

Westminster Pulpit- G Campbell Morgan-5

Part

4

Part

6

1. [Sermons on Genesis through Nehemiah](#)
2. [Sermons on Psalms through Song of Solomon](#)
3. [Sermons on Isaiah through Zechariah](#)
4. [Sermons on Matthew](#)
5. [Sermons on Mark through John](#)
6. [Sermons on Acts through Colossians](#)
7. [Sermons on 1 Thessalonians through Revelation - - Series on "Problems"](#)

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SERMONS ON THIS PAGE:

- Mark 3:4. The Sanctions Of Ordinances.
- Mark 3:5. Ability For Disability.
- Mark 3:21. The Madness Of Jesus.
- Mark 3:28-29. Unpardonable Sin.
- Mark 6:3; 6:14; John 6:15; Mark 6:49. Four Mistakes About Christ.
- Mark 8:34. The Shock Which The Spell Of Jesus Brings To The Soul.
- Mark 8:34. The Spell Which Jesus Casts On Men.
- Mark 10:14. Suffer The Children.
- Mark 11:11. The Looking Of Jesus.
- Mark 10:21. The Young Ruler.
- Luke 1:74, 75. Holiness: Definition.
- Luke 2:7; Colossians 1:15; 1:18; Romans 8:29. The Firstborn.
- Luke 2:14. Peace Among Men Of God's Pleasure.
- Luke 8:45. The Touch Of Faith.
- Luke 9:51. Christ's Vision Of Jerusalem.
- Luke 9:51-62. But!.
- Luke 12:35, 36. Men Looking For Their Lord.
- Luke 12:49, 50. The Passion-Baptism.
- Luke 13:6-9. The Rights Of God.
- Luke 14:15, 27. The Kingdom: The Oath Of Allegiance.
- Luke 15:2. Jesus And Sinners.
- Luke 18:1. Prayer Or Fainting.
- Luke 18:14. Exaltation And Humbling.
- Luke 22:37; Hebrews 7:26 Christ And Sinners--Identified And Separate.
- Luke 24:32. The Burning Of Heart.
- Luke 24:50. Led Out--Led In.
- John 1:4. Light And Darkness.
- John 1:11, 13. The Coming Of The Word.
- John 1:13. Regeneration.
- John 1:14. The Word Became Flesh.
- John 1:43. Follow Me.
- John 2:23-25. Christ's Knowledge Of Men.
- John 3:36. Eternal Life.
- John 6:29. The Work Of Faith.
- John 9:1-5. Born Blind: The Disciples' Problem--The Master's Answer.
- John 10:11. Life Through Death.
- John 12:12, 13. The Triumphal Entry.
- John 12:36. Life In The Light.
- John 14:9. The Purpose Of The Advent: 3. To Reveal the Father.

- John 14:21. Love's Proof And Prize.
 - John 15:5. The Vine.
 - John 15:15, 16. The Fruit-Bearing Friends Of Jesus.
 - John 16:7-11. The Spirit's Testimony To The World.
 - John 16:12. Progressive Revelation.
 - John 19:30. The Accomplished Mystery.
 - John 20:28. Was Thomas Mistaken?.
 - John 21:1. Manifestations Of The Risen Lord.
 - John 21:15, 16, 17. My Lambs--My Sheep.
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Mark 3:4. The Sanctions Of Ordinances.

Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill? Mark 3:4

The story of the healing of the man with the withered hand is part of a larger whole. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story, and each places it in relation to the cornfield dispute about the Sabbath. Matthew and Mark read as though both events took place on the same Sabbath; Luke, however, distinctly says that the healing of the man with the withered hand was on another Sabbath. The difficulty in the mind of the enemies of Jesus, both in the cornfield and in the synagogue, was that of His apparent violation of the Sabbath. Moreover, there can be no escape from the conviction that this attitude on the part of Christ which caused their criticism and aroused their hostility, was definite and intended. In all the incidental wonders which He wrought He was moving quite definitely along the line of an illuminative and corrective mission. Whereas there can be no doubt that every incidental putting forth of His power was an expression of the compassion of His heart for needy men, the way in which he selected the hours and the occasions proves the larger purpose of His will. Not only did he heal this man on the Sabbath day, He also cast out an unclean spirit; probably on two separate occasions He healed Peter's wife's mother of a fever, He loosed the woman who had been bound in infirmity for many years, He healed the man with the dropsy, He gave sight to the man born blind, and He healed the man who had lain in the grip of infirmity for eight-and-thirty years, as He found Him in the porches of the Bethesda pool, all on the Sabbath. These workings of wonders on the Sabbath day were all wrought in the atmosphere of conflict concerning the Sabbath. We find not merely the story of the deed recorded and the declaration made that it took place on the Sabbath; we also find, side by side with these statements, the account of how He challenged them or they challenged Him. I repeat that He definitely violated the Sabbath according to their conceptions of the Sabbath.

The meaning of this maintained and definite attitude on the part of our Lord is revealed very clearly in these two stories: the story of the disciples in the cornfields on the Sabbath plucking the ears of corn and Christ answering the criticism of the Pharisees, and the story of how, on coming into this synagogue, He entered into discussion with them and then healed the man with the withered hand.

I propose asking you to fasten your attention with me on this story of the healing of the man with the withered hand, not so much in order that we may observe its wonderful teaching concerning the method of Jesus with individual cases, but in order that we may consider this attitude of Jesus, and endeavor to understand His meaning, and apply the values to ourselves.

First, I am going to trespass on your patience as I attempt very rapidly to reconstruct the story from the three accounts that we have; I read them of set purpose. I maintain that here as elsewhere in the gospels these stories are not contradictory but complementary. Each man told the story from his own standpoint quite simply, not necessarily giving all the details. The careful comparison of the three will enable us to see what happened, and so prepare us for the study of this particular word of Christ.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell of His entry into the synagogue, and of the fact that there, in the synagogue, was the man with the withered hand.

Mark and Luke tell us that when He went in, the Pharisees watched to see whether He would heal, that they might accuse Him. Yet in their watching they paid Him an unconscious compliment: they expected that He would heal. They already knew enough of Him to know that the one man of all the crowd of worshipers most likely to appeal to Him was the most needy man in the crowd, the man with the withered hand.

Matthew alone tells us that they not only watched Him, but challenged Him, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?"

Mark and Luke declare that then Jesus first called the man to stand out, called Him from the place that he occupied in the synagogue, and that the man came forward, and standing in the midst where he might be observed, became the center of observation.

Matthew tells us—and I believe it was at this point that it happened—that when the man stood forth in the midst, Jesus asked two preliminary questions, "What man shall there be of you that shall have one sheep, and if this fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he

not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man of more value than a sheep?"

Mark and Luke tell us that He answered their question by asking a question. They had said, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?" He asked "Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill?"

Matthew alone tells us that He added to that this word, "It is lawful to do good on the sabbath day."

Continuing to follow the course of events, we find that Mark and Luke declare that He "looked round about on them." Mark alone interprets the look in the words, "being grieved at the hardening of their heart."

The three evangelists then declare that Jesus addressed Himself to the man in the terms of an impossible command, "Stretch forth thy hand." Immediately the man obeyed and was healed, Matthew adding that beautiful touch of comparison, that the hand "was restored whole, as the other."

Luke tells us of the madness of His enemies, and of the fact that they communed as to what course to pursue.

Matthew and Mark declare that they went out and took counsel to destroy Him.

From that narrative let us now take three central words. First, their question, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?" Second, His argument, "Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill?" Finally, His answer, "It is lawful to do good on the sabbath day." Once again, narrowing our outlook, our text is the argument of Jesus in that atmosphere.

If as the result of that grouping of the records, we see that crowd of hostile souls, that man with the withered hand standing in the midst, and that lonely and imperial figure of the Lord; if we understand that the mental mood of the rulers was that of questioning his attitude toward the Sabbath, and if we see Him violating the Sabbath according to their view, we shall be a little nearer the heart of the theme.

I now leave their question and His final answer, and confine myself to His argument, "Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill?" Listening to that argument there are three things I desire to impress on your attention. Therein I discover, first, a remarkable revelation of our responsibility in the presence of all human need. Second, in that argument I discover an equally remarkable revelation of the true value of ordinances, especially Divine ordinances, the Sabbath being the illustration. Finally, in that argument, I find the ultimate test of religion.

First, then, as to the revelation of responsibility in the presence of human need. Let us go back to the synagogue. Taking the case of the man as typical, we see him disabled, incompetent, and suffering. All students of the New Testament, and of the method of the Master's ministry, are familiar with the constant merging of matters material and spiritual in His actions. The physical was always both sign and symbol of spiritual condition. We see in this man with the withered hand, a type of humanity disabled, incompetent, suffering. We shall miss the whole value of our study unless we fasten our eyes resolutely upon that man in this way. We need not travel back to the synagogue, he is in this house; we meet him every day in office, store, shop, professional walk. The children of the King, the disciples of Christ, the servants of God, are constantly face to face with the man with the withered hand, the withered heart, the withered soul, spiritually disabled, spiritually incompetent, spiritually suffering; and over and over again spiritual disability, incompetence, suffering, reveal themselves in physical disability, incompetence, suffering. All human need was focused, suggested, symbolized, by the man in the synagogue whose right hand was withered. What, then, is our responsibility in the presence of that man?

I pray you listen to that which to me is the most arresting, startling, marvelous thing in my text. Said Jesus, with that man standing there: "Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good or to do harm? to save a life or to kill?" Mark most carefully the startling alternative that Christ suggested: "To do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to kill?" That is the most disturbing of revelations to the complacent negativism which so often passes today for vital Christianity. There is the man with the withered hand, the incompetent man, on the highway, or in the synagogue; if you see him, you either do him good or do him harm, you either stretch out a hand to save him, or you help to kill him.

The average Christian man, to say nothing of the man of the world, is in revolt against this alternative of Christ. He says: I am doing nothing to help, but I am not harming. I have not stretched out a hand to save the man, but I have done nothing to kill him. That is not Christ's outlook. It may be that refined paganism imagines it can be neutral in the presence of human incompetence, but Christ says not to help is to harm, to fail to stretch out the hand of love is to have complicity with the forces that destroy. That is the heart of the argument. It is the revelation of Christ's attitude toward humanity, of God's attitude in the presence of human incompetence and sorrow. God is such that in the presence of human sorrow He must either help or harm, and harm He cannot; He must either save or kill, and kill He cannot; and therefore we have Calvary, the Cross of His blood, the breaking of His heart, the sacrifice by which He lifts crushed, bruised, broken humanity and remakes it. Let no man name the Christian name and claim relationship to the Christian fact who in the presence of the incompetent man passes by and because he has not added another blow imagines he has fulfilled

his Christian duty. To do harm or to do good, to save or to kill, are the graphic, drastic, startling alternatives of Jesus.

