it is the peculiar peril of those who know the terms of the law and the Gospel. I very much question whether you could find me a person hardened in the sense of my text who is unfamiliar with the Christian evangel. There are many men in this city who are quite unfamiliar with its terms, and they are so vicious that you thank God you are not as they; but they are not "hardened." If we are not startled by the word, if it produce no blush of shame, no blanch of fear, the danger is that we are already becoming hardened.

Let us consider, then, first the peril, "hardened"; second, the cause, "sin"; and, finally, the method, "deceitfulness."

First, then, the peril: "Lest any one of you be hardened." The word suggests a change, indicates a process, and reveals a condition.

When I say that the word suggests a change, I mean that no human being starts life hard. No little child is hard. Human nature is essentially impressionable. If you take a child in its earliest years out of any set of circumstances, and put it into new surroundings, you can mold its life. There is no greater illustration of this truth than Dr. Barnardo's great work. For forty years the doors of that institution have stood open to any child, the only qualification for admission being destitution. Though the children dealt with for the most part were born with hereditary taint of evil, with an environment that gave them no chance morally, the percentage who have answered the touch of Christ through Christly influence, and have become pure, and noble, and beautiful, is amazing. Every child is impressionable; every child has its windows open toward the morning; every child indulges in romance, dreams dreams, sees visions, hopes, is capable of tears and laughter; every child is plastic. The man who is hard, and who boasts in his hardness, was not always hard.

If I could put my hand, my brethren, tonight upon your shoulders, and by some mysterious process drive you back through the years, I should bring you to a period of tenderness, to a moment when you also were soft, and plastic, and emotional. You tell me you are glad the day has gone? If you knew what it really means, you would begin to weep again tonight, because you have lost the power to weep.

"Lest any one of you be hardened." Because the word suggests a change it also indicates a process.

What is this process? Let us look at it in its symptoms. What are the symptoms of this hardening? We began to fight against tenderness as being childish, and then we silenced conscience as being inconvenient to success, and finally we questioned the verity of the things unseen. This is the process of hardening.

There was a time when some of you men would have wept over a dead canary. Tonight you do not weep over lost souls! The fountain of tears has been dried up. There was a time when you blushed awkwardly when you told a lie. Today there is no blush and no inward shame. There was a time when you believed in God. Today you are hardly sure of your own wife.

The hardening process has gone forward until at last the condition of hardness is reached. It is the inevitable result of the stifling of tears, and the refusal to listen to conscience, and to believe. No tears, no conscience, no faith! Hard! Equal to dealing with business problems, but not equal to the commerce of eternity. Quite equal to touching and handling forces which are merely the affairs of this life, but not equal to laying hold on eternal life. Quite equal, in a word, to dust and the things of dust, but not equal to Deity and fellowship with God. Yet let me put this even more practically and personally. The moment comes when a man, who as a boy wept as he heard the story of Jesus, hears it without one thrill of emotion. The day comes when a man still listens to the terms of the law of God, but never trembles. The most difficult men and women to reach with the evangel are those who know it best, and are yet unmoved by it to tears, or high endeavor. "Lest any one of you be hardened."

But now, how does a man become hardened? I take you to the final word of my text, "sin." What is sin? It would be unfair to interpret the word "sin" in this letter in any other way than by the use of the writer. In every case, from first chapter to last, he uses it of unbelief. The whole argument of the letter is intended to strengthen faith, and the whole force of the writer's appeal against sin is an appeal against unbelief, and the sin that hardens is the sin of unbelief.

In order to explain that, let me first deal with what is meant by unbelief, for I can quite imagine that someone finds reason in rebellion against such a statement. It may be affirmed that a man cannot help unbelief, because a man cannot compel his belief. Such an objection reveals the fact that the meaning of unbelief is not understood because the meaning of belief is not understood.

What is belief? Belief is that which brings a man into personal relationship with Jesus Christ so as to save that man. But what is the

belief that saves a man? It is not an intellectual assent to a certain number of formulated truths. It is possible for a man to believe intellectually all the truths of the evangelical faith, and yet be lost for time and eternity. The fact that I am convinced of the truth of the Deity of Jesus, and of the atoning nature of His death, will not save me. These truths do not become dynamic simply by intellectual apprehension and consent. No man is saved by intellectual comprehension and conviction. All that may be a part of the process, but it does not save a man. What, then, is the belief that saves? Now let me go to a slightly different standpoint. What is the thing you really do believe? A man in church on Sunday recites a creed. I have great respect for his doing so. He says, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth." Does he? The fact that he recites the creed on Sunday does not prove that in the deepest of him he believes. I shall want to watch him on Monday to know whether he really believes in God. I shall want to live with him, and observe his business method, and his habits of speech, and the tone and temper of his disposition before I know whether, in the deepest of him, he believes in God. You say, "I do believe in God," and that is true intellectually, but that is not the belief that saves. The faith that saves is the answer of the will to the truth of which the reason is convinced, the handing over of the life to the claim of truth. If I believe in God the Father Almighty, not merely with my mind and heart, but also with my will, then I shall walk from Monday morning until Saturday evening, as well as upon the Sabbath day, as a man recognizing God's throne, seeking His law, endeavoring to find the way of His commandments, measuring all the activities of my life by His claim upon me. That belief saves, which compels the surrender of the whole life to the conviction of truth. The following of light is the faith that saves a man. I am always thankful to remember—and I pause to say this, though it is not part of my main argument—that the New Testament never asks me to believe in the atonement in order to be saved. I am not saying a man can be saved without the atonement. But the Scripture asks that I shall believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The belief which saves is belief in the Person of Christ, which expresses itself in surrender to Christ, even though I may have to postpone the explanation of the mystery of His being, and the marvel of His atonement, and the miracle of His resurrection.

Therefore it becomes evident that unbelief is refusal to obey that truth of which I am convinced intellectually. To know the truth, and then refuse to obey it; to hear the message, assent to its accuracy, bow in the presence of its great demand intellectually, and yet not answer its claim, that is the sin which hardens a man. When a man so disobeys, he becomes hardened by the very truth that might have softened him; he becomes enslaved and debased by the very message that ought to have made him free indeed. In that sense the Gospel is a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death; and the unbelief that hardens a man is not his refusal to accept intellectually a statement of truth, but his refusal to obey the truth when it lays claim to his allegiance, and calls upon him to tread some definite pathway. "Hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

That brings us to the central thought of the text. How is it that men commit this sin of unbelief? Brethren, is not that the mystery, the perpetual mystery? Is not every preacher confronted by it, every Christian worker conscious of it? Why is it men hear the truth and do not obey? Why is it that men, conscious that the Spirit of God is striving with them, even though they may not express the fact in these words, yet will not yield. Why are men guilty of unbelief? Here in my text is the word that shows that the writer of this letter understood perfectly the reason: "the deceitfulness of sin." The sin of unbelief is always the result of a false argument. When truth breaks upon a human soul and makes its claim, if the man does not obey, it is because he is deceived either intellectually, emotionally, or volitionally.

It will be easier now, I think, to illustrate than to attempt to state the case theoretically. Suppose that I should resolve this service into one of another kind, and some of you in honesty should tell us why you are not Christian people in the full sense of the word, what would be the result? You are familiar with the terms of the evangel, you have been nursed upon the songs of the Church, and yet you yourself are not Christian. It may be that once you made a profession, and once you companied with the saints, and once rejoiced in the vision of God, and once knew all the blessedness of fellowship; but things have changed, and you have become hard. Why? Because of your unbelief, your refusal to obey truth. But why did you refuse? Now, I say if we could have definite testimony, I think we should hear some things such as these. I will not imagine a single case, but will tell you actual things that have been said to me. One man tells me that he is not a Christian because he desires his liberty. There are thousands of young men in London tonight who in their deepest heart revere the Christian standard; but they are not Christians simply because they want to be free. Now, listen. "The deceitfulness of sin." Was ever unbelief more subtle than when it promises a man that if he will refuse to believe, in this evangelical sense of the word, he will be a free man. Do you not know, have you not yet discovered in your own experience, that the only free man is the man bound to the throne of God, that no man is free who is simply attempting to follow the lusts and desires of his own heart and life? Your freedom to do the things that you yourself desire to do, unchecked by law, is at this very moment weaving a chain. It may seem to be of silk, and you toy with it in its silken loveliness, and imagine you will presently snap it. But you will find that the chain about you is adamant. If you and I were talking together as man to man you would confess that already you have discovered that habit has so fastened upon you that you cannot break it. What is the story of the corruption of sin that abounds in our city? It is the story of men who have sought for freedom and have found slavery. It is the story of men who declined to have a master, and they have become the slaves of the worst taskmasters that ever held human beings in bondage.

Your own lust? Lust is not wrong. Jesus said to His disciples, "With lust have I lusted to eat this passover with you." I find it is written in my Bible, "which things angels lust to look into." At the back of every sin that curses humanity is a true desire. Sin is always the

prostitution of right, the taking of a true capacity, and using it in an untrue method. If a man answer his desire without constraint, without instruction, without guidance, without mastership, he cannot fulfil it, and at last the desire becomes a burning, flaming thirst, a passion that nothing can slake; and he becomes the slave of the desire he answered when he refused to obey the light that came to instruct him how to answer the true desire within his own life. You want to be free, my brother. Come tonight to your Master Jesus. Hand in to Him your wholehearted surrender and allegiance. Say to Him as you stand before Him, "Here and now, O living Christ of God, spirit, soul and body, now and forever, in every fiber of my personality, and every power of my being, take me!" Then you will be free. Then you will find liberty. The Son alone can make you free. If you have refused to obey the voice of truth, and so have been guilty of the sin of unbelief, it is because you have allowed yourself to be deceived by sin's promise of freedom, while all the time it has been forging your chain.

Take another illustration. A man will say to me, "Yes, I know all that you say is true. I know that the pure is the beautiful. With my mind I admire its great ideal, but I want to see life. Oh, sometimes I wish I could give all my life to speak on that one theme to the young men and women of our cities. You want to see life? Yes, you say, I should have to give up so much if I became a Christian. What would you have to give up? I would be quite willing to stop preaching for a moment if you would tell me. Will you tell me what you would have to give up if you became a Christian, which I cannot keep, being a Christian? Or, rather, what can you have of life by not being a Christian which is denied to me because I am a Christian? If you will name anything that you can do, not being a Christian, which I cannot do as a Christian man, you will know immediately that the thing that you are clinging to, that you call seeing life, is the thing that passes sentence of death upon you.

What does a man lose that is essential to his manhood when he becomes a Christian? Freedom for intellectual pursuits? Nay, verily, Christianity has set the world's intellect free. The late Lord Salisbury said that it was a good thing to study large maps. So it is. When you want to know what Christianity has done for the world, take a broad outlook over the centuries and over the world as it is, and know this, that the crucifixion and stoning of a man for scientific investigation has been made impossible by the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. Jesus Christ has set man's intellect free, has said to men in effect, You may knock at every door and demand admission, and you may enter as far as you can. The only limit set to your investigation is your power of investigation. But then Jesus Christ also says, When you have come as far as you can along the line of investigation, never forget the revealed things are yours, and the secret things belong to God.

Christ has set the intellect free. What is it that you have to abandon? Music? I will not insult the intelligence of this congregation by arguing it. You have all heard the "Messiah," and after that there is nothing to hear. Art? Certainly not, save as art may be debased in order to suggest evil thoughts. Some pictures you are hiding, or showing clandestinely, you had better burn, and you know it! Amusement? What form of amusement must you give up if you become a Christian? No amusement that is recreation. That must be your philosophy of amusement, recreation. Anything that destroys you, spirit, mind, or body, of course you must give up because Jesus is set upon making you perfect and beautiful, and He will not tolerate a retention of anything that stultifies you physically, or dulls you mentally, or blights you spiritually. In the name of God, I charge you do not hear me as a theorist, but come and see me, if you will, and tell me what you have to give up that I cannot keep. You dare not do it, my brothers, because you know that I should say to you, "What about it? Do you not think you had better give it up?" And you would have to say, "Yes." And yet you are being deceived by sin. You want to see life, and in the pursuit of life you are tracking the desert of death. Oh, the deceitfulness of sin!

Or, again, another man says to me, "Well, I am not a Christian because I am not fully persuaded of all the truths of the Christian religion." If you adopted that method in any other department of life, where would you land yourself within the next seven days? The perpetual law of life is that a man accepts the known fact and acts upon it, afterwards investigating the mystery that lies behind it. And yet there are men—I know them, I hear from them; they come to see me, and tell me they are not Christian because they do not understand the mystery of incarnation, or the mystery of atonement, because they cannot quite follow all the statements of the Bible concerning the methods of God. My brethren, Jesus Christ presents Himself to you, attested by tens of thousands of witnesses in the passing centuries, as the One Who gives you at once the highest ideal of life, and is able to communicate to you a sufficient dynamic to enable you to realize your ideal. Obey that, and postpone the rest! I know there are men who tell me they understand all the mystery of the Christian truth. I thank God with all my heart that Christian truth is so large that at present I do not perfectly comprehend it all. I thank God for its vastness, for the infinite reaches of it. This heart of mine, poor little restless thing as it is, is yet so big that it would rebel against a religion formulated and tabulated, in which the last thing could be recited in a creed in half an hour. It is the vastness of the reach; it is the sense that this thing is greater than I, that there are infinite reaches stretching out on every hand, that makes me thank God in the midst of the mystery. I have found foothold, and I have found it upon the rock of Christ, and from that vantage ground I may inquire.

Because of the mystery, in God's name do not refuse to obey what is no longer mystery, the plain fact of what Christ is, and what He can do for you.

Compare your present position with the past. Take your childhood, and put it into comparison with your present position. I do not say possession, material possession. I said your present position, the position of your own inner life. What is the difference?

I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away.
I remember, I remember,
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky.
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heaven
Than when I was a boy.

Is that what you are saying? You have done wonderfully well, so the world will tell you. You have made a great deal of money, you lost yourself. When you lost your tears, you lost God's finest gift to you. When you lost your conscience, you lost the balance wheel of your life. When you lost your faith in God and man, you lost everything that makes life high, and noble and beautiful.

Ah me, there is another song that comes back to a man's heart tonight, a song which I wonder people can sing without catching its pathos and tragedy:

Backward, turn backward, O time in your flight,
Make me a child again, just for tonight.
Mother, come back from the echoless shore;
Take me again to your heart as of yore.
Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care,
Smooth the few silver threads out of my hair,
Over my slumbers your loving watch keep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

I do not know who wrote it. I do not know the circumstances but I tell you that is not the cry of a baby for toys. It is the wail of a soul after God. Listen!

Tired of the hollow, the base, the untrue,
Mother, O mother, my heart yearns for you.
Many a summer the grass has grown green,
Blossomed and faded, our faces between;
Yet with strong yearning, and passionate pain,
Long I tonight for your presence again.
Come from the silence, so long and so deep,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

My brethren, do not check that emotion. If those lines have touched a chord that has not vibrated for years, thank God for it. If there is a sob in your heart tonight, it is a sign of hope. Follow it; it is a gleam, and it is because long ago you refused to follow some gleam like it that you have become hard as the nether millstone.

But there is another word, and it is a word that the King James's translators and the revisers have written with a capital letter. What is it? "Today." "Exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today." That means to say that if you have become hard, you are still in the place you can be remade.

Today! O blessed word of hope,
And laden still with heaven's own breath,
The night is passed, and has not come,
Between the shades life conquers death.
Light falls around the ruined soul,
The wind of God blows with new lust!

Fling back the shutters! Swing the door!
Answer God's breath upon thy dust!
Then day shall never end in night,
But night be merged in perfect day;
And all the forces of God's life
Control thy life with mighty sway.

It is Today, and you may go from the sanctuary without word spoken to any friend, with all the fallow ground plowed up, and with the promise of harvest, and the blossoming of the rose where the desert has been. But, my brethren, in order to do that you must obey the truth you know. So believe with all the mind, and all the heart, and all the life, and you shall find the remaking of your life by the grace of God.

225 - Hebrews 9:14 - Purity by the Cross

Purity by the Cross

How much more shall the blood of Christ... cleanse your conscience from dead works?

Hebrews 9:14

In our previous study we considered the first blessing that comes to men by the way of the Cross—first, I mean in the line of human experience—the blessing of pardon. We attempted to listen reverently to this note of the great evangel, the glad declaration that forgiveness for actual trespass is provided for men not merely on the basis of pity, but in righteousness, through the mystery of the Cross of Jesus. We all are conscious how great a blessing this is, yet I think I speak for every person here when I say that we do not feel that it goes to the root of our need.

That is not to undervalue the blessing of pardon, but it is to say that mere pardon leaves us lacking something that we do not earnestly desire, and something which we desire the more earnestly as the result of the pardon bestowed on us. I attempted very carefully to limit our previous study to the word which my text contained, "trespasses": sins rather than sin, definite, personal, actual acts of disobedience. Sins as trespasses are pardoned by the way of the Cross, but all such sins are the outward manifestations of an inward disease—a moral disease, of course—the disease of sin.

I am not proposing to enter into any lengthy discussion even now as to how man, using the word in its generic sense, contracted the disease. I simply propose to recognize the fact that it is here, present in human life, that we are all conscious of it, that we feel that behind the deed is a force which impelled us to the deed, and which, strive as we will, struggle as we may, has proved too much for us.

That is not the experience of lonely individuals. It is the common experience of the race. Every man fails, goes wrong, breaks down; and the fact of his actual transgressions results from this deeper, subtler, profounder fact of a tendency toward actual transgression, of a bias in that direction. You may call that original sin or continuous abnormality—phrases matter nothing. The fact of which I am conscious and you are conscious and every man is conscious is that in man there is the double consciousness of a desire to do good and of a force which prevents his doing good.

Unless the evangel of the Cross can deal with that deeper thing in my life it does not meet my profoundest need. Great and gracious is the proclamation that my sins may be forgiven, and my hands are open to receive that gift and my heart sings a song of gladness as I receive it; but, oh, my soul, is that all? Must I still be left with this underlying somewhat that drives me to sin? Can nothing be done for me in the actual warp and woof of my spirit, in my moral fiber, to quench the fires of passion, to correct the poison that throbs? Or, again, to use the simpler language, is my prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God," to find no answer?

The evangel of the Cross is incomplete unless it meets that great need. My probation is not the probation of an unfallen man, of a man born without these forces and vices within him. The probation that I live is not exactly identical with that of the perfect One of Nazareth, or even of the first man according to the story of holy writ. The father of the race, according to that story, stood upright, erect, began without these forces throbbing through his consciousness. I did not so begin. I was born in sin and "shapen in iniquity." I was born with the need of a redemption that should deal not merely with the sins I have committed as the result of an inherited iniquity, or deviation from the straight, but with the inherited iniquity itself. And I am prepared to say this, even though for a moment it may sound a startling thing. Believe me, I say it most reverently, and yet I am talking out of the deepest and most passionate conviction of my life: Unless God has provided a redemption that touches sin in me as well as the sins that grow out of it, it is an imperfect redemption. All that, as it states the need according to the common experience of men, prepares the way for the consideration of our text, in which the perfect provision is revealed.

God has provided—to quote from the passage I read—"eternal redemption," and eternal redemption is infinitely more than long-lived redemption. Eternal does not finally or necessarily mean continuance without end. Eternal is as broad as it is long, as high as it is deep. Eternal redemption is redemption that meets every possible and conceivable necessity of the case. He has provided that redemption, and, while pardon for sins is its first benefit, everything else that I need is contained within that selfsame redemption. In this passage it is declared that Jesus Christ, who offered Himself through the Eternal Spirit, without spot to God, made a provision by which my conscience can be cleansed from dead works, that I may be able to do that thing that I have not been able to do—to serve the living and true God.

Now let us consider some of the outstanding terms of this text. I want to draw your special attention to the expressions, "conscience" and "dead works." "Conscience" is a word used at this point in one particular sense. "Dead works" is a figure of speech, and we must go back to the old economy with which the writer was dealing if we would understand what the phrase really means in this connection.

According to popular usage, conscience is a faculty enabling men to distinguish right from wrong. Conscience in the Bible has a far wider meaning.

The word is found only once in the Old Testament save once, and then it is in the margin. A careful examination of all the passages in which the word occurs in the New Testament shows that it is used in the sense of consciousness rather than in our ordinary sense of "conscience." The Apostle speaks of "a good conscience," of "a conscience void of offence," of "an evil conscience," of "a conscience branded as with a hot iron." Now, in neither case was he referring to the faculty that discerns between good and evil, but rather to the facts discerned. When he speaks of a good conscience he does not mean an excellent capacity for the discernment of good and evil. When he speaks of an evil conscience he does not mean a conscience unequal to the discernment of good and evil. Conscience is consciousness. To make this clearer let me requote those isolated passages, inserting the word "consciousness" instead of conscience. "A good consciousness," "a consciousness void of offence," "an evil consciousness." In each case the word indicates the fact of discernment rather than the faculty of discernment. "A conscience void of offence," then, is man's inner consciousness, having nothing in it that causes him to offend. "A good conscience" is man's whole consciousness, the whole sweep of his mind good. "An evil conscience" is man's whole consciousness, the whole content of the mind evil.

And here the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that by the mystery of the Cross man's consciousness is cleansed. Consciousness lies at the back of conduct, is influenced by conduct subsequently, but is first the inspiration of conduct. There is perpetually a reflex action between a man's consciousness and his conduct. My consciousness of anything creates my conduct toward it, and my conduct toward it reflects on my consciousness, and changes it, in that it either defiles it, or lifts it into higher reaches of purity.

Take the simplest thing you know for purpose of illustration. Let us take such a simple thing as the Master would have taken. Bring me a little child, and put this little child in the midst. My consciousness of a little child will create my conduct toward that little child. Let that be my first proposition. What is a little child? What do you think of a little child? Tell me, and I will tell you what your conduct toward that child will be. Is your consciousness of a little child a low consciousness, a mean consciousness? Your conduct to the little child will be low and mean. Suppose you have the same consciousness of a little child that Jesus had, suppose you say, In heaven its angel always beholds the face of the Father, then what? Then your conduct toward that little child will make you say what He said. If you offend that child it is better that a millstone were hanged about your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. My consciousness of a flower will affect my conduct toward it. Young man, your consciousness of a woman will affect your conduct toward her. Now, as God is my witness, there is nothing I crave more than a clean consciousness of things—a consciousness that takes hold upon a flower, a child, a woman, a city, everything, cleanly, purely, and without defilement; if I have that, then have I solved my riddle, then have I found plenteous redemption. And that is exactly what the Cross provides for every man, no matter how depraved he may be, or how utterly his consciousness has become evil. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, "If the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your consciousness from dead works to serve the living God."

Now let us look at that phrase, "dead works." As we indicated before, it is absolutely important that we should notice that the writer is dealing with the old economy, and we remember how strict and stringent were the laws of that economy concerning ceremonial defilement. Both in Leviticus and in Numbers we find clear revelation of how particular God is about small things. To touch the dead was to be defiled, and cleansing was needed. To enter the house where the dead were, and, though they were wandering through the wilderness, and the tabernacle was not erected, and they could not come to sacrifice, they must be sprinkled in water in which were the ashes of a red heifer. If you will ponder well these old Mosaic requirements they are suggestions and pictures of infinite truth, telling us what God thinks of defilement and how easily a man is defiled. So that when I read here, on the page of a letter written to Hebrews, the term, "dead works," I must not pass it over as a mere poetical description. It is a description of corruption, of an evil thing that contaminates and spoils the life. These are the very forces spoiling me; these are the things from which I want a

cleansing. My consciousness—how, I do not know; why, I may not be able to tell—is defiled, is contaminated; it suggests things to me which are not pure. Of course, I am speaking of a man by nature, and apart from the grace of God. I am speaking also of many a man who has been born again, but who has never appropriated God's gift of purity. The consciousness is tainted, defiled, spoiled by dead works. It is from that possibility of being contaminated that man wants cleansing.

Let us take some illustrations of things resulting from a consciousness defiled by dead things, corrupt things. First, in personal life—in the realm of the physical, a perpetual inclination to self-indulgence, to laziness, even to sensuality; in the realm of the mental, a tendency toward sloth, toward covetousness, toward dishonesty in dealing with truth, and even, alas! sometimes toward actual impurity of thinking; or, in the spiritual, proneness to lethargy, to neglect, to compromise between right and wrong. It was such impure consciousness issuing in carnal conduct which made the Apostle urge the Corinthians to purify themselves and cleanse themselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit. It is the defilement of the spirit which lies at the back of these manifestations in the realm of the flesh that we supremely need to have dealt with.

Then, because of this defiled consciousness, this defiled spirit, sin abiding still in the life manifests itself in lack of love, so that envy, malice, and even hatred are present. These are actively expressed by unwillingness to forgive where wrong has been suffered and unwillingness to apologize where it has been done. Or, again, in violation of truth, so that men are given to exaggeration or to prevarication, which is an evasion of truth; or deceit, which is to give another a wrong view of a matter; or fraud, which is to give another a wrong view in order to gain something for oneself; or slander, which is to issue a false report to the injury of another person. Or, again, in the violation of justice, the spiteful disposition, the incivility, the rudeness, the thoughtlessness, and, alas! sometimes the robbery. Now, all these things are to be found, not all in any one person perchance, but in the common consciousness of men and women who have received the blessing of pardon and sing in their joy over that blessing. My brethren, I am talking with you, not merely to you. We know what this conscience or consciousness is which is not devoid of offense, out of which offense comes, so that we do not look on men or things or affairs as we ought to, and the distorted vision of men and things and affairs produces a wrong attitude toward men and things and affairs. We know this is wrong, and we cry out at last, in the agony of our hearts, and say the good we see we cannot do. The vision of the ideal is in front of us, but power to realize it we lack. Or, in the words of the Apostle, when we would do good, evil is present with us.

Now, what we need supremely—what I need, what you need—is that our very inward nature should be taken hold of and cleansed. We need not merely the forgiveness of sins, but a consciousness that is clean. It is a terrible need. It is as deep as our nature, and the cleansing must penetrate as far as our pollution. It must be a cleansing that deals not merely with the surface of sin, but goes down into the warp and woof, into the fiber of the being. Water will not do; fire is needed. Water is not sufficient; the infinite mystery of blood is demanded.

If I have partially voiced your sense of need, as I have spoken experimentally to you of my sense of need, as I have come to know what God is, and what I am, then I bring you the second note of the evangel. It is in the presence of that need that the writer asks, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your consciousness?" Christ offered Himself through the eternal Spirit. And by that offering He is able to cleanse the nature of the soul that trusts Him by the mystery of that blood poured forth. He can cleanse the consciousness and make it pure and good. And again I say I am not going to tell you how it is done, I am not going to try to explain to you by speculation of my finite mind or any philosophy of man how through the mystery of that shed blood a man's consciousness can be cleansed as he trusts in Jesus. The writer does not explain it, he affirms it, and all the burden of the teaching of the New Testament is this, that not merely by the mystery of this shed blood a man's sins are forgiven, but he is cleansed from his sin, changed, remade, a new creation, so that the consciousness defiled becomes a consciousness that is pure.

Now, I am perfectly well aware that a great many people who certainly have received the blessing of the forgiveness of sins have never appropriated this blessing of the cleansed consciousness and purity. I am perfectly well aware that hundreds and thousands of us are sighing after it, but not possessing it; and consequently I am driven to ask this question, if that indeed is declared to be a possibility, on what ground can I have that cleansing of my nature which shall change my view of everything, and give me a new outlook on everything, and so remake my attitude toward everything? How, in brief, can I have, instead of an evil conscience, a good conscience, instead of a conscience seared as with a hot iron, a consciousness which is void of offense? How? And the answer takes us back again to the statement of first principles.

The first thing we have to learn to do is to cease attempting to change our own consciousness. We must quit the conflict which is purely personal. A man says, I will come to look upon a little child as I ought to look upon a little child. You cannot do it in the strength of your own willing. That is the very mystery we have been dealing with. How many a man has said, I hate my outlook, this conception which is false and which issues in sinful conduct. I will alter it, I will change it, I will look upon the old things from a new standard, with cleanness of perception. A clean consciousness of the things round about me shall be mine. He was sincere in the vow, but long before the sun went westering, and the night had come upon him, he had looked again with evil thoughts, and impure desire, and debauched conceptions. The first thing, then, to do, strange as it may sound, is that we cease attempting to change our

own consciousness. What then? Then we must be ready and willing to abandon once and forever all permitted acts of sin. We are to put ourselves, so far as it is possible to us, outside the place of sinning. That is very concrete if only you will make it so. It means this. If you are going to quit impure thoughts you must begin by burning your impure pictures. If, after long struggle, you are going to enter into the possibility that lies declared in this text and overcome your tendency toward drunkenness—for let us name things by their right name—you must begin by turning out the last hidden cupboard in your house of the thing that has made you sin. "Having, therefore, these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." "Having, therefore, these promises," what promises? "I will be their God." "I will dwell in them and walk in them." "I will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to Me sons and daughters." These are the promises. Having them, what am I to do? Cleanse myself! But that is what I cannot do. If I try self-cleansing apart from these promises, and apart from the claim that faith makes upon them, I shall fail; but if I claim the promises and neglect the personal cleansing, I shall fail. There must not only be first a cessation of attempt to master the underlying evil in my strength, there must also be what appears to be a contradiction to that first statement, a resolute parting company with all the circumstances and friends and habits and methods which I know have led me into sin.

What beyond? There must be a handing over of the life just as it is, with its defilement, to Jesus Christ. Oh, but you say you are telling us to do what you tell people to do when they come to Him at first. Exactly! When the Church at Ephesus lost her first love, the great and glorious One, walking amid the seven golden lamp-stands, said, "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." What shall she do? This is what she shall do: "Repent, and do the first works." Begin where you began, fall in line with the principles you have neglected and wandered from. Remember, when we come for purity we are to come exactly as we came for pardon. First, "Nothing in my hands I bring," the cessation of my attempts to deal with the underlying impurity; second, "Here I give my all to Thee," the utter and absolute abandonment of the life to Jesus Christ—not as a theory to be sung, but as fact. And then what next? Then, dear heart, trust Him for that very thing after which you have been sighing. Accept it as from Him, trusting in Him. The cleansing of the conscience comes whenever a soul ventures everything on Christ and trusts Him absolutely. If you will come now, just where you are and as you are, with your false consciousness, but in strong determination that you will cut every cord that binds you to the old life, burn every bridge behind you, stand out in separation to Him, and then trust Him, He will break the power of canceled sin. He will set the prisoner free. And so, by the way of this Cross, infinite and ever-increasing mystery of God's love, there comes to men not merely pardon, but purity—that for which the heart, quickened by the Spirit, most profoundly seeks.

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Purpose of the Advent: 4. To Prepare for a Second Advent

Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation.

Hebrews 9:28

We come this evening to consider the last of the four great values of the first Advent. We have spoken together of the fact that He was manifested to take away sins, that He was manifested to reveal the Father; and now we come finally to this great truth that He was manifested to prepare for another manifestation, that He came once in order that He might be able to come again. All the things of which we have spoken as constituting the values of the first Advent were necessary in order that there should be another Advent.

Our thoughts are turning with gladness to the first coming of Jesus. The light that shone o'er the plains is shining around us; the songs which the shepherds heard we also hear; and the new hope that filled the hearts of shepherds and Wise Men in that Eastern land at the Advent of Jesus is in our hearts at this time.

Yet we are all conscious that nothing is perfect, that the things which He came to do are not yet done, that the works of the devil are not yet finally destroyed, that sins are not yet experimentally taken away, that in the spiritual consciousness of the race God is not yet perfectly known. As the writer of this said in another connection, "Now we see not yet all things subjected to Him." The victory seems not to be won. There seems to be very, very much still to do. Or, if I may put this into another form, it is impossible to read the story of the first Advent and to believe in it, and to follow the history of the centuries that have followed upon that Advent, without feeling in one's deepest heart that something more is needed. The first Advent demands something else.

Therefore, we turn with relief to the declaration of the New Testament which formed the very hope and song of the Early Church, the declaration which states that He Who has come will come, that the first Advent was indeed preparatory, and that the consummation of its meaning can be brought about only by another coming, as personal, as definite, as positive, as real in human history as was the first.

Think of the fact stated in my text: "Christ... shall appear a second time." There is no escape, other than by casuistry, from the simple meaning of these words. The first idea conveyed by them is that of an actual personal advent of Jesus yet to be. To

spiritualize a statement like this and to attempt to make application of it in any other than the way in which a little child would understand it is to be driven, one is almost inclined to say, to dishonesty with the simplicity of the Scriptural declaration.

This statement is not peculiar to the letter from which it is taken. It is the teaching of the whole of the New Testament. To the man who has given up the New Testament as final, authoritative, and infallible, I have no appeal. We have no common ground. If you are attempting to erect a Christian structure upon your philosophizing I have no time to argue with you. I respect your conviction, I believe in your honesty, but I part company with you. To me the New Testament is the living, final, absolutely infallible Word of God.

I find a great many Christian people, however, who believe that as surely as I do, who yet seem not to be perfectly sure of a second personal Advent of the same Jesus. I repeat, and again I would say it carefully, with no desire to offend or hurt the convictions of any, that you cannot take your New Testament and read it simply and honestly without coming to the conclusion that the Christ Who came is still to come. There may be diversities of interpretations as to how He will come and when He will come. I am not discussing these tonight. We may part company as to whether He will come to usher in a millennium or to crown it. I think that is important, but I am not careful now to argue it. When the risen Christ had passed out of the sight of the men who waited upon the mountain side and in astonishment looked at the clouds which had received Him, angels appeared to them who said, "This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven." He is coming or the angels were wrong.

Paul in all his writings is conscious of this truth of the second Advent. In some of them he does not dwell upon it at such great length or with such clearness as in others, for the simple reason that it is not the specific subject with which he is dealing. In the Thessalonian letters you have most clearly set forth Paul's teaching concerning this matter. In the very center of the first letter we have a passage which declares in unmistakable language that "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." "It was this hope which more than anything gave its color to the primitive Christianity, its unworldliness, its moral intensity, its command of the future even in this life." The latter sentence is a quotation from the book of a man who does not hold the position I hold, who does not believe as I believe in the actual second personal Advent of Jesus, who, nevertheless, recognizes that this view gave the bloom to primitive Christianity and constituted the power of the early Christians to laugh in the face of death, and to overcome all forces which were against them.

That is not peculiarly Pauline. Writing to those who were in affliction, James said, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

With equal clearness, Peter said to the early disciples, "Be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

John, who leaned upon his Master's bosom, and who wrote the most wonderful of all mystic words concerning Him, said, "We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is. And everyone that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

Jude said to those to whom he wrote, "Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

That is but a rapid passing over of the great field of New Testament teaching. To summarize yet more briefly the things to which I have already referred, I would declare that every New Testament writer presents this truth as a part of the common Christian faith. I believe there is nothing more needed in our day than a new declaration of this vital fact of Christian faith. Think what it would mean if the whole Church still lifted her face toward the East and waited for the morning, waited as the Lord would have her wait—not stargazing and almanac examining, but, with loins girt for service and lamps burning, waiting as she serves. If the whole Christian Church were so waiting she would cast off her worldliness and infidelity and all other things which hinder her march to conquest. It is because we have lost the bloom of hope that our songs are so poor. If we may but hear again the promises of the New Testament, the assurances of the Word that He Who came is coming, then there will be strength in service and new fortitude for suffering, and new hope for all the world in its sin and its sorrow and its sighing.

Our text does more than affirm the fact of the second Advent. In a somewhat remarkable way, it declares the meaning thereof, "Christ... shall appear a second time, apart from sin."

To understand this rightly we must look upon it as putting the second Advent into contrast with the first. That is what the writer most evidently means, for the context declares that Jesus was manifested in the consummation of the ages, to bear sins. That we have considered. He now says that "Christ... shall appear a second time, apart from sin." Consequently, I repeat, to understand this rightly we must look upon it as putting the second Advent in contrast with the first. All the things of the first Advent were necessary to the second, but all the things of the second will be different from the things of the first. The whole of the first Advent was conditioned

within the fact of sin. Jesus came to deal with sin. By His first Advent sin was revealed. Men never truly understood the meaning thereof until He came, and by the light of His presence in human history flung it into clear relief. From the slaughter of the innocents which accompanied His birth to His own death upon the cross His presence in the world flung hatred into view. The slaughter of the innocents was the action of a false king who feared a new king coming to snatch his scepter, and hatred manifested itself in devilish cruelty to little children. Our Lord's own cross was the place where all the deep hatred of the human heart expressed itself most diabolically in view of heaven and earth and hell.

There was also revelation of darkness as contrary to light. "Men loved the darkness rather than the light," was the supreme wail of the heart of Jesus. His presence in the world was, moreover, revelation of spiritual death as contrary to life. In the perpetual attempt of men to materialize His work, the attempt of His own disciples as well as all the rest, and their absolute failure to appreciate the, spiritual teaching He gave, we see what spiritual death really is.

In His first Advent He not only revealed sin but bore it. In the words, "Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many," the reference is not merely to the final movement of the cross. The word "offered" is used in reference to God's action in giving Him. It would be perfectly correct interpretation to supply the word "offered" by the word "gave," the word which you have in John's Gospel, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." Let us put that word here, "Christ also, having been once given to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time." All through His life He bore sin. All through the long, long days, He was putting Himself underneath sin in order to take it away. He bore its limitations throughout the whole of His life. In poverty, in sorrow, in loneliness He lived, and all these things are limitations resulting from sin. All poverty is the issue of sin. It is well we should remember that. The problem of poverty has a deeper problem lying at its heart which is the problem of sin. I do not mean that the poor man is the sinner always. Far from it. It is very easy for people who live in comparative ease and comfort, or in affluence, to write about the blessings of poverty. There are no blessings of poverty save as God does overrule all the grinding and crushing of human life for some essential good. All poverty is the result of sin, either of the man who is poor or of some other who is robbing him. When Jesus Christ entered into flesh He entered into the limitations which follow upon sin and He bore sin in His own consciousness through all the years. Not poverty only, but sorrow in all forms. Sorrow is lack. The sorrow of bereavement is the lack of the friend. Every sorrow is a sense of lack, something wanting, something gone, and Jesus lived through all the years "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And in His long loneliness He lived in the midst of limitations resulting from sin. Finally gathering all these things to a crisis, He reached the ultimate issue of sin, bearing it, carrying it, lifting it, placing Himself, very God as well as very man, underneath it until all its weight was upon Him—the weight of its poverty, for "though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor"; the weight of its sorrow, for all the sorrows of the human heart were upon His heart until He uttered that unspeakable cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Such was the story of the first Advent.

Now hear my text. Having finally dealt with sin and destroyed it at its very root in His first Advent, Jesus' next coming, His second Advent, is to be that of victory. He will come again, not to poverty but to wealth. He will come again, not to sorrow but with all joy. He will come again, not in loneliness, but to gather about Him all trusting souls who have looked and served and waited. We are celebrating the Advent when there was no room for Him in the inn. When He comes again the whole world and the universe will make haste to make room for Him. At the close of the first Advent we saw Him holding the reed of mockery, robed in the purple of contempt, crowned with thorns, surrounded by a mob. When He comes again He will hold the scepter of the universe in His right hand; upon His brow there will be many diadems; He will be panoplied with all the splendor of God, and ten thousand times ten thousand angels will be the cohorts that accompany Him. All in His first Advent of sorrow and loneliness, of poverty and of sin, will be absent from the second. The first Advent was for atonement, the second will be for administration. He came, entering into human nature and taking hold of it, to deal with sin and put it away. He has taken sin away, and He will come again to set up that Kingdom, the foundations of which He laid in His first coming.

I pause for one moment to say I am not dealing with the different phases of the Advent, with the fact that He will first gather His Church to Himself and then establish the Kingdom on earth. I am viewing the whole in general outline, recognizing the different phases, but insisting now only upon the glorious and gracious fact that this One Who came is yet to come.

Let us go one step further, and we shall find that my text declares the purpose of the Advent. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment; so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation." A similarity is suggested. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment." Over against that dual appointment stands "So Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation." As His first Advent was parallel to the appointment of death, His second Advent is parallel to the appointment of judgment. "It is appointed unto men once to die... Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many." It is appointed that after death there shall be judgment—He "shall appear a second time, apart from sin..." But the contrast seems to break down. The similarity is not carried out. There is a strange differentiation in the ending of the two declarations, and we must notice it. We expected that it would have been written to complete the comparison, thus, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment; so Christ also, having been once

offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, unto judgment." That would seem to be a balanced comparison, but the writer does not so write. Notice how this very difference unfolds the meaning of the first and second Advents. It is appointed to men to die—He was offered to bear the sins of many. After death judgment—He is coming again unto salvation. As the first Advent negated the death appointed unto men, the second Advent will turn the judgment into salvation.

"It is appointed unto men once to die." It is often somewhat carelessly affirmed that men must die. While admitting the truth of this statement, we inquire why must they die? Ask the scientist. Science can no more account for death than it can account for life. It has never been able to explain the mystery of the beginning of life. It has never yet been able to say why men die. How they die, yes; why they die, no!

We are all reconstructed on the physical side every seven years. The essential personality is not reconstructed, but maintains its individuality through all the processes of reconstruction. I am the man I was seven years ago, and yet there is not a particle of this tabernacle, through the medium of which I speak to you tonight, that would have been here had I been here seven years ago. Waste of tissue and breakdown of the physical is a constant process of remaking. The mental in man gains breadth and strength and beauty as years pass on. The man who has run out the allotted three score years and ten, or for whom God has lengthened the lease a few years, mentally and spiritually is greater than he has ever been before, but the reconstruction of the physical is not quite so perfect as it used to be, the elasticity is missing, the vision is becoming dim, the new-made temple is not quite so fibrous and tough as the old one. Why? I wait for scientific answer, but I wait in vain. No man without revelation has ever been able to tell me why the physical ceases at maturity to reconstruct itself with ever-increasing strength. I will tell you why. Death is the wage of sin. Science will admit that death comes by the breaking of certain laws. Science will use some other word than the word "sin." Sir Oliver Lodge tells us that sensible men do not use the word "sin." I am a little tired of the Church's worship of Sir Oliver Lodge. I am surprised at the way Christian ministers have welcomed his creed. I have every respect for him as an honest scientist, but he does not understand Christianity. His creed is not the Christian creed. If there is no place for "sin" and "blood," there is no room for Jesus Christ. "It is appointed unto men once to die" by the fiat of God Almighty because they are sinners, and no man can escape that fiat.

But Jesus Christ was offered by God to bear the sins of many—that was the answer of the first Advent to man's appointment to death.

Beyond death there is another appointment, that of judgment.

Who shall appeal against the absolute justice of that appointment? He "shall appear a second time, apart from sin... unto salvation." To those who have heard the message of the first Advent and have believed it, and trusted in His great work, and have found shelter in the mystery of His manifestation and bearing of sin, to such, salvation takes the place of judgment. But to the man who will not shelter beneath that first Advent and its atoning value judgment abides. All the things begun by His first Advent will be consummated by the second.

At His second Advent there will be complete salvation for the individual—Righteousness, Sanctification, Redemption. We believed, and were saved. We believe, and are being saved. We believe, and we shall be saved. The last movement will come when Our Lord comes.

What of those who have fallen on sleep? They are safe with God and He will bring them with Him when He comes. They are not yet perfected, "God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be perfected." They are at rest and consciously at rest. They are "absent from the body... at home with the Lord," but they are not yet perfected, they are waiting. We are waiting in the midst of earth's struggle, they in heaven's light and joy, for the second Advent. Heaven is waiting for it. Earth is waiting for it. Hell is waiting for it. The universe is waiting for it.

That coming will be to those who wait for Him. Who are those who wait for Him? Let Scripture interpret this. In the Thessalonian Epistle I find Paul's description of the early Christians, "Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." The first thing is the turning from idols. Have you done that? The second thing is serving the living God. Are you doing that? Then because you have turned from idols and are serving Him you are waiting. That is the waiting the New Testament enjoins, and to those who wait, His second Advent will mean salvation. There is waiting other than that, but we have no share in it. That is our waiting, because we have heard the Evangel of the first Advent and know it. The whole creation waiteth, "groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." I hear the sob of the waiting myriads in China and Africa and India. They are waiting. They have never yet heard of the first Advent. They are waiting. They know not for what. They cry as a child in the night, with no language but a cry. Oh the pathos and the tragedy of it!

"Christ shall appear." Glorious Gospel! He shall appear, to heal the wounds of all creation. "He comes to break oppression and set the captives free." He is coming to rule with a rod of iron, which means absolute and inflexible equity. Ofttimes there is more love in justice than in mercy. When He Who came in meek mercy long ago comes again, He will come in majestic might, and also in love. He will come to gather out His trusting souls and then to establish His own rule and set up His own government. What a day of

burning it will be for some! What terror will come to the hearts of those who have lived and fattened upon devilism!

He is coming! That is my hope and confidence. That is my hope and my song for the world this Christmastime. He came to commence, to initiate. He will come to complete. "Christ... shall appear a second time, apart from sin... unto salvation." Salvation means judgment wrought out in the impulse and power of love.

We stand tonight between the Advents. Our relation to the first creates our relation to the second. To receive Him as rejected is to be received by Him at His coronation. To accept His estimate of sin and share in the value of His atoning work is to enter into His coming administration of righteousness. To trust in the first is to wait for the second.

How stands it between my soul and the Advents, first and second? I am not trying to cast a cloud over the merriment of Christmastime. But have a reason for your merriment, and in God's name cease your merriment if the Child Who was born, and of Whom you sing, is excluded from your heart and hearth and home. The blasphemy of it! The tragedy of it! The shame of it! People who by persistent sin are crucifying this Christ afresh every day yet make merry this Christmastime. If you have admitted Him and found room for Him for Whom there was no room in the inn, if you have handed Him the kingdom of your life though the world still rejects Him as in the days of old, then make merry. Let your songs abound. Let your hearts be glad. Give the children a good time. But I warn you against all merriment if you have shut Him out, for He comes again, and if, in spite of the light of the first Advent you have rejected Him, He must, on the basis of eternal justice, reject you. He is coming. May we so trust Him as to the meaning and merit of His first Advent as not to be ashamed of Him when He comes again!

227 - Hebrews 10:14 - The One Offering

The One Offering

For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Hebrews 10:14

The Biblical conception of religion is right relationship between God and man. The Biblical doctrine of man is, essentially, that he is the offspring of God, whose relation to God, therefore, is threefold: first, that he has the right of personal access to God; second, that there the possibility of direct, immediate intercourse with God is given to him; finally, that the privilege and responsibility of co-operation with God in carrying out God's designs rests on him. After the briefest declarations concerning the origin and nature of man, the Bible introduces the subject of sin. Sin, according to its teaching, results in the exclusion of man from God, the cessation of communion with Him, and the consequent inability to realize the privilege and fulfil the responsibility of co-operation with Him.

The ultimate message of the Bible, however, is neither that of the essential nature of man nor that of his sin. The final message of the Bible is that of redemption. It is the literature of redemption. It is therefore a message to sinning men, to those who are excluded from their birthright by sin; excluded from the consciousness of the presence of God, denied fellowship with Him, and unable to fulfil their responsibility to Him either personally or relatively. To that state the Bible appeals. The Bible has been written for sinning and not for sinless men. If I may venture to put into brief words that which shall express the whole message of the Bible, then I shall employ the very words of the Lord Himself, for that which is the truth concerning the Word incarnate by His own declaration is true concerning this written word: "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

The burden of the Bible was perfectly expressed in the words of the wise woman of Tekoa to King David when he was fleeing from Absalom, in which she uttered the profound truth, "God... deviseth means that he that is banished be not outcast from Him." So far as the Biblical revelation is concerned, this great declaration has been made in two stages, both of which are referred to by the writer in the opening words of the treatise from which our text is taken: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." The first stage was that of the revelation to the fathers in the prophets by divers portions in divers manners. The final stage is that of today, the revelation in the Son.

The method of the old economy was suggestion, prediction, illustration. That of today is the method of finality, fulfilment, realization. In the Hebrew system one phase of the necessity for human redemption, and one phase of the way of its provision was revealed in all that splendid ritual of the Hebrew people, revealed particularly in the offerings as they shadowed forth the way of approach to God by sinning man. It is the way of complete dedication, accompanied by sacrifice and propitiation, with the resulting elements of atonement and forgiveness. In that pictorial system there were five offerings, named, respectively, the Burnt Offering, the Meal Offering, the Peace Offering, the Sin Offering, and the Trespass Offering.

These may be divided into two groups, the first consisting of three offerings, the Burnt, the Meal, the Peace: the Burnt, the symbol of the dedication of the entire life to God; the Meal, the symbol of the dedication of the service of the life to God; and the Peace, the symbol of that fellowship with God which is possible on the basis of the dedication of life and of service. In each case there was the

element of sacrifice connected with the offering.

The second group consisted of two offerings: the Sin Offering, which suggested the necessity for, and the method of, putting away sins in order that man might be brought back to his birthright of access to God, intercourse with God, and co-operation with God; and the Trespass Offering, which dealt with certain definite acts of sin.

The writer of this letter to the Hebrews declared that these offerings were not in themselves efficacious, and in that declaration he wrote in harmony with the teaching of the great Hebrew prophets. In his argument he quoted from the ancient Hebrew Scriptures, and his quotations might be multiplied, for they are manifold. The declaration of the seers of the old economy was persistently that in themselves these sacrifices, these offerings, had no value, no efficacy, but that they pointed to something profounder, were adumbrations of something greater, shadows of it demonstrating its reality. In this chapter the word of the writer of this letter, is a striking, suggestive one, "The law having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things." While he recognized that there can be no power, no dynamic, no saving virtue in the shadow, he did nevertheless recognize that there can be no shadow without the substance. There was infinitely more in these ancient sacrifices than feasting and fasting; they were evidences of the existing purpose and power of Deity, to be yet more perfectly manifested. The whole argument of the writer of the letter was that the deepest, profoundest meaning of all those offerings of the ancient ritual was fulfilled in human history in the Person and work of the Son of God, "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." We must be true to the conception of the writer if we would understand his meaning. To whom, then, was the writer referring? Who is it that by one offering can perfect forever them that are sanctified? The answer is found in the opening declaration of the letter, "God... hath spoken unto us in His Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds; Who being the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." In that august and remarkable introduction of the central Person in the mind of the writer we find relationships with all the arguments that follow. When I read that He, this wondrous Son of God, perfects forever them that are sanctified, I remember that associated with the description of His inherent being and glory and beauty is the declaration that He has made purification of sins.

The declaration of our text, then, is that in and through Him the Son of God man may be restored to right relationship with God, and that in every way. If the Biblical conception of religion be that of man in right relationship with God; if the Bible teaches that sin has excluded man from access to God, from intercourse and from co-operation, the ultimate word of the Bible is that God has devised means by which the banished shall not be outcast, the means being that in His Son God has wrought the work through which man may be restored to his right of access, restored to his communion and fellowship, restored to both the responsibility and privilege of co-operation with God.

Let us, then, consider this declaration of the text as it deals with the one offering provided in Christ, with the perfection provided for men, and with the condition of appropriation.

"By one offering." Let us think of that offering in itself, in its sufficiency, and in its exclusiveness.

First, in itself. Directly we begin to attempt to think of this one offering in itself there are so many aspects of the matter that we are in difficulty. Let us follow the simplest method and consider the offering, using the word as a noun, that which was offered; and then consider the offering, using the word as a verb, the act of offering, the way of the offering.

What, then, is this one offering through which Christ hath perfected forever them that are sanctified? We are not left to any speculation; we follow the statement of the writer and we have a clear and distinct declaration of what that offering was. From verse fourteen, which constitutes the text, I glance back to verse ten, and there I read these words: "By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Ere I am able to comprehend the meaning of that utterance, I move backward still a little further, and notice a very remarkable and significant quotation from one of the psalms,

Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, But a body didst Thou prepare for Me.

By the offering of that body of Jesus Christ, that body prepared for Jesus Christ, He perfects forever them that are sanctified. We must briefly give attention to one matter of detail, and perhaps of difficulty. The quotation of the psalm here by the writer is a quotation from the Septuagint, and not from the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Hebrew the psalm reads:

Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, But Mine ear hast Thou opened.

I draw attention to the difference because it has created difficulty as to whether the translators of what we speak of as the Septuagint version thought for some reason that there was a mistake in the Hebrew, or whether the text as it is in the Hebrew today is correct. There is a sense in which the vital, underlying spiritual value is not changed in either case, for the word as we have it in the Hebrew text and in the Bible, "Mine ear hast Thou opened," has no reference whatever to that ancient rite or ceremony by which the servant coming to the doorpost had his ear pierced in order that he might demonstrate his fidelity. The thought is that rather of making the

ear absolutely attentive in order that the soul may be mastered by the Divine will. That is the whole story of the human life of Jesus. I have no doubt that the Septuagint version is the true one. I build my view on the fact that the New Testament writer quoted the psalm in this way, as I believe, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thus distinguishing between the true and the false and giving us a most remarkable statement concerning that offering which our Lord made: "A body didst Thou prepare for Me." Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this word was fastened on by the writer of the New Testament to show that the sacrifice of our Lord by which we are redeemed, even on the physical side, was that of a body especially prepared by God for His Son. Thus the One Who hung on the Cross is differentiated from all other men, even in the matter of His physical life. In that word, "a body didst Thou prepare for Me," is involved the mysterious method of incarnation which is recorded by two of the evangelists, that of the virgin birth of our Lord. In an activity, wholly within the compass of the Divine power, God did purify human flesh and through that purification gave to us the immaculate Son of His love in human form and human being. He was in Himself the sinless One, not a member of our sinning race, but a member of our race, brought into it by a Divine overruling and activity of love and power so as to share that which is essential in humanity and be separate from sinners and from all things which have ruined and spoiled humanity.

Then we must remember that His living body fulfilled its true function, that of being an instrument of the spirit. The body of a human being is but the earthly instrument of the spirit, which is the essential fact in the life of that human being. Thus reverting to the original economy and ideal of creation, this Man of Nazareth fulfilled the Divine purpose, and His body, prepared for the specific purpose, was the perfect instrument of His spirit. His spirit was never imprisoned within His body, was never mastered by the appetites of the body, was never deflected from the course of rightness by the allurements of the body, was never clouded in its vision of God by illicit answer to the cry of the body. It was the instrument of the spirit; and as in His spirit life this Man of Nazareth was separate from sinners, holy, undefiled, so also in all His bodily life He was separate from sinners, holy, undefiled. Therefore, when we think of the Man of Nazareth, and in those hours in which we properly rejoice at His nearness to us by reason of His humanity, let us with equal propriety and solemnity tremble and wonder as we recognize that He was alone, distanced from us in Himself in spiritual life and in bodily life; that He stands alone, unique in all the centuries, a lonely Man by virtue of His purity and uninterrupted adjustment to the holiness, purity, and rightness of God.

If these things be remembered we shall never fall into the unutterable blunder of imagining that the evangelical doctrine is that one man died for other men, we shall never fall into the unutterable mistake of imagining that on the Cross some one member of our own race did persuade God to a change of mind and a change of relationship concerning men. We shall watch through all the process for the movements of God, for which He first did prepare a body for the Son of His love; and we shall watch Him as He moves along the way of men, ever recognizing His entire separation from humanity, even in the hours of close, mysterious identification.

In the Hebrew economy the Burnt Offering was symbolic of the dedication of the whole life to God; the Meal Offering was symbolic of the dedication of the service, for in that offering men brought what they themselves had wrought, the result of their own toil; the Peace Offering was the symbol of the unbroken fellowship with God which results from the dedication of the life and the service. We immediately see how that wonderful kindergarten of the old economy found its fulfilment in Jesus. On all the pathway of His pilgrimage the supreme note was that of the dedication of His whole life to God. I reverently quote in this connection from the Roman epistle: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." That was the apostolic appeal to redeemed men, that they should make the body the sacramental symbol of the spiritual attitude. Reverently I declare that this is exactly the story of the life of Jesus; His spirit was ever yielded to God in perfect obedience, and the body perpetually expressed that attitude of the spirit, so that every journey the body took was a journey God-ordained, and every activity of those gentle hands was an activity God-inspired, and every glance of His eye was the outlooking of the purpose and will and intention of God. All the body of the Lord expressed the fact of the dedication of His whole life and being to God. It was also the medium of a dedicated service, for all that He did He did under the Divine authority; I do nothing of Myself; I speak nothing of Myself; what My Father gives Me that I do; what My Father gives Me that I speak. All His service was God-inspired. I see Him with the children about Him, angry with the disciples who would prevent them coming, and I hear the thunder of His love, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the Kingdom of heaven." That is a Man acting under Divine impulse and Divine authority. I see Him on another day, when, looking into the eyes of the false rulers of His people, He says to them, Woe unto you! scribes, hypocrites, whited sepulchres, full of dead men's bones. That was not a passing spasm of human passion; it was God speaking out of His holiness and His wrath to the men who oppressed other men. Therefore He realized the meaning of the Peace Offering. He was always at peace with God, always in fellowship with God. He spoke with august and reverent familiarity of His Father at all times and in all circumstances, feeling that no sanctity was violated when He linked God to flowers, to sparrows, and to children.

Consider, then, the worth of that One, and mark the worth of that body, prepared in infinite mystery and by infinite power, the perfected and unharmed instrument of the spirit, perfectly adjusted to God. There has been nothing like it in human history.

We pass now to the word "offering" as a verb. The intention of the offering was symbolized in the two remaining offerings of the Hebrew economy, the Sin Offering and the Trespass Offering. Its method was co-operation with God, and its purpose, reconciliation of man with God, making peace, or, again to take up the august word of the Old Testament and of the Christian Church, making

atonement.

In Jesus, fulfilment of the symbolism of the Burnt, the Meal, and the Peace Offerings, we see the sacrificial element. Have I spoken of the Burnt Offering of a dedicated life? He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Have I spoken of the Meal Offering of dedicated service? In all His service there was the element of vicarious suffering. With infinite ease He healed the sick as Matthew records—no, not with infinite ease, for Matthew adds, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases." Have I spoken of the Peace Offering of fellowship? Our Lord's unbroken peace with God was challenged by the perpetual restlessness of humanity, and found expression again and again in the hot discontent of His heart with things unlike God. Take sin out of the world and Christ had known no sorrow. He might have lived a life of perfect dedication, a life of perfect dedication in service, a life of perpetual peace untroubled by sorrow, undesolated by agony. But in this world the measure of His perfection was the measure of His pain. The measure of our nearness to Christ is the measure in which we are capable of suffering with sinning men and sinning women. If we are merely righteous, cold and hard when we have sinners to deal with, we know very little about God or Christ. The measure of purity is the measure of pain in the presence of impurity. All through His life there was this sacrificial element, until at last everything was gathered up in the infinite, awe-inspiring mystery of the offering of His body on the Tree.

All the demand of the Divine character was perfectly met in that offering. In such life there ought to be no pain, no death; if pain and death were there, and that by the very will of God, pain and death were there for some wider and beneficent purpose. All the demands of the Divine character are met in that Person.

Once again, that which it is so extremely difficult to state or to comprehend, but which nevertheless is the declaration of Scripture and must be true or all our religion fails, in Christ there was the fulness of the Divine consciousness: "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporeally." All the Divine consciousness was in Him, and the Divine consciousness includes the whole creation, the consciousness of all men and of all life that has consciousness. All was focused in Him. That body prepared by infinite power and in infinite mystery, and yet of my very nature, was the central instrument of the spirit which in co-operation with God was conscious of the fulness of the Divine consciousness.

Not only did it please the Father that all the fulness should dwell in Him as to consciousness, but also as to resources. The supply of Deity was vested in Him in order to co-operate in the Divine work.

So, in the light of these unfathomable things and of these Divine facts that defy our mathematical terms, I read my text again: "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

I say in the presence of God that I am not astonished now, when I think of Who Christ is, and what that body really meant, even though I cannot fathom the mystery. If there are depths too deep for me and heights too vastly removed for my climbing, still I feel that here is the place of my refuge:

Rock of ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.

That one offering excludes all human activity which is insufficient to realize the restoration which man seeks. It excludes the value of human merit, for human merit is worthless. It excludes the necessity for all human intervention which, in its presence, becomes blasphemous and impertinent.

In considering the perfection provided through the offering we go back to the initial words of our meditation. The perfection provided is the restoration of everything lost. Through that one offering we have perfection of access to God, for we come to God now by way of a cleansing which is immediate and continuous. We come to God by the way of a renewal of our spiritual life which is progressive. We come to God by way of a reconciliation which is constant.

It is the perfection of communion with God. Communion with God is, first, the sense that we have no secrets from Him, that He knows everything, all our sin and our failure:

Thy kind but searching glance can scan The very wounds that shame would hide.

Do you know the restfulness of getting alone with someone to whom you have not to say anything about yourself because that someone knows? You do not, unless you know God. Do you know the awful agonizing awkwardness of attempting to make yourself known to your nearest and dearest? Fellowship with God means that there is no such agony, no such awkwardness; all things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with Whom I have to do. That is the doctrine that fills the soul with fear until the soul is reconciled; but it is the doctrine of infinite comfort to the soul that has rested on Christ.

It is not only a sense that we have no secrets from Him, this communion with God; it is also the desire and capacity to know His secrets, and the fact that He tells us His secrets. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him."

Fellowship means, moreover, the appropriation in intercourse with Him of His wisdom, so that we need no longer blunder our way through darkness—He will direct; it means appropriation of His might, so that we need no longer struggle helplessly against difficulties—He will energize; it means appropriation of His love, so that we are never alone. In fellowship with our Lord we can say with our Lord, My Father doth not leave me alone!

All that issues in perfection of ability. Restored likeness to God is renewed fitness for co-operation with God, and that is in itself regained power.

The condition for appropriating the perfection provided is sanctification. There are different aspects of sanctification. Sanctification is separation to the will of God. It is wrought in the soul of man by the ministry of the Spirit. It is made possible by the work of the Son.

The reference to sanctification in this text is to that act of the Spirit, in response to faith, whereby we are accepted in the beloved. All such are adjusted to the will of God, perfect but not yet perfected; perfect in standing, relationship, and resources, but yet to be perfected in experience, in finality and complete realization.

The dwelling place of the saints is the holy place. They sit at the table of shewbread and have communion with God; they trim the golden lampstand and bear their testimony to the world; they stand before the golden altar of incense, God's remembrancers and intercessors; and, most wonderful of all, they pass beyond the holy place into the holy of holies, and, standing face to face with God hold communion unafraid, because on the mercy seat are the tokens of that one offering whereby He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

This is our only perfection. Let us not presume upon it. Let us not repose our confidence in anything else, not in our Christian service, not in our preaching, or our work; for at the last we shall come home, and we shall do, saying:

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy Cross I cling!
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die!

I think that will be the last prayer I shall ever pray, and it will be answered, "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified"!

This is not only our only perfection, it is our sufficient perfection. Let us perfectly trust it. Let us answer all its demands, that we may realize all its power. Let no doubt of the efficacy of the one offering lurk in the heart, and so we shall enter into the very peace of God.

228 - Hebrews 11:1 - The Optimism of Faith

The Optimism of Faith

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

The history of the world's progress is the history of the triumphs of faith. Faith, to all human seeming, does the most unwarranted things. It sings in prison. It fights while still in chains. It works without tools. You may put the men of faith into prison, but at midnight you will hear Paul and Silas singing. Sigh sings in the morning when it has escaped from prison. Faith sings at night while it is in prison. You may put the man of faith into the dungeon and bind him with chains; but there, without a sword, with no carnal weapon, he will still fight a fight, and win a victory the issue of which will be seen in the days to come. Put the man of faith into circumstances devoid of all the forces upon which the man of sight depends, and he will begin to work, and in the long issues you will discover that his work is that which lasts, that which abides.

The literature of the prison is a wonderful literature. We confine ourselves to Biblical illustrations, and to one that is almost Biblical, Biblical in spirit. The great prophecy of failure and tears breaks out into its sweetest music when Jeremiah sings in prison. Find the central messages of hope, and they are messages which were written while he was in the dungeon. The clearest and most startling visions of God ever granted to the ancient people came to Ezekiel when he was an exile by the banks of the river Chebar. The great epistles of the New Testament were written in prison. Though you take the fisher of the Galilean Sea and banish him to the Isle of Patmos, there he sees through the mists and mysteries to the light and glory of the infinite consummation, and the Apocalypse is part of the literature of the prison. If you take the Bedford Tinker and shut him away in the prison house, there Bunyan dreams his

celestial dreams and lays the world under a perpetual debt of gratitude to him. Why? Because these men were men of faith. If the test of a word is a work, if the test of a creed is a creation, if the test of a root dry and withered, is fruit luscious and beautiful, then faith is vindicated in the passing of the centuries. The men of faith have found:

Glory begun below
Celestial fruit on earthly ground
From faith and love will grow.
Lo to faith's enlightened sight,
All the mountain flames with light,
Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,
Circling us with hosts of fire.

We may not be able to account for it, but I think no one here will be prepared to contradict the statement, that it is the men of faith who have made the great contributions to the world's progress; always the men of faith. I am not proposing to argue that tonight. My business is of a profounder nature.

I want to ask this simple question. Why is it that faith always triumphs? Why is it that the word of faith materializes into the work that lasts? Why is it that the creed of the man of faith vindicates itself in a creation? Why is it that this root—may I very reverently borrow a word that does not belong here—this "root out of a dry ground," this root which at the present moment is considered by the philosophies of men to be so entirely out of date, why is it that this russet, drab bulb, that seems to have no color and no glory and no light, why is it that it is forevermore breaking through and blossoming into beauty and triumph? Why is faith victorious? The answer is in my text. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen."

Let us first take two phrases from the text in order that in the briefest way possible we may remind ourselves of what they mean; "things hoped for"; "things not seen."

These are the unreal things, the intangible things, the imponderable and unlikely matters; the uncertain things of the future "things hoped for"; the uncertain things of the present, "things not seen." Mark, I pray you, that difference in suggestion. "Things hoped for" are always future. "Things not seen" according to the interpretation of this writer and this letter, are not future but present.

The "things not seen" are in existence now. How are you going to demonstrate them, be sure of them? By faith. The "things hoped for" are future. How are we to be sure of them? By faith. This is the statement not only of the two sides of the great fact, but of a sequence. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for." Why? Because it is the "proving of things not seen." "Assurance of things hoped for" grows out of faith, because faith demonstrates, proves to certainty the "things not seen." "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for," therefore it sings in the midst of the process and in the prison house. Why does it sing? Why is it sure? Because it demonstrates, it proves the unseen things.

"Things hoped for"; these are things that lie ahead of us, things that we have not yet come into possession of, things that according to the philosophy of men and the appearances of the hour, it is improbable we ever shall come into possession of. "Things hoped for," the realization of our own ideals; the ultimate victory of good in the world; compensation for all the travail, the sorrow, and the loss of today; the striking of an even balance in the affairs of men, when justice shall reign supreme. We all sigh for these things; they pass, ever and anon, like a vision before our eyes, and we speak of it as a mirage, a disappointment, and ask, "Can our ideal ever be realized? Will there ever be the ultimate victory of good? Is there to be compensation for the stress and strain and sighing and sorrow of humanity? Will there be a victory of justice?" "Things hoped for" are the things we fain would see if we could.

"Things not seen." Is there anything unseen? Have we not done with reality when we have looked the last upon the things material? We are gathered together in this building; there are real, seen things in this building, light and life; men and women. Is that all? The man of the world says, "That is all you can prove." Faith, according to this writer, proves the unseen thing, not the unseen things that are distant, but that are near. What are the things that faith claims to prove? For the moment, I will not say faith has proved them. What are the things faith claims to prove? God, the spirit world, the hidden forces; angels sweeping up the mountain side that the prophet saw and his servant did not see, the angel ministers watching in Gethsemane, which Jesus saw and the disciples did not see. You say these are the uncertain things which the present age doubts, the unseen things. So much for our phrases. "Things hoped for"; the realization of ideals, the ultimate victory of good, compensation, the even balance and justice; the building of the city of God and the triumph of righteousness. "Things not seen." Oh, if there only were a God, if only there were spiritual forces as well as material forces, if only the dreams of these men of old were true and the mountain flamed with light and angelic hosts; if only these things were real, then we should be quite sure that our dreams would be realized. Fail to believe in things unseen and hope dies, the song is silent, the fight ends, and the work is abandoned. Let the dust of the highway be everything, and the troops will weary upon the march and the territory will never be possessed. Let humanity come to the conclusion that the life of bread and raiment and dust is everything, and thereby is signed the death warrant of all high ideals and aspirations, and of everything noble. There is no assurance of things hoped for unless there be the proving of things unseen.

The writer of this letter declares that "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen."

It is necessary that we take time to understand what this man meant when he wrote that word "faith." This letter to the Hebrews is peculiarly the letter of faith. It is a letter which supremely warns men lest they apostasize from faith in the unseen. From beginning to end, without waiting to turn to actual passages, sin is synonymous with unbelief; the sin that is in good standing around, that is, the sin that is popular, the sin that men never count vulgar, but which is so insidious that it weakens the nerve and dims the vision, and ends the possibility of strife, is unbelief. The master principle of victory is that of faith, the opposite of unbelief. This eleventh chapter, of which my text is but an introductory, explanatory word, deals with that whole subject. In this chapter, the writer makes pass before us the men of the ancient economy who wrought wonders, won victories, and made contributions toward the final consummation, and it was always by faith that they did these things. It is the story of faith.

What is faith? Faith is not merely intellectual conviction of a truth. Faith is more than intellectual conviction of a truth. Let me turn to one or two words here. In the third chapter of this letter, verses twelve to fourteen—

Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God; but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; for we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end.

Confidence is the word that I want you to remember there. Store that word in your mind.

Pass on to the nineteenth verse, and in close association with it read the eleventh verse of chapter four. "We see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief." "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience."

Store in your mind the word disobedience. Turn on to chapter six and the twelfth verse—"Be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

From this passage we will store in our memory the thought, not sluggish but patient.

In chapter ten, verse twenty-two—"Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water."

The phrase I ask you to store in your memory hence is, "with a true heart."

That is a somewhat wearisome business; but very important, for I hold that it is far more important for us to catch the real significance of the word, according to the mind of the man who wrote it, than that we should speculate about it. In the reading of those verses, my hope is that some of you, my young friends particularly, will go back to read this letter through again and find what faith is. For the purpose of our present study let us observe that faith is not only intellectual conviction; it is that confidence reposed in a statement which produces obedience. I am not sure that faith is always perfect certainty. I am not sure that there may not be living faith which is not intellectual certainty. Faith is that which in the presence of a great statement, puts confidence in it, obeys its suggestiveness, risks something, ventures something upon the declaration in order to discover whether the declaration be true or not. I am growingly convinced that there may be living faith which is not based upon absolute intellectual certainty. I am inclined increasingly to say to men, "You will come to intellectual certainty by the exercise of faith." That is one of the values of my text. Faith is the proving of unseen things. That is the way whereby men find out whether there be a God, whether there be a spiritual world, whether there are forces other than the material. The declaration is made of the existence of God. The declaration is made as to the reality of the spiritual. The declaration is made that there are forces other than those of dust. You say, "I am not sure, my intellect is not entirely convinced; yet I will exercise faith, I will put confidence in the declaration, obey its suggestion; and I will do it with patience and diligence and a true heart. If I do that, and there is no answer, I shall have the right to deny the existence of the unseen and banish the hope of ultimate realization." I have no right to begin by denying the existence of the unseen and turning from the hope of the future, on the supposition that they are not. Faith is a risk, a venture, an adventure. That is the word, adventure. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. What was he doing? Making the great adventure. If there had been newspapers in Ur of the Chaldees, I can imagine the leading article on the morning after he had left—"We regret that our respected fellow-citizen has imagined!" It was a great adventure of faith, and faith was vindicated. What this letter calls men to is the proving of the great declarations of the unseen by stepping out in obedience to what these declarations demand, in order to discover. "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God." Whereas that great word may have many applications—and I have heard many applications made of it, more or less correct—take its first significance. Christ was being criticized, men were denying the authority of His teaching and asking Him whence came His authority and His learning. Did He tell these men, "You must be intellectually convinced before you can be My disciple?" By no means. He said, "Do the thing I tell you, and in the doing of it find out whether it is true or not." This is the perpetual challenge that faces man, and faith is the great adventure. Might I not illustrate it on lower levels? Has anything ever been done in this world save upon the principle of adventure? Would the New World ever have

been discovered if there had not been one man fanatical enough to sail and sail until he found it? "Oh," but you say, "it was there." If it had not been there, he could only prove it was not there by the same action. "Unseen things? Oh, they are not there." How do you know? You cannot deny until you have made the great adventure to discover. The testimony of the centuries is that the man who does make the adventure always discovers the unseen things.

When the writer of this letter here says that faith is the proving of things not seen, I want you to notice that he is not saying what I have been saying. He does not say that faith is the adventure. He says that faith is the victorious adventure. He declares that the man of faith demonstrates, proves the things that otherwise are absolutely uncertain. When a man will hear the declaration of the unseen and will square his life to the doctrine of the unseen, refusing to put upon his own personality the measurement of dust; when he will behave as though there were a God and eternity, and a spiritual world; that man shall come at last to certainty of God and certainty of the spiritual world. Faith is the proving of unseen things. One would like to go through this eleventh chapter not so much to tell again the ancient story, as to mark the working of the principle in the case of individual men.

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for"—the realization of ideals. Faith is perfectly certain they will be realized. Faith says, "He will perfect that which concerneth me." Faith says, He shall present us faultless before the throne of God. Faith says these things. That is assurance, that is certainty. What is it based upon? He will "perfect that which concerneth me." That is an uncertain quantity. That is taking God for granted. That is the venture of faith. Faith is sure. Why? Because faith has proven the unseen. Faith has discovered God, is sure of God, and when faith is sure of God, faith is sure of the throne, and sure of the spiritual world, and sure of the reality of the things that lie beyond the material.

How am I to prove this to you? I cannot prove it to you. You must prove it for yourselves. While you challenge me to prove to you the reality of the unseen, let me give you a challenge in all earnestness and sincerity. You try to prove to that old woman that there is no God and see how you get on! She has never had more than the bread necessary for the day; her heart has been crushed with bereavement after bereavement; she has laid the sacred dust of loved ones in the grave until she is quite alone. Go to see her one day. Do you not know her? I will introduce you. She is in London. You will find her in every village. Go into her cottage. She will soon talk to you about the loved ones gone, and then suddenly with a light in her eyes that never was on land or sea, she will say, "I shall soon be with them. They will not return to me, but I shall go to them." "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Prove to her that she is wrong! You will not attempt it. You think she is wrong. You have no right to think so, until you have made her adventure, until you also have acted along the same line and have found out by that action of faith whether these things are so or not.