Of course, all this must be interpreted by the measure of our ability to do good or to save life. In the strict economy of Divine justice we shall be judged by that measure. I do not say that unless I can save a man I kill him. I do say that when I stand in the presence of need, unless I put forth what power I have to help toward salvation, then in the measure of the help withheld I harm and hinder. To leave the man stranded on the highway when my hand stretched out to him would have helped him but one yard toward home and health and God is to be guilty of his further sinning and further failing. This is the startling alternative of the text, revealing in a most remarkable way our responsibility in the presence of human need. If the man with the withered hand lives with us, lives in our neighborhood, and if we who bear the Christian name and wear the Christian sign pass him, and merely look and pass on, upon us lies part of the guilt of his ultimate undoing. It is that conception of responsibility which was the inspiration of Christ's perpetual violation of the false view of the Sabbath, and we naturally turn therefore to our second consideration.

We have in this text, then, second, the revelation of the true value of ordinances. Take the sabbath as the type, for that was the matter at issue in this story. I go back for one moment to the story preceding this, for in that story our Lord uttered words concerning these men which are vital to our consideration. When the Pharisees criticized His disciples for plucking the ears of corn, among other things Jesus said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Those familiar with the Greek New Testament will remember that in that particular phrase we have the Greek preposition *dia*, which I think we have somewhat loosely translated by our preposition *for*: "the sabbath was made for man." *Dia* used with the accusative always has one significance, therefore I make no apology for reading the text in another way, "The sabbath was brought into being as the result of man and not man as the result of the sabbath"; or perhaps I might take another slightly different method of translation and read the text thus, "The sabbath was brought into being on account of man, and not man on account of the sabbath." That is the fundamental word.

There are certain things of interest in this statement to which I refer only in passing. You will notice that our Lord said, The Sabbath was made for man, not just for the Jew. Much controversy today about the Sabbath is due to the fact that we look on it as a Hebrew institution. According to the Bible, the Sabbath is older than the Hebrew institution. The Sabbath was made for man, it was made as the result of man; man first, the Sabbath second, not the Sabbath first and man consequently.

Here we are at the root of the whole question as to the place and value of ordinance. If, indeed, the Sabbath was made on account of man, as a result of man, for man in that sense, it must never be desecrated by being made an instrument of harm to men, by being made a reason for helping to kill a man. There is the incompetent, disabled, suffering man! What is my duty to him? To help him, to heal him, to save him. But it is the Sabbath! Is he therefore for twelve or four-and-twenty hours to suffer his agony? That is the blasphemy of all blasphemies. The Sabbath was called into being on account of man, and not man on account of the Sabbath. If I may attempt to gather up what seems to me to be the intense and remarkable light of this word of Jesus and express it in a brief way, I would do it thus: the sanctity of the Sabbath must not destroy its sanctions.

What are the sanctions of the Sabbath? The well-being of man. If you take the Sabbath and make it so sacred and separate that you allow a man to continue to bear his burden alone without attempting to help him, you are making the sanctity of the day destroy the sanctions on which it rests.

So with every ordinance. I need not say human ordinances, for I have little care concerning them. I would break them all with pleasure. I care nothing for human ordinances. I am speaking of higher things, I am speaking of Divine ordinances. There are not very many, according to the New Testament; but there are some. There is the ordinance of preaching; I do not hesitate to call it an ordinance. There are the ordinances of prayer, and of worship; there are the ordinances of Christian baptism, and of the supper of the Lord. Over all these New Testament ordinances, so finely independent of the trivialities of ritualism and so instinct with abounding life and spirituality, high and sacred as they are, we must write this dictum of Jesus: These were called into being on account of man and not man on account of them.

What is the meaning of preaching? Preaching is not an institution to which man shall be compelled to attend in order to live; preaching is an institution for the proclamation of the living word of God that men may live and thrive and grow thereby. It is made for man, not man for it.

What is the institution of prayer? Why is the Church called on to be a priesthood? What is the meaning of intercession? It is not something ordained, which man must use in order that it may continue. Prayer is ordained for man, for his healing, for his helping, that he may come nearer God. For these purposes the ordinance of prayer has been established.

For what end is worship ordained? Now we are getting back very near to our story, to the synagogue, the temple, and so very near to this hour, and this building. What is the place of worship for? Worship is ordained for man and not man for it. The ultimate purpose of our worship and our gathering together for worship is the healing and helping of humanity by bringing humanity into living, vital, relationship with God. God is not demanding that man shall conform simply in order to fulfil an institution that He has created. He made the institution that men in it and through it may find their way to Him. So also with baptism and the supper of the Lord. All

ordinances are made for man, and if we are making any Christian ordinance an excuse for leaving some man half-dead on the highway while we observe it, we are blaspheming the sanctions of the ordinance, and so are sinning against God.

Take the Sabbath again as test. In the economy of God the Sabbath is the true test of our understanding of the Sabbath. God's Sabbath is the day for rest and worship. But there in the synagogue is a man with a withered hand. What am I going to do with that man because it is the hour of rest and worship? Let him suffer? Therein is proof that I do not understand the Sabbath. In the presence of that man it is my duty to break the Sabbath, give up my rest, turn from the holy shrine of worship to the holier shrine of service to help him. By so doing I keep Sabbath according to the Divine purpose.

I go further and declare that the Sabbath is the test of our conception of God. Let us return to the cornfield once more, to listen to something that Jesus then said to these men on the question of the sabbath. The words are recorded in Matthew, "If ye had known what this meaneth, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless." In that word Christ declared that the very method they adopted for defense of the Sabbath was demonstration of their ignorance of God. They did not understand mercy. If you had understood God and the passion of His heart, said Jesus, in effect, you would not have blamed the guiltless.

In the light of this great word of Jesus it becomes our bounden duty to test all our ordinances and arrangements. The test of the church is the man with the withered hand. If to the church no such man comes it is for one reason and one only, that Christ is not there. To the church Christo-centric, gathered about the living Lord, the man with the withered hand will surely come. If he be not in the midst, it is because Christ is not there. Let it be known that the loving, tender, strong, mighty, saving Christ is in the midst, and the incompetent, disabled, palsied, spiritually defeated will come. They become the test of the church. If the ordinances and organizations are so perfect that there is no time for them, or if to deal with them would violate the regularity of the sanctuary, then the sanctuary is a sepulcher and of no use to God or man. That is the supreme test of the church's life and the church's work, and of all ordinances.

So I come finally to notice that this text offers the final test of religion. We fix our attention no longer on the man with the withered hand, but on the rulers. Look on these rulers, only let us look at them as Jesus saw them. There is nothing more remarkable in these stories than the emphasis laid on the fact that He looked at them before He healed the man. I draw your attention to the fact that Mark interpreted the look in the words "being grieved at the hardening of their hearts." So remarkable is that declaration, so full of awful light, that one almost trembles to make any attempt at exposition. He looked at them with anger. Do not minimize the word, I pray you. Let us have done with all this soft sentimentality that imagines that Christ was incapable of anger. The word "anger" here suggests the sudden stretching out of the hand in a passion that is active and moves toward punishment.

But just as I am arrested by the flaming fire that flashes from the eyes of the looking Christ, fire that is evidently the fire of actual anger with these rulers, Mark leads me behind the anger in the mind of Christ and writes for me the strange and startling word, "being grieved." The Greek word there is a striking word, and this is the only place in the New Testament where it occurs. We find it again and again in Classical Greek, but nowhere else in the New Testament. Expositors and scholars have come to the conclusion that the only word by which you can convey its meaning is our word condolence. What is condolence? Just grief with. Condolence is in its truest sense that which I feel with you when you are in the midst of grief. The mystery deepens. He was grieved with whom? They were not grieved. They had no sense of shame. He was in sympathy with all that must inevitably come in the moment of their awaking to the unutterable folly and failure of their own attitudes. Grief with them was His fathoming of their sin to its deadly depth and its unutterable darkness. It was the Cross of Calvary, the passion of God manifesting itself in the midst of human failure.

Now observe the reason of that anger and that grief. Because of the hardening of their heart, not because of the hardness of their heart as the Authorized Version renders it, but, far more accurately, because of the hardening of their heart. It was not merely grief over a condition, it was grief over a process. The word "hardening" there is a word that describes a process, the process by which the extremities of a fractured bone are united by a callus. Not the hardness, but the hardening. They were hardening their own heart. If we see these men set in this light we see that they were allowing a false religious conviction to dry up the springs of emotion in the presence of the man with the withered hand; they were allowing prejudice in favor of a false conviction to stifle the conviction that He came to bring them, the conviction of what their attitude ought to be in the presence of all human need. That is the picture of the rulers.

How far are we guilty of their sin? We are verily guilty if for us the Sabbath stifles compassion, if we are so eager to fulfil the obligations of worship that we have no time to stretch out a hand to help the man who needs our help. If we feel that it is more important that we should pray than that we suffer to serve and save, then verily are we guilty. We are guilty of awful sin when worship fails to inspire service. If in coming to this house we have observed the duty of a day, and entered into the realm of rest, and there shall abide with us on the morrow no driving, inspiring impulse to rescue the perishing and care for the dying, then this hour of worship is the most disastrous instrument for hardening the human heart, deadening its emotion, destroying its spirituality. When slavery to the letter denies the spirit, when loyalty to the sanctity undermines the sanctions, then are we guilty of the very sin of these rulers.

In the measure in which we are guilty, Christ's attitude toward us is the same as was His attitude toward these rulers. He is grieved, He is angry, He is already on the threshold, leaving the synagogue; and we can recall Him only as we consent to violate professional regularity in the interest of the compassion of the Kingdom of God.

I pray that this great truth, burning, scorching, arresting the soul, may flame before us in the midst of all our worship. Not to minister, even to our own highest spiritual need, does this building exist; or, if it do, then verily it is a sepulcher; but for the sake of the man with the withered hand, for the sake of the man with the withered heart, for the sake of the man with the withered soul, paralyzed, incompetent, undone, that we may help, heal, remake; and to that end and that end alone Christ abides in the midst.

104 - Mark 3:5 - Ability for Disability

Ability for Disability

Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and his hand was restored.

Mark 3:5

The theme in the sermon is Christ's ability in the presence of inability. Every miracle which Jesus wrought was a teaching, and that because the life of our Lord was unified. His was not a life separated into compartments independent of each other. Upon one occasion He said, "I am the truth," a very significant and remarkable statement made by no other teacher: not "I teach the truth," or "I declare the truth," or "I believe the truth," or even "I hold the truth"; but "I am the truth." In the life of Jesus, in His teaching, in His thinking, in His doing, there were none of the divisions which we are so apt to make. We divide between the secular and the sacred, but you cannot find any such division in the teaching of Jesus. To Him all life was sacred. Everything called by us secular when He touched it was revealed to be sacred. He did not divide His life or His thinking into business, recreation and rest. His whole life was effort homed in the will of God—essential truth. Therefore, whatever He touched, He touched from the same central conviction, and whatever He did, He did under the impulse of the same age-abiding principles. If He dealt with a man on the physical side of His being, He acted in exactly the same way as He would when dealing with a man on the mental or spiritual side. He lived and taught in the power of the fact of spiritual law in the natural world. I do not say, "natural law in the spiritual world"—that is an inversion of order—but "spiritual law in the natural world." All natural things were touched by Him from high altitudes of spiritual perception and spiritual power, and, consequently, whenever I take up the story of His dealing with a man on the physical side of his nature I see flaming through it His method in dealing with men in spiritual need, and therefore all the stories of Christ's dealing with physical disability have been used, and rightly, as illustrations of His method with spiritual need. In that way I take this old and familiar story tonight.