Mark the inter-action between these two statements. The proving of things not seen "is the assurance of things hoped for." Look at verse ten, "He looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." The assurance of the city resulted from the proving of things not seen. You say, This man was very foolish to leave a certain city for an uncertain city, to leave Ur of the Chaldees for some city never seen. Oh, but he was sure of the city. What made him sure? God. Let faith find God and faith sings the song of the city, and comes into fellowship with the future. That figure of the city runs all through the Bible until you get the figure of John in Patmos. He saw a city. Why was he sure of the city? Because he knew God. Why was his vision more detailed and more beautiful and wonderful than that of any other man? Because he had leaned his head upon the bosom of the Son of God incarnate, and had had fellowship with the Father through the Son. His song of the city was a song of the assurance of faith resulting from the proving of the things unseen. The proving of the unseen realities is the assurance of realized ideals. The proving of the unseen God is the assurance of the triumphing God. The proving of the unseen order is the assurance of ultimate compensation for all the strain and stress and sorrow. The proving of the unseen measures and weights is the assurance of the final victory of justice. Take away from me my certainty of God and of the unseen order and of the underlying justice, then I have no hope for the world. My hopes are not in parliaments, or in policies—and how much there is to shake a man if he put his hope there! London, Babylon, center of the world, celebrates the induction of its chief officer with military display and an animal feast that ought to shock civilization. When in the midst of London's poor, we can spend thousands of pounds on a feast such as that, I have no hope when I look at man. Underneath are the forces of eternity. The atmosphere of London is the fire of the ever-present God. The unseen things, men blunder through and never know them. God is not dethroned. He will build His city and bring in His triumph. Faith adventuring in obedience to the conception of the spiritual becomes certain of the spiritual and sings a song of hope on the darkest day that ever dawns.

Mark briefly in a closing word the effects of faith. Here again the chapter is better than anything I can imagine. The effect of faith is obedience. "By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Let there be in the soul certainty of God, and faith will be obedient in circumstances of contradiction and difficulty.

Not only obedience, but endurance; "By faith he," Moses, "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible."

Endured, is the word. You say, That is an ancient story and perhaps it is not true. It is true in this house. There are men and women in this house who have done the same thing; they have forsaken Egypt, they are enduring misunderstanding, persecution. How are they doing it? "As seeing Him Who is invisible." Beyond that, the writer goes on with illustrations every one of which one would like to dwell upon. From verse thirty on, he mentions names and then deeds. We will not stay with the names, but listen to the deeds, "Subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens."

Then from the major music of that melody, the writer drops suddenly to the minor melody which has in it more of victory than all the rest.

"By faith... women received their dead by a resurrection." You say, That is not so now. I know it is so now. By faith women, the most seriously smitten in the hour of bereavement, wrap their loved ones to their hearts and sing in triumph o'er the tomb. Faith is the victory. It is the inspiration of obedience and strength and might and endurance.

It is the spring of perpetual hope. Through rivers and seas of blood, men make their way onward toward the goal, lay down their life for lives in perpetual darkness of sin, lift their eyes ever toward the eastern sky though no streak of dawn be visible, and are full of exultation and expectation on the darkest day.

There is one other thing to say. Faith proves the unseen things not for itself only but for other men. By your faith you demonstrate the reality of the unseen to the world at large. You bring the unseen things into sight by your faith. By the victory your faith wins, you prove faith and prove the unseen things to the man of the world. By your strength in the hour of your agony, I come to believe in God more perfectly. By the magnificence of your overcoming, by the result of your faith, you demonstrate to me the reality of the things which you profess to believe. You say, God. I am not sure. But when you have ended your saying, I watch your doing; and I see that on the dark day there is light in your eye and a song on your lips, and I say, "You must be right; there is no secret for that triumph other than God." You demonstrate the unseen things by your faith. Faith brings out of your word a work, out of your creed a creation, out of your root, fruit full of beauty and sustenance; and men look on the work and believe the word, observe the creation and accept the creed, gather the fruit and are compelled to believe in the root. By your triumphs in the hour of pain and sorrow and agony, by your strength, by the victory with which you overcome in the pressing battle of life, you make men believe in the God you affirm to be the strength and sustenance of your life. By realization in personal life and conduct of victory, you prove to others the unseen things. Can I not put that in the simplest way possible? I put it so because it may help others. No man can ever persuade me not to believe in God, for this among other reasons. Had I no other reason, this for me would be sufficient to the end of my days. My father and my mother believed in God. Not because they said so did I believe in God, but because of what I saw their belief did for them. You cannot persuade me that they were mistaken. Their faith fastened upon facts, unseen, but facts, and I am trying to live as they lived, and I am demonstrating for myself the reality of the unseen.

So whether it be in the individual life, or in the life of the Church of God, or in the life of the world, faith is the victory. I am inclined to end tonight perhaps on your behalf, but certainly on my own, by saying to the Presence, the unseen Presence, in view of all the battle and all the sorrow and all the difficulties, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief."

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The Conditions of Coming to God

He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him.

Hebrews 11:6

The text is part of a verse which breaks in on the continuity of the chapter from which it is taken. That chapter constitutes the roll of honor of the heroes and heroines of faith. The second name on the list is Enoch, of whom it is said, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him: for before his translation he hath had witness borne to him that he had been well-pleasing unto God." Then it is declared, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." In this interpolation on the continuity of the chapter we have the one clear Biblical statement for the necessity of perpetual and fundamental Biblical assumptions. Everywhere the Bible assumes the two things that here it is declared must be believed if man is to come to God. The Biblical literature from its first majestic sentence, "In the beginning God created," to its very last sentence, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints," assumes that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him. For these things it never argues. Of the men whom it presents to us, whether they be the great historical figures of the old covenant or the new, whether they be lawgivers, or prophets, or psalmists, none argues for the existence of God, none ever attempts to prove that He is a rewarder of such as seek after Him. This is supremely, finally true in the case of the one supernal figure, Jesus. He never argued for the existence of God. He never argued for the truth that God is available to souls that seek after Him. These Biblical writers argued for

the love of God, for the justice of God, for the care of God; and some of them, in the midst of agony, questioned the love of God, questioned the justice of God, questioned the care of God; but none of them argued for Him, or for His availability to certain souls in certain conditions. The man who denies the existence of God is almost contemptuously dismissed, "The fool saith in his heart, There is no God." In my text, then, we are face to face with fundamental things.

Let us consider, first, the central idea suggested, that of coming to God; second, the declared condition in its twofold application; and, finally, the involved teaching which may be of profit to our own hearts today and always.

First, then, the central idea of coming to God. Simply add inclusively the thought is of approach to God, drawing near to God, or of putting oneself into communication with God. In expression and in experience the thought is of speaking to God in praise and prayer and of hearing God speak. Of these two exercises of the soul in addressing God, prayer is the first in experience, but praise is the higher. I believe that praise may become so profound and so continuous that there is hardly any room left for prayer. But the experience of the soul in speaking to God is, first, of prayer, then of praise. In experience and expression, drawing near to God is not only speaking to Him, whether in prayer or praise, it is hearing God speak. That is the more difficult exercise, conditioned in silence and experienced in the reception of what God has to say. Of these, the second, the reception of what God has to say to the soul, is assured to all those who keep silence before Him. But again I say it is far harder to be silent before God than to speak to God. This is one of the lost arts of the Christian Church and of the Christian soul. We have almost forgotten how to listen for God. That is the reason why we so seldom hear Him speak. I would urge all young Christian people, at whatever cost—however busy the days with pressing duties, however important it be that you do something for God—not to fail to make time in which to cease praising and praying in order to cultivate the silence of the soul. That is the condition to which God addresses Himself directly and immediately. These are the highest aspects of the expression and experience of coming to God. Light on the conception comes to us from the context. "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him: for before his translation he hath had witness borne to him that he had been well-pleasing unto God: and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him: for he that cometh unto God must believe that He is." Immediately in connection with the great declaration we have this illustration: "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." That is coming to God. "Enoch walked with God" in a godless age. Enoch was the seventh from Adam through Seth. The seventh from Adam through Cain was Lamech. Lamech and his sons were the originators of the arts and sciences, and of the enfranchisement of women. It was a wonderfully successful age, but godless. One simple soul walked with God in the godless age. That was coming to God. It involves leaving a good deal, cutting oneself off from many things; it means being out of date, peculiar, behind the times! Enoch walked with God in a godless age. With what result? God took him, took him out of the godless age while he was still in it, became his boon companion, making up for the loss of all such friendships, satisfying the inner cry of his soul, though all other things were denied him. At last God took him away from the age by translation, so that men sought for the strange, peculiar character who had been separated from all the progress of the age, and they found him not, for God had translated him. What was the deep secret of it all? Enoch believed "that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." Answering his belief, he found God, he gained the reward; he marched with God through the weary years, and at last walked out into light and life forevermore. That is coming to God.

What, then, is the condition of coming to God? I pray you note the simplicity of the statement, and its sublimity. We "must believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder." Nothing can be simpler in statement, nothing more sublime in conception; for to believe that God is, and to believe that God is a rewarder, is to have all life conditioned by that belief, to see everything personal, relative, social, national, racial, set in the light thereof. To believe that God is, and that God is a rewarder, is to have solved the riddle of the universe, and then to march along the line of the solution, knowing that presently every tangled web will be made straight, all the mists will melt, and the discords of the straining and the tension will merge into the last and final harmonies of perfect order and perfect music. It is so simple that a little child will understand it, and agree that no one will come to a person he does not believe exists, no one will come to a person he does not believe will receive him and reward him. It is quite simple; and yet fundamentally, finally sublime.

The inclusive condition is to have faith, Faith is infinitely more than intellectual conviction. Faith is intellectual conviction expressing itself in volitional obedience. To me, trust is a greater word than faith. Faith is belief, conviction; trust puts conviction into practice. There is a chair, I have faith in it; when I sit on it I trust it! I have an intellectual conviction that the chair will bear me, I could argue it, demonstrate it, lecture on it: that is faith; but when I sit on it I am trusting it. That is the faith that is demanded of men who come to God: not merely intellectual conviction, but abandonment of the whole life to the truth of which the soul is convinced—that is faith.

First, we must believe that God is. I have said in my introduction that it is never argued for in the Bible. I will stand by that declaration. Therefore, is it necessary, or wise, or will I do any good if I argue for it, seeing that the Bible never argues for it? Yes, I think it may be well to discover the reasons of our faith, for the faith demanded of us is not blind, foolish credulity. Therefore we will inquire if there be any grounds for this great assumption of the Bible.

I first declare that belief in the existence of God is the most natural activity of the human soul. Effort is required to disbelieve rather

than to believe. Wherever you find a person who does not believe that God is you have a person who has come to that condition of mind as the result of effort. I am not speaking disrespectfully of such; they may be honest; the disbelief may be the outcome of agony, but it is the outcome of effort. The human soul naturally believes in God, in the fact that He is. Is there anything more beautiful or wonderful than the story of Helen Keller? She was blind, dumb, deaf from birth, a soul imprisoned; yet with infinite, beautiful patience another soul took time to communicate with that imprisoned soul. Without the aid of eyes, or ear, or tongue, but with the touch of tenderness and delicacy of sensation, Miss Sullivan at last found Helen Keller's beautiful soul. In the process of that training, Bishop Phillips Brooks was asked to see her, and communicate to her the idea of God. With patience the great Bishop gave himself to the business. After a long while Helen Keller responded. She said to the Bishop, "Oh, I know perfectly well what you mean; I have always known Him; but I did not know what you called Him." That is a rare illustration, but by reason of its rarity the more powerful; a soul shut up in prison always knew God. It is perfectly natural to believe in God. Every child believes in God, unless you in your unutterable folly have told the child there is no God; and even then it does not believe you at first. Every child believes in God. All simple souls believe in Him. I say it is the natural attitude of the human soul.

If you are not for the moment prepared to accept that, or it may be that in your struggle after truth you have got away from that, then there are lines of proof that it would be well for you to consider. I should be inclined to ask a man who told me he did not believe in God first to appeal to his imagination. I wonder how many of you young people have read Paley's Natural Theology. You young men, lay preachers, have you read it? I find no exercise more helpful when I am preparing a sermon than to get down some old book and read it again. I have been all through Paley's Natural Theology getting ready for this sermon. It was written in 1802, and contains the argument from design, which I am asked to believe is out of date. It may be out of date, but it has never been answered or refuted. The first argument, on which he bases all the rest, is the argument of the watch. Paley says that if walking across the moorland his foot struck against a stone, and he should inquire whence it came, it is possible that he might say, That has been there forever and forever, and not be able to demonstrate the absurdity of the reply. If, instead of a stone, he found a watch there, it would be impossible to say that it had been there forever and ever. The watch argues a watchmaker. That has never been answered; it has been laughed at, counted out of date: today I do not know that there is a theological college or seminary in the world where it is studied; but it has not been refuted. I appeal, then, to my imagination. The fact that watches are improved and that the skilful watchmaker would laugh at the old-fashioned mechanism does not disprove the argument; the more complex the mechanism, the more secure is the argument for the man behind the mechanism. Since that book was written what strides we have made in our understanding of the universe! It has been discovered to us to be far more complicated, mystical, marvelous than our fathers ever suspected; but that does not invalidate the argument from design; rather this additional knowledge accentuates the argument and makes it powerful. If there can be no watch without a maker and a mind, will your imagination allow you to be satisfied to believe that the universe so rhythmic, so wonderful, so beautiful in its processes, so regular in its irregularities, so irregular in its regularities, is a mere accident, a creation without intelligence, an order without arrangement? Take a twig from an apple tree and look at it; the leaves are set in spirals, and number five is always exactly above number one. Why is number five above number one? I do not know, I have no idea; but it proves regularity, order, design. My apple trees, with their spiral blossoming, make it impossible for me to believe that there is no God. An odd number of rows will not be found in any single ear of corn, among all the multiplied millions. I do not think these things are accidents. If I try to think of creation without intelligence, of order without arrangement, of man, the most marvelous thing in all the universe, without the God Who thought him, created him, my imagination is in revolt. Consequently, my appeal to imagination becomes an appeal to reason. I declare that for myself it is far easier to believe that God is than to believe that He is not.

I make my appeal finally to the manifestation of God which He has made of Himself in human history in a Man named Jesus, Who claimed to be one with the hidden God, Whose influence through two millenniums has been to make men believe in the one hidden God, Whose most glorious victories in the two millenniums have been the victories of the growing beauty of man's conception of the God Whom He claimed to reveal. We cannot decide whether God is until we have dealt with Jesus of Nazareth, have listened to His claims, and have begun to consider the influence He has exerted. Countless millions of souls have walked with God because they have trusted in Jesus, have found infinite comfort in the Divine compassion because they have dared to follow the lonely Galilean peasant; have felt the force, the energy of God sustaining them in conflict and in suffering because they have loved Jesus. We must remember also that the great conception men have of God, even though they may be denying Jesus His Deity, has nevertheless come to the world as the result of His presence therein and His teaching of the sons of men.

But there must be more than believing that God is. There must be belief "that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." The general idea is that this means that man must believe in the moral government of God. Of course, that is involved. It is impossible to believe that God has abandoned the highest results of His creative power, man, and the moral element in man. It is impossible to believe that God rolls the seasons round, decks the sod with beauty, clothes the trees with verdure, maintains the equilibrium of all things in the great process of His order, and has nothing to do with man. It is impossible to believe that God cares for man on the physical side of his being and nothing for his moral nature. All that is involved, but that is not the declaration of the text. The declaration is of the availability of God to certain souls on certain conditions. Those souls and conditions are revealed in the words rendered in the Revised Version, "them that seek after Him," and in the Authorized Version, "such as diligently seek Him." I think the

Revised Version has lost something by omitting the word "diligently." As a matter of fact, there is but one word in the Greek, but it is a strong word, and we need something more than the ordinary word "seek" to convey its meaning. The word means to investigate, to crave, to demand. God is a rewarder of such as investigate, crave, demand Him; or, in the simpler words of Jesus, such as ask, seek, knock. The attitude of soul described is persistent determination to approach God. God is not found of men who indulge in dilettante fooling. When the soul feels its need, when the soul gropes in the night, and, knocking, inquires, then God becomes a rewarder, a Payer of wages—that is the word, a Remunerator, one who gives what is demanded, pays over what is asked. God comes to the soul that comes to Him.

What proofs have we that God is a rewarder of them that seek after Him? There are hours in which the soul seems unable to find God. Said Eliphaz to Job, "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace." Said the man in his agony in reply, "O that I knew where I might find Him.... Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, when He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him." The human soul knows that experience; but let us never forget that Job did find Him. Through the very process in which he thought he could not find God Job was preparing himself to find Him. By the strenuousness of his endeavor, by the stress of his agony, by the strong crying of his soul after God, he was preparing for the coming of God. The very pain and suffering and tribulation and unrest which seem to prove that God cannot be found may be the exercise of soul through which He will be found.

I find in the nature of man the first proof that God may be found. Man is made to ask, to seek, to knock. In her beautiful book, Laddie, Mrs. Gene Stratton Porter makes one of her characters say of man that he is a praying animal. Though he never prays, if he be in sudden peril of shipwreck, fire, or death, he will pray. Man has a natural capacity for prayer, and there is no half measure in this universe. Has that bird a wing? Then there is air in which to poise it. Has that fish a fin? Then there is water in which to use it. Does your soul go out in prayer? Then there is a God to pray to Who will answer prayer.

Another proof that God gives Himself to such as seek Him is to be found in the experience of men. If testimony is to be accepted as evidence on any subject, why not on this? Why do men rule out the testimony of souls who declare that they have prayed and have been answered. It is unscientific to rule out such testimony. There are tens of thousands who know what it is to pray and to be answered, to ask and to have, to seek and to find, to knock and to see the door swing open. Their testimony is not merely the testimony of their avowal. It is also the testimony of their lives, transfigured by their belief, and made beautiful, pure, compassionate, glorious.

The final proof is the testimony of the Man of Nazareth, Who, whatever doubts we may have concerning the meaning of some of the things He said, has left no room for doubt that He believed, and intended men to believe, that God is available to souls, will answer them, will reward them, will come to them in grace, in succor, in strength, in love, in help—when they seek after Him.

To believe that God is, is to believe in One Who knows all, is infinitely wise, is always close at hand, is all powerful, and is love. If that be true, then how easy it is to come to God. There is nothing to explain when you come, He knows it all. There is no journey to take to reach Him:

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

Effort is unnecessary; in silence, and in the quietness of the soul that has ceased its struggling God makes Himself known. "Perfect love casteth out fear."

To believe that God is a rewarder is to believe, first, that He is interested in me. I can think of Him as interested in the universe, but to learn the corollary of that, that nothing is too small for His attention is the wonderful thing. God is great not only in the infinitude of immensity, but in the exactitude of littleness. Consequently, He is interested in me, in what I wear, in what I eat, in where I live, in my amusements. Think how easy it is to come to Him; no persuasion is necessary. That whole conception of prayer that declares we must persuade God is erroneous. Jesus gave us the figure of the importunate widow to prove that we need not be importunate. Importunity was necessary in the case of the unjust judge; it is not necessary in the case of God. Refusal is not possible in the heart of love, except that love will refuse what would harm us.

Nevertheless, the text reveals the need of urgency. The belief necessary involves conviction of the necessity for demand, craving, seeking. Such is the only condition to which God can give Himself.

Finally, do not let us forget the opening declaration of the letter from which the text is taken: "God hath spoken... unto us by His Son... the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance." Christ stands to me in the place of God, and He is God. So that when I would come to God I come to Christ, the Man of my humanity, so that this frail imagination of mine may go out to Him apprehendingly. As I do so, I find I have included in the grasp of my comprehension the vastness of God and eternity. I come to God because I believe that He is, having seen Him in Christ; because I believe that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him, having seen Christ receive publicans and sinners, and heard Him say to them as they thronged to Him, "Him that cometh to me I will in no

wise cast out." Believing these things I come to Him, and He comes to me, and we walk and talk together.

230 - Hebrews 11:10 - Christian Citizenship: The Building of the City

Christian Citizenship: The Building of the City

The city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

Hebrews 11:10

This is now the third Sunday evening that we have turned to the subject of Christian citizenship.

Speaking on the first evening from the words occurring in this same letter, "We have not here an abiding city," we considered the reason why men of faith have always had to make that affirmation; and have to make it still. The cities of men are cities in which the principle of selfishness is the master principle; and the law of life is that of the survival of the strongest; and the character of the citizens is to a large extent that of sordidness. The pilgrims of faith are those who have entered into life by self-death; who believe not only in the survival of the fittest—in that—but also in the possibility of the salvation of the most unfit; and whose law of life is that of sacrifice. Therefore, such can find no abiding city in the world.

We then considered the true attitude of the pilgrims of faith toward the cities of men. While it is true that "we have not here an abiding city," this also ought to be true concerning us, "We seek after the city which is to come"; not by gazing at the stars and waiting for the coming of a city; not by seclusion from the ordinary and everyday life of these cities of men; but by first seeing the vision of the ultimate purpose of God, and then by the response of life to all that vision means, the realization within the individual experience of the principles of the Divine Kingdom; and finally by earnest, actual, persistent effort in harmony with these things.

Now all this has seemed to be most excellent; but we are constrained to say: What of the chaos and misery in the midst of which we live? What of the sad habit of the Christian Church of withdrawing itself from the great centers of the life of the city? Or, what—and this is perhaps the question which overwhelms us most often—after all can be the value of our small contribution toward the building of the city of God and the bringing in of His Kingdom?

The answer to all these suggestions is contained within the compass of our text, "The city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." We shall surely be depressed and overwhelmed unless we learn the lesson which is crystallized into this declaration of the writer of this letter, that the Builder and Maker of the city is God. If that fact do but take possession of our hearts then we shall be content to live out our little day in the midst of the scaffolding, seeming to see very little of the beauty of the city, yet knowing that the plan is in His mind, He is the Architect; that the power is in Himself, He is the Framer; and that, therefore, at last the city must be built.

Let us remember as we come to this consideration, that the material city is but the shell containing the city itself. As today we speak of a school and think of the building, and yet know that the building is not the school; as today we speak of a club, and look upon the building, but know that the club is not the building; or finally as today we speak of a church and think of the building in which we gather, but know that the church is not the building; so let us remember when we speak of the city, we think, and properly think, of an actual material city, full of glory and beauty, built in the ultimate economy of God; but the glory and beauty of the material will be the outcome of that life which constitutes the city. The remembrance of that at the very beginning of our meditation will enable us to see that things which seem to us full of discouragement, may after all prove to be methods of God, and the very slowness over which we lament in our foolishness is assuredly part of the process necessary for the creation of a life so strong and true and abiding that at last the material city will result.

Let us glance at "The city which hath the foundations," as it was revealed to the Seer of the Galilean Lake in the Isle of Patmos. If you ask me if I really believe that some day, somehow, out of the mystic distance of heaven, there will descend to this earth an actual city, I reply that I am not Sadducean enough to think that only the things I can see and handle today are the real and final things. Whether that be so or not, for today, in the midst of the spiritual conflict, we are to take this vision and find in it spiritual elements which are of abiding value; and therefore, I shall for the sake of brevity pass by the descriptions of the city as to material construction, all of which are valuable and I think full of suggestion. I want first to set that vision in relation to the whole movement of the Book. The city according to the story of that Book is not heaven. Neither is the city to be built in the millennium, but beyond it. I am particularly anxious not to enter into controversy with your mental convictions. The writer may have been mistaken. I am only reminding you of what he wrote. There are no detailed pictures of the millennium in this Book. There are descriptions of events, full of awe and sublime majesty and terrible judgment, which usher in the millennial reign; but the millennium itself is dismissed in this Book in three or four verses in the chapter preceding that in which we have the story of the city. At the close of the millennium John says that the devil will be loosed again after having been chained for a thousand years. Another period of swift judgment will then fall upon the earth; after which, the great white throne and final assize, full of awful majesty.

Beyond all that, as to order, will come the city of God. This city will not be built immediately. The ultimate victory is postponed; not that God has abandoned His work, He is the Architect, the Framer, and He is building; but the victory is not yet. I shall be able to do my day's work better, however, if I can see something of the ultimate victory; and to John was given this wonderful vision of the city that hath the foundations, flashing with the splendor of the precious stones of earth, which in their preciousness are symbols of principle suffused with passion. A city in its form pyramidal, lying upon its base foursquare; a city with walls, and those of jasper, the stone symbolic of conflict, full of beauty.

The subject of supreme interest to us as we look on, out of the midst of the conflict, is that of the conditions of its life. The government of the city is that of the ever-present God, influencing all its inhabitants. All the life of that city is worship. No temple therein; because the Lord Almighty and the Lamb are the temple; and all life has become worship, because all life is communion.

Every city, according to these Eastern figures had a burgess roll, and this city has its burgess roll. A burgess is one who inhabits a walled town, having a tenement there which is his own property. The burgesses of this city are those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. The defiled of every class, such as work abominations and make a lie are excluded.

The vision of this city is that of the great Theocracy which is the true democracy. It is the vision of the true democracy which is the great Theocracy. All is of heaven; the ideal, the process, the realization. It is a city which comes out of heaven. The plan of it was not born in the brain of any man. It is a city entirely of the earth; the material is of the earth, gathered from the earth, returning to the earth. It is the city which Abraham saw but never reached. It is the city toward which all the pilgrims of faith have been looking, and in the building of which they have been co-operating with God by faith, but none of them have reached it. Abraham has not reached it yet. Moses has not entered into it yet. The great seers, and prophets, and psalmists of the past; statesmen, in the economy of God, who have seen it but have never found it. "These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise." They saw the city, but they have not yet entered it. The goal toward which they ran was not their crowning in heaven, but God's crowning on earth. The city which they saw was not in a land beyond, this to which they hoped to go; but this whole earth, governed by God, from a central city, the metropolis in which God is King, and which therefore is the Theocracy, the people constituting the instrument through which in every age He makes known His will. It is therefore the final and ultimate Theocracy. All attempts to realize the Democracy apart from God will issue in the most disastrous failure; and every attempt to preach the Theocracy which forgets the Democracy, will issue in failure equally disastrous.

Of this city the Architect and Framer is God. The whole plan is in the mind of God. What that is, no man can see finally, perfectly. Some vision has been revealed from time to time to men of vision, and in the vision they have seen something of the glory. Abraham saw it; Moses saw it. Isaiah saw it. Luther saw the city of God. Cromwell saw the city of God. Mazzini saw the city of God. William Booth has seen the city of God.

To take that latest illustration; what drove General Booth into that method which some people, who are nearsighted, criticize, the method connected with the social endeavor? What made him want to care for the flotsam and jetsam of this great city of London and all the cities? What put into his heart the passionate discontent with unholy conditions of life? His vision of the city of God. All the discontent that is constructive is born of a great content with the ultimate purpose of God. To have seen this vision of the city is to be forever restless in every other city, and so "We have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come." The inspiring vision which has created the pilgrims and warriors and builders of faith has been the vision of the city which is in the plan of God. No man has seen it wholly. No man has been able, if he has seen it wholly, to communicate his vision to other men. The thing is too great to be finally stated. The vision is too great for two eyes to see and one mind, by symbols of pen or brush, to convey to the minds of other men. The city of God; not heaven, but the city according to the heavenly pattern; the heavenly city on earth.

Through all the processes of human history, God has been working toward this end. When Josiah Strong wrote that little book, *The New Era*, he used an illustration full of illumination as he reminded us of how, when Pilate wrote the superscription and had it nailed to the Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, he wrote other and better than he knew. That, which so far as Pilate was concerned, was only a method of annoying the priests, was the writing of God, and the method was of God. The superscription, "King of the Jews," was written in three languages, the Roman, the Hebrew, and the Greek. This, so far as Pilate intended, because Roman soldiers were there and he wanted them to read it, and Greek merchantment and travelers would be there and he wanted them also to read it, that they all might mock and laugh at the priests. There was a profound significance in the writing of that superscription in the three great languages of the hour, the languages of the three peoples most powerful in the affairs of men. Hebrew was the language of spiritual religion. Greek was the language of intellectual strength. Latin was the language of imperial empire.

God was building by all those great world powers. God was at work, in the midst of the Hebrew religion, in the midst of Greek culture, and at the heart of Roman power. Through all these, there were operative in the world forces making possible the mission and mastery of Christ. Not idly does Scripture declare that He came in the fulness of times. Let me say a thing that I hesitate to say in this way, lest there should seem to lurk in it something of irreverence, but yet let me say it: Had He come sooner He would have

come too soon; had He come later He would have come too late. He came when the Hebrew nation had prepared in the history of the world the great spiritual atmosphere resulting from the monotheistic doctrine of God. The history of that people is a history of persistent sin against God. Oh the greyness of it all. But there is wonderful sunshine in it too. My spirit has been elated in many an hour of study as I have seen the overruling of God, the chaos coming to cosmos; God forevermore making the wrath of men to praise Him, and restraining the remainder. However much the Hebrew nation failed, after the captivity they never again set up an idol. They went back to their land a broken, poor, miserable remnant only, under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah; with no king, no prophet, no priest; but a people who had learned the lesson with which they started, "Hear O Israel Jehovah thy God is one." When that master spiritual truth was embodied in the world's history, the Christ came. God was building.

Or, if we turn to the Greek outlook, and think of the wonderful history of Greek culture and refinement, that history of intellectual giants which made it possible to speak of Athens as the fairest shrine of pagan humanity; if there be no other thing to be said, let this at least be said, the Greek had provided, for that time, a language which was of universal use, in some dialect of which, the story of the Christ could be written, in some dialect of which, the messengers of the Cross could preach through all the known world and be understood. God was building. Rome was the center of imperial power, and if you want to know the value of it, read again the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters and keep your eye on Paul; the restlessness with which he wanted to get to Rome, the eagerness with which he looked toward it, the haste which made him unable to wait, and compelled him to sit down and write the Roman letter. What was it that made Paul want to reach Rome? It was not the restlessness of the tourist. It was the passion of the missionary. He knew that from Rome, the strategic center of the world, there were roads leading out to all the known world along which her legions traveled; and he saw that they ought to be captured for the traveling of the legions of the Cross. All the forces contributed to prepare the way for His coming in the fulness of the times. God was building.

But there was the preparation not only of what these forces contributed; there was the preparation of their failure. Hebraism, when He came, was degenerate; the home of ritualism and hypocrisy; and the spiritual ideal was not enough to create spiritual religion. By the failure of the past the way was prepared for His coming. The history of Greek intellectualism had become the history of Greek bestiality. When Paul came to Athens, he found Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who knew nothing of Epicurius or the original Stoics; men who had degraded their philosophies. Then He came, when the way was prepared for Him by this failure; and His evangel was presently published by the Hellenist-Hebrew Paul, and redeemed all that was best in Greek strength. Rome had failed; voluptuousness and brutality were the two facts of her government. By that failure the way was made for the building of the new empire, for the coming in of the Kingdom, for the proclamation of the new evangel. He came, and coming found the past had prepared for Him, the failure had created His opportunity; and in Him, all the essential forces of these three world powers were taken hold of, and their opportunity was created anew. The Spiritual religion; the opportunity for intellectualism; the method of true government, making for abiding strength, all came through Him. These things were the things after which men had groped, and by so doing had made way for His coming, and the imparting of His power. In that groping they had failed, and had made necessary the coming of Another; and He came, not only for the salvation of individual men; let us never make that mistake, for that He came, oh yes, but for more, to take hold of the essential world forces and to compel them to cooperate with the enterprises of God. So God was building, and has ever been building.

There is a great work waiting to be done among our young people. I want someone to write the history of England as Isaiah reveals the history of Judah. I do not think it would be popular in England, but it needs writing; the history of how God has been at work and is at work still, the history of the fact that amid all the chaos and break-up and disruption God is building; a history of the fact that through the centuries and today God is at work.

Ah, Habakkuk, thy trouble has been our trouble. What is God doing? I will get up to the watch tower and see. And he climbed, and God said to him, I am at work, but if I told you what I am doing you would not believe Me. I am bringing the Chaldeans to do My work. And Habakkuk was more amazed than ever; the Chaldeans are not in the covenant, the Chaldeans are people outside the privilege of the Divine government. How can God use the Chaldeans? Once again, I will away to the watch tower. What was the end of his watching? The great psalm, the psalm of a great triumph, a psalm in which a man could say amid the break-up and disruption:

—
For though the fig tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The labour of the olive shall fail.
And the fields shall yield no meat;
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
Yet will I rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Whose Builder and Maker is God.

This is a dark day, you tell me. There are disappointing things abroad, heartbreaking things abroad; Missionary Societies languishing for lack of funds, indifference spreading over the Christian Church. Away with you; God is building! That is the highest of vision, and if you deny it me, then I will bow my head and die for very heartbreak. But if you will grant it me, I will build, and fight, and sing, because the city will be built, and God's victory will be won.

There are abundant proofs of the tending of humanity toward that ultimate city of God. Do not be at all alarmed at that statement. Some people are very much alarmed. Do you not think the world is getting worse? I am asked. Certainly! But do you not think it is getting better? I know it is! I mean that in all seriousness. Wheat and darnel, "Let both grow together until the harvest." Some men are always looking at the darnel and they say the world is getting worse. Some men see only the wheat and they say the world is getting better. The man who sees the whole field of the world, sees the darnel and the wheat, he sees that evil is becoming more evil and growing into clearer manifestation in all its dastardly devilishness; but he sees that the world is being prepared for the coming of the King. I affirm that there are abundant proofs of the tending of humanity toward the city of God. Compare the world when Christ came with the world today. Then the nations were in thralldom, class in bondage to class. Have you ever thought of this very remarkable statement in the gospel story. "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be numbered, and it is declared that every man went up to Jerusalem." I do not know whether that impresses you, but to me it is an amazing thing. If they want to number us in this country, they have to come to us; we would not think of going up to report ourselves to be numbered. It is a very slight thing, but it is a revelation of the despotism that existed in those days, but which is gone in the countries of the world influenced by Christianity, and gone forever. Spiritual freedom is becoming civic liberty. Divine Fatherhood is whispering the story of human brotherhood. Laws are being made, or men are attempting to discover laws, for the ennoblement of the people. Care for the helpless is a new element in human history.

If you point to the evil that abounds, and tell me of the breakdown of these very principles to which I have been referring, then I tell you that as it was, so shall it be again. Not only the work of the great Hebrew, Roman and Greek people prepared for Christ; but their failure also prepared for Him. The very fact that failure is everywhere today is to me a revelation of the necessity for some new work of God in the world; and the corroboration of the great prophecies of Scripture, which declare that by another crisis, an advent in the history of humanity, He will at last establish His Kingdom.

Not consciously, any more than Greece or Rome of old did consciously prepare for His coming, but surely all the forces are preparing for that Advent.

"God's in His heaven," therefore ultimately, finally, "All's right with the world." Failure itself shall prepare the way for the coming triumph. He will again purge His floor and gather the wheat into His garner and burn the chaff. The city will be built, the victory won, God vindicated.

I looked; aside the dust-cloud rolled—
The Waster seemed the Builder too;
Upspringing from the ruined old I saw the new.
Take heart! The Waster builds again—
A charmed life old goodness hath;
The tares may perish—but the grain
Is not for death.
God works in all things; all obey
His first propulsion from the night
Wake thou and watch!
The world is gray with morning light!

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The Cities of Men and the City of God

Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

There is an irresistible charm about this passage of Scripture. The suggestions that lie within its compass appeal to us. The mystery of the cloud of witnesses; the strenuous reality of the description of the present experience of the saints under the figure of a race; and, finally, the lonely splendor of the Lord of Faith. It seems a ruthless thing to dissect and analyze a passage so full of beauty as

this passage undoubtedly is; and yet this is in part what I propose to do, and that for a very simple reason—that it seems to me that a partial interpretation has robbed it of much of its spacious and far-reaching value. A very common and popular interpretation of the passage is that the writer of the letter is here describing the individual race of a Christian soul through this world toward the mystic and mysterious heaven that lies beyond it; that as the runner presses along his way he is watched in his running by great companies of those who have gone before; and that, in order to win his individual crowning, he is urged to lay aside weights and the sin that doth so easily beset. That interpretation I have referred to as being partial; I am inclined to use a much stronger word, and to say that it is wholly and absolutely inaccurate. I know something of the strenuousness of the individual race. I believe with all my soul in the ultimate glory of the heaven that lies beyond our vision. I am perfectly certain that it is necessary, in order to run that individual race, that there should be the laying aside of weights and of the easily besetting sin; but if the passage be taken, as it ought to be taken, in its contextual relationship, we shall see that the argument is wider in application.

The first word of the passage drives us in honesty to that which has preceded it. A passage commencing with the word "therefore" must of necessity be an appeal based upon an argument already advanced. The argument of this passage lies in all that has preceded it. Let us refresh our minds by passing over the content. The letter opens with a thunderclap. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." The writer of the letter takes two things for granted—God, and God's revelation of Himself to man. He then immediately begins the specific work of his letter. He is most evidently writing to those whose outlook has been narrow. The Hebrew people had come to think of themselves as the elect people of God, and imagined in their own unutterable narrowness and folly that God had forgotten or neglected the other nations of the earth. When members of this nation passed from Judaism into Christianity, all the things that ratified them in their ancient convictions were broken down and swept away. They believed that their economy had been administered by angels; that their leaders had been Moses, who led them out of slavery, and Joshua, who led them into the land; that their system of priesthood and religion was lonely and final.

And now mark the method of the writer. He shows them how in Christ are realized the underlying principles which they have so largely lost sight of; and that all the things which they would make their own peculiar possession are fulfilled by Christ. Ministry by angels, he does not deny; but the Son is above the angels, and the new economy means the ministration of the Son. Led out by Moses, he does not deny; but Moses led out, and could not lead in. The new leader leads out and leads in. Led in by Joshua, he agrees; but Joshua, having led them in, could not give them rest. The new Leader leads them in, and, Himself entering into rest, makes rest possible to all who trust in Him. Have they imagined the priesthood was peculiar to them? Let them remember that Melchisedek was not of their tribe or nation, and yet was a priest of God; and the last priest of humanity was after the pattern of Melchisedek, and in His great Priesthood all other priesthoods are forever swept away. So he leads them to see that in the Christ all the things intended in the creation of their national life are realized. But he declares that these things are fulfilled for the sake of the whole world; and gradually, as the argument proceeds, in stately measure and in unanswerable logic, the horizon is put further back, the outlook becomes more spacious, and the light becomes more glorious.

Finally, approaching the appeal on the basis of the teaching, he leads his readers through that wonderful gallery of the heroes and heroines of the past, and comes to the words of my text.

This appeal is that of a master of method. Appeal is made to the whole man. First to the intellect: "Seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." At the center, to the will: "Let us lay aside"—"let us run." Finally, with a master touch, to the emotion at its highest: "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame."

I propose this evening to bring you especially to the central appeal. Let all the language of appeal to the intellect, and the tender language of appeal to the emotion—both of which we will return to in time—be out of sight. What is it the writer says? Brethren, he says a very simple thing, and this is it: "Let us run the race." What race? The burden of my message tonight is an answer to that inquiry.

In speaking of Abraham, he has declared: "He looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." Of the others he declared: "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..." "God is not ashamed of them to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city..." "These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

Thus it is evident that the race which he urges upon those to whom he writes is not a race toward a heaven out of sight, but a race toward a city. Now let me stand away a little from the letter to the Hebrews and take the whole Bible as an illustration. My Bible opens in a garden, but it closes in a city. To me that fact is suggestive. A city expresses the result of a nation's dealing with a garden. In the heart of man there is a passion for the city. It is there because it is intended that it should be there. God's ideal of man is that he should take the garden and dress it, and bring out its final and ultimate result; and the last result of the garden of man is

the establishment of a kingdom, the building of a city, the accomplishment of all the larger reaches of human life. And it is for that ultimate city that the men of the past have always hoped. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees and set his face toward a city, not a city to be reached beyond the grave, but a city to be built in the world; not a beatific condition of life when the pathway of dust has come to an end, but the establishment in the world of a Divine order. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven. Thy name be hallowed. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done"—by men and women who have done with the world and reached heaven? No, a thousand times no! What then? "Thy name be hallowed. Thy Kingdom is come. Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth." The prayer which Christ taught us to pray—which summarizes all prayer, truly understood—is not a prayer that we may be able to pass through the world and win a heaven that lies beyond; it is a prayer that here, in this world, in the midst of its sin and its sorrow and its sighing, the will of God may be done, and the name of God perfectly hallowed by the coming of His Kingdom. In other words, the passion of the man of faith is not to hurry through the world and win heaven. The true passion of the man of faith is that God shall win the world and govern it for the blessing of humanity, for the healing of its wounds, for the ending of its sorrows, for the canceling of its sins, for the establishment of the reign of right and truth, and peace and blessing over the whole world. And as these men of the olden time, according to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, moved out into loneliness, leaving behind them established orders, they did it in order that they might find a new order—found a new order—in the world, and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. And every great movement and appeal in the history of national life has been in that direction. For, not only among the Hebrews did God work His will; not only them did He guide by the Shekinah; He has guided other nations. Long years ago a band of men went to a land across the sea. For what? So far as they are concerned—I am not dealing with the issue—to establish the Kingdom of God. And, slowly, through all the centuries, men have been looking for that.

I pray you remember the essential things of the final city. It is a city of exclusion and inclusion. What are the things excluded? The conditions. Tears, and mourning, and crying and pain. The character. The fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable. The conduct. Murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and liars. Night, the opportunity for evil; the unclean, the occasion of evil; that which makes a lie, the occupation of evil; the curse, which is the outcome of evil. And included within that city I find light, and life, and love, order and radiant beauty. It is a picture of the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of God in the world. The ultimate of faith's vision and desire is the establishment of the Divine order in the world, the setting up of the Kingdom of God on this earth. The race that we are called on to run is a strenuous race toward the building of His city, the setting up of His kingdom, and the banishing from the broad earth of everything that is contrary to His ideal and contrary to the well-being of those whom He has created and whom He loves.

The appeal of the writer is to rise above everything that is narrow in outlook, to see the broader purposes of God, to gather into the affection all the round world, and to hasten along the line of earnest endeavor, the coming of the day when the city of God shall be built, and when men shall find in His perfect government their own final and perfect social order.

If that be the central intention of the text, I pray you now mark the preliminary word. In order to run that race the writer charges us, "Let us lay aside." What are we to lay aside? "Every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset." I think I need hardly tarry to speak of the meaning of the passage as to the weights that are to be laid aside. What is a weight? Anything that hinders running toward that goal. Love may be a weight, learning may be a weight. I am mentioning the highest things of set purpose, feeling that it is not necessary to discuss the lower. Anything that dims the vision of the ultimate, that kills the passion, is a weight. "Ye did run well. What did hinder you?" Well, that which hindered you is the weight, and, in view of this large purpose, in view of this ultimate victory, in view of this stupendous intention of God, beneficent, and glorious, and beautiful, the writer charges the men who name the name of Christ to lay aside the weights. Yet, brethren, I think he touches something that lies nearer to the center of the whole necessity, when he says, "and the sin that doth so easily beset." What is the sin that doth so easily beset? I recognize the difficulty of answering the question. I take that word and bluntly translate, "the sin in good standing around." I suggest to you that the word means just exactly that—that the plain translation touches its deepest meaning. Sin in good standing around, sin that is not looked upon as vulgar. The word sin here must be interpreted by its use throughout this letter, and the sin against which he warns those who would run the race is the sin of unbelief. In order to understand what the "unbelief" of this letter is, I must now inquire what is the "belief" that the letter enjoins. Not mental conviction of a truth. That is not the belief of this letter, or of the New Testament. What, then, is belief? The answer of the life to the truth of which a man is convinced. The Greek εἰς with the accusative suggests infinitely more than belief on. I may believe every word of the Gospel of Christ, and be an immoral man. But if I believe into it, if I answer its claim, and walk in its light, and obey its command, and trust myself to its infinite and gracious promises, that is the belief which saves. Unbelief, therefore, is refusal to answer the light, and that is the sin that doth so easily beset. It is sin in good standing around. Now, I say no word against that intellectual attitude that demands a reason, but I do say that if we are to co-operate with God toward the building of His city, we must lay aside the sin of unbelief. Unbelief in what? In God, in man, and in the ultimate building of the city. Kadesh-Barnea still has its lesson. They came to the border, and they sent up into the strange new country spies to spy out the land, and they brought back from Kadesh-Barnea their report. There was a majority report, and there was a minority report, and, as is usual in such cases, the minority report was the true one. What was the difference between the majority and the minority report? The difference in the placing of a "but." Hear, I pray you, the majority report. "The land is a fair land, and a good land; the grapes are luscious grapes; the rivers are beautiful rivers; the hills and the valleys are full of verdure and beauty, but there are walled cities and there are giants."

The minority report put the "but" a little further on, and it said, "The land is a fair land and a good land; the grapes are luscious grapes; the rivers are beautiful rivers; the hills and the valleys are full of verdure; there are walled cities and there are giants; but God will give us the land."

We are going to make no contribution toward the building of the city, and the bringing in of righteousness, if we lose our clear vision of God; but we shall fight our fight, and sing our song, and put in our day of toil with hope and a song of gladness, if the vision of God be kept clear before the mind.

It is equally true that we must lay aside the sin of unbelief in man. The moment we talk about man as being hopeless, we are unfit to build the city of God. We can strike no blow for the delivery of man from the things we lament unless we can see clearly stamped upon every face the hallmark of the Divine image. Unless we see behind the ruin the capacity, unless we see as Christ saw that, however low man is, however broken, however bruised, however spoiled, he is yet worth dying for—unless you and I have that vision, we can do nothing to build the city. There must be belief in the coming of the city. Have you begun to say, It will never come? I remember twenty years ago hearing that prince among our preachers, Alexander Maclaren, of Manchester, say a simple and beautiful thing that has been an inspiration to me through all my work. "Let no man say, because the day seems as though it never would reach high noon, that therefore its light will never be perfect day. Let us, rather, say how fair will that day be on which the twilight dawn has lasted 1,900 years." That is the language of the man of faith. That is the language of the man who knows that at last the victory must be won, and the will of God be perfectly done. If we are to run that race we must lay aside the easily besetting sin of unbelief, and with firm confidence in God and in man, and, in the ultimate, we must give ourselves to the travail and the toil that makes the coming sure.

And now, in a closing word, in order to inspire these people with that faith, the writer of the letter reminds them of the cloud of witnesses. The writer is not describing witnesses who watch us, but those who witness to us. You say to me tonight, It is easy to condemn unbelief, but look at the slow moving of the centuries—the dark places of the earth. No, says the writer, see the witnesses! And I stop there, at the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, which you know so well. Abel worshiped, and Enoch walked, and Noah worked. Abraham obeyed, obtained, offered. Isaac and Jacob foretold. Moses, being preserved, chose. Israel had its Exodus, and came into possession. The writer goes on to say that time would fail him to tell of Gideon and of Barak, and of Samson and of Jephthah, of David also, of Samuel and of the prophets. And the surprising thing is the men he puts in. You would not have put Samson in there. You would not have put Jephthah in that list. O heart of man, take courage! Is there faith in thee? Even though thou dost blunder and seem to fail, thy faith is accounted for righteousness, for faith is something that helps towards the coming of the city. And then, as though deeds were most important, he masses them—"subdued," "wrought," "obtained," "stopped the mouths of lions," "quenched," "escaped," "waxed valiant."

The story is not ended. Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs, seers, visionaries—the men of today at whom we laugh are the men of faith. The vision creates a passion, the passion becomes a mission, and the life is lived till eventide. But the city is not built.

The fog's on the world today,
'Twill be on the world to-morrow;
Not all the strength of the sun
Can drive his bright spears thorough.
Yesterday and today
Have been heavy with care and sorrow,
I should faint if I did not see
The day that is after to-morrow.
The cause of the peoples I serve
To-day in impatience and sorrow
Once more is defeated; but yet 'twill be won
The day that is after to-morrow.
And for me with spirit elate,
The mire and the fog I press through,
For heaven shines under the cloud
Of the day that is after to-morrow.

Seeing the witnesses, I take new heart and hope, and run my race.

But, last of all, looking not at the witnesses, but at the One Witness. Looking unto Jesus, the Author, the File Leader, the One Who goes first, Who takes precedence, and the Vindicator of faith—looking to Him. And if I look to Him, what do I see? I see One Who saw a vision, and for the joy that was set before Him, not the joy of escaping from the earth, but the joy of bringing God's government into the earth; not the joy of being away from the fight and the battle, but the joy of knowing that the issue of the fight

and the ultimate of the battle is the establishment of the Divine order, He endured the cross, despising the shame.

Oh for the city of God! Oh for the coming of His Kingdom, for the healing of the wounds of humanity, for the ending of its strife, for the dawning of the last day, bright and glorious! If we would help it, we must run this race. There is no more pregnant or suggestive word in all the Gospel stories concerning our Lord than this. Hear it, I pray you, and I have done. It is a simple sentence, but unutterably sublime. "He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." What did He see? Jerusalem, hostile, waiting to arrest and murder Him, but "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." What did He see? Jerusalem doomed by its own sin—the sword hanging over it, but "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." What did He see? Through Jerusalem, hostile and doomed, Jerusalem—the mother of us all, rebuilt—the order established, the victory won, and "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

All the cities of the world today are hostile, are doomed, but are to be rebuilt. And it is the work of the Christian Church of whatever name or nation to see that ultimate vision, and then to begin the building just where they are, knowing that He will bring on the top stone, and that we shall join in the shout of the ultimate victory. Amen.

232 - Hebrews 12:27 - Things Shaken--Things Not Shaken

Things Shaken – Things Not Shaken

And this word, 'Yet once more', signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain.

Hebrews 12:27

The first value of these words is that they constitute a Christian interpretation of a phrase in a Hebrew prophecy. Their final value is that they reveal a perpetual method of God in His dealing with men.

As to the first of these. The prophet Haggai was looking back to God's shaking of the world by the giving of the Law, and he was looking on to the shaking of the world by the coming of Christ. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews had exactly the same double outlook. The letter was written to Hebrews who were filled with fear because the Hebrew economy was being shaken to its foundations by the Christian faith, and the writer reminded them of what their own prophet Haggai had said. By the giving of the moral law the whole world had been shaken with a shaking symbolized by the Mount which burned with fire. Then he reminded them that the shaking in the midst of which they lived, and of which they were tremendously afraid, was in fulfilment of the prophecy. God was indeed shaking; shaking the order of things that He Himself had made, but the purpose of that shaking was that things which can be shaken should be removed so that things which cannot be shaken should be seen to abide. The final value of this word, then, is that of its interpretation of this shaking. It is a revelation of a method of God. This method of God was recognized by all these old prophetic writers and as surely by the New Testament writers. Ezekiel thus gave expression to a Divine determination and so revealed the same Divine method; "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it:... until He come Whose right it is; and I will give it Him," the Whole fact was expressed by Paul in his Corinthian letter when speaking of God's anointed and appointed King, His own well-beloved Son, He said of Him: "... He must reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet." Not: He must wait, but He must reign. The word marks executive activity.

In these words, then, we have faith's outlook upon convulsion and upheaval. The facts of convulsion and upheaval are perpetually patent to all men, and they are variously described. We speak of change, we speak of revolution, we speak of calamity, we speak of catastrophe, or we sometimes use that so expressive expression, the deluge. I say these facts of upheaval, of convulsion, of shaking, are patent to all men. Faith sees all this, and faith feels all this, but faith sees far more. Faith is a volitional activity of the soul of man in response to a Divine revelation. It goes without saying that knowledge must precede faith. There must be some truth upon which faith can fasten. Knowledge makes its appeal to the intellect, and faith, not able to prove, ventures. The beginning is always with God. Whether the first approach of God to the soul of man is of value, depends entirely upon the soul's response to that approach. When response is made to the first gleam of light, the soul finds itself admitted to the shining way which broadens to the perfect day, and so it comes to clear vision. This is the history of all prophetic interpretation of the ways of God with men. The words of our text reveal the distinction between the outlook of the man of faith upon the circumstances in the midst of which we are living and the outlook of the man who is merely the man of sight. Faith watches change and revolution, and calamity and catastrophe, yea, observes the sweeping deluge, and then says: God is shaking. The Lord sitteth King upon the water floods.

Let us, then, consider the conception in itself and attempt to make a present application of it.

I have said that here we have the vision of faith in the day of upheaval. What is that vision? It is, first of all, a vision of the fact that it is God Who is shaking the order in the midst of which we live. It is, second, a vision of the reason why God is shaking that order. Thrones are trembling, empires are rocking, battles are raging, and all men know that. But faith knows more. Observe the absolute

accuracy of the prophetic word; notice the modern element in the writing:

... I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.

That is the story of the things in the midst of which we are living, and that is how faith looks at it. Faith declares that it is God Who is shaking. Faith is conscious also, as men are conscious everywhere, of spiritual and moral disturbances. Ideals are shattered, laws have failed to fulfil their function, and policies everywhere have broken down. All men know these things, but faith, looking at the disorder, observing it, acutely conscious of it, yet climbing the height, says: God is shattering our ideals to teach us the vanity of them; God is so dealing with humanity that it bursts the bounds of laws and so learns the inadequacy of laws which it is able to make for itself; God is breaking down our policies and laughing at their folly in order that we may learn their futility.

So we come to the second fact which faith sees, and it is of supreme importance. Faith sees the Divine purpose in the shaking. God's shaking is for the destruction of the transient, whether it be good or bad. It is for the destruction of everything that is evil. God's shaking of things in a terrific hour of judgment like this, is His breaking of the bruised reed, His quenching of the smoking flax. I have of set purpose quoted those pictorial words of Scripture. We generally use them, and in some senses with perfect justification, as indicating the fact of God's patience. He will not break the bruised reed; He will not quench the smoking flax. That is true in so far as it goes. It reveals one method of the Divine activity.

But to make this the final meaning of these words is to be false to their intention. The declaration is that He will not break the bruised reed, He will not quench the smoking flax until He send forth judgment unto victory. When He sends forth judgment unto victory, He does break the bruised reed, and He does quench the smoking flax. The bruised reed and the smoking flax are not the emblems of frail humanity striving towards goodness. What is a bruised reed? Weakness weakened. What is smoking flax? That which has within it the element of its own destruction. God leaves the bruised reed in all its boastfulness and leaves the smoking flax to smoulder in its own fire until He send forth judgment unto victory. Then He breaks the one, and quenches the other.

God today has been sending forth judgment unto victory. He is breaking bruised reeds, and He is quenching smoking flax. He is working for the destruction of evil things and for the destruction of good things if they are outworn, because they may become hindrances though at one time they were helps. "Lest one good custom should corrupt the world," God will break through and destroy the custom. That is the atmosphere of the text. God shook the mountains in Sinai, and through the shaking of the mountains in Sinai, He shook the moral order of the world as He gave to humanity through His chosen people a Law. How good and great and wonderful a law it was is revealed in the fact that all modern civilizations have built their codes of ethics upon it. But in the fulness of time He came again, shaking that law, setting it at one side, sweeping away its ceremonial observances and symbolism, as He gave to the world the new moral ethic in the coming of His Son, and thus moved forward toward the final accomplishment of His will. He was working for the destruction of things which, having served their generation and His purpose in human history, might become, and, indeed, had become to some people, the very grave clothes that prevented their growth and advancement. Thus God is ever shaking to destroy the transient and to reveal the abiding, the things that are not shaken and which remain. The one Kingdom, which is His Kingdom; the one ideal, which is His ideal; the one law, which is the law of love; these are the things that are not shaken and cannot be shaken. In order that men may find them, turn back to them, God is forever shaking, disturbing. The things that are shaken are the things, either good or ill, which are transient. The things that are not shaken are the things that are eternal.

From that general attempt to understand the inner thought of the text, let us lift our eyes to the circumstances in the midst of which we live.

What are the things that are being shaken in the world today? Dynasties, thrones, national boundaries, international relationships. I might speak of all these. They are full of interest, but they are incidental and not essential. The insecurity of certain men upon their thrones, the change of the map of Europe in the matter of national boundaries, the new methods of international relationships; all these things are incidental, and I do not propose now to tarry with them. God has been shaking to their very foundations false conceptions of humanity, false methods in diplomacy, and false emphases in religion. In the understanding of these things, we shall at least gain some gleams of light revealing the need for constructive work.

False conceptions of humanity are being shaken to their very foundation. The first is that widespread conception which had mastered the whole of Europe—and more, of the world—which may be expressed in the statement that Humanity is self-sufficient. God has so dealt with us during this period of war that we are face to face with the fact of humanity's insufficiency as within itself to arrange its own course, or make its own plans, or conduct its own efforts to anything like success. We are being taught today that human cleverness is entirely at fault and that human strength at its uttermost is defeated. We are being taught this by the experience of our enemies and by our own. Everything of human cleverness has broken down. Every plan that was peculiarly of men, and peculiarly clever, has been smashed in the course of two years. The illustrations that come to us most readily are those of all the ingenuity and terrific cleverness and marvelous comprehensiveness of the thinking of the powers with which we are at war. Yet they made no single plan that has not already been wrecked so that it never can be realized. Then, when we think of ourselves, I

wonder how far we are prepared to boast of our own cleverness. How have we been delivered? If it be true that there are gleams of light upon the eastern sky for us, if we are beginning to feel a greater sense of security, if in our hearts we feel a new day is coming, how has this all come about? If we have learned nothing else, surely we have seen our smug self-confidence rocked to the center by the hand of God. If we have not seen this, then we are blind indeed.

Is there not, however, another false conception of humanity that God is shaking? The idea was prevalent that humanity was hopelessly degenerate; the idea that everything that was essentially fine had gone; that there was nothing left in man to which any appeal on high and noble lines could be made. Are we prepared to say that today? Are we prepared to say that for our own country as we look back? I confess I cannot altogether understand men who can look back over these two years without being made to think again in the presence of the quick and marvelous response to the high call, ringing out of the spiritual realm, that has characterized the going forth of our sons. Moreover, we have seen humanity able to endure the uttermost strain in its devotion to these high things. I am not saying for a single moment that anything that has happened in these two years is making any one of us think that we can do without Christ and His Cross. I will put the matter bluntly, as my own soul feels it when I say that as I look out upon these two years, I feel more than ever that His estimate of it is right, that it is worth dying for however much it may be bruised and weakened by the way. God is shaking us to the center, and so shaking these false conceptions of humanity.

Again, have we not seen, are we not living in the midst of the shaking of false methods in diplomacies? That is a great theme on which I dare not speak in detail. I speak as one who is looking out over the clouds and mists and trying to see clearly through any light that breaks through. Diplomacy has been conducted for many years under the inspiration of selfishness. Our phrases give us away. Here is one. Inferior races! That is a phrase we have heard in much of our diplomatic discussion, and because inferior races, they are to be mastered and managed, or let us tell the blunt truth for once, they are to be oppressed in the interest of the superior races. That has been the underlying inspiration of a great deal of diplomatic activity.

Or take another phrase that is not ours; we never made use of it although we did a good deal which seems to suggest that we believed in it. The superman! That means the right to conquer. These phrases reveal the inspirations of our arrangements. Our international plannings have been based upon the conceptions that there are such things as inferior races and supermen.

Where are we today? By the shaking of God we are coming at last to know that we have no right to speak of any race as inferior. We are at least beginning to think it is the superman who is inferior and that in every way.

Based upon these false conceptions, our methods have been the methods of cunning. The law of much diplomatic activity has been the law of outwitting someone else, quietly, secretly, no one other than the plotters knowing until it was done. God is shaking this to the very center, compelling us to a nobler way of thinking, bringing back to us words we have quoted day by day to our children but now applying them to national things and international:

The lip of truth shall be established forever:
But a lying tongue is but for a moment.

During these two years, false emphases in religion are being shaken to their very center. Our persistent and perpetual discussion of forms and media and channels is being challenged. We fight for the supremacy of some ecclesiastical form. The question of media has been considered more important than that of grace, and this has meant the destruction of the power of grace. One man says that grace comes through one media, and one man says it comes through another media. This man says that grace comes through certain forms and channels, another says that it does not come so, it comes directly. The matter of supreme import is not media. I believe that again and again grace is communicated to a man in connection with the laying on of hands. I believe that grace is found of some men through high ritual. But grace does not reach me that way. For the reception of grace into my own soul, I prefer the simplest place of meeting or the lonely quietness of some hillside. We of the opposing views concerning media quarrel with each other, and the result too often has been the destruction of grace!

Another false emphasis has been that of the finality of human opinion. We have been more concerned about formulae than about truth; about the things men say about truth rather than about the truth itself, and so truth has been hidden. God is shaking these things. But it seems to me that it takes a profounder earthquake to shake these things than any others. I see more evidences of hope as I look round on false conceptions of humanity, as I look round upon false methods of diplomacy, than I do in this realm of religion. Nevertheless, God is shaking to the very center these attitudes toward religion.

Are there any things that are not being shaken? There are, and they are the only things that matter. First, the relation of humanity to God is unshaken. He has the over-ruling of all human affairs. Take that map of yours and sit down and look at it, as it was, as it is, and, so far as you can, as it is going to be. Mark well the significance of what you see. Nation after nation is appearing before the bar of God and making its decision all unknowingly, and all unknowingly before that bar is receiving verdict and sentence. How many nations of Europe in these two years have chosen deliberately upon the basis of righteousness? How many nations of Europe within the last two years have chosen upon the basis of selfishness? I am not going to answer my questions. But this I say: God is judging.

The nations have not escaped from the grip of God, and that impossibility of escape is the one hope of the dark hour.

The Lord still reigneth, and the fact of the reign of God is being demonstrated by the victories that faith has won. Take your eleventh chapter of Hebrews again. It is a wonderful chapter. I need not tell you that. The most wonderful part of the chapter is not that which gives names and shows us men, but the little brief sentences concerning the unknown heroes and the greatness of deeds. In the eleventh of Hebrews I find these words: "who through faith... waxed mighty in war,..." That is what has happened during these two years. That is the story of the hour. How have these armies of Britain been raised? In that glorious response of the earlier days what was the inspiration? Did your sons go out to bring more territory to Britain? Never! Those armies would not have been raised to accomplish that end. Did they leave university and court and office and desk in order to give commercial supremacy to Britain? Never! They would never have gone for such reasons. They went for righteousness and truth. They went by faith in God, and by the victories that are being won at cost of suffering and sacrifice enough to break the heart, faith is being vindicated and so the relation of humanity to God is being proved. That is something that cannot be shaken.

The supremacy of righteousness and truth as a national foundation is unshaken. Nations built thereon cannot be destroyed. All other ground is sinking sand. As national policy also it is unshaken. Nations acting thereby pass through travail to triumph. All other policies are folly.

Finally, I find unshaken still the centrality of the Cross as the way of human salvation. To this all spiritual ministry agrees in spite of forms or opinions.

All over the world the story is coming to us of men going back to the Cross who thought the world had outgrown it or been mistaken about it. The Cross is also found to be the law of victorious life, not armies or munitions, but the spirit of sacrifice in the consecration of high devotion to righteousness. These are the unshaken things.

For every shaking of the earth the man of faith thanks God. Only the things which are not vital can be shaken; only the transient can be destroyed. The real things of life abide; faith, love, and hope. Through the shaking these are manifested. Or, as Haggai said, through the shaking the desirable things of all nations come, which means that by this shaking comes the desire of the nations which is Christ Himself. By these shakings He ever comes. He comes again to take the kingdoms to be His own. May He direct our hearts into that patient waiting for Him that is born of our sense that the shaking of all things is of God, and that only that which can be shaken can be destroyed.

233 - Hebrews 13:8 - The Unchanging One

The Unchanging One

Jesus Christ... the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever.

Hebrews 13:8

There is nothing more certain or more impressive than the transitory nature of all earthly things. We change our calendars, and become conscious as we do so, that we ourselves have changed. Then we glance around us, and we find that there has been change everywhere. And even while we are in the act of thinking, we have changed again, and all around us is changing even as we look.

Now, this fact of change is at once the salt and the poison of life. It is the salt of life preventing monotony, that deadly foe of the soul. It is the poison of life paralyzing effort, that vital ally of the soul. Change is of the very nature of life and is necessary to life. Change takes on the guise of death and checks the movements of life. Thus are we perplexed, and earnestly do we desire to find some center of permanence and some secret of perennial freshness.

We need a center of permanence, not an anchorage. An anchorage means limitation and monotony. An anchorage belongs to a ship and is a hindrance to the ship. The tug of the ship to be away from the shore and out upon the sea is of its very nature and being, and the anchor holds it back. We are not asking for anchorage. The only sense in which the figure of the anchor is warranted is when it is used, as it was used by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, in such form that it is contradicted in the very suggestions it makes.

In an earlier part of this letter he said: "... the hope set before us; which we have as an anchor of the soul,... both sure and steadfast." Yes! but let us finish the quotation! "... entering within the veil." In that phrase he has contradicted his own symbol finely, intelligently; not blunderingly. It is the figure of the anchor cast, not where the shoals are, but within the veil; the place of finality, the place of satisfaction, and eternity, and God. Thus the figure breaks down, but in the magnificence of its breakdown, it is fitting in every sense and at any and every time. The anchorage which we need must have some element, sure, unshakable, persistent, continuous; and because we are persons, let us at once say, some Person, never destroyed, never weary, never changing.

And we ask not merely a sign of permanence, but a secret of freshness; not excitement, that means reaction and yet more deadly inertia; but some element growing, developing, surprising the soul. And once again, because we are persons, we need some Person always alive, full of initiation, and ever equal to realization. Where shall we turn for these things?

We look within, and if there be one place where we fail to find the stability for which we cry out and the springing freshness we desire, it is within. We look to our friends, and the story is tragic. The air is full of farewells to the dying. We look to circumstances, and there is neither anchorage that holds nor freshness that satisfies the soul. Where are we? Great God! Where are we? We must find anchorage in that broader sense of the word somewhere. Where shall we turn?

Such thinking inevitably recalls those lines of the last hymn which Henry Francis Lyte ever wrote, the hymn he wrote two months before he crossed the bar and saw his Pilot face to face; a hymn which in his intention did not refer to the closing of the natural day but to the close of life:

Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!
Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day!
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away,
Change and decay in all around I see,
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me!

When Henry Francis Lyte wrote those lines as expressive of his own experience, he wrote a hymn for humanity; one of the few, rare hymns throbbing with the elemental things of the human soul and capturing the heart and conscience of men everywhere; we do not wonder that the hymn is sung today around the world.

What warrant had he to write that hymn? The warrant is found in my text. The man who wrote that hymn was a man who believed that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

In the declaration of this text is found the perfect answer to the two-fold cry of the human soul. Let us remind ourselves then of the eternal freshness of Christ. He is always alive; "... I am alive for evermore..."; always beginning some new thing, "I am the Beginning..."; always realizing and consummating that which He does begin, "... I am the Ending...." Let us remind ourselves of the unchanging nature of Christ. He is never destroyed nor can He be; never weary, however weary we may be; never changing, for love never faileth, and love altereth not when it alteration finds. He is unchanged in the fact of His perpetual freshness, so that no soul has ever found it to be monotonous to walk with Him or talk with Him or think of Him or sing of Him; He is perpetually breaking in upon the soul with new surprises, in some amazing and lightning flash, or as the freshness of a morning in the springtime. He is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The text is in itself the message with which I would greet and hearten my own soul and that of each of those who may be reached by my words. I do not propose to defend this statement of the writer. I affirm it anew and pray that its music may strengthen our faith, may brighten our hope, may deepen our love. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Let us then attempt to listen to the music as we consider Jesus Christ yesterday, Jesus Christ today, Jesus Christ forever.

Sometimes, in order to gain a better understanding, we must tarry long enough to be mechanical and so to catch the true meaning of the thing which is written. Therefore we pause to notice the peculiar title employed at this point by the writer of the letter. Jesus Christ! These were the usual names which this writer used in reference to our Lord but generally in separation from each other. In this letter, He is constantly referred to by the human name, the simple name of Jesus. In this letter also, over and over again He is referred to by the august and dignified title of Christ. Jesus was a Hebrew name. There were hundreds of boys who bore that name in Galilee and Judaea for it is but the Greek form of the old Hebrew name Joshua. The name had peculiar associations, setting it apart and differentiating it from all other names in that it was a name that was coined for the man who first bore it by his great predecessor, Moses. Yet it had become common, and so attention is fastened in the first case upon the fact that our Lord is essentially of our own nature and of our own being, of our own emotions and of our own temptations. Jesus is one of us. Our thought is first brought face to face with that fact. But we must remember that this name is not introduced in this letter until we reach what we speak of as our second chapter and ninth verse. The one referred to there as Jesus was introduced at the beginning of the letter in other terms and by other designations. At the commencement of this letter, He is described as Son of God, heir of all things, through Whom God did fashion the ages; the effulgence of His glory, the very image of His substance, the One Who upheld all things by the word of His power. So was He introduced, and then, presently, this Person is named Jesus! Another statement that will help us to apprehend the mystery is that of John, in what we call the prologue to his Gospel, in which he says: "In the beginning was the logos (Word); and the logos (Word) was with God; and God was the logos (Word); and the logos (Word) became flesh!" That is Jesus!

The other name, Christ, is the Messianic title indicating the fact of the office, the work, the mission of this mysterious Person Who was human and yet was infinitely more than human. He, the King-Priest, is introduced by this title at the third chapter and the fourteenth verse, having been introduced at the beginning of the letter in the way which we have already considered.

Now in this text the two titles are brought together, and the combination is rare in the letter. Only on two other occasions did this writer thus link them. When he spoke of the Lord as the One through Whom the will of God for our sanctification is accomplished, he called Him Jesus Christ. When a little later he spoke of Him as the One through Whom God makes us perfect to do His will, he called Him Jesus Christ. And here, when he was referring to Him as the unchanging One, he named Him by the human name and by the Messianic title. The Person to Whom he referred is the One Whom he had already introduced as Son of God, the effulgence of His glory, the express image of His Person, the One through Whom all things were made, the One Who fashions the ages. It is to this Person that we are introduced, and He is declared by the writer of the letter to be the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

If we are to understand Him, we must consider the yesterday in its limited sense and remind ourselves again of what are described in the New Testament as the days of His flesh. That is the focal point of revelation. The mystic and the infinite Son of God is revealed by this veiling of deity in human flesh.

I am impressed first of all by His appeal to humanity in itself, by what He was in Himself. I am not thinking now of His appeal to humanity in His teaching. Shall I not be accurate when I declare that the teaching of Jesus Christ did not appeal to humanity and that it does not appeal to humanity yet? Humanity must be regenerated before the teaching of Christ makes any vast or powerful appeal to it. I know full well that there are certain parts and portions of the teaching of Christ, expressive of His outlook upon the ultimate purposes of God for this world, which make their appeal to humanity; but when He deals with those things of the soul in which He demands a purity which is awe-inspiring, when He begins to appeal to the human heart and to show it its own disobedience, humanity is still in rebellion against His teaching. There are a thousand men who praise the Sermon on the Mount for its broad outlines who dare not face its personal investigations. Not by the teaching of Christ were men attracted but by what He was in Himself. Today, two millenniums after His earthly manifestation, there is no literature in the world that appeals to men as do these gospel narratives. He came into the midst of human life making hypocrisy impossible while He stood confronting men. Men unveiled themselves, or unmasked themselves, in His presence. They could do nothing other than show themselves. They were often angry as they unmasked themselves, but they were compelled to the act. They were more often comforted as they unveiled themselves. But the supreme fact, the first fact that impresses us is that here was a Man Who moved among men and whenever they came into His presence, they were seen for the men they really were; veils were rent, masks were torn off, duplicity was at an end, hypocrisy perished; they stood naked in the essential facts of their character wherever He came! In His human nature, the very deeps of humanity called to the deeps in humanity, and the deeps in humanity answered the deeps of humanity. Moreover, His appeal was not that of a clan, not that of a tribe, not that of a nation, but that of the race.

I look back at Him once more, and I observe His appeal to humanity in its need. I will cover the whole ground of humanity's need by the use of two of the most commonplace words in our language—sin and sorrow. Observe how He appealed to each. He never excused sin. He never admitted that sin was necessary. There is not a single sentence in the teaching of Christ that suggests that sin is a necessary part of a process by which God is moving to something higher. He never excused it, never admitted that it was necessary. But something else is true. He never abandoned it. He never admitted that it was incurable. In the vocabulary of Jesus there never could have been such an absurd contradiction of terms as we sometimes make use of when we speak of "necessary evils." If necessary, not evil; if evil, never necessary. In the vocabulary of Jesus, such an absurd contradiction of terms as "hopeless cases," never could have been brought together with regard to humanity. No case was hopeless to His eyes. Of those men and women that came into contact with Him in His life, none were hopeless. When He confronted them, they were saved over and over again by faith, not theirs in Him but His in them and by His wonderful confidence in them.

As to sorrow, He never ignored it. It was a great reality to Him. Dear old Faber, that saint infinitely greater than his ecclesiastical convictions either before or after his going to Rome, sang the very truth as he sang that the sorrows of earth are most keenly felt in heaven. While Jesus walked the ways of men, all the sorrows of Palestine that His eyes looked upon settled on His soul and wounded His heart. But He never submitted to sorrow. He never admitted that sorrow was the final thing. In the world you shall have tribulation, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy!

He saw the dark clouds and the sweeping rain! But He forevermore said, "I do set My bow in the cloud!..." He knew the sun, and that the light of it flashed upon the rain drops, symbols of tears and agony, made them radiant with the colors of heaven in hope and joy. Sorrow for Him was never final. It was real, graphic, terrific, evil. He knew it. He was "... a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:..." But he never bowed His head beneath sorrow and yielded to it, never came to despair. He moved breast forward against sorrow for Himself and humanity. He mastered it; He transmuted it!

I look once more at those days of His flesh, and I notice the perpetual surprises of those who were about Him. He was constantly surprising them. I think I may dismiss the whole story, for the purpose of our present meditation, by saying that He trained His

disciples by surprise after surprise, surprise after surprise. They thought they knew Him, and they were glad they did and went with Him. Then He startled them by something He did or said. They were halted and then discovered its value and went on a little further. Now they understood Him! Then He wrought some new wonder and they cried: "Who, then, is this?" He was so human that they called Him Jesus of Nazareth. Yet out of that human personality there were always breaking lights and glories and powers and revelations and surprises. How are we to account for this? We account for it because of the longer yesterday. The "yesterday" includes all the infinite mysteries of the far-flung splendors of the ages about which we can only dream and about which we know nothing. In the beginning was the Word, and when tabernacled in human form, walking human pathways, mixing among human beings, lights gleamed, and glories flashed, surprising the heart of the men who were about Him. Jesus Christ yesterday!