My message is to one particular condition of mind or, I might say, to one particular class of persons. I want to speak tonight to those who are fearful and afraid of committing themselves wholly to Christ because of their profound consciousness of some disability within their own life, and there are hundreds of such. I want to speak to the people who, if one should have to deal with them personally about spiritual things, would say, "Yes," to every declaration concerning the glory of Christ, to every affirmation of His perfect example and His gracious tenderness, and yet when urged to yield themselves to Him would utter some word telling of heartbreaking consciousness, of personal disability, and, consequently, of fear. My message is to the fearful. I do not mean at this moment that particular class of people who are afraid to follow Christ with the fear of cowardice. There are such.

It is with another kind and quality of fear that I desire to deal, the fear of the man who says, "Yes, I would like to be a Christian, but I am afraid that I would fail." It is a fear wholly wholesome and to be respected. I say that, not to encourage the fear, for, as God may help me, I want tonight to show you that there is no reason for it, although I respect it. The young man who looks me in the face and says, "I would like to be a Christian, but I am afraid I would dishonor His name in the business house where I am," I respect. "Happy is the man that feareth alway," said the preacher long ago; and he was right. It is the man of caution and of fear, conscious of his own disability, who, if we may but lead him into the true and simple relationship to Jesus Christ, which this little story reveals, will be true to Him, loyal to Him, and will stand against all the storms of opposition. That man is worth helping, worth saving. I want to help him if I can.

Let us try to see this thing as it happened, that we may deduce the spiritual values which lie hidden beneath it. The scene is the synagogue, and, as so often in the life of Jesus, His enemies unconsciously complimented Him. "He entered into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had his hand withered. And they watched Him." Why did they watch Him? "Whether He would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse Him." I am not now interested in the ultimate purpose of these men, the mean and dastardly watching that they might catch Him and accuse Him. Mark this fact, Jesus came into the synagogue, and there was a man who most likely had been there again and again through weeks and months, perhaps years, at all the Sabbath services—a man whose right hand was withered, and immediately the enemies of Christ linked Him with the most needy man in the crowd. It is wonderful what an accurate sense of Jesus Christ His enemies had. They did not at all expect that He would be interested in the chief seat of the synagogue; but they did expect He would be interested in the one man there who was in direst need—the man

whose hand was withered. They linked Him in their thinking with need, and they were perfectly right. Of all the men in the synagogue that this Christ of ours would seek out and attempt to help, that was the one man. If the story is a parable, let us apply it as we go. The one man He wants in this house tonight is the man who is in the direst, sorest need. I do not know where he sits or what his name is, but, my brother, if you are in the grip of some dastardly habit that is paralyzing you, you are the man He is after. He is not half so interested in me just now as He is in you. Blessed be His name—His hand is on me, His ordaining hand, or I dare not speak for Him. But I hear Him saying, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that 'which was lost.'" We cannot sift this great congregation. Thank God, we cannot! It is not our work. Hear this, my brother, hidden away in the crowd, as you say that your neighbor does not know how evil you are in your heart, how tight a hold habit has upon you—the Master sees you, and you are the man He is after. They linked Him with need. That is the first thing that flashes out of this story.

He knew their thoughts, and was angry with their attempt to entrap Him and the hardening of heart which was manifest, but He did not allow their criticism and opposition to interfere with His blessing. I hear Him saying, "Stand forth," and when the man stands in the midst He challenges them as to their attitude. Then I hear Him say to the man, "Stretch forth thy hand," and as I watch in wonder and amazement, "he stretched it forth," and as I look to see the result, "his hand was restored." Three things, then, demand our close attention. First, the command of Jesus, "Stretch forth thy hand." Secondly, obedience of the man, "He stretched it forth." Thirdly, the result, "His hand was restored."

Now hear the command, and I want to ask you to do something which is a little difficult. Imaginatively, will you come into this synagogue with me? Let us forget this building and the people who are about us and transport ourselves in imagination overseas and back through centuries. We are in the synagogue watching. Here is the man with the hand withered. I need not attempt to enter into any explanation. I will take the word as it stands, "withered," devoid of power. Paralyzed, if you will; palsied, if you will; but "withered," nerveless, devoid of feeling, unable to work. That is the picture. As you are looking at the man with the withered hand, I want you to keep looking at him; the one thing you must not do is look at the One who speaks to him. I want you, if you will, to turn your back upon Jesus Christ in contemplating this scene. We are back in the synagogue among all the people who were there, without all the accumulated testimony of the centuries to the power of Jesus Christ which is our heritage and inheritance. There is the man with the withered hand. The one thing he cannot do is to use that hand. It is powerless, nerveless, "withered." As I look at him with my back to Christ, I hear Christ say, "Stretch forth thy hand," and in a moment my mind is in revolt against Christ. I say to Him, "What do You mean by telling this man to stretch forth his hand? It is the one thing he cannot do. Are You mocking his impotence? Are You asking him in the presence of these people to attempt the thing which, if he could do, he would have done long ago? This is the man's disability. Why ask him to do the thing he cannot do?" I say to Christ as He stands there, "This thing is impossible, and therefore it is unreasonable."

I cannot say that save as I keep my eye fixed upon the man with the withered hand. Change your viewpoint. Once again let your imagination have play. Stand with me in the synagogue, and, being perfectly familiar with the disability of the man with the withered hand, for you have known him for years, look into the face of the One Who said, "Stretch forth thy hand." There is always a quality in these stories not present in the cold letter on the page. You must always bring into your thinking the fact of the Person of Christ. This is not imagination. It is proved by all the context and all that happened. If you will follow me, let me try to lead you in an attempt to do, not what the critics did, but what the man did. Put yourself in the place of the man for a moment, and look back straight into the eyes of the One Who has said, "Stretch forth thy hand." I dare venture to affirm that if you can do it, if you can imagine the man doing it, if you will forget the spiritual application and see merely the story, you will at once see what I am trying to bring you to. On that day I think I know the things which passed, flash after flash, through this man's mind. The first thing was this, "He says, 'Stretch forth thy hand.' I cannot do it." Then he looked straight back into those eyes, and I think he said in his heart, "He would not tell me to do it if He did not mean something that I cannot comprehend. I cannot do it, but I will do it because He says it. I shall will to do it." I think it is very likely that doubt lurked at the back of his mind while his will prompted obedience, but the will did prompt obedience. That is the important truth. Looking into the face of Jesus, that face which carried its own argument perpetually as all the stories reveal if you read them carefully, the man said in his heart, "I cannot, but I will." It is a strange contradiction, but that is what he said that day in his heart. The moment he said, "I will," to the command of Christ, he began to find the forces that he had lacked pulsating through the nerves that had made no response, and all strength was his, and he stretched out his hand.

Surely the picture carries its own teaching. First of all, it teaches me that when Jesus begins to touch any man's disability his perpetual method is that of bringing the man face to face with the one impossible thing in his life. He does not undertake a case, and undertaking it say, "Now we will not notice the evil thing, we will begin outside it." He goes right to the heart of the paralysis, as it is manifest in the case of the man He is dealing with. I do not know what Christ is saying to you particularly, specifically; but I do know this, He is bringing you face to face with the one thing which has mastered you and kept you away from Him for so long. He does not stay to admire the hand you can use. That is not His business. He draws your attention and concentrates your thought immediately upon the power that is paralyzed.

You say to me, "In this great scheme of salvation is it not true that the whole man is paralyzed?" It may be so, but this is also true, that every man coming to Christ comes at first in his supreme weakness, in one point of supreme difficulty. If I may put the thing

from another standpoint, men are kept away from Christ by some one thing, some pride of the eye, or some lust of the flesh, some habit of the life, some desire of the carnal nature, some one thing. If it were possible for all the mists to melt about us tonight, and we who have never yielded to Christ could be seen in the clear light of the absolute truth, it would be found that in every case there is one thing hindering. When Jesus said to the young ruler, "One thing thou lackest," He was not dealing with one case only, but with a case which stands forevermore as the type of those who need Him and yet refuse Him. His method is always that of bringing men face to face with the master paralysis of the life. "Stretch forth thy hand." The one thing you cannot do, do! The one thing you are unable to do at this moment, do that!

So far, all this appears to be not calculated to help, but to affright, the soul. Yet we must begin where Christ begins. Is it some habit which masters you? Christ says, "Abandon it now and forever." Is it some one power that is paralyzed in your life? Christ says, "Use it." You tell me your difficulty is right in the center of your being, with your will. You have no will power. Christ says, "Exercise your will and abandon yourself to Me by an act of will." Is your hand withered? Stretch it out. That is His perpetual method.

Now notice the obedience. "He stretched it forth." Let us try to see how this happened. I think there are three of the simplest things to be noticed. First of all, there was a deep conviction in the heart of the man that his hand was withered. In the second place, there was created in his mind, somehow, a profound conviction that Christ was not there to mock him, that Christ was there in some way to draw attention to his disability in order to turn it into ability. In the third place, by confession of faith, the man attempted the thing commanded, in obedience to the One commanding, and in the moment when he made that confession of faith by an act of will, he made contact with all the infinite resources of Christ, and there came, like a new dynamic, healing, helping life, and he did the thing he could not do. Again the picture is a parable.

There is no man here who will stretch out his hand in obedience to Christ save upon the basis of a profound conviction of need. If you do not know the withering of your power, if you have never yet felt the grip of habit upon you, if you are still unconscious of paralysis, I do not think I can persuade you to this Christ, at least, not by this address. It is to the man who knows his need that this story appeals. You must begin where this man began.

You have begun there; you are so far toward Christ. You know your need. I am quite willing to drop out of account all the rest of the congregation if I can talk to one man hidden away. You know your need. You say, "One power paralyzed? Why, all my high essential powers are paralyzed. In the grip of one habit? I am in the grip of more than I care to name. Incompetent in one power? My whole life is paralyzed." You know your need. Now I pray you look into the face of Christ and think well of what He has proved Himself equal to do in all the centuries that have passed, and remember this, that what He has been doing He still is doing, and what He is doing for others He waits to do for you. In your heart is a great confidence in His ability to save certain men. Honestly and logically apply that confidence to your own need first. Say, if you will, that you cannot think how He can help you, but remember that He Who has helped scores of cases, hundreds, thousands of cases such as yours, is surely not limited in your lonely case among all the sons of need that the centuries have produced. May there come back to you confidence in His ability.

But neither conviction of need nor confidence in Christ's ability will bring healing. Healing can come only when a man, convinced of need, sure of His ability, obeys His command, and by an act of will surrenders to Him. Obedience determined upon by act of will, then contact is made with Him in His power, and the hand willed to be stretched forth because He commands it becomes the hand made whole as the other.

What was the last thing in the story? The result: "his hand was restored." Matthew tells us that his hand "was restored whole as the other." Here was a change from disease to health, from weakness to power, from uselessness to usefulness. All was wrought in the moment when in obedience to Christ, he did the impossible thing and found the power to do it communicated in the act of his surrender.

Here again the picture is a parable. In the moment in which a man, by obedience to Jesus Christ, abandons himself to Him, and then wills to do the thing he has never been able to do, in that moment, because Christ commands it, he makes contact with Christ's power, and there comes into his life a change more wonderful, more marvelous, spiritually, than was the change wrought in the hand of this man physically, and yet the same in essence. In the moment of your surrender and your obedience you will be changed from spiritual disease to spiritual health, from spiritual disability to spiritual ability, from spiritual uselessness to spiritual usefulness, for in all the withered powers there lie dormant possibilities which can be quickened only by the touch of the life and resources of Christ. Christ's life and resources can touch these powers only as man's will yields to Christ's will and he begins to use the activity of obedience. The moment that surrender is made, power is communicated, and the whole spiritual life is changed. That is the Gospel. It is not an explanation of all the mystery of the process or of the mystery of the communication of life, but that is practically exactly what Christ does for men. How many people there are here tonight who are conscious of spiritual disability, seeing the vision occasionally, but never able to realize it; feeling a passionate desire for communion, for purity, for holiness and spiritual power, yet always mastered by evil things! Before you leave this building tonight Jesus Christ can change your death into life, your disease into health, your blindness into vision, your incompetence into competence, your disability into ability, your "I cannot" into your "I can."

Unless Jesus Christ can do that, He cannot help me, and He cannot help hundreds and thousands of men. What Jesus Christ is waiting to do, and is able to do, and has been doing for men through all the ages, is not to present an ideal to them which they are to imitate, but to communicate life which enables them to realize the ideal they have seen. What Jesus has done is not to give men directions how to use the withered hand, but to communicate power to the withered hand that they may be able to use it under the impulse of indwelling life.

Is there anything else here? It is not written, but I think we may follow the story. What happened to the man afterward? What happened to his withered hand afterward, the hand no longer withered but whole, restored like the other? How can he maintain that hand in strength? I think I see him going away from Jesus that day saying, "Well, this is wonderful. See here, this withered hand is healed. I have not been able to lift anything, and now I can lift things easily. I have not positively felt life in it, and now it thrills with life." Then I can imagine him saying to himself, "I have obtained a great blessing today. I must take care of it." Then I can imagine that he takes that hand—healed, restored, made whole as the other—and carefully wraps it in bandages to preserve it, and places it somewhere in his bosom to take care of it, and keeps it there lest it should be harmed again. You see the folly of the whole supposition. You see the tragedy of the folly if you carry it out far enough. Let a man do that, and the hand will wither again, for life is maintained in strength by use. When Christ gives a man back his power it is not that the man may guard it, but that he may use it. That man will retain the life in its fullness by using it, by taking hold of weights and lifting them; if he is a mechanic, by taking up his tools, by going back to work. That is the meaning of the healing of the withered hand. Man is not to take care of his withered hand by bandaging it, but to preserve it in strength by using it for the thing for which it was first created.

That which we have ventured to add to the picture is also a parable. You say, "There was a time when I saw His face. There was a moment when I came back with my withered powers to the Christ, and in obedience to Him I commenced to use them, and He gave me back those powers; but I have lost them. My hand is withered again. Instead of power there is paralysis, which seems more deadly than of old." How have you lost your power? There may be many ways with which I am not dealing. One way of losing power is that of perpetually attempting to take care of it instead of using it. There are hundreds of people who lose their spiritual power by the very attempt they make to conserve it. I am not at all sure that the churches are not in danger of being filled with weak, nerveless, anemic men and women because they are so forever anxious to deepen their own spiritual life. I am not sure that the perpetual restless hurrying to and fro in the attempt to conserve personal spirituality is not a prolific source of spiritual paralysis. In the physical realm you have known some people who are forevermore carrying round a thermometer and taking their temperature. They have always got their hand on their pulse, and are wondering whether they are quite so well as they used to be. You know these are the people who are never in robust health. If you can make them break their thermometer and get their hand off their pulse and turn out and work, they will be better. What is true in the physical is true also in the spiritual. I want to warn you with all my heart against perpetual spiritual introspection. As Christ gives you new power use it in the world's wide field for Him. Think more of the need of the man who is down than of your own personal need. Think more of the enterprises of your Lord than of your own strength or weakness. Look less in, and more out, and up into the face of Jesus, and take every power He gave you when you trusted Him, and get out on to the field in ceaseless, hard toil for Him and His Kingdom. Then your spiritual life is likely to be deepened and strengthened and broadened, and instead of anemic and sentimental religion, we shall have full-blooded, robust, strenuous Christianity, which will lift the world and help and bless it. Do not put your restored hand into a sling. Use it. That is the meaning of this story.

In conclusion, I go back from that added word, that carrying out of the picture, a little beyond the actual happenings in the synagogue, and bring you to the central thought, for I want to help the man who is afraid. Are you afraid because you know your own weakness? Your fear is wholesome. But now, I beseech you, for one moment take your eyes off your own weakness and fix them upon Christ. If you will do that, then hear Him say, "Stretch forth thy hand," and know this, when He tells a man to do the impossible thing, He does it knowing that He has in His gift all that is needed to help the man do it. The moment you obey He makes over to you the resources of His power.

I may fine down this whole message and bring it to this final word. Take your eyes off your own disability and fix them upon His ability. Doing that, obey Him, and by obeying Him make contact with His power, and you will feel the thrill and force of it and know its result in restoration of lost and paralyzed powers. Do not think of this as a sermon, but as a message to you. There are some here tonight who crossed this threshold with a reverent and absolutely sincere desire to sit in the quiet of the sanctuary and hear some message from on high, yet you know that in your life is the thing that spoils. You hate it as much as any other man hates it—and more; but you feel that it is your master, that it is useless trying. So it is, in your own strength! If you have got as far as that, you are not far from the Kingdom of God. But now, I beseech you, from your weakness look to Jesus' power; from your inability turn to all that He is able to do, and begin again, not to try in your own strength, but to trust and to obey. Though you make no sign of your surrender, if you will do so, in the moment of crisis that waits for you just over the threshold of the sanctuary at the close of the first day of the week, in the moment of crisis that waits for you tonight, you will find His strength made perfect in weakness, and the thing you could not do you will be able to do through Him Who strengtheneth you.

The Madness of Jesus

And when His friends heard it, they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself.

Mark 3:21

The first matters that arrest our attention are that this was said by the friends of Jesus, and that it was intended to be a friendly saying. These friends of Jesus meant exactly what we sometimes mean when we say of some person in certain circumstances and for certain reasons, "Well, the kindest thing you can say of him is that he is insane!" It was the mother and the brethren of Jesus who thus went out to lay hold on Him and bring Him home, because they had come to the deliberate conclusion that He was beside Himself. Thus it was those who knew Him most intimately, as men and women know each other in this world by the light of ordinary observation, who said this thing. They had lived with Him through all those wonderful years as He advanced from babyhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to young manhood, and had wrought as a carpenter in the little workshop in Nazareth; and I venture to suggest that their criticism was in itself an assumption of His previous sanity. This was something new which caused them to say: "... He is beside Himself"; and so they went after Him to bring Him home. When our Lord commenced His public ministry, these people accompanied Him in that first year in which He traveled up and down between Galilee and Jerusalem and exercised His ministry for the most part in Judaea. When at the death of John the Baptist, He set His face toward the Tetrarchy over which Herod reigned, His brethren journeyed with Him. They were with Him in Capernaum and saw His first sign, that of the turning of the water into wine. There is no proof anywhere in the New Testament that they had any hostility to Him personally. I think it is proven that they were a long time before they became His disciples, and in the account of that very journey to Capernaum to which I have made reference, the evangelist is careful to tell us that He went with His disciples, His mother, and His brethren, thus separating the groups; but there is no evidence of hostility to Him. Later on in His ministry, His brethren endeavored to hurry Him to Jerusalem for manifestation and claim of Messianic authority, but even then there is no proof that there was any real hostility to Him in their hearts. So far as these records reveal, for a year prior to this event, they had not been with Him very much, if at all. As a matter of fact we have no record of their having been in close association with Him from the time of the sign at Cana. Now, the reports of His more recent doings had reached them, and this was the decision to which they had come as they heard about Him; they said, "... He is beside Himself"; and prompted by love for Him and friendship for Him, they traveled, as I think, from Nazareth to Capernaum, to bring Him home. In the Gospel of Mark the sequence is quite plain. He tells us in my text of the fact of this attitude toward Him, then goes back to give an account of what the Lord was doing in the house in Capernaum, and presently resumes the narrative and says that His mother and His brethren arrived seeking Him and sent Him a message; and the people told Him, "... Behold, Thy mother and brethren without seek for Thee." They had come because they thought He was beside Himself and in great love for Him to try to persuade Him to go home and rest. It was then that He said, "Who is My mother, and My brethren," and looking at the little group of disciples added, "... whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." So much for the setting of the criticism.

I am going to ask you to follow me along two lines of consideration. First, let us consider the reasonableness of their suggestion, that He was beside Himself, and second, let us consider the reasonableness of what they counted His madness.

We must endeavor to put ourselves into their place and hear what they heard, in order to know what they meant when they said, "... He is beside Himself." Let us remind ourselves, therefore, of some recent events. When He left Judaea and set His face resolutely to Galilee, He first went to Nazareth, traveling from Judaea toward Capernaum, which henceforth was to be, for a period at any rate, His headquarters. In Nazareth He went into the synagogue, and I think we are justified in imagining that they were present that day, that they saw Him, and knew what He did. There in the little synagogue in Nazareth so familiar to Him, in which He had been brought up and which it had been His custom to attend, He read from the roll of the prophet Isaiah the Messianic prediction and then deliberately declared that that Messianic prediction was fulfilled that day in their experience because He was there in their midst. Then He taught them and in such fashion that they wondered at the grace of His words. Then, suddenly, the tones of His teaching changed, and He said to them: "You will say to Me,

Physician, heal Thyself; do here in Nazareth the things that we have heard Thou hast done in Capernaum." In answer to that supposed criticism He said: "... No prophet is acceptable in his own country." Then he began a discourse characterized by rebuke with the result that the attitude of the men of the synagogue changed toward Him. They passed from admiration to anger and took Him to the brow of the hill deliberately determining to murder Him. He passed quietly through them unharmed and left Nazareth.