And now what of Jesus Christ today? There is a difference, and we must face it. The difference is that He is now gone out of sight, as He said He would in those Paschal discourses from which our lesson was taken, and for a while we shall not see Him. He is gone out of sight. But He also said, "... a little while and ye shall see Me." In that promise there was no reference to a second Advent. He was referring to something that was to be immediate; something to which they actually did come and that soon. Those men who heard Him talk in the Upper Room, Peter, James, and John; Philip, Thomas, and Jude; the men who spoke in the Upper Room, those men lost Him. He passed out of their sight. Then came Pentecost, and they saw Him as they had never seen Him, though they could no longer see Him. He said to them: "... It is expedient for you that I go away..." I do no violence to the thought conveyed if I change the word. "It is better for you that I go away." Why better? Because this Eternal One, localized in flesh, was limited by that localization; because in the midst of His Ministry He was compelled to say, "... I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Passing out of sight, the sight of sense, in His coming again by the Holy Spirit to the consciousness of such as put their trust in Him, He came into nearer association, came to be the Companion of the spirit-life of men, that inner spirit-life which no man can see, either of himself or of his neighbor, by the eyes of sense. "No man hath seen God at any time..." We all agree that no man hath seen Him at any time. No man hath seen man at any time! Do you agree? It is true. You have never seen me, I have never seen you. We look upon these outward forms, these are but tabernacles. Thank God if we have learned the lesson, that the body, marred, spoiled, broken, laid to rest, was but the tenement house. Jesus said to these men in effect. "I am shut outside you by living in this body, while you live in these bodies. I will go away and come again, and come right into the true spirit-life of you and reveal Myself to you by the Spirit, as you never can know Me while I remain outside you." We can have closer fellowship with Jesus than with each other. I am shut out from the final fellowship of my nearest and dearest friend in this world. I must wait for the larger spirit-life that lies beyond. I can have no final spiritual fellowship with my earthly friends, but with Him I can have full spiritual fellowship.

Thus He came again to these men and to us. He is known today through the writings, through spiritual interpretation, and through the saints who in their fellowship with Him are transformed into His likeness and reveal Him to other men. Thus, He is the same. The only thing that is different is the accidental. The essential abides. Through that which I have just described, not carelessly but carefully, as the accidental of the days of His flesh, the essential and abiding was revealed.

I look again to the yesterday, to the days of His flesh, and I declare that He is the same, making the same appeals to humanity. That is the deep secret of the victory of Christianity. All our hindrances are due to the fact that we quarrel about forms and methods of expression and neglect the central authority of the Christ Himself. Oh! shame on us! shame on us! He is the same. Let us remember that whenever we are tempted to quarrel!

He makes the same appeal to humanity. Take that little Testament of yours! Nay, take much less. Take Mark alone, the first and simplest narrative. Print it, give it away. Read it to men everywhere. Read it to them when they are quiet, when they are thoughtful. Let them look, let them listen. So let them see this Jesus. They will come to Him. He will attract them whether they are black or white, whether learned or illiterate, whether high or low, bond or free, rich or poor. When they see Him, they forget black or white, high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, for they have found in Him their own humanity. Humanity ever goes out to the humanity in Him. That is the story of the success of missions.

He makes the same appeal to human nature. He will not excuse sin. He will not excuse my sin. He will never allow me to say in His presence that I was bound to sin. We cannot say it, we dare not say it in His presence. We say it to each other. We say it to our own souls sometimes. "We could not help it." We know we lie when we say it! But when we are alone with Him we dare not look into His face and say we were bound to sin! We know it is not true. All modern philosophy in so far as it says that sin is necessary is a lie against which this Christ of God proceeds, and he will deny it in the human conscience ere His mission is completed. Man need not sin.

But it is also true that we cannot say in His presence that our sin is incurable. It is not incurable. He believes in us. He has perfect confidence in humanity. He is producing the same effects today as of old, effects which I shall not enumerate, but summarize in His own sweet word, "Rest." "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In that word I find, righteousness, peace, joy, the things of the Kingdom of God.

He is the same today in His mysteriousness, still surprising the soul, still breaking out upon us at some point in life, amazing us and then explaining His own surprise and moving us a little further on toward the final knowledge.

So let me end, with only a brief sentence or two. He is the same forever. The phrase that the writer actually used was most suggestive. "Forever," is altogether too mechanical. It is trying to say everything. We cannot say everything. Let us dare to be poetic in company with the Bible. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and to the ages! They come, they pass, they go! The year has broken, the year has dawned. It is for us a new age, but a hand breadth, but a span; but it serves to illustrate everything that is suggested by the phrase, to the ages.

We are always at the beginning of a new age. Behind us are ages; before us are ages! Now the writer says that this One Who came into human history and human life, and Whom He names Son of God, Jesus, Christ, is the same to the ages! At the beginning of this letter he declared that this One fashions the ages, determines their nature, limits their duration, includes their forces.

Heaven will never be monotonous. There will always be new satisfaction for the heart. We shall never become satiated with the things spiritual. The unfathomed deeps and distances of the ages lie before us, but He will lead us through them. Therefore am I no longer afraid of the vastness of the outlook.

That Living One is in our midst now, calling us to rest. He is the center of all that is permanent, the spring of all that is fresh. Dare I be afraid? Amid the shock of battle, the stress of life, and the overwhelming perplexities of things, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

March on my soul, without fear or faltering, for the Pierced Hand holds the scepter of the universe! All is well!

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Our Altar

We have an altar.

Hebrews 13:10

The majority of days in the lives of the majority of men are ordinary days. Nevertheless, all men have extraordinary days, red-letter days; and whatever may be the nature of the experience which makes them stand out from all the rest, these are the days that give character to all the rest. Men mark or celebrate such days in different ways. We very often reveal ourselves quite unexpectedly by the manner in which we celebrate them, and we reveal our God almost unknowingly. This fact may be illustrated in very many ways. There are men, quite irrespective of their educational advantages or social position, who celebrate any day that stands out from the rest by a drink or a feast. They are revealing themselves, and in the biting, scorching satire of the great Apostle we may say of them, "whose god is their belly." There are men of a much higher type who will celebrate the day of emotion, whether it be of joy or of sorrow, by a great song, a treatise, some expression of the inward life that others may know it. There are men who celebrate a day of tragic sorrow, a day of ecstatic joy, by a bequest, or by raising a memorial.

The men of the Old Testament turned all such days into opportunities for raising altars. It is very interesting to run through the Old Testament and see in what varied circumstances these men raised altars. According to the record, when Noah found himself in possession of the world he raised an altar. When Abraham, after some tarrying, found himself at last in the land to which God had directed him he raised an altar. In that ultimate and final experience of his soul, when after long processes and much fellowship with God, groping after Him and finding Him and coming ever nearer to Him, he at last reached the spiritual experience which was higher than that of desiring privilege, namely fellowship in suffering, Abraham erected an altar on which to offer his son. And in after years that son, a man of quietness and peace who stands out on the pages of the Old Testament as celebrated for digging wells and living by them, when at last he was left in peace after a commonplace quarrel between herdsmen concerning wells, he too raised an altar. When Moses had prayed all day with uplifted hands, and Amalek was defeated, he built his altar and called it Jehovah-nissi, the Lord our Banner. When at last Ai was reduced, after the defeat of the hosts of God as the result of the sin of a man, Joshua built his altar. When Gideon was going through the process of preparation for delivering his people from the oppression of Midian, he built an altar. When God had wondrously appeared on behalf of His people, and through a thunderstorm had discomfited the foe, Samuel built an altar and called it Ebenezer. When David sinned, and the people were visited by plague, and when the plague was stayed, right there, where it halted at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, David built an altar.

These men were always building altars. At a time of great joy they built an altar, in the time of sorrow they built an altar, if they were defeated they built an altar, if they were victorious they built an altar, if they sinned they built an altar, if they triumphed over temptation they built an altar. This rearing of altars by the old patriarchs was revealing. When the Mosaic economy came, careful instructions were given for the private raising of altars. Such was the instruction we read in the book of Exodus. In the ceremonial system the altar had its place, its central place; but the idea that was suggested by the altar was larger than the ceremonial system.

For what we see in it is God accommodating Himself to, and answering, the human heart in its great need; and that which thus sprang out of the human heart came originally from God. So deep answered deep in the provision of the law.

The writer of this letter to the Hebrews took up the sacred things of their religion in order to show how all found fulfilment in Christ. In all this letter there is a theoretical value; it is a defense of the faith; there is also a practical value, for it is a revelation of the conduct resulting from that faith. From beginning to end the writer sees in the Son of God the effulgence of the glory of God, and in all the ministry and mission of the Son he sees the fulfilment of those things which humanity had been groping after. Almost at the end of the letter he said, "We have an altar."

Our meditation is intended to deal with the idea suggested by the altar rather than with the particular ritual to which the writer was referring. When he said, "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle," he was dealing with the putting aside of all ritual method of the past; but he retained the altar, and thus retained the idea of the altar, and claimed that while the veil of the tabernacle had been rent in twain and all the Mosaic ritual had been superseded, the essential thing which the altar always symbolized remained, "We have an altar."

I have made this somewhat lengthy reference to the place of the altar in the Old Testament in order to say that in proportion as we are finding our way back into the habit of these men, the habit itself being cleansed, purified, fulfilled, made glorious in the light of the Christian fact, we are finding the true attitude to the day of crisis, to the day that stands out, to the day that casts its light or its shadow on all other days. Just such a day came to some of us last week, when all the light of life went out, or when suddenly there broke on a pathway that long had been shadowed a new and glorious light in which we rejoiced. There was that one hour last week in which, in spite of all professions and protestations, and sincere they were, we fell into sin, and the dark horror of it is on our soul, and all the days are threatened by the shadow of it. What are we to do in these days? These men of the olden days built an altar, and laid on it a sacrifice, and watched the material fire devour it, and forced their souls into the spiritual conception suggested by the fire, and so got back to God. There are days when we feel we would like to do exactly the same thing, get away to some quiet desert place and slay something and see it burn for the readjustment of spiritual things. But we do not do these things today. Nevertheless, as this writer says, "We have an altar."

Keeping in that atmosphere of the past, I want this morning to find out for my own soul's sake what these men meant, in order to discover what my attitude ought to be to the day which stands out, black or radiant, in order that neither the darkness nor the light may affect the other days in such a way as to spoil them. "We have an altar." Let us get back to these great men of the past. When they built their altars, what did they mean? Fundamentally the action was one of worship; actively, it was sacrifice; experimentally, it was readjustment and new beginning.

First it was worship. The erection of an altar was an expression of belief in God. The erection of an altar was the expression of the sense of need of God. The erection of an altar was the expression of desire for God. The erection of an altar was the expression of submission to God. If that analysis seems almost unnecessary, as though having said "worship" we have said all; yet these are elements that we have to remember. When that man is building his altar, watch him at his work; forget all that surrounds him, forget the immediate occasion of the building, and inquire quietly while he builds his altar what he is doing and why he is doing it. Building an altar means that a man believes in God, not that he knows God perfectly, not that he understands God adequately, not that he has anything like final fellowship with God, but that he believes in God. It means more; it means that the man not only believes in God, but is conscious within his soul that what he needs is that very God in Whom he believes. Whether for his joy or his sorrow, his darkness or his light, he needs that God. Not only does it mean that he believes in God and feels his need of God; it also means that he desires God. If one could listen to the deepest thing in the life of any man who is seen building his altar we should hear him say, One thing I desire, it is that I may find God and order my way before Him! There are occasional singers who actually utter words, words which became the inspiration of pilgrims through all the ages; but for the one man who sings the actual words there are a thousand men who are acting in harmony with the song which they cannot express.

The altar means more than belief, more than confession of need, more than desire. Whenever a man builds an altar he is expressing, imperfectly, inadequately, but nevertheless sincerely, his desire to submit himself to the God to Whom he thus builds. As I find my way through these pages of the past, with all their magnificent revelation of contradictory things in human life—passion, prejudice, pride, lust, love—and I see these primitive men, rough, unhewn men, building altars in all sorts of circumstances, making every new occasion in life the opportunity for building an altar, I see men worshiping.

But observe carefully that it is an altar each man builds, and that the meaning of the altar is always sacrifice. An altar built by a man who believes in God, needs God, desires God, and submits to God, is a confession of his consciousness of distance from God, and a confession, moreover, of something within him that speaks of the possibility of restoration to nearness, which must be based on some mystery of sacrifice and pain. Every altar means sacrifice.

Experientially, the altar as these men of the past raised it, meant as I have said, readjustment in all circumstances. The events giving rise to the altar were set in the light of the altar. The joy that fills the life and makes man raise his altar is now to be conditioned by all

that the altar stands for. The sorrow that has overwhelmed him, out of the agony of which he has built his altar, is now to be put in the light of these essential things which the altar suggests to him. The altar forever speaks of the readjustment of life in the presence of God through the mystery of sacrifice.

The altar always meant more than that experientially in those Old Testament narratives. After the altar, there was the move forward, according to the things of the altar. I will not stay to illustrate it. Take your Bible and spend an hour or two going through the story of individual altars, and you will find in every case that after the altar there was a move forward, a line of progress; and everywhere the forward movement was the result of the readjustment of the life in the presence of the altar. The men who moved forward from the altar which they had raised in the hour of their solemn, sacrificial approach to God carried with them in the forward move the things which gave occasion to the altar. Joy, sorrow, light, darkness, defeat, victory—the values were wrested from all these in that hour of the altar's worship; and the men marched forward, stronger for these very experiences as they were found and sanctified in the hour of worship in the presence of the altar.

"We have an altar." I need not stay to remind you that the whole subject of the letter to the Hebrews is that in the Lord Christ we have found all that men were seeking after, and seeing dimly by the altar and the priest and the sacrifice. In the Lord Christ we have that coming near to us of God, which means the discovery of the meaning of defeat, the answer of the desire of our heart after God, and the removal of all those things which prevented our realization of fellowship with Him. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, "We have an altar," that is, an abiding altar, which in some senses we have not to erect, for it is always erected; yet an altar which in some senses we must ever erect, erect again and again, and bring to its measurement and its correction every crisis in life that appals the soul with fear or joy, with trembling or with a sense of triumph.

Let us go back again for a moment to the old story. Not without profound significance were the instructions which Moses gave concerning the erection of these altars. We have no means of knowing the form or fashion of them in those patriarchal days before these instructions. Moreover, we must not confuse the instructions of Moses here concerning the altar with those instructions on the great altars of the ritual which he received in the Mount. The instructions here were quite clear and simple, and, indeed, most astonishing, for they were for the man who desired to erect an altar for himself. It must be of earth, or if perchance it should be of stone, then it must be of unhewn stone; and, further, no steps were to help him in his ascent to the altar.

The altar was to be of earth; that was the first simple command. If some man should desire to raise his altar amid rocky fastnesses where perchance no earth could be found, then let him build it of stone; but he must not grave or polish his stone, or set any tool on it; he must erect quite simply a heap of rough stones, and he must not under any circumstances approach it by steps. Without any interpretation, we all realize the wonderful significance and suggestiveness of these simple requirements.

The altar is to be of earth, it is to be of the commonest, it is to be of that which every man or woman could find close at hand, earth, common earth. Build your altar of that; just make a heap of earth, that is all! Is that all? No! There is more. Listen: "In every place where I record My name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee." Wherever a man shall thus erect his altar of earth God will come to him, and from that moment of revelation, man would understand the meaning of the altar he had erected in the twilight. Wherever a man gets earth together and erects an altar, God comes there, heaven touches earth, God is nigh at hand. His approach to the human soul is dependent on that desire of the human soul for Him which expresses itself in the sacramental symbol of the heap of earth. There, says God, I will come to him.

If the altar be of stone, then let it be of unhewn stone. No tool must be lifted on it; there must be nothing of artifice in the symbol of approach to God, nothing to create self-consciousness in the worshiper, no human workmanship. Note the appalling severity of the word. Who can doubt the accuracy of it: "If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it"? No steps to the altar, no approach by climbing, "that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon." How appallingly human nakedness is discovered when by its ornate ritual it attempts to get near to God. This man says—nay verily, let me be true to the context—this Church says, "I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing," and the Watcher with eyes of fire says, "Thou art the wretched one, and miserable and poor and blind and naked." That is a Church climbing to the altar by steps carved and beautiful, by a ritual which is self-conscious and self-assertive. In these ultimate matters of the dealing of the soul with God, the altar must be of the earth or of unhewn stones, of such things that man can find in them nothing that ministers to his own pride. There will I meet with thee, says God.

"We have an altar." If the altar shall be seen to be the Lord Christ, then let me say the things that are in my own heart. The wonder of God's revelation of Himself in Christ is the simplicity of Christ, the humanness of Christ, the fact that in all the brief period of His revelation in human history He walked the plane—I hardly like the word, but let me use it—of the commonplace. If some of us had lived with Him as He then lived, we would not have spoken to Him. He had no social position. He was of the earth, the lowest of all the low, and the lowliest of all the lowly! That is the marvel. There are some of us to whom others will not speak, and we are angry. He was not angry. It is not only true that in that human life of His He was beneath the notice of some people; it is also true that He was perfectly happy there. If in His presence those who hold their fellows in contempt are rebuked, those who in turn hold in contempt those who hold them in contempt are also rebuked. Do not forget this. Again forgive the phrase—there is no meaning in it

in this connection in Ruskin's sense—but here we find the true ethics of the dust! Christ is an altar for me of the common dust, the clay of my humanity! Yet, so help me God, I would not speak irreverently of that common clay of my humanity; that is the only glory I have. All other things are accidental trappings, to be destroyed in the fire, that eremacausis, the slowly burning fire of God, that is always destroying effete things. The accidental things that separate men are being destroyed in that fire, blessed be God!

When a man in the hour of crisis readjusts things his first business is to find himself anew in Christ in the common fact of his humanity, and to strip himself of all the ornaments and accidentals by which he thinks he rises—and by which he does seem to rise a little way above his fellows. Do you remember what Mr. Dooley said about the skyscrapers of New York? They are called skyscrapers, by everything except the sky! Let that be a parable, and there I leave it. When I want to readjust things in hours of crisis, of sin, or sorrow, or tragedy, my first business is to get to the altar of Christ which is of the earth, and, stripping myself of everything else, put my manhood by the side of His Manhood. That is the first thing, the great thing, the sublime thing. I never climb to God on the steps I have carved. I climb to God when I descend to the dignity of my naked humanity on the earth and in the dust; and when, lying there, I find the Son of Man, for there also I find heaven opened, for He is also Son of God. He will interpret my problem and heal my wounds and illuminate my darkness. There is no approach to God by climbing.

Heaven comes down our souls to greet,
And glory crowns the mercy seat.

I glance back once more over all the pages of the past, and find the altar was the symbol of human conditions. When the altar was neglected there was individual, social, national weakness. One of the first signs of true revival was repairing altars and erecting new ones. When the altars were whole, and used, there were times of prosperity.

I leave these larger applications this morning, for I am more occupied with the individual. Unless I take this crisis to which I have come to the altar which is also an altar of sacrifice, then it is going to harm me, whatever its character may be. A new joy having come into your life, my brother—a joy of God, and from God, and intended for you—which does not make you erect your altar, a joy in the experience of which you do not go back for readjustment to the altar, will work you harm, however beneficent it may seem. Let me now speak tenderly, but as faithfully as I know how. Some of you are brooding over a sorrow, nursing it persistently; you have never taken it to your Lord, you have never erected your altar, have never stripped yourself in the presence of the Man Christ Jesus and found in Him the solace of grace, and through Him your way to God. Sorrow like a bird of evil omen, with its black wings outstretched, is blighting your life, and, more, it is spoiling the lives around you. Let us fulfil the symbolism of the past in the light of the new, and erect our altar and find our way into that fellowship with God that comes through Christ.

We have an altar, not in Jerusalem, not in any official place, but outside the camp and on the earth. This altar is for every occasion of life, and especially for those that are marked as special, an occasion of joy or of sorrow, of victory or of defeat, of holiness or of sin.

I have said nothing of the appeal of this passage. I conclude by referring to it and asking you to consider what the writer of the letter said. There are two kinds of sacrifices which we are to offer on our altar. First, praises to God, and, second, "to do good and to communicate forget not," that is the giving of benefits to other men. To erect this altar is always to be constrained, first, to praise God, and then to be driven out on the pathway of beneficent helpful service.

If in this hour of sudden crisis, on this day that stands out from the rest by reason of sudden joy or swift sorrow, I cannot do that which sometimes one feels would be helpful, erect an actual altar and slay a victim and watch the fires burn it, still, let me remember that all the spiritual things suggested by that act are mine in Christ. He is the sacrifice, through Him burns the perpetual fire, and in Him the elemental things of my soul may be restored, purged, lifted, renewed, satisfied. Then let us who have the altar use it to the glory of His name.

235 - Hebrews 13:13 - Christian Citizenship: Co-Operation in the Building

Christian Citizenship: Co-operation in the Building

Let us therefore go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.
Hebrews 13:13

This is the final injunction of the letter to the Hebrews, and the final application of our study during these four Sunday evenings.

In our previous studies, we have seen that the ultimate passion burning in the heart of the men and women of faith, inspiring their pilgrimage, creating their battle, enabling their building, was not a passion for their own personal salvation, but for the ultimate victory of God in the world, that which is figuratively described as the building of the city of God. All these men of vision, revealed to

us in the Divine library, were men who looked through the mists and fogs to the dawn of a glorious day, to the establishment of the order of Heaven on earth, to the completion of the city of God, to the restoration of the sin-blighted world to the Kingdom of God.

Because we also are pilgrims, warriors, builders of faith, we have no abiding city here, for the city has never yet been built in which the principles of the Divine government obtain full and perfect mastery. Nevertheless, we, pilgrims, warriors, builders of faith, do not spend our time in useless lament—we seek after the city which is to come. By the clear vision of it, by acceptance of all the principles of the government of God and obedience to them within our own lives, and then by definite endeavor we prepare for the coming of the Kingdom—we become workers together with God both in His battle against evil and in His building of His city. "Let us therefore go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."

The word is as startling and as revolutionary today as it was when the Lord first uttered the principle in the ears of Peter and the disciples at Caesarea Philippi. "From that time Jesus began to shew unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up."

Let us first reverently attempt to look upon the position of our Lord as indicated in these words, "without the camp." Quite simply they mean that our Lord was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem; that is the thought embodied in the hymn of our childhood, sacred to us all—"There is a green hill far away Without a city wall."

Now it is quite evident that He set His face from the beginning of His ministry toward death as the culmination of His mission. In His own heart, and according to His own conception, the ultimate warrant for all His teaching and all His doing was the Cross. When they challenged Him as to the right by which He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, He answered them in figures of speech, which they could not then understand, but which were explained afterward by John: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"; thus claiming that His right to cleanse the temple of God was the right of His Cross and coming resurrection. Passing over all the intermediate spaces in His ministry, we come to the final movements, and we see how with calm, definite deliberation, born of a clearly defined purpose, He set His face toward Jerusalem. The Cross lay before Him as part of the process leading on to resurrection, which was the culmination of His mission. Neither the ideals of His teaching, nor the splendor of His example, completed the meaning of His work; but always, in His thinking and deliberate intention, the Cross and resurrection. Apart from these, to use His own language, He was straitened, limited, and prevented from fulfilling His high and holy purpose. Therefore, as we see Him going out through the gate of the city, away from the center of the life of the people, outside the city over which He had wept, we are to remember He is going, out of His own deliberate choice and will, to the Cross arranged for and accomplished by the Lord Himself. That is the historic background of our text.

He thus left the city because of the sin within the city; because of its godlessness, its selfishness; because these things were not only manifest, but held mastery over every department of the city's life; the priests, the princes, the people, and the publicans, were against Him at the last. Against Him, not for personal reasons, but upon the ground of His presentation of the Kingdom of God, and His call to men to repent. Against Him, because His ideals were wholly spiritual. He touched life always at the spiritual center and from there moved out to all the suburbs of the mental and the physical. For that reason the city of Jerusalem, through its priests, its princes, its publicans, its people, was entirely opposed to Him. It was impossible for Him, in the city as she then was, to fulfil the Divine ideals. The whole movement of life was against Him. He gave Jerusalem His high ethic, and all His peerless example; but not by these things could He build the city of God or ransom the lost. It was necessary to move outside the gate, and beyond the camp, for the accomplishment of the work.

He went outside the gate, as the writer here says, "that He might sanctify the people." This was separation from the city in order to create an evangel for the city. It was the excommunication of a nation, in order to the making of a nation; the dooming of a city, in order to complete the building of a city; the passing out of chaos, in order to set at liberty forces which would restore the cosmos.

Then mark the nature of His activity; "He suffered without the gate." Look back upon the scene. If we could only see it in all simplicity as it actually happened; He was crucified as a malefactor between two thieves. To the ideal presented, to the ethic enunciated, that is man's answer; the answer not of those whom in our foolish pride we describe as the lower orders; but the answer of light and learning and intelligence; of the highest intellectual capacities in Jerusalem. "Outside the gate... without the camp."

There through suffering He created a new center. The old was to be destroyed because of its departure from the Divine. He returned to the Divine, and made possible the new. In Exodus we have the same principle illustrated. When the people had sinned, Moses came into the midst of the camp, and carried the tabernacle outside the camp and pitched it there. He said in effect: "By your sin you have exiled God, and by this act you are all excommunicated; there is but one way back, it is that you find your way to the new center created; for God Whom you have exiled can only return to you as you return to Him in obedience and repentance."

At the moment when our Lord turned his back upon Jerusalem and passing through its gate, suffered without the camp; He excommunicated the nation, put an end to the temple, abandoned the economy; but He did it in order that He might make a new tent of meeting, a new tent of testimony, a new point at which God and man should come together, a new center where God and man

could be restored to fellowship with each other.

In the mystery of that hour, outside the city, outside the temple, in His suffering and His dying, He was standing, in the eternal economy of God, inside the veil as the great High Priest, accomplishing for humanity that infinite mystery of sacrifice whereby it should be possible for man to return to God, and God to return to man.

It may be that in the mind of someone listening to me the question may be arising, What have these things to do with our Christian citizenship in London? Everything. In the first sermon of the series, we saw that the city cannot be our abiding place because it is contrary to godliness; in the next we considered our responsibility of seeking the city of God, in preparation for the coming of the King; in the third we saw that God Himself amid all the chaos is working toward the cosmos and building His city. The present study shows that we can only be workers with God, and builders with Him, as we pass by the way of separation and sacrifice to the place outside the city gate; the place without the camp, where is to be the new center of the new city; because there new forces are operative by which individual men, and so the city, the nation, the race, can be made fit in the economy of heaven.

If we are to help God in the building of His city, we must be men and women outside the city, discontented with the city as it is; so living that the city becomes discontented with us.

Has the offence of the Cross ceased? It has not ceased. If we know nothing of the offence of the Cross, it is because we have not yet followed Him without the camp bearing His reproach. With absolute sincerity it may be, but with appalling ignorance let me also hasten to add, we may hope to reconstruct the cities of men apart from the Cross of our Lord. We shall never do it. The only way is that of resurrection and ascension; and that is the way of true fellowship with Him in separation to the offence of the Cross. The offence of the Cross abides. The Cross of Christ is as offensive today as it ever was. It is foolishness still to the Greek, a stumbling-block to the Jew. I spoke last Sunday evening of the great world powers represented by Pilate's superscription. What does the Cross mean to them? What was the Cross to the Roman? A gibbet, a gallows, a thing utterly offensive. What was it to the Greek? Foolishness. What was the Cross to the Hebrew? A stumbling-block, something devoid of power, over which men stumbled, and which they were determined to be rid of as offensive to fine religious instincts. The Cross has been the power of God unto salvation for nineteen centuries, and there is no other power of God unto salvation. Men today are as surely offended by the Cross as ever they were; offended by the idea that man can only be redeemed through suffering which has its symbol in blood; and offended by this deepest fact of Christianity, because acceptance of redemption that way, and fellowship in redeeming others that way, involve personal communion with and in the Cross. Yet this is the appeal of the text, "Let us therefore go forth unto Him without the camp." Let us become disinherited men and women, suffering the loss of all things, content even to suffer the loss of rights if by loss of them we can help other men; men and women abandoned of all the powers of the world. The power of the world said to our Lord, just ere He passed through the gate away to suffering, through the Roman Procurator, "Art Thou then a King?" "What is truth?" The culture of the world looked at the Cross and said it was foolishness. The religion of the world looked at the Cross and said the Cross was a stumbling-block. The reproach of the Cross, the offence of the Cross. Only as we get into fellowship with that reproach, that offence, only as we are willing to be at the end of that pride which affirms the possibility of reconstruction apart from that Cross, shall we ever be workers together with God for reconstruction.

Of course, I am dealing with reconstruction; with the necessity for it in human nature as I find it. If you have a nature that needs no redemption, if you were born of such as need no redemption, then do not be angry with the preacher, but listen; Christ said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." If it may be granted that there are men and women who need no repentance, righteous men and women, then let them remember that they must not take the Christian name, for Christ said He did not come after them. His business in the world is with sinning men, with ruined men; with chaos, in order that He may restore it to cosmos; in order that He may save—gracious word, never to be dropped out of our vocabulary—that He may save the sinner; that He may remake the flotsam and jetsam, until it is beautiful for the palace and home of God; that He may build the city that never has been built by reason of human sin; and build it by so dealing with sin at its devilish heart as to cancel it and break its power forever. That is the mission of Christ.

The appeal of this series of sermons, and of this evening's sermon, is to souls that desire to be with Him in that work, the work that is necessary wherever you look. My comrades, you cannot get very near to this world's heart without getting very near to its agony; and you cannot get near to the world's agony without getting near to its sin; sin underneath all the veneer of the West as well as patent in the vice of the East.

Sin; how will you deal with sin? With the liar who tells you he is a liar, and hating it cannot end it; with the polluted man dripping with filth, who hates his filth but cannot break away from it? How are you going to deal with these men and women, for Christ's mission is with such; "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

When I look at the city of God—at the vision of which we glanced last Sunday evening in the Book of Revelation—there are two things that fill my soul with wonder. On the gates are the names of the twelve tribes of the Children of Israel, and on the foundations the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. We have missed the significance of the symbolism of that great vision if we have

thought that these are the names of men of naturally fine and noble character upon the foundations. Nothing of the sort. Let the man whom some of us most admire tell us—for I verily believe that Paul's name is among the apostles of the Lamb,—he says of himself that he was "chief of sinners." On the gates of the city are the names of a failing, disobedient crowd of men who handed on the forces of failure to their sons. The names on the foundations are those of men who were sinning men, and who chant the anthem of redemption as they say, "Who loveth us, and loosed us from our sin by His blood; and He made us to be a Kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father." The city of God is a city of ransomed, redeemed, regenerated humanity, the work of One Who came into human history and laid hands upon the chaos in order that He might restore cosmos. If we are going to help to build that city, we must go with Him by the way of His Cross.

To speak only of the Cross is not to deliver the whole of the Christian message. Said Paul, "It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead." It is that "was raised" which is the final word of the Christian evangel. If I leave the city and find my way to Him without the camp, I am coming to a new center of humanity. He looked on to the Cross, and in the midst of a great multitude of men, in answer to the inquiry of the intellectual Greeks as represented to Him by two of His own disciples, He said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." What did He mean by "now"? To what was he referring? Read the context and it will be seen that He spoke in anticipation of His Cross. By the way of the Cross is the judgment of the world, is the casting out of the prince of the world, is the drawing of humanity back to Himself, and the consequent building of the city of God. If we go forth bearing His reproach, we come to this new center of discrimination, of judgment; this new center of repelling power over the forces of evil; the prince of this world cast out; this new center of attraction and healing. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself."

Mark the sacred, holy paradox. To come with Him without the camp is to come with Him within the veil, to the very heart of the sanctuary, into true fellowship with God. To come with Him through the gate, to the camp, to the place of reproach; is to find our way into the place of peace, of communion; is to find our way to the dynamic center from which the forces flow, for the doing of that which cannot be done in other ways.

That is one reason why I read not merely that one passage in the thirteenth chapter but that which is a part of it in the twelfth chapter, "Ye are come," not merely you will come, not merely the ultimate and final victory, but "Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect."

To follow Him outside the gate, without the camp, to the place of reproach is to come to the center of actual present accomplishment of the purposes of God; and to assurance of their ultimate accomplishment, to the widest bound and reach of the universe of God. We come to a new center. We pass within the veil. We come to a place where the old ideals are reborn and the old forces are renewed and remade. We come to the place which in the history of the world will finally result in the acceptance by men of the truth that government cannot be by might, but that it must be by right; we come to the place where the culture of the world will be reborn; science, art, music, literature were through that Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ born anew. Whatever there had been of these before the age in which He came was decadent and ruined. The great philosophy of Socrates had withered, and men were disobedient. The idea of Epicurus that men should get back to the simple life; or that of the Stoics, who aimed at high ideals of virtue; these things were perished, and even while the words of the ancient philosophies were upon the lips of the Greek teachers, the vital forces were at an end. But they were reborn in the Cross. With all its rugged severity it demanded forever more simplicity of life and strenuousness of life in order to bring about the fulfilment of being and to cooperation with the purposes of God. At that center, outside the city beyond the gate, spiritual religion was reborn, and by way of that Cross men have come to know that neither in Jerusalem or in any mountain set apart do men find God; but wherever they turn to Him and meet Him at the trysting-place of His love as revealed in His Cross, there do they find Him.

The urgency of the appeal is this, there can be no sanctification of the people or of the city save by cooperation with Christ in this method of self-sacrifice; this consent to fellowship with Him in His Cross. Here only is the place untouched of storms, for here was the center of the whirlwind. Here only is the place of action with God, in the building of the city.

If we are truly pilgrims of faith, warriors of faith, builders of faith, then let us remember we cannot dwell in Jerusalem sharing its life, and by talking of the Cross, redeem it. We cannot dwell in London and be of London, of its desire and of its amusement and of its philosophies, and save it. There must be utter separation, with a clear line of demarcation between those who have seen the vision and are walking the way of God toward the victory, and those who are content with godlessness. That is the first requirement for being able to help the city, or to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom or to cooperate in the building of the city of God.

Our only business as Christian men and women in London is that of missionaries. "What," someone says, "are you saying that all we have to do is to preach this gospel at the street corners, and preach this gospel by the distribution of literature?" No, nothing of the kind. Every relationship is our opportunity for proclaiming this evangel and bringing men into fellowship with this Christ of the Cross; our business by our strict integrity therein, and even by denying self therein for the sake of the man who is struggling by our side is

our opportunity for building. That is Christianity. In social life and in municipal life, by standing for the crown rights of the Lord Christ, we build the City of God. We are to be separated to these things on six days of the week as well as on the seventh; by definite, honest, sacrificial toil, declaring the evangel; and by getting hold one by one of broken, bruised, battered men and women, and leading them to this Christ.

It is very little in the great whole that I can do, or that you can do, my brother. Thank God for the great whole; but do not let us forget that there is no great whole of God if we neglect our little. He has chosen, in an infinite mystery, which is also infinite wisdom, to limit Himself in His work for the restoration and salvation of men and of the race, to those who name His name and wear His sign, and share His life. Thus, the final appeal is the word of the text: "Let us therefore go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."

236 - Hebrews 13:14 - Christian Citizenship: No Abiding City

Christian Citizenship: No Abiding City

For we have not here an abiding city.

Hebrews 13:14

It is reported that the great German Chancellor, Bismarck, declared on one occasion that great cities are great sores upon the body politic. I do not suppose any of us who are at all familiar, experimentally with the cities of today, or from our reading, with the history of the cities of the world, will be inclined to differ from that opinion. The history of cities has through all time been the history of the gathering together of men, and the presence among them of forces which destroy. We are perpetually confronted in our dealing with human nature with two apparently contradictory impulses. The first is that of the gathering together of men into the life of the city; and the second is that of the ceaseless and almost restless desire to be away from the city.

"We have not here an abiding city," wrote this teacher of the Hebrew people, and the words, as you will remember, occur in the midst of the great argument concerning faith; its nature, its operation, its rewards; and the postponement of its final victory. The words of my text are taken from that chapter in the letter which is, as to the argument, the continuation of the teaching commenced at the close of the tenth chapter, running through the eleventh, and continuing until the close of the treatise. If we remind ourselves of the underlying teaching of that entire paragraph, we shall come to a better understanding of the meaning of our text.

The letter to the Hebrews is a letter written in order to warn men against the specific sin of unbelief. It illuminates for us, therefore, as perhaps no other writing in the Bible does, the true meaning of faith. It reveals the fact that faith is not merely intellectual apprehension and conviction of truth; and shows that faith is the assent of the will, and the yielding of the life, to the claim of the truth of which the mind is convinced. It is the letter, if I may say so, which more than any other writing of the Bible gives Biblical force and warrant to the suggestion of the title of Professor James's essay, "The Will to Believe"; showing forevermore that belief in its profoundest sense is not conviction merely, but conduct proceeding out of conviction, and harmonizing with the conviction. From beginning to end the writer has but one sin in mind, the sin of unbelief; that is, the sin of refusing to yield obedience to the claim of the truth, when the truth has brought conviction to the mind.

The positive teaching of the letter is that of the superiority of the Christian economy to all that had preceded it; the superiority of the revelation by the Son, to the ministration of angels; the superiority of the leadership of the Son, to that of Moses who led the people out but could not lead them in, and to that of Joshua who led the people in but could not give them rest; the superiority of the priesthood of the Son, to that of Aaron who perpetually repeated sacrifices which brought no peace to the conscience. After these arguments we have the illustrations of those who by faith, that is, by yielding to the claim of the truth, wrought righteousness, subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire; and marched through seas of blood and through ever darkening perils to victory; and who by their activities of faith laid all the ages under debt to them for their triumphs. In the course of that great illustrative chapter, the central thought is that these pilgrims of faith, warriors of faith, builders of faith, were forever moving forward toward the establishment of a city. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees because in it he could find no rest, and he left it seeking a city whose Builder and Maker is God. That chapter is gathered carefully around that central word of revelation; and thus we discover that the march of these men, their pilgrimage, their warfare, their constructive passion, were inspired by the vision of a city, a city established, a city of perfect order, a city Whose Builder and Framer is God.

The eleventh chapter of the letter closes with this very significant declaration, that while these men of faith of bygone days saw the city afar off, set their faces toward it, made persistent pilgrimage to reach it, fought opposing forces on their way, yet they never reached the goal toward which they ran, or saw the city built. "These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

It would be possible to write a continuation of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews; we could gather the names of apostles, confessors,

martyrs, reformers, statesmen, prophets, preachers; and if we did so, thus completing the list of the pilgrims, warriors, builders of faith; then of all those who have crossed the borderline and are out of our sight, we should still have to say, the goal is not yet reached, "these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise."

Now in order that we may take this first part of the larger text and understand it, I must tarry a moment longer to add something to that already said concerning this pilgrimage, this warfare, this passion of the men of faith. What, according to this whole contextual teaching really is the goal toward which these men ran; and toward which men of faith have ever been moving through the centuries? The hymn we sang together will mislead us unless we are careful.

I am not saying we should not sing it; there are values in the hymn and we shall continue to use it; but the idea of our hymn was that the pilgrim hosts are moving toward the heaven that lies beyond.

We are travelling home to God,
In the way the Fathers trod.
They are happy now, and we
Soon their happiness shall see.

That is not the teaching of this letter. I am not denying the reality of the heaven that lies beyond. Some day by God's good grace and by the merit of the Saviour I hope to reach it. But that is not the pilgrimage, that is not the warfare. We are not fighting to build heaven. The living Lord passed out of sight saying in infinite tenderness and pity and love and compassion to His fearful followers, "I go to prepare a place for you"; and that He will assuredly do.

What then is this pilgrimage, what is this warfare? What is the consuming passion of the men of faith? I answer that inquiry superlatively, that I may state it briefly. He has gone to prepare a place for us beyond; our business is to prepare this place for Him. The city which Abraham went to seek was not a city postponed beyond this world; but the city of God established on the earth; the city of God, the symbol of the whole wide world subdued to the Kingship of God. Toward that the men of faith have ever moved. Toward that the men of faith are moving still today. The supreme passion of faith is not the selfish desire to win heaven, but the self-emptying desire and devotion to win the earth for God.

It is not my intention now, or indeed on the three subsequent Sunday evenings in which I propose to tarry with this line of consideration, to deal with dispensations and methods; all these are interesting and valuable, but they are not within the province of the present consideration. We are looking at the ultimate desire, the ultimate passion, of the men of faith. It is a passion for the establishment of the Divine order, or in figurative language, for the building of the city of God. To this the whole Bible bears witness. You open it, and you are introduced quite quickly to a garden scene. You read through it, and you journey in spirit along the way of the wilderness, over which there is a highway, a way of battle and of turmoil and of strife. You come to the closing book; and you find the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem; not heaven, but a city descending out of heaven; and while you look, you hear the all-inclusive anthem, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." The Bible is a mirror giving us human history from the Divine standpoint, and revealing those methods of God with men, and those methods of men with God, whereby from the garden man comes ultimately to the city.

In every human being there is a sense of the city, and the desire for the city. However much we would if we could—and let me say it quite bluntly, we would if we could—keep our young people away from great cities, and let them live in the country; we cannot keep them away, the lure of the city is in the heart of the young, they crowd toward the city. I am not discussing the question from the economic standpoint, but from the human standpoint. The underlying passion for the city is according to the Divine purpose, according to the Divine will; one of the primal forces of life, one of the elemental things of human nature, from which there can be no escape.

Whether you count the Scripture lesson of this evening as poetry or history, for the moment I care nothing, I am after its central lesson. The first city the Bible names was built by Cain, a murderer, a self-centered man, whose offering was refused because he was refused. That is the first city to which the Bible refers. The naming of names will be enough to help us to see the history of cities since; Sodom, Babylon, Nineveh, Carthage, Rome, Paris, London, New York; a long, continuous succession, and always the same thing, the city expressing human failure as nothing else can; startling the ages, and inevitably passing and perishing; in the time of their existence places where evil gathers, and where Satan's seat is; then crumbling to decay.

Man is always attempting to build a city; he has never yet built a city. Why? Because man has been attempting to construct a city out of a garden, in forgetfulness of the God of the garden, and the laws of his own life in relationship to that God.

"We have not here an abiding city." Why not? Let us answer that question first, by reminding ourselves of what the Christian character really is, and what it therefore demands.

The first essential element of the Christian character is the death of self—so easily said, so imperfectly understood, so little realized—the death of self; not the destruction of self, but the death of self, so far as self is a separate personality thinking only of itself and making all outside forces minister to its own well-being and advancement. The Lord Christ begins by saying to men, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself... and follow Me." That is the central fact of Christian experience, denial of self.

The result in the economy of grace is holiness of character; purity of motive; holiness and righteousness, the two sides of the one great pure Christly character; holiness, rectitude of character; righteousness, rectitude of conduct springing out of rectitude of character. Add to these two things that one inclusive word which has in it the fire of holiness and the passion of self-denial, the great word love. These are the distinctive elements of Christian character.

What is the result wherever these things are realized? A new refinement; life finding self realization according to the original purpose of God through self denial; life set free from all the vulgarities that spoil, and coming into realization of all the refinement and beauty of character which once had its manifestation in human history in the Person of our Lord Christ, the Man of Nazareth. And not refinement only; but that permanence which defies decay, which realizes that the things of past failure are things of no moment; which enables a man to think of death as transition merely, and to challenge the rider upon the pale horse, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

What are the resultant needs of the people who share this character? A dwelling place in harmony; the congregating together of like characters; enterprise inspired only by such motives; the City of God. The presence and work of our Lord in the world was for the creation of these characteristics, and of this character. I go further, and say that the presence and work of our Lord in the world has resulted in the creation of these characteristics and of this character. Dealing with individual men, He communicates the dynamic force which produces the change; and those who are so converted, turned back again to the Divine ideal for humanity, born again, find their life centered no longer in self but in God, and are conscious of the passion for holiness without which no man can see the Lord, and feel within them the thrill and throb and driving of this great eternal life. Those who partake of these characteristics become men and women who are constrained to say, "We have not here an abiding city." The men of faith are homeless in this world, having no place where they can perfectly rest; having no place where the surroundings are in harmony with the mysterious and mighty forces of their own life, as created by their contact with this Lord Christ Himself.

Turn from that first consideration, and think of earthly cities. We have already glanced at them in general outline, having named several. Plato declared that the origin of the city was the desire of man to protect himself against marauding and wild beasts. Aristotle declared—and came far nearer to the deepest truth—that the city was the outcome of the social instinct in individual life. Moses, in the chapter I read, does not attempt to give us a philosophy; but tells the story of the building of a city; it was an attempt to make out of a garden a city, and an attempt to do it without God. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, by which the writer did not at all attempt to suggest a localized Deity, but in figurative language spoke of a man who turned his back upon God and chose his own way, determined to carve his own fortune, and be independent of the Divine government and instruction. He went out from the presence of the Lord and built a city. In that case the city was the outcome of social instincts on the lowest levels; and men still look upon cities as opportunities for self-aggrandizement, and for ministering to covetousness. What is the history of London at this moment? Write it in one brief and burning word, the survival of the strongest—not the survival of the fittest, the fittest is not always the strongest. If you doubt it, stand any Saturday night upon the Embankment with our men who are doing work which is perhaps the most sacred of any we are trying to do, touching the flotsam and jetsam of the city, unemployable men, many of them; but mostly men unemployed as the result of the grind of brute strength flinging out weakness. If you could be divested of your accidental—or if you prefer the word providential—resources, and put down here in this great city with its tides of life and its abundant wealth, what would you do? In spite of all your education and ability, you would be ground with the rest. London is selfish to its heart and core. It is not peculiar in that. That is true of every city in the world today.

Perhaps, after all, there is no city more eloquent to the man of faith than Rome, the eternal city—oh, the irony of it! Those who have stood in Rome will understand what I mean. Rome is in three layers, pagan, ecclesiastical, modern; and the weakest of these is the modern. I am speaking materially of course. There was a strength in pagan Rome which abides until this day in spite of the overlaying of ecclesiastical Rome. There was the strength of awful cunning in ecclesiastical Rome, that abides in hoary magnificence in spite of the newer Rome that is arising. Three layers of failure; perpetual memorials of man's inability to build an eternal city without God.

Whatever city you come into, throughout the world, you will find the same thing. Why? Because of the man who builds; because the man attempting to build is self-centered and not God-centered; because at the heart of city life, varying its expression, changing its garments, altering its methods, there always sits enthroned the individualism of selfishness. Look at the advertisements on the hoardings or in the newspapers, and listen to the song of self! The Greatest Boon ever offered to the Public! The Greatest Discovery on Earth! The Largest Retail—something—in the World! Buy of Me: Take My Wares: They are the Best! What does that mean? Make me rich, whatever other man may suffer. Selfishness is everywhere.

If these are the incidental symptoms, the essential malady is godlessness, forgetfulness of God. Have you given up the story of Babel? Restore it to your Bible for it is the veritable truth. Let us make us a name! Let us be a confederacy independent of all men, and of God Himself! That is the ancient story of the Bible; but you can find it in tomorrow's newspaper in the last Trust formed, the newest monopoly cursing the earth: Selfishness! That is the history of the city. Self in its lowest forms, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life; with a neglect of all those who are unequal to the strife and the struggle. Great cities are great sores upon the body politic.

"We have not here an abiding city." And again, why not? Because there can be no harmony between the principle of self-death and the principle of selfishness; between the method of sacrificial service and the mastery of covetousness; between the determined proclamation of the evangel that declares salvation for the lost, and the determined propagation of the philosophy which is expressed in the words, the survival of the strongest. The two things contradict each other necessarily and perpetually. We have here no continuing city for we are men of faith; men who believe in God and in holiness and in love. The cities of earth are built by men of sight, attempting to do without God; who speak of sin as though it were an infirmity which does not very much matter: who prate of love but never practice it in commerce, statesmanship, or social life.

Here we have no continuing city. The conserving elements are lacking, and the corrupting elements are regnant. "Change and decay in all around I see." How often we glibly sing it; it is true also in this wider sense. We might write it over cities everywhere, over the cities of today. We may pull down our barns and build greater; but if God only comes into the life by an after-thought, by the use of the disjunctive conjunction "but," of what use are the barns and the produce laid within them, and the things in which we make our boast?

Here we have no continuing city, because the men of faith are a continuing people, those who are to put on incorruption, which cannot dwell in corruption. It is only when the elements of corruption are eliminated, and the leprosy of sin is dealt with in human life, that the city of God will be built. "Here we have not an abiding city."

What one would like to do is to preach next Sunday evening's sermon at once, for all this is preliminary. I would not like anyone to go away saying that the preacher has declared the aloofness of the men of faith; that they have no continuing city, and therefore, that they have nothing whatever to do with the cities in which they live; that they have no responsibilities concerning the cities of today. That is not the teaching of the passage, and I pray you listen to the rest of the verse, the sermon will matter little, "we seek after the city which is to come." Not we seek one that lies beyond, but we, the men of faith, discontented with things as they are, seek the city of God, moving ever towards it.

Whatever the future may have in store for us, today we have no home on earth as a people. I am convinced that the first lesson of powerful service is that of the separation indicated by the Abrahamic indices of tent and altar. There, at the center of the Hebrew line of worthies rises the great figure of Abraham who left Ur of the Chaldees and went forth to seek a city. What were the signs of his attitude? The tent and altar. The tent; easily struck, easily carried, easily pitched, and as easily struck again. The altar, wherever there is a tent, a place of worship, a place of recognition of God, a place to which to come for the renewing of vision and the communication of virtue. These two things are the symbols of the life which leads on to victory.

The measure of the separation of Christian men from the maxims and methods and motives of the cities of men is the measure in which they are able to correct the things that are wrong; to destroy the forces that destroy; to construct the city of God. We men of faith make no greater mistake than when we take up our abode in any city of earth saying: "Here are we, and of this city we are citizens"; saying in contradiction to the great word of the letter, Here we have found our abiding city! No, the tent is the symbol of the life of the man of faith; always ready to be disturbed by the Divine government, always ready to respond to the command to move away to bear witness somewhere else. That is the first lesson, but not the last, not the final one.

There is much to be done while we sojourn in the tent. We shall have to pray for Lot and for Sodom; we must go out and fight for the rescue of Lot; but there will always be Melchisedek, the Priest to meet us on our way, and minister to our needs. The first lesson is that of the tent, side by side with the altar.

The Church of God—speaking now in more general terms—can only help the nation, as she is composed of pilgrims, warriors, builders of faith who dwell in tents, and erect altars, and work with sword and with trowel for the building of the city of God.

Our only true content should be in our abiding discontent with everything unlike God. That is but another way of saying all I have been trying to say. The measure in which we sit down in the city, and are content with it, and rejoice over it, and are satisfied with it as it is, is the measure in which we have lost our vision of the City of God, and personal fellowship with the God of the city.

Out of our supreme content and rest in God and in His will, arises the restlessness of perpetual protest against everything that is unlike God. That is the driving force which will enable us to destroy the destructive, and to help in the building of the city of God. Pilgrims, warriors, builders, "We have not here an abiding city!"

Christian Citizenship: The Search for the City

For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come.

Hebrews 13:14

On Sunday evening last we took the first part of this verse, "We have not here an abiding city." This evening our subject is the second part, "We seek after the city which is to come."

The "We" of the writer refers to the men of faith, those who live by faith in God, those who share the vision of the ultimate victory of God in human history.

The declaration occurs in the letter which is preeminently intended to warn the men of faith against the perils of apostasy; the letter in which no specific sin is dealt with, but from the beginning to the end of which the one all-inclusive sin of unbelief is the only sin in the mind of the writer; the letter that perhaps in some ways more wonderfully than any other writing in the Bible sets before us the movements of the Divine economy, and shows how they all center in the Son of God; the letter which opens with the magnificent thunder that announces the fact of God, and proceeds immediately to the all-inclusive declaration that the God of the universe has not left men without witness and without testimony, "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son"; the letter that from that first and wonderful declaration proceeds to show that the speech of the Son is superior to all preceding it and absolutely final; superior to that ministry of angels whereby the ancient economy was initiated; superior to the great leaders of men, to Moses who led the people out and could not lead them in, to Joshua, who led them in but could not give them rest; superior as Priest, abiding forever, Priest in the power of an endless life; superior as the File-leader of the men of faith, going first in the great procession, taking precedence over all others by reason of the clearness of His vision of the ultimate issue, and by reason of the splendor of His devotion to the process of travail and pain by which the triumph will come.

It is in this letter that the writer says, speaking of faithful souls, adventurers upon the great highway, those who have seen the promise but never yet have realized it, "We have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come."

Our Bible opens with a garden; it closes with a city; and the garden and the city are alike of earth. The final vision is that of Jerusalem—not heaven, but coming down out of heaven to earth, as a bride adorned for her husband; and the great anthem that celebrates the coming of the City is "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men and He shall dwell with them." Between the garden and the ultimate city, we find all the tragedy of human sin, human failure, human inability; and all the magnificent processes of God's government, forever moving, to our seeming with great slowness, but with infinite sureness, toward the ultimate goal of the establishment in this world of His own Kingdom, and the realization of His own purpose among the sons of men. Between that garden and that city, there is a long succession of pilgrims of faith, visionary souls, fanatics in the thinking of the men among whom they lived, leaving earthly cities to seek one they saw, but no other saw; abandoning the values of the passing and perishing, because convinced of the values of the eternal and permanent. Abraham leaving Ur of the Chaldees to seek a city of heaven that lies beyond, to establish a heavenly order in the world, until at last in those wonderful hours when the seer of blue Galilee beheld the ultimate things of the processes of God in the affairs of men, he saw Jerusalem from on high coming out of heaven, and the mystic glory of the established Kingdom flamed before him. If we are of the number of those who see that vision, and hope for that result, who believe that the victory must be won, then we are of the number of those who have to say, "We have not here an abiding city."

What then shall we do? We are men and women who by God's good grace are men and women of vision, who see the ultimate; and understand that the supreme words descriptive of the ultimate are words made precious to us by the ministry of our Lord; men and women who understand, that at last, in the established Kingdom of God and city of God, love will be the all-inclusive reason for activity, light the sufficient intelligence that men may not stumble, and life the energy equal to obedience to love in the power of light.

What shall we do? Shall we wait for the city that is to be, in the sense of selfishly desiring it? That were to deny our Christianity. Then shall we have conventions and conferences and gather ourselves together for the deepening of our own spiritual life, and in order to sing about the heaven to which we shall go when we have done with the bearing of burdens? That were to unfit us for heaven, and demonstrate our unworthiness to enter in. Shall we retire from all the busy activities of the great cities of the world, and shut ourselves within stone walls, and give ourselves to meditation and prayer? That were to miss the very purpose of our life in Christ; that were to cut the nerve of prayer, for men can only pray for the world's woe and wounds as they live near to them, and enter into constant comradeship with them. What then shall we do, for here we have no continuing city?

"We seek after the city which is to come." "We seek!" If I could only fasten that one word, so old and so familiar that it has almost lost

its power of appeal, upon mind and heart and conscience, I should thank God for the opportunity given me. Seek! Did the writer of this letter mean that we are to be looking for the heaven that lies beyond? Surely not; for death is the way to that, unless our Lord shall come to gather us to that great and spacious life which lies beyond. That is not the thought at all. That is not the argument of the writer. That is not the master passion that moved pilgrims of faith in the past. Reverently, let me declare it, knowing I am touching upon supreme and superlative things, that was not the master passion that sent our Lord with face set toward Jerusalem, the faltering, falling city. What then does the writer mean? Does he suggest that we should look for some unknown earthly land where we may build this city; that we are to seek some Eldorado? That, my brethren, were in itself of the essence of selfishness. Wherever men have attempted to find some tract of country hitherto unoccupied, in order there to build a new state, a new city, the result has been the condemnation of the method, for the impulse behind such activity is merely that of finding a safe city into which the privileged may gather, and be free from the stress and strain of all the things of conflict. You cannot find me any settlement of men which has attempted to escape from the burden and battle of the actuality of life in city, village, or town, that has ever justified its own aim or object or been a success; for God lays upon all selfish endeavor the paralysis of His disapproving touch.

The word "seek" has occurred before in our hour of worship. We heard it from the lips of our Lord in the midst of that great Manifesto of the King, wherein everything as I full well know and would perpetually enforce, was spoken to His own disciples and not to the mixed multitudes. To them He said, "Seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." In that wonderful passage, in which He revealed to men so much of the Father heart of God, showing that God cares for the flowers and the birds that have no ability to think and plan and arrange, and argues that He will therefore much more clothe and feed those to whom He has given the ability to think and plan and arrange; that passage in which He shows the unutterable folly of the man who sets his heart wholly upon treasures that are of the dust, and with a fine touch of sarcasm, mingled with pity, reminds men that moth and rust consume, and thieves break through and steal; that wonderful passage in which He puts into contrast in a way that surprises us the more, the more we study it, with its revelation of His perfect understanding of human nature and the tragedy of human sin, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon"; in that passage we hear Him say, "Seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness."

The particular word made use of by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews is an emphasized form of this word which our Lord used. It suggests strong passionate desire, accompanied by earnest effort in the direction of the desire. Seek; not merely gazing, in the hope that we may see; not merely superficially looking for, and expecting; but seek. "We seek after the city which is to come."

The thought suggested is not merely that of looking to see if we can find a city built; it is that of fellowship in the process of building the city. We do not merely turn our back upon Ur of the Chaldees, and go wandering forth in the hope that somewhere, sometime, we may discover a city in which the principles of righteousness and truth may obtain; but we turn our back upon Ur of the Chaldees, in order to seek the righteousness of God and His Kingdom, in the establishment of that Kingdom, and the building of that city.

I am not now entering into any discussion as to whether or not there may not be an opening heaven, and the actual descending of a city. I am not Sadducean enough to deny these things. I believe there will be startling surprises when at the crisis of His Advent our Lord will bring all things into subjection to Himself.

I am speaking now, however, of the present responsibility of pilgrims who have no continuing city. As we look back over the long line of heroes and heroines of faith described for us in this letter; or as coming away from them, we track the footway of others through the centuries since the time of our Lord Himself, we find that these men of the pilgrim character, these men and women who found in the cities of earth no permanent resting place, became pilgrims with tent and altar, and sought a city of God by exerting in the cities of men those influences which were possible to them by their comradeship with Christ Himself.

The nature of the seeking is suggested by the words, "The city which is to come." Not the city to which we go, but the city which God is building, and between the building of which by God and the seeking for which by His people, there is the most intimate relationship.

From these most general statements as to the meaning of the text, let us turn to practical application. How can we help toward the establishment of this Kingdom and the building of this city of God? First, by inward and personal realization of the principles of this Kingdom. The citizen of London, who is a Christian man, will help toward the building of the city of God, first by absolute personal abandonment of himself to the Lordship of Christ, by recognizing that Christ is infinitely more to him than an ethical teacher, infinitely more than a great pattern of human life, infinitely more than a Saviour from the punishment of sin and from sin itself.

All this is He, this Lord Christ of ours; ethical Teacher, speaking as men never spake, with a severity so terrible that even today I cannot read the words of His ethical requirement without trembling; perfect Pattern for human life, so that the nearer I come to Him the more I recognize the distance between Himself and myself, perfect Saviour, so that I know in the deepest of me that He has pardoned my sin.

But He must be more than all this to us; He must be Lord and Master of our lives. If I have received from Him the gifts that He

bestows, and render to Him absolute obedience, I can cooperate with Him in the building of the city of God, in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God into the world. Everything else will follow when that first principle is realized and yielded to; but nothing else will follow until it is so. There can be no larger seeking for the Kingdom of God until the Kingdom of God has come in our own lives. In other words, we cannot divorce private and public life, and declare that a man can be an influence and instrument for the establishment of the Kingdom of God, if in his own life he is impure. I can strike no blow against the powers of darkness which will tell, if I am allowing them to hold high revel within the citadel of my own personality. In beginning to build the city of God, I make my contribution, first and fundamentally, when I see to it that all my own life is under the Lordship of God's anointed and appointed King.

When that is granted, what next? The search for the city of God within the cities of men is first the result of the presence within those cities of pilgrims of faith who can find no abiding place within. "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world." Salt has no power to change corruption into incorruption. Salt has power to stay the spread of corruption. Salt is aseptic rather than antiseptic. In this great city of London we seek for the city of God as we are true to the life which our Lord has communicated to us, and as salt, purify, preserve, and give to goodness its opportunity. I am particularly anxious that this principle should be recognized by young men and women who name the name of Christ, and have seen the vision of the city, and desire to help in the search for it. You are salt of the earth, your life absolutely yielded to Jesus Christ, in the office, in the warehouse, in the college, wherever you may be, is a life that makes difficult the spread of impurity, that gives a chance to the aspiration after God that is born in the heart of the young man at your side.

Light; I do not think our Lord used His figures carelessly when, illustrating His own word, He said, "A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house." The city on the hill is for the illumination of vast expanses. The lamp in the house is for the irradiation of private places. Wherever these pilgrims of faith live with their tent and altar; pilgrims, ever ready to be disturbed; men of faith, never disturbed in the midst of disturbance; there is the light, revealing God to men, by revealing all that life means when men have found the Kingdom of God and have entered into it for themselves. By such living we make contribution to the coming of the Kingdom. By such living we seek for the Kingdom of God; and only by such living.

Why was it that Lot did not save Sodom? He could not help Sodom because Sodom knew that his motive for living there was selfish; that of gaining, getting. So also the Christian man, when London knows he is simply in the city for his own selfish gain, is unable to influence London for God. Unless London can discover beneath the legitimate exercises of life the passion for righteousness and truth; beneath all the activities of the passing days, the search for the Kingdom; that man has cut the nerve of his own endeavor. We seek for the city of God as we live the life of loyalty in the cities of men.

But further. There can be no such life that will not find opportunities for definite activity. The basis of all our activity must be love and light; not as though they were two things; they are but the two sides of the one great experience of fellowship in the life of the Son of God. God is love; it is an all-inclusive word. God is light; it is an all-inclusive word. They are not mutually destructive. They reveal the two qualities of the essential life of God. Love and light, passion and principle merging forever more in great and awful purity. In the proportion in which men are living that life of fellowship with God in the city, there will be activity, and it is only activity which proceeds from that inspiration and is governed forever more thereby that is powerful. The reason of all that we do if we would help must be love; and the method must be light. Our activity must be love inspired, but it must be light instructed. Love which is mere sickly, sentimental, humanitarianism, may destroy instead of building. Unless the love we feel for men is love illuminated by the awful purity of God that insists upon His holiness as well as His mercy, we cannot help men. Rose water is no medicine for the malady of sin. We never can understand love until we realize what it means, in the presence of the awful, brutal Cross of Christ which is His insistence upon holiness, and upon love. These are the things which are to master our activities if we are to seek the city of God. Alas, that we so often blunder into some selfish kind of desire to help men, forgetting these things! Take up the New Testament and see how these writers never forgot to relate the truths of everyday life with the fundamental truths of holy religion. "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church." Thus in one brief, burning sentence, home is saved and sanctified, and the flaming sword of the Divine anger is against all attempts to loosen the divorce laws of the country.

If we seek the city by the revelation of God and of man, and the interrelationship between them in our own lives, and thereby actual, positive endeavor inspired by love and light, which are of the essence of the life of God, we shall help toward the coming of the city.

Love will be angry in the presence of sin, in the presence of all oppression, in the presence of everything in our own city which is opposed to the city of God. Love is of the very essence of anger. Someone has said during recent years in writing of one of those old Hebrew prophets that the severity of the opening part of the book makes it impossible to imagine that the tenderness of the latter part was written by the same pen; that the man whose attitude was characterized by awful thunder could ever have merged into the infinite love song that describes Jehovah as singing over His people and resting in His love. That opinion is not true to the revelation of God. It is the severity of God which demonstrates His goodness. It is the goodness of God which creates His severity. It is the son of thunder who becomes the apostle of love. If we would help to build the city of God, we shall need the driving rage of a great anger. Do not forget that when Paul, the great embodiment of the Christian temper, came to Athens he was in a paroxysm, his spirit

was provoked within him.

Our contribution toward the building of the city of God will be a great anger against sin and all that is opposed to the will of God; but it will become a great tenderness toward the sinner. These are the things of which a man cannot speak; he can feel them though he cannot say them. Anger with sin, but tenderness with the sinner; that is the Christian mystery. We caught her in the very act! What will you, pure Teacher, say to this woman taken in adultery? What did He say? He looked at them and said, "Let the man that is without sin, cast the first stone." And when they had filed out, single file, He said to her, "Where are thine accusers gone; did no man condemn thee?" "No man, Lord." "Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more."

Do you think by that word He condoned adultery? You know He did not. His fierce and awful word abides forevermore, the most fierce and flaming thing ever said against adultery; but for the woman taken in the very act, He had a great compassion and a great pity. O God, that I may be a man something like that, fiery, angry with sin; forever patient with the sinner. So the city will be built; so the Kingdom will be prepared for the coming of the King.

Where shall we begin? At home. We need that word in England today. At home. Oh the perils threatening us! The first of them is the break-up of home life, the failure of Christian men and women to maintain home life. Let us begin there. You can have a city of God where you live. Your house can be the city of God. The amount of the rent does not matter. The kind of furniture does not enter into the calculation. Your house can be the city of God. On thirty shillings a week, someone says? Yes, if that is your income. Your Father knows you have need of these things, and if you really needed more He would give you more. Remember, He has only promised you sustenance. Your bread and your water shall be sure. Home with Jesus King, and the law of His light forevermore recognized, and the law of His love forevermore yielded to is the city of God.

There is nothing this land of ours needs more than the multiplication of Christian homes; and the Christian home is not a home that bolts its door when all its own members are in, and excludes all others. The Christian home will leave its door upon the latch and welcome the homeless—and there are hundreds of them in London who for lack of a home which will give them, not charity and patronage, but home life, are drifting away. Let your home be God's city.

Then the Church, that must be God's city. The Church, a hospital for all spiritual malady and disease, a nursing home for all the weak ones; a barracks into which men shall be brought to be trained for fighting; a base of operations from which the army shall march, terrible with banners against the things that oppose. That also is the city of God.

If we begin at home, and continue in the Church, then where next? In your office tomorrow morning. If you are a member of Parliament, in the House, and God hasten the day when it may be true—I say it because it is on my heart—that not at the beck and call of any party whip, but under the control of the Lord Christ, men shall speak for Him and be true to Him in Parliament.

In other words, begin to build the city of God where you are. Do not sit down and sigh, wishing that you might be somewhere else, in order that you might help. You can help where you are. George Herbert's philosophy is the philosophy we need to understand, that it is possible to sweep a room and make that and the action fine; and the maid in the house of her mistress tomorrow, who after this service will do that sweeping a little better for Christ's sake, is as surely helping to bring in the Kingdom of God as is the preacher in the pulpit here or anywhere.

This is Christian citizenship. This is seeking for God's city, and this outlook and conception will correct many popular fallacies such as that the Christian Church should catch the spirit of the age. A thousand times No! The business of the Christian Church is to correct the spirit of the age. Or that more manifest fallacy that when you are in Rome you should do as Rome does. Nothing of the kind. When you are in Rome do right though you violate all the conventionalities! Then there is that most devilish of all fallacies: It is no use, we must let things alone! That is what the devil wants us to do. That is what the devil said to Jesus; "Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee?" Our answer must be His answer, "Come out"; and in His name we are to be out upon the great campaign. Pilgrim of faith, soldier art thou, builder art thou!

Thine to work as well as pray,
Clearing thorny wrongs away;
Plucking up the weeds of sin,
Letting heaven's warm sunshine in.
Watching on the hills of faith,
Listening what the Spirit saith,
Of the dim-seem light afar,
Growing like a nearing star.
God's interpreter art thou,
To the waiting ones below;
'Twixt them and its light midway

Heralding the better day—
Catching gleams of temple spires,
Hearing notes of angel choirs,
Where, as yet unseen of them,
Comes the new Jerusalem!
Like the Seer of Patmos gazing,
On the glory downward blazing;
Till upon earth's grateful sod,
Rests the city of our God."

May we be builders with Him, as well as warriors and pilgrims.

238 - Hebrews 13:17 - Watching for Souls

Watching for Souls

They watch in behalf of your souls.

Hebrews 13:17

"Watching for souls" was a common phrase in the speech of our fathers. It has largely fallen out of use in the Christian Church in the present day, or it is carelessly used, with sad ignorance of its Biblical sanctions and its proper values. It is, nevertheless, an illuminative and forceful phrase warranted by the whole Biblical revelation, and remarkably focused in my text, "They watch in behalf of your souls."

While, incidentally, the statement constitutes an argument giving urgency to an appeal, essentially I find in it a revelation of the responsibility of spiritual leaders. I propose, therefore, to come to the consideration of the text, not in its incidental relation to the context, but in its essential revelation of the responsibilities of Christian men and women.

We shall consider, first, the Biblical sanctions of this word of the writer of the letter, and, second, some of its immediate applications.

Commencing with the Biblical sanctions, we are, first, quite simply and necessarily arrested by the central word, the word that gives thought and meaning and direction to the whole conception, "They watch." What is it to watch? If I take the word translated "watch," and feel my way into its heart I find that it suggests sleeplessness. Thayer says that the word has in it "an image drawn from shepherds," and at once, if we recognize that fact, the ampler atmosphere into which we are introduced is suggested. As a sprig of heather suggests the Highlands, or a spray of edelweiss suggests Alpine heights, so this word admits us into the atmosphere of the Divine conception and method.

What, then, is that conception, and what that method? The Biblical relations I endeavored to indicate in measure by the readings of the evening, that majestic word of the Twenty-third Psalm with which we started, "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want," the graphic picture which Ezekiel drew of the failure of the shepherds and the scattering of the sheep, that tender passage revealing the compassion of the Master's heart in the presence of the scattered sheep; that superb language in which He claimed for Himself the function of shepherdhood, "I am the good Shepherd," and yet again the tender light of the Galilean shore, when He commissioned Peter and through him all disciples to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep, until we reached the focused light of our text; and I believe that in the reading there broke on us a true conception of what it is to watch for souls.

The fundamental thought is full of august majesty and broad with the beneficence of Deity. "Jehovah is my Shepherd," said one lonely singer millenniums ago; and down the millenniums and through the centuries his song has been taken up and repeated in lonely hours, in the midst of the rush of life, and as men have crossed the desert where no water is. It is the profoundest word concerning God in His attitude toward the sons of men in their sorrow and in their sin. It is a word which has within it all the other great facts concerning Him. It is the synonym for His Kingship. It is the revelation of the meaning of His Fatherhood. So we start with that fundamental truth that Kingship in the Divine economy is Shepherdhood, that God is King because He is Shepherd, and that His activity of sovereignty is forever the activity of His Shepherd heart. That is fundamental.

We turn from that fundamental word of the psalm and go through the prophetic writings, selecting one only from the mass of material—that in Ezekiel, perhaps the most graphic of them all, in which we have the picture of the sheep scattered, and hear the thunder of the Divine denunciation, not of the sheep but of the shepherds. Those who should have bound up their wounds and healed the sick and sought the lost, and folded the flock and fed them, all these, said Ezekiel, had fed themselves instead of the sheep, had clothed themselves with the wool while the sheep were left to starve and to be scattered on the heights. Therein lay the supreme condemnation of the false shepherds.

I pass from these Old Testament Scriptures with the fundamental song of the Shepherdhood of Jehovah, through that stern denunciation of the men who had failed to fulfil their function as shepherds of the people, and I come to the New Testament. I read that when Jesus saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion, and the reason was that He saw them as sheep having no shepherd. I go a little further on in the days of His public ministry, and hear Him in that wonderful discourse which John alone has chronicled, describing His mission in this selfsame figure, "I am the good Shepherd." The hireling—mark the infinite scorn of it, the satire of Jesus—the hireling "fleeth because he is a hireling." The good Shepherd Whose own the sheep are enters into conflict with the wolf, grapples with the evil beast that spoils the sheep, and dies in the conflict. In that infinite mystery which is the heart of Christianity, exhausting all figures, He declares, "I lay down My life for the sheep.... I lay down My life that I may take it again," thus prophesying the resurrection whereby He is able not merely to slay the wolf, but to communicate to the sheep the virtue and force of His own life that they themselves may be made strong against the marauding wolf. Finally, interpreting the word of Jesus to Peter by all the symbolism of the ancient economy and the attitude of the heart of Christ, I hear Him charge the Christian man that it is his work to be a shepherd, to watch for souls. Such are the Biblical relations.

From these let us attempt to deduce the Biblical conceptions that are suggested in my text. "They watch in behalf of your souls." The first conception is that of the Kingdom of God under the figure of the flock. There is one verse in the New Testament to which we have often drawn attention, and doubtless you have often noticed its peculiar beauty. Speaking on one occasion to His own disciples, Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." In the economy of God the Kingdom of God will be the family of God; the family of God will be the whole flock of scattered sheep folded under the one Shepherd, Jesus; or, as He Himself did say, at last, when He has found the other sheep, there shall be one flock and one Shepherd. So that beneath this phrase, which seems to us so simple, we discover the ultimate purpose, the folding of the sheep into one flock, the gathering of the children into one family, the building of men into one ultimate, glorious Kingdom of God. That is the underlying conception.

Glancing again at these Biblical quotations, I find another truth, an immediate and present one—that the Kingdom is not established, that the children are not yet at home, or, to return to the line of our thinking, the sheep are still scattered. Jesus went through all the cities and villages preaching, teaching, healing, and He saw the multitudes, the multitudes of the cities, villages and hamlets, rich and poor, high and low, learned and illiterate, massed humanity. In some senses it would be a most inaccurate thing to say that Jesus never saw whether a man was rich or poor; in some senses it would not be true to say that He was unconscious of the phylacteries that were on the garments of the Pharisees or of the rags of the beggar; but in a profound and deep sense I do affirm He was unconscious of all these things. He was not attracted by wealth, He was not attracted by poverty. Let me change the tense to the present. Christ cannot be the Head of a labor church, He cannot be the Head of a capitalist club; but He is in the club where wealth gathers, He is present when poverty is arguing its necessity and grappling with its problem. He is attracted by humanity, indifferent to the false divisions in His passion for humanity and His determination ultimately to destroy the divisions that separate, and to create one flock and one Shepherd, the very Kingdom of God. He was conscious, and He is conscious today, of the scattered sheep, the fleeced, wounded sheep, the harried, worried souls of men. That is the condition that Ezekiel saw, the condition that Christ apprehended, and which exists until this moment. This London of ours teems and throbs with agony and unrest, sheep having no shepherd, the prey of wolves that raven, marauding by night and prowling by day, and stripping men of the things most precious to them. This is Christ's outlook: the Kingdom is not yet, the children are not home, the sheep are not folded. That vision of the condition of humanity is part of the light focused in my text, "They watch in behalf of your souls."

Tarrying yet a moment longer with these Biblical conceptions, I find the revelation of responsibility involved in the meaning of our text. What is it to watch for souls? Let us go back to Ezekiel and remind ourselves of the things that the shepherds did not do. Ye did not feed My flock, ye did not strengthen them, ye did not heal them, ye did not bind them up, ye did not restore them, ye did not seek the lost! Watching for souls is doing these things. Or I turn from the message of Ezekiel and come to the final, inclusive word of the incarnate Son of God, and I ask, in the light of that great passage in John, What is it to watch for souls? First, it is to enter into conflict with the wolf, and then, at personal cost and suffering and sacrifice, to be patient with the sheep as we lead them back to the fold and to the one great, only Shepherd of souls. Watching for souls demands sacrifice, expresses itself in sleepless vigils, in untiring activity, in going out after those that are lost, and bearing them, in the virtue of expended strength, back to the fold and back to the Shepherd.

So far, I have attempted merely the interpretation of the Biblical sanctions that lie behind this great text. Now, in the second place, I desire to turn to the practical, immediate application of the truth. In this letter occur the great words, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever," and I want to crave your patience for a moment while I say that thing again, asking you to consider whether you really believe it, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever." I am not at this moment interested in the last stupendous word "for ever." I am intensely interested in "yesterday" and "today." What He was He is, what He felt He feels. I ask your patience while I emphasize that. Do we believe it, do we act as though we knew it and believed it? Are we not in awful danger of imagining, somehow, that this crowned Lord of all of Whom we sing is removed far away from the actuality of human pain and suffering and human sin? Have we not some subconscious conception of Him, as in a land of glory where no

shadows fall, removed from immediate consciousness of human agony and immediate sympathy with human pain? The proportion in which we are mastered in our thinking of Christ by any such conception is the proportion in which we are misunderstanding Him, and are cutting the nerve of our endeavor in dealing with other men. We have to commence by reminding ourselves that He is the same, His vision of the ultimate is the same, His vision of the present condition is the same, His conception of the responsibility resting upon Himself as the Servant of God in the compulsion of His own nature of infinite love is the same. He has not changed. Did He see the multitudes in the olden days harassed by wolves, fleeced and fainting by the way? So sees He the multitudes of today. Was He moved with compassion then? So is He now. May God deliver us from any false and blasphemous idea that God has no sorrow, that He is impassive and unmoved in the midst of His universe, in the presence of human sorrow resulting from human sin. That is a libel, a lie, a contradiction of the whole Biblical revelation. Faber knew the heart of God better. He sang truly when he sang, "There is no place where earth's sorrows are more keenly felt than up in heaven." At this moment all the surging sorrows of London and the world are focused in the heart of the Son of God. We must start there. To fail to believe the great truth that He remains the same is to be so out of sympathy with Him, so out of touch with Him, as never to be able to watch for souls.

Let that be granted, and then I may proceed. The first thing we need if we are to watch for souls is a clear vision of the ultimate. The responsibilities of the immediate result always from the nature of the ultimate. Watch a builder at his work, at his one small corner of the building! Why that accuracy of eye and the corrective precision of the plummet that every single brick be truly laid? Because, if not to him, at least to the architect under whose inspiration he labors, the ultimate building is in view. That was what Michael Angelo meant when he said that trifles make perfection. That was why he spent so many hours perfecting the curves in the marble. He had seen the angel in the marble, and every movement of the chisel and hammer was directed toward the final, the ultimate. I am more and more convinced that one of the perils of our day in Christian service is that we are so occupied with the immediate that we fail sometimes to lift our eyes and look toward the ultimate, we lose the vision of God's final victory, and so we fail to do the finest work.

The ultimate in the work of Christ is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth; the ultimate in the work of Christ is one flock and the one Shepherd. It is when that ultimate glory had broken on the soul and possessed it, when that gleaming splendor of the final day of God has surcharged the life of the shepherd; it is then that the immediate becomes instinct with meaning, and that, to quote the Apostle Paul's great word, we labor "that we may present every man perfect in Christ." I pray there may come to every preacher and teacher, to all Christian men and women occupied in service, a very clear vision of the goal toward which God is moving and toward which He calls us to move in comradeship, fellowship with Himself. Christ's work for this world will never be done until there is one flock and one Shepherd, the end of nationalities in the one nation, the necessary cessation of war in the reign of the Prince of Peace, the last of strife and weariness and sin and sorrow in the final victory of the Shepherd Who laid down His life for the sheep.

The process leading to that ultimate includes a method of judgment as well as a method of mercy. There is a day of vengeance. He will not quench the smoking flax until He send forth judgment unto victory. But that day of judgment is not within our responsibility. We have nothing to do with it. This is the day of His seeking, the day of preparation for the Kingdom, and we are to work consistently in our watching for souls with the vision of the ultimate before us, realizing that every man won back to the Shepherd, every little child fed as a lamb of the one great flock, is a contribution to the dawning of the morning that waxes to noon and never wanes to eventide, when the "kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ."

If in order to achieve fulfilment of this ideal of watching for souls a vision of the ultimate is necessary, then also a vision of the immediate is necessary. Here I would speak with great carefulness and with great sympathy, and with strong conviction. What is our view of the men who are without our Christ? Has it ever occurred to you that the word to which I have referred describing Christ's vision of the multitudes is a very strange word, and that it certainly would not have described His disciples' view of the multitudes at that time? It is still more certain that it would not have described the multitudes' conception of their own condition. Remember, it was He Who saw them as sheep not having a shepherd, sheep scattered. They did not so think of themselves. Blindness had fallen on them, hardness of heart, that terrible hardness which is failure to appreciate one's own condition. It was His eye that saw them so. His vision—mark this carefully—of the scattered, fleeced, failing condition of the multitudes was born of this very vision of the purpose of God. What measurement do you put on humanity in order to understand it? If you once see humanity as God intended it to be, then you will understand how far it fails and comes short. Look out over the world today, look out over our own city, our own land today, and we see multitudes; we meet them every day, pass through their midst on the highways of the city, gaze on them when they are massed for sport or spectacle, or tragedy. How do we see them? Comfortable, respectable, fairly moral? Are we satisfied with the condition of the multitudes? Then we have not Christ's vision, and that because we lack the life that makes the light as we look. There are some men today who look out on the multitudes and speak to me only of the magnificence of humanity. There are others who speak only of the depravity of humanity. In each case it is a partial vision. The vision of Christ was one that clearly saw the magnificence and possibility of humanity within the economy and purpose of God, the glory of the race; and that clear vision of the dignity of humanity, of the worth of one soul, of the splendid possibility of human life, created His vision of the ruin and the failure of humanity. You and I will never be watchers for souls of men until we see the glory of God's thoughts for them, and in the light of that see the awfulness of their failure. The Kingdom is unrealized, the family is broken, the sheep are scattered! That vision

also is necessary if we are ever to become watchers for souls.

Let these things be granted; then the measure in which the life of Christ is our life, the measure in which we have surrendered ourselves to His indwelling, so that His life gives the vision and creates our sensitiveness to the need of humanity, is the measure in which we are prepared for our service.

What, then, is our service? What, then, is our responsibility? If we see that ultimate, if we see this present condition, what is our responsibility? To bring the sheep to the Shepherd. I think perhaps if I stay for exposition I shall rob that statement of some of its power. That is the inclusive declaration of the responsibility of Christian men and women in order to establish the ultimate Kingdom of God, in order to meet the present necessity, to

Lead them to Thy open side,
The sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

It should be true of all Christians, "They watch in behalf of souls," and that watching means that they are incessantly laboring at sacrifice to gather the sheep to the Shepherd.

From these general words of application let me pass, in conclusion, to some particular words. We must recognize, in the life and work of this church and of all churches, that this is our business. Our business is to attach men to Christ. Here are the perils which threaten us in Christian work—the peril that we should attach men to ourselves, and the peril that we attach men to our church. The peril is that the preacher should imagine that when he has gathered a crowd about himself he has done Christ's work. No. I know how this thing searches, how it creates the doubt whether there may not be failure in the very fact that men and women gather about a ministry. I must be true to God and my soul. If I do but gather here men and women to hear me, I am of all failures the most terrible; unless through the things I say I can lead you to my Lord, how I fail! Unless I can attach you to Christ, and bring you to the one and only Shepherd of souls, then I also am a "blind mouth," the most terrible of all human failures. It is true of every teacher in the Sunday school. It is true of the whole Church. You tell me that you have erected your buildings, and that they are now being crowded with men and women who come to the socials and attend the clubs, and you are getting on! Are you leading them to Christ? If not, you are failing utterly. It is not enough to throng the building with multitudes, to crowd classrooms and club rooms with interested, patronizing men and women who will take the material things and imagine they are Christians. Unless you are bringing men to Christ, into first-hand relationship with Him, you are failing.

If that is our business we must prepare ourselves to the enterprise. We must partake of the Shepherd nature, have the Shepherd heart. It is through manifestation of the Shepherd that we must lead souls to Him. It is only as Christian souls constitute the media that they can be avenues of approach to the Shepherd. I must be like Him in my passion, in my patience, in my purity, or I cannot do His work.

Our responsibility is also that of availing ourselves of the resources at our disposal. If I am to feed the flock of God I must be familiar with the sustenance of souls. I must be a student of the Word of God, not merely of its technicalities, but of its dynamic. I must be a man of prayer, or, as I prefer now to put it, a man often talking with the Shepherd Himself if I am to help Him in His shepherd work.

Then it is not merely necessary that we recognize this as our business, and not merely necessary that we prepare ourselves for this enterprise; we must actually give ourselves to the business. That is the business of the preacher in his study, in his pulpit, in his social relationships. Woe be to the minister of Jesus Christ who establishes social relationships with his people of such a nature that he is not able to talk to them about their souls! Woe be to any man in the ministry who becomes so friendly with a member of his congregation at the club that he cannot grip him on the matter of God and eternity when occasion arises!

That is true of the teacher in the class. Dear fellow worker in this great enterprise, teacher in the Sunday school, what are the children and young people gathered about you for? They create your opportunity to lead them to Christ. It is true of all office holders in the church. It is true of the men who seat this congregation; it is true of the choir; it is true of those who preside over the finances of the church. The ultimate reason of everything must be to lead men to His open side, the sheep for whom the Shepherd died.

It is true of the church in the neighborhood in which it exists and in its world relationships. The Church has nothing to do with social relationships, apart from its insistence on the necessity that men shall find their way to Christ. If men want me to come out and help in their fight to get better conditions, I will come, provided always they will crown my King. My business is to present men to Christ and Christ to men in individual life, and then, on the basis of regenerate humanity, to reconstruct society.

This is the business of every church member. This is your central responsibility at home. Fathers and mothers, the supreme word of your parenthood is this—watching for souls. If I have fed my bairns, clothed and educated them, and have given them a start in life, and nothing else, God have mercy on me! Unless I have by some form or fashion, principally by example, led them toward my Saviour, then how I have failed!

It is the business of Christian men and women in their business life. You are responsible, my dear Christian lady, for the servant girls in your home. They are not employes merely. You are responsible for the men you pay wages to—at least, that your influence may be Christian, that you show by your character that you are related to the Lord. It is a blasphemy of the worst kind to say you employ a hundred hands. You employ a hundred men, and for each man who is spirit, mind and body, who is coming into contact with you, you are responsible. By your attitude toward him, by the graciousness of your character, you ought to lead him toward Christ.

Watching for souls, a phrase of the days of our fathers, fallen largely into disuse, misinterpreted in a narrow, mechanical method all too often today, is yet a great phrase, indicating the responsibility and the enterprise of the Christian Church.

May that God Who is the Shepherd of humanity, and Who has revealed Himself in the One Who is the good, the great, the true Shepherd, lead all those of us who rejoice in His Shepherdhood into such fellowship with Himself that of us also it may be said, "They watch in behalf of souls."

239 - 1 Peter 1:3 - An Easter Meditation

An Easter Meditation

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1Peter 1:3

These are the first direct words of this letter of Peter, following, as they do, immediately on the salutation. They constitute an outburst of praise. Undoubtedly, this letter was written by Peter in obedience to his Lord's injunction, "Do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren." He wrote "to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," and he wrote for the one purpose of strengthening them in the midst of severe trial and great difficulty. The letter thus intended to strengthen opens with this great doxology. One can understand how these words of Peter came from a very full heart. They are distinctly autobiographical. While expressed in that plural number which associated all the saints with himself, those to whom he wrote as well as those who had been his immediate companions in the early days of discipleship, there can be no escape from the conviction that he was writing very much out of his own experience. They were the words of one who had passed through deep waters because of manifold temptations and severe proof of faith, manifold temptations in the midst of which he had faltered and failed, severe proof of faith in the process of which his courage had failed, though his faith in his Lord personally had never failed. They were the words of a man who had passed through these experiences and had proved his Lord's power to deliver. They were words written, as we have already indicated, to such as were then passing through trial, so that he spoke to them almost immediately of the manifold temptations through which they are passing, and referred to that trial of their faith which was indeed severe, but which had its values and place in perfecting their character.

In a letter from such a man to such people we are at once arrested by the initial outburst of praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

In these words we have Peter's own account of what the resurrection of Christ did for him and for the first disciples. That is the narrowest application of the text; but, in proportion as we appreciate it, we shall be prepared for the wider application. I repeat, Peter was writing out of a personal experience. He was thinking of the past, of the first meeting with Jesus, of the mystic and marvelous influence he felt when his Lord looked into his eyes and said to him, "Thou art Simon... thou shalt be called Rock." He was remembering how, there and then, he yielded himself to the irresistible glamor of that personality and went blunderingly but courageously after Jesus. He was remembering all the days that followed, the weeks and the months, the wonders and the teachings, the dreams, the revelations, and the aspirations; he was remembering the gathering of the shadows, and the darkness that settled on him, and the dull despair, and then that strange and mystic light which broke on his astonished spirit when—we know not where or when—his Lord, having risen from the dead, found him all alone and talked to him. In that hour, he now declared, we were born again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Here again we may consider Peter, as indeed we constantly have to do, as the representative man. Interpreting his declaration that he was begotten again unto a living hope by his experience as it is revealed to us in the gospel stories, we may consider in what sense this was true. Such a meditation will serve to reveal to us the true value of that glorious event which we celebrate this morning, the resurrection of our Lord.

We shall consider, then, first, Peter's experience of Christ before resurrection; and, second, the difference which the resurrection made.

First, the experience before the resurrection. We will confine our attention to the man who wrote this letter, Peter, looking upon him

as a representative man. We need not dwell on the earlier incidents to which I have already made reference, but only on those of the later months of our Lord's ministry, the incidents occurring in that last, mysterious, shadowed portion of the time.

In the earliest days and months of our Lord's ministry He was the center of attraction to all sorts and conditions of men. We cannot but have observed in our reading of these gospel narratives that there was a very strange sifting process which went on from the beginning of that public ministry: gradually men and women who had been irresistibly attracted to Him withdrew from Him. Indeed, I should almost be prepared to say that they were driven away from Him by the very severity of His terms and the strange and almost appalling manner in which He repelled them. Our theme is not that of the attractive, or the repelling power of Jesus, but it is important that we remind ourselves of it. At the commencement of His public ministry multitudes crowded after Him; at the close of His life's mission not a single man stood by His side. The tragedy is ultimately expressed in words that always flame with fire when we read them, "They all forsook Him and fled," for these words refer to His own disciples. The course of the ministry was one of attraction and sifting as within the infinite wisdom of God; it was part of the Divine economy. In the course of our study of the life of the Lord we become impressed with the fact that in about two and a half years this hostility became very patent, criticism became more definite, men were evidently plotting to silence His voice, to take His life. They are seen working against Him, spreading the net, in order to capture and destroy Him.

Let us listen to three things that Peter said in that shadowed period, for in those three things I think we shall be brought face to face with his experience of his Lord. As the result of all the training, all the teaching, and all the gracious ministry of the years, he said three things, not to be undervalued, but for the moment simply to be observed. Without staying to turn to the actual passages, which are amongst the most familiar in the New Testament, let me refer to them and group them.

The first is recorded in the Gospel of John. We have the account of a certain hour of criticism, in the midst of which our Lord delivered discourses recorded by no other evangelist. In that hour of profound teaching, men drifted away from Him, and at last He asked the disciples, "Would ye also go away?" Then Peter spoke, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." That was Peter's first great confession.

A little further on, so far as one is able to follow these events in chronological order, perhaps three months later, we have that very familiar scene at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus, having gathered the disciples away from the multitudes, questioned them on the result of His ministry, and at last made the question personal to them: "Who say ye that I am?" In that connection we find Peter's second great confession, "Thou art Messiah, the Son of the living God."

So far as time is concerned, almost immediately following, perhaps within the next few hours, for Matthew carefully links that which follows to the story of the great confession, our Lord began to unveil to these men the method by which He would pass into His Kingdom, and told them of the coming Cross and resurrection. Then Peter looked at Him, and we have now no confession, but a voice full of anguish and anger. We have hardly dared to translate this passage accurately; that may be a somewhat bold thing to say, but those who are familiar with the Greek will agree. To catch the real significance of the word of Peter on this occasion we need to express what he said in the most colloquial language. In effect, he exclaimed in angry protest, God help you, that be far from Thee!

In those three sayings of Peter—all uttered within the space of three months, in the period when the method of ministry of our Lord was changing, and He was moving toward the ultimate passion—his experience of Christ is revealed to me.

First, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Then, "Thou art the Messiah." Finally, God help you, not that, not the Cross, not suffering! That was as far as Peter went in experience before the resurrection, and it was a long way.

The occasion of the first was that of gathering hostility. There was a deeper tone in the teaching of Christ as He attempted to direct the attention of the crowds from the material miracle to the spiritual suggestiveness, and the very disciples were offended in Him; and of them who had followed Him, "many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Then came the hour in which Jesus looked at the twelve and said to them, "Would ye also go away?" That is, do you wish to go? He gave them the opportunity to do so. There was in that question a touch full of severity. It was as though He had said, If you wish to go, the way is open. Do you desire to go? Then Peter looked at Him and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." This was a remarkable reply. Oh to be able to get back into the actual atmosphere! Think of these words for a moment, not from the Christian standpoint, but from the Hebrew, remembering the mental outlook of the man who uttered them. It is only as we do so that we shall understand what he meant. In that word of Peter spoken to Jesus he declared his conviction that the teaching of the Lord was authoritative and life-giving. In other words, in that confession of Peter, I find the declaration of his conviction that in the hands of Jesus were the keys of prophetic ministry, the keys of the true interpretation of the moral order, that His word was final as the law of life. In effect, Peter said at that moment, In Thee we have found the Prophet for Whom we have long been waiting: "Thou hast the words of age-abiding life."

We pass on, a few months perhaps, to the next crisis at Caesarea Philippi, and hear the challenge of Jesus, "Who say ye that I

am?" answered by that old and familiar confession, "Thou art the Messiah," for of set purpose I adopt the Hebrew word for interpretation of the Greek word "Christ." Once again, oh, to be back in the actual atmosphere and listen to the words as they came from the lips of Peter. What was it that he really meant? What was the Hebrew idea of Messiahship? It was that of kingship. In the second psalm we find the light of the Old Testament conception focused. The Hebrew was looking for a king to sit on the throne, and administer the affairs of the kingdom in order to realize the great ideal of the Hebrew nation as a nation, to make it the Kingdom of God. Peter looked into the eyes of Jesus and said, "Thou art the Messiah"! I can never quite make up my own mind whether there and then the conviction became final, or whether some little while before he had come to this conviction. I am inclined to think that it was in that moment when he was challenged that all the thinking, all the previous processes of his mind, crystallized into conviction and he said, "Thou art the Messiah," recognizing that Christ held the scepter.

Thus Peter saw Jesus not only as the Prophet for Whom men had long been waiting, speaking the words of ultimate authority; he saw Him also as the King for Whom men had long been waiting, holding in His hand the scepter of perfect government. He had discovered in Jesus the King to Whom all the prophets had given witness. This meant that his heart was full of hope, hope for the establishment of the Kingdom, the realization of the Divine purpose, and the fulfilment of the aspiration of his own people for generations; hope that in the King-Prophet there should be the enunciation of the final, perfect ethic, hope that the Kingdom would now be established.

Immediately we pass to the third word of Peter. The third word was spoken following the two confessions: the confession of Peter of which we have been speaking, and the confession of Jesus answering that of Peter. The confession of Peter was, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God"; the confession of Jesus was, "I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." In this word of his Master there flamed before the surprised vision of Peter the glory of the established order, and then immediately that deeper secret of the Cross, which Christ had never explicitly mentioned before to His disciples, for the evangelists are very careful to tell us that after this Christ began to show that He must suffer. This secret He had nursed within His own heart; it was the ultimate movement of His mission, the passion, the exodus! Of this He had never until now been able to speak; but "from that time began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up."

It is well to notice in this connection that every passage in the Gospel narratives which records our Lord's foretelling of His death records also His foretelling of His resurrection. This is a matter of supreme importance, because we are sometimes told that this foretelling of death was the result of Christ's yielding to circumstances, that He was so heroic that He would not turn aside from His path although He knew that men would kill Him. That is not the New Testament teaching. The New Testament does not reveal Jesus going to death as a victim, but as a Victor.

After the confession of Peter, then He told the secret for the first time to Peter and the rest of the disciples, that He must die, and that He must rise again. It was then that Peter uttered his passionate word of protest.

The more I ponder these stories, the less I am inclined to criticize Peter, and the more perfectly I come into sympathy with his protest. I do not say that it was right, but that it was perfectly natural. The Church of God still only half believes that the way to crowning is the way of the Cross. There never yet has emerged the Christian nation that is ready to die for the sake of right in the hope of resurrection into new life.

Jesus now looked at this man and said, You have found that I am a Prophet; you have found that I am a King; now let me tell you the secret of how I am going to utter the deepest truth, and of how I am going to build the Kingdom. I must go up to the city, I must be bruised, killed, and rise again. If we put ourselves in the place of Peter we shall understand his protest, made in anguish and anger. There is no escape at all from the fact that Peter was angry. He took Jesus aside, and began to rebuke Him, that is, to chide Him. God help you! That be far from Thee! In that moment his hope was overshadowed. If He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and to die, what about the words of age-abiding life? If the Teacher dies, the words will be dead! In that moment the shadows fell. If we read the story carefully and chronologically so far as we can, we see what happened from that moment until the Cross. Peter never came near to his Lord again. This is true of all the disciples. They followed Him all the way, they were amazed, they dared not ask Him questions. Over and over again we have the account of how He tried to tell them about His Cross, and every time—oh, the tragedy of it, and the wonderful unveiling of human nature there is in it—every time He spoke of His Cross some one of them broke in upon the conversation with practically the same question: Lord, who is the greatest among us? In those final days hope was dying. The disciples never ceased to love Him, never ceased to believe in Him and in His intention; but they lost all hope. Hope died, until at last they could bear it no longer, and they all forsook Him and fled. There at last He hung on the Cross, the brutal Roman gibbet, done to death; and the sun went out of the sky, the light faded from the horizon, and despair surged through their souls, and who can wonder? And now let us listen to the doxology:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The text tells its own story, but for a moment or two let us meditate on it, that we may discover the difference which the resurrection made. Do not forget the unutterable, immeasurable, unfathomable darkness of those days and nights, especially to these men—the Prophet dead, therefore the teaching impracticable; the King dead, therefore the Kingdom impossible.

Then came the strange news of the morning: "Certain women... came saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive"—I never read that without feeling that these men did not quite believe the story, because the women had told them! Then somewhere, somewhen—I am always thankful there is no record of the where or the when—Jesus found this very man Peter. When the two arrived from Emmaus eager to tell the assembled disciples that Jesus had walked and talked with them, before they could tell the story, the eleven told theirs, and this was what they had to tell: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." When, or where we do not know. When he was massing the evidences of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul referred to it, but neither he nor the Evangelist gives any details. This is one of the sacred, powerful silences of the New Testament. Somewhere the Lord met Peter. It would be almost sacrilegious to paint the scene, yet I feel that I could paint the picture of that meeting. At least, in this doxology we find the effect produced on Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It was the dawning of a new day in the rebirth of hope. The resurrection began its work at the point where this man had broken down. He had discovered the Prophet; the King had been revealed to him: Prophet? yes! King? yes! Priest? no! That he had not understood. He had seen the keys of moral interpretation in the hand of Christ and had said, Thou art a Prophet. He had seen the scepter and had said, Thou art a King. But he did not understand the wearing of the ephod, he did not apprehend the need of the Priest. The Cross had filled him with fear. In that moment when he saw the risen Christ, the first effect was on his conception of the Cross; the Cross was transfigured before his eyes! He had seen the hand holding the scroll, and the brow on which rested the crown; but now he saw, not first the King, not first the Prophet, but first the Priest wearing the ephod.

We are all familiar with Watts' great hymn:

When I survey the wondrous Cross.

In it there is a verse which is generally omitted from our hymn books today, why I do not know. It reads thus:

His dying crimson like a robe
Spreads o'er His body on the tree,
And I am dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.

Why have we cut that verse out of our hymnbooks? If it is the sign of a theological movement, that movement was not born in heaven.

His dying crimson like a robe
Spreads o'er His body on the tree.

That is the robe of priesthood. Peter now looked at the Cross through the resurrection light; and the Cross that had shamed him, that had filled him with fear, flashed and gleamed with the splendor of mercy: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to his great mercy..."

The Cross was now seen as the propitiatory, the place of priesthood; there was the altar, the sacrifice, and the priest; there sin was dealt with. Before Peter was far on with this letter, he wrote: "Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ."

Go back to the other side of Resurrection and stand with Peter. Death? God help you, no! That is murder and defeat! Come to this Resurrection side and look back. The Cross is no less vulgar—the vulgarity of the Cross is the vulgarity of the sin that erected it—but the Cross flames with light. The light of the glory of the grace of God, who took sin into His own heart and canceled it in a mystery of pain that can be expressed in human history only by blood-shedding, is shining from the Tree! The Cross is transfigured: "Who according to His great mercy begat us again into a living hope." By the way of that Cross the Evangel of forgiveness, which is the moral basis of the Kingdom, is made possible. The word of the prophet is the law of the Kingdom; the scepter of the King is the government of the Kingdom; but the Kingdom is a lost Kingdom, despoiled territory, a people in rebellion. How can it be restored? Only by building on a moral basis, by reconstruction, regeneration, repentance, renewal—all great Christian words born of the fact of the Cross. In the morning after the resurrection, when the Lord sought him, Peter saw in the transfigured Cross the first gleam of

hope, the hope that had perished when the Cross was erected, and he was begotten again unto a living hope. Hope springs from the Cross, it begins the flush of a new morning, it inspires the anthem of the ultimate victory, it composes the song of undying hope.

In the Cross Peter saw the throne established, and he saw the King, still holding the scepter in His hand, and knew that authority was vested in Him. Presently Peter heard Christ say, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and disciple the nations," and by the witness of Resurrection Peter knew that in the King were vested all resources of power for the establishment of the Kingdom.

When the risen Lord spoke to him that morning, Peter heard the final word of revelation. He had seen the keys in Christ's hand before; but now the truth was perfectly published. Thus the hope-restoring vision was, first, that of the Priest; second, that of the King; third, that of the Prophet enunciating the laws of the Kingdom, and every word full of force and power and life because of the victory won in the midst of the mystery of the darkness of the Cross.

Take away the resurrection, and what then? It is surely a work of supererogation to argue it in this assembly. Deny the fact which we celebrate today, what then? Then the Cross was the ultimate tragedy. If Christ was murdered and there was nothing in His death other than the victory of sin, then that is the severest reflection on the government of God of which I know anything; no other moral problem compares with it. If there was no resurrection, then that was of all tragedies the most tragic! No resurrection! Then that King with high vision, noble aspiration, is dead! No resurrection! Then the Prophet was mistaken when He said, "Fear not them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do," mistaken in all His high ideals! Then where am I? "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching in vain, your faith also is vain... ye are yet in your sins."

It is altogether too late for arguments of that kind. The results demonstrate the resurrection. Spiritual and moral reconstruction by the way of the Cross, the fact that men have seen, and still do see, sin when they come to the Cross, and confess it when they kneel before the Cross, and know the breaking of its power when they yield themselves to the Christ of the Cross, these are the facts that prove the resurrection.

The King is alive and known, exercising His will in the hearts of individuals, creating magnificent heroisms today, so that men are venturing forth in obedience to Him on high and holy enterprises, counting not their lives dear unto them, that they may be obedient to His will. The prophet is vindicated in the growing victories of His teaching.

Our hope is living, for these things are the result of the resurrection, they demonstrate the resurrection.

If for a while we are in the midst of conflict, and the noise of battle is about us, we know the victory is already won. Armageddon was fought in the hour of the Cross, the prince of this world hath been judged, and at last the victory shall be complete.

So that, with this song of hope in our heart, we also, born to a living hope by the way of the resurrection, trust in the Priest, follow the King, and obey the Prophet until His Kingdom shall come.

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Our Hope and Inheritance

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.

1 Peter 1:3-5

This is a great doxology. It immediately follows salutation, and merges into consolation. This method of introduction is the more remarkable when we consider the condition of those to whom the letter was addressed. Peter, faithful to the compact he had made with Paul to devote himself to the circumcision, was writing to Jewish Christians in Asia Minor who were then passing through a time of "fiery trial." They were charged with being "evildoers," enemies of the State. Their very name, "Christian," brought them persecution and oppression. Writing thus to these his brethren—his brethren after the flesh, and his brethren in the Lord Jesus Christ, writing to them to establish them, as his Master had commanded he should do when once he himself was turned back again—he began his letter with a vibrant note of praise and doxology. It is hardly the usual method. It is hardly the method that we should adopt ourselves. When we write to someone in fiery trial, misunderstood, oppressed, persecuted, we do not often begin with Hallelujah! But that is what this man did. His sentences are positively vibrant with joy.

The doxology consists of a celebration of life, the life from which it springs. What was the reason of the doxology? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who... begat us." The life so begotten was the inspiration of the song, and the song celebrates that life out of which it springs.

Observe the movements of the doxology. God is praised, is worshiped—for that is the significance of the word, "Blessed be God." It is the language of a soul prostrate before Him, not in fear, but in courage; not in despair, but in hope; not in cowardice, but in high and holy confidence. It is praise for life, for life as the outcome of the mercy of God by the way of the resurrection, "Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," and for life having a twofold value—"unto a living hope," "unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Thus we may say that the exultation of the singer centers in the abounding mercy of God, celebrates the resurrection of Jesus as the medium through which this mercy of God flows out toward men, and confesses the twofold benefit resulting from the outflow of that mercy by way of the resurrection.

Our theme tonight, selected from the many themes which the great passage suggests, is the relation of the resurrection to mercy and life. I propose two lines of thought only: first, what the resurrection of Jesus Christ meant to God; and second, what the resurrection means to us.

What the resurrection meant to God we will first state, and then attempt to consider. The suggestion is somewhat startling, that the resurrection in itself could mean anything to God. Yet, if one thing is most clearly revealed in this passage, and, indeed, in all the New Testament writing, it is that God had great gain by way of the resurrection, that the resurrection made possible in the activity of God that which apart from it had not been possible. We here view the outworking in time and into visibility of the profound fact by which God was enabled to do, what apart from this fact He could not have done. Take Peter's words once again, leaving out the subsidiary clauses: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... according to His great mercy begat us again... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The declaration of the apostle is that by the resurrection God created the possibility for the outflow of His great mercy in the gift of life to needy souls.

This assumes, first, the fact of the mercy of God. That mercy was not created by the resurrection. The resurrection made a channel through which it could flow. It also assumes the restraint of the mercy of God. It could not move; it could not act according to its own desire. By that of which the resurrection was the symbol in time all the barriers were broken down; and the eternal fact of the mercy of God found restraint ended, and the consequent possibility of outflow toward the sons of men.

What is mercy? Our word is a rich and beautiful one; but in order that we may make no mistake, in order that our interpretation may be neither too narrow nor broader than is warranted, let us see what the word really means which here is so translated. It is a primitive word whose history is unknown. It always had one particular significance, being always used in reference to compassion in activity. There may be compassion which never becomes active, which is always passive, the nursed sorrow of the heart; but that is not mercy. Mercy is compassion struggling and determined to reach out, and become active. The root significance of the word translated mercy in the Old Testament is apparently at the first a very simple, insignificant one; it means to bend, to stoop, to bow. Mercy is compassion bending, stooping, bowing.

Mercy, then, presupposes a state of need in those toward whom it moves, or over whom it stoops. Herein we distinguish between love and mercy, between grace and mercy, between compassion and mercy. I grant that apart from love, grace, or compassion there can be no mercy; but there may be love and grace, and even compassion, without mercy. Love does not necessarily connote sorrow or suffering in the case of the one on whom it is set; but mercy does. Love becomes mercy in the presence of the suffering and sorrow of the soul on whom it is set. Without love, there is no mercy; but whenever we employ this great word "mercy" we are conscious of a shadow over the brightness, there is a sigh and a sob, the sigh and sob of need; and mercy is that effort of love to go out to the needy one and lift and heal and bless. The mercy of God, then, is God's desire to heal and help, to deliver and save those who are wounded and in need, who are bound and in the place of destruction.

The apostle writes of the "much mercy of God." Here is a case in which all grammar is defeated. When I went to school I learned, positive, much; comparative, more; superlative, most. Which is really the greatest of these three? The superlative? By no means. The superlative is only the ultimate in comparison. The positive is the greatest, for when left alone it admits of no comparison. We may speak of the most merciful God when we are thinking of someone else; we think of God as being most merciful when we think of ourselves. When we think of any quality of God comparison is impossible. There is nothing with which to compare it. In that phrase "the much mercy of God," so easily passed over, the apostle has brought us face to face with the fact that God suffered; and suppose—a supposition which is entirely unwarranted, but in which I will indulge for the sake of argument—suppose God had found no way of saving men, He still would have mercy, compassion reaching out toward need. "The much mercy of God." None is unreached by that mercy, so far as it is desire on the part of God to save. If you rather question that statement I will enforce it by another Biblical quotation, God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

But there is a sense in which that "much mercy of God" must be, and is, held in restraint; there is some reason why it cannot flow out to men, some reason why it cannot act on behalf of those who are in need. This reason consists in the impossibility of conferring benefits on those who are in sin, that is, who are in rebellion against holiness, and under the mastery of evil. God cannot give the gifts of His love to souls who are under the mastery of sin. This restraint is not the operation of justice as opposed to mercy; it is the

operation of mercy itself, and of mercy in the interest of its own object. To bestow benefits on such people would be to defeat the intention of mercy. An angel is seen with a flaming sword at the gate of Eden guarding the way. Why? "To keep the way of the tree of life," lest man should eat of the tree of life and live forever. You say, That is judgment! No, it is mercy! To confer the gift of life on a man who has sinned would be to perpetuate his sin, and his pollution, and his paralysis, and his agony. Guard the way to the tree of life, and guard it by a flaming sword; and that flaming sword is mercy delivering men from the unutterable penalty of continuity in the condition into which they have brought themselves as the result of their own sin. Mercy is not weakness, not sentiment, not mawkish sympathy. Mercy will never try to deal with sin by the application of rose water! The old Hebrew singer understood this:

He smote Egypt in their first-born;
For His mercy endureth forever.
He smote great kings;
For His mercy endureth forever.
And slew famous kings;
For His mercy endureth forever.
Sihon, king of the Amorites;
For His mercy endureth forever.
And Og, king of Bashan;
For His mercy endureth forever.

The mercy, the going out of God in desire to heal, cannot confer blessings on men in sin. The gates of the city of God which the Seer of Patmos beheld were of pearl, every several gate was of one pearl; and the infinite significance of the pearl is its purity. The flashing splendor of the gates of the city of God forever says, Nought that defileth can ever enter here! Why? Because if that which defileth be permitted to enter into the city of God, then the very city of God is insecure, and the very conditions which mercy seeks to establish are denied and made impossible. By reason of the profundity of the Divine mercy, by reason of its intensity, of its marvelous greatness, it can make no truce with sin. The much mercy of God is, therefore, held in restraint.

Listen, then, to the doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus." What, then, was the resurrection of Jesus? First, the resurrection of Jesus was the necessary, inevitable sequence and culmination of the Cross of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus was the perfecting of that which took place in the mystery of His passion, of that passion wherein sin was dealt with in a way so profound that we have never been able to understand it perfectly, but in a way so Divine that two millenniums have rejoiced in the experience of it. The resurrection was not something separated from the Cross, or in opposition to the Cross; it was part of the Cross, the completion of it, the last movement in it. To that conception of it all the references of the Lord Himself give witness. Whenever He spoke of His Cross, the last thing He said was about resurrection. We cannot find a single occasion on which Jesus spoke of His Cross but that He ended by speaking of His resurrection. The evangelist tells us that when Jesus and Elijah and Moses met on the mount they "spake of the exodus which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." That is more than the Cross; it is the Cross and the resurrection. When Luke tells the story of Jesus going to the Cross, His determination to journey to Jerusalem to die, he does not say Jesus is going to die, he says, "When the days were well-nigh come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." Jerusalem was an incident by the way, the Cross was part of the journey, the resurrection was its completion. In that hour of resurrection, therefore, we come to the culmination of the Cross, and so to the ending of sin, the breaking of its power, the canceling of its obligation, the quenching of its fires, the disannulling of its bonds, the devitalizing of its poison. When that is done, the abounding mercy of God can move out toward suffering and needy humanity.

The second thing has been involved in the first. The resurrection was the initiation of a new and living way. The resurrection was that which, resulting from the Cross, meant that the life taken from the dead, having been voluntarily laid down therein, was now at the disposal of others. Christian life is Christ's life, communicated, shared, and mastering our own lives. That is the new and living way open for men, made possible for men. Mercy can operate, indeed operates in this very activity, and brings men into the new and living way. The sinner is cleansed from that with which God can make no terms, and energized for that which God demands in His holiness because He is a God of love. The sinner is lifted from the depths, loved out of the pit of corruption, and saved, in the full and gracious sense of the word. The resurrection stands in human history for our eyes to look back at its light and glory, and know that through it, that is through all those infinite and spiritual mysteries and wonders of which it was the outward symbol, God has gained a way by which His great mercy may flow out for the help of such as are in need.

What the resurrection, therefore, means to us is revealed in the doxology by two co-ordinate clauses, each one beginning with the word "unto," one before the declaration as to begetting, and the other after it: "Unto a living hope... unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."

"A living hope" is a hope that is alive, that is not mortal, perishable. Hope always deals with things unseen, with things which are not demonstrable to the senses. What a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? We are saved by that hope. What, then, is hope? What I

have said about hope I might surely say about faith. Indeed, it is difficult to keep the two things apart. Yet there is a difference. Hope is a greater word than faith. Faith does not always involve hope. In the first place, God has conditioned our salvation on faith. Hope is not always involved in faith. When faith operates simply it grows into hope. Faith is always involved in hope. Hope is therefore to me the greater word. Hope is the element of joyful expectation in faith. A man can have faith by a strenuous effort of the will. When faith has a song at the center of it, a song of assurance, then it becomes hope. Our word is a beautiful one, coming from the Anglo-Saxon *hopa*, which meant not merely anticipation of something ahead, but the effort of the life to reach it.

In what sense has the resurrection given us a living hope? Hope, as we have said, deals with unseen things which cannot be proved by the senses, not being demonstrable to the senses. Let me name two such. The resurrection of Jesus is a new interpretation of personality, such as the world had never had before, such as the world has never had, apart from the resurrection, and the works which our Lord Himself did work. Do not be foolish enough to try to get rid of the last two chapters in John's gospel. They are absolutely necessary to the interpretation of the gospel. Do not try to get rid of the post-resurrection stories. You need them. Think of them as a whole. What do you see? Jesus the same, and yet different. Human personality is revealed as superior to physical death. He died, but is alive. By that sign and token our heart is sure that the last word has not been said about personality when over the sacred dust we repeat the words, dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes. We are referring then to the transient abode of personality, but not to personality. We know, moreover, that personality means continuity of essential individuality. It was the same Jesus they had known before Whom they knew after. Shall we know our loved ones in heaven? Surely, absolutely yes. There is no question about it. That is what these post-resurrection stories show. He was the same, the same Jesus. Yes, but there is more in this new interpretation of personality. I see in the risen Jesus change, and enlargement of capacity and potentiality, even within the realm of that of which, for lack of a better term, I speak as the material. In the resurrection the body of Jesus was raised; it was such a body that He was able to light a fire on the shore and prepare breakfast for tired fishermen who had been out all night, such a body that He was able to sit down with them in the upper room and eat of broiled fish, yet so different a body that He was there in their midst without the shooting of a bolt or the opening of a door, so different that for a long way along the road to Emmaus He could walk with two of them who knew Him well without allowing them to discover Him. So much the same that when He so chose, they saw and knew that it was the Lord. Are these stories speculations? No, they are revelations; your philosophy cannot explain them, no human philosophy can; but God has given us this one picture of personality beyond the grave for the cheer and courage of our souls. The grave does not end everything. Beyond it we continue the same, yet with a personality so changed, enlarged, and beautified, that as they read the story men are inclined to doubt. I do not wonder. Do not treat these stories as though they were in any sense small. Some man says: Do you really think that someone came into that room without anyone opening the door? Do you really believe that? I reply: Would not you like to be able to do it? I think you would. I think you often sigh within the confines of this material body. I know there have been moments when I would have given anything, not to be out of the body, but to be suddenly present where I could not come by traveling. That is only a rough and almost brutal suggestion. We have no definite, detailed revelation; but here are great whispers, wonderful whispers, giving us gleams of personality beyond the tomb. I think Jesus tarried those forty days with bereaved souls in order that straining, tear-bedewed eyes might know that the life on the other side is the same, only ennobled, glorified, beautified.

The resurrection is also for us the pledge of our redemption. The death of Jesus was vicarious. He died for others. The resurrection of Jesus was vicarious. He rose for others. Men die in Him and live in Him. This is the great value for time with its vicissitudes, for earth with its limitations. We are born again unto this living hope.

The text, then, takes us across the line, and suggests to us the things that lie beyond. "An inheritance." That means a place and possession in the heavens, interpreted, as I have said, by the risen One, and guaranteed by the ascension of that risen One. Let us pause ere we call in question the accuracy of the declaration that this Man ascended as Man, and that this Man, as Man, sat down at the right hand of God. If you deny me that, then I am not sure about myself and the future. While that remains to me as a truth in the power of which I live day by day I have hope indeed. At the right hand of God—the mystic phrase suggests a definite location—is Jesus of Nazareth even now, not limited in His Deity by His location, but located in His humanity, while by the Spirit His Deity is with us everywhere. In that ascension of the Son of Man I have man's guarantee of place and possession in the life that lies beyond this: where He is we shall be also.

That inheritance is reserved by the power of God. Reserved, what does the word mean? Withheld! That does not sound quite so pleasing. It means something else. Secured! The infant in the eye of the law to the age of twenty-one does not enter into his inheritance and patrimony, but it is reserved for him. Withheld from him in the days of infancy, it is secured to him at the period of his manhood. So the ultimate in our life in Jesus Christ is withheld from us for the present; but it is secured to us; it is reserved for us. "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

The experience is reserved for those who are kept. The picture here is that of the power of God on sentry duty, the power of God watching over us and guarding us, keeping us for the inheritance which is withheld from us, but secured to us in Jesus Christ. Kept by the power of God through faith, that is through faith operating in that power, trusting it, and obeying it.

The apostle employs language full of poetry as he gives us the characteristics of the inheritance, "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." There is something of the poetry lost in the translation. As he wrote it, there is a beauty and dignity which we miss in the translation. Our inheritance is unwithering, unsullied, unfading! Unwithering—that speaks of its deathlessness, nothing is in it of the element of destruction; it cannot die; that is eternal life. Unsullied—that speaks of its sinlessness, nothing is in it that prevents the perpetual development of the Divine life; it is perfect in purity. Unfading—nothing is in it that dims the glory or tarnishes the beauty; it is fadeless.

Lift your eyes, ye sons of night; for ye are also sons of light! On beyond the gloom is the gleam of the glory! Beyond the fiery trial is the day of emancipation! A larger and more stupendous life lies beyond!

For today amid the strife we have a living hope. An inheritance is reserved for us in the undying ages and limitless spaces of eternity. To these things He begat us when His abundant mercy was enabled to flow forth through the resurrection of His Son.

The theme is a very pertinent one for today. I have found it so in meditating on it. This is a time of fiery trial to Christian souls. So far we are preserved from physical suffering; but these our sons are enduring, and we also with them. Our spiritual and mental stress is great. We need some great comfort of God today. Moreover, I think there is another line of similarity. It seems to me that it is even so that prophets of Christianity are in danger of being called enemies of the State today. There is a subtle peril abroad of supposing that Christianity should be postponed to some more convenient season. I hold no brief for Dr. Lyttelton. I have not read his sermon; but from what I gather from the criticisms of it I agree with him almost entirely. I think that very probably he was unwise in some of his illustrations; but if Christianity is not to be proclaimed in the Spirit of Christ today God have mercy on the Church and the nation. We are in dire peril lest we be afraid to say the great things of our faith because we shall be supposed to be enemies of the State. It is also certainly so that in some quarters the very term "Christian" is suspect. We need comfort, we need help. Where shall we find it?

This Easter day has come to us in the midst of fiery trial, misunderstanding, difficulty, perplexity, and agony. If Easter day does nothing else, it should bring to us the capacity for singing a great doxology. Mercy is the inspiration of judgment. While God's judgments are abroad in the earth men are learning righteousness, and that is the purpose of mercy. God will, and does, remember mercy in the midst of wrath. It is the reason why His judgments are operative. Our hope today is still living. No slaying can destroy it. No grave can hold it. Our inheritance is still reserved, and through death, defilement, and decay, we move ever onward toward the unwithering, the unsullied, the unfading. We look, as Peter said in another of his letters, not alone for the things that lie beyond, we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

We march listening to the music of the reserved inheritance; we march in the energy of the living hope, to both of which we have been born anew in the much mercy of God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead.

241 - 1 John 2:3 - Fellowship with God

Fellowship with God

Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

1 John 2:3

The great word of this passage, which at once arrests our attention, is the word "fellowship." While not exclusively so, it is peculiarly the word of John; and as I find it in this letter, and in the two brief ones which follow, I am always impressed with the thought that these letters are the result of that wonderful thing Jesus said to His disciples in the farewell discourses, part of which we read this evening, "Henceforth, I call you not servants, but friends." It ever seems to me that the word fellowship, as John makes use of it, is the peculiar and particular word of friendship.

It is an interesting fact, which some of you have doubtless noticed, that in these three letters John never speaks of Jesus as Lord, and never speaks of the disciples of Jesus—believers in Him—as servants. I do not mean to suggest that John forgets the relationship which he and his fellow-disciples bore to Jesus as His bond-servants; or that John ever forgets the supremacy and sovereignty of Christ, that He was, indeed, the Lord; but it is an interesting fact that he does not speak of Him as Lord. These are peculiarly the letters of a close, and intimate, and personal friendship with Jesus.

This word "fellowship," therefore, is an illuminating word concerning our friendship with God and our friendship with Christ; our friendship with God through Christ.

I have already said that the word is not exclusively used by John; Paul uses it, it occurs in the fundamental proposition of his first letter to the Corinthian Church, "God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

The word thrills us, with all the deepest, and the sublimest, and the tenderest things of our relationship to Christ, and in Him to God.

It is a rich and spacious word, full of suggestiveness, almost impossible of full and final translation. That is borne out by this fact; the word which is here translated "fellowship" is translated in many ways in the New Testament—"fellowship, contribution, distribution, communication, communion." Or, if we turn from this actual word, which is an abstract noun, to the common noun, it is translated "partakers, partners, companions."

I believe that all these are needed in our language if we are to have any idea of the richness of this one great word; the word which is descriptive of the great and gracious fact of our friendship with God and with Jesus Christ.

If we tarry for a moment longer with the word, it is only that we may inquire if there be any illustration of its simplest meaning. I think we can find one in the Acts of the Apostles. It is declared that in those early days of apostolic love and fervour, the disciples had all things in common. The word so translated is the root from which the other word is derived, and in that translation we get nearer the heart of its suggestive meaning than in any other word in the New Testament.

What is fellowship? Having all things in common. What is it to have fellowship amongst men? To have all things in common with them. What is it to have fellowship with God? Although the statement is a stupendous and amazing one, I am constrained to make it—it is to have all things in common with Him. That word is the one that indicates the perfection of our friendship with God, and my desire this evening is to lead you along a line of quiet meditation as to what our fellowship with God is, for the sake of encouragement for those who are the Lord's, and, perhaps, to win, and woo, and allure those who lack this friendship; that before this service ends they also may become the friends of Jesus, the friends of God, henceforth to know what fellowship with God does really mean.

I shall, therefore, select from these different words two, which mark two phases of the one great fact. I will take that rich word of the Church "communion"—fellowship is communion—and I will take one of those common nouns, rendering it in its abstract fashion, and say the word means partnership. Why make the difference, for they signify the same thing? Because in our use of these words we use them in different relations. We use the word communion in the realm of friendship; we use the word partnership in the realm of business; and for that reason I select these two words, because by so doing we shall come to a better understanding of what this fellowship with God means. Fellowship with God, then, as to privilege, is communion with Him; the actuality of friendship and fellowship with God, as to responsibility, is partnership with Him. I almost hesitate to say this because it is so incomplete and unworthy a method of presentation; but for the purpose of arresting thought and fixing it here, I will say that fellowship with God means we have gone into business with God, that His enterprises are to be our enterprises.

Let us first dwell on our fellowship with God as communion; our fellowship with God as friendship.

I will take three simple illustrations of what friendship is on the earthly level, in order that we may climb to the higher height, and understand what is meant by our fellowship, our friendship, with God.

I propose to give three quotations, which have appealed to me personally, as setting forth most perfectly the ideal of human friendship. I begin with these words from Mrs. Craik's *Life for a Life*.

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort, of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pour them all right out just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.

Is not that a perfect description of friendship? How many people are there in company with whom you can pour out everything in your heart, say everything, say anything? Very, very few; for God does not give us many friends in this world; many acquaintances, and we value them all. But that is a perfect description of friendship. With your friend you think aloud, there is no restraint; there is no need to keep up an appearance—the blunter thing would be to say, there is no need to play the hypocrite. You pour everything out, knowing this—your friend will sift between the chaff and the grain, and with the breath of kindness will blow the chaff away, and keep only the grain. That is friendship on the human level. And it described what true friendship with God is—that is on my side of the fellowship. With God it is my privilege to pour out everything that is in my heart, chaff and grain together, saying anything, saying everything I am thinking. But have we learned that lesson? Do not we think altogether too often our conversation with God must be that of carefully prepared and often stilted phrasing? I think we never so grieve His heart as when we attempt to speak thus with Him. Conversing with God reaches its highest level when, alone with Him, I pour out in His listening ear everything in my heart; and the manner in which I have learned that secret, and live in the power of it, is the measure of the joy and strength of my friendship with God.

It is perfectly true, it may be done. I can say, and I do say, when alone with God things I dare not say in the hearing of other men. I tell Him all my griefs, and doubts, and fears; and if we have not learned to do so, we have never entered into the meaning of this great truth concerning fellowship. He will take out the grain, and with the breath of friendship blow the chaff away, only we must be

honest when we are dealing with Him. I believe that if your heart is hot and restless about the way God is dealing with you, and you force yourself to the singing of a hymn of resignation, He spurns it; but if you pour out your anger as Martha did when she said, "I know he shall rise in the last day," then He will be patient, and loving, and gentle; and out of the infinite love and gentleness of His heart He will speak some quiet word of comfort.

How much do we know of this fellowship? How much have we practiced talking to God of everything in our souls?

Or take another illustration. Goethe speaking of his friendship for one with whom he held conversation, said this:

For the first time I carried on a conversation; for the first time was the inmost sense of my words returned to me more rich, more full, more comprehensive from another mouth. What I had been groping for was returned clear to me. What I had been thinking I have been taught to see.

Is not that even a more subtle and delicate definition of friendship? Not only can I pour out all the things in my heart; but my friend will say yes, and repeat the thing I have said, and repeat it definitely better than I could ever have hoped to say it.

Here again is the revelation of what friendship with God means to those who know and practice it; and even though this may be a more delicate and wonderful definition, I think we all understand it perhaps a little better, for there have been moments when we have struggled to say things to God, and have heard Him saying them again to us better than we could have said them. Is not that what Paul meant when he said: "We know not what to pray for as we ought"? Is not that the supreme inspiration for high and prevailing prayer—the consciousness of inability to make prevailing prayer? But Paul added: "The Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," that is, He says the things for us, and we know that God is praying prayers we fain would pray, and answering our imperfect articulation with the perfect words that prove His perfect comprehension.

Or once again, Dryden, describing his friendship for his truest friend, said:

We were so mixed up as meeting streams, both to ourselves were lost. We were one mass. We could not give or take but for the same, for he was I, I he.

What is that but Dryden's method of declaring that he and his friend had all things in common? And dare we take that last illustration and use it of friendship with God? Without a doubt. Here we touch the real meaning of fellowship; here we are at the heart and center of the great idea.

Let us now consider the other aspect of fellowship as partnership; mutual interests, mutual devotion, mutual activity.

Fellowship with God means mutual interests: God interested in me, and I interested in God. The overwhelming sense of the heart, as these things are uttered, is that of the inequality of the friendship. That I may be interested in God is understandable; the infinite marvel at first sight is that God can be interested in me. "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? Or the Son of Man, that Thou visitest Him." Fellowship with God means that God is interested in my being, is all its parts; in my spiritual life, in my mental ability, in my physical need. Be not anxious about what you shall eat, or drink, or put on, for your Heavenly Father knoweth you have need of these things.

Now, would to God, brethren, I knew how to say this thing as it ought to be said. Presently, the evening service will be over and the day of worship and rest done, and most of you will be back in the midst of all the everyday things we speak of as the daily task, the common round. But fellowship means that God is as profoundly interested in a man on Monday in his office and store as when in the sanctuary; that there is no part of the life in which God is not interested. I only pause for lack of words to express a thing so sublime and yet so simple. The difficulty in business, the perplexity that burdens the mind—all these things He is interested in. God is interested in me, and in my development! Oh! let us begin where it is always best to begin—interested in the growth of the child. Just as interested as you are, infinitely more, in the physical development. Are you interested in the manifestations of your child's opening mind; in the questions and problems of your child? God is also interested.

I shall not be misunderstood when I say this: that while I personally differ profoundly with what is known as Unitarian theology, I am conscious we owe a good deal to Unitarians if it only be that they have brought us back to the consciousness of the nearness of God to human life, as revealed in the perfect manhood of Jesus. And do not let us forget it for our own comfort, our own strength. Brethren, we do not leave our God here when the Benediction is pronounced. Are you dreading tomorrow? Remember, God will be with you there, as profoundly interested in the piece of work your hands have to do, in the problem your mind has to face, as in the sanctuary at this hour.

Yes, but it is equally true I am to be interested in the things of God, in His ultimate ends and His present enterprises; that as His heart and mind are set upon my perfection, upon that ultimate realization when I shall be presented perfect before His throne; so also this fellowship demands that my eyes are to be forevermore upon that goal. If God will find His rest in me when I am perfectly conformed to His will, I should never find my perfect rest until His kingdom is established and His glory perfectly come.

Partnership also means mutual devotion. God's resources are all at my disposal. And now I must speak, I fear, in the language that indicates duty—my resources ought all to be at His disposal. His resources are all at my disposal; His knowledge, His wisdom, His power, are all at my disposal. How small a demand we make of Him! How often we settle down in our own wisdom and neglect asking for aught, while He is waiting to give! How constantly we dishonour Him because we do not appropriate all He has put at our disposal! All His resources at our disposal!

But have we responded to the other fact that all our resources are to be at His disposal? All of them, not a tithe, not a tenth. Oh! tithe your possessions if you will, but let your tithing be the evidence that the nine-tenths are also His. The man who takes his income and says, One-tenth is God's and nine-tenths are mine, is a bad Jew, and certainly not a good Christian. All belongs to Jehovah, just as the one day in seven is the symbol of the fact that the seven days belong to Him. All our resources at His disposal. That is the law of friendship, and if He put all His at my disposal, and I keep back part of the price, how unworthy I am of this great fact of fellowship with God.

But partnership means also mutual activity. God accommodating Himself to my weakness and I rising by that accommodation into cooperation with His mind and with His strength. Of these two things, the one to emphasize is that of God bringing Himself to my weakness. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Do you remember George Mathieson's description of gentleness? He declared that when you speak of a brook running down the hillside, and away through the meadows, as a gentle brook, you are using a false term. He says there is no gentleness in a brook, but that if you watch the mighty ocean when it kisses the golden sands, and does not harm the child at play, then you may speak of gentleness. Gentleness is strength held in reserve, and placed at the service of weakness—"Thy gentleness hath made me great." Why does not God move more quickly? Why does not God accomplish His purpose in the world, and put an end to all the things that fret and puzzle us? Count that the long-suffering of God is His patience. Remember, that it would be possible, as we believe in God, for Him to end everything with a crash. But where would some of us be if He did so? Vulgarity is in a hurry; omnipotence is never in a hurry. All His processes are slow, as they appear to us, because of the gentleness of God. He waits for men. If it be a marvelous thing that Enoch walked with God, it is a more marvelous thing that God walked with Enoch, waiting for him as for a weak little child along the way. Just as you, father—strong man, equal to great speed—walk by the side of your little child that is just beginning to walk, accommodating your strength to the child's weakness, your speed to the child's slowness; so God forever accommodates Himself to our halting pace.

I wonder if that brings to your heart the comfort it brings to mine! I look back over my own life tonight, and see how wonderfully it is true; He is waiting, always waiting. Ah, I have kept Him waiting when I ought not, but He has waited even then. Always waiting—so patient with my foolishness, my weakness, my fear. Our fellowship is with God, and fellowship is friendship, and friendship means that partnership which, on His part, is the accommodation of His strength to my weakness.

But the gentleness does make us great, and by comparison with the pace we once had, how much quicker the pace is today; and by comparison with what we once were able to do, how much more we are able to do today! Let us not be afraid of boasting in the Lord, but say: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." He leadeth us everywhere in triumph. When you think of the "all things," and the triumph, in comparison with God's ability, then you will remember again the slowness and weakness; but when you think of what He enables us to do in comparison with what we would have done without Him, then we marvel at the victories and accomplishments, for He is enabling us.

If God accommodates Himself to us in gentleness, He enables us to rise to new activity with Him, in almost overwhelming power.

Our fellowship is with the Father. The fellowship of the friendship that says everything, knowing that He will listen and blow the chaff away; the fellowship that says its best, and hears repeated by the friend the inner meaning of the best; the fellowship that merges into such identity of interest that we discover that God and we are in every deed in partnership with each other. He is committed to all the things that pertain to the fulfilment of my life, while I am committed to all the things that pertain to the fulfilment of His purpose and of His glory.

And yet, brethren, there is another test of friendship which goes beyond these, a more severe test of friendship than the ability to talk and be listened to, than speaking the innermost thought that the friend may repeat it better, than the merging of lives. The supreme test is the ability to say nothing, and be content when nothing is said. Silence is the final proof of friendship, and contentment in silence. When I want a holiday and a true rest, I want a true friend, and the true friend is the one I can sit with in the railway train and say nothing. When I am introduced by courtesy, and acquaintanceship results, and I must always be saying something to my host, that is not friendship. Very valuable for a little while; but in the home of my friend I sit down, and stare at him, and say nothing. He looks right back at me, and says nothing.

My true friend meets me some morning, and there is not the old smile, there is not the cheery word. Now if there be true friendship, I am not disturbed by these things. I am quite sure that this attitude is on the surface, that there is a reason for it. I prove my friendship by respecting his silence, and not seeking for explanation. I think that is the final proof of friendship. The moment you ask your friend

to declare his friendship, you reveal your doubt of his friendship. Well, I am afraid we shall have to look to heaven for this friendship, but we have it in God if we will, and it is here we fail.

Is there an hour when you can no longer pray? Then do not pray; and know this—God knows. Of course, if the reason of your inability to pray is that you have violated the laws of friendship, that you have sinned against it, then speak with repentance and with tears, until you be restored to joy and salvation. But if there be no conscious reason in your own life, let me quote from the ancient prophecy—"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant? He that walketh in darkness, and hath no light."

Well, now what are we to do, prophet, because we are often there? Let him compel himself to sing? Nothing of the kind. What then? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon the Lord without speaking. God is equal in His love to the strain of a silence that is born of honesty. Are we? Nay, nay; am I? And I shall not answer with public confession, but I do want the thing to search me. That is where I break down. If God does not speak, and there is no light and no revelation, I begin to wonder if He loves me. Oh, cultivate heart-silence.

And, my brethren, God's truest friends are those to whom God is most often silent. Would to God I could comfort some heart with that. The light has gone out, and you are obeying Him, walking in darkness. Do not imagine that is because He cannot trust you; it is a supreme proof of His trust; silence is the last test. Our fellowship is with the Father, so that if we are driven to silence we need not be afraid; so that if He is silent we ought not to be afraid.

It was a great hymn to which Bliss was writing the music when he was suddenly taken from life in a railway accident. They found in his writing-case the music, half-written, to that hymn:

I know not what awaits me;
God kindly veils mine eyes,
I'd rather walk in the dark with God,
Than go alone in the light;
I'd rather walk by faith with Him,
Than go alone by sight.

We often sing it. May God make it true to us. That is the final proof of friendship.

"My soul, wait thou upon God." "Oh, yes," we say, "we will do that; it is the easiest thing to do." Nay, it is the hardest thing to do! It is much easier to work for God than to wait for God. It is the waiting that tells and wears the heart. It is suspense that kills. There is relief in the hour of catastrophe, if there has been long waiting. Remember how often He has had to wait for thee. Let us be ashamed that we are keeping Him waiting, and yet let us know that His friendship will bear the test. If in our deepest heart, when there is no song, no psalm, no ecstasy; no joy, we are true; His friendship will bear the strain. And He wants us to be such friends that we can bear the strain of silence and the great test of quietness.

But, my brethren, we need to practice our fellowship. He wants to talk to me of His own secrets, of the meaning of my life, and the way He would have me go; and I believe, brethren, one of the greatest lacks in the present day is that we do not take time to listen. "Oh," you say, "God does not speak to men now as He spoke to Abraham." I do not believe it. I think the true thing to say is that men do not listen as Abraham listened. We do not give God the chance to speak. The practice of fellowship.

I am listening, Lord, for Thee,
What hast Thou to say to me?

Quite easy to sing in a crowd; but we want to learn to practice it in our own individual life; and the practice means that we must take time to speak to Him of our work and His work; of our need and responsibility; of our sorrows and of our joys; of our defeats and of our victories. That is the practice of this fellowship, and we need to take time for these things.

Brethren, in closing, has it ever occurred to you that God is often disappointed that we are so busy doing things for Him, that we have not time to talk to Him? I feel that is true of my own life. I feel increasingly that I have to guard against being so busy for God that I have no time for God Himself; and God created man for His glory. For what is man to be? What is the ideal of human life? That he may enter into the secrets of God, and be the friend of God; and if God's friends never visit Him, never talk to Him, even though they are busily occupied in His work, they are robbing Him. Let us see to it that we take this great word and attempt to enter into the fulness of its suggestion.

Oh, presently we shall be back again facing the problems and perplexities, and doing that piece of work we laid down yesterday, glad to be away from it for very weariness. But now, when we take it up tomorrow, let us remember God is as interested in it as in the song with which we close the Sabbath. And if we will, brethren, that very piece of work—so poor, so commonplace that we desire

not to do it—will become transfigured; and we shall find that the least thing of every day is part of God's method for building the city, and winning the world, and bringing in His kingdom.

May it be ours, therefore, not only to hold the doctrine of fellowship with God, but to practice it, and enter into all the fulness of the blessing, for His name's sake.

242 - 1 John 3:4; James 1:15 – Sin

Sin

Sin is lawlessness.

1 John 3:4

Lust when it hath conceived beareth sin.

James 1:15

In these two brief passages we have inclusive statements of the nature and the genesis of sin. I am proposing to consider this subject in the most personal and immediate way, desiring to discuss the question of sin in the individual life, as to what it really is, and as to how it comes about.

What is sin? "Sin is lawlessness." How does a man sin? "Lust when it hath conceived beareth sin." We exclude from our consideration, first, the question of sin among the unenlightened peoples; and, second, the question of racial inheritance. Concerning those who have never heard the Evangel there is but one thing to be said, that the Judge of all the earth will do right. Concerning the subject of racial inheritance, or, if you will, the subject of heredity, I am not proposing to speak, save to say that while it is perfectly true that very many of us may have inherited tendencies from our fathers, it is equally true that we all have another inheritance, mightier than the inheritance of evil. The mightier inheritance is our inheritance in God, both by creation and redemption. We are living in the midst of the sanctions of the Christian ideal. Wherever the ideal came from, the common consent of enlightened humanity agrees that it is right. There is no man in this house but that in the deepest of him consents to the standard of life revealed in the ethical teaching of Jesus. The standard of right and wrong for us is necessarily the Christian standard. We are all living in the light of that conception of life which has come to us through Christ, and we are all, in the deepest of us, consenting to the beauty of that conception.

Moreover, we are all conscious, however much we may debate it philosophically, of our power of choice. The man who, today, or yesterday, or the day before, committed sin, knows full well he need not have done so. I grant that there may have been unnatural predisposition to sin; I grant that the surroundings may have been very difficult; yet if a man be perfectly honest he will confess that he never yet committed an act of sin but by the choice of his own will. If the act of sin was not by the choice of his own will, then it was not sin. If you can conceive of circumstances in which a man is compelled by physical force to the doing of a thing which his conscience does not approve, circumstances in which a man has no choice left, under such circumstances he does not sin. Sin is always in the realm of the will. I am not discussing evil. Evil is a larger subject. Evil is all that is hurtful and harmful, whether as to cause or effect, whether material, mental, or moral. I am discussing sin.

Let us first, then, consider John's definition, "Sin is lawlessness." In order to understand this, we must take time to look at these two words, "sin" and "lawlessness," and see what they really mean.

"Sin." The word translated "sin" here is one of doubtful origin. From the philological standpoint, there is doubt as to its derivation. We are in no doubt, however, when we trace its use, as to what men meant by it. The very simplest definition of the word possible is "missing of the mark." It was made use of by Greek writers in at least three ways, always with the same underlying thought and intention.

The word was used in the physical realm. A man cast his spear and misses his mark.

It is used in the mental realm. A man sits down to write a poem and fails. That is a missing of the mark.

It is used in the spiritual realm, of failure to realize coming short of the high ideal.

Turn to the other word, "lawlessness." Philologically, it means "without law." Greek writers, however, never use the word to indicate the condition of being without law, but always with reference to the breaking of law.

Now, take these two words and look at them as they constitute the one definition of my text, "Sin is lawlessness. May I change the words and indicate the meaning? "Missing of the mark is due to the breaking of law." While the word "sin" alone might indicate a condition for which the one sharing in it might not be responsible, this whole definition declares the condition to be the result of choice and action. Thus the element of guilt enters into the thought and fact of sin. The mark is missed because the law is not observed.

The prize desired is not gained—and this is for the young men here—because the rules of the games are not observed. I is not merely that a man is disqualified and flung out by a judicial decision of someone outside; but that there is only one way in which to reach the prize, and that is by the observance of certain rules. If a man break the rules he missed the mark of the prize of his high calling. That is sin. Sin is first a decision and choice of the will. It is, finally, the ultimate disaster of failure, resulting from that choice of the will. It was when I knew, and disobeyed, that I sinned. I was when I came to the parting of the ways, and had the right, the power to elect, to choose, to decide, and I did so in the way of disobedience, that I sinned.

A young fellow in a business house told me an almost grotesque thing. He had become a teetotaller, and had kept his pledge for some time, when one night in a mad frolic, and exhibition of wickedness, the other men in the house absolutely forced him to swallow brandy. He did not break his pledge. He did not sin. They sinned, but he did not. I know the illustration is rough, almost grotesque, but it gets to the heart of what I want you to see. How often that has been true in your life is another matter. You talk to me of the seductions of a certain hour and place. Why were you in that hour and place? I should need to cross-examine you very carefully before I would be willing to agree that there was no guilt in your sin. You speak to me of the fact that you have in your blood, in your life, tendencies to evil, things that drive you. Have you put proper guard upon those tendencies? Have you used the common sanity of the athlete in your fight against them? I am not speaking yet on the highest ground, but on the lowest. Is it not true of the vast majority of men who are sinning today that they "have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin"? Until a man has resisted unto blood in his striving against sin, he has no right to say he could not help his sin. If sin is never sin in the sense of guilt until a man violates law, directly a man does violate law it is sin. When you state excuses for your choice of wrong, state also in common honesty the resources which were at your disposal, which you neglected. There are many excuses. There are men in this house tonight who live in the midst of circumstances very difficult for them, men who come to see me and talk with me, and write to me—I thank God for every such chance of helping men. All the environment in which you have to spend six out of your seven days is difficult. I grant it. I know it. Over against the difficult environment and the difficulty of the tendencies which you say you have inherited put the resources which are at your disposal if you will but avail yourself of them: the resources which are at your disposal in God, of which you may avail yourself if you fulfil His one condition of crowning Christ, the resources which are at your disposal in the comradeship of the saints, the resources which are at your disposal in prayer, prayer on the highway, in the midst of the environment, when the forces of evil are massed against you, prayer, which is but a sigh, a sob, the uplifting of the heart, but which touches the very hand and heart of God and brings deliverance to men. When next you tell me you are bound to sin, be careful that, first of all, you have considered not only the difficulties by which you were surrounded and the perils in your way, and the things which were against you; but be careful that you have also taken into account all the resources which were at your disposal.

In turning to James I want to read a few more words than the actual words of my text. "Each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust when it hath conceived beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death." This is a remarkable passage. In it three things are clearly revealed concerning sin. First, the basis of it, lust. Second, the method of it, a man is drawn away, enticed by his lust. Third, the issue of it, lust, being drawn away, conceives and bears sin. When I see the external act of sin, I ask what lies behind it. An enticement and a drawing away. And behind that what?

"Lust." It is absolutely necessary first of all that we should understand that deepest word in my text. What is lust? We have come to use this word almost exclusively in one sense. What does this word mean as it appears upon the page of the New Testament? Let me give you one or two illustrations where it occurs, which will prove that it does not necessarily, or indeed radically, mean what we have come to associate with the word in our speech today. When Jesus was approaching the end, coming near to the Cross, He sat at the table of Passover with His disciples, and said to them, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you." To translate that in another way would be to read, "With lust I have lusted to eat this passover with you." It is the same word exactly, the suggestive Greek word *epithumia*. Peter in his letter, speaking of the great redemptive work of Jesus, says, "which things angels lust to look into," "desire" as we have it translated. It is the same as the word in my text. Once again, Paul writing in that wonderful letter, so radiant in its revelation of Christian experience, to his children at Philippi, said to them, "having the lust to depart, and be with Christ." I am sure you see at once what I am trying to bring you to understand about this word "lust." Desire is not sin, and there is no sin that men commit but at the back of it there is desire which is not sin. If only you can get far enough back into the mystery of your sin you will find desire which is not wrong in itself. Go back to an illustration which I am perfectly sure I have used more than once in this pulpit. I take it again as being the most graphic I know. Paul in writing to the Ephesian Christians said to them, "Be not drunken with wine... but be filled with the Spirit." That seems a strange bringing together of opposites. Behind both is the common lust, the same desire. Why does a man drink wine? Because the taking of it opens a window, lifts him, exhilarates him. I dare not say enthralls him, for the difference between enthusiasm and excitement is radical. The word "excitement" simply means things in rapid movement without order. Enthusiasm means God-filled. But the man is after vision, light, excitement, lift, and lift. What does a man obtain when he is filled with the Spirit of God? Vision, lift, enthusiasm, the thing that puts him high above all the troubles of life and enables him to keep beneath his triumphant feet the very things which perplex and harass and make difficult the way of man. The desire for the vision, for the lift, for the sense of fullness of life—it is that which drives a man to drink. If I should tell a man that when he appeals to drink for the satisfaction of that desire he is on his way to find God, I should lie. He has then, in answer to the cry of his soul after God, turned his back upon God. Desiring to find life, he has deliberately turned his face to death. Seeking the sun

rising, he has knowingly begun to follow the will o' the wisp which leads him on to the swamps from which there is no return, save by some miracle of the redeeming grace of God. It is perfectly true that lust, desire, is in every life, and in every advance of evil to man; every suggestion of evil is made to something which at its root is right. Lust is not sin, but sin comes out of it.

Mark the method. "Each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed." I think with rare discrimination James here makes use of two words and they are both remarkable.

"Drawn away." It is a hunting figure, a figure of a man who is engaged in trapping animals, and the word means seduced from safety into snares. The next word "enticed" is a fishing figure, and includes the thought of a bait held out. The thought of the word enticed is "seduced by a fancied advantage." Mark the process in your own soul while I try to describe it to you as in mine, for, ah me, I know it, and you know it. There is desire in my life. Here is a suggestion that I shall satisfy that desire by being drawn away from the straight line which I see in front of me. I am enticed by the bait that offers me immediate realization of the thing I am after. I turn away, mark the word, turn away from the law which is in my conscience of right and wrong, I turn away to satisfy the lust. Lust is right, but the suggestion is that instead of answering the desire of my nature within the realm of God's holy law, I shall attempt to answer it outside. I am enticed. I am drawn away. The desire is right; the peril is that I am asked to satisfy proper desire by breaking law. Preaching some time ago on the subject of temptation, I illustrated this fact in the temptation of our blessed Lord. Every appeal of the devil was an appeal made to something which was perfectly right, but the suggestion of the devil was that there should be satisfaction of the proper desire by turning aside from law, being enticed, drawn away. You have not yet reached sin. Lust is not sin. Temptation is not sin. Desire is not wrong. The fact that you are drawn toward lawlessness is not sin. The fact that you are enticed by suggested advantage toward breaking law is not sin. You are yet upon the highway of rectitude. Christ desired, but He never sinned. Christ was tempted, but He never sinned. You may have come as far as this many a day and yet have not sinned. You will perpetually have to come as far as this. You will be conscious of desire for all kinds of things for which you have been made of God. Allurements will come and enticements and suggestion that you should step outside the proper line of rectitude which you know full well and satisfy your craving by some illicit process. That is temptation, but it is not sin.