Then there came news to them that one day in a house in Capernaum He had done a strange new thing. He had positively claimed the right to forgive sins. He had said to a sick man whom they had brought to Him, "... thy sins are forgiven"; and the rulers had objected: "Why doth this man thus speak?... he blasphemeth; who can forgive sins but one, even God?" Then the news reached them of His rupture with the rulers. That had occurred, and doubtless they knew it, in Jerusalem in some measure, but now it was

repeated in this Galilean district. This rupture was due to two or three things. He seemed to be setting Himself to violate the Sabbath. He never violated the true sanctions of the Sabbath but those false sanctions that were destroying the true sanctions. Then He was neglecting ordinances; neglecting in company with His disciples the fast-days that were appointed; He was not fasting; and most appalling of all, He was consorting with sinners. All this was resulting in rupture with the rulers.

Then they heard that He had now, for some strange purpose which they could not understand, taken twelve of His disciples and appointed them to some close relationship with Himself; they were to leave all ordinary work, and they were now always to be with Him, and presently, He said He was going to send them out to preach and to do what He was doing, cast out demons. They heard all these things.

Look over the whole ground again from another standpoint, and mark the unusual elements in the things He was doing and saying. His teaching was characterized by the strangest sort of other-worldliness. He was always talking as though the other world were the supreme world, of the spiritual life as the supreme life. He had given the great Manifesto and men were talking about it, but He had said such strange things. In that Manifesto there were visions and pictures of a great social order; but then in the Manifesto He had talked about praying for things and getting things by praying for them. A most curious thing about the present hour is that thousands of men are glorifying the Manifesto of Jesus, as it describes a social order, who, nevertheless, ignore it when it speaks about obtaining things by prayer, about knocking at the gates of God.

Then they heard the stories about Him and were amazed at His lack of diplomacy. He was no diplomatist or He never would have broken with the rulers. If He really is the Messiah come to establish the Divine Kingdom, what is the meaning of this lack of diplomacy? Look at Him again, and see the strange disinterestedness of everything He did. What was he getting out of it all? Nothing! He was not even conserving His work, apparently. Then there was the fact of His ceaseless activity and His restlessness; He was never long at one place. Within the last two months, eminent Christian scholars—I will not deny their Christianity though for the life of me I cannot understand it—have been discussing this very question, the sanity of Jesus; and they are basing their discussion upon these very things. They say, “See how restless Christ was, crossing the sea and coming back again; one day filled with joy, the next day filled with sadness.” Positively men are saying again in this day what these friends of the olden days were saying of Him, He was beside Himself! It is a suggestive fact and an interesting one, and it helps us to understand them. Then they heard of His carelessness about Himself. He had no time to eat, He was always giving Himself to others. They said, “... He is beside Himself.”

The phrase itself is a very suggestive one. The English phrase suggests personal eccentricity. “Beside himself” suggests a person standing by the side of himself; that the man who ought to be at a given place is not there; he is beside himself, by the side of himself. That little English phrase carries exactly the sense of the Greek word meaning a person standing outside himself. The paradox is illuminative and suggestive. It describes a man eccentric instead of concentric; a man not quite responsible; the central inspirations of conduct are out of place somehow; there is something wrong with Him; He is beside Himself.

Now let me ask a question. Do we wonder at their conclusion? Much as I object in some ways to the form of my next question, I am going to employ it: If He came to England in bodily form, and did in England exactly what He did in Judaea, what would you say about Him? I do not ask you to answer, because I know; that is, unless you have the vision He had, unless you have been admitted to His deep secret. If you are living according to the spirit of this age, if you are mastered by the maxims of the hour and are swept by the wisdom of the day, you would say of Him, and you would think in the saying of it you were speaking in the most kindly way possible, He is beside Himself, He has lost His balance, He is eccentric, He is fanatical.

Let us now take our second line of inquiry. In contradistinction to everything I have suggested to you, I want to declare first of all the reasonableness of the life and ministry of Jesus. I shall ask you to observe first of all the worldliness of Jesus. I have spoken of His other-worldliness, now think of His worldliness. Remember His worldliness was manifested in such ways that the men of that age said of Him, “A gluttonous man and a winebibber; the friend of publicans and sinners!” No one will imagine that I am saying that He was a gluttonous man and a winebibber; that was but the superlative way in which hostility spoke of the fact that He was not an ascetic, that He lived an ordinary human life, that He entered into home interests, that He was preeminently worldly; of course, not in our modern theological sense. He loved this world, its flowers, its birds, its children, its mountains, its desert places; He was so worldly, so near to the heart of nature, that He was not afraid of loneliness. He was a Man Who walked amongst men, one of their own number, and so free from anything that marked Him as spiritually aloof, that sinning men and women crowded after Him; and they never crowd after Pharisees, even today. It is the human touch that arrests the human race.

In the second place, I ask you to observe that His methods were characterized by unceasing beneficence. He went about doing good. Everything He did was good in that sense. His activity was that of ceaseless benevolence and beneficence; the doing of good, not merely the wishing of good. Wherever He went He was doing good, helping someone always. All His signs were signs which brought blessing to men. I have made reference already to John's question, “... Art Thou He that cometh, or look we for another?” Carefully consider His answer: “... Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame

walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them." Let me not spoil that by adding anything to it.

I ask you to look at Him once more and to observe not only His worldliness and the beneficence of His activity, but His dignity, His quietness, His unobtrusiveness. He did not strive, nor cry aloud, nor lift up His voice in the streets. The crowds knew Him from north, south, east, and west, but not because He was clamant, and noisy, and ostentatious. They were drawn by the things He was doing, the quiet things. If you journey with Him imaginately through the fields, and the walled-in towns, and the country towns, and the great cities, you are impressed with the quiet self-possession of this Man; there seems to be no touch of insanity about Him.

Look again, and let us try to see what He saw. Let us inquire, and we may do it at this distance quite reverently, what were His inspirations, what lay behind all His methods. Whether these strange, wonderful things of familiarity with the world, of perpetually doing good to others, of quiet dignity; or those strange things of disinterestedness, or unceasing and restless movement to and fro make Him seem sane or insane. What lay behind them all? I declare to you that the inspiration of all the life of Jesus was threefold. First, His knowledge of God and the real meaning of the Kingdom of God; second, His knowledge of man and of the real meaning of human failure; third, His knowledge of Himself and of the real meaning of His mission in the world.

His knowledge of God and of His Kingdom. His knowledge of God as truth and grace, as the God of infinite holiness and light and the God of infinite compassion and love. His knowledge of the Kingdom of God. He saw through everything to the Divine purpose and the Divine possibility. He saw the Kingdom of God, the empire over which God reigned and ruled and in which all were submitted to Him, and He knew that it would be a Kingdom of righteousness, of peace and of joy, a Kingdom in which there should be no place for oppression nor cry of distress. Wherever He went He saw that Kingdom of God for He saw the God Whose Kingdom He so passionately desired.

That meant that He saw clearly man and his failure. He saw man in his essential relationship to God and in his capacity for God, and, therefore, in his unutterable ruin. There is nothing more remarkable in these stories than the fact that this is what Jesus saw. He saw humanity as no other man of His time or of all time has seen it, save only those who share His life and have His vision. Matthew admits us at one point to the secret. I quote again the old familiar words, "... Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them...." Why? "... because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." No one else was moved with compassion. Why not? Because no one saw their ruin for no one else saw their possibility. Wherever He looked He saw men and saw them ideally, in their true relationship to His Father, saw them in the breadth and beneficence of the Divine Kingdom, and saw that they were not there and knew what they were missing. Instead of righteousness, He beheld iniquity; instead of peace, He found strife; instead of joy, He saw misery. The inspiration of all the doing of Jesus was His contentment with the perfection of the Kingdom of God and His consequent discontent with everything in the midst of which He found Himself.

Then superadded to that clear vision, that double vision, there was that constant consciousness that mastered Him, to which incidentally He made reference again and again. Every evangelist records the fact, and John becomes rhythmically, monotonously, insistent upon recording the fact that He spoke of Himself as sent by God. He was the Son of God, but He was sent by God into the world for the accomplishment of a mission which He Himself did in varying phrases clearly declare: "... the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many"; "... the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Time and again such speech passed His lips revealing His own inner consciousness. Thus, in a world characterized by failure, He proceeded to His work and resolutely refused to adopt the methods of human wisdom and human strength and human cleverness which had resulted in all the chaos in the midst of which He moved; He walked the ways of men, Himself one Man perfectly responsive to that Kingdom of God which He saw; and He lived perpetually obeying its behests and carrying out its commands and doing the will of God.

Do we wonder at His other-worldliness when we think of Him as holding perpetual communion with His Father, seeing through all the mists the established Kingdom? Do we wonder at His worldliness as we recognize that this earth with all its misery was still Divinely beautiful to Him, so that, as He Himself did say, God clothes the grass of the field, and garbs the lily with more delicate beauty than that in which Solomon in all his glory was arrayed? A sparrow falls and sickens and dies, and has as Comrade in its dying, God. When that man bending to his toil, overwhelmed with it, bearing the burden and heat of the day, wipes from his brow the sweat and dust of toil, and with it some hair of his head, God has numbered that hair! Nothing was little or away from God. Do you wonder at His other-worldliness, that all His speech took on the accents of the eternities, and that His brow was ever so high lifted as to catch the flaming glories of the spiritual? Do you wonder at His love of the world, that all its trees and flowers and birds and children were near and dear to Him? In this world He knew nothing of divorce between the material and the spiritual. For Him every common bush was ablaze with God, and He saw men sitting round plucking blackberries! Do you wonder at His worldliness or at His other-worldliness? Do you wonder at His freedom from diplomacy when diplomacy simply meant arrangements between men who had forgotten God and did not know Him? Do you wonder that once when in the midst of lamentation and complaining at the

unreasonableness of His own age, He thundered against the persistent rebellion of the cities in which He had done His work, His lamentation and thunder suddenly merging in the worship of God and His words, "... I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes..."? Do you wonder at His disinterestedness? Are you amazed at the ceaselessness of His activity, its restlessness, and His carelessness of Himself?

He was concentric. He was the only Man of the vast multitudes of His day Who was not beside Himself. It was they who were beside themselves; they who, because no longer related to the center, God, were no longer in true relationship as within themselves. That is why He said to them in differing phrases, yet again and again the same thing, "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for My sake, shall find it." He was the lonely concentric; all the rest were eccentric. He was the one Man not beside Himself, and therefore by the standards of all men who were beside themselves, beside Himself. In an eccentric world, a concentric man will ever seem eccentric.

It did not end with Jesus. I most reverently say it did not begin with Him. I read you a strange Psalm. It is one of the finest pieces of satire and irony in Hebrew poetry. Mark the movement of the psalmist as he laughs at the wisdom of the world, amassing wealth and passing to Sheol, and then exults in the wisdom of the simple-hearted, that rest in the wisdom and love of God. I repeat that to an eccentric world, the concentric man ever appears eccentric. It was so before Jesus came. It was so after He came. There was a day when Paul was talking to two kings and a queen, and one of the kings burst in upon the discourse saying, "Paul, thou art mad; thy much learning doth turn thee to madness." Who was mad; Paul or Festus? The Pope of Rome said that Luther ought to be in bedlam. The men of his own church said Xavier was mad. All England laughed at the unutterable folly of John Wesley. Many people thought William Booth was not quite sane! It has run through all the centuries. Men concentric, who have seen God and a vision of His Kingdom and have been mastered by the passion for that Kingdom, are ever considered beside themselves.