When does sin begin? James is careful to tell us. "Then the lust, when it hath conceived." We may translate this word "conceived" here in order to help us, by a number of words—to clasp, to seize, to arrest, to capture. Here is a desire in my life. It is not sin. Here is temptation luring me from the line of rectitude. That is not sin. The will within me decides that I shall turn from the line of rectitude and take this suggestion and lay hold upon it, seize it, capture it. What then? The act is committed. That is sin. When I seize the bait the hidden hook seizes me. The hook is not sin. The hook is the penalty, the first pang of hell. The sin is in the deliberate choice of the will and the determined act by which I turn aside to answer, not my desire, but the allurement to the fulfilment of desire in an improper way. When you turn toward evil courses, when you go out upon the highway or into the hidden and secret and shameful place, you are not seeking God, you are turning from Him. In your heart and conscience you know the thing which is right and the thing which is wrong. There is desire within you for vision, light and life in its fulness. Oh for the thrill and throb of a great life. Who does not desire it? Every man does who is physically, mentally and spiritually sound. He desires it. It is the cry of his life after God. But when you turn to the ways of lust and licentiousness you are not answering that cry, you are answering the seduction which suggests that you turn by short and illicit methods to satisfy desire. Sin is the answer to the suggestion that I break law to satisfy desire.

A man wins when he says, "Desire is perfectly right. It is right that I should desire vision and life at its fullest, but I must find these things along the line of law." If you listen to the voice and turn aside, know this, and know it forever—be not deceived, I pray you; "God is not mocked"—you sin, and you are not seeking God. Listen to me, you are trying to dodge God and get your prize without God, and you cannot do it. Lust, desire is enticed, is drawn away, and if man with the will shall seize upon the bait, then he sins.

Remember, this is not only a revelation of the genesis of sin. It is also a revelation of the nature of sin. It is not a thing to be pitied. It is a thing to be smitten, to be punished. Its punishment lies in the line of its own activity. If a man will turn away he turns to death, for mark the last word of James, "The sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death." The man who is indeed alive, desires fulness of life, vision, sense of God, and turns to find fulfilment for these things in the evil and pernicious ways of ungodliness, is not after God, he is attempting to get round God and win something which his nature wants without God, and he never succeeds. This is sin, not merely against himself, not merely against the community, but against the cosmic order. Sin as the wilful choice of wrong is not a part of God's cosmic process. It is rebellion. It is treason. It is chaos. Let every man who feels allurement to satisfy desire apart from the way of God know this, that when he turns in answer to it to the house of evil, to the method of wrong, he is not after God, but lifting the fist of rebellion in the face of God. There can be but one issue for all such high treason, and that is the nemesis and the ruin of alienation from God and the consequent cutting off of the possibility of all that man most seeks after.

So I come to our common use of the word "lust." There is a poetic accuracy in it. What is lust? Desire. Yes, but get a little lower down. What is lust? The Greek word suggests hard breathing, passionate desire, earnest desire. If man attempts to satisfy desire without God, what is the answer? Desire which never can be satisfied. There are appalling illustrations of the truth of that which cannot be used here and now. God help me to say this thing solemnly to you. Take hold upon any proper and natural capacity of

your life, I care not what it be, and attempt to satisfy it outside the lines of God's law, and you do but intensify the desire and never satisfy it. That is perdition. The craving for the thing which never comes. The God-created desire without the God-provided bread. That is the issue of sin. There are men in this house tonight who know something of it. There are men here, I dare venture to affirm, who are conscious of the fact that the more they attempt to satisfy the craving of some inner desire without God, the greater the craving becomes. Take an illustration which is commonplace. Christ's supreme illustration of evil is mammon. I pray you watch the man who attempts to satisfy his craving for possession without God. The craving for possession is perfectly right. God made man to hold a scepter and wield power. Jesus did not tell men they were not to answer the craving for possession. He did utter words sadly and awfully forgotten by the Christian Church and the world at large, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." He did not say, "Lay not up treasures," but "Lay not up... treasures upon earth." Then also He said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." The desire to possess is perfectly correct, it is part of the proof of your relationship to Deity. Here is a man who turns his back upon God, or, if he still names His Name, breaks His law of love. Did you ever find a man come to the moment when he said, "I am satisfied with my getting"? Is there not always an insatiable passion for more gold? A grasping devilishness that blights everything that is human in the man and makes him cruel and hard and cynical, grinding all others to the dust that he may make his gold. You need not envy the man who, without God, has piled his millions. There is a greater hunger in him after possession than ever, and the more he possesses, the more he hungers. Lust, which is desire at its deepest, attempting to be answered outside the line of God's law, becomes in itself a very consuming fire, the "worm that dieth not" and the "fire that is not quenched." That is the issue of sin.

I warn you with all love and earnestness, with all the passion of a strong conviction, and with all loyalty to my ordination vows to preach the Cross of Christ, I warn you do not be deceived by any philosophy which declares to you that sin is one of God's processes. It is man's poison and God's enemy. It is the one thing which has brought in its wake bitterness, anguish and sorrow. If you answer the desire of your inner life outside the line of God's will, which you know full well, then the lust which was proper becomes a fire which cannot be quenched.

Who here has never sinned? I am not asking whether you are a sinner by nature or not. I am not discussing that subject now. I pray you remember that in the mystery of Incarnation and Atonement there are forces provided greater than the forces which you inherited by nature. Actually and personally, who has never fallen? I mean into actual sin, as men count sin, sin of the flesh, or of the mind? Of course the mere moralist of the hour will reckon that the sin of the flesh is an evil thing. We are on other and higher ground. We recognize also the sin of the mind, the desire for safety, for ease, for all the things which are merely self-centred.

It is for the man who has sinned that Jesus came. The Evangel of the New Testament is for the sinner.

Where does the Gospel begin? It begins where sin ends. Mark the process. Lust, enticement, yielding, sin, death. Not death postponed. Not physical death. But death here and now. Dead in trespasses and sins. Jesus Christ brings men as His first gift, life from the dead, a new vision, a new sense of strength. The man who has become the slave of the evil thing, to which he has turned himself, may know his chain broken, the fire quenched, the passion stilled as the Master stilled the storm upon Galilee, and all the incompetence of the broken will made strong again. There is but one condition, and it is that man should turn from his sins to Christ and trust Him wholly and absolutely. Though you have answered lust outside law until lust has begun to be your judgment and your pain, even here tonight, He will quench the fire and break the bands and set you free.

Do not, I beseech you, give these last words away in generalities. I am getting weary of generalities. I mean you, my brother, hidden away. Thank God, you are hidden away. No eye is resting upon you save the eye of the Master. You are hidden away in this crowd, in the grip of sin. Its power can be broken tonight and forever as you turn to the Christ of God and trust Him with all your soul and mind and body and estate. May God help all such as feel the force of sin to turn to that mighty Saviour.

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The Purpose of the Advent: 2. To Take Away Sins

Ye know that He was manifested to take away sins; and in Him is no sin.

1 John 3:5

Last Sunday evening we spoke on a verse in this same chapter, "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." If the works of the devil are death, darkness, hatred and lawlessness, the one word "sin" expresses all these things for us. Sin is due to death and issues in death, that is, death as separation from the life of God. Sin is due to darkness—the carnal mind which cannot see the things of God—issues in yet denser darkness. Sin is due to hatred—the man continuing in sin continues a carnal man, not knowing God, is at enmity with God—and issues in yet profounder hatred. Or, comprehensively, it may be stated that sin is due to lawlessness as a principle expressing itself in lawlessness as an activity. Thus in our text we get nearer to an understanding of the purpose of the Advent as it touches our human need.

The simple and all inclusive theme which the text suggests is, first, that the purpose of the Advent was the taking away of sins, and secondly, that the process of accomplishment is that of the Advent.

Let us first, then, take the purpose as declared. "He was manifested to take away sins." In order to understand it we must take the terms in all their simplicity, and be very careful to find what they really mean. "To take away sins." What is intended by this word "sins"? The sum total of all lawless acts—the thought is incomprehensible as to numbers. I think I shall carry you with me when I say that there is no human being here who would care to have the task allotted to him of counting up his own lawless acts. If the thought is indeed incomprehensible as to numbers let us remember that in the midst of that which overwhelms us in our thinking are our own actual sins. The actual sins which we cannot enumerate are nevertheless included in this declaration of purpose. For a moment postpone the activity of your mind which suggests difficulties as to how anyone can do such a thing as this; leave out of the question the whole thought of process and simply face the avowed declaration of purpose "manifested to take away sins." "Sins," missings of the mark, whether willful missings of the mark or missings of the mark through ignorance, does not at present matter. The word includes all those thoughts and words and deeds in which we have missed the mark of the Divine purpose and the Divine ideal: those things which stand between man and God, so that man becomes afraid of God because he recognizes that in his sins he has violated the Divine purpose and broken the Divine law; those things which stand between man and his fellow man, so that man becomes afraid of his fellow man, knowing that he has wronged him in some direction; those things which stand between man and his own success. Call them failures if you will, call them by any name you please, so that you understand the intention of the word.

When John the Baptist looked upon Jesus, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." There he used the same word but in the singular. There he referred to the principle manifesting itself in lawless acts. He used a word which includes all sins, and therefore is, in some senses, the profounder word, and yet in our text we understand the writer to mean that the Advent was in order to the taking away of all acts of lawlessness springing out of the attitude of lawlessness, of all practice of wrongdoing issuing from the principle of wrong life.

Let us now examine the phrase "to take away." This is a statement of result, not a declaration of process. There is a marginal reading which says "to bear sins," and in the Gospel of John there is also a marginal reading, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away," or "beareth the sin of the world." These words are not incorrect if we are very careful to understand what they really mean. The Hebrew equivalent of the word "taketh away" is found in that familiar story of the scapegoat. It was provided that this animal should be driven away to the wilderness, "unto a solitary land." This suggested that sins should be lifted from one and placed upon another, and by that one carried away out of experience, out of consciousness. That is the simple signification of this declaration, "He was manifested to bear sins." If you take this word and track it back—not always a safe process, but here, I think, a helpful one—to its root meaning, it is, "He was manifested to list sins." He was manifested in order that He might come into relationship with human life, and passing underneath the load of human sins lift them, take them away.

Either this is the most glorious Gospel that man has ever heard, or the greatest delusion to which man has ever listened. I care nothing, for the moment, about your theological tendencies, or convictions, or prejudices—you may choose your own word! What I do care about is that there is in the heart of every man and woman in this house a consciousness of sin. No one of us would be prepared to say, "I have never deliberately done the thing I knew I ought not to do." That is consciousness of sin. You may attempt to excuse it. You may even say that it does not much matter, that the sin was the result of some infirmity of the flesh. You may even go so far as to say that the fact that you have repeatedly done the thing you knew was not the right thing was simply part of a process in which you were learning not to do it. So ingenious is the human heart that it will attempt to excuse itself by all kinds of fallacies. I do not believe there is a single person here who will deny the charge—if you deny the arguments I care nothing.

I will go one step further, and declare that in the deepest of you, in the best of you—again notwithstanding theological opinions, or prejudices, or convictions, as you choose—the one thing you hate most of all in your past is your own sin. You may affect to excuse it. You may be ready to argue with me as to the reason for it and the issue of it, but, if you could, you would undo it. If you could make it not to be, there are some here tonight who would be ready to sacrifice right hand or right eye. You may profess to have turned your back upon these evangelical truths which we declare, and yet you know you have sinned, and you wish you had not.

Passing for a moment from that outer fringe of men and women, who are somewhat careless about the matter, to the souls who are in agony concerning it—to the men and women who know their sin and loathe it, to the men and women who carry the consciousness of wrongs done in past years as a perpetual burden upon their souls—and there are many of them who have never confessed it, who have never spoken to another soul about it, but nevertheless hate the memory of their own sins—I say that to such, a declaration like this is the cruelest word or the kindest that can be uttered. Cruel if it be false, kind indeed with the kindness of the heart of God if it be true. If somewhere, and somewhen, and somehow, in human history One was manifested to lift sins and bear them away; if by some means I can find some just and honorable peace of conscience notwithstanding sins and sin, then have I found blessing greater than any man can give me. I dismiss for the moment for the sake of my argument not only the outer fringe but also the inner circle of burdened souls, and I speak as a witness. Turning aside from advocacy, I bear testimony that if it be true, that He was manifested somehow, in some deep mystery that I shall never perfectly understand, in order to get beneath my sins, my

sins, my thought of impurity, my words of bitterness, my unholy deeds, and lift them and bear them away—that is the one Evangel I long for more than all. More valuable to me, a sinner, than anything else that He can do for me is this.

In order that this great purpose of the Advent, as declared, may be more powerfully and better understood, let us reverently turn to the indication of the process which we have in this particular text, for while the supreme value of the text last week was its unveiling of the purpose of the Advent in victory gained over the enemy of the race, I am inclined to think that the supreme value of this declaration of purpose is its indication of process. "He was manifested to take away sins." Notice the Person referred to. "He was manifested." Who was the Person? "Ye know," says John, "that He was manifested." The reference certainly is to some One. If you go back over this chapter you come presently to the statement, "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him." Whom? The same Person is being referred to as in my text. I go back a little further and read, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." Whom? I go yet further back, into the preceding chapter, and trace my way until I come to the twenty-third verse, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also." You cannot read the context of this text without seeing that, in the thinking of the man who wrote it, there is identity between God and the Son. It is perfectly evident that John here, as always, has his eye fixed upon the Man of Nazareth, and yet it is equally evident that he is looking through Jesus of Nazareth to God. That is the meaning of his word "manifested" here. It is the Word made flesh. It is flesh, but it is the Word. It is something that John had appreciated by the senses, and yet it is Someone Whom John knew preeminently by the Spirit. When he says in this same letter, "Everyone that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure," he means hope set on God finally, on the Son by manifestation. So that the Person who is presented to our view here is that One Who in human life was the manifestation of God Himself. "He was manifested." He was before manifestation. Who was He before manifestation? Because Whosoever He was before manifestation, He was in manifestation; and Whosoever He was before manifestation and in manifestation, He was in the taking away of sins.

Notice that after John makes the affirmation, "He was manifested to take away sins," he adds this great word, "In Him is no sin." Will you let me put that into another form? Let me render the actual word of John in slightly different terms, "Missing of the mark was not in Him." The One in Whom there was no missing of the mark was manifested for the express purpose of lifting, bearing away, making not to be, the missings of the mark of others. Mark that declaration of the eternal and essential sinlessness of the One Who came. We can interpret the language of John only by the teaching of John; so without apology I take you back again to the introductory word in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." No missing of the mark was in Him. He was sinless through all the unmeasured and immeasurable ages. "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men"—all created things springing from the energy of that mysterious One in Whom was no sin, in Whom was no missing of the mark in the mystery of creation. "All things have been made by Him"; that is continuity of activity in creation. In Him, the Upholder as well as the Creator, there was no missing of the mark. Presently "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." In Him was no missing of the mark. Presently we see Him yielding Himself to death, and even there, in the hour of His death, there was no missing of the mark. Through resurrection, by way of ascension at this moment at the center of the universe of God, the same Person, and in Him is no missing of the mark.

"He was manifested"—and in the name of God I charge you do not read into the "He" anything small or narrow. If you do you will at once be driven into the place of having to deny the declaration that He can take away sins. If He was man as I am man merely, then though He be perfect and sinless He cannot take away sins. If into the "He" you will read all that John evidently meant according to the testimony of his own writing, from which alone I have been making my quotations—if you will read into it all John meant, "He," the Word made flesh, in Whom was no missing of the mark before or after He was manifested to take away sins, you begin to see something of the stupendous idea, and something of the possibility at least of believing the declaration that "He was manifested to take away sins."

Consider the manifestation and sins, as to man. The terms of the promise of the Advent were, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins." From hell? Certainly, but I pray you remember, only by saving them from their sins. From the punishment of sin, because from sin itself. That was the great word, "He shall save His people from their sins." When the songs to which the shepherds listened were heard, what said they? "There is born to you this day... a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The promise of the Advent was that of the coming of One to lift sins.

During the probation of the long years this Person was meeting all the forces of human temptation and overcoming them. I think we may accurately and reverently speak of the long years of probation as testing years, years in which there was being wrought out into human visibility the fact of the sinlessness of the Son of God.

During His life and ministry what were the words of Jesus? Words revealing the meaning of sin. Words calculated to rebuke sin and to bring men away from sin. What were the works of Jesus? By works I mean miracles and signs and wonders. They were chiefly

works overtaking the results of sin. You tell me that the miracles of Jesus were supernatural. I tell you they were always restorations of the unnatural to natural positions. When He cured disease it was not a supernatural thing, but the restoration of man to the normal physical condition. He was taking away the results of sin. So all along the line of His miracles of healing and His calling back out of death He manifested His power. I see Him forevermore in grips with sin, showing men tentatively, not yet finally, how He had power to lift sins. Once, in the course of a miraculous revelation of that wonderful power, He said to a man, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and He was immediately criticized. What was His answer to the criticism? "What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch." You will sadly misread that story if you think He did some piece of jugglery in the physical to convince them of His power in the moral. There was most intimate connection between the man's palsy and his sin, and Jesus demonstrated His power to lift sin by setting the man free from the result of sin and sending him on his way in sight of the men who had heard Him. These men who criticized had no more to say. They criticized Him for pretending to forgive sins, but when they saw the man raised they had enough simple mental intelligence to see the connection between the thing said and the thing done.

I come now to the final thing in this manifestation, the process of the death, for in that solemn and lonely and unapproachable hour of the cross I come to the final fulfillment of the word of the herald on the banks of the Jordan, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." It is not open for us in these days to attempt to interpret that word of John by the day in which we live, or by the conditions in which we live. We can interpret that word of John only by the simple facts in the midst of which he stood when he uttered it. Remember that phrase, "the Lamb of God," could have but one significance in the ears of the men who heard it. This was the voice of a Hebrew prophet speaking to Hebrews, and when he spoke of the Lamb taking away sins, they had no alternative other than to think of the long line of symbolical sacrifices which had been offered, and which they had been taught shadowed forth some great mystery of Divine purpose whereby sin might be dealt with. When John stood there in the midst of the great ethical revival which came under his preaching, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," we must explain his language, not by any poetical license of this age, but by the deep religious intention of the man who uttered it, and by the religious understanding of the people who listened to it. In all probability, when John uttered that word there were men from all parts crowding up to the Passover Feast, taking with them lambs of sacrifice in great numbers. In the midst of all the ritual, these men were arrested by the voice of John crying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." So in the hour of death you have the ultimate meaning of that great word. Whereas by manifestation, from first to last, He is forevermore dealing with sins and with sin, lifting, correcting, arresting, by gleams of light suggesting to men the deepest meaning of His mission, it is when I come to the hour of His unutterable loneliness and deep darkness and passion baptism that I have that part of the manifestation in which I see as nowhere else and as never before the meaning of my text, "He was manifested to take away sins."

Reverently let us take one step further. The manifestation and sins—as to God. Let me take you back simply to this affirmation that the manifested One was God. If that be once seen then we shall forevermore look back upon that Man of Nazareth in His birth, His life, His cross, as but a manifestation. The whole fact cannot be seen, but the whole fact is brought to the point of visibility by the way of incarnation. If indeed this One be very God manifested, then remember this, the whole measure of humanity is in Him and infinitely more than the whole measure of humanity. Do not forget the last part of my assertion. If you take the first part only—that the whole measure of humanity is in Him, you may imagine that humanity is the measure of Deity. I did not say so. But the whole measure of humanity is in Him. It is true of the whole race, from its beginning to its last, that "in Him we live and move and have our being"; that we are as to first creation and essential meaning of life, "the offspring of God." The whole race is from God and of God, and I repeat, the measure of humanity is in Him, but He is infinitely more; it is also true that the measure of all created things is in Him—and infinitely more. Beyond the utmost bound of creation, God is. All creation, heaven and earth, suns and stars and systems, angels and archangels, principalities and powers, the hierarchies of whom we hear but cannot perfectly explain their nature or their order, all these are in Him; but He is infinitely beyond them all. They are but the dust in the balances which His right hand holds, and it is an arrogant and ignorant assumption to declare that humanity is the sum of God. All humanity is within the compass of His upholding might. No man can escape from God. In some deep sense of the word, no man can live a Godless life. "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." Humanity is not the measure of Deity; but the measure of humanity is in Deity. "He," the immeasurable, "was manifested to take away sins."

I begin to wonder. In amazement I begin to believe in the possibility of lifting the burden of my sin. The cross, like everything else, was manifestation. In the cross of Jesus there was the working out into visibility of eternal things. Love and light were wrought out into visibility by the cross. Love and light in the presence of the conditions of sin became sorrow—and became joy! In the cross I see the sorrow of God, and in the cross I see the joy of God, for "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." In the cross I see the love of God working out through passion and power for the redemption of man. In the cross I see the light of God refusing to make any terms with iniquity and sin and evil. The cross is the historic revelation of the abiding facts within the heart of God. The measure of the cross is God. If all the measure of humanity is in God and He is more, and the measure of the cross is God, then the measure of the cross wraps humanity about so that no one individual is outside its meaning and its power. When next you ask, or hear anyone else

ask, "How can one man bear the sin of the race?" say, "He cannot, and he never did." One man cannot bear the sin of another man, to say nothing of the sin of the race. He Who was manifested is God. He can gather into His eternal life all the race as to its sorrow and its sin, and bear them.

Yet remember this—I would state this with great carefulness—it was not by the eternal facts that sins were taken away, but by the manifestation of those facts. My text does not affirm, and there is no text that begins to affirm, that He Who was manifested takes away sins. There is a sense in which that is true; but this is the truth, "He was manifested to take away sins." It required the "He," the Person manifested, but it required His manifestation. Most reverently do I declare that the passion revealed in the cross was indeed the passion of God; but the passion of God became dynamic in human life when it became manifest through human form in the perfection of a life and the mystery of a death.

Man's will is the factor always to be dealt with, and whereas the sin of man was gathered into the consciousness of God and created the sorrow of God from the very beginning, it is only when that fact of the sorrow of Godhead is wrought out into visibility by manifestation that the will of man can ever be captured—or ever constrained to the position of trust and obedience which is necessary for his practical and effectual restoration to righteousness. Wherever man thus yields himself, trusting—that is the condition—his sins are taken away—lifted.

If it be declared that God might have wrought this selfsame deliverance without suffering, our answer is that the man who says so knows nothing about sin. Sin and suffering are coexistent. The moment there is sin there is suffering. The moment there are sin and suffering in a human being it is in God multiplied. "The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world." From the moment when man in his sin became a child of sorrow, the sorrow was most keenly felt in heaven.

Yet I would that my last word should be a word specifically and especially to the man who is burdened with a sense of sin. I ask you to contemplate the Person manifested. There is not one of us here of whom it is not true that we live and move and have our being in God. God is infinitely more than I am, infinitely more than this whole congregation, infinitely more than the whole human race, from its beginning to its last. If infinitely more, then all my life is in Him. If in the mystery of incarnation there became manifest the truth that He, God, lifted sin, then I can trust. If that be the cleaving of the rock, then I can say as never before,

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

He was manifested and by that manifestation I see wrought out the infinite truth of the passion of God, what we speak of—and whether our language be the best or not, who shall tell?—as the Atonement. All the mystery of Deity was rendered visible by the Advent, the Incarnation, the Manifestation, so I know that here and now, as nineteen centuries ago on the rough Roman gibbet, as surely as God is God, here and now are the living values of the thing of which men sang and of which we still sing. Here and now I trust, and here and now I know that my sins are lifted, carried, borne away.

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The Purpose of the Advent: 1. To Destroy the Works of the Devil

To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

1 John 3:8

We are approaching the festival of Christmas. In the calendar of the Christian year this is the first Sunday in Advent. I am proposing to speak for four successive Sunday evenings on the purposes of the Advent. The importance of the subject cannot be overstated. The whole teaching of Holy Scripture places the Advent at the center of the methods of God with a sinning race. Toward that Advent everything moved until its accomplishment, finding therein fulfillment and explanation. The messages of the prophets, seers, and the songs of psalmists trembled with more or less certainty toward the final music which announced Jesus' coming. All the results of these partial and broken messages of the past led toward the Advent. It is equally true that from that Advent all subsequent movements have proceeded, depending upon it for direction and dynamic. The writings which we have in the Gospel stories are all concerned with the coming of Christ, with His mission and His message. The last book of the Bible is a book the true title of which is The Unveiling of the Christ. Not only the actual messages which have been bound up in this one Divine Library, but all the results issuing from them are finally results issuing from this selfsame coming of Christ. It is surely important therefore that we should understand its purposes in the economy of God.

There is a fourfold statement of purpose which I propose to make. The purpose to destroy the works of the devil, the purpose to put away sin, the purpose to reveal the Father, the purpose to establish by another Advent the Kingdom of God in the world.

In dealing first with the purpose to destroy the works of the devil I am attempting to follow the order of historic appreciation. There is a sense in which these purposes go forward concurrently, the destruction of the works of the devil, the taking away of sin, the unveiling of the face of the Father and the administration of the Kingship of God toward consummation. In yet another sense we may state the order of these things differently. We may say that He came first to reveal the Father, then to deal with sin, presently by way of the second Advent to set up the Kingdom in the world, and ultimately and finally to destroy the works of the devil. I think, as I have already intimated, that so far as historic appreciation of the purposes of God is concerned, I have suggested to you the true order. To the men of Christ's own age, both those who yielded to Him and those who rebelled against Him, He was first of all a reformer—and I pray you do not interpret the meaning of that word "reformer" by those who have followed in His wake or those who preceded Him, but gather all your thought of it from what He was in Himself—a soul in conflict with all that was contrary to the purposes of God in individual, social, national, racial life.

Such was Christ, and there is a sense in which when we have said this we have stated the whole meaning of His coming. His revelation of the Father was toward this end; His putting away of sin was a part of this very process, and His second Advent will be for the complete and final overthrow of all the works of the devil.

Confining ourselves, however, to the simplest meaning of this particular passage, let us notice, first of all, John's description of the Advent. He does not say, "For this purpose, or to this end, was Jesus of Nazareth born." That would be true, but only part of the truth.

Remember, there can be no question as to Whom John referred when he said "the Son of God." We all know that he was writing of the One of Whom he always wrote. We are taken back irresistibly, however, to words at the beginning of John's Gospel and Epistle. "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." "That which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled." It is impossible to read these words and imagine they are wholly or exclusively spiritual statements. John is most carefully defining the Person. In all the writings of John it is evident that his eyes are fixed upon the man Jesus. Occasionally he does not even name Jesus, does not even refer to Him by a personal pronoun, but indicates Him by a word you can use only when you are looking at an object or a person. For instance, "That which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled." Upon another occasion John said, "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk even as that One walked." It is always the method of expression of a man who is looking at a Person. Forevermore the actual human Person of Christ was present to the mind of John as he wrote of Him. How intimate he had been with Him we all know. One of the most tender and beautiful things in all the story of the life of Jesus is the story of John's love for Him, pure human affection for Him. The other disciples loved Him in a sense, and I do not undervalue their love, but it was of a different tone and quality from that of John. You cannot imagine Peter getting very intimately near to Christ. There was something of distance, of breeze and bluster, and of beauty, about the love of Peter. He would be quite content to talk to Jesus across the table, but John must get close to Him and lay his head upon His bosom. There was none of the disciples so intimately associated with the actual human personality of Jesus as John. When John refers to Him it is always in words that thrill and throb with the warm tenderness of human consciousness, of human friendship. Yet there is not one of you here who does not know that if I said no more I would not have uttered half the truth. If John the mystic, the lover, laid his head upon the human bosom of the Man of Nazareth, he heard the beating of the heart of God. If he laid his hand upon Jesus when he talked to Him he knew that beneath the warm touch of the human flesh there beat the mystic majesty of Deity. "That which our hands handled, concerning the Word of life." Mark the contradiction of it in this materialistic age of ours. Can you handle a word? Can you handle life? Yet John says, "This is what we have done." He is perfectly conscious of the flesh, but supremely conscious of the mystic Word veiled in flesh and shining through it. He is perfectly conscious of the human and gets thereby to Deity. So that when John comes to write of this One he speaks of Him as "the Son of God." He remembers the warmth of His bosom, the gentleness of His touch, the love-lit glory of His eyes, but He is "the Son of God."

The word "manifested" presupposes existence prior to manifestation. In the Man of Nazareth there was manifestation of One Who had existed long before the Man of Nazareth.

The incarnation was not an act by which God began to be in any single sense. It was not an act by which God came into nearness to human life. It was an act by which God manifested His nearness to human life, and by which manifestation He was able to do in human life and in human history things He could not have done apart from that selfsame method of manifestation. "To this end was the Son of God manifested."

Now we come to the statement of purpose. The person referred to, the devil. The things to be destroyed, the works of the devil. The purpose declared, to destroy the works of the devil.

The enemy is described here as the devil. I want to take other passages from the writings of John and let their light fall upon this name. In the eighth chapter of John's Gospel it is recorded that Jesus, using this very name, declares of the devil that "he was a murderer from the beginning... he is a liar." A little further on in the Gospel it is declared it was he who put it into the heart of Judas

to betray Christ. I read in the context of my text that he is the fountainhead of sin, the lawless one. Gather up these thoughts concerning this personality—murderer, liar, betrayer, the fountainhead of sin, himself missing the mark because of lawlessness—and it will immediately be manifest what his works are. The work of the murderer is destruction of life. The work of the liar is the extinguishing of light. The work of the betrayer is the violation of love. The work of the archsinner is the breaking of the law. These are the works of the devil.

First, as to the destruction of life, for he is a murderer. This consists fundamentally in the destruction of life on its highest level, which is the spiritual. Alienation from God is the devil's work. It is also death on the level of the mental. Vision which fails to include God is practical blindness. On the physical plane, all disease and all pain are ultimately results of sin and are among the works of the devil. These things all lie within the realm of his work as a murderer, destroyer of human life. The Greek word might perhaps be translated more forcefully "man-slayer." He is the slayer of man, in the spiritual, which is supreme; in the mental which marks consciousness, whether spiritual or material; in the body, which is the instrument of the spirit, whether for good or evil. The man-slayer is one who comes in to spoil humanity, to rob it of its life, to blind it spiritually toward God, to limit it mentally because of the blindness of the spiritual, and to bring into it all manner of disease and death in the physical realm.

He is more. He is the liar and to him is due the extinguishing of light, so that men blunder along the way. All ignorance, all despair, all wandering over the trackless deserts of life, are due to the extinction of spiritual light in the mind of man. I can quite imagine someone saying, "You are going outside the realm of what is true when you declare that all ignorance is the devil's work." I abide by that statement, perhaps for reasons which are not ordinarily advanced or held. I will make one contrast in your mind tonight. I claim that in this Man of Nazareth as pure man there was an utter absence of ignorance. His thinking was perfectly clear. He as man saw right through to the heart of mystery, and that because He was never brought under the dominion of sin, never brought under the dominion of the evil one, was able in His life perpetually to rebut every advance of the prince of darkness, who is a liar from the beginning. I am not merely speaking of Him as One infallible in spiritual things. I believe He was also absolutely infallible in other things. I am asked today if I imagine that Jesus knew the laws of nature by the discovery of which in recent years men have made such rapid progress. Yes, absolutely. He knew every one. I am asked if I believe that He understood the mystery of electricity. Yes. Then you say, "Why did He not tell the race?" The race was not ready for the knowledge. What is true in the spiritual realm is true also in the scientific. He had many things to say which men were then not able to bear. I for one have no part or lot in the view of Christ that He was scientifically half ignorant, while spiritually infallible. You say, "Then He was not upon our level." He was not upon our level. No perfect man was ever upon our level. There was in Him no sin, no darkness, no limitation, and you have one gleam of this fact in the impression He produced upon the men of His own age. He went up to Jerusalem and was talking in the midst of men of culture and men of light and leading, in the midst of the school men. What did they say of Him? "How knoweth this Man letters, having never learned?" "Whence hath this Man the accent of the school, never having been to school? How is it that this Man in His teaching is most evidently familiar with the things we have obtained through strife and difficulty?" They did not answer their question. Men today cannot answer their question, save as they recognize that here was a Man never having learned yet knowing, and seeing clearly to the heart of things. I go back from that illustration, which is in some sense a digression, and yet I think you see its purpose. All ignorance is the result of the clouding of man's vision of God. "This is life eternal," age-abiding life, high life, deep life, broad life, long life, comprehensive life, "that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him Whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." The proportion in which man knows God is the proportion in which he sees clearly to the heart of things. You say, "How is it that Christian people have not been able to see these things? How is it that the great discoveries of science have not been made by Christian people?" I would have you remember first that the discoveries of science have always been made in a Christian atmosphere. In the second place, the redemptive work of Christ will not be perfected in humanity until that mysterious morning of His second Advent, when we shall have our new bodily powers as well as our new spiritual powers, and when man is wholly restored to God. Let me say this as superlatively as I believe it. In that day manhood will laugh at the foolish pride of this day, which thinks it understands this world. Sinning man has but scratched upon the surface of the infinite mysteries of this world. By and by, when the redemptive work of Christ has been perfected in man, and in the world, we shall find that all ignorance is banished and man has found his way into light. But the liar, the one who brings darkness, has made his works far spread o'er all the face of humanity, and all ignorance and resultant despair and all wandering aimlessly in every realm of life are due to the work of the one whom Jesus designated a liar from the beginning. Again, the violation of love, as a work of the devil, is seen supremely in the way he entered into the heart of Judas and made him the betrayer. All the avarice you find in the world today and all the jealousy and all the cruelty are the works of the devil.

Finally, He is the supreme sinner. Sin is lawlessness, which does not mean the condition of being without law, but the condition of being against law, breaking law. So that all wrong done to God in His world, all wrong done by man to man, all wrong done by man to himself, are works of the devil.

To summarize them, death, darkness, hatred, find them where you will, are works of the devil.

The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil. If at the beginning we saw Him as a soul in conflict with all these things, remember that was an indication of the program and a prophecy of the purpose. The Advent which we

celebrate was not merely the birth of a little child in whom we were to learn the secret of childhood and in whom presently we were to see the glories of manhood. All that is true; but it was the happening in the course of human events of that one thing through which God Himself is able to destroy the works of the devil.

"To destroy." What is this word? It is a word which means to dissolve, to loosen. It is the very same word that is used in the Apocalypse about loosing us from our sins; or, if you will be more graphic, it is the word used in the Acts of the Apostles when you read that the ship was broken to pieces; loosed, dissolved, that which had been a consistent whole was broken up and scattered and wrecked. The word "destroyed" may be perfectly correct, but let us understand it. He was manifested for what? to do a work in human history the result of which should be that the works of the devil would lose their consistency. The cohesive force that makes them appear stable until this moment He came to loosen and dissolve. He was manifested to destroy hatred by the gift of love. He was manifested to destroy lawlessness by the gift of law. He was manifested to loosen, to break up, to destroy the negatives which spoil, by bringing the positive that remakes and uplifts.

He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil as to death by the gift of life. This means first spiritual life, which is fellowship with God. It means also mental life, the vision of the open secret. Not yet perfectly do we understand, but already the trusting soul in this house, utterly devoid of education, hears more in the wind at eventide, and sees more in the blossoming of the flowers than any scientific man. Was it not Huxley who said that if our ears were but acute enough we would hear the flowers grow. You say that is a purely scientific statement. I know it is, and science, in the last analysis, is spiritual. Christ has so far invaded the world that the men who do not name His name are beginning to spell out this great truth. The merely physical scientist of a generation ago has passed never to return. I hear of whitening dawns of psychological investigation, but what does it mean? That men are gradually beginning to hear the singing. There is no simple-hearted child of God in this house but that looking into a flower sees the face of God. I think, perchance, I have told you here before of something that happened in my boyhood's days which I have never forgotten. There came to my father's house a young fellow who had been led to Christ but recently in one of my father's meetings. One day he took me down the garden—I was but eight years old—and he plucked a nasturtium leaf, and putting it in his hand he said, "Look at this." Boylike, I thought he had found a great curiosity, and hurried to see it. I did not see what he saw. The day came when, by the grace of God, I saw it also. He said, "See, is not God beautiful?" For me, you may take all your botanists if you will give me that man with the leaf in his hand. That is not imagination. It is the open secret. It is what Carlyle called the great significance shining through. Mrs. Barrett Browning was right—

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes—
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

How many there are in the "rest"!

He who sees has the true intellectual vision, which Christ has bestowed in His gift of life. "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God." The gift of life was to destroy death, and the man who has His gift of life laughs in the face of death, laughs triumphantly, and—yes, I will say it—makes fun of death! Do not misunderstand me—I mean for himself, never of the sorrow which comes to the bereaved. I still believe, say what you will, that there was laughter in the Apostle's tone when he said, "O death, where is thy sting?" As though he had said, "What hast thou done with thy sting, death? What hast thou done with thy victory? I trembled in thy presence once, O rider upon the pale horse, but now I laugh in thy face, for thy paleness has become the glistening white of an angel of light." So He destroys the works of the devil by giving the gift of life which destroys death.

As for darkness, this is intimately associated with the thing already said, the gift of light; but remember light always comes out of life. If there be death then there is no vision. If there be life there is light. Light means knowledge and hope and guidance, so that there is no more wandering aimlessly. By bringing light into human life and into the world Christ has destroyed the works of the devil.

As for hatred, He destroys hatred by His gift of love, benevolence—and I am not using the word idly as we often do; I am using it in all its rich, spacious, gracious meaning—benevolence, well-willing, self-abnegation, kindness in the Apostle's sense of the word who, when writing to the Galatians, gives kindness as one of the qualities of love, the specific doing of small things out of pure love. All these things are things by which the works of the devil are being destroyed. Hatred, avarice, jealousy, selfishness, how are these things destroyed? By shedding abroad love which is the warmth of life, as light is its illumination. By these things He destroys the works of the devil.

As for lawlessness, this Jesus destroys by the gift of law, passion for the rights of God, service to my fellow men, the finding of self in the great abnegation, and the finding of self in perfect freedom because I have become the bond-slave of the infinite Lord of Love. The works of the devil, what are they? Death working within us, the spirit that is against truth and light, the darkness of ignorance. The spirit of hatred and malice, avarice and jealousy and the whole unholy brood of things which are unlike God, lawlessness lying at the base of all, the refusal to submit, these are the works of the devil. Nineteen centuries ago the Son of God was manifested,

and during those centuries in the lives of hundreds, thousands, He has destroyed the works of the devil, mastered death by the gift of life, cast darkness out by the incoming of light, turned the selfishness of avarice and jealousy into love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness. He has taken hold of lawless men and made them into the willing, glad bond-servants of God. So has He destroyed the works of the devil.

Do not forget the meaning of the Advent historically. It was the invasion of human history by One who snatched the scepter from the usurper. It was the intrusion of forces into human history which dissolved the consistency of the works of the devil, and causes them to break and fail. "How long, O Lord, how long?" is the cry of the heart of the saint today. Yet take heart as you look back and know that force has operated for nineteen centuries and always toward consummation. Still, the works of the devil are manifest, the works of the flesh are manifest. Yes, but the fruit of the Spirit of life which has come through the Advent of Christ is also manifest. All over the world today on many a branch of the vine of the Father's planting the rich clusters of fruit are to be found. All, so far, is but preliminary. It is twilight only. High noon has not yet arrived; but it is twilight, and noon must come. What the Advent has wrought it will still work. That which it has accomplished in the face of opposition it will accomplish. That which has dissolved the vested and established evils proves to my heart the certainty of the ultimate victory. I tell you that if we have but eyes anointed to see we shall discover the fact that all the works of the devil in the world are wrapped about by the slow burning fires that came when the Son of God was manifested that He might loosen, dissolve, destroy the works of the devil.

The last word is to be personal. The Advent personally was the coming of the Stronger than the strong men armed. It was the coming of One to destroy the works of the devil in my own life. Are they not destroyed? Are they not shaken to their foundations? Are they still established in the fiber of your being? Do you know as you sit in this house tonight that the works of the devil, death, darkness, hatred and rebellion are the master forces of your being? Then I bring you the Evangel. I tell you of One manifested to destroy all such works. I tell you not merely as a theory, but as having the testimony of history attesting the truth of the announcement of my text. I do not move you by that! Suffer me, then, to tell you as a word of personal and actual experience: not that in me the victory is perfectly won, not that the Master's work is accomplished, but that in me, solemnly, I bear the testimony, the forces of this Christ have operated and are operating, and the things that were formerly established are loosened and are falling to decay. He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. If tonight you are in the grip of forces of evil, if you realize that in your life his works are the things of strength, then I pray you turn with full purpose of heart to the One manifested long ago, Who is here now, Who, in all the power of His gracious victory, will destroy in you all the works of the devil and set you free.

245 - Jude 1:21 - "Keep Yourselves in the Love of God"

Keep Yourselves in the Love of God

Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Jude 1:21

These words are most remarkable in the light of their context. Taken apart therefrom, it would be the easiest thing in the world to misunderstand and misinterpret them. Let us, therefore, be patient while we remind ourselves of all that which we have read as a lesson. The words of this text may be said to be the center of Jude's advice in view of danger; danger, let it be carefully observed, threatening the called, beloved, kept, for so in the opening words he addressed those to whom he wrote, "them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ."

To such he said, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." It has often been pointed out that the theme on which Jude desired to write was that of our common salvation. While he gave all diligence to the great subject, preparing for his work; he was turned aside from his purpose by the Holy Spirit of God, and constrained to write words of exhortation in view of perils threatening the called; the beloved of the Father, those kept for Jesus Christ.

He first described the perils, "There are certain men crept in privily, even they who were of old set forth unto this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." He did not enter into any fuller description of these men. We may be left very largely to speculation as to what the teaching was which they were advancing, or what the habits of life in which they were living. Having referred to the perils, he proceeded to remind those to whom he wrote by three instances that those once saved might by their own wrongdoing be fearfully punished. The Israelites delivered from Egypt, sinning in the wilderness, failing in faith, were destroyed. Angels who kept not their proper habitation, but left the appointed orbit of their being and service, were cast down from the heights, and reserved in darkness to the final assize. Sodom and Gomorrah, cities of the well-watered plain, having all the advantages of that wonderful country; failing to discover the Creator through the creation, and giving themselves over to all manner of uncleanness, were destroyed. Then, referring again to the evil workers, he compared them to Cain, the hater of God, who reddened his hands in the blood of his brother; to Balaam, who constrained and compelled of the Spirit to the uttering of truth in prophecy, did nevertheless, eventually seduce the people of God to idolatry, and hopelessly perished; and to Korah, who rebelled against the government of God, and was destroyed. Then follows that

passage which we have so often read, and yet of which, as we read it together tonight, we felt the almost appalling force, showing the evil of lust and pronouncing judgment upon it. Then having referred to Israel, and illustrated his master thought, that privilege does not in itself ensure ultimate blessing, but brings grave responsibility to those who share it; he came to the positive part of his letter, "But ye, beloved, remember ye the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they said to you, in the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts. These are they who make separations, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

I bring you the message of that injunction. I bring it to those of you in this assembly who are "called, beloved of the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." While we shall not have time in the course of one evening meditation to go back over this ground and consider it in all its detail, let us recognize that this injunction is one born of a consciousness of peril, filling the heart of a man who turned aside from what might have appeared to him would have been a greater, more important work—that of writing of our common salvation—in order to write this one brief page of exhortation. The final message of it, that to which all the rest lends force, is contained in these words, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

I want to lead you in meditation; first on the plain meaning of this injunction; second, on its importance; and finally on the method which Jude reveals, by which we shall be able to obey the injunction.

Be patient with me if I take two or three moments to ask you to remember what this text does not mean. We are not told to keep ourselves in such a state as to make God love us. I think a recognition of that at the very beginning will help us in the consideration which is to follow. I am not called upon to bring myself to a condition of life which will compel or constrain the love of God toward me. I am not called upon in my life as a child of God to maintain a certain attitude in order to make God continue to love me. Let us start with the recognition of the fact, that God's love is unsought, undeserved and unconditional. We cannot, in this life, put ourselves outside the love of God. It is a great, fundamental truth of the Christian religion that "God so loved the world." The world did not seek His love. The world as He saw it in its sin did not deserve His love, and He did not impose upon the world, conditions fulfilling which, He would love them. He loved the world. I can never think of this for myself, without there coming back to me these lines full of simplicity, full of beauty, written by Charles Wesley.

He came from above our curse to remove,
He hath loved, He hath loved us because He would love.
Love moved Him to die, and on this we rely,
He hath loved, He hath loved, though we cannot tell why.

Said a boy in a Sunday School class to his teacher many years ago: "Teacher, does God love naughty boys?" The teacher said, "No, certainly not!" It was terrible blasphemy. Of course He does. There is a man somewhere in this congregation who has been disappointed within the first five minutes of my message, and is saying, This message is not for me; if it is to the called, the beloved, the kept for Jesus Christ; it is not for me. There are certain senses in which you are quite right; but remember this; God loves men, not upon any condition, not because they seek His love; but, I dare to put it even more forcefully as the idea is suggested in Wesley's hymn, because He would love; nay, He could no other, for His is love. However far you may have wandered, however far, the far country may be; you may have wounded Him, and grieved His Holy Spirit, but you have not made Him cease to love you. You may have forgotten Him, but God has never ceased to love you.

If that be admitted, then we may proceed. What then did Jude mean when he said, "Keep yourselves in the love of God"? Quite simply he meant this. Being in the love of God; keep yourselves from all that which is unlike Him; from all that which violates love and grieves the heart of God; or to use the actual word of Paul, that which causes sorrow to the Spirit of God.

Mark again the introductory word of this brief letter; you are "called, beloved in God the Father, kept for Jesus Christ"; therefore, seeing that you are loved, that you are dwelling in love, that love encompasses you, is set upon your perfecting, "keep yourselves in the love of God." Correspond to that in which you dwell. Answer the love of God.

Therein is the point of our personal responsibility; if indeed we are called of God, if indeed we are beloved of God, if indeed we are being kept for Jesus Christ, then to us the word applies, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Go back to the illustration of the earlier part of the letter; What was the sin of Cain? It was that of hatred, which expressed itself in murder. What was the sin of Balaam? The sin of greed, of covetousness, which expressed itself in the wickedness by which he seduced the people of God from their allegiance, and brought them into evil relationships with idolatrous peoples. What was the sin of Korah? Envy in the heart against the arrangements and the government of God, which expressed itself in rebellion against Him. I refer to these again only to ask you to notice that in each case that love is violated. In each case the action is contrary to love. Cain; hatred, murder; impossible to love. Balaam; greed, seduction; impossible to love. Korah; envy, rebellion; impossible to love. These illustrations, used to show the evil of the men against whom Jude is warning us, serve also to illuminate the meaning of this great

charge, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Being in His love, do not become careless, but remember that you are responsible. The atmosphere in which you dwell creates responsibility. The great and gracious fact of the unsought, unconditional, love of God, into which you have been specially brought as you have been called, creates grave responsibility.

Last Sunday evening, we were speaking here of that great word of Paul, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," and the final message I brought you in that consideration was this, that the love of God shed abroad in the heart of the child of God if allowed to have its own way and master the life will express itself in the attitudes of the life. Paul's injunction is "Let this mind be in you." Answer the movement of the Divine life by bowing to the inward impulse of that life.

There is the same thought here. In speaking on that theme last Sunday night, I dwelt upon it as a great inspiration and gospel of hope to the child of God. Tonight, I come back to it, and listen to the emphasis of solemn warning. "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Mark the importance of the injunction. We are surrounded by seductive influences. We are in the love of God; and yet we live in an atmosphere in which, unless we learn the art of watchfulness, unless we discover our responsibility, and answer it in the economy of God, we shall wander, not away from His love, for He will still love, but from the possibility of realization and manifestation; we shall fail to fulfil its purpose, and to answer its great and gracious impulse.

Take again these three illustrations. Let us take them in all their bare and naked horror. What are the dangers threatening those upon whom God's love is set; threatening those who live and move and have their being within the very love of God? The dangers are suggested by these illustrations; murder; Cain hated his brother; enticement of other men to actual evil; Balaam seduced the people of God; rebellion against the actual and established government of God in the midst of Whose love we live; Korah led such a rebellion. When I say these things in this assembly, speaking to Christian people, I can quite believe that there are those who object and say, We cannot commit murder; we shall surely never be guilty of deliberately seducing the people of God from allegiance, and leading them into the practice of evil; we never can be guilty of leading a rebellion against God. In answer to that objection, I pray you to remember one or two simple things. First, Cain immediately prefaced the murder of his brother by bringing an offering to the Lord. Balaam, compelled by the Spirit of God, uttered a prophecy concerning Israel more wonderful than any other in certain respects. Korah led a popular movement, and was a man of the people. All the things that are things of horror as we look back at these illustrations, were prefaced by others we are compelled to admire. Let the conceptions of Jesus fall upon these ancient illustrations. Cain murdered his brother. We say, We shall never do so. The answer of Christ is this, "everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." The actual crime is not the worst sin. The capacity for it, the tendency toward it, the willingness in certain circumstances to harm another. We are nearer to vulgar sin than we know oftentimes. The man who in the presence of so solemn a warning as this epistle brings, says: "These things have no application to me, I cannot commit murder, I cannot be guilty of the sin of Balaam, I can never be guilty of the sin of Korah," may be by his own self-satisfaction on the very margin of those very sins. "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

The warning is needed, for we lose, ere we know it, the graces and glories of the Christian character. Before we know it, these things which result from His love, and which are full of beauty according to His will, have lost their bloom, lost their freshness, the withering process has begun. I am afraid—I would not utter it as a word of censorious criticism, I associate myself with the statement—I am afraid the Church of God is full of men and women who belong to God, who are not in the love of God as to their own character, as to their own conceptions. The forces that are about us are full of peril. Ere we know it, we have fallen—not out of His love—but from such correspondence thereto, as fulfils His will, and manifests His purpose, and accomplishes His work in the world.

Then we need to take one step further most solemnly, and to remember that our age-abiding and ultimate safety depends upon our correspondence to God. We are not to think our salvation is the result of grace, independently of our response thereto. We are not to imagine that at last He will present us as faultless before the throne of the glory of God unless we are faultless. Christ will not introduce us into heaven's fellowship unless there be correspondence to God. Unless there be that love of God shed abroad in our hearts, mastering the life, which expresses itself in holiness, compassion and sacrificial service, He will never present us before the throne of God. There is a grave and awful responsibility resting upon us. Let us remember it.

These thoughts are enforced by the illustrations of the earlier part of the letter. Israelites delivered from Egypt were destroyed in the wilderness. Angels who kept not the orbit of their high and holy service were cast into darkness. Cities dowered with all the values of the fairest valleys and the well-watered plain, were destroyed by fire.

Privilege is not enough. It creates responsibility; and responsibility not responded to, unanswered, not yielded to, issues in destruction. "Keep yourselves in the love of God." It is necessary that over and over again those of us who name His name should bring ourselves back to the measurement of His requirements, and test ourselves as by His love.

If the word of the living God is searching and trying you, do not forget that He loves you still. You are in His love; answer it, respond to it, yield to it. All that in you is contrary to that love; all of bitterness, of hatred, of injustice, of impurity, all that violates the perfect

law of the universe which is love; all these things are to be put away. So, we are to keep ourselves in the love of God, responding to it, allowing it to be the perpetual test of our thinking, the criterion of our conduct. We are responsible in these matters.

How may we obey the injunction. The answer is given in the words lying immediately around our text. It may be remembered by the remembrance of three simple words, building, praying, looking. "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit... looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." These are the laws of fulfilment.

Building on faith. We hear a great deal today, I sometimes think too much, on the subject of character building, yet there is great value in the idea if it be rightly apprehended. How is character built? Character is built by thought and by action. Or, if I may take three words indicating a sequence: There is first the conception; then the conduct arising out of the conception; and finally there is the character resulting from the conduct. That is the whole process of character building, as I understand it. The matter of first importance is that of the conception, for "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he." According to our thinking, will be our doing; and according to our doing, resulting from our thinking, will be our being.

The foundation of the building is that of our most holy faith. When Jude used the term, he used it as expressive of truths which center in Christ. Enumerate, if you so will, the facts of the one great faith of Christ. "Christ; God incarnate. Christ; perfect, ideal Man, living a sinless life. Christ of the cross; God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." Christ; "Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" Christ; sitting at the right hand of the Father. Christ; coming again to receive His people and to administer the affairs of the world. Are these the cardinal truths? The central thought is that of Christ Himself. He is the object of faith. The Lord Christ; of the sinless life, of the atoning death, of the triumphant resurrection; is the object of faith. We are to build on that foundation. That is to say, that all the activities of our life must harmonize with the faith which we exercised in Christ, and by which we entered into that inner circle of the love of God.

Let us apply the principle to the illustrations of the earlier part of the letter. Is it possible for any man to slay his brother while he is building up on that faith? Can there be harmony between murder and obedience to the ideals of Christ? Is it possible for a man to build on that faith, and seduce the people of God, or rebel against the rule of God? Let that faith be the master passion of the life, let that Christ be not merely the object upon which faith fastens for its first realization of life, but let the Christ be Lord of the life. Faith on Jesus Christ as an act of twenty years ago is useless for the present moment. Faith in Jesus Christ must be the maintained attitude of the life; so that all the habits of the life, the thinking, planning, and doing, shall forevermore be tested thereby. To build on that faith is to keep in the love of God. To be true to Christ in thinking, loving, willing, and doing, is to abide in the love of God. That is the first condition.

Are some of you saying in your hearts, "All this is so patent?" I know it. I know also how easily we forget and how constantly we disobey, and how insidiously there creep into our lives wrong motives, and we fail to build on our faith. We, who in the sanctuary hear the message and feel its force, drift into the world, and ere we know it, we have denied the faith, not by open word that affirms disbelief, but by answering impulses that were born in hell rather than in heaven. "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Keep yourselves by building on the faith.

Take the next word; "Praying in the Holy Spirit." Then even the building on the faith is not to be an action wholly of my own will and in my own strength. If it were so, I should be hopeless. I should know the truth and be unable to do it. I am to pray in the Spirit. The testing of my desires is to be that of the Holy Spirit of God. I am to pray in the light of His interpretation of Christ. The sacred office of the Holy Spirit is to make real to the consciousness of the believer the truth about Christ. Some newborn child of God may say to me, "you have charged us to build on this faith, to test all our living by Christ, how are we to know?" The Spirit of God is given for constant, direct, immediate interpretation of Christ. We are not to imitate the example of a Leader separated from us by two millenniums. We are to walk in the will of God interpreted in the inner life of each of us by the indwelling Spirit of God. "Praying in the Holy Spirit." All the desires of the life are to be submitted to His purification, to the fire of His presence, which burns up the dross of base desires. So am I to build.

Do not let us forget the last word of the three; "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." The reference of Jude, without any doubt, is to that advent of our Lord for which we are bidden to look. I am convinced that the Church of God has lost, and is losing immeasurably because she has ceased to look for the coming One. When Paul was writing one of his earliest epistles, that to the Thessalonians, he described the new attitude of Christian men in these words, "Ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." We still insist on men turning from idols to the true God. We insist today as perhaps never before upon serving the living God. Remember, the perfecting word is the last, "to wait for His Son from heaven." In our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we have justification, sanctification, glorification. I know the words are old, but how full they are of value and meaning. I look back and say, "There and then I was saved." I think of the present process and say, "Today I am being saved." I look on and up and say, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." The completion of the work will be at His coming. If we would keep ourselves in the love of God, we must be watchers for that morning. To remember that He may come and disturb me at my work, or in my play; will have wonderful effect upon my work, and on my play. I am so to live and toil and

speaking, that if the life were perfected, the toil ended, and the speech checked, by the flaming glory of His advent, I should not be ashamed from Him at His coming. "Keep yourselves in the love of God," by looking for the mercy.

Let our last thought be that suggested by the closing ascription of praise. "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power before all time, and now and forevermore."

Mark the beginning of the brief letter. Mark its central injunction. Listen to its final doxology. How did it begin? "To them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ." How does it end? "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling." Between these two the charge, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Let us test ourselves, whether we be in the faith or not, by asking ourselves whether we are in the love. Is there bitterness in the heart, anger in the soul against some other man? Is there the making of murder in you, greed, covetousness, a spirit of envy? While God still loves you, you are not keeping yourselves in the love of God. I pray you with Jude, remember Israel delivered from Egypt, perishing in the wilderness; angels keeping not their first estate, cast into darkness; the cities of the plain desolated. May He help us to understand and to keep ourselves in His love.

246 - Revelation 1:9 - Tribulation, Kingdom, and Patience

Tribulation, Kingdom, and Patience

... the tribulation and kingdom and patience... in Jesus....

Revelation 1:9

The text is only a phrase. But what a phrase it is. Taken thus, in separation from its context it is full of suggestiveness. Its opening word, "tribulation," is tremulous with sadness. It speaks of stress and strain and sorrow. Its central word, "kingdom," is pregnant with majesty. It speaks of government and order and strength. Its final word, "patience," is vibrant with heroism. It speaks of courage, and fidelity, and endurance. Final word, did I say? I was wrong. There is yet another, and it is supreme. "In Jesus" are the final words, and they qualify, interpret, glorify, all that have gone before. "... the tribulation and kingdom and patience... in Jesus...."

All this becomes far more arresting and illuminative when the phrase is considered in relation to its context. Therein it is the description of an experience; the experience of the writer; the experience of those to whom, or for whom he was writing; and—as the phrase itself reveals—the experience supremely of Jesus Himself.

The writer thus describes himself and his situation:

I John, your brother and partaker with you... was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day,...

His writing was addressed to "... the seven churches which are in Asia..." To Ephesus in danger of false teachers and bearing persecutions; to Smyrna, in tribulation, poor, suffering, some of them imprisoned; to Pergamum, dwelling where Satan had his throne and where Antipas was martyred; to Thyatira, in danger from the false prophetess and patiently enduring; to Sardis, overwhelmed in death, only a few remaining undefiled; to Philadelphia, keeping the word, not denying the name, under the most difficult circumstances; to Laodicea, made tepid by prosperity, that gravest of all perils that ever threatens the holy church.

Moreover, his writing was by the direct command of the One Who, speaking of His own experience said, "... I was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore,..."

Our phrase then describes the experience of John, of the church, and of Jesus. It presents two outlooks which qualify each other. The first is the outlook on circumstances, and the whole of that outlook is condensed, compressed, packed into one throbbing word, tribulation. The other is the outlook on life, and the whole of that outlook is expressed in the two words, the kingdom, and the patience.

Let us then consider first this twofold Christian experience; the experience of circumstances and the experience of life. Let us then attempt to consider the mutual relation of these two phases of the Christian experience which cannot be separated in this present time and age and dispensation.

First, then, the twofold experience itself. The first phase is that of the experience of circumstances, expressed in one word, tribulation. What is tribulation? The thought of the word is that of pressure producing actual suffering. I can do no better than illustrate its meaning by reference to our Lord's use of it, when in the Upper Room He was discoursing with His own, prior to His departure. In the course of that conversation He said: "In the world ye have tribulation:..." In the same discourse a few sentences earlier, our Lord employed a most arrestingly suggestive figure which helps us to understand what tribulation is;

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but when she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for the joy that a man is born into the world.

The word there rendered anguish is the same word. We are brought by that flash of intimate understanding and tender grace, to an interpretation of tribulation; it is the pressure that means agony, but it is the travail that issues in life and joy. That is the experience of the church, of John as it was of Jesus, in this world.

Mark the persistence of it, taking first of all that which must be supreme in our thinking, the experience of our Lord Himself. His whole life was a life of tribulation; to quote the prophetic word uttered concerning the Messiah long ere He came, He was "... a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:..." As we observe Him from babyhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to manhood, and through full maturity to the completion of His public ministry, in ever-increasing measure we see Him always feeling the pressure of circumstances.

This was so in material things. He was homeless. "... foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Mentally it was so. He had no comrades. He had no peers in the realm of thought. There were no great philosophers in His age; philosophy had become decadent before He came into the world. The great philosophers under the influence of whose teaching men were professing to live and act; Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, were not comrades for Him in their thinking. He was alone. Among the men of His own age and of His religion after the flesh, there was none able to enter into His conception of things or to soar to the height of His outlook.

Spiritually, He found no sympathy in the world at all. His spiritual concepts were not accepted by men, not understood of men. He stood alone. Such was His loneliness; materially without home, mentally without comrades, spiritually without sympathy. Life to Him was the bearing of a testimony to the essential and eternal things; the bearing of a testimony that men never apprehended, would not apprehend or receive. From the beginning to the end there crushed and pressed upon Him the false concepts and false ideals of men, which at last found their supreme expression in the words so often quoted and yet so terribly revealing: "... we will not have this man to reign over us." This pressure upon Him of circumstances found its culminating expression and experience in the Cross of Calvary.

The persistence of this experience of tribulation in the history of His people has been equally definite. The story of loyal-hearted discipleship has ever been, and still is, that if a man will live godly in this world he shall suffer persecution. The church forever contradicts the world. That is its business. That is what it is in the world for; to contradict it in its fundamental conceptions, in the conduct that grows out of its fundamental conceptions, and in the character which results from the persistent conception expressing itself in conduct. The church in the world is an eternal negative to the things which are supremely of the world.

With what result? The world is forever opposed to the church. It is against the church. It will bring all its pressure to bear upon the church. It will do everything to silence her voice and destroy her influence and end her propaganda. If this is not so, it is because the church has forgotten her message. If the world now is making friends with the church, then alas for the church. The world has not changed. Its central conception of life, its ideal, is still that of the magnificence of mastery and the glory of the material. The church's ideal is still that of the magnificence of service and sacrifice and the beauty of the spiritual. These things cannot merge and mix without the quality being changed entirely on the one side or the other. The church is in the world to affirm the things of the beginning, the original things of truth, the meaning and the reason of things; to tell man what man has honestly sought to discover for himself but never has been able, the reason, the truth behind everything. The world is still saying: "We will not have these things"; the world is still against the church. The church stands in the center of this pressure, bearing her witness and feeling the agony of her loneliness and her strife with the things against which she is called to protest. This is a persistent experience.

But this is not all the truth about the experience of the church's Lord and of the church. We need the other two words of my text; not only is it an experience of tribulation, it is also an experience of the kingdom and the patience. Two thoughts are suggested by these words, and yet they are so closely related that they describe one supreme fact. In the one case, that of tribulation, we have the experience of circumstances. In the other, that of the kingdom and patience, we have the experience of the church in her very life, that which constitutes her what she is, that which differentiates her from all other societies, that which makes a distinction clear, sharp, between a man of God and a man of the world. What then do these words connote? The word "kingdom" connotes the rule and the realm of a king. Here, of course, the reference is to the Kingdom of God, and not to any dispensational interpretation of the phrase, not to any dispensational application or value, but to the fact of the Kingdom of God. It is the static, unchanged, abiding fact. It is static, that is, it is the one fact that has never altered, never changed, the fact that abides. The Kingship of God, the Divine sovereignty, holds all things in the grasp of its power and within the authority of its management. The whole fact of the universe is included, whether it be heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the depths of the underworld below. Nothing escapes from the operation of that one fact. Satan himself must report in the Divine Presence ere he goes upon any mission of persecuting the sons of God. The arch enemy of mankind cannot touch one single piece of your property, not so much as a hair upon the back of a camel that you possess, until he has asked permission. Satan desires to sift you. Then he must ask before he can do it. Satan desires to

plunge a continent in war. Then he cannot act save under a Divine control. If in the Divine control there be a process of judgment, it is judgment proceeding toward the accomplishment of a purpose of mercy. The true experience of the whole church of God in its life is fundamentally an experience of that Kingdom of God.

And closely related, indeed growing out of it as an inevitable sequence, there is the experience of patience. The word literally means, "staying under"; but the staying under always means staying on. If we are to stay under the pressure of circumstances, we must stay on the kingship of God. Patience is the experience of the soul that relates itself to the Kingdom of God and relates all circumstances to that selfsame fact. The soul, keen and sensitive to the fact of the Divine Kingship, is able to remain under the pressure of circumstances, tribulation, affliction, persecution, as it relates them all to the underlying fact. In use the word always connotes cheerful, hopeful endurance. It is never used of that state of mind that says things are as they are and cannot be helped. That is not patience, that is stupidity. Patience will feel the agony, shudder at its appearance, and be conscious of its pain; but patience will hear the undertone of the eternal music and express it in song even when circumstances press and grind upon the soul.

In the experience of our Lord the persistence of this sense of the Kingdom and of patience is most clearly marked. The whole truth was expressed in His own words in this same discourse to which I have already referred. When He said: "... In the world ye have tribulation,..." He also said: "... but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." The victory of His life was gained by submission to the static fact of the Divine Kingship and by consequent sovereignty over all circumstances.

He gave us the supreme exemplification of the experiences of life. His life was homed in the centrality of the Divine government and expressed itself in infinite patience and so mastered all tribulation.

And that was not only the experience of our Lord Himself. By His grace and through the ministry of His Spirit, it is the experience of the Christian church. If her experience is that of fellowship with His sufferings, it is also that of fellowship in His triumph. There was one man who knew perhaps more of these things than any other man who appears upon the pages of the New Testament. I refer to Paul. When he was writing his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, he spoke twice of his own experience in this regard.

"We are pressed on every side..." — and that is the same word, tribulation— "... yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body."

And again;

"... in everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions,—(that same word)—in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings;—(that is the experience of tribulation)—in pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left—(this is the experience of the Kingdom)—by glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" — (this is the experience of patience).

The church always overcomes the world. In the case of every individual martyr, the victory is with the man slain and not with the men who slay him. In every hour of persecution it is the church that is victorious, not the oppressive power that persecutes. Following in the pathway of her Lord and Master, Who death by dying slew, the church bends to bonds and stripes, is battered and bruised to death, to rise again in life immortal, and to triumph. Tribulation! yea verily, but also the kingdom and the patience that are in Jesus.

The mutual relation of these phases of experience has already been seen in our consideration, yet it is so important, as it seems to me, that it demands separate statement. Let us think of tribulation then in its relation to life, and then of life in its relation to tribulation.

Tribulation is caused by life. The sense of the kingdom and the sense of the patience of the soul makes the world's opposition inevitable. It is impossible to have a man or a society utterly sensible of the Divine government, utterly faithful to the Divine government, living in a world like this, but that man, that society, becomes a center of opposition. Consequently, it is the kingdom and patience that create the tribulation. If we relax our conviction as to the kingship and our patient fidelity to all that kingship inevitably connotes, then the pressure weakens. We shall not feel it so much. If we abandon our attitude and our fidelity toward the kingship of God, the pressure of the world will cease altogether. We need not have persecution if we do not desire it. All we have to do is to abandon our loyalty to the Kingdom of God. The world will not persecute us then.

But not only is it true that tribulation is caused by life; it is also true that tribulation strengthens life. The very forces that are against us are making us stronger. This is the strange and wonderful experience of all Christian souls and of the Christian church. Deepening loyalty increases patience. Growing pressure increases the strength of the life which it strives to destroy until life

becomes forever and finally victorious.

From Antioch in Pisidia Paul was driven out. At Iconium they put him outside the gates. At Lystra they stoned him, leaving him for dead. After a while the broken, bruised body revived and he went to Derbe. When he had been there a while he went back to Lystra, the place of the stones; back to Iconium where they drove him out; back to Antioch in Pisidia. He went back to teach the Christians something that it was important they should know, that "Through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God."

The very pressure of the stones had deepened and intensified the sense of the real and the spiritual. He went back to tell those people that by these things we enter the Kingdom of God in all its fullness. The old saying is indeed true, that "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The church hidden in the Roman catacombs overcame the gross and devilish materialism of Rome. The church seated and patronized by Constantine on the Seven Hills, became weak, paralyzed. It has ever been so. It has been by the pressure and agony of tribulation, that the forces of the church's life have been increased and renewed and made powerful. The church persecuted is the church powerful because then she is true to her life and realizes her strength.

Life is surrendered to by tribulation. The sense of agony and the sense of patience in the soul makes opposition contributory to the very life which it is persecuting. Here again I quote from Paul in his letter to the Philippians: "... the things which happened unto me have fallen out... unto the progress of the gospel," as the Revised Version has it.

The things that have happened unto me—the bonds, the imprisonments—have turned out for the beating forward of the gospel.

Life transmutes tribulation, and so (in effect) Paul writes: "Let us also rejoice in our tribulations. Tribulation worketh patience, patience worketh conviction, conviction worketh hope!" Wherever we find life in its strength, we find tribulation in its pressure, but if we watch the process we see life transmuting tribulation.

These are dark days for the church of God. Are they? Think again! What has provoked this world conflict? The opposition of the world to the church. Exchange that for other words if you like and say it is a conflict of ideals. That is but another way of saying that it is a conflict caused by the opposition of the world to the church. This is a testimony to the power of the church. The passion for the mastery of the earth by brute force is the hatred of the world for the ideals of Christ.

What is the issue to be? Let us ask another question. For the moment what is happening? The church is led into a wilderness in which she looks the world squarely in the face and shudders. That is great gain. Too long the church has been playing fast and loose with the world, and now God has permitted a situation when the church is once again compelled to look at the world and see what it really means. As she does it, if she is true to God, she shudders and is ashamed.

But she is not only brought into a wilderness in which she can look the world squarely in the face. The church is brought to the place where she looks God in the face anew. There will happen to the church that which happened to Jacob at Jabbok; she will be able to say, presently, after the night and the darkness have passed: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is healed."

That thing is true individually. Here is a boy back from the war, marvelously preserved from anything more serious than a wound that has incapacitated him for a month or so. This is what he said: "I never really knew God till I was at the front." No, he was not a heathen and a publican. He belonged to the church. But he saw God there. That experience is being multiplied, and the vision will heal. There will come to us a new sense of the powers of our life, a new experience of the agony and of the patience.

Are we in tribulation? are we in Patmos? Let us also be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. So shall we know the kingdom, so shall we know the patience. It may be we shall hear behind us the voice of a trumpet, and being turned to look we also shall see the Son of Man, girt about the paps with a golden girdle, with feet that shine like brass burnished in the furnace, with eyes that flash as with a flame of fire, with hair white as the driven snow. The thing He will say to us amid the carnage and the darkness is this:

"... I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore...."

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The King at the Door

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door,
I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.

Revelation 3:20

The first and true application of these words is an application to the Christian Church; but, with a fine sense of appropriateness, the

Christian consciousness has taken the principle involved, and made personal application of it. For while in the letter to the church at Laodicea these words spoken by the Lord outside the Church had application to that church and those within its doors, we do no violence to the principle involved, but indeed come to understand it more perfectly, when, in all simplicity, we listen to these words of Christ as addressed to the individual. The door at which He stood knocking was the door of the Church; yet it was to one man that He made His appeal. If we make our application to the Church we must remember that the call of Christ was to an individual within that church, and that the way back for the excluded Christ to fellowship with those who bore His name and wore His sign was through an individual life. Therefore, the two applications are not only permissible but important.

My principal purpose this evening is to make the second of these applications the personal one. Yet, standing as we do on the threshold of the new year, I feel that I cannot wholly pass over the first value of my text. I have no desire, neither have I the time at the present moment, to enter into any discussion of the application of the whole of these letters; but, taking them in all simplicity, we accept them as letters sent to seven churches then actually in existence; and, moreover, this church at Laodicea was certainly known to Paul, for his references to it in the letter to the Colossians are very striking. An examination of them in the light of this letter is interesting and valuable. The fact that arrests our attention is that here, so soon after the presence of the Lord in the world in the days of His flesh, was a church bearing His name, gathering together ostensibly for His worship, making its boast in its own sufficiency; while His estimate of it was that it was Christless, He was not in the midst, He was outside the door. I say that a picture such as that must cause pause to all of us who are united in church life. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

To summarize, for I am going into no detail in this application, what is the picture of this church at Laodicea? It is that of an influential church without influence. We should have taken the church at its own estimate, and our Lord made perfectly clear what that estimate was, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing." That was the language of the Church. That was our Master's interpretation of the underlying thought of the Church concerning itself.

His estimate of the church was very different. "Thou art the wretched one, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." That phrase, "the wretched one," really means burdened one. We often hear of churches being burdened with debt, but never of churches being burdened with wealth; but that was our Lord's estimate of this church. Therefore, in His view, it was pitiable, for such is the thought of the word "miserable," not that the church was conscious of its own misery; therein lay the profoundest tragedy of its condition, it was not miserable, but it was pitiable, in the old sense of the word "miserable" with which we are familiar in the liturgy of the Episcopal Church, "Have mercy upon us, miserable offenders," pitiable offenders as the thought really is. We "have need of nothing," said the church; but the Lord said, "Thou art... poor and blind and naked." A church without influence, wealthy but poor, satisfied but pitiable. I have no desire to do any other than thus to glance at the picture. As the minister of this church, in the midst of many of my own people, I make no application of it; I dare not, I do not know; but I confront the possibility that a church may bear the name of the Lord, may be perfectly satisfied with its own success and its own influence, may make its boast in the fact that it has now become wealthy and has need of nothing, while yet the Master is outside, declaring it to be pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked. That is the background of condition.

Now hear His word to such a church, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." He has not yet abandoned that church. If He is excluded from His own church He stands still near to that church. How near? At the very door, knocking and asking for what? For one man who will let Him in! And promising that if there be one man within the church who comes to consciousness of poverty, and misery, and blindness, and inefficiency, and if that man will admit the Master, He will pass in and set up the table of perfect fellowship with that man. If that should have happened at Laodicea, perhaps it did, I do not know; but suppose some one man opened the door and the Master crossed again the threshold and sat down with that man, what happened in that moment? That man excommunicated the church. We have often heard of a church excommunicating a man; it is possible for one spiritually minded man absolutely loyal to Jesus Christ to excommunicate a whole church.

I now pass to the personal and individual application of this simple and sublime word of Christ. In doing that I am anxious first of all to look at the One Who is speaking. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Who is this? Where shall I go for a description of Him in the New Testament? I will confine myself to the writings of John. We were looking at one of them on Sunday evening last, as we found it in the prologue to the gospel beginning with the stately words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"—then omitting the parenthesis of the next twelve verses and catching up the statement at verse fourteen—"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." On that description I am not going back. That is the Person referred to here. In this book of Revelation the same One is described for us in symbolic language. In all the symbolism of that description of the One upon Whom John looked we have suggestions concerning His glory and His grace, which as we meditate upon them fill the heart with a sense of wonder and amazement in the presence of this Lord Christ of ours. The first word is an arresting word. "I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man." Bear in mind—this is mechanical, but if you will ponder it, it may be helpful—that description occurs in the New Testament, in the gospel stories eighty-five times, eighty-three of which are occasions when Jesus used it concerning Himself. It was His favorite description

for Himself, "the Son of man." I am not going to tarry with the significance of the word save in this one and simplest respect; it brings us face to face with the fact of the humanity of our Master, brings us face to face with the fact that the One upon Whom John looked in Patmos, was, whatever else He was and is—and other facts and forces of His being are symbolically suggested—He was of our own nature, a man of our humanity, the Son of man. Then we find the symbolism of character: the hair white as wool, suggestive according to Eastern symbolism of purity and age; the feet of brass, which burnt as though burnished in a furnace, suggestive of that procedure in judgment in invincible strength which had been spoken of by all the prophetic writings ere the coming of the Christ Himself; the voice as the sound of many waters, the concord of all the voices that had sounded ere His voice sounded, merging into one final truth all the divers portions that had been spoken to the fathers in times past by the prophets; or, briefly and inclusively, the infinite music of the full and perfect speech of God to men through His Son, the Son of man. This is but to touch upon some of the suggestive thoughts of the symbolism of the vision. It was this Person Who said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." As we think of the statements of the prologue to the Gospel, and of this symbolic description at the commencement of the Apocalypse, and merge them into one, and endeavor to realize all they suggest, let us remember, however hard it may be to understand it, that the declaration of the text is that the One Who stands at the door and knocks is the Creator, the King, the Lawgiver, the Judge; but He is the Redeemer also, for He says, "I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever more, and I have the keys of death and of hades."

Ere we listen to the word of the text, let us turn to the particular description with which this letter opens: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

There is nothing more wonderful in these letters than the fitness of the description of Jesus at the commencement of each one to the peculiar need of the people to whom the message was sent. Here none of the symbolism of the description is employed. Here every word is mystic and awe-inspiring. "The Amen" is a title which by its very simplicity arrests the attention, and of which, when we inquire as to its meaning, we find the root signification is that of nursing, nurture, strengthening, establishment, so that the Amen reminds us that He is the essential, final Truth. It is exactly equivalent to the word which fell from the lips of our Lord when He said, "I am the Truth." Then He is "the faithful and true witness"; and while the Amen is the positive description, this is relative. He Who is the Amen, the essential truth, eternal truth, is, in His dealings with men, the faithful and true witness, not true alone but faithful also, not faithful merely but true also. The thing He will say will be the thing of truth, and He will say the thing of truth however it may burn.

Then the final title, so simple and yet so startling, which links this letter to Laodicea with the teaching of the letter to the Colossians, "the beginning of the creation of God."

Thus it is seen that Christ stands at the door of the Church, or at the door of the individual life, in all the essential grandeur and dignity of His own being, which is far beyond our comprehension; yet in order that we may understand, and be able to hear the knock at the door, and the accent of the voice, "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God," is "the Son of Man." All these things are the commonplaces of our New Testament and of our understanding thereof. Yet I have taken time, of set purpose, to remind my own heart of them ere I turn to the consideration of this word of Jesus.

Now listen to the text, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." There are two things I shall ask you to notice. First, the attitude of Christ described; and, second, the responsibility resting on us in view of that attitude.

What is His attitude? First, He is the excluded One, excluded from heaven by Love, excluded from earth by hate, for "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not." And if we think of the Church, think of Him excluded from the Church, neither by hate nor by love, but by luke-warmness, the tepid condition which is loathsome to the heart of this Christ of ours.

Now let us take this one thought about the Church and make application of it in the case of the individual. They did not know He was outside. They thought they were Christians. They named His name. They professed to believe His teaching. They had His institutions in their midst. They observed the ordinances of His commandment. They were a fully organized church. They did not know, did not dream that He was outside.

The peculiar individual application of this text, then, is not to the man who is openly and avowedly anti-Christian. I believe that at the door of that man's heart and life also Christ is knocking; but the peculiar application of this word of Christ must be to the man who is a Christian in name.

I pray you therefore to place the measurement of the picture of the Laodicean church on your own life, and find out whether in your case these things be so or not. How shall we do this? How shall we find out whether we individually are poor, pitiable, blind, naked, devoid of the essential Christian character? There is one test, very simple, but very suggestive, and very searching. How shall we detect the difference between the church with Christ in the midst and the church with His name in the midst, and Himself excluded? How shall we detect the difference between the man truly Christian and the man who names the name of Christ but is not Christian? What is the testing word, the discriminating thought? This is it, lukewarm! May I use another word, far more common, but perhaps more arresting, tepid!

That is a startling affirmation to make, yet I make it on the basis of this flaming revelation in the letter to Laodicea. "I would thou wert cold," and the word may be rightly translated frozen—"or hot," flaming, "so because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold"—are you not appalled by these words of Jesus?—"I will spew thee out of My mouth." That is the test. Can you sing about the Cross without any tears? Can you talk about the holiness of God without any tremor? Are you lukewarm? Then it is more difficult for the Lord Christ to deal with you than with a frozen man. Is it not true? The most difficult congregation in the world to which to preach the gospel is the congregation that regularly listens to it and refuses to obey it! The one man it is hardest to bring into living relationship with Christ is the man who sits right there in front of the preacher sabbath by sabbath, and hears the message but never answers it; admires it, talks to his friend about it, and agrees as to the accuracy of it, but in the center of his own life does not obey it; that man is lukewarm, tepid! Know well that Christ is not within because thou dost only admire Him! Know this, Christ is outside if thou art only prepared to patronize Him. He is the excluded Christ. This is the first picture that my text suggests. Behold, I stand outside, and knock. I do not think there will ever be any hope of Christ finding His way into the central life of some of us, until God in His infinite mercy awakens us to the fact that He is not within, but outside!

But this is also the picture of Christ seeking admission. The first is the human side; it tells the story of your condition, many of you who are listening to me. I am not preaching about men and women who are not here, but to men and women who are here, so help me God! Let us hear what the picture suggests about Christ. If He is excluded He is asking to come in. It is so old a story that men do not believe it because they know it so well, and a man does not know how to preach it so as to arrest the attention of the men who know it. Oh that I could so say it that men would be startled by it and believe it; this Lord Christ wants room in your heart and life, notwithstanding the fact that you have excluded Him by your own will, notwithstanding the fact that you have insulted Him by your patronage and admiration while you have withheld your obedience. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

What does He want to do if He comes in? To give you gold instead of poverty, to provide you with the white raiment that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; with gentle fingers to do for you what He did for the blind man long ago, anoint your eyes with salve until the light shall stream on them and you shall see. He has described your condition, burdened, pitiable, poor, blind, naked; and He says "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," with wealth for thy poverty, with sight for thy blindness, with raiment for thy nakedness. Thy condition is not My will for thee, says the Lord Christ to this heart of mine; I fain would make thee wealthy with all My wealth; I fain would open thine eyes until thou canst see the vision that I see; I fain would clothe thee with the white raiment that is My very own.

What does He want to come in for? He wants you to be His host, He is asking your hospitality. He wants to be your Host, He desires to give you hospitality. Was there ever statement more perfect than this? "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me"; I will be his guest, he shall spread the table for Me. I will be His Host and he shall sit at My table. I do not suppose there is another figure in the New Testament quite so wonderful as that of a revelation of the Lord's purpose as He knocks at the door of the human heart. How can a man say a thing which in the very saying may be spoiled? Yet let me try! God is robbed of one of His own homes so long as He is excluded from the heart of a man; and that is not a piece of my imagination. I go back to the Old Testament and I find the truth. Let God speak by the lip of the ancient prophet, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." The dwelling places of God, eternity, and the heart of a man! Jesus says, I want to come in to My own home; I built it, furnished it, all the material is My handiwork; let Me in! Be My host, let Me come in and live there. Let Me be the Guest in My very own home, and then I will be Host as well. I will spread the table for thee!

He always wants hospitality. He is very homeless in London by comparison. Will you not make home for Him in your heart? No room for Him in the inn. Let Him in, that He may sup with thee. He is hungry for thy love. He is homeless until a man shall open his heart and let Him in. He shall be thy Host; yet not wholly at His own charges, for thou shalt be His host. And in that perfect fellowship, My heart—as though Christ should say—will find rest, and thy heart will find rest.

What is our responsibility? To admit Him, that is all!

That is all, did I say? It is a very old story, but it will help us now, the story of Holman Hunt's picture. When Hunt painted his great picture, "The Light of the World," the picture of this thorn-crowned King knocking at the door, a friend of his who saw it before the public exhibition said to him, "Hunt, you have made one mistake here." "What is that?" asked the artist. "There is no handle on the door." Hunt looked at his friend and said, No, that is not a mistake; that is the door of the human heart, and it must be opened from the inside. "I stand at the door and knock." He desires to enter, but He will not force an entrance. I am responsible in this matter. If ultimately I should miss the way, I cannot put back the blame on God. I must open to admit Him. You may have heard His voice tonight in some whisper other than any word spoken by the preacher. You may have been conscious of the nearness to you of this Lord Christ; but He is still outside, until you swing your heart's door open and bid Him enter. Why do not men open the door? I would like to tell you another story. My dear friend, Mr. Collier, of Manchester, told me this story, and it made a very profound appeal to me; it is full of simplicity from the standpoint of the child, almost quaint and humorous, but it is a wonderful story. One night they were having a lantern service, and a working man was present with his boy by his side, looking at the pictures of the life of Jesus. When

Holman Hunt's great picture was flashed on the screen, they were singing,

Knocking, knocking, who is there?

Waiting, waiting, oh, how fair!

and the boy gripped his father's hand and said, "Father, why don't they open the door?" The man said, "I don't know; s'pose they don't want to!" "No," said the boy, "it isn't that. I think I know why they don't; they all live at the back of the house!" Why don't you open the door? Because you are living at the back of the house? You have receded into the baser, meaner, things of your own life, and, living there, you do not hear the knocking at the front door! You have descended in life voluntarily to mean motives, intellectually to limited outlook, emotionally to unworthy passions. You are living at the back. But for this hour some of you have pressed from that back region in the front, and you have seen the light from the windows out of which you seldom look. God grant that you may have heard the knocking. Will you open? I quoted two lines a moment ago from a hymn, and I am always sorry that the hymn ever appeared in that form. It is the mutilation of a great poem. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote something far finer than those two or three verses. Let her poem make my appeal;

Knocking, knocking, ever knocking!

Who is there?

'Tis a pilgrim strange and kingly,

Never such was seen before.

Ah, sweet soul, for such a wonder

Undo the door.

No, that door is hard to open;

Hinges rusty, latch is broken.

Bid Him go!

Wherefore, with that knocking dreary,

Scare the sleep from one so weary,

Say Him—No!

Knocking, knocking, ever knocking?

What! still there?

Oh, sweet soul, but once behold Him,

With the glory-crowned hair;

And those eyes so strange and tender

Waiting there.

Open, open, once behold Him—

Him so fair.

Ah, that door! Why wilt Thou vex me,

Coming over to perplex me?

For the key is stiffly rusty,

And the bolt is clogged and dusty;

Many fingered ivy vine

Seals it fast with twist and twine;

Weeds of years and years before

Choke the passage of that door.

Knocking, knocking! What! still knocking?

What's the hour? The night is waning;

In my heart a drear complaining,

And a chilly, sad unrest!

Ah! His knocking! It disturbs me,

Scares my sleep with dreams unblest!

Give me rest,

Rest—ah, rest!

Rest, dear soul, He longs to give thee;

Thou hast only dreamed of pleasure,

Dreamed of gifts and golden treasure,

Dreamed of jewels in thy keeping,

Waked to weariness and weeping.

Open to thy soul's one Lover,

And thy night of dreams is over,

More than all thy faded dreaming!
Did she open? Doth she? Will she?
So, as wondering we behold,
Grows the picture to a sign
Pressed upon your soul and mine;
For in every heart that liveth
Is that strange, mysterious door—
Though forsaken and betangled,
Ivy-gnarled, and weed bejangled,
Dusty, rusty, and forgotten—
There the pierced hand still knocketh,
And with ever-patient watching,
With the sad eyes true and tender,
With the glory-crowned hair,
Still thy God is waiting there.

248 - Revelation 19:16 - The Kingdom: The King

The Kingdom: The King

He hath on His garment and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Revelation 19:16

This is a view of Christ in His glory, a poetic and prophetic description of a glory upon which the eye of man has not yet rested in actual history.

John, as he wrote an account of the vision granted to him, was careful in the center of the descriptive paragraph to name the glorious One the Word, in the mystic language which he had used in writing the story of His mission in the world. In the loneliness of Patmos there were granted to the Seer such visions of his Lord as he had never seen before. In the presence of the unveiling of the glory of this Person, John became as one dead; and yet, he was conscious of the touch of a gentle, tender hand, thrilling with all human affection, and of the sound of a voice full of sweet tenderness, and ringing with all authority, saying: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the Living One; and I was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." The One Who passes before our vision in this paragraph is the self-same One upon Whose bosom John had laid his head in the years that now seemed so far away, the one of Whom he declared: "We beheld Him and we handled Him." Now he sees Him, in the figurative language of this paragraph, riding from the opened heavens, a King, followed by armies; and on His vesture and on His thigh a name was written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." I repeat that the eyes of the men of the world have never yet so seen Him; nevertheless, Jesus is today God's anointed and appointed King.

One of the great themes of the Bible is that of the Kingship of God. I am sometimes inclined to think, as I study and attempt to teach it, that whatever word, descriptive of Deity, one may be thinking of at a given moment, that word contains within itself the suggestiveness of every other word. A little while ago, in a careful and devout treatise on the Atonement, the author declared that in the word Father all essential truth concerning God is contained; for the Father is a King having authority, and the Father is a Saviour, forever seeking the realization of the highest life of His children. Would it not be equally true to say that when one speaks of Kingship all other thoughts are included therein? Would it not be equally true to affirm that if one speaks of God as Saviour, authority and tenderness and tears are all suggested by the word? From the beginning to the end of the Bible, the revelation of God is that of His Kingship, not declared in so many words in the stories with which the record opens, but as clearly revealed there as anywhere else. Take the ancient story, and see the placing of man in the garden; mark the spacious liberty, the glorious opportunity in the midst of which he found himself, in order that he might have dominion; but, as you gaze upon that spacious liberty and that wonderful opportunity, mark well the tree that indicated the limit of liberty and the condition for the fulfilment of opportunity: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." That tree was the sacramental symbol of the limit of liberty, and therefore a revelation to man of the throne higher than the one upon which man himself sat, and to which he must bow in allegiance if he would reign in power over everything that lies beneath him. As I pass on and on through the library I find the same story of God as King, God governing, God lifted up and enthroned, and when the seers of the ancient economy came to the highest visions of God they were always visions of God enthroned. With the coming of the New Testament, there came the fulfilment of the things suggested in the Old concerning this very fact of the Divine Kingship and government. In the language of the far distance there had been indications of the fact that at last into human history there should come a manifestation of the Kingship of God—the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. It was a prophecy of the authority which should overcome the forces that were against

humanity. The great promises made to the father of the race all indicated the coming of manifest Kingship, and to the great tribe of Judah the promise was definitely made that out of it should come a governor. The psalms are full of a King yet to come. The prophets during the delivery of their messages among the failing thrones of time, and in the presence of all the breakdown of earthly royalty, looked on and on, and waited and hoped that this essential fact of government and authority would come into clear manifestation.

In the New Testament there is the fulfilment of the hope, the answer to the expectation, the aspiration, the desire, the longing, the passionate waiting of the long centuries. From the beginning to the end of the story of Jesus' public ministry, there is the note of Kingship and unquestioned authority in His teaching. When he ascended the Mount, and delivered to His disciples His ethic, there was no note of apology, no question of counsel taken with any other. Nay, rather, there was the note that set aside the old economy, because it was now superseded by the new ethic, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time... but I say unto you!" I listen to Him in all His teaching, and I watch Him in all His ways; and I see ever One Who is sole and absolute Monarch, calling no man into His counsels. I trace Him through all His life, and I see Kingliness manifest not only in His teaching and in His general attitude toward men, but also, and perhaps supremely, in His attitude toward God. Christ never used the same word to describe His own praying which He used to describe the praying of other men. The word He used when describing the praying of the disciples, and when He charged them to pray, was a word which indicates coming into the presence of God with empty hands, as a pauper asking for the bestowment of a gift, of a bounty. Jesus never used that word about His own praying. Martha once used that word of His praying, but that was her mistake. The word Christ used of His own praying was a word which indicated partnership, fellowship with the God to Whom He spoke, "I will inquire of the Father." It is equally significant that you never find Him praying with His disciples. He prayed alone. They watched their Lord at His prayer, and as they watched Him and listened to Him, they came to Him upon one occasion and said, "Lord, teach us to pray." The very petition they presented to Him, asking that they might be taught to pray, is demonstration of the loneliness of His praying. Jesus prayed on another level, on another plane. His fellowship with God was other than the fellowship of the men by whom He was surrounded. Whether I watch His attitude toward men, or His attitude toward God, this perpetual note of authority is to be discovered.

As the shadows of the Cross were falling upon His spirit, the shadows of the dark hours to which Jesus was coming, and to which He had so often made reference in the company of the disciples, and as they trembled in the presence of the Cross out of their very love for Him, it is perfectly evident that the effect it produced upon Him was not that of trembling. There was no tremor in the presence of men and what they could do; the trembling was reserved for the loneliness of Gethsemane, when He faced the infinite mystery of the passion, and men were excluded. In the presence of the Cross itself Christ said: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself."

That authority was manifested with equal clearness in the hour of the Cross. If we watch Him carefully we cannot fail to see that Jesus compelled the hour of His own death. In the earlier days of His ministry He said: "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself." Watch Him at the last. Read carefully Matthew's story, and you will find two statements close together, though we have sometimes read them and never recognized their relationship. The high priests, plotting for His arrest, warned Judas that it was not to be effected at the Feast. Directly after, I see Him with His disciples, and Judas sat at the board; and Christ said to him, "What thou doest, do quickly." And He was arrested at the Feast, in spite of the priests. This was not a man driven by circumstances; He was a Man compelling circumstances. This was not a prisoner arrested at last, having been hunted to death by His enemies, who had now overcome Him. He held in His hand every foe that was against Him, and compelled the whole of them to cooperate in the fulfilment of His own purpose. He stood in the presence of the representative of Roman power, Pilate; and when he asked Him, "Whence art Thou?" Jesus gave him no answer. When Pilate said, "Knowest Thou not that I have power to release Thee, and have power to crucify Thee?" Christ replied, "Thou wouldst have no power against Me, except it were given thee from above."

Man of Nazareth, did you call Him? Verily yes, man of my manhood, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, humanity of my human nature, but a King. This is He of Whom all the prophets spoke, and Whose coming they anticipated. This is He of Whom all the psalmists sang, their expectation becoming the inspiration of their psalmody. This is He for Whom long ages have been waiting. This is the King, God's one and only King. In the great Kingdom of God Christ is King, an expression to men of the meaning of God's Kingship, and for the accomplishment in the midst of human history of all the purposes of God.

Now for one moment look beyond this hour in which we are assembled. Lift your eyes! It is not easy to look on into the mystic future; but look, I pray you, look on to the Advent. Place it where you will; I care nothing for the sake of the present argument and illustration as to your view concerning the relation to each other of the various aspects of that Advent; I am desirous only of drawing attention to this tremendous declaration:—

Then cometh the end, when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death. For He put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He saith, All things are put in subjection, it is evident that He is

excepted Who did subject all things unto Him. And when all things have been subjected unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected unto Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all.

The underlying truth of that declaration is that of the Kingship of God. Jesus is seen as the manifestation in human history of that Kingship. Jesus came for the demonstration thereof in the midst of the long failure. He came into human sight, into human consciousness, to destroy the works of the devil, to restore again that part of the Kingdom which was lost and in rebellion. The fisherman of Galilee who leaned upon the human bosom of Christ—and I sometimes think felt the very beating of His dear heart—John, in the isle of Patmos, with the waters washing in shores, and desolation in his heart because of absent friends, looked, and the heaven was opened, and that Man of Nazareth was seen, and "upon His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Let us, therefore, consider this Kingliness of Jesus, for it is a manifestation in time, and for us, of the real meaning of the Kingship of God. I shall ask you to consider three things: first, the Kingly character as revealed in Jesus; secondly, the Kingly qualifications as manifested in Him; and, finally, the Kingly position which He occupies even now, and which will be manifested before the eyes of men in the accomplishment of the purpose of God.

The Kingly character. Upon this depends the Kingly position. That is a revolutionary thing to say, by which I mean that it is saying something that the world has never yet come to understand. True kingliness must be based upon character. A sentence like that is quite naturally applied to kingdom among men; but, in order that the truth in that application should be emphasized more powerfully, I affirm that the Kingship of God is founded upon the character of God. That is a tremendous truth, and if we can but grasp it, what will be the confidence, the assurance it will bring to us in the midst of battle and strife? That truth had its unveiling in Jesus Christ. Kings have become kings in human history by force of arms. Said this King, "Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Nationality that begins with military power, that is built upon military power, ends by military power. Not by force of arms, not by policy and intrigue, not by succession does this King reign.

Let me but remind you of that great passage in the Philippian letter, in which Paul described the humiliation and consequent exaltation of Christ. Let us begin in the middle: "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." How that thrills with the music of the march to imperial power—every knee to bow and every tongue to confess! This paragraph commences with the word "Wherefore," and now I take that word and use it interrogatively. Wherefore? Why has God lifted Him high, and put Him on the throne? I go back to that which precedes: "Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross." Can you explain to me that patient, persistent, awful descent to the uttermost depth of the Cross? There is only one answer. The answer is in the word which never occurs in the passage, but which bathes the passage with infinite light. The answer is given in the word Love. "God so loved the world."

Love brought Him down, my poor soul to redeem;
Yes, it was love made Him die on the tree.

That is the character upon which the Kingship of Jesus is based. That is the character upon which the government of God is based. The Kingly character is love. Love is not a weak, sickly, anemic sentiment, which has in it no discipline, no strength, no anger, no fierceness. Love has holiness at its heart. Wherever we find true love we find the capacity for anger. Love is always angry with anything and everything, and with anyone and everyone, that harms, hurts and spoils that which is loved. Jesus once brought the prince of darkness into the light, and described him as a murderer, a liar. Love will judge the murderer, and fling the liar out. If love permit the murderer house room, and forgive the liar in his lie, it ceases to be love. Love can be stern, severe and hard, but always in the interest of redemption and renewal, and remaking. "The King of love my Shepherd is." In that great word there is laid bare so much as man may see of the Kingly character of Jesus, and the character of God upon which His government is based.

Then consider the kingly qualifications. "The King of love my Shepherd is." All the great kingly characters in the Bible were shepherds. Moses, uncrowned, but a king, learned the art of kingship not at the court of Pharaoh, but in the desert. David, the king after God's own heart, served his apprenticeship to human kingship while he was a shepherd boy. Jesus said the sweetest and profoundest thing about Himself, in some senses, when He said "I am the good Shepherd," and other writers described Him as the great Shepherd and the chief Shepherd. The work of the shepherd is to watch over the flock, to feed the flock, to protect them, to heal their wounds, to lead them to pasture, to restore the wanderers, to fight the wolves even though he die in the conflict. That is kingship. The true king is always a shepherd, living not for himself but for his flock, thinking for the flock, caring for them, putting all the thought of his life and the service of his being into the interests of the flock. Such was this great Shepherd. Because of the perfection of the shepherd character of Jesus, there was perfect qualification for government. I know how difficult that is to understand, how revolutionary it seems, when thinking of the kings of earth even until this hour. God's king is a shepherd, because

God is a Shepherd. I take you back to the ancient word, "Jehovah is my Shepherd, I shall not want." So sang David the king, who also was a shepherd. He saw on the throne of majesty and government the Shepherd who leads and loves and restores.

A further qualification is that He is a prophet also. When I use the word "prophet" thus, I do not use it in the imperfect sense of foreteller, but in the larger sense of forth-teller, law giver, one who interprets the perfect will to people who need such interpretation, one who is able to enunciate an ethic, which if obeyed, life will be fulfilled at its highest and best. How is it that other kings have so constantly failed in human history? Because they have had to be dependent on others to make laws. I believe in absolute monarchy, provided we find the true monarch. He has never been seen in human history, except once; and this is the once. All other kings have either consulted their parliaments, or made laws despotic and devilish.

Here is a King Who went to the mountain and enunciated an ethic of which the whole can be written in two or three pages, and yet the proportion in which the world has found its way into light and liberty is the proportion in which it has obeyed that ethic. It is a perfect law, perfectly adjusted to human need. Who is there today who is not prepared to admit that if this nation could be remodeled and governed according to the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount, all our problems would be solved? Men outside the Church know that to be true. Men who charge us with being other-worldly learned the ethic which they admire from the lips of One Who was the supreme other-worldly Man. From His lips there fell the perfect and final law for the government of humanity.

This King has as qualification not merely the Shepherd character and the prophetic gift; He was also a Priest, and He is a Priest in very deed and truth. A priest is one who becomes a representative of others, one who stands for all the rest, one who takes the blame of failure, one who stands in the gap. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" What is the answer of the ancient prophet? "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save... I have trodden the winepress alone." Figurative and wonderful language, foretelling the fact that finally the King takes into His own Person all the sins of the people. That is atonement. That is the mystery of the Cross. That is the infinite, incomprehensible, wonderful, eternal love that was manifested upon the green hill. This is my King, for He is my Shepherd. This is my King, for He is my Lawgiver. This is my King, for He is my Priest. The qualifications of His kingship are that He is Shepherd, Prophet, Priest.

One final word. I pray you mark the authority of Jesus, His Kingly position. He stood at the end of His days upon earth on the Mount of Olivet, with a little group of men surrounding Him, and He said, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth." That was human speech in order to reveal to men the fact, and to fix their attention upon it, that in that Manifestation of the eternal principle of Divine government, all authority is forevermore vested in the Man Jesus. He utters the final word of life or death concerning every individual soul. There can be no approach to God save through Him. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Forevermore He pronounces the word "Blessed" or "Cursed" upon men, according to whether they bend the knee to Him, or reject Him. No man or woman can disobey His ethic without being lost. He is not a capricious King, commanding that men shall be destroyed, or that men shall be saved, to please His own fancy. He is the embodiment of eternal law. He brings men to the judgment bar of His high ideal; accept it, fall before it, worship it, and He will make you; reject it, and turn back to the base, the ignoble, the mean, the dastardly, the devilish and impure, and He will blast and blight you by the fires of infinite and eternal law.

We need have no anxiety about the Kingship of Jesus. We need not imagine for a single moment, in all the fussy feverishness of this neurotic age, that the Christian religion is going to fail. Christ cannot fail. All authority has been given unto Him. The thing He says is true. Nineteen centuries have passed away, and His word is living and abiding—searching, tender, gentle, healing even yet. He is God's King. All power is His as well as all authority. Read carefully the stupendous description of Christ in Paul's Colossian letter, and see how true it is. He can stay the progress of life, arrest the planet, and gather the souls of men about Him when and how He will. He is King.

He is King executing judgment in the world. What is judgment? Judgment is that which the world needs more than anything else. Judgment is absolute rectitude, the holding of the balances, the readjustment of things that are wrong. Judgment! Great word, gracious word, beautiful word, tender word! But you say, "I tremble when you say judgment." That is because there is sin in your life, permitted and retained. I am afraid of judgment, you say. That is because you are oppressing. The men who are oppressed thank God for judgment. Judgment is heaven's love at work, correcting all the things that are wrong. "He shall establish judgment in the earth."

Remember finally that His Kingly position is not merely that of authority, power and judgment; it is that of infinite patience. How often have we said—if you have not said it, be patient with those who have, and I stand with them—How slow are the goings of God. We stand in the presence of wrong and oppression, we look out over the city scarred and seared with wounds, we listen in moments of high spiritual inspiration, and we hear the sob and sigh of broken humanity, and we say, "How long, O Lord, how long?" Then the answer comes back, the longsuffering of God is His patience. Supposing we go back a little way. Had God moved to a swift issue twenty-five years ago, where would some of us have been who today, by His grace and patience, have seen the light and walk in it, and are hoping towards it, and looking for it? There is a process by which all evil might be crushed; but it could not be crushed without crushing all the possibilities of good. Let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest. When the wheat and the

tares have grown to their final development and manifestation, then the thunderstorm.

Thank God for the patience of the King, and part of His patience is this service. Shall we not find our way to the King, and, submitting to Him, bring our lives into harmony with the eternal and abiding things? Thank God for Him, on Whose garment and on Whose thigh is "a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." Oh, soul of mine, bend to His sceptre, kiss His sceptre, put thy neck beneath His yoke, and find thy life and find thy liberty.

249 - How Can A Man Walk With God? Conscience

How Can a Man Walk With God? Conscience

To-night I have no text. If anyone is sufficiently under the power of tradition to feel that a text is necessary, then either of the twenty-nine verses in the New Testament in which the word "conscience" is found will serve, for conscience is my theme.

Conscience is that at which some men mock, and if we could but know the truth, while they mock they feel the power of it in their own souls. Conscience is that in deference to which some men today in England are suffering imprisonment rather than disobey the dictates for which they are prepared to die.

The power of conscience has been recognized by philosophers, poets, prophets, and all great leaders of human thought. Shakespeare expresses it in the words of Hamlet:

...the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of.
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought

Crabbe, in his *Struggles of Conscience*, has these lines:

Oh Conscience! Conscience, man's most faithful friend,
Him canst thou comfort, ease, relieve, defend;
But if he will thy friendly checks forego,
Thou art, Oh! woe for me, his deadliest foe!

Sterne, in *Tristram Shandy*, says: "Trust that man in nothing who has not a conscience in everything."

George Washington, in his *Moral Maxims*, wrote: "Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire, called conscience."

Or once again, and perhaps in the whole realm of literature nothing is found more remarkable than the words of Byron:

Yet still there whispers the small voice within,
Heard through gain's silence, and o'er glory's din;
Whatever creed be taught, or land be trod,
Man's conscience is the oracle of God.

What, then, is conscience? What is its value? What part does it play in life? How much heed ought we to pay to it? These and many other related questions are being forced upon us in this strange hour in which many things we have held as sacred are being postponed to a more convenient season. It goes without saying that in this pulpit, if we discuss the theme, it is in order that we may seek the Biblical light: thereupon; and to that I may add that our discussion will be concerned with the truth itself rather than with any application thereof.

As to the Biblical light, I shall begin by making some general statements. First, the word "conscience" is not found in the Old Testament; but the literature is full of the story of the operations of conscience in the human soul. Every record of a moral heroism is the answer of man to the call of his conscience. Every manifestation of immoral anger is produced by the activity of conscience. All the sobs of the penitent, and all the songs of the forgiven, are inspired by the working of conscience.

The word is found in the New Testament. Presently we shall discuss it. For the moment let us note some general things concerning

its use there. According to the New Testament, conscience "bears witness," "gives testimony," produces action, for things are done "for conscience' sake." In the New Testament conscience is described as "good," as "void of offense," as "Pure," as "toward God." But conscience is also described in the New Testament as "weak," as "seared," or, more literally, branded with a hot iron; as "defiled," as "evil." Finally, the New Testament declares that conscience can be "cleansed."

There is no clear-cut definition of conscience in the Bible. Perhaps the passages which come nearest to definition are two. The first is to be found in the Old Testament: "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord searching all the inward parts of the belly." In the New Testament the passage which always seems to me to come nearest to a definition of conscience occurs in the prologue to the Gospel of John: "The true light,... which lighteth every man." The spirit of man has many qualities, many quantities, many capacities, many activities. Among the rest it is in itself the lamp of the Lord. A light shines in every man.

Let us, then, consider, first, conscience in itself; second, conscience as to its place and power in personality; third and finally, conscience as to its place and power in society.

Our word "conscience" is almost a transliteration of the Latin word from which it is derived, conscientia, which means simply, knowledge with.

That definition, which is perfectly accurate, and perfectly justified, and beyond which, in some senses, we shall not be able to go, leaves us asking questions. The suggestion of the word is evidently agreement. Necessarily, the next question is, Knowledge with whom or with what? Recently, a writer on conscience said: "The original connotation of the word implies a common agreement, a social idea shared by the community." Is that so? I think not. There is absolutely nothing in the history of the word to warrant the impression that conscience means a social idea shared by the community, and there is certainly nothing in Biblical use to warrant it. Conscience is ever referred to in a peculiarly individualistic sense; it is personal, it is lonely.

Therefore we ask again, What is the suggestion of the word? If it be individual, if it be personal, if it be lonely, how can it be knowledge or conviction with? The answer is that the agreement suggested is agreement between a man's understanding and the fact that he understands. Certain standards are postulated, use what terms you will to describe them. Speak with the old philosophers of the reason, the idea, the essential and eternal truth; or speak in the language of religion, of the law, of ethics, of truth—conscience is the sense of the soul that apprehends those things. The knowledge is true, whether I apprehend it or not; but when I apprehend it, that is conscience.

In process of time the word has been reserved for the moral realm, so that today almost invariably we draw a distinction between conscience and consciousness. Conscience is the recognition of good and bad, the distinction between right and wrong, a distinction created, not by laws written outside the man which govern his life, but by the inherent sense of his soul in the presence of these things.

But conscience in the Biblical sense is far more than that. Normally, conscience is always a warning against the bad and an urging toward the good. Conscience is that activity of the human soul which recognizes the difference between goodness and badness, which makes the distinction quite clearly to the soul itself, and which then inevitably urges the soul toward goodness, and warns the soul from badness.

Of the actual New Testament word, our word "conscience" is in every sense so trustworthy and accurate a translation that I need simply stay to remind you what that word is, and of the slight difference, which finally is no difference at all. It means seeing with; that is co-perception. Again, we have the supposition of agreement, and it always has a moral value, and the moral value is exactly the same as that to which we have been referring. So much for the words themselves as to their meaning and their use.

Now as to the fact. Conscience is an activity of the human spirit in the moral realm, and normally it is wholly beneficent. Conscience is that within the soul of man which reveals goodness as goodness, which reveals badness as badness. Conscience is that which calls things by their right name, refuses to allow any evil thing to be rebaptized by a name that robs it of its real meaning and significance. Conscience will call a lie a lie, and will not allow a man to escape by applying to it the high sounding name of hyperbole. Conscience cannot prevent a man saying the untrue thing, but it will trouble him. It cannot prevent him saying it, but it does prevent him thinking it. No liar escapes that voice. He can become so accustomed to it as to laugh at it. That is the ultimate tragedy. Nevertheless, conscience persists. It is always unveiling the truth, always unmasking a lie, forever warning the soul against the wrong of wrong and the peril of wrong. That is the terror of conscience. But it is always luring the soul toward the high and the noble and the true, always inspiring the soul to follow the light, to follow the gleam, to obey the truth. That is the hope of conscience.

Conscience is an activity inherent in man by Divine creation, and active under Divine activity. This is the Biblical teaching from first to last, in both the Old Testament, in which the word is never found, though the idea prevails; and in the New Testament, in which the word occurs, and the idea is even more powerful. God never leaves a man alone in this world. That may be challenged, I know. Well, then, if it be true, as some theologians have taught, that there is a line over which a man may pass in this world and leave hope behind; if it be true that a man can in this life, and before this probationary state ends, cross such a border line and be as

hopelessly lost as though he had reached the darkling void where God is not; if that be true—I do not admit it:—but if it be true, then remember that a man so abandoned of God has no conscience, he has no trouble about his sin, no pain of heart in the presence of it, no sense of the badness of badness. That agony of soul that is almost despair, when alone a man thinks of sin, is the touch of God in infinite mercy on the man's soul. That is conscience. Conscience is infinitely more, and I am inclined to say infinitely other than a moral sentinel threatening a man with damnation. It will do that also. But why? In order to turn a man back from the darkness toward which he is proceeding. The severer the voice of conscience, the more terrific its appeal; the more poignant the agony of soul, the surer the evidence of the unfathomable and unutterable love of God. The very agony of conscience is a call of love.

Therefore conscience is a capacity to create responsibility. Its warnings must be heeded, its promptings must be obeyed, or it will become weakened, it will not act with the readiness it once did; it will become seared as if branded with a hot iron; be insensitive to every movement in the spiritual world; it will be defiled, until, at last, it is made utterly evil. Only as men obey conscience can they escape from the perils suggested by these words of the New Testament.

Now as to the place and power of conscience in personality. All I have already been saying is pertinent at this point. Conscience exists in every human being, and originally it is good, pure, without offense, God-governed. Take a child naturally. I mean any child: that little child born in the slum, born in the East End slum, with all its squalor and its filth, where the street is the only playground; or born in the West End slum, which is all veneer and false refinement and godlessness—wherever a child is born, in that child spiritually the conscience is good, pure, without offense, God-governed.

The first exercise of conscience, of the normal conscience, is witnessing. It is that activity within the soul which is wholly personal. Yet the soul knows that, somehow, it is other than personal. Have you never sat down in the presence of some temptation, opportunity, duty, responsibility, and talked to yourself? Oh, no, I am not speaking now of that muttering aloud which is a sign of old age creeping on. I am thinking of something far profounder, of the moment when you think all by yourself, and you first say, Yes, that thing is wrong; and then you say, I do not really see that it is wrong. Then, still alone, you argue with yourself. That is conscience, it is you. Ah, but "the spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord"; that is also God, God dealing with you. That is the first activity of conscience, witnessing to the difference between good and bad, and always urging the soul toward the right, and warning the soul from the wrong. Later on, when we have disobeyed the voice, when we have not followed the gleam, when we have refused to walk in the light, when knowing the good we have chosen the bad, then conscience still witnesses within the soul, still emphasizes the difference, but now the supreme note of conscience is the condemnation of the wrong done. That is the haunting of conscience. The fame of Jesus spread over Galilee and Judæa, and there was a man on a throne who said, It is John, whom I beheaded, risen from the dead! What was the matter with that man? He was an Idumean; he was a Sadducee; he did not believe in resurrection. Ah, did he not? Conscience never let him escape from the wrong he had done, never allowed him to dodge the truth, that in a drunken debauch, to please a wanton woman, he had violated conscience. Conscience violated, wronged, battered, kept on; and when he heard that there was another voice sounding he said, It is John whom I beheaded, risen from the dead. That is a wholly beneficent activity, that is still God in the soul; and had Herod repented, Herod had been ransomed and redeemed. Conscience is always calling men back. Consequently, the first human responsibility in the matter of conscience is obedience, immediate, utter, and at all costs.

Yet there is another phase of responsibility. It is not enough that I shall obey my conscience; I must constantly seek the correction and readjustment of my conscience. Conscience may be weakened, conscience may be seared, conscience may be defiled, conscience may have become permeated and saturated with evil. Hence the necessity for the perpetual correction and readjustment of conscience. I must seek the light which comes from God Himself, in order that I may know whether the light that is in me—to use the marvelous words of Jesus—be darkness or not. Conscience may be out of gear, may lead a man astray. Who shall correct it? Not you, not I; no human being can do it; God alone is able to do it. I well remember once crossing the Atlantic without a gleam of sunshine from the first moment to the last. As we were nearing New York the captain said to me, "We have been going by dead reckoning, and we are a little out of our course. We have had no sun, and all our mathematical precision breaks down unless the sun shines." That is the whole point. Suppose you come late to business, my dear young friend, and the person in charge of your work says, "You are late." You reply, "You will excuse me; I am not late, it wants a minute to nine." The sharp reply is, "Your watch is wrong." Ah, yes, you must readjust your watch by Big Ben. Is that enough? No, Big Ben must be readjusted from Greenwich. Is that enough? It is if you remember that Greenwich is governed by the sun. Your conscience may get out of gear, it may be wrong. This is a most solemn consideration that every man ought to face in this particular hour. Your conscience may be misleading you. It may need readjustment, correction. That readjustment is a solemn responsibility. Prejudice must be denied. Pride must be impossible. Persistently, with regularity, sincerity, and determination, conscience must be remitted to the Son, to the essential Light, to the Light beyond which there is no light, to the Authority beyond which there is no authority, to the God Who is good, and from Whom the spirit of man proceeds. That spirit which is His candle must be held in His light, that a man may know whether or not his conscience is leading him astray. That is the human responsibility for conscience.

And so, finally, what is the place and power of conscience in society? If all consciences were normal, that is, good, pure, without

offense, God-governed, there would be no difficulty in the matter of conscience. The conscience of each would be the conscience of all, and life would be a perfect harmony; and that is what will be when God has finished His work with the race and completed His victory. But it is not so today. There are seared, defiled, evil consciences in the world. There are also weak consciences, and these are in the majority. Weak consciences are such as are not clear in their apprehension of good and evil; they are not quick to discern. Weak consciences are not keen of scent in the fear of the Lord; they are not quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord. Here is the cause of conflict and difficulty in the realm of conscience. Here is a man whose conscience says to him, I am bound today to enlist and fight. Here is a man who says, My understanding of the will of Jesus is that I cannot do it. Who is to judge? I declare to you that you cannot, and you have no right to do so. I declare to the man who says that his conscience forbids his fighting that he has no business to impose that conviction on the man who says that he must fight; and I declare to the man who feels the tremendous obligation of the present hour—there are multitudes of them, men whom we honor in proportion as they are true men—must respect the man who cannot share his conviction. There can be no judgment. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." That is a very solemn and searching word. This whole Biblical conception of conscience teaches us, first, that there must be respect for the individual conscience; and, further, that no attempt must be made to impose the law of personal conscience on other men.

However, every man who takes his stand on conscience should, at least, have the ability to give a reason for the faith that inspires him. Even though he may not be able to persuade another, even though he have no right to try to compel another to stand where he stands, surely he should be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him. During the period of stress—I do not mean this war now, I mean all life as we know it—the period of human imperfection, the period during which the temporary and imperfect expedient of government by majority is in force, during that time, minorities are to be respected. If history teaches anything, it teaches that over and over again it has been proved that the minority was right, and not the majority. I give it you as a personal conviction that in every commission that has considered a great question, from the time when the commission sat in the days of Joshua to decide whether they should obey God or not, the minority report has been the correct one, and not the majority. The majority said, There is the land, it is a great and wonderful land, but we cannot take it; there are giants and walled cities! That was the majority report. The minority said, We see the giants, and the walled cities, but we see God. I come right down from then until the very latest Royal Commission that comes to my mind, the commission on Divorce, and it is the same story of the rightness of minorities. At least, that should give us pause. It is a great thing when the multitude is right, but I am never going to be persuaded that anything is right because the multitude says it is. There must be in the heart of men who believe in this Biblical revelation a respect for minorities.

In any such consideration, however, the conclusion must be on the individual note. For every man the last stand of life is his personal conscience, that conscience being cleansed and void of offense. If taking that stand shall bring that man into the place of suffering, then let him suffer. A man who for conscience' sake suffers and whimpers, calls in question the reality of his conscience. "For this is acceptable, if for conscience toward God a man... suffereth wrongfully." Let the man who suffers for conscience know that in all probability the whole conception of the Bible bearing witness, and all human experience bearing testimony, his suffering is winning a victory for the principle for which he suffers.

So whether this way or that way we may be doubtful at the moment as to what the path of duty is, one thing only matters—that every man shall be fully persuaded in his own mind as he stands before God. So may He Who cleanses human conscience give to us the conscience which is good and pure and void of offense, so that having done all things, we may stand.

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The Coming of the Word – The Beginning of Sin

I do not propose to take any one verse in this chapter as text. It is complete in itself for all that it is intended to teach, and it is required as a whole if we are to understand that teaching. Of course it is impossible now to deal with all the details of this story, and for the purpose of this meditation it is not at all necessary that we should do so.

This chapter is supremely interesting because it is the first in the Divine library on the subject of sin. The fact of the existence of evil has already been thrice recognized in the first two chapters.

In the desolation described in the second verse of chapter one, we have a recognition of the presence of evil in the universe;—"the earth was waste and void." In the charge to Adam, to keep the garden, as well as to dress it, there was recognition of the presence of evil, not in the world, not on the planet, but in the universe. Finally, the sacramental symbol, the tree in the midst of the garden, was the indication of the possibility of disobedience, a recognition that the fact of human will admits the possibility of wrongdoing.

Thus we have seen the adumbration of evil resting on the first pages. The Bible does not begin with anything perfect, save that in the first verse it does indicate a perfect God, and a perfect primal creation.

Now we come to the chapter which deals with the beginning of sin in human history; and it is a microcosmic revelation in that it

shows not merely the source of the poison, but also its method, its activity, and its issue.

We must remind ourselves again that we are looking at these things in the atmosphere of simplicity and not of complexity. I attempted to emphasize that by way of introduction last Sunday evening, when we considered the garden story, and saw man, perfect but not perfected, as to his being, his nature, his vocation, and his limitation. In all these stories we are away behind the complexities of life in the midst of which we live, dealing with the simplicity of elemental human character and nature.

We shall attempt to gather our thoughts around the three personalities revealed in this chapter; the personality of God, the personality of man, and the personality of Satan. These are taken for granted in the story that is told.

We are introduced in the beginning of the chapter to a clearly defined, yet mysterious personality, wholly evil, described here as the serpent. Then we are again face to face with man as we saw him in our previous study. And here also we are in the presence of God, described first by the name Elohim, and then by the title Jehovah Elohim.

Gathering our meditation around these three personalities, Satan, Man, and the Lord God, we shall attempt to examine the teaching of the story concerning the Satanic method; the Human experience; and the Divine attitude and activity.

Satan is here introduced to us as a personality doubly disguised. Neither the beast nor the Angel is clearly seen. "The serpent" appearing to Eve was not a snake in our sense of the word. "The serpent" means "the shining one," and the suggestion is that this temptation came through the medium of a person, new to the one being tempted; a person arresting, commanding attention, neither an angel of light in all the full glory of the revelation, nor wholly a beast of the field; but some strange personality in which there was the disguise of the beast and the disguise of the angel.

Those of you who care to follow the study, will take time to trace the word serpent, or shining one, through the Scriptures; noticing especially what light the New Testament flings upon it, and discovering the harmony of the teaching which the Bible gives concerning this person.

It is enough for our present purpose that we recognize that there came into that garden scene at which we looked last Sunday evening, one who was neither angel nor beast; a living one, for that is the real meaning of the word beast, not necessarily beast in our sense of the word, but a living one, somehow of the material, of that creation beneath man and under his government; and yet shining with a splendour that suggested other powers, subtle and supernatural.

Whatever the appearance may have been we are supremely interested in watching the method of the enemy. First, he questioned the goodness of God; secondly, he denied the severity of God; finally, he slandered the motive of God.

The enemy questioned the goodness of God, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" What I am about to say may appear a paradox, but hear me through. The question was not an inquiry; it was rather an attempt to convey a suggestion to the mind of the woman, by the method of interrogation. The thought suggested was that in that sacramental symbol of limitation, there was, on the part of God, an unkind withholding of something which might have been possessed by man. In the wilderness, long millenniums afterwards, I see another Man being tempted; and I hear this as the first temptation, "If Thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." We seem here to be very far away from Eden. I am glad of this, because it reveals the fact that temptation comes in varied garbs to man, but that essentially it is ever the same. Coming to the wilderness to the Son of God, the second man, the last Adam, the tempter said, "If Thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread"; and the suggestion was that if He were the Son of God, God ought to feed Him, that God was withholding something that He ought to have; He was asked to use the power of His Sonship to change the condition in which God had placed Him for the moment.

Thus, the first suggestion of the Tempter is that God is unkind, that restriction is unkind. This was not declared, not announced, not affirmed, but it was suggested. That is always the beginning of temptation. For the purpose of immediate illustration, instead of thinking over the vast expanse of diversified human life as we know it today, let us think back within our own personal experience, and we shall find that whatever form the temptation of sin takes, at the heart of it there is suggested the idea that restriction which forbids the thing we desire is unkind on the part of God. That is the first suggestion of evil.

Evil is ever inconsistent. This is part of its method. A most contradictory word follows immediately. The woman said to the serpent "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." To that the Tempter emphatically replied, "Ye shall not surely die." If in the first movement, I have the questioning of the goodness of God, in the second I have the denial of the severity of God. The affirmation is a distinct negative of the emphatic declaration of God, made to this man when He put before him the sacramental symbol of the limitation of his liberty. This was a minimizing of sin, a declaration that disobedience will not have the effect which God has said it will have; and consequently, it was a minimizing of the value of holiness.

Thus while the first suggestion was that restriction is unkind; the second was that restriction is unreal. First, God is not good in that

He deprives you of anything. Secondly, God is not severe, He will not punish you as He said He would if you take of the fruit of the tree.

Come to the wilderness again, and again the suggestion seems entirely different, while yet it is the same, "Cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee." In one case; Take this fruit and eat it and you shall not die. In the other; Cast Thyself down, and Thou shalt not die. It is the very same temptation in its central meaning, though the method of declaration is different, that there can be no punishment as the result of trafficking with God and disobeying His clearly defined law.

Finally;—and here we reach the heart, the most awful revelation of evil—the motive of God is slandered; "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." One almost trembles even to interpret so evil and awful a suggestion, yet this is it. It was the suggestion of selfishness and jealousy on the part of God. It was the suggestion that God was keeping man outside his own kingdom.

The motive of God was thus slandered as the enemy declared in effect; He knows that you will be as gods knowing good and evil; He is jealous, He would keep you out of your kingdom.

I come again to the wilderness and hear the Tempter saying, "Here are the kingdoms of the world; You ought to have them all; You ought to be able to possess them; but You cannot possess them because of Your loyalty to the will of God, because of Your poverty and Your lowliness, and Your refusal of the things that other men are seeking. Behold, I will give Thee the kingdoms of the world from which Thou art being kept by abiding within the law of Thy God." Again the principle is exactly the same.

The appalling thing is the element of truth in every lie that evil tells. In this third chapter of Genesis, I see the supreme illustration of that which Tennyson sang,

A lie that is all a lie may be met with and fought outright;
But a lie that is partly truth is a harder matter to fight.

Take each of these temptations, "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" That was the truth, but it was the truth so framed and presented, with veiled suggestion, that it was the most monstrous lie. "Ye shall not surely die"; that was true, but it was the interpretation of death on the level of the material; man sinning, did not immediately die after the fashion in which men use the word; that is physically only. "You shall be as gods, knowing;" you shall come into a kingdom from which God has excluded you. Directly as they sinned they came into the kingdom, and they knew.

Therein is revealed the subtlety of temptation. The Satanic method is that of uttering a partial truth, and suggesting a lie; of seducing men, by the uttering of a half truth, to yield themselves to that which is of the very nature of evil.

All this is testified to by common human experience. The first definite step of wrong to which we can look back, that act in which we overstepped the boundary within which we had walked in childhood, was taken after inward thought. That thought took the form which inspired to outward action of evil when we imagined that it was unkind of God to deny us something which we desired. Then followed the thought that violation of the law would not result in punishment. Finally, we persuaded ourselves that God was keeping us out of something which by right belonged to us, that He was unjust as well as unkind. In answer to such suggestions we acted in the hope of gaining our kingdom.

I hold in my hand a little book unveiling the soul of a man who gave himself to all the courses of evil. The tragedy of the book is that I am afraid it was not an honest book, as subsequent events proved. This man wrote:

I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. Desire at the end was malady, or madness, or both.

"I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation." As though he had said, there were things from which God shut me out by His law. I felt I had a right to enter into those things, and I went to the depths! And what depths they were; depths not to be named in the company of clean men and women. That was an illustration of the outworking in the nineteenth century of this selfsame principle. Here is the method of Satan. It is unkind of God to keep you from those things that lure you. God is not severe after all; you will not die if you disobey. You have a right to know, even though you break His law to gain knowledge. These were the suggestions of evil.

Intimately related to these and immediately following upon them, we find the human experience. I shall waste no time in distinguishing between the sin of the woman and the sin of the man; they were one. There are three things at which we shall look. First of all the sense. What was felt by this human being? How did temptation appeal? We have, so far, been looking at the temptation as it came from the enemy. Now let us try to feel the sense, the experience of the woman under temptation.

The woman saw three things; that it was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes; and that it was desirable in order to make

one wise. Let me interpret the story of Genesis by the language of the mystic Apostle John. The lust of the flesh; she saw that it was good for food. The lust of the eyes; she saw that it was pleasant to the eyes. The vain-glory of life; she saw that it was to be desired to make one wise. That was the threefold human emotion under the spell and power of which man capitulated in the presence of temptation.

The lust of the flesh; good for food. Get to the wilderness and watch the Man being tempted once again; "Man shall not live by bread alone."

Pleasant to the eyes; the lust of the eyes. "It is written Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"; Thou shalt not live by sight, but by faith.

"To be desired to make one wise"; the vain-glory of life. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve," was the answer to the glamour of the kingdoms of the world, the vain-glory of life.

I have referred to the wilderness, for there we see temptation refused; but the human sense was the same; good for food, pleasant to the eyes, desirable to make one wise. There is no need for me to make application. Stand out in this great city and you have the whole picture; the lust of the flesh; the lust of the eyes; the vain-glory of life; that is how man is attracted. Let James put all the story in brief words. "Lust, when it hath conceived...." That is the sense.

The second matter demanding attention is that of the act, the taking of the fruit. It was volition, acting in answer to the impulse of sight, wholly within the realm of the material. It was an act impelled by sight; by that which contradicts faith, or professes to be independent of it; it was an action of the will, inspired by wit, wisdom, cleverness, observation, sight.

It is wonderful how men can be deceived by their own cleverness. It is perfectly certain that two and two make four, but it may be unsafe to act upon that fact. If you are making your calculation, and say that two and two make four, your finding may be a blasphemy and a sin. Is it not true, then, you ask? Certainly; but supposing you ought to have said, two and two, and one; you have forgotten a quantity, failed to take account of another number; then your logical accuracy is your soul's damnation. You ought to have found five, and not four. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry; but God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee." "But God," that was the One he had forgotten. He said, two and two make four; and he tried to live upon the four, when it ought to have been five; the One was the forgotten principle. That demonstrated the madness of living by sight. That is the story of Eden. Volition by sight; action impelled by the cleverness of human calculation; turning from faith in the forgetfulness of the supreme One, Who makes the quantity in your clever four, the eternal five.

That volition by sight on the basis of the material expresses itself in rebellion against God on the level of the spiritual; and finds as the result life passing under the bondage of Satan. That was the first act of sin. Let us again take James' word. In dealing with the sense we said "Lust, when it hath conceived." In dealing with the act we say "beareth sin."

Then we come to the issue of it all, the first issue was fear. That is where fear comes into the Bible. What was fear? In this case and always, it is lack of spirit-strength. They were afraid, afraid of God! Why? Had God changed? No, they had changed. In the mystery of that spiritual life which was the essential, they had lost their knowledge of God, and consequently, they had become afraid.

Then followed shame. To me this is a very remarkable word, "they knew that they were naked." Let us disabuse our minds of some very paltry and incidental interpretations of that statement. They became conscious of the material, conscious of the flesh, and were ashamed of it; because they knew that in that act they had violated the spiritual. "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" What made you conscious supremely of the material, and in your consciousness of it, what generated in your mind the sense of shame? That sense of shame is the one note of music here. It is the one gleam of light. If there had been no shame, how utterly hopeless it would have been ever to hope for their redemption. The shame is the evidence that there was still the opportunity for return. It was the sense of the material, and the fact that they had yielded to the temptation, surging through the soul. They were naked, and they tried to cover up the material because they had become ashamed of the sin.

The final fact was that of their utter and hopeless dejection. Not satisfied with the coverings they had woven for themselves of the leaves of the garden, they hid themselves amid the trees of the garden when they heard the sound of God going in the wind of the day.

For food the hand was stretched out, and in the grasping of that forbidden fruit there was loss of spiritual strength, which issued in fear. For that which was pleasant to the eyes the sin was committed, and immediately there surged upon the soul, not the pleasantness of life, but the shame of life. After wisdom the mind stretched out, and instead thereof there came the knowledge of good and evil experimentally, which was conviction of the most appalling madness and folly. Again we turn to James, and complete his declaration, "Sin bringeth forth death."

Briefly, let us notice the Divine action as answer to the Satanic method. The first suggestion was that God was not good, that He was

unkind. God vindicated His goodness in His administration of justice. The very fact of His inquisition is a revelation of His goodness; He came to their level, and talked to them, asked them questions, allowed them to talk to Him, made opportunity for them to speak out the story of their wrong. The method of the inquisition traced the sin back to its source. I suppose we are always inclined to feel contempt for the man as he attempted to place the blame upon the woman, and even upon God, for the emphasis of his answer is this, "the woman whom Thou gavest me"; and we have the same feeling for the woman when she tried to plead her own weakness, "the serpent beguiled me." Ere you indulge in contempt for Adam or Eve, remember that God asked the questions and accepted the excuses. When in reply to God's question Adam named the woman, He turned to her and asked, "What is this thou hast done?" and when she replied, "The serpent beguiled me," He immediately turned to the serpent. In the form of whatever living creature he had disguised himself, that beast was then and there changed in its material fashion, and forevermore became a snake. You remember Ruskin's description of the snake, "that running brook of horror." Whenever men look upon a snake they feel the revulsion that sin ought to make in their minds. Sentence was pronounced at the center of the wrong. Yet there was a sentence upon the woman, full of grace; "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." The crowning glory of her being, motherhood, was to be sanctified through sorrow, travail, and pain. Do not let us be afraid of looking at that. What holy sanctification has come into the world, and been maintained therein by the awful and appalling mystery of motherhood through pain. There was a sentence on man, full of purpose; the highest dignity of thy being, toil, shall be gained through stress and strain and weariness. Side by side with that most sacred thing of all, the sanctity of the pains of motherhood, is the sanctity of the weariness of toil. If these things had been unnecessary to perfect men and women, they were necessary for the remaking of imperfect men and women. So that His severity was exercised in patience, and the direct lie of evil was answered.

Finally, His motive was unveiled in mercy. The devil had suggested selfishness as His motive, and that He answered in the word that prophesied the ultimate triumph through travail; the seed of the woman "shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel"; that was the prophecy of the ultimate good of the creature, and it revealed the love that motivated the whole government of God. Such was the Divine activity in the presence of sin.

This is the Bible account of the origin of the sin and sorrow of humanity. If you reject it, then what? From the facts of sin and sorrow and suffering you cannot escape. How do you explain them? Do you tell me that all I see in the world of sorrow and suffering and sin are parts of an upward movement; that gradually humanity is rising superior to these things and will leave them behind? Then, my masters, what an appalling and unutterable beginning there must have been! I cannot write over the beginning, if the beginning was such as is necessary to that view, "In the beginning a good God." I must put away the idea of good altogether, and write God down a monster. But again; if you tell me that this is part of an upward movement, where are the evidences in individual or national life of a natural upward movement apart from external influence brought to bear? I affirm there are no evidences. Wherever you find an individual rising, a tribe rising, a nation rising, it is not the result of a natural movement from within; it is the result of some external touch of quickening and redeeming power.

If I accept this story, what then? I have found the theory corroborated in all human experience, absolutely corroborated in my own. I know temptation did not come to me by way of a tree, because I do not live in a garden. I saw no shining one taking the form of a beast, or beast transfigured into the form of a shining one. Yet the temptation came in the same way, by the suggestion that God was unkind, that He was not severe, that He was not fair. My heart was persuaded to imagine that because I could not do this and could not go there, I was being kept out of some kingdom that I ought to be able to enter.

So temptation came, and the sense which resulted in my capitulation to the temptation, was the same, good for food, pleasant to the eyes, to be desired to make one wise; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the vain-glory of life.

It is the same story. You can change the garments and the environment, and the language, but the facts abide. The story is true to life in London today.

If this story be true, herein is the vindication of the Christian evangel. Herein is the inspiration of all Christian endeavor. Man as we meet him is not as God meant him to be. He is what he is as the result of temptation and sin. Yet thank God, over all the darkness and sorrow and sadness there is the word of God, the seed of the woman shall at last crush the head of the serpent and master evil, even though in the process His own heel be wounded.

Tonight we are not looking on in hope, we are looking back to accomplishment. We have seen the seed of the woman crushing the head of the serpent, to the bruising of His heel; we know the perfect Victor, Who is the perfect Saviour.

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The Problems Of The Religious Life: Can A Just God Forgive Sins?

To the ears of the Christian believer the question seems superfluous, and I think I may almost say it sounds grotesque. That fact

notwithstanding, to vast numbers of men and women it is the most perplexing of questions, and constitutes the initial religious problem. If that question could be settled the whole attitude of their life would be altered.

The question is full of interest at the present time. It exactly expresses the mental attitude of the scientist today. Thirty years ago the scientist was not in the humor to ask questions; he was making affirmations, declaring quite reverently, quite devoutly, quite honestly, but with absolute dogmatism, that God, if there be a God, is unknowable by man. That is not the mood of the scientist of today. He is on the much saner and safer ground of asking, not necessarily in this language, but to this effect, and in this spirit, Has man anything to do with God? He may not yet write God with a capital G, indeed he may not use the word God at all, but he is recognizing that behind all material phenomena there is something, and he is now inquiring honestly, reverently, with profound earnestness, what relation has man to this fact?

The question is an interesting one for another reason. It indicates the point at which theology becomes religion or fails to become religion. Theology is the science of God, the truth concerning God, the facts concerning God so far as they have been discovered and recognized. Theology is not religion. I believe it to be quite necessary to religion, but it is not religion. A man may be theological and irreligious. The point where theology merges into religion, or else declines to be religion, is where the question is asked, Has man anything to do with God?

The question is interesting in the third place because it challenges the Bible. When I use the word challenge, I do not mean it attacks the Bible. The Bible assumes an affirmative answer to that inquiry. The Bible never argues for the existence of God. It takes God as granted. From its first stupendous and majestic word to its last glorious refrain it is a book the theme of which is the relation between man and God, defined, enforced. So that when I ask the question, Has man anything to do with God? I challenge the Bible. I do not contradict it, but I inquire as to its accuracy.

This initial question, which is a serious question to hundreds of men today, is of interest because it exactly expresses the mental attitude of the scientist today, because it indicates the point at which theology becomes religion, and because it challenges the Bible.

Now faith—and by faith I mean for the moment the attitude of mind of the Christian man—recognizes the right to make such an inquiry. It also insists that the right to inquire involves the responsibility to consider the evidence. I want to make that quite clear to my friend who is inquiring. You have a perfect right to inquire. Do not believe any preacher, or any man who claims to be a prophet, who tells you that you have no right to ask questions. You will never find bedrock for religious faith until you have learned how to ask questions. It is equally true that the right to ask questions involves the responsibility of considering the evidence. You have no right to ask questions and then imagine that there is no answer. You must listen to the answer. You are not bound to accept it, but you must listen to it. That is to say, the man who asks a question does by such action indicate the fact that his mind is open, and that he desires an answer. If not, then the man who asks questions is a trickster, and we have no time for him, and no patience with him. When Jesus stood confronting Pilate, and Pilate asked Him questions, Christ said to him, "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee?" Is your agnosticism first hand or second hand? It is a very important question to begin with when you are going to ask a question. If the question you are asking in the presence of the Christian religion is a question you have heard in Hyde Park, and you repeat it glibly because you think it sounds clever, then, in the name of God, I have no time or patience to deal with it. But if the question comes up out of the agony of your soul, as a sob out of your inner life, out of a tremendous, passionate desire to know the truth at all costs, then, because the hand of my Lord has been upon me in ordination, my business is to try to help you. I may not have gotten very far, but as far as I have come I want to show you the way. You remember Tennyson's "In Memoriam," and how he describes the fight of doubt for faith. I know it is an old story, but listen to it again:—

You say, but with no touch of scorn,
Sweet-hearted, you, whose light blue eyes
Are tender over drowning flies,
You tell me, doubt is Devil-born.
I know not; one indeed I knew,
In many a subtle question versed,
Who touched a jarring lyre at first,
But ever strove to make it true:
Perplext in faith but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.
He fought his doubts and gather'd strength
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone.

From that I take the one line I endeavored to emphasize, "He would not make his judgment blind," which means not merely that he would not accept a dogma simply because the preacher declared it to be true; but also that he would not accept his agnosticism as final until he had tested it by every power of his mind. If you ask questions you must be willing to weigh the answer.

Suffer me still another word in the preliminary stage. Let those who are honestly inquiring recognize the difficulty of faith in the presence of their inquiry. By that I mean to say there are those who are so certain, so irrevocably certain of God, that it is very difficult for them to argue for Him or for man's relation to Him. I remember my dear old father saying to me over and over again in days when I did not so perfectly apprehend his meaning as I have come to do since, in my own experience, I am far more sure of God than I am of myself. Now, if you are an inquirer you can hardly understand that. Even if you think it false and that we are very foolish, please to remember that it is a conviction, that it is a sincere conviction, and remember also that if the man of faith has to be patient with you, you must learn to be patient with the man of faith. All that is very preliminary, yet I have taken time to say these things, because they indicate, so far as I am able to do, the attitude of my own mind toward the man who is inquiring in the spiritual realm.

In attempting to deal with this question I do so as giving evidence rather than as pleading a cause. Twenty-five years ago I came as a young man into a place of almost unutterable darkness about spiritual things. Two inquiries came to me with forceful power. First, is there a God after all? Second, and if there be a God, have I any personal relations with Him? Has He any personal, direct, immediate relationship to me? I am bound again to pause a moment to say there are, perhaps, some of you here who have been Christians for years who never came to such a crisis as this. I can only say, be patient with those who have been through it. Without undervaluing the quantity or quality of your faith, I still believe that what Tennyson says is true: the man who faces the spectres of the mind comes to find a firmer faith his own, not firmer than yours, but firmer than the faith he had before he faced the spectres of the mind. I want to say as I look back to that period of the eclipse of faith—I think that is a correct description of what took place in my own mind—it was not caused by anything moral. I say that only in order to intensify the testimony I desire to bear to any who may be facing similar inquiries. I believe that Dr. Torrey affirmed that infidelity and immorality are always closely allied. That may be true in some senses, but I do not believe that all infidelity springs from immorality. I do believe that infidelity will work out into immorality, but that is another matter. So far from these inquiries arising out of any moral delinquency, they came immediately following the most definite experience of spiritual blessing that ever came to me. The eclipse swept over me in a day, and hung over me for months, even for two years. I had been brought up in a home where my first slumbers were wooed by songs full of the music of the name of Jesus. The whole atmosphere of my home life was an atmosphere permeated by confidence in God. I never learned to doubt when I was a child. I had no chance. Then suddenly, and apparently without cause, these inquiries came. Is it true that there is a God? And if it be true, has that God anything to do with me? It is the second of those questions which is the real theme of our talk together tonight. The first is intimately related to it, and I choose to begin there.

My answers to these inquiries in each case are of the simplest. I propose to give the answers that came into my own experience, and to tell how they came. These answers do by no means reveal the final structure of faith. That is not yet completed. There are a great many things I am not yet sure about; things about God, and about man, and about Truth. The structure is in process of building. The final exposition, the ultimate explanation, I am still waiting for. These first answers constitute the rock foundation upon which faith is being built, and the first stone of the structure of faith laid upon that rock foundation. Twenty-five years ago, when the light came, I began again the life of faith, finding a firmer faith my own, and I did so, first upon the rock foundation of a simple conviction; and from that conviction came a first deduction, which deduction was the first stone in the structure of faith, which is not yet finished.

What, then, was that first piece of rock that I found underneath my feet in the day of faith's conflict, in the day of faith's eclipse?

This: The consciousness of myself and the universe became the conviction of God. After a process of inquiry, and of attempt to restate the doctrines of the faith in such terms as would enable me to accept them; and finding myself utterly unequal to the task, there came a moment when, standing alone on the earth in the midst of the universe, I seemed to come to the consciousness of myself and of that universe. That consciousness compelled me to affirm, It is infinitely easier in the presence of myself and the universe to believe that there is a God than to believe that there is not. It was not much to stand on, but it was a bit of rock under the feet of a man who had been sinking. You say, You demonstrated nothing. That is true, but I had a conviction. You cannot demonstrate a great many things of which you are absolutely sure. You are sure that the woman you call mother is your mother, but you cannot demonstrate it. I did not get mathematical demonstration, but I got conviction, and came at last to say: Here am I, here is the universe. I cannot believe that there is no God! There is a God! It was not much, just a bit of rock; but, oh, God, what a bit of rock means to a man who is drowning. I started there. If you can get a bit of rock under your feet, never mind the temple; never mind

the Church; never mind the theologians; put your feet down and stand squarely on it.

Now, I should like to describe the process by which the conviction came. That is not easy, but I propose to attempt it with all brevity. That conviction came as the result of a look back, a look around, and a look on.

A look back to origins. I came to realize that everything results, and to ask from what? You remember Mr. Hastings' old riddle. Here is a hen, and here is an egg. The hen results, from what? The egg. The egg results, from what? The hen. Go on, and when you have solved that you have solved the Christian religion. I only quote it to remind you that everything results. A chair. It results from what? From man's handiwork. On what? Trees. Trees? How did they come? They resulted. From what? Leather, what is that? There were animals once. Whence came they? They resulted. From what? Get on back with your journey.

That is all very childish, is it not? But put your hand where you will; put it on your own thin-veined wrist. It results from what? All that is the beginning of a journey. I do not care how far back you go, through the long centuries, the infinite mysteries, all the evolutionary processes. I do not care anything about them. Back, back. Oh, where did it all begin? The only answer that ever brought satisfaction to my soul is, "In the beginning, GOD." Yes, I can believe that. If you say mighty atom, or tell me about a protoplasmic germ, which John Ruskin translates for me and reminds me that the Greek term being translated means, first, stuck together, I ask, What was stuck together? And who stuck it together? I am not playing; my soul went through all this in agony twenty-five years ago, and no theory satisfied my reason until I said, at the back of all results, as originating cause, is God. That was my first bit of rock.

Then there was a look round, first on the vast, then on the minute. On the far-flung splendors of the starry night, on the minutiae of beauty in a handful of lichen, of moss, of dust. I looked out on life, not human life merely, but on all life, and I saw changeless change, and changing changeless-ness: seasons regularly moving, life repeating itself true to type, types by inoculation with new types making new mysteries and new wonders, but everywhere order, and everywhere law. I said, Who presides over all this? A double-faced something? Nothing; it all happened? I cannot believe that. Then I found that the Christian writings declare of man, the final manifestation of life, In God he lives, and moves, and has his being. I came to see that the infinitely great God is seen in the infinitely little thing, in the dust; and in the infinitely vast thing, the universe; and I said, Yes, that is easier than any other proposition.

Then I took a look on. All mystery; the light is not clear even yet, but the rhythmic order of things convinced me that at the last "that cannot end worst which began best." There is a goal somewhere, to be reached somehow, "one far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves." I am not talking theology now. Theology discusses how the goal is to be reached. The conviction of the goal brought certainty in my own soul of the one presiding Being.

Then I began to ask about the Being, and I discovered certain things from which I could not escape. Let me only name them: wisdom and might, beauty and beneficence. I came to the conclusion that all these things must ultimately rest in the Being who "spake and it was done," through Whose power all things are upholden, to Whom as the final Goal all things forever move.

Now a few brief words as to what was the result of that finding. I passed immediately to the second inquiry, Has man anything to do with God? I do not think that inquiry can long remain unanswered if God be believed in as a personal Being, having in His own being wisdom, might, beauty, and beneficence. You see, I am trying to omit all the terminology of theology. I am not speaking of righteousness, holiness, love. All these things are there. I am speaking only of the things I found apart from the revelation of Scripture. When the first conviction came to me, I came to the second conclusion, a deduction from the conviction. Because God has everything to do with man, man must have to do with God. If man is of God, and in God, and for God, as a part of creation, it is utterly unthinkable that God, having everything to do with man, man could have nothing to do with God. That was the first stone laid upon the rock foundation.

Think of the process by which I came to that conclusion. Two propositions and deductions made from them. The first proposition. Man is the crowning wonder of creation. Theories and processes matter nothing in this respect. I am not saying what my conviction is, but it does not matter at all whether man was created by a definite, immediate act within an hour from thought to completion; or whether man emerged through long processes. I care nothing. Here is the fact. Man is the crowning wonder of creation. We are all agreed on that, the agnostic, the so-called infidel, the inquiring scientist, the Christian preacher, the most indifferent man who looks about him at all. We are all in agreement. From that proposition I made this deduction. The Creator cannot be unmindful of the crowning glory of His creation. It is unthinkable that if this whole vast and minute universe has come from God, and is of God, and moves toward God, that God should be careless of the highest, most wonderful thing in all creation. You remember the psalmist's inquiry, "What is man that Thou takest knowledge of him?" The psalmist's query and our conclusion may be put together, but they begin at the poles asunder. The psalmist started with revelation, which declared that God is mindful of man and visited him. On the basis of revelation, he inquired what relation there was between man and God. "What is man that Thou takest knowledge of him?" Revelation says, Thou art mindful of him. In the presence of that statement the psalmist asked, What can man be? Our question is not that. Our question is, Has man anything to do with God? We affirm the relation, and we demand to know whether the man who is related has anything personal to do with God.

God is, and He has something to do with man. He sustains him. And man has something to do with God, man receives his life from God, he lives and moves and has his being in God. Now comes the real point of inquiry. Has God anything to do with man's doing, his thinking, his habits, his morality? I submit this to you. The crowning glory of man is moral. I am not quite so sure that I carry you all with me when I say that, nevertheless, I repeat, the crowning glory of man is moral. Is it not so in a little child? You love the child when it is not immoral, but non-moral, before it has come to a knowledge of right and wrong. A child in its mother's arms is not immoral, but it is non-moral. How you watch the day when it begins to be moral, to know right and wrong, making its own choice, defying you. I shall not be misunderstood when I say there is a charm in the defiance of a little child. It needs to be guided, for defiance is but the exercise of the supreme function of life, will. It is the hour of dawning beauty. You have watched all the physical development and the opening mental power, as it looked up and inquired, talking in language no one but a mother could understand; but the crowning hour comes when the child becomes moral. What is true of the child is true of the nation. I read this morning a very remarkable article in the Daily News on W. J. Bryan; one of the most inseeing articles, if I may be allowed that word, that I have ever read. In the course of that article I read these words:

His appeal is always to the moral conscience. The name of the Almighty is as familiar on his lips as it was on the lips of Mr. Gladstone, and it is the highest tribute to his sincerity that employing it he never gives you the sense of canting. The truth is, he lives in an atmosphere out of which our politics have passed. No one today in the House of Commons ever dares to touch the spiritual note. When we say that oratory is dead, we mean that faith, which is the soul of oratory, is dead. Oratory fell to earth when Gladstone and Bright ceased to wing it with spiritual passion. Our wagon is no longer hitched to a star.