So I would commend to all this passion of Jesus, this worthy passion. To be thought eccentric with Him, to be thought fanatical in matters of religion, is a high compliment as angels watch and listen.

It is a worthy passion this, for it includes all others that are truly noble; all passion of protest against that which is wrong and oppressive, lies within this passion of our Lord for the Kingdom. All passion of endeavor that constructs and builds and toils and suffers, and has no time to eat, is en-folded within this passion of Jesus for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

It will always bring this charge of madness upon those who share it. The world is still self-centered, and in its eyes God-centered men are still the eccentrics of the world. When Paul reached Thessalonica, he had not been there very long before the men of Thessalonica said of him and of his friends, "... These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." It is exactly the same idea. Let me suggest a sermon on the text; "... These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." I will give you the divisions. First, the world is down-side up; second, and therefore, the men who are turning it upside down are turning it right side up; but third, and consequently, the men who are living in the world will think they are turning it upside down. That is the whole business.

Hear me as I say, I hope not censoriously, what the church of God supremely lacks today is this kind of passion. It is not the passion of madness, of frenzy; it is the burning passion that enables the church of God to cooperate with God when the wisdom of the world laughs at it. That is the true passion. We are not quite sure today that these methods of Jesus are the best methods. Are we not a little in danger of being over-busy in conferring about the adaptation of religious thought to the modern mind and the adaptation of religious organizations to modern conditions? I am somewhat tired of modern things, and that because the things of the Christ are ancient and modern. Christ told His disciples that they were to bring forth out of their treasure-house things new and old, and in proportion as we walk with Him we shall be compelled to the foolish things of the world wherewith God confounds their wise things.

That little bit of work you did this afternoon does seem rather old-fashioned and out of date; that class of children that fidgeted all the while is just a little behind the times, is it not? A thousand times No! That is building for eternity and hastening the coming of the Kingdom of God. That call you made that no one knows about save you and the sick one, the flowers you took, the word of cheer, the tender approach to a soul that asked how it was between that soul and God; all that is Christly work.

I am not undervaluing other methods. God will send some of His workers into the House of Commons, and the more the better. God will send some of His workers on to Parish Councils and Town Councils, and we need them all. But let us not undervalue the foolish, simple, wandering, restless methods; the method that does things as they come and never draws up a program. That is the whole story of the life and ministry of Jesus. He did things as He went, as He passed by, as He went out, as He was by the sea. In the midst of preaching somebody disturbed Him, and He halted His preaching and went after Jairus; and on the way with Jairus a woman touched Him, and He left Jairus on one side to attend to the woman and then went on again. He did the next thing that came, because to those eyes the Kingdom was ever present. That touch of the hand, that glance of the eye, and that tone of the voice, all spoke of it and brought its power nearer. He was content to wait, as He still is waiting, till His enemies be made the footstool of His feet. That will never be done by the clash of arms, or by human cleverness; but by Christ and His comrades, of whom, until the last victory is won, the world will say they are beside themselves. So if we know the wisdom that is from above, we

shall sing with Wesley:

Fools and madmen let us be,
Yet is our sure trust in Thee.

106 - Mark 3:28-29 - Unpardonable Sin

Unpardonable Sin

Verily I say unto you, All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.

Mark 3:28-29

It is impossible to overestimate the solemnity of these words of our tender and compassionate Redeemer, yet they have always been considered difficult of interpretation, and strange, I had almost said wild, theories have been based upon them. I personally believe that much of the difficulty of interpretation is due to lack of the childlike heart, and a simple method in approaching them.

I think I speak for all Christian workers—and by Christian workers I mean all preachers of the gospel, or teachers, or individual workers who know what it is to come into personal dealing with men and women about spiritual things—when I say that at some time or another someone has come to you and told you that they fear they have committed the unpardonable sin.

After some years of such work, and after having met with very many such cases, I have come to this deliberate conclusion, that when a person is obsessed by the idea that he or she has committed this sin, such obsession is the result of Satan's attempt to harass a saint, rather than his effort to destroy a sinner. If that may seem a somewhat strange thing to say, I want quite simply to attempt to make clear what I mean by it. I speak now entirely from experience, and experience may not be trusted as infallible foundation for dogmatic statement. Speaking entirely from experience, I declare that I have never yet found a man or woman, hard and rebellious and determined in sin, possessed by that particular fear. It is always the fear of the sensitive soul, always the fear of some trembling child of God. I do not say that it is always the case, but I do say that I have never met an exception. Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that Satan never destroys men by making them believe that, but he does harass the saints by attempting to make them believe that.

A method I have invariably followed for many years in dealing with those who come to me and say that they have, or that they fear they have committed the sin against the Spirit which has no forgiveness, is that of asking them this question: If you have committed this sin, will you be good enough to tell me what it is? I have never yet found a person possessed of the fear that they have committed it who could tell me what it is.

Notwithstanding all this, the words are full of solemnity. Jesus uttered no idle words. No words that fell from His lips are more full of startling arrest than these. No words are more calculated, or ought to be more calculated, to make men pause and listen and think, and search their own hearts: "Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." Immediately, let me mention one matter, so that I need not pause to refer to it again. The change in the versions is all-important. In the Authorized Version it reads, "Is in danger of eternal damnation" or condemnation. Here is one of the cases where there is absolutely no doubt that the text was incorrect. The translation resulted from the fact that the King James translators followed the translation of Tyndall, which translation was based upon the text of Erasmus, and there is no question that at this point it was at fault. Now that other texts are at our disposal, it has been found that Jesus said a far more solemn thing, a far more searching thing than that man blaspheming the Spirit is in danger of eternal judgment, punishment, or condemnation. He declared that such a person is, not in danger of, not even guilty of, in our sense of the word guilty, but to be more literal and in this case far more accurate, he that committeth this sin is in the grip of an eternal sin. Such is the strong and startling word of our Lord.

I detain you yet another moment by way of introduction as I ask you to remember that this most solemn thing was said in immediate relation to perhaps one of the most gracious things that ever fell from His lips, and that is why I read the twenty-eighth verse as well as the twenty-ninth. Hear again the twenty-eighth verse, "Verily I say unto you, All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme." Not all their sins may be forgiven, but shall be forgiven. It is one of the greatest words He ever uttered about forgiveness, a word in which He virtually declares that the value of His Cross covered the whole race, and that the redemption He provided was for all men; that sins, not may be, but shall be forgiven; except that sin which He here described as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

We shall better understand the meaning of our Lord if we interpret His words in the light of the whole Bible. Therefore I want in very brief words to cover a large area in the next few minutes, as I remind you of what the Bible teaches concerning the Holy Spirit of

God and His mission in human history. Having considered that it will be pertinent for us to inquire reverently, "what is the sin against the Holy Spirit." From these two lines of consideration we may draw lessons of practical application which shall be by the help of God for our own profit in this evening hour.

What does the Bible teach about the Holy Spirit? No one can be at all acquainted with this Library without knowing that the Spirit of God is referred to from the beginning to the end; yet that there is a distinct difference between the teaching of the New and the teaching of the Old Testament. They are not contradictory. They are complementary; yet if I had no New Testament, the doctrine of the Spirit's activity would be other than it is. Go back in memory to your Old Testament, and passing over it in rapid survey, think of what you find in it concerning the Spirit. His work is referred to in the first chapter of your Bible, the Spirit brooding over chaos, the agent through whom the will of God was wrought out so that cosmos came out of chaos, light from darkness, order out of disorder. I pass along over the pages and I find ever and anon, some individual at a crisis who, for a special purpose is spoken of as acting in cooperation with the Spirit. The Spirit was with Joseph and he was able to explain dreams. The Spirit fell upon Bezaleel, and he was able to be a cunning worker in gold for the beautifying of the house of God. The Spirit laid solemn imprisonment upon Balaam, and he was compelled to utter blessing when he desired to mutter cursing. The Spirit clothed Himself with Gideon, and Gideon became the deliverer of his people from Midianitish oppression. The Spirit fell upon Saul, and even he for a time was among the prophet. The Spirit spoke through the prophets, gave them visions and voices, and made them the messengers of Jehovah. You will notice, moreover, through all the Old Testament, that the Spirit was forever associated, according to the thinking of these men, with Jehovah Himself, working with Him in wonderful fellowship. I may quite reverently borrow the language of the letter to the Hebrews concerning the method of revelation in the past, to describe the method of the Spirit in the Old Testament as "at sundry times and in divers manners." The Spirit fell upon men, equipped them, passed away from them. As I look back over the history which the Old Testament reveals, I see the Spirit of God interpreting the will of God to men when they specially needed it, equipping men for their work in crisis. No system of teaching is given concerning His work, but He is often referred to; so I find through my Old Testament the presence of the Spirit in the history of men.

I come to the New Testament and immediately find that I am in a new age. One Man is presented to my view, born of the Spirit, anointed by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, led by the Spirit; one Man Who passes before my view from Bethlehem to Calvary, all the while in living cooperation, fellowship, partnership, and harmony with the Spirit of God. During the last days of the life of that Man, I listen as He teaches the group of His disciples truth concerning the Spirit of God, to which men had never listened before. He told them distinctly what the mission of the Spirit should be, when presently, as the result of His own work, that Spirit should be given to men. He made a distinction which I want you to note, the Spirit would no longer visit them fitfully, but He would abide with them forever. He would no longer come to them for special revelation of the will of God, but He would remain to tell them the secrets of God in the commonplaces of life as well as at crises. He would no longer anoint them merely for some hour of crisis, some day of battle, some delicate piece of workmanship, but He would be with them all the days and all the hours, and in all places, in all the activities of life.

Jesus declared that the Spirit should be sent from the Father through Himself, as the result of His own work. He declared that the work of the Spirit should be that of making Him, Christ, living and real in the experience of men. His work was to be Christocentric in the profoundest sense of that word. To the disciples of Jesus, He was to reveal Jesus when He was absent in bodily presence, bringing to their minds all the things He had said, leading them into all the truth concerning the Christ. He was to be the advocate of the absent Christ in the lives of His disciples, and so their Comforter, strengthening them, disannulling the orphanage which they would experience when they lost the vision of His face and the sense of His human nearness.

He also declared that the Spirit would have a special mission in the world beyond His mission to the Church: "He, when He is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged."

We, therefore, have not to consider the ministry of the Spirit prior to the coming of Christ. We have to consider the ministry of the Spirit subsequent to that coming, in its new aspects, new relationships, new meanings, and new purposes, all of which result from the mission of the Christ.

Therefore, let it be understood that the work of the Spirit in the world is not to make Himself the consciousness of the Church, but to make Christ the consciousness of the Church. The work of the Spirit in the world is not to present Himself, or offer Himself to the world. The work of the Spirit in the world is to present Christ, to offer Christ to the world.