The proportion in which that is true is the proportion in which this nation has lost its greatness and its grandeur and its glory. The proportion in which the highest spiritual emphases of morality are reckoned out of court in the legislative assembly is the proportion in which we are under eclipse. I put it that way, for God grant that the touch of ultimate spiritual morality may be felt yet again in all our national life. You know it is true. Morality is the supreme thing, the greatest grandeur in the child and the man, in the people and the nation.

Get back to the beginning. If the child, the man, the people, and the nation, are the creation of God; and if it be unthinkable that He is not interested in that which He has made its crowning glory, can it be thinkable that He is not interested in the highest glory of that which He has created, which is moral? To me it is utterly unthinkable.

Let me repeat the three things I have tried to say. First: It is easier for me to believe God is, than that He is not, when I stand in the midst of the universe. Second, I cannot believe that, man being the crowning glory of creation, God can be unmindful of him. Finally, when I look on man and know that the ultimate, most wonderful thing in him is morality, I cannot believe that God is careless about morality. Consequently, I believe that this God, Whom I have never felt with the touch of sense, upon Whom these eyes can by no means look, can reveal Himself to man, and I believe man can receive the revelation. The ability in each case is obligation. In the case of God the obligation is fulfilment.

I have attempted to go over the ground which I trod, not thus easily, but in tears and in pain and anguish, twenty-five years ago. I bring to you, in conclusion, a word from the most ancient of the Scriptures of our Bible, "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace." My friend, inquiring at this the very beginning, the threshold of religious problems, let me say to you in all sincerity, that no man of intellectual power can rest in agnosticism. He may find himself there, but he cannot find rest there. The man who says, I am an agnostic, in an agony, and is inquiring, will find his way through; but the man who is smug and satisfied, and imagines he has reached the highest plane of intellectual greatness because he is an ignoramus will never arrive anywhere. There is no rest for an intellectual man in agnosticism. I charge you, if you are making inquiry, put your blood into it, put your life into it. "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace." Do not stand on the edge of great questions and indulge in the dilettante fooling with them. Get down to the business, and so far as you have ability, ask honestly, persistently, determinedly. It was Eliphaz who said to Job, "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace." Job was agnostic, but never rested in his agnosticism, and he said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." Someone says, That is exactly where I am, where I have been for a long time. Now, you must be patient with me as I bring you the Christian message. "No man hath seen God at any time. The Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." That God, infinite, mysterious, present everywhere, came "out of the everywhere into the here"—to borrow reverently George Macdonald's description of the baby—and tabernacled—may I be more blunt in my translation, 'pitched His tent' among us, "and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Man, my brother, there is no escape from God. Get to Him through the Son and you will find rest. You say, What of the problems of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, theologies old and new? In God's name do not begin with these things, but begin with the God of Whose existence you are convinced. Put your feet on the one bit of rock, and you will find it not so small as you thought it was; but rather the strong and mighty rock of ages. Then begin to build the superstructure of faith by handing over your life to the light so far as it has come to you, to the truth so far as you have come to see it.

The Problems Of The Religious Life: Can A Just God Forgive Sins?

It will be admitted at once that the possibility of the forgiveness of sins has been believed in and proclaimed by the Christian Church for nineteen centuries.

False deductions have been made from the central doctrine, and false presentations of that doctrine in the process of the centuries. By false, I mean untrue to the earliest teaching of Christ and His apostles as that teaching is recorded for us in the Scriptures of the New Testament.

Perhaps the most glaring of the false deductions was that which was known as the Antinomian heresy, which was that because God has in His grace provided perfect redemption it does not at all matter how a man lives.

Perhaps the supreme illustration of what I mean by false presentations was to be found in that most remarkable movement which preceded the reformation, and had its head center of exposition in Tetzel, who preached that by certain payment on their part men might receive indulgence to sin. These false deductions, and false presentations, as well as the simple proclamation of the New Testament declaration, do prove that the idea of the forgiveness of sins has obtained in the Christian Church from the beginning until now.

This belief is based on belief in the government of God, the conviction of righteousness, and the consciousness of sin.

The idea of forgiveness of sins cannot be present to the mind of the man who does not believe in the existence and government of God. Therefore, all we said last Saturday night must be taken for granted as we take up this second problem of the religious life. God is, and God governs. If you deny these things then you deny sin, and this inquiry as to whether God can forgive sins is absurd. Unless we find common ground in this premise we certainly shall not find a common resting place in the conclusions that I shall draw. To admit the government of God is to be convinced of His righteousness, and that conviction is ever followed by the consciousness of sins. Do you quarrel with me at that point? Do you question the accuracy of what I am now taking for granted? If for a moment you grant the idea of righteousness, measure yourself by that idea, and tell me if you have realized the ideal. I do not care, for the moment, whether your father was a sinner, or whether Adam fell. I care very much about these things on other occasions and in other directions, but not now. See God, and righteousness, and immediately, if you are honest, you will say I have failed. I think there is no man here who knows what righteousness is, who has had the first faint idea of the ideal of perfection and of beauty, but who is compelled to say, While I see it, and believe in it, and admire it, I have not realized it. That is the consciousness of sin. It may bring no terror to the heart, but it is there. It is only as these things are recognized that we make such an inquiry as the inquiry of our subject tonight. Taking these things for granted, I inquire, Can a just God forgive sins?

Seeing that the forgiveness of sins is a Christian doctrine, it is necessary that we inquire what the doctrine really is that the Church teaches. I think you will agree with me that this is a fair proposition. Suppose I had no Bible and no Christian body of truth, and no Church which for nineteen centuries had been proclaiming the possibility of the forgiveness of sins, and someone should suggest a question such as this, I should have to approach it from a different standpoint altogether, and answer it in a different way. Even then I should say to my questioner, What do you mean? There are two or three words in your simple question that I want you to define. What do you mean by "just," by "forgiveness," by "sins"? Exactly as I would ask these questions if this inquiry came to me without the light of the Christian revelation, seeing that the idea conveyed by the inquiry is a Christian idea, I must still ask these questions. What is the Christian meaning of the terms "just," and "forgiveness," and "sins"? Let us then proceed along three lines. We will define our terms. We will state our problem. We will attempt to formulate the answer of the New Testament.

First of all, for the definition of terms. The terms are very wide, having racial applications. We will, however, endeavor to confine ourselves to the individual applications. Understand from this moment I am attempting to deal with these questions as though I were the only man involved in the inquiry, as though I made the question pertinent to myself, and entirely and absolutely personal, as though I said, Can a just God forgive my sins? In dealing with the inquiry in that way we will first define our terms. I am going to attempt a rapid definition of words used and ideas conveyed in that question.

First, the words, just, forgiveness, sins. What does the word just mean? If you take the word that lies behind it, and examine it, and attempt to discover, as you always will do if you are a careful reader, its root significance, I am not at all sure that you will not at first be somewhat surprised. The word out of which this comes is a word which means seeing. Let me suggest another word, observing. You say at once that these two words mean the same thing, and yet the second of them is constantly made use of in a slightly different sense from that in which the first is always used. Seeing suggests a view. Observing also suggests a view, but it often means more. For instance, you say to a boy, Here is a rule of conduct, observe it; by which you mean to say, You are not only to see, but to act in harmony with the thing you see. So if the root idea of the word translated just be seeing, its use means acting in harmony with the thing seen. Just means activity in conformity with things as they really are. Can a God who acts in conformity with things as they really are forgive sins?

Let us be as simple and childlike with our next word, forgive. What does forgive mean? To let go is the simple meaning. It suggests the idea of unlocking a prison house so that the prisoner is set free. The sense in which the word is used always means to treat sins as though not committed, to let them go, blot them out, pardon them, forgive them. Let me repeat my inquiry in the light of these definitions. Can a God Who acts in conformity with things as they really are treat sins as though they had not been committed?

For the third time let us follow this line of definition. From the Christian, Biblical standpoint it is almost more difficult to define words translated sin or sins in our Bible. I am content to take the word that is most often translated sin, which suggests the simplest fact in the mind of the writers. It is a word which means "missing the mark." It is the word used of a man standing with his rifle and shooting at a bull's eye and missing it. It is a word which indicates the failure of the man who sets himself to realize, and never realizes. He misses the mark. To fail, whether wilfully or unwittingly, is, in the broadest sense of the word, sin. Let me make my inquiry again. Can a God Who acts in conformity with things as they really are treat missings of the mark as though the mark had not been missed? That is the problem of this inquiry.

Once again, take the two ideas suggested here for definition. First, the idea of the justness of God. What is justness? We have already said it is seeing things and observing them in the sense of being true to them. Let us now put it this way. Justness in God is undeviating conformity to truth, in Himself, and in His dealings with all others. Take the phrase forgiveness of sins and the idea suggested by it. What is meant by the forgiveness of sins? The treating of failure as nonexistent, and the treating of the one who fails as though not having failed. That is forgiveness in the Bible sense. If you try to understand what forgiveness means by what you do with your children you will never understand it at all. If you begin to argue that just as you say to your child, I forgive you, so God does with the sinner, you do not begin to know what the Bible teaches about the forgiveness of sins. That is not the forgiveness of the Bible. You cannot make the sin of your child as though it had not been, and that is what the word really means. Someone is saying, You are making the problem more difficult than it seemed. I hope I am. In order to persuade ourselves that God can forgive, we are losing the amazement that ought to fill the heart in the presence of the meaning of the Cross and His infinite grace in forgiveness. The thing that first overwhelms me is the problem. Then the thing that overwhelms me more is the solution of the problem which the Bible teaches and for which the Christian Church really stands.

Having spent so much time with the definition of terms, let me now try to state the problem. Here are certain self-evident things that I submit to you and pray you to follow me, and not to be afraid. As to God. To treat sin committed as not committed is to act out of conformity with truth. That is unjust. As to the universal order. To treat sin committed as not committed is to establish and confirm sin. That is unjust. As to the sinner. To treat sin committed as not committed is to establish and confirm sin as a power in the life, and that is unjust. Now, the problem can be stated by only first making a fundamental affirmation. A just God can forgive sins only by basing His judicial action upon absolute truth. If the forgiveness of sins means the violation of truth, then God can never forgive sins. Can God so deal with sin as to enable Him to forgive it on the basis of absolute truth? You say to me, Of course God can forgive sins, because He loves. I say, Yes, but then in God's name remember what love is. Love is not a sentimental softness that overlooks the poison in the blood. Love is not an anaemic weakness that weeps over cancer and refuses to cut it out. There is nothing we are suffering from today more than this weakened conception of the meaning of love. We begin to understand love only when we understand that at its heart, at its center, are purity, and eternal righteousness. Let me say the thing as I feel it. If you could persuade me that forgiveness, which simply says, Oh, never mind, say no more about it, pass it over, could satisfy God, then I say it could not satisfy me. It does not get to the depth of my own being. It does not touch the heartache and anguish of my conscience. Before I can know forgiveness as experience in which I dare rejoice, there must be, somehow or other, blotting out, canceling, making not to be. I tell you honestly that it does not seem to me that there can be a solution, until I open my Bible and begin to read it.

Now I want—and as God is my witness I feel the almost appalling difficulty of it—I want to state the Christian answer to this great inquiry. I do not propose to state the answer in the terms of my own ideas of how God might do this thing. I will tell you why. It is honest for me to say only what I have already said, that there appears to be no solution. What, then, does Christianity affirm? The Bible teaches the forgiveness of sins. The Church has taught the forgiveness of sins. We are still—in proportion as we are true to the doctrine of the Catholic Church for nineteen centuries, and to the doctrine of the Word of God—proclaiming the possibility of the forgiveness of sins. Upon what grounds?

First of all, let me attempt in a very few sentences to state the process by which God can forgive sins so far as that is stated in the New Testament; then let me speak of the provision He has made for sinning men who turn to Him, and, finally, of the great proclamation which is entrusted to us in the presence of sin.

What is the process? We must begin where the New Testament begins. First of all, there is presented to our view a Person, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ; or, to give Him the full and dignified title with which the apostolic writings abound, and which culminates all other suggestiveness, the Lord Jesus Christ. What is this Person according to New Testament teaching? God incarnate. I know perfectly well that you may say that is not granted. I am not dealing with the question as to whether this Person is God incarnate or not, apart from my Bible. That is an inquiry which every man may make, but that is not the one with which I am now dealing. All I

now say is, and I say it quite carefully, if that Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, is not God incarnate, then some part of the New Testament is untrue. It is quite impossible, absolutely impossible, and those of you who differ most widely from my own position will agree with me here, to retain your New Testament and deny that. You may deny it, and deny it honestly, but if you do, then there are certain parts of the New Testament which you say are not true. I respect your conviction, though I do not share it. I want you to see this. I stand asking what the Church has taught for nineteen centuries upon the basis of Biblical revelation, and my first answer is, that, first, a Person is presented to me, God incarnate. I see Him living. I see Him dying. I see Him rising.

Then, in the second place, will you remember that this New Testament teaches that this Person is a manifestation. In His life there is manifestation of righteousness. In His death there is manifestation of substitution. In His resurrection there is manifestation of victory won in and through and out of death.

Now, a manifestation is never all. A manifestation means that all cannot be seen, and therefore it must have a medium through which men may come to see it, though they cannot see it all. The moment you speak of this Person as a manifestation, using, if you will, the actual phrase of your New Testament, "God manifest in flesh," you recognize the spiritual and essential fact behind the manifestation, which is more than the manifestation, which is superior to the manifestation, of which the manifestation is but the unveiling, the revelation.

Therefore, finally, this whole fact revealed in Jesus is inexplicable. I cannot know all the life, even though I see its lines and lights, and movements. I cannot know all the death though I see its suffering and brutality and tragedy. I cannot know all the resurrection, though I see its triumph and hear its song. Behind the manifestation is a great spiritual and essential fact, yet not a contradiction to the manifestation. That is to say, I am to interpret the spiritual, essential, eternal facts in the terms of the manifestation. When I look at the life of Jesus I see righteousness incarnate, and in that manifestation I learn, as nowhere else, the holiness and righteousness of God. In the same way, when I look at that death interpreted by all the declarations of the New Testament, I see death for others, death in which He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, in which He was the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world. In that death I see manifestation of something in God, infinite, mysterious, overwhelming, appalling, which cannot be shown in any other way than by such a death as that. In the terms of that human death I come to understand something that lies back in Deity which I cannot fully understand, but which apart from this death I never could have dreamed of.

Looked at on human levels, what was this death of Jesus? Suffering undeserved. Suffering on behalf of others out of pure love and compassion. At the back of it, what is there? The suffering of God out of pure love on behalf of those who do not deserve such suffering. You say that does not explain it, and I admit I have never yet had it explained. It lies beyond me, surging upon my spirit in billows of unfathomable love that almost break my heart, yet eluding the grasp of my mind. I come back to the terminology of human manifestation, "By His stripes we are healed. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him." That old prophetic word was carried out to the letter in the human life of Jesus. But this was manifestation in order that human eyes might see the infinite and unexplored reaches of the pain of the being of God. So I see through Christ the activity of righteousness, of expiation, and, finally, of victory. In His life God's righteousness revealed. In His dying, God's expiation by suffering of man's guilt unveiled. In His rising, God's victory over all the forces of darkness made manifest.

What is the result of this according to the New Testament teaching? Think for a moment of the provision. The New Testament declares that there is now forgiveness of sins through the shed blood of Christ, that by the shedding of His blood remission has been made. Blood is the symbol of what? I veil my face, and take my shoes from off my feet. God knows I do not. So much as blood says, I know. Blood shed is not life lived, but life laid down. Blood shed is not merely the strength of a great ideal. It is the bruising and battering of that ideal. It is agony, and pain, and defeat. That is the symbol. God help us to tread reverently when we go beyond it. The issue of sin realized in God, gathered into His heart, to His own suffering, to His own pain, to His own wounding. That is the ultimate significance of the old word in the Hebrew economy, "In all their afflictions He was afflicted."

The New Testament never teaches that a man named Jesus tried by dying to persuade God to love. The New Testament never teaches that God was impassive, and never felt pain, while some person other than Himself endured it, in order to appease Him. There is no such teaching from Matthew to Revelation, from Genesis to Revelation. The New Testament does teach—and quarrel with all I say, but hear this—"God was in Christ." Every word He spoke was a word of God, and every work He wrought was a work of God, every tear He shed was a tear of God. The very blood He poured out was in that sense symbolical of the very blood of God. So that we are in the presence, not of a unit out of the vast multitude of humanity, pure in himself, trying to deal with God so as to make God love men. We are in the presence of God, in the One in Whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead corporeally, that men might see a suggestion of it, and come to an understanding of it. In Him I see how God has taken hold of guilt, and made it not to be, curing the pain in His own pain, ending the issues in His own agony, taking all the responsibility and the mysterious harvest into His own nature and bearing it. Thus a God of absolute truth, without violation of truth, makes sin not to be, and thus forgives the sinner. Whether these things are so or not, these are the things the New Testament teaches. These are the things for which the Christian Church has stood, and must stand, if she would remain. The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins is a doctrine that a just God can and does forgive, not by putting the issue upon someone outside Himself, but by gathering up into His own heart and life

and being the weight of sin, by suffering in Himself.

Consequently, the proclamation of the Christian evangel is that God can be just and the Justifier—mark well the condition—"of him that believeth in Jesus." What does that mean? To believe in Jesus is to return to the government of God at the point of His grace. Never miss out government when you think of grace; never miss out grace when you think of government, for in Christ the two have met. In the universe, measureless to us but measured in God, in the pain and passion of God my sin has been canceled, made not to be, but put away. Now God says, By the Man Whom I have ordained, through Whom the eternal things are manifest, in Him put your trust. That is a command. Master, "what must we do, that we may work the works of God?" said the cynical men of His day to Jesus. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent." That was His answer. It is the first word of the new law. Believe. A man says, I will not believe. Very well, then there is nothing for you but the harvest of your own wrongdoing, the hell to which sin sends you. Remember, if you will proceed along the path of your own disobedience all that it involves here and forever of darkness and death is the issue of refusing to believe. I am talking in London. I am talking to men and women who know the evangel. You cannot begin there for the dark nations of the earth until you have preached the evangel. I am talking to men who know it. God comes in Christ, through Christ, revealing His righteousness, His expiatory suffering, His victorious life over and through death.

Grace there is my every debt to pay,
Grace to wash my every sin away.

That Grace is government, and God says, Now get back into My government and yield yourself to Me by obeying Me at the point of trusting Me. I come at the point of His grace and I find not merely the value of the Cross, but the virtue of the resurrection, and ultimately the victory of a realized ideal. If a man will not, then to refuse is to remain unforgiven. God is a God ready to pardon. I love that word of the ancient prophet, because ready does not mean merely willing, but fully equipped, to pardon.

So I come to Him in Christ, I come to Him with my sin—or put it in the plural my sins, I bring them all to Him—and I say, He cannot be just and forgive them unless He can find a basis for His judicial action in absolute truth, He cannot treat the sin as never committed unless He can put it away as to its virus, and as to its issue. That is what He has done, and because He has done it, He can pardon sin.

My final word is this. The experience of men for nineteen hundred years witnesses to the truth of the Christian proclamation. I know my sins are forgiven. If I say that all alone you must at least believe me to be honest in my conviction. When I multiply my testimony by the company in this house tonight who can say the same; and when that company is multiplied through this city and land, by the numbers who are singing the song of assured forgiveness, and when that testimony is multiplied for nineteen centuries, in which men have confessed their certainty of the forgiveness of sins; you have a weight of evidence that is overwhelming. You dare not charge all the men who have made this claim with hypocrisy or with lunacy. Through nineteen centuries men have sung this song, and the testimony and burden of it has been, "I know my sins are all forgiven. Glory to the blessed Lamb."

Hear me again. The evidence of life rising to higher levels of righteousness witnesses to the truth of the experience. The man who really knows his sins forgiven is the man who rises and begins the life of conquest over sin. If a man say his sins are forgiven, and goes on deliberately sinning, he is a liar. The language is vigorous, but it is Johannine, that of the apostle of love. The man who tells me he knows his sins are forgiven, and continues in sin, is lying. That is not the normal experience of the Christian Church. If you deny me this affirmation, I ask you, Where have you been living? And on what have you been looking? You may quarrel with the Salvation Army; you may not like their flag and their big drum and their Hallelujah; but their one message is the forgiveness of sins, and the perpetual result of their preaching through all the years of their existence has been that sinning men have been saved from the power of sin. The demonstration, I repeat, of the truth of the experience affirmed is in the remade lives of men and women who go out to sin no more. I do not mean that forgiveness brings immediate victory. I do say that forgiveness creates the passion not to sin, and inspires the endeavor to be obedient, and presently realizes absolute victory.

So if we are sinners and know it, there are two things concerning which we need to be most careful. First of all, to remember that God sets up the Cross of His Son as the trysting-place to which we are to come, and the place at which we are to turn our back on wilful sin. Then we are to remember that by that Cross uplifted, or by that for which it stands—all the infinite mystery that lies behind it—it is possible, to use the apostolic language, for God to be just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. So when all has been said, we sing the old song, and know the answer is ours as we sing:

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!
Let the water and the blood
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save me from its guilt and power.

The Problems Of The Religious Life: What Does God Require Of Man?

This inquiry is the outcome of those which have preceded it. If it be granted that man has to do with God, the inquiry is natural and necessary: What does God require of man? If it be granted that God can forgive sins the inquiry is urgent and vital: What does God require of man? If it be true that I have to do with God, what does God require of me? If it be true that when I realize I am a sinner He can forgive sins, what does God require of me?

The inquiry is of supreme importance because it deals with fundamental matters; it gets back in human life, behind the incidentals, to the essentials; down in human life beneath the ripples on the surface, to the still majesty of the underlying tides. It is the first question of all life. It asks: What does the God in Whom I live and move and have my being, and Whose are all my ways, in Whose hands my breath is, require of me—His creation, over whom He still maintains the right of government in the material, mental, and moral realms? Because the inquiry deals with the foundations of life, it deals also with the whole superstructure.

The answer to the inquiry is contained in the writings which—accepting the facts of God as dealt with in our first study—interpret His will for men and His methods with them. These writings declare the requirements of God in terms of the ideal, and in terms of the actual. In God the ideal and the actual are identical. He is what He ought to be. All you postulate of Him which is true and high and noble, He is. In man they are not identical. The ideal and the actual are not the same in human experience. A man who was transparently honest before he met Jesus Christ and after, said, "To me who would do good, evil is present," by which he meant that the ideal was seen but the actual was out of harmony with it. On the other hand, Jesus said, "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him." In that claim the ideal life is expressed in the words, "things that please Him," and the actual in the declaration, "I do." Jesus alone in human history united the ideal and the actual in His experience.

The ideal and the actual are not identical in human experience. Therefore I propose to answer our inquiry in two parts. First, the ideal requirement of God; second, the actual requirement of God. His actual requirements are that we may at last fulfil the ideal; but we look at them in separation in order that we may understand what the requirements of God for men really are.

The ideal requirement of God. I want first to state the terms of revelation, and having done so to consider the revelation of the terms. I go back to Deuteronomy, and to Micah; and then coming to the New Testament, listen to Jesus. My quotations are selected from the great books of authority. Deuteronomy is law in the terms of love. Consequently, it is the supreme book of authority in the old covenant. Micah was pre-eminently the prophet of authority. From these two great books of authority I take my selections from the Old Testament. Then I turn to the New, and come to Matthew, because therein I have the King, always speaking in tones of absolute and final authority.

In the first we find what the law says that God requires. In the second we find what grace and truth say that God requires. "The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." In these quotations from the law by Moses, and from grace and truth by Jesus Christ, we shall find the terms of the revelation of the ideal requirements of God.

I go back to Deuteronomy and find that God requires of man that he should love Him and serve Him, and keep His statutes. I come to Micah and I find that God requires that man should "do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with God." In each of these declarations the word "require" is used in our translation, but the Hebrew words are different. They both convey the same idea, but there is a difference of emphasis. The Hebrew word in Deuteronomy means, This is what God inquires; this is what God asks. When Micah wrote he used another word with more fire in it, more force in it, which we may safely translate, This is what God insists upon. When the law was given it declared, in our simplest sense of that word, what God requires. But the law having been broken, Micah, calling the people back from their sins, used another word with another emphasis: God insists. The things that God insists upon are that a man shall walk with Him, shall do justly, shall love mercy. In the New Testament I find the requirements of God in words of Jesus, spoken in answer to a cynical inquiry by a lawyer, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hangeth the whole law, and the prophets." Everything that Moses and Micah said lies in this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.... Thou shalt love thy neighbour." Hear one other word of Jesus in answer to our inquiry. It occurs in the middle of the manifesto. More criticism has been spent on it than on any other of the sayings of Jesus, criticism of an order more perilous than all higher criticism, criticism which attempts to accommodate the great words of Jesus to the low level of the living of people who think they are Christians and are not "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." What does "perfect" mean? The exact opposite of sin. Sin, the word most commonly used in the New Testament, means missing the mark. The root idea of perfect is hitting the mark. "Ye therefore shall be perfect." You shall not miss the mark, but hit it. You shall not fail, but succeed. You shall be all God meant you to be. Whether that is a promise or a command does not at all matter. Whether the mood be indicative or imperative is of no consequence. If it be a command, all His commands are promises. If it be a promise, all

His promises are commands.

But what is the revelation of these terms? That God requires from every human being perfection, the realization of the ideal. That is God's first requirement. God expects me to be what He made me to be. That is perfection. God does not expect us to be angels, because He has not given us the angelic nature. He expects a man to be a man. He expects a woman to be a woman. He expects a child to be a child. There is nothing more out of harmony with the will of God than a child that ceases to be a child before it has ceased to be a child. There is nothing more out of harmony with the will of God than a man who does not come to manhood when he does come to manhood. Nothing insults high heaven more than a woman who does not become a woman even when she becomes a woman. Your perfection and mine will be as different as are our different lives in outward expression; as identical as are our two lives in life principle. I am not attempting to deal with the outward expression. In a congregation like this there are as many different expressions as there are people; but the inner essential thing in all life is likeness to God, that is, perfect love and perfect truth. Under the command of these two, all the things of the life are to be realized, the artistic, the mechanical, the business; whatever is in us to be realized at its profoundest and its best. That is the will of God.

The passion for perfection is common to humanity. You cannot find a healthy being but that has a passion for perfection in some form. The only people who seem afraid of the word are Christian people. I am constantly asked, Do you believe in Christian perfection? It is a most absurd question, and I am always inclined to reply to it with another question, Certainly I do. Do you believe in Christian imperfection? The passion for perfection is in every healthy soul. Did you ever know a boy or girl who did not dream dreams and see visions of what he or she was going to be and do? Perhaps you in your folly sneered at them, and hindered them. That was a Divine passion in their heart, a desire to reach the goal, to hit the mark. The passion for perfection is indicative of the possibility of perfection. No man ought ever to be satisfied to be less than he is intended to be in the economy of God. God expects that every man shall be that. If you are satisfied with anything less than that, God is not. He requires, He asks, said the ancient lawgiver; He requires, He insists, said the thundering prophet of the closing days of Hebraism, that man shall walk with Him, do justly, and love mercy; that men shall realize their own lives, and realize them by living in harmony with Himself. That is what I mean by the ideal requirement.

All, so far considered, is related to our first inquiry, and the answer concerning man's relation to God. The require-merits of God thus understood result in the conviction of sin. Can anyone stand in the presence of his own life, the ideal possibility, and say, I am perfect? You say the instruments were imperfect to begin with. I am not discussing that at all. I admit it. If you admit it, you admit the thing I am asking you to admit, failure, sin. Because the instruments were imperfect to begin with, all the activities have been imperfect. When a man says, If that be the Divine requirement, I have failed, then he begins to ask the new question, What are the actual requirements of God for me? If there were nothing other than what I have been saying, then where are we? Where am I? Where are you? If the demand of God is realization of my life, and perfect realization, I have failed. When Pilate looked into the eyes of the Jewish priests, and said to them, "What I have written, I have written," he was giving expression to his own obstinacy, but he gave expression to a fact far more profound than he knew. What you have written you have written, and you cannot unwrite it. I cannot undo the failure of the past. There lie behind me the years that the cankerworm hath eaten. There lie behind me wasted opportunities. I care nothing if you tell me there have been no vulgarities in your life. My reply to you will be, What do you mean by vulgar? If you are measuring yourself by the ordinary man you may be a very respectable man, but if we measure by heaven's requirement, we are guilty sinners, every one, vulgar with the awful vulgarity of those who are cultured mentally perchance, but have no commerce with heaven and no traffic with God. No man sees what the Divine requirement really is without having to say, I also have failed, I also am a sinner.

Therefore our inquiry must now follow the terms of the actual. What does God demand of such a man? What does He require of me, a sinner? This brings us back to our previous inquiry. I will but state in briefest words the sum and substance of that message thus, God has provided plenteous redemption: forgiveness of sin through the value of His passion, and the dynamic for purity through the victory of His resurrection. In the light of that, what does God require? Come to the terms of the revelation, and once again I take you back to the words of Jesus, startling words as we read them. The cynical men of His own age asked Him, "What must we do, that we may work the works of God?"—What does God require of us? Christ replied, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent," or, as I think it should always be read, "That ye believe into Him Whom He hath sent." That is what God requires of the man who has failed. Those of you who are not perfectly and experimentally familiar with all the meaning of this will admit that it appears a very surprising thing for Christ to say. Listen to it in the light of much preaching which we hear, "This is the work of God, that ye believe into Him Whom He hath sent." There are those who tell me that I am to be saved by works. There are others who say, There is nothing to do, only believe. Christ says, "This is the work of God, that ye believe into Him Whom He hath sent." Who is right, they or He? If we say at once, as we do, that He must be right, then what did He mean? He meant unquestionably to claim that He was not King merely, but Saviour also. Realizing the fact of their failure, knowing their sin, He said, if they would believe into Him they would work the work of God. That is to say, God provided in Him for their cleansing, for their new birth, for a gift of new life in the energy of which they would be able to do the thing which God would have them do. Therefore, the initial responsibility is that men believe into Him. Why do I say into? Those familiar with the Greek New Testament know that the

preposition eis, whenever used with the accusative, means motion into. It is not believe on—you can believe on Jesus Christ and lose your soul. You can believe everything about Him that was ever written and perish. To believe into Him is to hear His claim, and, knowing it true, to obey it. This is what God requires of men who have sinned and failed. Having made perfect provision whereby sin can be canceled and paralysis energized, God's requirement is that we believe into Him Whom He hath sent, that we yield ourselves to the Christ.

The revelation of these terms is that all a man needs for his remaking is provided in Christ Jesus. What does God require of man? That man take what God has provided. "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." In that passage John uses two terms, receive, and believe, and shows that they are synonymous, thus suggesting that whichever helps us most we are free to use. Those who receive Him, who are they? Those who believe into His name. What is it to believe on Jesus? To receive Him.

God requires from me perfection. That is, the ideal. I cannot give it Him. What does He do for me? He provides for me in Christ forgiveness for my sins, and power to go and sin no more. Now what does He require of me? That I take what He provides, that I crown the King He presents, that I trust in the Saviour He sends, that I receive the life He places at my disposal. That is the first requirement for the sinning soul. God presents the one all-sufficient Saviour, revealing the pattern, providing the power, and commanding men everywhere to repent and believe into the Son Whom He hath set forth.

The requirements of God in grace are man's fulfilling of His requirements in law. The actual requirements are realization of the ideal requirements. Am I putting these two things into opposition to each other? By no means. Has God ever given up His ideal requirement for you or for me? Never. Does He by Jesus Christ consent to take something less than perfection in our life? By no means. Is the work of Jesus Christ that of asking God to excuse and let into heaven multitudes of incompetent souls? By no means. Was the work of Jesus Christ the making of a provision by which a man can be hidden out of God's sight in his impurity? By no means—a thousand times, by no means. Did Jesus Christ come to fling a cloak of righteousness over the filthiness of my rags? By no means. A cloak of righteousness, a robed righteousness, surely yes. I can still sing what my father sang.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed
With joy shall I lift up my head.

The robe of His righteousness is never placed upon the filthiness of rags to hide them. The work of Jesus Christ is not that of bringing into the Kingdom of God men who are paralyzed and incompetent; but men made perfect. That is the meaning of the mission of Jesus. God's actual requirement is that man shall believe on Jesus, in order that His ideal requirement that man shall be perfect may be fulfilled. Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy." Was anything more stupendous than that ever written? That is what God requires. Nothing less than that will ever satisfy Him. He begins with the actual requirement that we submit ourselves to the perfect Saviour Whom He has provided, in order that that Saviour may realize in us all that we failed of, and all that we have lost.

I pray you remember, however, that in the first submission to Christ the perfect ideal is not realized at once. Saul of Tarsus was smitten down on the road to Damascus by the Lord of love and life, but thirty years after that, writing one of his most beautiful epistles, he said, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus." Thirty years of Christian experience and discipline; of fire, nakedness, peril, sword, and yet he had not yet attained, was not yet made perfect. God deliver us from the idea that by some mechanical dispatch we can come into all perfection of Christian character. I pray you remember this perfect ideal is not realized at once, but the perfect force necessary for the realization can be received at once. Before you cross the threshold of this house, before you leave Westminster Chapel, you can have all that you need for the ultimate. If Paul said, I have not yet attained, in the same letter he said, "To me to live is Christ." He had all the forces, as is indicated in the words, "One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I persecute toward the goal." You say, That is wrong. Oh, no, it is quite right. When Paul said, "I persecuted the Church," he used exactly the same verb as we have translated press. He meant to say, all the zeal and passion and earnestness which he had put into the business of persecuting the Church he afterwards put into the business of attempting to reach the goal, and be what God would have him be.

I am perhaps speaking in the presence of men and women who have been Christians more years than I have been in the world, and who in the time of their Christian relation have in all probability been far more loyal to their Lord and Master, and far more simple in their faith than I have been, but these are the men and women who will be the first to say, We have not yet attained, we are not yet made perfect. I am also speaking to men and women who have only recently started the Christian life. Let them remember that they possess everything that is necessary for ultimate perfection, because, having received the Christ, they possess Him in all His

perfection, and in all His power; and at last when His work is done they will be like Him, presented faultless before the throne of God. Without these forces perfection is impossible. With them perfection is assured.

Hear me as I utter this last word, applicable alike to those who never yet have answered this actual requirement of God that they should yield themselves to Christ, and to those who longest have been following Him. Belief into is the preliminary, and perpetual condition for the realization of perfection. That is to say, belief into Christ is not an act, it is an attitude. I believed in Christ, you tell me, forty years ago. I care nothing at all about that. Do you believe in Him now? That is the question. I am not undervaluing your past experience. Thank God if you have a day about which you sing, a place to which you take pilgrimage. Some of us have neither day nor place. There were years in my Christian life when it troubled me that I could not put my hand on a day or an hour or place. It troubles me no more. Yesterday is gone. Jesus saves me now! Belief is an attitude, and there will never dawn a day upon our failing, sinning, yet trusting souls when we can afford to cease our trusting. There never will come a day so bright in our experience that we can walk wholly by sight, never a day in which we shall be able to cease to believe into the Son of God.

That is God's requirement. The actual requirement includes the ideal requirement. When I believe into Him, what does it mean? I will begin on the lower level. I shall love my neighbor as myself. I am silent because of the rebuke of it to my own soul, and to the souls of all such as are honest. You and I have no right to sing of our love to God unless it is expressed in our love to men. If I see my brother in need, and shut up the bowels of my compassion against him, how dwelleth the love of God in me? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." That is the ideal, and belief into Christ means that it can become and will increasingly become the real.

It may be as well in conclusion to leave out of view those ultimate reaches of the Divine requirement, never forgetting them wholly, and begin in the presence of His Christ set forth as God's righteousness, set forth as God's perfect Saviour for sinning and failing men. Let us believe into Him, trusting Him for absolution, trusting Him for power, and so looking into His face tonight in full abandonment, know that the Christ of God will perfect that which concerneth us. In order that it may be so here and now,

Jesus, I will trust Thee,
Trust Thee with my soul:
Guilty, lost, and helpless,
Thou canst make me whole.

As we believe into Him, we fulfil God's first requirement in order that at last we may fulfil His final requirement.

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The Problems of the Religious Life:

The Opposing Forces of the Religious Life—The World

The world, the flesh and the devil constitute the trinity of forces which oppose the religious life. These are distinct from each other, yet they act in perpetual concert, so that any two of them are powerless apart from the third. I say this at once in order that we may realize the folly of dealing with the world alone, or with the flesh by itself, or with the devil as unrelated to both. Given the world and the flesh, minus the devil, and there is no opposition to religion. There is nothing inherently evil in the world or in the flesh. The flesh and the devil apart from the world cannot successfully oppose the religious life. The devil needs the media of the world to appeal to the flesh. The devil and the world apart from the flesh cannot make any appeal to the spiritual essence of man. The world can appeal only to flesh. The world plus the flesh, plus the devil, equals conflict. In dealing with the world as an opposing force to the religious life we shall consider, first, the world in itself; second, the world as opposed to religion; third, the world in relation to the flesh and the devil; and, finally, the victory over the world.

We begin, then, first with the subject of the world itself. There is a great deal of nonsense talked about the world and worldliness. A great many things are called worldly that are not worldly, and a great many things are never called worldly that are of the very essence of worldliness. We need to be very careful to understand what is the real meaning of the term "the world" in the New Testament when it is used in such sense as to warn us against it. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Such an apparent contradiction should at once compel careful investigation of the sense in which the world is a peril and an opposing force. Perhaps one suggestive illustration may be worth a great deal of argument at this point. I know men who denounce others for worldliness because these others play cards, and go to the theater, and dance. I am not now asking whether these things are worldly or not, but rather insisting that men who do none of these things may be as worldly as men who do them all. Worldliness does not necessarily consist in these things. I repeat, therefore, there is necessity for great care as we approach this subject.

I begin with the world in itself. Of course, you understand I am speaking strictly within the limits of the use made of that word in the

New Testament. The word has become almost part of our everyday speech. The word "cosmos" originally meant simply order. It was then used to describe the whole of the universe because of its orderliness and its beauty. So that the world itself does not at all suggest evil. It does not hint at disorder but announces order. It has in it no suspicion of ugliness, but breathes the very spirit of beauty. That in itself is enough to make us pause and consider what is meant by the world, and how the world becomes an opposing force. When a child speaks of the world it thinks of the earth on which we live, and up to a certain point, quite accurately so thinks. May we not say that the word stands for the facts and forces of which man is conscious in his everyday life. That is not a perfect definition, because there are multitudes of men and women who are conscious of facts and forces in everyday life which lie beyond the material. The world means the facts and forces of which material man is conscious, the facts and forces of which material man is a part, the facts and forces of which material man is or may be master. In childhood some of us were taught that the earth and the things therein were divided into three kingdoms, mineral, vegetable, animal. These things have two qualities in common. They are all material, and temporal. Material, that is appreciable by the senses. Everything of form. Everything of sound. Everything of fragrance. Everything of color. Everything of flavor. Everything of tangibility. The things that can be seen and heard, and smelled and tasted and handled. All that the senses can know is the world. I hope you have imagination, then the vastness of this breaks upon you, for it is a great world.

These material things are also temporal, transient, passing; none of them abides. The form and the color change and fade and pass. Sound, though it be the most discordant or the most harmonious, ends. The fragrance passes away. The flavor dies. Nothing on which man has ever laid his hand is lasting. All the rocks are crumbling. Temporal, transient, passing.

The world, then, is the sum total of things material and temporal. I feel the utter inadequacy of the statement in certain ways. One might stay to speak of trees and plants and birds and beasts and men and cities. I leave all that to your imagination. All this is of God. This very material world in the midst of which we live is so marvelous that we are driven to the conclusion that it is easier to believe it to be the work of God than to believe that it originated in any other way. I take up my Bible and go back to the story at its commencement of the origins, and amid all the poetry and marvel of that ancient story I read this, "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." That is true until that hour. If you think of the world in its most material sense, if you think of the world in the simplest sense, there is nothing inherently evil in it.

Then in what sense can it be said that the world is opposed to religion? Let me answer that inquiry by quotation of one passage written by Paul in his letter to the Romans, "They worshipped the creature rather than the Creator." That is worldliness. It is when a man does that that the world is an opposing force to religion. Let us think of that a little more closely. What is the rational process. Given an object—I do not care what object, sun or star, bird or animal, tree or man—given an object, say a tree for the sake of illustration, behind that tree is a thought. Nothing ever has been, so far as human observation has any right to declare, but that the deed, the act, the fact, was preceded by a conception, an intention, a thought. Begin with the simplest thing in the wide world. I take in my hand this glass—an object. Behind it is a thought. It was seen before it was made. It was intended before it was constructed. Or take the most splendid and matchless building that your eyes have ever seen—the whole thing was thought before it was erected. What is true there we believe to be true everywhere. Here is a tree, a flower, more wonderful than the most splendid cathedral that man ever raised, far more mysterious than the most magnificent piece of machinery that man ever constructed. We may call it argument from design. I know it is the fashion to declare that argument exploded. I say it has never been answered. The rational process, then, is this. Behind the object is a thought; behind the thought is a thinker, for you cannot have a thought without a thinker, a mental mood without a mind, a conception without a conceiver. The rational process in the presence of the world is to pass through the object, sun, star, river, animal, to the thought behind it, and through the thought to the thinker, and in the presence of the thinker to bow in worship and service.

What, then, is the irrational process? To take the object, sun or star, animal or tree, and worship it, and serve it. That is the meaning of Paul's argument concerning the Gentile world. Instead of worshiping the Creator they worshiped and served the creature. They stayed in the realm of the things seen, and did not pass through them to the actuality of the unseen things. That is worldliness.

Let me put it in another way. Worldliness consists in dealing with the material, without recognizing the spiritual of which the material is an expression, dealing with the things that are temporal without recognition of the things that are eternal, living in the midst of the transient without having commerce with the abiding. When a man begins the religious life he still feels the pull of the world, the temptation to deal with finite things, without placing upon them the measurement of the infinite, without weighing them in the balances of eternity.

Let me attempt to illustrate this in a yet more immediate and practical way. There may be worldliness in religion, in education, in commerce, in pleasure. I take these only as illustrative. The fact may doubtless be illustrated in many other ways.

There are two manifestations of worldliness in religion. One is ritualism, the other rationalism. A man may be a ritualist, and not be worldly. I want to grant that at once. It is high time we were beginning to learn the lesson of being perfectly fair to men from whom we most profoundly differ. A man may be a ritualist and not be worldly. I have known men who through form and ceremony and

splendor of ritual have commerce with God. But when a man observes so many days, so many ceremonies, and the observance being over, he turns back again to all the things that are contrary to the will of God, that is worldliness in religion. Worldliness in religion is the idea that things that are of the world, beauty of form and color, and the fine fragrance of incense, constitute religion.

Worldliness may manifest itself in religion as rationalism. By rationalism I mean contentment with present conditions. When religion deals simply with the present conditions of men and women it is worldly in the extreme. Sometimes this type of religion charges those of us who believe in God and heaven and hell with being other-worldly, by which it makes unconscious confession that it is worldly. It is of the dust. It begins and ends there. Anything that attempts to deal with men simply on the level of this world, the betterment of human conditions, pure humanitarianism, is worldliness in religion. Hear me again. If a man have commerce with God and the eternities, he cannot be indifferent to the condition of his brother men in the slum. Let there be no misunderstanding of my position. In proportion as a man really lives the spiritual life, and has dealings with God Himself, he is hot and angry in the presence of all human limitation; but when a man attempts in the name of religion to deal simply with these conditions, and forgets the infinite and eternal, his religion has become utterly worldly. Worldliness in religion begins and ends in things that are material and sensual and passing.

Then there may be, as there is, worldliness in education. Education which deals simply with knowledge of the material and temporal, and never puts on these things the measurement of the infinite and eternal, is worldly education.

There may be worldliness in commerce. Someone says, That goes without saying. I pray you, then, remember that there may be the spiritual in commerce also. What is worldliness in commerce? Commerce that is based on a passion for possession of goods to the neglect of God. Jesus Christ has given us an accurate picture of it. It is not a flattering picture; but you can hang it up in London today, and thousands of men, if they are honest, will see their own portrait. The rich fool, the man who says, My lands are increased, my wealth is increased, what shall I do? "And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my corn and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry." He fed his soul on goods! That is worldliness in commerce, and ultimately it means selfishness, greed, oppression. There is worldliness in pleasure. That needs no argument. Pleasure in itself is not wrong. God made no half measures in His universe. When He made a fish and gave it fins it was that it might swim. When He made a bird and gave it wings it was that it might fly. When he gave me a laughing apparatus it was that I might laugh. I have not said a more religious thing than that tonight. God made man for pleasure. The ultimate intention of God for man is pleasure. When Jesus began that great Manifesto of His Kingdom which scorches and burns, He used the word "happy." I read in my Bible that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," but I never read that He will stop laughter, pleasure. Worldly pleasure is abuse of the senses by forgetfulness of the spiritual.

These are rapid and almost haphazard illustrations of what the word really means. Though you never go to the theater, you may be a very worldly man. Though you sit regularly—I will speak of no other place than this—in Westminster Chapel, and sing the songs, and give to the collection, you may be an absolutely worldly man. What is a worldly man? I ask once more. A worldly man is one who lives as though this were the only world. He may think about another. He may tell you in conversation that he believes in another. He may recite the creed on Sabbath, beginning with the august and stately measure, "I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," but Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, in business, at home, in pleasure, he lives as though there were no God in the universe. That is worldliness, though he recite the creed regularly and sings all the songs of the sanctuary. It is not the singing of songs, or the recitation on the creed that disproves worldliness. Worldliness is life lived in the dust to the forgetfulness of Deity, life that has no sense of the infinite and eternal, that does not bring the measurements of eternity and lay them on every half-hour.

Now I see how the world is an opposing force to religion. When it so engrosses my thought and attention as to make me unmindful of spiritual things, when it so obtrudes itself on my attention as to capture all my thinking and make me forget God, then it opposes religion. We have to face the fact that it is a very real force in opposition. "I see the sights that dazzle"—how often we have sung it, and how awfully and appallingly true it is!

For a moment we must stay here to notice the connection between the world, the flesh and the devil, because only by so doing can we understand how it comes to pass that the world opposes religious life. It ought to be the most natural thing in all material things to discover the presence of the spiritual. It seems as though it was impossible for the Man of Nazareth to touch anything of the earth but that somehow it flamed with the glory of the heavens. Yet He was quite natural. We hardly like to use these words about Him, yet you will understand me. A more artless and unaffected man never lived than Jesus of Nazareth. He loved the flowers, the gorgeous lilies of His own land. He looked at their beauty, and what did He say? Your Father clothes them, and "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Children, how He loved them! Yes, but what did He see when He saw a child? The angel beholding the face of God. So you may pass through all His life and you will find a Man with feet firmly planted on the earth, of the earth, belonging to it, and yet different from the earth, Master of it, King of it. Whenever He touched it He revealed by His touch its relationship to the boundless spaciousness of eternity, in which forevermore He was at home. He stood on the plains of Judaea, and talked to men, and He used their own language. Their eyes looked at him. Their hands handled Him. There He was, and yet He

spoke of Himself as the Son "in the bosom of the Father." That is the utter, absolute opposite to worldliness.

Now I ask this question. How comes it that the world which ought everywhere to reveal the heights, the world which ought to suggest God, makes me forget Him? Man's attitude in the presence of the world is determined by his conception of himself. To live in the flesh is to be imprisoned by the material and temporal, never to see through the garments of God in the green sward to the God Who wears them, but to see only the grass. A self-centered and self-contained life seeks its satisfaction in, rather than through, the material world. What is a self-governed life? It is a devil-governed life. A worldly, self-centered life always results from the dethronement of God, and the dethronement of God is always the result of listening to a lie from without. When you track back the forces that oppose religion, you find the devil behind them all. This world, all the fair and beautiful handiwork of God through which I ought always to find Him, hinders the essential spirit within me. Why? Because an enemy has come between my soul and God, and persuaded me to dethrone Him and enthrone self, and has blinded me so that I have lost the true perspective, and proportion of things, and the sense that discovers God everywhere. These are the themes of future discussion. They are stated now only that the intimate connection between the opposing forces may be recognized.

Finally, is there victory over the world? I read my New Testament statement, "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." I go back to that passage, and I find that the object of the faith that overcomes the world is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The soul believing is begotten of God. The eye is opened, the ear is unstopped, the lost sense is restored. That is the final Christian evidence. You cannot make it known to any other man. It must be personal and immediate. No man need waste time trying to persuade me there is no God. I know. No argument you can adduce in proof of the existence of God will convince me. No argument you can adduce as against the existence of God will convince me. I know. As one man said in the presence of a material sign long ago, so say I in the presence of heaven and earth, on oath, "One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see."

Mark the issues of faith. Life becomes God-governed. That is the devil's defeat. Self is found at last, realized within itself. Flesh is made subservient to spirit. Then "all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world." Mark that well. I have not lost the world. I have found it. I have found it in that I have discovered that the material and the spiritual are related, that on every blade of grass shines the grace of God, and in all the prismatic colors of the rainbow is revealed His beauty. I have not lost the world. I have found it. Only the temporal is now seen in its relation to the eternal, and change and decay are no longer destruction, but the perpetual process of that which abides. The man who has faith has not lost his world, but he is no longer worldly.

What, then, is the final word of injunction in the presence of these opposing forces? Again I quote from the New Testament and from Paul. "Use the world as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." That is to say, use the world, but never imagine that it is all; and never use it save in its relation to that larger whole of the spiritual and eternal. Deal with the things of dust, but touch them with the force of Deity. Enter into all that the senses can reveal to you of the life in which you live, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment, not to punishment but to judgment, the finding of a verdict, and the passing of a sentence, the creating of a destiny. All the things of the world are mine, but I am not to live in them as though they were the whole. I am to understand that they are things of dust and I am to treat them as such.

To go back again to that word of John, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Dr. Chalmers' great sermon on that text is entitled, "The expulsive power of a new affection." What is the new affection? The true affection, love of God. What does it do for a man? Puts out of his heart that love of the world which makes him forget God, and puts into his heart a new love of the world because he sees it to be the handiwork of his Father. I remember as though it were yesterday something that happened in my own life at least thirty-seven years ago. I was a boy, and there came to my father's house a young man who had been brought to Christ in some meetings my father had been conducting in the Welsh hills. This young man was out in our garden talking to me about all sorts of things. I remember how he interested me, and how I loved him. Suddenly he stooped and picked a leaf from a nasturtium plant. He held it in his hand and said to me, "Did you ever see anything so beautiful." As a boy I looked at it, saw all the veins and the exquisite beauty. Then he said this, and I never forgot it. "I never saw how beautiful that leaf was until six months ago, when I gave myself to Christ." How true I know that to be now in my own experience. The worldly man loses his world. The godly man finds it. Where are you going for your summer holiday? I strongly advise you to get right with God before you go, and if you will, you will have such a holiday as you have never had. When a man crossing the ocean sits on deck and refuses to look at the sea because it is worldly, he is the most worldly man on board ship. He is self-centered and even though he is spiritually proud, he is godless and worldly. The love of the Father, let that fill your heart, and then what? Then all the things He made are exquisite with beauty. You will listen to the music of the thunder at night, and thank God that you are a child of the Thunderer. You will look at all the wonders in creation, and rejoice more than ever that you are the heir of the God Who made them, and that consequently they belong to you. I have lost neither poetry nor art nor music because I am His, in answer to the call of His grace. I have found them because I no longer believe that they are all. When you look on a painting and tell me it will fade, I tell you not half so soon as the pictures He paints. He is so great an artist that He flings a picture on the sky, and as you look it is gone, but in ten minutes there is another. All the things of beauty in the world are mine because I am His and He is mine. When you lose your vision of God you lose your sense of the eternal, and live wholly in the things of His beautiful world. Then you have imprisoned your own soul. May God deliver us from all worldliness by bringing us into such unity with Himself that we shall

look nowhere without seeing Him, touch nothing without feeling Him, be in the midst of no circumstances without being conscious of Him.

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The Opposing Forces of the Religious Life—The Flesh

Because of the near personal relation of the flesh to every human being, this subject is at once supremely interesting and vitally important. The flesh is part of the ego, part of myself, not all of myself, but part, and an essential part so far as the present life is concerned. The world is outside me. The devil is other than I am, a distinct personality. But the flesh is of my very self. I cannot escape it. It goes where I go, it abides where I abide; it is with me in my thinking, in my loving, in my willing. I have to take account of the flesh. I may be able to escape, in some measure, from the world in cloistered seclusions, and within stone walls. I cannot so escape from the flesh. I may be able to escape from the devil in certain surroundings, and certain atmospheres. I can never escape from the flesh. Consequently, I say we are dealing with a subject which is supremely interesting and vitally important.

Now I propose to follow the same line of examination as when I considered the world as an opposing force. First, the flesh in itself; second, the flesh as opposed to religion; third, the flesh in relation to the world and the devil; and, finally, the victory over the flesh.

We are greatly aided in this study by the Incarnation. Therein we see human nature according to the pattern, true to the ideal. We have no real understanding of what was in the heart of God when He said, "Let Us make man," until we know Jesus Christ. We may have studied human nature; we may have studied human history, we may have a large and varied circle of acquaintances and friends, but we never know man until we know Jesus Christ. It is graciously and wonderfully true that He is the Revelation of God. It is equally and as graciously true that He is the Revelation of man. I know the meaning of this life of mine only when I know Jesus. Through all the ages, so far as I may glance at them through the windows of history, secular and sacred, I see man after man, some rising above their fellows, conspicuous heights among the mountains, but I never know what man is according to the Divine pattern until my eyes rest on the one Man of Nazareth. In Him we are able to understand, as we never could apart from that revelation, the failure of all other men. Had there been no Jesus Christ in the world, and no record of Him, no image of Him stamped on the human consciousness, I can conceive that men might be very well satisfied with themselves. But no man who has honestly studied the portrait of Jesus which the gospels present, who has stood face to face with the Man of Nazareth and allowed Him to put the measurement of Himself upon life, has escaped the conviction that he ought to say, Lo, I have sinned!

I know the kinship between Jesus and myself; but, my brethren, it is when I am most conscious of the kinship that I discover the immeasurable, appalling, and awful distance between Him and myself. The distance would not appall me if there were not kinship, but it is when I know He is flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone, blood of my blood, and then see Him rising into the infinite heights, towering above me in the sublime simplicities of His fulfilment of the ideal, in the simple sublimity of His realization of purpose, that I know how low I have fallen.

Now, in that light of that revelation we turn to our consideration. The first necessity is that we should understand the meaning of the term, "the flesh." There are two brief passages which I am going to quote in order that their light may fall on the subject. The first is to be found in the opening chapter of John's Gospel. "The Word was made flesh." The second is to be found in the first letter of the same writer, in the fourth chapter, "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." Then it is certain that flesh in the first and simplest condition is not sinful. There is nothing inherently sinful in flesh. There is another passage in Romans, but notice very carefully what it really says. He was made "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He was not made sinful flesh, but in the likeness of it. He was made flesh, but not sinful flesh; and when you bring together these two words, sinful and flesh, you are recognizing the presence of something in the flesh, you are recognizing the presence of something in the flesh that does not belong to it, that ought not to be there. I lay my hand on this hand of mine, I touch this body of mine, and I handle and touch sinful flesh. But when the disciples in the olden days laid their hand on the actual flesh of the Man of Nazareth they laid their hand on actual flesh, but not on sinful flesh. And so I look at this Man—this ideal Man, this actual Man, this sinless Man, this Man Who challenged any to convince Him of sin, this Man Who claimed absolute holiness—and as I look I know that the flesh in its first and simplest condition is not sinful, that there can be flesh without sin.

What, then, according to that first Divine intention as revealed in Jesus, is the flesh? The idea is the instrument of the spirit, perfectly adjusted to the material underworld and to the spirit over-world. Man who is not a body, but who is a spirit inhabiting a body, is able to touch all the material through the medium of his flesh. When the psalmist, referring to the flesh, to the body, said, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made," he uttered a tremendous truth. Through the medium of the flesh man has been able to examine and discover, and manipulate, to exercise the dominion for which he was created. The body is the perfect instrument of the spirit, subservient to it, answering it; the medium through which the spirit touches all lower creation, and the medium through which all lower creation comes into living touch with the spiritual that lies beyond it. There is no inherent evil in flesh according to the original purpose and intention of God.

So that when you speak of the body of a man in terms of disapprobation be very careful lest you be found to blaspheme against God. For remember this body of mine is as much a work of God as is the spirit that indwells it, and it is a work of God made to fit the spirit, to be the dwelling place of the spirit, the temple of the spirit. Infinitely more sacred than any temple, or cathedral, or church that was ever erected is every human body. Made to be the instrument of the spirit, fearfully and wonderfully made, delicate in its organism, tough and tremendous in its strength, is the flesh.

How, then, can flesh be an opposing force to the religious life? Let me again cite three scriptures, and, at first, there may seem to be very little connection between them, and not much bearing on our subject. The first quotation is from the gospel according to Matthew, and the account which the evangelist there gives of words spoken by our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane to three of His disciples, who when they ought to have been watching were asleep. It is a word having a local setting and coloring, but revealing a great, and shall I say, an appalling truth. Jesus said to these men, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The second quotation is from the Galatian letter, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." The Greek word, *epithumia*, may be translated "desireth." Let me use that word here. "The flesh desireth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." In the Revised Version the word "Spirit" is spelled with a capital letter, and quite accurately. The whole context shows that the apostle was referring to the Spirit of God. In the first quotation I made, the quotation from our Lord, the word should be written with a small s, for the reference is not to the Spirit of God but to the spirit of man. The third quotation is from the first letter of Peter, "All flesh is grass."

Now, what are the facts which these Scriptures suggest to us? First, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." In that word Jesus revealed the fact of internecine strife in human life, that is, mutually destructive strife. In these very disciples there was strife between the aspiration of the spirit and the ability of the flesh. The spirit willing, conscious of the beauty of the religious ideal, having seen the glory of the Christ, and having earnestly desired to follow Him; and the flesh going to sleep. Peter had said but a little while before, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." That is the willing spirit. That is the essential man, the deepest man in Peter, desiring to be true to his Lord, declaring that he can die for Him. In the garden Jesus said, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest thou not watch one hour?"

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. That is the trouble. Over and over again you find in the case of the man who has never yielded to Christ the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. I know it is said that there can be no admiration of the good and true on the part of unregenerate man. That is not true. There are thousands of unregenerate men who know the beauty of holiness, but they cannot be holy. But now I am far more anxious to deal with the flesh as an opposing force in the lives of those who have yielded themselves to Christ, who see the ideal revealed in Christ, all the things high and excellent and beautiful. In such the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. I ought to watch, but I go to sleep. I ought to win, but I fail. Jesus Christ could not have said that of Himself, The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. In His case the spirit was willing, and the flesh was equal to the demands. There was never any failure. There was never any internecine strife between the spirit of Jesus and His flesh. His flesh was forevermore the instrument of His spirit, obeying it, answering it, serving it, helping it. Not so with other men. Not so with me.

Notice the second of these two quotations. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit; and the Spirit lusteth against the flesh." That is to say, there is not only internecine strife, but in human life there is antagonism to the purpose of God in the realm of the flesh. The spirit of God is leading me toward the heights and calling me to the spiritual outlook and conception, and the flesh is dragging me to the depths and suggesting that I live the life of the animal. That word sounds hard and uncouth. Are you in rebellion against that definition? Are you saying, "Not the life of the animal; you cannot speak of the cultured life of today as the life of the animal"? Absolutely, if the sum total of life may be thus expressed, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed?" That is animal life. It means food and warmth and animal comfort. The flesh is drawing every one of us to that. That is the temptation of it. That is the suggestion of it.

The Spirit of God is calling me to the life of spirituality, the life that takes in eternity in its outlook, and has dealings with God in all its transactions. The flesh says, Just for today, what shall I eat and what shall I drink?

Once again, "All flesh is grass." That is to say, the flesh has on it the stupor of death, and always asks for ease instead of effort, for licence rather than liberty, and the issue is riot instead of realization. All these things are things of death.

In this way the flesh is an opposing force to the Christian life. I am not entering tonight on the question of how this happened. I am simply dealing with the fact. You can have your own theory about how it happened. I have my Bible and I still believe that man has fallen, and the humanity which I share, and which I meet in the city and in the village, on land and on sea, both rich and poor, both bond and free, is one humanity, fallen humanity; not humanity climbing up, but humanity helplessly and irrevocably down, so that it never can rise, except by a miracle of Divine power lifting it out of the dust. I am dealing with the fact. The moment a man sees the spiritual, and answers it by following Christ, he becomes conscious of conflict with the flesh. The conflict of the child of God with the flesh is the conflict of the subjugation of a recovered empire. Before you were a Christian you lived in the flesh. Now that you are a

Christian you live in the spirit. Your own spirit is enthroned. You had it in the prison and starved it and neglected it, and sometimes even said that you did not possess it. In the moment in which you gave yourself to Christ He put that spirit, your spirit, back on the throne of your personality, and He put it there in partnership with His own Spirit, in order to realize your whole life; and the first thing is that the flesh become subservient to it. But the flesh does not become subservient immediately. The flesh which so long was degraded by the fact that you allowed it to have its own way by answering its lust, and dwelling wholly within it, when put in its right place, under the spirit, rebels. Regeneration does not mean a sudden convulsion, of such a nature that all the fibers of my flesh cease to make their own demands. The fight is long and strenuous, and sometimes almost to blood. I want every young Christian here, every young man and every young woman who is fighting this fight, to remember that he or she is subjugating a recovered empire. You have set up the throne, but you have to win and cultivate and restore the whole territory. A man can be cleansed in a moment by the Spirit of God, but there is then the whole campaign of subjugation to go forward. What I do plead for is that you shall be patient. That very thought comes out in the words, "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." That is a recognition of the fact that the flesh which has been rampant and masterful for years, when you take the throne in the fear and fellowship of the Holy Spirit of God, is not immediately subjugated, the long habits of years are not immediately broken.

Now, remember the relation of the flesh to the world and to the devil. As last time, I indicate this in very brief sentences, yet the three must always be taken in connection with each other. The degraded man is the man who degrades the world. The degraded world hinders the remade man. For the interpretation of the meaning of that I must refer you to the things I said when speaking of the world. The degraded man, the man who has lost true balance and proportion of things, and instead of being spirit with a body subservient, has become spirit imprisoned by flesh; he degrades the world. Then the world so degraded hinders the man in the moment in which he is remade. The old appeals and allurements of the world make their appeal to the flesh which has not yet come into the absolute consciousness of the mastery of the spirit.

The devil appeals to the degraded man through the degraded world, and he appeals to the remade man through the same medium of a degraded world, and thus fights against all the purposes of God in the man and in the world; for no man will ever be able to take hold of the world and use it as God intended he should use it and bring it to ultimate perfection unless he is a spiritual man. God's purpose for him is defeated, and God's purpose for the world is defeated so long as he is degraded. When man has found his right relationship to God, and the flesh is what it ought to be, what it was in the Christ, then "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.... In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." The earth will come to its ultimate fulness and realization when man has found his true relation to God, and to prevent that the devil presents the degraded world to man and attempts to lure him back to the things of the dust only, forbidding him to take into consciousness the things of the eternities.

Finally, can I have victory over this flesh life? Do I mean to say by the things already said that all the while and always I must be defeated? Assuredly not! I have said, and I believe, that the conflict is long and continuous, but defeat is not a synonymous term with conflict. I need not be defeated. There can be victory over the flesh. Hear these words of Paul in the letter to the Romans, the eighth chapter and ninth verse, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." Take that whole passage, and be patient with me if I ask you to read it in the Revised Version, and notice particularly the spelling of the word spirit. You will find it written with a capital letter in certain places and with a small letter in others. After the most careful examination I am able to make, I am convinced our revisers have spelled the word correctly. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit," that is, your own spirit. If the Spirit of God dwells in a man that man is living on the spiritual side of his own nature, not on the fleshly side. I can live in the flesh or in the spirit. The difference between life high and noble and life low and ignoble is the difference between life in the spirit and life in the flesh. Life in the spirit means the spirit of man enthroned. Then is the flesh bruised and battered? Certainly not! What, then? The flesh is in its proper place, properly nourished, and forever more the servant of the spirit and never the master of the man. That is true life. Man can live in the flesh, answering every cry of his mouth and every appeal of his eye, and every itch of his hand, and every passion of his dusty nature. Where in such life is the spirit? Imprisoned, choked, starved, neglected. Where are you living? "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." If you have the Spirit of God, then you are living in the spirit and not in the flesh.

Then I turn to the Galatian letter, and find these words in the fifth chapter, "I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would." That is the statement of a principle. The flesh desires against the Spirit in order that you may not do the things that you would when you are following the Spirit. The Spirit desires against the flesh in order that you may not do the things you would if you are following the flesh. In the presence of the lust, the desire, the temptation of the flesh, what am I to do? "Walk by the Spirit." The only way of victory over the flesh is that of the reception of the Spirit and obedience to His direction. If we fight the flesh in the power of the flesh we shall be beaten by the flesh. If we have received this Spirit of God, Who takes our spiritual nature and puts it back on the throne, He says to us, Now, follow Me, walk by My rule, do the thing I suggest, obey Me, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

You say to me, Now you are becoming mystical. No, I never was more practical in all my life. The way of the Spirit is revealed in the

simplest things of life and in the simplest way possible. When did you yield to the flesh last? I ask for no public answer, no answer made to me in language. I ask for answer in your own heart. The moment you admit that you yielded you recognize the fact of allurements, temptations; and temptations and allurements recognize the fact that the voice of the Spirit was telling you the way, but you yielded to the flesh and obeyed it, and did not obey the voice of the Spirit. The Spirit said to you, Not that way home, but two miles round to be out of temptation! But you went that way home, and went down. Do not say that Christ cannot save you, and that the Spirit cannot keep you. It is a lie. If you will not obey Him He cannot. Of course, if you have never yet given yourself to Christ you do not know what it is to have the indwelling Spirit. The first thing necessary is the yielding of the life to Christ. Yield to Him. From the moment that is done, the Spirit is there the Mentor and Watcher, and infinitely more. Not the Mentor merely, but the Might you need. Not the Watcher only but the Worker able to deliver you. There is no man or woman here belonging to Christ who has fallen into known sin by yielding to the clamant cry of the flesh, but that if you are quite honest you will have to confess you did it wilfully and in disobedience to the call of the Spirit.

"The Spirit... shall quicken also your mortal body." That is not a reference to the resurrection. It is a present thing. The quickening of the mortal body means bringing the flesh into such subjection to the Spirit that the Spirit does master it. He breathes through the pulses of desire His coolness and His balm. He breaks the power of canceled sin and sets the prisoner free.

What I have desired to do supremely to-night—I know not whether I have succeeded—is to help every young Christian struggling in the presence of the pull of the flesh to understand that this fight is in the economy of your salvation, and that you are subjugating a recovered empire; and I want you to see that the only way in which you can have victory is that of obedience to the Spirit of God, Who interprets to your spirit the will of God. I want you to see, moreover, that if that be the only way it is a sure way; and so surely as we follow the leading and guidance and call of the Spirit of God resolutely we shall have victory not only over the world but over the flesh, and the flesh will become again an instrument of the Spirit. Our members yielded to Him, He will make use of them; the eyes of this poor earthly tabernacle may flash with the light of His love; the hands which have been ministers of iniquity may become ministers of His mercy to others; and the feet which have taken us into the highways and by-ways of evil may carry us, under the bidding of His love, on errands of mercy and loving kindness and help to the sons of men. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost? Yield yourselves, therefore, and your members as instruments of righteousness." So comes the victory, and more than victory, the redemption of the flesh and the realization in it of all the purpose of God.

256 - The Problems of the Religious Life: The Opposing Forces of the Religious Life—The Devil

The Problems of the Religious Life: The Opposing Forces of the Religious Life—
The Devil

In this study, as in the previous ones, our appeal is made wholly to the Scriptures of truth. It is impossible to make such appeal and at the same time to deny the personality of Satan. To deny the personality of Satan as revealed in the Scriptures is to have to believe that all the evil things with which we are familiar today, and all the dark and dastardly crimes of the centuries, have come out of human nature. This the Bible does not teach. There are two chapters at the commencement of the Bible and two at the end in which we have glimpses of this world unaffected by the devil. In the two first chapters he is not seen. In the last two chapters he is banished. Through the rest he is recognized and referred to as an actual personality of evil, and that to me is a most hopeful doctrine. If humanity is a part of God, then all murders and lies are part of the activity of God, and that is impossible of belief. I know it is not quite fashionable to talk about the devil today.

Men don't believe in a devil now,
As their fathers used to do;
They reject one creed because it's old
For another because it's new.
There's not a print of his cloven foot,
Nor a fiery dart from his bow,
To be found in the earth or air today!
At least—they declare it is so!
But who is it mixes the fatal draught
That palsies heart and brain
And loads the bier of each passing year
With its hundred thousand slain?
But who blights the bloom of the land today
With the fiery breath of hell?
If it isn't the devil that does the work,
Who does? Won't somebody tell?

Who dogs the steps of the toiling saint?
Who spreads the net for his feet?
Who sows the tares in the world's broad field
Where the Saviour sows His wheat?
If the devil is voted not to be,
Is the verdict therefore true?
Someone is surely doing the work
The devil was thought to do.
They may say the devil has never lived,
They may say the devil is gone;
But simple people would like to know
Who carries the business on.

I shall follow exactly the same method as I have followed in the previous two lectures, speaking first of the devil as he is revealed to us in Scripture; second, of the devil as opposed to religion; third, of the relation between the world, the flesh, and the devil; and, last, of the way of victory over the devil.

The personality of Satan is revealed as distinctly in the New Testament as is the personality of Jesus Christ. To deny the one is to deny the other. In casting out demons Christ perpetually addressed Himself to them as to definite personalities, possessing men, and all through that New Testament story it is quite evident that the personality of the devil was believed in.

But now what does the Bible teach concerning this personality? First of all, the Bible never suggests that Satan is self-existent; and if not self-existent, therefore created; and if created, created by God. God creates everything good, and nothing evil. "Do not I, the Lord, create evil?" is a distinct declaration of Scripture, but read the context, and it is at once seen that the word "evil" there means calamity, judgment on a guilty city. Therefore it is perfectly evident that, according to Bible teaching, Satan being not self-existent, but created, and that by God, was therefore created good. And if today he is evil, he has fallen from his original estate.

There was a time when the disciples came back to Jesus, and said, "Even the devils are subject to us," and there fell from the lips of the Master these very remarkable words, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven." There a whole history is condensed into a flash; and a great unveiling of truth comes almost with a blinding glare. The disciples said, Even the demons are subject to us, and Christ's answer in effect was this, You need not be surprised that demons are subject unto you in My name. Satan, himself, the prince of the hosts of wickedness, the lord of the whole empire of sin, is not enthroned, he is fallen from heaven. It is testimony borne by the lips of Christ to a primal fall; to the fact that Satan is one of the principalities, one of the powers, an angel, but an angel fallen as lightning from heaven.

There is very little doubt that Peter heard that word of Jesus, and when I turn to his epistles I find in the course of an argument he declared, "God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." That is an inspired declaration of the fact that God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down, committed them to pits of darkness. Jude, in his brief epistle, gives us a still more detailed and remarkable account of the primal fall of angels. Here these words, "Angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation." The Authorized Version reads "their first estate." Which is the better translation I cannot tell. I should be inclined to change them both and read, "Angels which kept not true to first principles, left their proper habitation or residence, or sphere, or orbit, He hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." There is nothing detailed in all this, but there is quite sufficient to reveal all that it is necessary for us to know. It is the story of a fall of angels led by one. Jesus named the one in the forefront, the leader, "I beheld Satan as lightning fallen from heaven." Peter writes in the plural, "God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness." Jude went a little more carefully into the matter and declared that they "kept not their own principality." They were not true to the principle of their own life, they left their proper orbit, habitation, residence, sphere, but they did not escape from Divine government when they so fell. He kept them "in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

What was the sin? Who shall dare to say? In Milton's "Paradise Lost" we have splendid speculation as to what the sin was; and in all probability more than speculation.

Satan is never spoken of as having any independent existence. He is never spoken of as having sovereign dominion. The Bible never suggests that he has successfully cast off the government of God: He is in rebellion against it, but still held by it. That is the meaning of the petition in the Lord's prayer, "Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil." It is a recognition of the fact that the very forces of evil in the spiritual realm are still under the government of God. To imagine that the Bible teaches that Satan is a personality in the universe in rebellion against God successfully, is to contradict entirely what the Bible perpetually teaches.

Now notice what this means. The devil is not omnipotent. The devil is not omniscient. The devil is not omnipresent. Let me begin

with the last first. The Bible never suggests the omnipresence of the devil. Someone says, The devil is here. How do you know? You have no proof of it. It is impossible for the devil to be in London and in New York at the same moment. To admit the creation of angels is to admit limitation and location. Whether you think of angels fallen or unfallen, I pray you remember none of them are omnipresent. They come, they go. They guard and watch the saints, for "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation." So also with Satan and all the fallen angels, none of them are omnipresent. The number of them is so great that in every assembly, and over every man, some of them watch in order to destroy. But Satan himself, marshaling, guiding, commanding the hosts of spiritual wickedness, can never be in two places at once. Swifter than the lightning's flash, quicker than the thought of man can travel, he may encircle the globe, but he is not omnipresent. He is personal only in the measure in which any angel is personal. He is personal only in the measure in which man is personal.

Neither is he omniscient, knowing everything, seeing the end from the beginning, as God is able to do. Far more subtle in his wisdom, far more keen in his intuitions, far cleverer than man has ever been, but certainly not seeing all the ultimate issue from the commencement. And assuredly he is not omnipotent, not having all power. Go to the book of Job, and put all that wonderful story into brief words in this respect. The devil, full of subtlety, and malice, and determination to spoil the work of God in a human soul, could nevertheless not touch a single hair upon the back of a single camel belonging to Job until he had asked God's leave.

The protest against dualism is out of place when you are thinking of the devil, according to Scripture teaching. The protest may be a very excellent one according to much misinterpretation of Scripture teaching which has possessed or obsessed the minds of men. If you once deny the existence of the devil in the universe because God is all and in all, that is to postulate a doctrine of the universe which is unscriptural. That doctrine must equally deny the existence of man. Is man a personality? If you admit that he is, then you may also admit the possibility of a personality in the universe other than God, created by God, who in some way is out of harmony with God, is indeed in antagonism against God, and yet who is not coequal with God in power, or in knowledge, or in presence.

Now, for a moment take the other side of this matter, and think of his power as revealed in the scriptures of truth. Do not forget that he is spiritual in essence. All the angels are spirits, flames of fire, and Satan, one of the hierarchy of heaven, fallen, is a spirit. If it be true, as Tennyson says, that "Spirit with spirit can meet," referring to man's possibility of approaching God, it is equally true that the devil as spirit and man as spirit can meet, and in that fact lies the tremendous power of Satan, and of all those hosts that he commands, the army of fallen angels that are spiritual in essence.