The Church of God all over the world is confronting a very subtle peril, that of putting the Spirit of God in a place of prominence that is entirely unwarranted by New Testament teaching. The movement associated with the phrase, the gift of tongues, at the present time has upon it the hallmark of hell. Let there be no mistake about this. The terror of it to my heart is that some of the sweetest saints of God, the very elect, are being deceived, because they lack this fundamental intelligence of what the mission of the Spirit

really is. If the emphasis of any movement is on the Spirit and on gifts that prove the presence of the Spirit, know this, that according to the teaching of the Christ, that movement is out of harmony with the work of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is to reveal Christ. The Spirit is the hidden Worker making the Christ Himself the supreme and overwhelming consciousness of believing hearts, the one and only Saviour of men who need salvation.

What then is the sin against the Holy Spirit? The answer to that inquiry can only be given as we thus understand the ministry of the Spirit. That is why I have taken so long in attempting briefly, yet nevertheless carefully, to declare what the work of the Spirit is. The sin against the Spirit is that of persistent, willful rejection of His testimony concerning Christ. There are other passages in the New Testament which have created as much anxiety, as much doubt in the hearts of some Christian people, as has this great and wonderful word of Jesus. They are all passages that refer to the sin which has no forgiveness. You will find two of them in the letter to the Hebrews, one in the sixth chapter, verses four to six, "For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then apostatized," "fell away" I have upon the page, but I use the anglicized form of the Greek word because it helps us to understand the meaning of falling away, "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance: seeing that they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." It is quite evident that the sin for which there can be no repentance and for which there can be no forgiveness is that of rejection of the Son of God, as revealed and interpreted by the Spirit in that dispensation which had not dawned when Jesus uttered the warning, and which did not dawn until the day of Pentecost. If you turn on in this same letter to the tenth chapter you find another warning full of solemnity, "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgement and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries. A man that hath set at nought Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy," mark the sin, "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." I know there are other difficulties of interpretation and of exposition surrounding these two passages in Hebrews, with which I am not now proposing to deal. I have only read them that I may bring you face to face with the central thought they contain about the sin for which there can be no repentance and no forgiveness. What is the sin? The crucifixion of the Son of God afresh. The trampling under foot of the blood of the covenant, the counting of it as an unholy thing. How then do men commit that sin? By doing "despite unto the Spirit of grace." To state the case as from the other side. What is the sin against the Holy Ghost? The sin of deliberately refusing to accept His testimony. The sin of deliberately rejecting Christ in that hour in which Christ is presented to the conscience and will by the ministry of the Spirit, so that the conscience is sure of Christ, and the will is constrained toward Christ. Conscious and willful rejection of the Spirit's revelation of Christ is the only sin for which there never can be forgiveness.

Let me put this in another form. Had these men to whom Jesus spoke committed the sin? Certainly not. They were in the neighbourhood of sin. They had been undoubtedly convinced, in the presence of His work, of superhuman power, and they had charged it upon an unclean spirit. They were not guilty of the unpardonable sin. They had not committed blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, but He warned them. If you will suffer your sense of history to help you for a moment, you will see how presently the hour came in which He departed from the world, having left behind Him the circumstances of straitening and limitation. When the Spirit came to the disciples they knew Christ better than they had ever known Him when He had been amongst them in bodily form. On the day of Pentecost when the Spirit fell, sinners in Jerusalem came to a consciousness of the meaning of the mission of Christ which they had never gained while Christ Himself stood in bodily presence amongst them and preached. He warned these men, saying in effect, you may blaspheme My name, speak against the Son of God, and all your sin of that kind shall be forgiven, but there is a new ministry to commence, a new unveiling of My presence and power to be given to you, the Spirit is coming to convict, mark the word, "of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged." If you disobey that testimony, if you refuse to yield when the Spirit interprets the meaning of My mission, then there can be no forgiveness, because in that hour you reject the Saviour and forgiveness for all sin. The sin against the Holy Spirit then is that of final and willful rejection of the Lord Christ as He is presented to the heart of man by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That sin is committed only when the Spirit is finally withdrawn from human life, and the Spirit of God is never withdrawn from human life until the choice has been made distinctly and irrevocably in full possession of all light. Never until that solemn and awful hour is the Spirit withdrawn, and never until that hour can man have committed the unpardonable sin.

Follow me patiently, one step further. That sin cannot be committed during probation. It is not a sin of an hour. It is not a sin of a moment. It is not a sin of an act. It is a sin of attitude, definitely, persistently taken, until the choice has become destiny. When does that hour come? It cannot come while men are still in the midst of light, in the midst of the operation of the Spirit. It never comes until man crosses the boundary between this life and the life which lies beyond. This is not the day of vengeance. It is the day of grace. I may have refused, disobeyed over and over again, time after time, but the Spirit does not leave me, it does not abandon me. I am here to make this affirmation to you with all confidence, basing it upon the whole revelation of the Bible, the Spirit never abandons a man while this life lasts. God has set a limit to probation. At that hour when man passes out of the present into the larger life that lies

beyond, he crosses the boundary line.

Have you ever heard the Scripture of the Old Testament quoted, "My Spirit shall not always strive," in order to declare that it is possible for a man with whom the Spirit has been striving for ten, twenty, thirty years, to be abandoned, so that he may live another ten years, lost. I declare that there is no warrant in Scripture for any such affirmation. Take that word, "My Spirit shall not always strive." It was a word of the old economy, as the Bible teaches us. It was a word used in the days when Noah preached righteousness before the flood came. When did the Spirit cease to strive with the men of Noah's day? Never until God shut Noah in, and shut them out, and the day of judgment immediately supervened. While he remained a preacher of righteousness, the Spirit was still striving with men. Lifting the ancient figure into our own age, remember this: God's Spirit never ceases to woo men until the hour comes when crossing over the line they enter upon the destiny they have created for themselves by their own choosing. If there has been no obedience to light, no response to the Spirit, then there is no forgiveness. It is the one and only sin for which there can be no forgiveness. All other sins shall be forgiven except that of refusing forgiveness by refusing the Saviour; the sin of blaspheming the Spirit, refusing His ministry, shutting the heart against His appeal, declining to answer the wooing tenderness of His ministry, or the warning severity thereof. If a man shall so choose and so rebel then the sin becomes age-abiding, it becomes eternal sin and there can be no forgiveness.

Yet hear me once again. Every time in which you refuse the Spirit's ministry you are sinning toward that sin. The final hour will never come while this life lasts. Where is that dividing line? Who shall mark it out for himself? Who shall know but that the Spirit so often refused will not be compelled to end His ministry ere the light of morning breaks because the day of opportunity shall have passed, as you shall have stepped from this room of time into the spacious halls of eternity and the spiritual world. The solemnity of the word needs to be upon our hearts. It may be that in very deed I am close to the border line, and so He who said, and said in virtue of His passion, in virtue of His cross and shame and dying, that all sins shall be forgiven, also said that if a man will not receive forgiveness by the ministry of the Spirit then there is no forgiveness, neither can there be, for the sin becomes age-abiding.

I read to you the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah. You remember when Christ passed into the synagogue and read the great words that indicated His own Mission, He read partly from that sixty-first chapter of Isaiah. Have you noticed where He ceased reading? "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath appointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," and He closed the book and handed it back to the reader in the synagogue. If you will turn to the book of Isaiah you will find that our punctuation puts a comma where He stopped, and the next sentence is this, "and the day of vengeance of our God." But He did not read that, because He had not come then for the day of vengeance. He had come to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. Over nineteen hundred years have run their course, and the comma is still there, but it is only a comma. He will come again with flaming feet for "the day of vengeance of our God." Did you notice the next phrase in Isaiah? "To comfort all that mourn." That is not a mistake. Do not imagine that the prophet has lost his way in rhetoric. It is scientific. It is systematic revelation on the highest line. "The acceptable year of the Lord"! We are in it yet, men, women and children! Beyond it the day of vengeance, of judgment, the day of the Lord, of fire and sword, thank God, upon all oppressors, and upon all wickedness. Beyond that again is the comforting of the mourning, and the establishment of the Kingdom.

Why do I refer to all this in this particular connection? Because the principle is one that I want you to discover at this point. Jesus in this evening hour, in this sanctuary, to every man, woman and child, is fulfilling His ministry by the Spirit in proclaiming liberty to the captives and opening the prison doors to such as are bound, and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. There is only a comma there, and beyond it the day of vengeance of our God. Where does the comma end in your experience? When you pass out of the acceptable year. When you pass out of the gracious time, which the writer of the letter to the Hebrews describes by an ordinary word and which he dignifies with a capital letter, "Today." Ere morning breaks, some of us may have crossed the line. If to the end we have refused the ministry of the Spirit, have declined to let Him break chains and open prison doors and set us free, then mark the word of Jesus, we are in the grip of eternal sin. There is no forgiveness. We pass out into the darkling void where we have lost the vision of God and the possibility of fellowship, and have become the companions of our own sins, dwellers with lust, that is, hungry, having no bread. The day of vengeance of our God has broken for no man or woman in this house.

Troubled heart, has the enemy been saying to you that you have committed the unpardonable sin? Nail that lie down in the presence of the Saviour. The fact that you are here; that your feet found their way here, even though you are filled with anxiety; the fact of the tender pain of conscience lest you may not be right with God; these are supreme evidences of the ministry of the Spirit wooing you toward the Saviour, attempting to persuade you to allow Him to loosen the bonds, unbar the doors, break the chains, and set you free. It is the acceptable year of the Lord.

Yet I could not be true to this text if I did not let my final word be its warning note. Forgiveness for all sin and blasphemy, but if I will not have forgiveness, then I commit the unpardonable sin, the sin of refusing the Christ Whom the Spirit presents. No one has committed it. Many may commit it ere a day or a week has passed. No one need commit it. Harden not your hearts while it is called Today, but answer the ministry of the Spirit Who is not making Himself the supreme consciousness of your thinking, but presents to

you the Christ. Yield yourself to the Christ presented by the Spirit, and the Spirit will enter your life bringing with Him the value of Christ's death, the virtues of Christ's life, the victory of Christ's indwelling, and you will find your way into fellowship with God for life and for service.

May we feel the constraint of the Christ through the Spirit, and feeling it, yield to it, and be delivered from the sin that lays its eternal grip upon us so that there can be no forgiveness.

107 - Mark 6:3; 6:14; John 6:15; Mark 6:49 - Four Mistakes about Christ

Four Mistakes about Christ

Is not this the Carpenter...?

Mark 6:3

John the Baptizer is risen from the dead, and therefore do these powers work in him.

Mark 6:14

Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take Him by force, to make Him King, withdrew again into the mountain Himself alone.

John 6:15

... they, when they saw Him walking on the sea, supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out.

Mark 6:49

We are often troubled about Christ, that so many different views of Him are held, and yet that is almost the inevitable sequence of the wonder of His Person. The fierce conflicts that have raged around the Christ—as to Who He is, whence He came, what is the real meaning of His mission—all are due to the finite nature of the mind of man in its attempt to grasp the infinite wonder and glory of the Person of the Lord Christ.