Then also he is subtle in method. "Subtle" seems a weak word to use in connection with the devil. Paul describes the devil as an "angel of light." Peter describes the devil as a "roaring lion." Jesus refers to him as the "prince of this world." Each description suggests a different method, adopted according to the occasion, and according to the purpose—transforming himself into an angel of light to deceive if it be possible the very elect, appearing in awful ferocity and fierceness as a roaring lion to overwhelm the timid and afraid; the prince of the world offering to man all the kingdoms for a moment's homage, coming to men according to the method necessary to entrap them and spoil them, and harm them. This is awful subtlety.

Then, again, he is revealed in Scripture as being strenuous in enterprise and stupendous in execution. He is the leader of vast hosts. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places." That is a graphic description of this army of spiritual forces fighting against everything: that is in harmony with the will of God. Those of us who accept the teaching of Scripture as final, recognize the place of angels fallen and unfallen. At the head of fallen angels, marshaling all, is the great head and center, the mightiest of them, the wisest of them, the most wonderful of them, his might, his wisdom, and his wonder prostituted in the universe of God to the purpose of fighting against God and yet forevermore held in check and never allowed to pass the limit of the government of God.

Now consider what is taught in Scripture concerning the devil as opposed to religion. All I have attempted to say concerning him tonight as revealed in Scripture makes it patent that he must be and is the enemy of religion. Let us again appeal to Scripture for his character in relation to man. Jesus said concerning him, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and stood not in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof." A lie is essential evil. Jesus said, "I am the Truth," that is, essential good. A lie is the direct opposite. The original lie in human history was a denial of the creature's relation to God, and a suggestion in the heart of man that God was hard, unkind, capricious, prompting man to rebellion against Him. If I come to the writings of the Apostle John I read that he thus describes Satan, "The evil one." That is a term that describes him absolutely. He is the very embodiment of sin. Let me take you to three other descriptive words in order that we may see how he is opposed to religion. He is described as "the god of this world," as "the prince of the world," as "the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience." Put these three descriptions together and you will see that in this wonderful personality of evil, mastering the hosts of evil, there is the exact antithesis of all we know of God—One, "God the Father"; the other, "the god of this world"; one, "God the Son"; the other, "the prince of the world"; one, "God the Holy Ghost"; the other, "the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience." Thus in this personality there reside all the things that are opposed to the things in God. In God the Father there is essential government, in "the god of this world"

there is disorder, evil. In God the Son there is grace, and in the devil there is everything opposed to grace. In God the Holy Spirit there is guidance for the sons of men and for the world: the devil is forevermore leading men away from the true path out into the desert and out into darkness. He is not coequal with God, but in the measure of his personality he is antagonistic to God, to His government, to His grace, to His guidance, forevermore trying to lead men astray.

"The god of this world." The world is devil-governed until this hour. Go to the homes of darkness in the far distant places of the world, and you will see that the fact is awfully patent. Is London governed by our God? Is love the master principle of human life? If not, then what? This. It is each for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. Men are under the government of Satan. Through all that great and remarkable antithesis the devil is seen, not coequal with God, not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent, but a fallen seraph, far more wondrous in wisdom than any son of man, with more subtle and marvelous power than man has ever yet possessed, marshaling the great hosts of fallen angels, and fighting against all the things that are in the will of God.

It becomes evident that he is the active and awful enemy of any man who begins to live the religious life in the true sense of the word. God loves man, and therefore the devil hates man because the devil is against God. God loves Christ in man, and therefore the devil hates Christ in man, and will prevent, if he can, the outworking of the Christ life in human character. Christ's mission was "to destroy the works of the devil." The devil's mission is to prevent that, and to destroy the works of Christ. If I am beginning to live the life that is obedient to God's rule, the life of loyalty to Christ, the life in which the purposes of Christ and the plans of Christ and the power of Christ are present, then immediately I become one against whom the devil, either in actual person or through those who serve under him, is at war. The young Christian asks, How is it I am being tempted as I was never tempted before? There is the answer. Because the moment in which you turned your life back again toward God you became one against whom the devil is at war. That is the declared fact in the passage to which I have made so many references, "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers." This is the terrible fact, and the man who does not face the fact is a fool. Our enemy patiently waits for the moment of weakness and is utterly merciless. It was a terrific word written in the book of Job, "Hast thou considered My servant Job?" There is a whole revelation of the devil's method in that word "considered"—watching for the opportunity of weakness and the place where to break in. The chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and the castle is only as strong as its least guarded door, and the devil is watching for the weak link, and for the least guarded door. There are men he will never tempt with a glass of wine, because a glass of wine is no temptation to them. Your least guarded door, your weakest link, pride, or passion, or lust, the intellectual, the emotional, the volitional, he is watching, mark the awfulness of the figure, watching. "Hast thou considered My servant Job."

It is against this enemy that we have to fight. That leads me to a brief word on the devil in relation to the world and the flesh. These are the media through which he acts, and in which he hides. You can find only one great occasion in all human history when the devil came out into the open. That was when in the wilderness he met Jesus Christ. He was not in the open in the Garden of Eden. He did not for a moment suggest that man should fall down and worship him there. What he said was, Please yourself! He suggested that man should leave the first principles of his life as the devil had left his, and depart from his proper habitation as the devil had de-parted from his. Is not that the primal sin? Is not that the sin of Lucifer, the son of the morning. Is not that the heart and center of all evil, self-pleasing? The devil hid himself. So he does today. In the middle ages the devil was portrayed by artists as with horns and hoofs. If you paint him so today no one will know him. Marie Corelli, in her Sorrows of Satan, gives her last picture of the devil going into the House of Commons. If he ever makes any appearance in London that is far nearer the truth than the horns and hoofs. That is part of his strategy, part of his subtlety. He is hiding today in half our theology and in half our new-fangled philosophies. We are told today that man has to fight against the beast in him, that there are angel and beast in him, and that if the angel in him will fight hard enough he will trample the beast under his feet. There is an element of truth in all that. But what has turned man into a beast? Lurking behind the flesh, making it the medium of his suggestion, is the devil. Once I say he was dragged into the open, and advisedly I say dragged. If the devil could have escaped that ordeal he would have. Jesus was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, led of the Spirit in the wilderness while being tempted of the devil. God dragged the devil out into the open. It is an appalling picture of the subtlety and power of the devil, but it also reveals the fact that all the artifice and subtlety of the devil is helpless when a man stands square in the will of God, and makes it the master passion of his life. Take that story of the temptation and consider it carefully, and you will see the limitation of the devil. He has only three avenues along which he can ever approach the citadel of man's soul, and they are all revealed there. The real enemy that we have to fight is not the beast in us, but the devil behind the beast. It is not the flesh and the world but the devil's misrepresentation of the world: "The god of this world hath blinded their eyes." The arch enemy, the master enemy, the one real foe of their religious life, is the devil and all the hosts that he commands.

Are we to be defeated by this foe? The apostle in the passage I read to you recognizes the conflict, "our wrestling" It is very definite conflict. We are to put on the whole panoply of God, we are to stand, to withstand, and having done all to stand. So that victory is possible according to the apostle's outlook. If you ask me the way of victory I take you back again to a passage which puts the whole truth into simplest form. James said, "Submit to God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Submit! There is deep reason for this. It gets down to the root of the whole matter. The devil's sin was rebellion, and his method with man is to propose rebellion,

and the moment a man submits to God he crosses the devil's plan and purpose. The idea is that of a soldier. Submission is the first law of success in warfare. There can be no ultimate victory save under discipline and submission.

What next, "Resist." After you have submitted to God there will be conflict, but the conflict will be under orders, under the command of One Who knows every method of the enemy, Who holds in His own hand the reins of ultimate government. So that the conflict will no longer be in unexpected places. We sang about the devil being ambushed, but God knows where he is ambushed. The man who is really submitted to God starts out to real difficult conflict, strenuous fight, but he is under the command of One Who is never caught unawares, Who knows the whole field, the whole plan of the foe, Who never lost a battle, and Who never will, Whose soldier never will, so long as he obeys, and so long as he follows. Mark James's confident assertion, "Submit to God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you." That is the way of victory. I cannot add anything to it. Indeed, I am inclined to think that in any attempt to add I am in great danger of subtracting from the force and power of the simple statement. Submit and resist. Some man says, but I fail and fall. I hear the voice and I yield, I sin; why do I sin? Because you have not obeyed this method, Submit, and resist. I have known men who have submitted seriously, earnestly, sincerely, but they have fallen. Why? They did not add to submission resistance. I have known other men who have resisted, who are resisting, and they say, How is it I am beaten? I have put up this fight against the devil, and I am down again. You did not begin your resistance by submitting. If a man submits and never fights, God will not, cannot, lead him to victory. If a man fights without having submitted, he has not put himself under discipline, under orders, and he will be beaten. Or you submitted but never fought. The word of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews is very striking, "You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." You submitted but there was no resistance, you did not burn your bridges behind you. You locked the whisky up in a cupboard in case you should need it some day, and you were drunk in a month. There was no fight. You kept the impure picture in your own private cupboard and you were back in your devilish licentiousness within a week. You have got to put up a fight. Put yourself under control, act under the Captain's orders. Submit now, and resist the moment the devil meets you. That way lies victory. The old quaint hymn which we never sing now is nevertheless true if it be rightly interpreted:

Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.

I said, when it is rightly interpreted. If you get on your knees and do not fight, Satan is not at all afraid of you. If you know what it is to get to your knees and gather strength, and then fight, all the forces of the fallen intelligences are not wise enough, and all their might is not strong enough, to overcome you. Submit, resist. Let the two words abide with us as we part.

257 - The Problems Of The Religious Life: Is The Religious Life Possible?

The Problems Of The Religious Life: Is The Religious Life Possible?

This is the question of one who desires to live the religious life, but who is afraid. I do not think that a man who sees nothing attractive in the religious ideal will ever ask that question. It is rather the question of one who considers that the teachings of Jesus constitute, to borrow the great Roman Catholic phrase, counsels of perfection.

The question is the result of conviction: first, of the ideal requirement of God, that what God requires of a man is the perfecting of his life; and, second, of the strength of the forces that oppose. Such a man, standing between the ideal and the opposing forces, asks, Is it possible to be what God would have me be in the presence of these forces that are against me?

The question is not only the result of a conviction, it is the result of doubt. It is the result of doubt as to the power of Christ. I am not saying that such doubt is sin. It is honest, sincere, but it is doubt of the power of Christ when a man says: There is the ideal, here are the forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil; you, Christian preacher and Christian people, tell me that Christ is able; well, honestly I am not sure! It is doubt of the power of Christ.

Sometimes the doubt, while being of the same nature, is of another accent. It is doubt of the salvability of man. That is an awkward word, an old theological word. We can do very well without it, but we cannot do without the idea that it suggests. Doubt as to whether it is ever possible for a man such as the inquirer feels himself to be to reach the height of the Divine purpose and plan. Can I ever be what God wants me to be? Is it possible for such as I am? I say it in order to touch a sympathetic chord in the heart of those who are asking the question, there are hours in my life today when that doubt comes to me. I can believe for other men more easily than I can believe for myself. Sometimes it seems far more possible for God to deal with other men than to deal with me. There are hours of heart-searching and examination, when I ask myself, Is it possible that I shall ever be what God wants me to be?

Our answer to the inquiry is, first, that the Bible teaches that the religious life is possible, and also that human experience agrees with this teaching of the Bible.

Let us take that general statement and deal with it from two standpoints. I first affirm the possibility of living the religious life by

declaring that in the economy of God it is made possible. Second, I affirm that because it is made possible in the economy of God it is possible in the experience of man.

The religious life is possible in the economy of God because of the nature of man, and because of the nature of God. In a previous address we came to the conclusion that man has something to do with God because God has everything to do with man. In other words, that man is in nature such as to make possible the religious life, that God is in nature such as to make possible the religious life on the part of man.

When I speak now of the nature of man I am not referring to it as I find it today. I am speaking rather of essential human nature, human nature according to the Divine creation. Such human nature we know only as we know Jesus of Nazareth, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," was the Divine word, according to the Genesis story. Where is this being? I cannot find him in London. I cannot find him the world over. I cannot find him in human history, read it where I will. Yes, I find him, but not as God made him, not as God meant him to be, not according to the pattern. Once and once only I meet Him in the process of the centuries. In lonely, superlative, imperial splendor, one figure rises above all the rest, the archetypal Man, that which was in the heart of God when He said, "Let Us make man." I am kin of that Man. My humanity is His humanity. I prefer to put it that way than to say His humanity is my humanity. My humanity is His humanity. In Him I see most clearly that man has essential capacity for the religious life. Man is capable of knowing God. Man is capable of loving God. Man is capable of obeying God. Let me examine these matters a little more carefully.

Man is capable of knowing God. There is in every man the capacity for the knowledge of God. If you question that, let me begin upon a very low plane. I will come to the very lowest of all. The consciousness of the supernatural is in every human being, the consciousness of that which is over the natural, above the natural, beyond the natural. That consciousness expresses itself in some of the races of men as we know them today in the strangest ways, in ways that we may look upon with contempt. Here is a man in the heart of Africa who has traveled hundreds of miles driving cattle before him to trade with a white trader, and suddenly in consternation he refuses to trade. Why? Because he finds out he has left behind him what we call his fetish, a little piece of stick, a bit of leather, an absolutely worthless thing, but it is that man's symbol of the supernatural, of that which lies beyond the material. That poor African says, I cannot trade with you, I must go back; and he will tramp back, hundreds of miles, in order to obtain his fetish. And we laugh at him! I would that people who believe in God had always the same honesty of conviction. The trouble is that a great many professing Christian people will trade cattle without God when the African will not trade cattle without his fetish. That is a low level of consciousness of the supernatural, ignorant and foolish, and the cultured man laughs at it, pities it, holds it in contempt; but it is evidence of an instinct which goes far out beyond the base, and beyond the material. Let me put the same thought in other words: every man knows the infinite! You deny me that at once. You say, No, that is what no man knows. Finite man cannot know the infinite. What is the infinite? Your answer is that the infinite is that which has no boundaries, no limitations. In that answer you reveal the fact that you have thought it; and in your thinking of it you know it. No dog knows the infinite. The moment in which you have grasped the conception of that which is limitless, boundless, as to time or place, your mind has encompassed that which you can never understand, fully and finally, but you know it. Listen to the word of the old writer, "God hath set eternity in their heart." That is the capacity for knowing God Himself. Jesus said, "This is the life of eternity, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Him Whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." I am not suggesting for a single moment that all men know God. I am affirming that in every man there is capacity for knowing God. Man can talk to God and hear Him speak, hold communion with Him and know in the deepest of his inmost soul the fact of His being. Man is made for God. That is the light that lighteth every man. It is the strange, mystic, inward capacity for God which is of the very nature of God.

So far I have only spoken of the lowest evidences of light. What is the highest? "Our fellowship is with the Father." The man of the world is just as ready to smile at the fetish of the African; but his smiling does not alter the absolute fact that in this house there are men and women who know experimentally the meaning of that word, "Our fellowship is with the Father," men and women who still, to use the figurative language of the ancient writing, talk to God face to face as a man speaketh with his friend. Although you deny the assertion, you cannot deny the light that sometimes lingers on the face, the light that never was on sea or land, the light that made the face of your mother gloriously beautiful in spite of all your cynical skepticism. Men and women hold fellowship with God. I am not describing that fellowship, but only affirming that the capacity for it exists.

There is also capacity for love. The lowest form of that capacity in religious application is selfish love of safety, the thing that makes a man say, "What shall I do to be saved?" That is the lowest form of love. The highest is the selfless love of sacrifice. Here is the lowest form of love to God, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." You say, That is very high. It is indeed infinitely higher than any other love we know of, but it is yet selfish love, quite proper, perfectly right, but self-centered. God generates it in the heart by dying for men, therefore it is worth generating, but it is the lowest form. If you want to know the highest form of that love here it is, "I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake." That is the ultimate form of love for God. Every man is capable of this love, of this going out of the soul in adoration. Give any promiscuous audience today one hymn to sing—whether North, South, East, or West; in city, or village, on land or sea, I care not—you will find that hymn will touch a responsive chord in the heart, even though it be forgotten a moment afterwards;

Jesu, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly.

I never hear that hymn sung by a great crowd of men, women and children—hundreds of whom sing it without understanding it—but that I am conscious for the moment they are singing it on wings uplifted. Without their knowing it, they are giving supreme evidence by that emotion of man's ability to love God. There is capacity in man for love of God.

Then there is capacity in every human being for obedience. The lowest manifestation of it is duty, and the highest is delight. I say the lowest is duty. Duty is high, noble, beautiful, but it is the lowest relationship that the soul bears to God. We have been told often, and rightly, of the nobility of duty; but after all is said and done, we have never entered into the highest heights of spiritual experience until we have canceled the word "duty" and substituted the word "delight." "I delight to do Thy will, O my God"—that is infinitely more than duty. Duty, yes, but duty transfigured on the holy mount until it becomes delight, the delight of doing the will of another. The capacity for that is in every human being.

Thus to see man in the essential fact of his nature, capable of knowing God, of loving Him, and of obeying Him, is to be convinced that it is possible for man to live the religious life.

That, however, is finally demonstrated by a consideration of the nature of God. What is the nature of God? You may express the whole fact in one word, and I choose so to do, and then to take two thoughts in elaboration thereof.

"God is love." That sounds very commonplace because we have said it so often. It has become so familiar that no preacher can say it and hope to move an audience by the declaration of it, unless as the poor sounding words fall from his lips they are baptized into power by the presence of the Holy Ghost. "God is love." Love is not attribute. Love is essence. Love is to everything else in God what character in a man is to the characteristics of a man. Do you ever write a character for a man? Some man has left your employ, and you say you will give him his character. You cannot write his character. You do not know his character. You can write two or three characteristics, you cannot write his character. You may have a very accurate estimate of a man's character. That estimate is formed by the observation of his characteristics, the different expressions of his essential nature. As are the characteristics of a man to his character so are the attributes of Deity to His essence. Mercy, beneficence, holiness, righteousness, are all expressions of love.

The religious life is the life that is bound to God, the life that is obedient to God. Is it possible? It is possible because He, being Love, seeks on the part of man for such action and attitude as is for the best and highest for man himself. What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever. My dear old friend, Margaret Bottome, the founder of the order of King's Daughters, told me of a child who was asked that question and answered it accurately, and then the teacher said, I wonder if you can tell me what the chief end of God is! To glorify man and enjoy him forever, answered the child. Rarely have theologians come so near the truth! What glorifies God in me? All the best that can ever come to me. It is when I reach the highest in my own life, when my intellect takes in the widest sweep and most accurately knows the details; when my emotional nature is under the sway of the mightiest love; when my volitional nature is most full of authority because most perfectly under control; that God is glorified in me, because He is Love. He never forgives in man anything that harms the man. What is that which you have to give up to be a Christian? Something which is spoiling you. God is as fierce as lightning against it. Why? Because it harms you. At the back of the thunder are the tears. Behind the awful fire is the tremendous love. If only we can get to know God we shall see the possibility of the religious life, because we shall find that He is Love and is set upon our well-being.

Take out of that great essential and final fact these two matters. First, because God is Love He is patient; and if you want to understand that, think of the relationship between father and child. Second, because God is Love He is reasonable; and if you want to understand that, think of the ideal relationship between the perfect king and the subject of such a king. Patient. A father is interested in the development of his child, and therefore is patient with the feeblest effort of the child toward the ultimate perfecting; and is gentle in his method. The feeblest little child in your home is the one who interests you most. You are interested in it as you see it growing up, developing, and, oh, the delight of your heart at the strange, mysterious sounds that it makes when it tries to talk. Mothers can always understand the baby language. I will tell you something if you will not tell the mothers. I do not believe babies say half the things mothers say they say! But that is a man's ignorance. If I have got some of you back home, face to face with your youngest child, that is what I wanted. Do you know that what you feel toward that child is in kind what God feels toward us? There is nothing elegant in the walk of a child before it can walk; but is it not the most beautiful thing in the whole world? I have been watching a wee bit lassie trying to walk on my lawns at Mundesley. There was nothing elegant in it, but there was poetry in it, music in it. All that I feel about my bairn is a dim shadow of what God feels about me. There is nothing elegant in my walk as a Christian man. It is clumsy, awkward, bungling in the sight of heaven, but "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Patience with the feeblest effort issues in gentleness in method. That was a great word of the psalmist, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." What is gentleness? George Matheson once wrote a little article in one of the religious periodicals. I cut it out and still have it somewhere. I cannot remember the exquisite, poetic wording of it, but the thought of it was with me now. Said George

Matheson, we speak of gentleness and often do not understand it. We speak of the gentleness of the brook as it ripples through the summer fields. There is no gentleness in the brook. It is going as hard as it can, and all the strength it has it is exerting to make the pebbles rattle. You may speak of gentleness when you stand beside the mighty sea on a summer day, and when in its mighty strength you see it kiss the shore and bathe the feet of the child who is paddling. Gentleness is strength held in reserve. God's gentleness makes men great. Think what He could do and think what He does. Think how He lays His hand upon us in our feverishness as tenderly as the sunbeam falls on the face of a sick child. The sun could blast to a cinder, but it kisses to health. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." That is God.

Then there is the reasonableness of God. He has perfect knowledge of every one of us and He demands only that we fulfil the real purpose of our own life. He never asks anything that we are unable to give Him. The trouble is that we set up false standards and imagine they are God's standards. The first great word of the prophet to the sinning people of old was, "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord." He never makes demands upon man that man is not equal to answering.

By the nature of man who is capable of knowing God, of loving God, and of obeying God; and by the nature of God Who is love, and has patience, and is reasonable, I submit to you that it is possible to live the religious life.

In conclusion, let us mark the conditions. Look at man as he is. His nature is perverted. He does not know God. He does not love God. He does not obey God. You say, Ah, now you are coming to the real difficulties. These are the real sources of the question, Is the religious life possible? Very well, let us face them. Man does not know God. The carnal mind does not know Him, neither can it. Man does not love God. He is afraid of Him, hates to hear His name, escapes from the man who talks about Him, avoids the places of His worship, and taboos the subject of religion at his dinner table. Man does not obey God. He does not take God into account when he goes into business.

Yet to such men there come voices of truth concerning God, visions of the ideal concerning themselves. Then they find not only that their nature is perverted, but that it is paralyzed, and each exclaims, "When I would do good evil is present with me." Is the religious life possible to a man like that?

The answer to the inquiry now is the answer of the Christian evangel. First of all, how does God answer that inquiry? I go back to one of our earlier subjects. Can a just God forgive sins? Without going again over the arguments, I repeat the affirmation that He can. He can be just and the Justifier of him who believes in Jesus. If that once be accepted I want you to see what it leads to. God can pardon sin. What does that mean? The pardon of sin means a new vision of God. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." In the moment in which a man's sins are forgiven and he knows his sins forgiven he sees God as he never saw Him before. You can listen to me if you like quite theoretically, but I make this affirmation on the basis of experience and testimony. There has fallen asleep this week a man whom I loved with my whole heart, a man who has been an inspiration to me in this chapel over and over again as I have preached. Ned Wright, as you know full well, forty years ago was a prize-fighter and a burglar, and, as he himself would have admitted, just about as low down as it was possible for a man to get. I cannot tell you all I am thinking about him. I have seen him sit over yonder on Wednesday afternoons, and in the Institute Hall, as I have lectured on John's Gospel, and on no face has there been a more glorious light; and when one came to speak of God, and the love of God, and the ways of God, his face shone with the brightness of an angel. When did all that begin? Forty years ago, when he knew his sins forgiven. Up to that moment he had feared God and hated God's people, and kept away from them; but with the forgiveness of sins came a vision of God and he came to love Him. Have you had that vision of God? It was that vision which made Scheffler write:

O God, of good the unfathomed sea,
Who would not give his heart to Thee?

That is where the religious life begins. The forgiveness of sins always means a new vision of God. You have thought of God as a King, a Potentate, mighty, awful, terrible, exacting; but He says in your deepest soul, when you have put your trust in Him, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and you find He is tender, gracious, loving. Out of that knowledge comes the religious life.

Pardon not only means a new vision, it also means as a result of it, love. To see God is to love Him. Then it means desire to obey Him, for to love God is to desire to please Him. Mark the order and see how everything comes out of that first fact of forgiveness. Man knows his sins. The forgiving word is spoken in the innermost recesses of his soul as he submits himself to Christ. He sees that God is love and he loves. Then he desires to serve and obey. That is the passion of the religious life.

The answer of God is not merely pardon. It is power immediate and progressive. The moment in which a man yields himself to Jesus Christ and receives pardon of sin power is at his disposal. It does not work mechanically, however; it must be appropriated. Whereas there is all power at my disposal, it is only at my disposal as I make adjustment. God puts power at the disposal of the soul that trusts in Him, but we have to make contact, to obey, to put ourselves in line with His condition.

That leads me to the last word I want to say. What are the conditions on which the religious life is possible, in view of the pardon

God gives, and in view of the power He provides? First, an act of abandonment to Jesus Christ. Then an attitude of abiding in Christ. There must be a moment in which I take my life and hand it over to Christ, God's Son and my Saviour, sent forth from the Father for the doing of this work. After that I must abide in that attitude of abandonment. I am not saved today because I believed twenty years ago. I am saved now because I believe now. There must be not merely the act by which the life begins, but the abiding by which the life continues.

The religious life today in the midst of present limitation is the life which has found its true center, and which is adjusting the circumference to that center. There is a great deal to be done, a great deal to be learned, many disciplines to be passed through, a great deal to be accomplished ere the work is done. There are tenses in the Christian life. It is perfectly accurate to say we were saved then, pointing to a date, an hour, a place. It is perfectly accurate to say, We are being saved, the continuous process. It is quite accurate to say "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." The final stage is yet ahead.

In the presence of limitation, the life religious is the life which has found its center in God, and which through struggles, through strain and conflict and stress, is adjusting the circumference to that one center.

The psalmist said, "My soul followeth hard after Thee: Thy right hand upholdeth me." I sometimes think, in some senses, that is the most wonderful verse in the Bible. "Followeth hard" is one word in the Hebrew. It quite literally means, impinges upon Thee, clings, adheres, abides fast, clings! It is the strongest of words, indicating tremendous effort. Now listen, "Thy right hand upholdeth me." The Hebrew word "upholdeth" means sustains, holds fast. I can take these two Hebrew words and translate with perfect accuracy, "My soul clings fast to Thee: Thy right hand clings fast to me." No violence is thereby done to the text. That is the real thought. That is the religious life. The soul clingeth fast—conscious of perils, the world, the flesh and the devil, all the forces that are against it—clinging fast to God; and all the while this great assurance, "Thy right hand upholdeth me." Remember the religious life is life centered in God, and occupied earnestly, definitely, about the business of putting the circumference into true harmony with the center. That is not done in half an hour. It will never be complete until in the rapture of the morning of the second advent He will fashion anew even the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory. I cannot yet be perfect at the circumference, but I can be right at the center.

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The Problems Of The Religious Life: Is The Religious Life Necessary?

I confess to a great sense of difficulty in approaching this subject, resulting from the obviousness of the reply from my standpoint. To me the question is as though one should inquire into the physical realm, Is it necessary to breathe, to eat, to act? Nevertheless, the question is asked, and if we are to deal with it we need to get at the viewpoint of the man who asks it. We must understand his attitude of mind. The question moves on a much lower plane than the one we discussed last week. In that there was recognition of the beauty of the ideal, and the only question was one of fear whether it were indeed possible to live that life. In the inquiry that we are taking tonight the ultimate perfection of the religious life is not so much in sight as the conditions upon which that ultimate perfection can be realized. I think if a man says, Well, after all, is it necessary? he is not referring to that highest ideal of the religious life, that ultimate requirement of God that man should be perfect in his own being. He is rather standing face to face with the conditions which are imposed when a man is asked to give himself to Christ and to begin the truly religious life.

If a man is to live the religious life he must submit to authority, the one true final authority of the will of God. He must renounce all the things which he knows to be out of harmony with the will of God. It is necessary for him to cultivate the habits of the religious life; he must give himself to prayer, to the study of the Word, to perpetual watchfulness, and to service on behalf of others, without which the religious life is never possible. There must be discipline and diligence. When a man faces these conditions he asks, Is the religious life necessary? I think what he means is, "Suppose I decline, what will happen?" As I understand it, that is the question that we have to face. Such inquiry involves the necessity for restatement of the positive values of the religious life. The positive is the revelation of the negative. In proportion as we see what these values are we shall see what is the result of living the irreligious life.

I propose to confine our consideration to the individual. Taking a human life, and believing it to be spiritual in essence, I want to think of it in its continuity, but recognize the line of division at death. So in two parts I shall ask this question. Is the religious life necessary for the life that now is? Is the religious life necessary for the life that is to come?

That is a very old-fashioned method of dealing with this thing, but I know of no other possible. I put the dividing line there simply because it is there. The fact of death must be admitted and taken into account. It is sometimes affirmed that we have no right to appeal to the fear of man by preaching about death. The fear of man? I do not appeal to the fear of man when I speak about death. Are you afraid of death? Why? No man ought to be afraid of death. Why do you not like to hear about death? I will tell you, in the words of inspiration, "The sting of death is sin." That is why you do not like to hear about death. So I keep that dividing line which is quite a simple and natural one, and one that we all have to admit.

What are the values of religion in the life that now is? First of all, let me speak of the principle of the life of religion, then of its method, and so lead to the results of the religious life.

First, then, as to the principle. What is the principle of the religious life? The mastery of the will of God. There are very many things I am not proposing to deal with which nevertheless must be taken for granted, all those necessary matters which cannot be neglected if men would come into proper relationship to that will, "Ye must be born again," "Repent and believe." All these are simple terms that indicate how man is to readjust life, when it is out of harmony with God. The ultimate principle is that of the recognition of the sovereignty of God, and the beneficence of His will, followed by the abandonment of all other mastery, and the acceptance of that will as the perpetual, unceasing, and ever applicable law of the life.

The method of the religious life is that of obedience to that will discovered and accepted. What does obedience mean? Inquiry, consent, activity. Perhaps that is not quite clear. Let me pause with my words for a moment. First there must ever be inquiry. For a man to say that he accepts the will of God as the master principle of his life, and then having said so in the sanctuary or in conversation, to go out and take up his business, or to make a friendship, or to decide on where to spend his holiday, or to select a house, without ever seeking to know the will of God, is the utterest nonsense, and indeed is blasphemy. There must be inquiry. The religious life in its method asks what is God's will for me here and now, today and in this matter? I said here recently that the blasphemy of the man who prays, "Thy Kingdom come," and never seeks the Kingdom, never submits to it, is more perilous than the blasphemy of the profane swearer in the slum. Someone has written questioning that. I stand by the declaration. The man in the slum was born in the atmosphere of swearing, has always sworn, does not know he is swearing. I have heard some such men in the early days of their Christianity swear in prayer, but there was no blasphemy in it. For any man to say, "Thy Kingdom come," or to recite the creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," and then to refuse to submit his life to Him, for six days in the week, is blasphemy of the worst kind. The religious life inquires, waits for the voice, seeks to know. When the light comes the will consents to it and inspires actual obedience. Until the consciousness is borne in upon the soul, that this or that is the will of God, the religious man never moves hand or foot.

What are the results of such principle and method? What are the issues of making the will of God the master principle, of following the method, of making inquiry after the will, consenting to it, and rendering it active obedience? In such life there is, first of all, realization of fellowship with God. The man, woman, yea, or little child, who, not able to state the thing, not able to formulate perfectly the principle of life, nevertheless is submitted to God—that man, woman, little child, knows what fellowship with God means. The day is not gone when God speaks in the deepest soul of man, woman, or child if they will but listen. The consciousness of fellowship is the first result.

That fellowship means the appropriation of all forces. I believe that word of Paul in his Roman letter, "To them that love God all things work together for good," means not merely that God is laying His hand on all things and taking the keen edge off them and blunting that which would hurt, and making everything come right at last. The statement is not that all things will be compelled, but that all things work together for good. All forces are at the disposal of the man who is living in harmony with God. All the forces of life are at the disposal of the man who is living in harmony with God, so that the very things which harm one man help to make the man whose life is homed and centered in God. This means in its final statement, that the religious life is life more abundant. Life more abundant means not that there is superadded to your human life a life of another nature, but that your own human life comes to its fulfilment and realization. When a man is living the religious life whatever is in him by nature is glorified, fulfilled. He comes into possession of what he is. There is no more significant word, and yet no word that we more lightly consider, than this word of Jesus, "Whosoever shall lose his life shall find it," not another life, not an angel's life, not the life of some other person, but his own life. It is when a man is living the life of right relationship to God, and, consequently, is living the life in which all the forces under the government of God minister to his making, that he comes to fulfilment of his own life. What is in you? Someone went into the studio of David Cox—or one of the artists, I have heard the story told of several—and, looking at one of his pictures, said to him, I never saw anything like that in nature. The artist answered, No, you only wish you could. Have you that vision, the artist's vision? Can you stand by the sea, and, looking out over the waters, see glories which I cannot see? Is your life homed in God, responsive to His volition? Then that vision is not dimmed. You will see, as you never saw, that the light of God in your inmost soul illumines all your outlook on nature. What is in you—music? I love to hear music, but I am no musician. I always come to decision as to whether a piece of music is classical or not by the blackness of the page! That is not your outlook on music. You hear symphonies. If you are right with God you will be more keen in your appreciation of music than you ever were in your life. I am not talking in figurative language. I am talking about actual music. The touch of a godly man on a harp will bring out finer music than any other touch. A human life is lifted, ennobled, glorified, brought to its own when it is life lived in relation to God.

Reminding you that the positive reveals the negative, take the life irreligious, the life that has no vision of God, that never waits for His voice, has no sense of the eternal, no commerce with the spiritual, no traffic with the unseen, the life which Peter describes when he says, "seeing only the things that are near." Was there ever more graphic description of the irreligious life than that? "Seeing only the things that are near." What is the principle of that life? Self is enthroned! The exclusion of God, which means the exclusion of

perfect knowledge and the exclusion of all-sufficient power. What is the method of that life? Self-served. That is obedience to unintelligent desire, strife after experience without ability to realize. What is that? Friction, fret, fever. What is the result? Self lost. Hunger without bread. Thirst without water. Desire without ability. The illustrations of what I am trying to say in brief words are to be found everywhere. They are to be found in the East End of London. They are to be found in the West End. The East and the West are still far apart, but they are tremendously near together. The East and the West talk two languages, but out of one humanity. Give me a man of the East End who is living a godless life—he lives for himself. He was born in the very atmosphere of blasphemy. He is away down in the depths. When we begin to deal with statistics and political economy we speak of the submerged tenth and of the upper ten. Both are submerged so far as their humanity is concerned. Take the man in the East end, hot restless life, unable to find quietness, satisfaction, peace. Bruised, bitter, rebellious, angry! The word that you use to describe that man's condition is despair. I cross over from the East to the West, and here I find culture. Mark me very carefully, I am not undervaluing culture and education. Let no man charge me with such unutterable folly. I find culture and refinement. I find something in the West that it has taken centuries to produce. There I hear another word. It is not an English word this time but a French word, as though by the use of a French word you could heal a wound. I hear the word ennui. Do you imagine when you hear someone say ennui that it is a small thing. It is hell! Culture, refinement, things that are quite beautiful, admirable in most ways, but in the heart, no rest, no peace. I know the things whereof I speak. I know them better tonight than I did four years ago. I have had to listen to story after story, and to share agony after agony, and to come into definite touch with this thing. The godless life is anchorless, rudderless—no peace, no quiet—fever, friction. All the finest things absent in spite of the culture and refinement that the schools can give and the process of the centuries can give. The light of the infinite morning is never on the brow. The breath of the eternal hills never brings recreation. No grasp of God and therefore no grasp of life. I submit to you that if you simply take the life that now is, godless life has lost its own key and secret, and does not possess the power to realize itself. The godly life is the life that holds the key to all the treasure house and admits into the richest and best, even of the present life.

I bring you now to the dividing line, and speak of the life to come. Take the positive again. Let us see what the religious life is. How does the life to come begin? It begins with death. What is death? Transition. The laying aside of a tent. The entry on the consciousness of vaster environment. That is death. The tent is laid down and the occupant passes on. Of course, I am taking for granted the authority of this Book and the whole testimony of the Catholic Church [church universal]. I am not going to argue these things. I simply state them. The great Lord and Master of us all uttered words once full of light on this subject. I have often quoted them in other connections; let us see them in this connection. He said, "Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." What is the concept of life that lies behind that? Do you see what the thought of Jesus about human life is? Let us express His thought in His own words, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." Or again, "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?"—What is this conception of life? That the individual is spiritual in essence. That is the Christian conception of individuality. What, then, is death? Simply the moment when a person passes on to another plane, on to another level. You remember the exquisite, marvelous line in the course of the slave's dream in which the author describes the passing out of the slave into liberty through death, and speaks of the body of the slave as a worn-out fetter which the soul had broken and cast away. That is the Christian conception of death. I want to take again a side issue for a minute. I do not want anyone to imagine I am callous in the presence of death. I am not. I know its bitterness to those who are left. I hate the idea that no tears are to be shed in the presence of it, that we are to steel our hearts against emotion. I am looking at death from the standpoint, not of those who are left, but of those who go. This is death. The earthly tabernacle, the tent, dissolved; then a building, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The earthly tabernacle dissolved. I remember Moody saying to a group of friends, "Some day you will see in the newspaper that Moody is dead. Don't you believe it. The day you read that in the newspaper, Moody will be more alive than ever he has been." That is the Christian outlook, triumph over death.

What is the relation of that life to this life? When you begin to see that death is simply the laying aside of a tent and the going on of the same person, what is the relation between the life that now is and that which is to come? It is necessarily most intimate. There is continuity. The set of the life is the same five minutes after as five minutes before death. The direction, the conception, the character, the trend is not changed in the hour of death. A great many things are changed. Environment is changed. It is a new plane, a new level, a new world, but the direction is the same. I think there are some people who imagine that when they cross over in their essential life they are absolutely changed by the passing. Not so. There is no warrant for such teaching in the New Testament. You are exactly the same. There will be a great deal to learn on the other side for most of us, and I think we shall not know it all immediately, but the direction will be the same. What is to be the principle of that life? Exactly the same as the principle of life here, the mastery of the will of God. What is to be its method? Exactly the same as that of the life here, obedience to the will of God. What is to be the result? The result of the life here I said was life more abundant. The result of the life there is life most abundant. Christian people for a long time have been praying for dying grace. Such prayer is a waste of time. What we need is living grace. "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." The statement "he was not," does not merely refer to the method by which he was taken, but to the method of all his life for three hundred years before he went. He was not, God took him into fellowship. He went with Him along the way of earth through those centuries and then Enoch was not, the earth had lost him but God had gained him into fellowship a little closer, but in the same direction. Death is not going to do anything for me that Christ has not done, or

cannot do, save bring me to a larger outlook, and leave me more free for development along the very lines on which I have been progressing, if I am a child of God, from the moment I received the Christ life.

If these are the positive aspects, mark well the negative. What is the beginning of the life to come for the man who is irreligious? Death. What is death for that man? Exactly what it is for the other, transition, the laying aside of a tent, the entry upon a vaster environment. What, then, is the difference? Let me answer that question, by asking another. Is there still a point of identity? Yes, there is. As in the life of the saint the word that marks the relation of this life to the life that is to come is continuity, so also is it in the life of the godless man. The set of the life here is the set of the life hereafter. The direction of the life here is the direction of the life hereafter. When a man lays aside the tent he enters upon a larger, more mysterious, wonderful existence. What is he there? What he is here. You ask me about a second probation. The word of God has nothing to say about a second probation, and I have nothing to say about it. I do know of the present probation, and I know that the probation of today is to every man in the world, and I know that the basis of the present probation is the light a man has, and not the light he lacks. As a man passes out of this life into the next the matter of supreme importance is not what he believes about Jesus, for there are thousands who have never heard His name. What is the matter of supreme importance? The set of the life, the direction of the life. The matter of supreme importance to me as I pass out of this world is not the actual influence of the moment, but the direction, the master passion of the life, the thing that drives and impels and inspires, for that is the central thing after all. "As he reckoneth within himself so is he." What is your thinking? That is the deepest of you! Is it passionate desire to do the will of God? That is the set of your life and death does not change it. Is the deepest thing in your life desire to please yourself? That is the set of your life and death does not change it. You go out into the vaster environment in which vaster environment you discover more terribly and awfully your inability to satisfy the deepest cry of your own life. Hunger without bread. Thirst without water. Desire without answer.

I pray you consider his question. If life is one and indivisible; if I have now began the life that runs on, and if continuity is the word that tells the story of that which is to come in its relation to that which now is, then I ask you to carefully consider the question: "Is the religious life necessary?" You must decide whether or not you are prepared for the continuity of the life you are now living. Strip yourself of the habit of saying your life is this, or that, or the other. These are the methods by which you are attempting to satisfy the deepest thing in your soul. Do not measure your life by the method but by the purpose in your deepest heart. That is a difficult thing to get men to do. Take that round of pleasure, of strenuous work amassing wealth, and has a moment come in your life when you have said, "My soul, in this pleasure, in this wealth, thou hast found thy resting place"? Have you really found it? It is not the fact that for the moment pleasure is pleasure, that wealth is a delightful possession and gives you power that matters. The inquiry is, "Have I in my inner heart and life found rest in these things?" For, remember, the life that is to come is a continuity of the life that is, only all the present things, the transient things, will have passed away and the soul will go out in its nakedness, in its loneliness, and if it have not found satisfaction it will lack it forever. In the life religious the soul goes out in its loneliness, but if it have satisfaction in fellowship with God, it is satisfied forever.

The religious life is the life of obedience to light. The discussion of the problem of the heathen in Africa or in London is irrelevant, I am not dealing with it. What is your light? Put yourself into contrast, some of you, with the people in the West end. Some of them have had no more chance of vital godly life than the worst man in the East end slum. Put yourself into contrast, and remember this, you are not going to be judged by their standards nor they by yours, but each by the standard of the light possessed. Your light is not a rushlight that you yourselves light in a room which you have darkened by pulling down all the blinds. The light by which you will be judged is the light of the Christian revelation, as you have been brought up in its very presence and atmosphere. The religious life is the life that obeys the light. God as revealed in Christ. Man as revealed in Christ. That is the light. The religious life is obedient to it. Are you obedient to that light? Here is the almost overwhelming difficulty of the hour. These lectures have provoked letters, the majority of them kindly, courteous, but terrible in their revelation of the fact of how men will fritter away their time and strength and intellect on the fringes of things, and refuse to come to the central purpose. As to whether verse thirty-nine in chapter thirteen, is in harmony with verse forty-one in chapter twenty-two, a man is going to risk his eternal welfare on that. Suppose they do contradict themselves utterly, take out of your Bible that one imperial lonely splendor of Christ and walk in the light. That is the religious life. Is it necessary? Again I say, I leave you to decide. For me it is necessary, in order that I may live the life that now is at its highest, best. Necessary, entirely, absolutely necessary in order that when the fetter is broken and thrown away I may find home, and refuge, and rest, and fulfilment of my being. For I lack rest forevermore, if I have deliberately chosen in this life to disobey the light.

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In this question the emphasis is changed once more. In the first question, whether the religious life is possible, the beauty of the ideal is not for a moment questioned, but the possibility of realization is doubted. We attempted to answer that inquiry by declaring the religious life possible because of the nature of man, because of the nature of God, and, finally, because of the plenteous redemption that God has provided, even for the man who has failed.

The second question moves on a lower plane than the first. The man who asks it does not question the beauty of the ideal, neither does he doubt the possibility of realization; but in view of the conditions he inquires, Is it absolutely necessary? We attempted to answer that inquiry by declaring that the religious life is necessary for the life which now is, and for the life which is to come, in order that life may be fulfilled. The life that now is is less than life, unless it be the life religious; and the life that is to come and this life are one, death makes no change in a man's character. He passes over the boundary line and the set and direction are the same on the other side as on this side. Consequently, to admit the necessity for the religious life here in order that life may be fulfilled, is to be compelled to admit its necessity for the life to come.

The man who asks the third question admits the beauty of the ideal, admits the possibility of realization, admits the necessity for the religious life, if life is to be fulfilled; but, in view of the cost, suggests that perhaps after all it is hardly worth while, and inquires, Why not be content with something less than the best? Is it worth while?

I said, I think in the first of these last three addresses, that there is a descending scale in these questions. The man who asks, Is it possible? is asking a question on a higher level than the man who asks, Is it necessary? And the man who asks, Is it necessary? is on a higher level than the man who asks, Is it worth while? I have known cases in which these three questions have been asked and always in this sequence. In fear and trembling, a man confronted with the beauty of the ideal of the religious life asks, Is it possible? He is brought to conviction that it is possible, and then he asks the second question, Is it necessary? He is brought to conviction that in order to reach perfection of life it is necessary, and then he asks this lowest question of all, Is it worth while?

The first question is a question of desire mingled with doubt. Is it possible? The moment there comes to a man the conviction that it is possible a new peril is created, that of attempting, somehow, to find an excuse for not yielding to the truth. Then follows the next question, which is a mixture of conviction and compromise. When this is answered and a man knows that it is necessary to the perfecting of life, again a new peril presents itself, and the third question is a mixture of rebellion and risk. It is with that question we now have to deal.

In order to answer that question there are two things we must consider. First, the cost of the religious life; and, second, the value of the religious life.

The man who says, Is it worth while? is thinking of the cost, and of the values, and he is trying to strike a balance. Is it worth while? Let us see clearly, if we can, both the cost and the value.

I begin with the cost, and I want to say in your hearing as clearly as I know how that the religious life is costly. Whatever others may say, Jesus was perfectly clear in His teaching about this fact, and I do most solemnly say, especially to young men and women, be very suspicious of the preacher or teacher who tells you that the religious life is simple and easy. I dare any man to make that affirmation on the basis of what Christ taught. There is nothing more remarkable in the ministry of Jesus Christ than the fact that He forevermore repelled men by the severity of His terms. Oh, there was a wooing winsomeness about our blessed Master, and men crowded after Him wherever He went; it was only to look at Him to want to go with Him, only to listen to Him to be captured, and men said and said truly, "Never man so spake." But as the multitudes thronged and pressed Him, He turned upon them and uttered things so severe as to scatter them like chaff before the wind. All the way, from the beginning to the end of His ministry, Jesus Christ insisted on the fact that the religious life is costly. I make my appeal tonight wholly to His own words.

Let us see what Christ thinks about the cost of the religious life. In chapter fourteen of Luke's gospel, it is recorded that thrice over He said, "cannot be My disciple." Hear the connecting words: "If any man cometh unto Me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple." "Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." If we had never read those words before, and had not been so busy trying to lower the standard of Jesus in order to accommodate it to our own ideas, they would startle us so that we hardly dare sleep tonight. Look at them: except a man hate all the nearest and dearest, he cannot be My disciple. Except a man take up his own cross, he cannot be My disciple. Except a man renounce all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple. I pray you notice carefully what is involved in this threefold word of Jesus on the cost of the religious life. The first word indicates that if a man is to live the religious life he must submit himself to the absolute mastership of Jesus. "If any man cometh unto Me and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sister, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." By all of which He meant that if a man is to follow Him he must put Him absolutely first, so that if the love of father or mother or wife or children, of brethren or sisters, or of his own life, shall at any moment or in any circumstances, for any reason, conflict with loyalty to Him, that love must be crucified. That is the supreme and most appalling claim ever set up on the soul of a human being. That is where Christ begins. I know the difficulty of the word "hate" in this passage, but we must remember that in this Eastern language there was little light and shade. It was positive or negative. Love and hate stood opposite to each other. What Christ demanded that men should do for Him, He did for men. On another occasion He said, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." One day they came to Him and said, "Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak to Thee," and He replied, "Who is My mother? and who are My brethren?..."

Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother." By which He meant to say, there is an affinity far higher than that of blood relationship, that of the spiritual relationship of those who do the will of God. That is the principle underlying this word of Jesus. A man must make his relationship to Christ as revealing God, and so his relationship to God, his attitude toward religion, the supreme thing in his life. If he allows the love of father, mother, wife, children, brother, sister, or of his own life, to conflict with his loyalty to Christ and to God, then he cannot be a disciple. There are many of us here who do not know how costly a thing that may become. I confess there is a sense in which I do not know the costliness of that requirement. I was born of Christian parents and my love for them never conflicted with my loyalty to my Lord; but no farther back than last Saturday night I talked with one person after our meeting who was face to face with that old word, actually, positively, at the present moment. Love of father and love of Christ were in conflict. I need go no further with the story. There it is. Christ says, If it causes a conflict like that, you cannot be My disciple unless you put Me first. That is the cost.

He said a second thing, "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple." Some time ago I attempted to deal with that word of Jesus and His illustration of it in Luke. I want in a hurried manner now to repeat what I said then. What did Christ mean when He spoke about building a tower and going out to fight a battle? The popular interpretation has been that Jesus meant to say if a man is coming after Him he had better count the cost. He meant nothing of the kind. What He meant was this. You are not to count the cost. It is I Who must count the cost After the stern words to which I have made reference in which He demanded that a man should love Him before father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sister, and his own life, He began to explain the severity of His own terms. "Which of you desiring to build a tower, doth not first sit down and count the cost?... Or what king, as he goeth to encounter another king, doth not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?... Therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." He said, in effect, You ask Me why My terms are so severe. I will tell you. I am come into the world for building and for battle, and I cannot commit My enterprises to any save those I know I can depend upon. It is He that builds the tower, not I. He is the King conducting the warfare, not I. Because He is here to build, and here for battle, His terms are severe. I must, He says, have men and women coming after Me who will take up their own crosses and follow Me as I take up My cross: men and women who will not faint or grow weary when the battle thickens, or until the building work is done.

First, the devotion of the disciple must be so supreme that all other loves are put into abeyance. Second, the one ambition of the disciple must be for the enterprises of Jesus, for His building and His battle. He must take up his own cross, that is to say, there must be crucifixion of any thought in the life of the disciple of place or power. So long as I am seeking place for myself or power for myself, I cannot be His disciple and I cannot help Him in His building and battle. In order to be a Christian man, in order to be a disciple of Christ, in order to live the religious life, there first must be devotion, absolute loyalty; and, second, there must be such abnegation of self that there shall be no seeking for place or power, but, the enterprises of Christ possessing the soul, willingness to take up the cross daily and follow Him.

Once more, "Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." First, devotion, then ambition, now possession. If a man is to live the religious life he must lay all his treasure at the feet of his Lord, and recognize not only that what he is he is for Christ, and what he does he does for Christ, and that what he has he holds for Christ. Renunciation of what a man has does not mean flinging it away, but placing it at the feet of the Lord and recognizing that the man of vast possessions is a steward for the Master. I am weary to death of people who are telling us that we ought to give a tenth of our income to God. I believe the whole movement is wrong. Not one single farthing of yours belongs to you if you are a Christian. All that a man has is to be renounced. You are to spend this in dress dress for the glory of God, and that in food for the glory of your Lord, and that in recreation for the glory of your King; but over the superscription of King Edward there is the superscription of the Cross of Christ and the Kingdom of God. All that he has is to be renounced, so that the disciple no longer says that anything he has is his own, it belongs to his Lord and to his Lord's enterprises and to his Lord's work. We are a long way off from it yet, but these are the terms of discipleship according to Christ. I repeat, it is costly. If you want to know why there has been decrease—and I feel more able to speak about it this week because the Congregational statistics have been published and there is decrease there also. I hate these statistics. The hunt for increase is part of the reason of the decrease at the present hour. Be that as it may, if you tell me there is decrease not merely in numbers but in spiritual intensity and fervor, I ask why? It is because we have lowered the standard of discipleship and talked to men as though it were easy. We have to get back to the ideal of Christ which presents the religious life as strenuous, severe, costly. When we get back there we shall increase. I admit the cost, and if you stand outside and say, Is it worth while? your question is justified so far. It is a costly business to be a Christian. You can call yourself a Christian and sing hymns and give to collections and drift through the world and never do anything for God or humanity. But if we are going to be Christians indeed, Christ men and women, religious men and women in the profound meaning of the great word, there is blood in the business, there is cost in the business. Go back for one brief moment to the ninth chapter of this Gospel of Luke and see the illustration. One man said, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." To another man Jesus said, "Follow Me." The third said, "I will follow Thee, Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house." That passage is remarkable if you keep it in its setting. "It came to pass, when the days were well-nigh come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." Nothing more significant than that was ever written. Jerusalem was hostile to Him and He knew it, but He stedfastly set His face to

go. Jerusalem was doomed and He knew it; but He stedfastly set His face to go. Jerusalem was to be rebuilt, not immediately; but after long processes and centuries and millenniums there should be a Jerusalem from on high, and He stedfastly set His face to go. On His way, with His face stedfastly set to go to Jerusalem, a man came to Him and said, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." Jesus answered, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head," which was an explanation to the man not merely of what the man would have to do but of what Jesus was doing. He said to another man, "Follow me," and the man said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." I never understood that until I was talking to Dr. George Adam Smith about it, and he told me this story. He was traveling in Syria, and desiring to get into a part of the country where no ordinary guide ever takes the traveler, he went to a young Arab sheikh—whose father was still living—and told him that he wished to go to this out-of-the-way part, and wanted him to accompany him as guide. The Arab sheikh said it was impossible for him to do so. Dr. Smith pressed him, and, at last, with a salaam, the sheikh said, Suffer me first to go and bury my father, which did not mean that his father was dead, for his father was sitting by him as he spoke. It is the Eastern method of saying, I have family ties and affections that I cannot break away from. Christ said, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of God." His face was toward Jerusalem, and that was the attitude of His soul, passion for the Kingdom of God overcoming all lower instincts.

Once again, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." Put that into close contrast with "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." There is illustration of the religious life. Jesus of Nazareth was religious. He had not where to lay His head. He had no possessions, nothing which could prevent His progress toward the ultimate goal. His passion for the Kingdom of God overcame all lower instincts, and He never gave a backward look, but plowed His furrow straight to the ultimate victory. Now, remember that if He said these things when His own face was set toward Jerusalem, He said them to men on the subject of their following Him, and they are illustrations of the great principles revealed in the fourteenth chapter. That is the cost of the religious life. Is it worth while? That is the question.

What is the value, if that is the cost? The cost is the denial of self, therefore the value can never be stated as what I gain, but what others gain. I wonder if you take me at that point. Is it worth while? How am I going to answer it? By telling you what you will gain by being religious? No. You will gain. Jesus put the personal equation into these tremendous words, only He put it the other way, "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" If you want the personal equation there it is. You ask, Is the religious life worth while? Christ asks, Is the irreligious life worth while? I am not going to deal with that equation. I want to show you the value, not in the gain that comes to you personally, but in the gain to others. The gain to Christ if you will be a religious man, the gain to the world if you will be a religious man.

The gain to Christ. I take three words because they are all His words, and I am going to put them in the singular as though I were talking to one man only. If you will give yourself to Christ and begin the religious life, Christ will gain a friend. Christ will gain a witness. Christ will gain a servant. Christ will gain a friend. What does that mean? Identity of interest. Unity of purpose. Harmony of method. If you will give yourself to Christ, Christ will have a friend where you live, where you work. He will have a man in that store whose interests are His interests, whose purposes are His purposes, whose methods are His methods. Christ will gain a witness, that is, one who is a sample. How is London going to find out what Christ can do? Not by preaching, unless the preaching makes samples. A witness is not necessarily one who talks, but one who reveals. Christ will gain a witness, a man of whom other men will say, That is what Christ means. Christ will gain a servant, that is, someone whose one business will be the preparation of His Kingdom, someone through whom there will be the operation of His power. Christ's gain, if I may but lay that upon you tonight, is it worth while? Yes, for the sake of Christ and God it is worth while that you should be good, and religious, a Christian. I am coming more and more to think that is the final reason and the final impulse. The man who led my father to Christ still lives, Richard Roberts, in the Wesleyan ministry. I have at home a little book written years ago by Richard Wrench, being a pen-and-ink sketch of Richard Roberts. He says of Richard Roberts that his highest ambition was to place another gem in the Redeemer's diadem, to weave another garland wherewith to deck His brow. I believe that. I believe that is the highest ambition of all. Never mind whether you gain anything or not, Christ will gain immeasurably if you are a Christian.

If so, it follows that there will be gain to the world. What will be the gain to the world? Let me state three things. First, the maintenance of a testimony to the reality of the spiritual and eternal. To live the religious life really, truthfully, the life that has commerce with God, the life that counts with God and on God, daring even in this unbelieving age to season the speech with salt and to say, "If the Lord will," I will do this or that, is to live so that the world gains one man at least who lives as though there were a God and as though there were eternity. It is a great gain in this age. There is so much life that seems to shut Him out. But the world will gain more than that if you are religious. It will gain this, that in you there will be perpetual antagonism to all the things that are contrary to the will of God and which therefore destroy man. You will become a fighting man. Some of you are quite astonished at that. It is quite true, only you will fight the right thing. You cannot be a Christian man and be wholly a man of peace. Dr. Dale was once asked if he believed in peace at any price, and he said, Yes, even at the price of war. I am not discussing the Peace Congress. That is not in my mind. I think that all war as between man and man with weapons that are carnal, and where there is bloodshed, is

begotten in hell. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal," but we have a real warfare. If you become a religious man, a Christian man, you are going to fight everything that spoils your brother, because the thing that spoils your brother wounds the heart of your Father. The world will gain another man fighting the wrong for the establishment of the right. The world will gain in you if you are a religious man, one full of sympathy for all who are scattered, distressed, wounded, and one who out of that sympathy will work in order to uplift and to bless. Is this worth while?

When Moses wanted Hobab to accompany him, he said to him, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." What was the result? Hobab did not go. He was one of those independent men who said, No, thank you, I do not care for you to do me good. I will go my own way. Then Moses said, Come with us "and thou shalt be to us instead of eyes," and he went. "Come with us, and we will do thee good." No. Perhaps he ought to have gone. It is quite true that Moses could do him good and the company of the people of God could do him good. There are thousands of men today to whom that invitation does not appeal. I have resolutely tonight not said to you that it will do you good to be religious, but you can be eyes to somebody else if you are. You can do somebody else good if you are religious. If you are not careful you ought to be careful about the perfecting of your own life, but if not, then for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the world you ought to be good, you ought to be religious. It is only by submission to this one Lord Christ that I can ever hope to be able to help to bring in the Kingdom of love and truth and purity, and to bring in that Kingdom it is worth while.

My appeal to you, then, in answer to this question is on the highest ground. I affirm the costliness of being a Christian, but I declare the value issuing far outweighs the cost. If only you and I will give ourselves to this same Lord Christ—I say nothing tonight of the effect on our own life—what I say is this, it is worth while to do anything for Him, and it is worth while to do something for the world.

One Lord there is, all lords above;
His name is Truth, His name is Love,
His name is Beauty, it is Light,
His will is Everlasting Right.
But, ah! to Wrong, what is His name?
This Lord is a consuming flame
To every wrong beneath the sun:
He is one Lord, the Holy One.
Lord of the Everlasting Name,
Truth, Beauty, Light, Consuming Flame!
Shall I not lift my heart to Thee,
And ask Thee, Lord, to rule in me?
If I be ruled in other wise,
My lot is cast with all that dies;
With things that harm, and things that hate
And roam by night, and miss the gate—
The happy gate, which leads to where
Love is like sunshine in the air,
And Love and Law are both the same,
Named with an Everlasting Name.

Because I want to help to bring in that order, it is worth while.

260 - The Problems of the Religious Life: The All-Sufficient Solution

The Problems of the Religious Life: The All-Sufficient Solution

Christ Jesus—Mighty To Save and To Keep

In looking back over the subjects we have considered together I am quite conscious that I have laid myself open to the charge of having approached these inquiries prejudiced in favor of Christianity. I at once admit the fact. To me religion and Christianity are synonymous terms. Do not misunderstand that. I recognize as fully as any man that there is much sincere religion in the world which does not call itself Christian, but of all other religions I would say,

They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

Consequently, if I speak of religion I speak of Christianity. In this final address I want, as I am able, to give my reasons for that prejudice. Broadly stated, they are that Christ answers my first questions satisfactorily, masters my enemies completely, disposes of

my difficulties perfectly. Or more briefly, as indicated in the title, He is the all-sufficient Solution. This conviction is the result of knowledge of Him, which, in turn, results from experience of salvation. My prejudice in favor of Jesus Christ is not due to any theory I hold concerning Him, it is due to what He has done, and is still doing for me.

I shall ask you to follow two lines of consideration. First, Christ the all-sufficient Solution; and, second, Christ the all-sufficient Saviour.

First, Christ as the all-sufficient Solution. The first questions of the religious life are: Has man anything to do with God? Can a just God forgive sins? What does God require of man? Has man anything to do with God? What is Christ's answer to that inquiry? The New Testament introduces me to a Man Who in actual life presents a perfect ideal. I do not think I need stay to argue that. I am inclined to think that it will be granted not merely by those who stand within the center of the Christian Church, but by all competent judges outside the Christian Church. It is a remarkable fact, and it is well that we should be reminded of it sometimes, that the most scholarly and brilliant critics of Jesus Christ have always ended by putting some wreath upon His brow. Every man who has come to the study of Christ presented by the gospels, while perhaps denying certain things which the gospels say concerning Him, does nevertheless admit the perfection on the ideal He presents. I start with that fact in answering this inquiry. I then ask what does this Man say in answer to the inquiry, Has man anything to do with God? The whole of His life and the whole of His teaching attest the fact that man must have to do with God, because God has everything to do with man. Think for one moment of the teaching of Jesus. His teaching concerning God was teaching which declared God's knowledge of man, God's love of man. God's government of man. You may gather up into one brief sentence His whole message to man about his relationship to God: "Seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness." First, before what? What are the things that lie around the text in the great manifesto? Not luxuries, but the necessities of life. "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Christ says of them all—recognizing the necessity for them by a word full of tenderness and beauty, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things"—that they are not first. "Seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness." That is the word of a Man, admitted by foes and friends alike, to be the most perfect man ever presented to the vision of humanity. When I look at Him, I say Thou art the Man of all men I would rather be like. If Thy Manhood is the explanation of my humanity then I long to realize my own life. If it may ever be like that life in which there was the combination of strength and sweetness, that life in which there was mingled the thunder of fierce denunciation and the tears of infinite pity, then I want to be like that. When I would learn the secret of that life, He says, "Seek ye first His Kingdom." "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him... the things which I heard from Him these I speak.... I do nothing of Myself." "I must work the works of Him that sent Me." The master passion of His life was the will of God. The whole of His life was a life that had commerce with heaven, traffic with God. When I look at the ideal humanity of Jesus and ask its secret I discover that its secret is His profound, intense, personal conviction that He had to do with God, and that His whole life was a life or relationship to Him. His first recorded words are these, "I must be about My Father's business." His last recorded words are these, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." That answers my first inquiry. I have to do with God. I must find God and obey God.

I take the second of these inquiries. Can a just God forgive sins? How does Christ answer that question? I know that here we touch the realm of mystery because our finite mind cannot appreciate perfectly the infinite mind and the infinite power. Let me state the case thus. First He exercised the prerogative, He claimed to be able to forgive sins. He distinctly said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." But He revealed the method also. By the mystery of His Cross He unveiled God's attitude toward sin, and God's activity in the presence of sin. In the hour of the Cross He did not try to persuade God to change His mind; but working together with God He unveiled before the astonished gaze of man that passion of God whereby He is able, Himself bearing human iniquity, to forgive it, to cancel it, to set the prisoner free. You say that is all theory? Follow me yet further. He told men they were forgiven. He has been telling men they are forgiven ever since, and men have entered into the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins. They have professed to know sin forgiven. You say that is only human profession, and I reply that men have exemplified the truth of their profession in the new lives which they have lived. I hold that the last and ultimate proof of the absolute Deity of the Man of Nazareth is the consciousness in the soul that sin is forgiven by what He is and what He did. The demonstration that sins are forgiven is to be found in the fact that a man whose sins are forgiven mourns the sins forgiven to the end of his life and fights against them, and rises on the basis of that deep and inner consciousness to life that is pure and strong and holy. That is the supreme miracle of Christianity. When you are next theorizing about the atonement, and the forgiveness of sins, spend an hour in the slums, in a Salvation Army barracks, and look into the faces of some of the men; find out what they say, what they are, and hear from their lips the repetition of the apostolic word, "We are His witnesses." In the Cross He drew the veil a little way aside, and I see God in Christ, suffering, and so setting me free from sin. I cannot believe in the possibility of the forgiveness of sins by a just God until I come face to face with the Christ. Then, whatever the theory may be, I know, and so my second inquiry is answered.

Take the third of these inquiries. What does God require of man? The answer is Jesus Himself as the Revelation of God's actual requirement. He requires of every man that he shall be like Christ. Christ is the pattern. I pause there because it is a most alarming thing to say, or it ought to be. Before Mr. Gladstone died he said one of the greatest weaknesses of the age was the weakened sense of sin. I believe that with all my heart. I am sometimes told today that men are not convinced of sin as they were in the days

when our fathers preached. How are you to account for it? That is an inquiry that would take me more time to deal with than I have, but let me say this briefly. We are not preaching the perfections of Jesus as we ought. If we were, and men measured themselves by Him, there would be a profound and awful conviction of sin. Whenever I come into the presence of Christ I tremble. When I put what I am by the side of what He is, and then, when I discover that He is the Revelation of what was in the heart of God when He said, "Let Us make man in Our image," I know my sin. So, when I ask, What does God require of man? that is Christ's first answer. If that were all, I should be of all men the most miserable and the most helpless. The Man upon Whom I look is infinitely more than the perfect ideal. He is also the One Who comes down to me in my ruined condition and communicates to me a new life. Christ is not merely pattern, He is power. He is not merely a vision, He is virtue in the old root sense of the word.

Strength into strengthless souls He speaks,
And life into the dead.

When I ask what God requires of man He first shows me the pattern, and then teaches me that God requires of the man who cannot attain unto it that he shall submit himself to Christ, Who will perfect that which concerneth him, and at last in spite of all the paralysis make him what God wants him to be. What does God require of man? To be like Christ. What, then, does God require of me? That I shall give myself to Christ and trust Him. If I do, what then? Presently He will present me faultless before the presence of His glory. I am not afraid any longer to know what God requires of me, for I hide me in that rock, I follow that King, and through processes it may be, of discipline, pain and suffering, He will make me all that God wants me to be.

Then I turn to the opposing forces, the world, the flesh and the devil. I prefer now to take them in another order, because, as I have said in dealing with them separately, it is the devil we have to deal with finally. The world and the flesh are all right if only we can get hold of the devil and deal with him. The world is God's world, fair and beautiful. The flesh in itself, essentially, primarily, according to Divine intention, is not evil. "An enemy hath done this," I say whenever I see tares in the field.

What did Jesus do with regard to Satan? He first dragged him into the light. God led Jesus into the wilderness in order to make the devil stand out in the light. He was led of the Spirit in the wilderness. He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. With what result? A Man standing quietly within His own Manhood and obeying the law of God masters the devil at every point. He puts Himself in the will of God and stands squarely there, and the devil is defeated. In His life He mastered the forces that harm and spoil humanity. Paul, in one of the most daring phrases of his writings, tells us what He did with Satan in death. Speaking of the principalities and powers, the subtle forces of spiritual antagonism that thronged around the dying Christ, Paul says, "He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." So whenever I meet the devil now I meet a vanquished foe. The woman's seed has bruised the serpent's head. In Christ humanity has won its Armageddon as against all the spiritual hosts of wickedness. There is a good deal of administrative warfare going on, I still have to fight, but I fight under a victorious Lord against a vanquished foe.

What about the flesh? He took flesh, and sanctified it by taking it. He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. The apostle is very careful to show that His flesh was not sinful, but in "the likeness of sinful flesh." The purely flesh life of Jesus was as holy as His spiritual life. The flesh was subservient to the spirit, the body was the instrument of the Spirit. The eye was the window of the spirit, and was never allowed to gaze on that which might harm it. His body was the temple of His spirit. His spirit reigned over His body, and so the very flesh-life of Jesus was pure and spotless and beautiful. And mark this well, He did not bruise His flesh. He never scourged Himself. He left His brutal enemies to that work. He did not produce holiness of spirit by bruising and battering the flesh. That idea was born in hell. His life was a perfectly natural life, so natural that His critics said He was a gluttonous man and a winebibber, the friend of publicans and sinners. He loved flowers and children, went to the wedding feast, as well as to the house of mourning. His life was perfectly human, and because of the mastery of the spirit it was perfectly holy. Then through that mystery of death, which we must ever reverence and never can fathom, He set free His own life; and by regeneration He gives His life to other men, so that in the power of it they also begin to live the life of holiness, cleansing themselves from the filthiness of flesh and spirit in the power of His indwelling life.

What of the world? He entered it, and He redeemed it by entering it. He entered into its joys and its sorrows, never for one single moment so living that men could think of Him as ascetic. He entered into the world and loved its mountains, its seas, its children, its flowers, and all wonders. May I borrow a word of Paul and apply it to Him? He used the world as not abusing it. Then by the suffering of His death He introduced into broken creation healing forces that shall never cease their working until the whole creation which today groans and travails in pain shall be remade, and shall sing the song of redemption. He entered into the world and redeemed it, as He redeemed man. By redeeming man He put him back on his lost throne, over the things of the cosmos, in order that at last the desert should blossom as the rose, and the sin-scarred earth become what God meant it to be, a veritable paradise for the dwelling of man. So this great Christ masters the enemy, and by so doing restores all the physical and material to its proper place of subservience, thus making possible a fulfilment of the Divine ideal.

I turn to the last group of questions. The first, Is it possible? is answered at once by the things I have already said. If man sees the beauty of the ideal of the religious life and asks, Is it possible? Christ says, Yes, it is possible if you will admit Me and crown Me. "I

can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The religious life was quite impossible to scores of people in this building until they admitted Christ, and crowned Him and trusted Him. From the moment in which they did so they have found it possible.

Is it necessary? He answers that inquiry by His revelation of what life ought to be. He gave us some glimpses of the far-flung splendor of the ages to come, showing us the value of one human life, as He held in His own hand the balances. "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life."

Finally, Is it worth while? You will remember in dealing with that inquiry our answer was that it is worth while, not simply because of what it means to us, but for Christ's sake, and for the sake of the world. Christ inspired that heroism in the heart of every man who feels it. He is the File-leader of faithful souls, the first of the hosts; and everything heroic, everything done for the sake of those who are suffering, all toil endured for the sake of others, all this is due to the inspiration of that one supernal life by which Christ says to men, It is worth while to be right with God in order to lift other men.

Finally, Christ is the all-sufficient Saviour. Here I take one brief and all-inclusive declaration of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, "He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Let me take a minute or two with the terms of that declaration. "To save," what does this mean? The word here translated save simply means to render safe. I was very interested in looking this up to find the Greek word translated in different ways. Here are some of them. "To heal"; "preserve"; "do well"; "be whole." These translations are interesting, because all the thoughts suggested by them lie in this great word, "He is able to save to the uttermost." He is able to heal. That is the initial thing. That is the first thing I want. I cannot live the religious life because I am spiritually diseased. But He heals me. Then He is able to preserve. I would like to be a Christian, but if I start I am afraid I cannot. On this side of the Atlantic, North, South, East, and West, I have heard the same phrase, I am afraid I cannot keep it. On the other side I have heard the phrase, I cannot hold out. The answer is, He is able to preserve. Both these expressions show that men have a wrong idea of salvation. I am afraid if I am a Christian I shall not be able to keep it. Keep what? You have nothing to keep, you have to be kept. I am afraid I shall not hold out. You have not to hold out. You have to be held. There is responsibility. The responsibility is that of maintaining always the attitude of repentance and faith, the back turned on sin, and the face turned to the Christ. These conditions being fulfilled, He is able to preserve.

"To save" is a great and gracious word. Do not drop it out of your vocabulary, and do not drop it out of your experience. "He is able to save." It begins just where our need begins, with healing. It continues with the continuity of that need, with preservation. He is able to do all this. I love the word because it is a word that man needs to hear. Man cannot do the thing he supremely wants to do. He knows the beauty of holiness, but cannot live it. "He is able to save." Christ gives virtue where man lacks. He touches paralysis with power.

Take the next term, "to the uttermost." That is a great word that occurs only twice in the New Testament. It signifies the fullest measure, the furthest extent. It occurs in that wonderful story of the woman who was bent so that she could not stretch herself up. She walked doubled up, with infirmity, and could not straighten herself, to the uttermost. "He is able to save to the uttermost." You say, Spiritually I am decrepit, I cannot stand straight, or go straight. He is able to make you straight as He made that woman straight. That is the first application of it. He is able to save to the fullest extent, that is, the whole of your life, volitional, emotional, intellectual. It is one of the greatest words in the New Testament.

Tarry a moment longer with the terms, for the terms are everything in this declaration. "He is able." The Greek word from which we have derived our word "dynamic" is here. In the case of the woman who touched the hem of His garment Jesus said, "Virtue hath gone out of Me"; that is dynamite. He is able to save. You say you cannot be saved. God help you to fix your eye upon this Saviour. It is not what you are able to do. It is what He is able to do, to heal, to preserve, to set right all that is wrong in your nature, to preserve you against all the forces that oppose you, and to present you faultless at last.

What are the conditions upon which He saves men. "He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him." The goal, God. The way, through Him. How, then, can I live the religious life? By turning back to God. How am I to find my way back to God? Through Him. There is mercy, there is pardon, there is power through Him. So that tonight if you are perplexed with problems, the place in which to begin the work of solving them is Christ. If a man shall give himself to Christ I do not mean that all his intellectual problems will be solved at once. By no means. Again suffer words of experience. My intellectual problems are by no means all solved. Sometimes men come to me and say, You believe that Bible from cover to cover? By all means, but I do not perfectly understand it. I do not understand the problem of evil. I do not understand how God wrought in the mystery of His own Being in order to atone. I do not understand all the Bible teaches about the ages that lie beyond, either concerning the wicked or the good. Some men do, or think they do! I am content to postpone many things. The one sure and certain thing is, that we can be good if we trust Him. I like that word "good." That is why I used it.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin.
He only could unlock the gate

Of heaven and let us in.

How does He do it?

He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good.

I do not ask you to shut your mind to your intellectual difficulties, to say that these things do not matter; but to get right at the spiritual center of your life, and then to correct the circumference therefrom.