We have read these chapters in order that we may see that exactly the same things were true in the time when He was in the world. He was manifested among men, Himself a man, but a perpetual enigma to men. In this one brief chapter, brief by comparison with the whole fact of His ministry, Jesus is described as a carpenter, as a prophet, as a king, and as a phantom. These opinions were all wrong and they were all right. In every one of them there was an element of truth; but in each case, only one truth being recognized and discovered, false deductions were made. The mistake in each case was due to the limiting of Christ which resulted from an attempt to express all the truth concerning Him in the language of one particular manifestation of His presence and His power.

Let us then consider first the opinions that were given here; second, the mistakes that were made here; in order, third, to discover the lessons that are suggested here.

We need not tarry very long in examining the opinions. The story is familiar to all of us. Yet let us take time to recall the surroundings in each particular case. In the first, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary,..." we have the opinion of His kinsfolk, the opinion of the people who in all likelihood were most perfectly acquainted with Him within the narrow circle of His human life. Eighteen years of that life had been spent in Nazareth. There He had grown up in the sight of the men and women of that little township just off the great highways, but yet so near to them that the men and women living there were in all probability familiar with the things happening in Jerusalem and the towns adjacent, for these highways between Jerusalem and other great centers lay at the foot of the hill. Nazareth was a small township, so small that we are led to imagine from the actual wording of the criticism, that Jesus of Nazareth was the one carpenter; "Is not this the carpenter...." They knew Him perfectly well. He had grown up in their midst. They had seen the natural and beautiful boy advance to young manhood, until He came to be about thirty years of age. Now, after a brief absence, He had gone back, as a Teacher. It was not at all strange that this young man should begin to speak. The strange fact was the method and the marvel of His teaching. The picture is very striking. In that little synagogue, the men who knew Him best, looking, listening, and amazed, until, interrupting His speech, as the story suggests, they said, "Whence hath this Man these things?" What is the power that lies behind this strange manifestation of wisdom and these strange and wondrous works of which we hear in Nazareth? Then they began to account for Him, "Is not this the carpenter...?" And observe how particular they were to place Him, how particular to show that they knew all about Him, "The son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us?...". If we would know the tone and temper in which the question was asked, we must include the next sentence, "And they were offended in Him." They stumbled over Him, because they could not understand Him.

In that criticism they declared a truth that we are always thankful they did declare, that Jesus was a carpenter. They knew Him, as a man who wrought with His hands for the support of His own earthly life, through the larger part thereof. "Is not this the carpenter...?"

they were quite right, and they were sadly wrong.

Let us pass to the next scene. The fame of Him was spreading through all the country round about, increased by the mission of His apostles. They had been sent out, and we are told that they cast out devils and anointed many sick with oil and healed them. The fame of Jesus was thus spreading, and it reached the court of Herod, and Herod immediately said, "John the Baptizer is risen from the dead...." Herod had not seen Him. Herod never did see Him until the final hour, and then he never heard His voice. Christ declined to speak to him. But he heard the story of His power. These words of Herod reveal the impression made by the story of the work of Christ on a man who was immoral. To satisfy the vengeful nature of a wanton, Herod had beheaded John. An evil man can behead a prophet of God, but he cannot bury him. The prophet will follow him and will be with him in the night. If there is blood on your hand, you can say with Lady Macbeth, "Out, damned spot," but you cannot cleanse that hand. Herod heard of a prophet, heard of wonders wrought, and all the superstition in his guilty nature mingling with the moral cowardice of the man, he said, "John the Baptizer is risen from the dead...." The first opinion was due to the unfairness of the jealous. The second was due to the cowardice of the immoral.

Then we come to the story of that wonderful feeding of the five thousand, a kingly act in the true and full sense of the word kingly. It is said here of Christ, a thing so often repeated of Him, that He saw the multitudes, and He was moved with compassion for them. Why? Because they were as sheep without a shepherd, and it would be quite as accurate to say, a nation without a king; for God's kings are all shepherds. The true qualification for kingship in the economy of God, as the Bible reveals from beginning to end, is the shepherd qualification. They were as sheep without a shepherd, and "He taught them many things"; and then He fed them. There had been no movement towards His crowning while He taught them, but the moment He fed them they wanted to crown Him. They said, "this is the King we have been looking for"; and they would fain take Him by force and make Him a King. Mark only gives us the picture of Jesus suddenly dismissing His disciples and returning to the mountain, but John tells us the reason; "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him King, withdrew again." They desired to make Him a King upon the basis of His ability to satisfy their material hunger. They reasoned, He is a King, He is kingly, He can feed, and so they would crown Him. That view was that of the desire of the selfish.

We come to the last scene, the most difficult to deal with in some ways. We will look at it in its simplicity and naturalness. He retired to the mountain to pray, and the disciples, in obedience to His command, pointed the prow of their boat to the other side. The wind was contrary, and they were distressed in rowing. Then He went after them from the height to meet them by appointment on the other side of the sea. He walked across the waters, with no intention whatever of coming to them in the boat. He would have passed them by, which distinctly means that it was His purpose, that it was His intention to pass them. They saw this figure moving over the waters, and they cried out for fear and said, "It is an apparition, a phantom." This was the dread of the perplexed.

He is a carpenter. That opinion was due to the unfairness of the jealous. He is a prophet. That dread was the outcome of the cowardice of the immoral. He is a king. That view was based upon the desire of the selfish. It is an apparition. That was language resulting from the dread of perplexed hearts.

Let us turn, in the second place, from this brief glance at the circumstances and the opinions, to consider the mistakes. But just let it be recognized that there were elements of truth in all these opinions. When these men of Nazareth said, "He is one of us," they said a true thing. He is One of us. They were perfectly correct as to His relationship to Mary and as to the relationship borne to Him by the men and women they knew. He was one of them, so much one of them that they had never dreamed that there was anything beyond immediate kinship in His nature. I think that we might take out of the old prophetic writings one word and inscribe it in imagination over the door of the shop in which Jesus had wrought and used the tools of His craft for eighteen years; "There was the hiding of His power." There was no halo round His brow, no peculiar flash in His eye that suggested Deity, nothing in His appearance to make these men think for one single moment that He was other than a peasant. He was One of us. It was perfectly true. There was nothing in His appearance to make men imagine that He was anything other than they were.

When King Herod said, "John... is risen from the dead," there was an element of truth, not in that supposition of John's resurrection, but in the thing that made Herod quake, the consciousness that there was still a voice bringing him face to face with moral standards. John had made Herod tremble in olden days when he had listened to him. Herod had been almost persuaded to righteousness by John. There is one little phrase that indicates this. Herod "heard him gladly." Herod was now merely the wreck of a man, wholly sensual. John was dead and buried, but a voice was sounding. Herod had not escaped the law, he had not escaped that prophetic note that makes men tremble. He was perfectly right in thinking of Jesus as a prophet, stern indeed, enunciating the severest of all ethics.

The people who desired to make Him King were perfectly right. He is King, and He is King upon the basis of His shepherd character; and as King He will provide for all the necessities of those over whom He reigns if they do but obey His teaching. That, however, is the order. He taught them and then fed them. He is the one King Who really provides for the material needs of men, Who will feed them and feed them perfectly.

I watch the disciples as looking at the strange figure moving over the waters through the darkness of the night they say, "It is an apparition!" Here was something coming toward them that they could not fully apprehend, something upon which they could not put their measurement. They forgot the tossing waves and howling wind, the material and present difficulties, in the presence of this new and mystic difficulty, the difficulty of a personality that they could not apprehend, could not measure, could not weigh. There was an element of truth in what they said. Christ is still an enigma. We cannot say the final thing concerning Him. He still moves over the rough waters, surprising and startling men; and men see Him as He passes, but not clearly, and catching some mystic going of the Christ, they are still filled with perplexity.

Wherein, then, lay the mistake in each case? In the limitation of their views placed upon the Christ Himself. If we could gather these four opinions and express them in one statement, I think we might be near the whole truth about the Christ. I put that carefully, because I am not sure that it is correct. Yet, think of it for a moment. What were the things that these men discovered? His nearness, His severity, His authority, and the infinite mystery of His being. That surely is the Christ; near, "One of us"; severe, so that no sinner could escape Him, though He robe Himself in purple and hide Himself in the court. King so that He will enunciate His moral ethic, and to the people who obey it, He will be the Provider of all their material need; and yet, an infinite Mystery, baffling the attempt of the centuries to place Him, breaking the mould of every philosophy that attempts to include Him, forevermore appearing in some new guise, some new wonder, some new marvel of His power. Just as the disciples think that they have understood Him and seen the ultimate of His wonder, He dismisses them across the water, and hies Him to the mountain, and then startles them by walking over the water that baffles them. The element of the mysterious in the fact of the Christ perpetually breaks upon the consciousness, and men come to recognize that they cannot say the final thing concerning Him. Near, One of us, a carpenter; severe, so that immorality is always dragged into light. King, with an ethic the severest that men have ever dreamed of, and a power the most generous that humanity can ever hope for. Yet ever beyond us, a mystery, an apparition.

In either of these cases, the recognition of all would have prevented the false conclusion. If they could have mingled with that conception that He is One of us, the very thing the disciples said, "He is a phantom," and known that beyond the manifest was the mystery of His being, then they would have listened to His teaching and not have been offended. Or if the disciples, when they saw Him only as a phantom and hardly knew Him, could have remembered the One Who in love bade them pass from the sea to the mountain, they would have been delivered from all false fear. If Herod could have known the nearness of this Man to him in all the sympathy of His heart, in all the authority of His kingship, and in all the infinite mystery of His being, then he would have left the court and found his way to this King of kings, not merely to submit to Him but to receive from Him all He could bestow. The mistake was in limiting the Christ. A recognition of the whole truth would have prevented the false conclusion in each case.

What then are the lessons suggested by these things said concerning the Christ in this sixth chapter of Mark? The first is that the opinion a man has of Christ invariably reveals the man. The men who attempted to place Him as a carpenter did so because they were jealous and were not prepared to be honest enough in the presence of the wonders they confessed of word and work to find out the deeper secret. The fear that shook the heart of Herod like a tempest in the night at the rumor of Jesus was the result of his own impurity. The desire to make Him a King as a wholesale food-provider was based upon personal selfishness and the materialization of life. The fear of the phantom in the case of the men who were in the pathway of obedience, with their prow pointed to the shore He had indicated, was the outcome of their own doubt and their own questioning. Every criticism of Christ is a revelation, not of Christ, but of the men who make the criticism. Whenever a man shall attempt to place the Christ and leave Him as One of us, it is a revelation of the fact that he has lost a sense of the spiritual. Whenever a man is afraid of the Christ, and dare not name His name, and endeavors to escape the message of His prophecy and kingship, it is because in that man's heart there is something of impurity; the only man that dreads the Christ is the impure man. When a man shall eliminate from the teaching of the Scripture and the church, all supernatural elements and attempt to make Christ merely the leader of a party that shall feed men on this earth, it is because in that man's heart there is enshrined a selfishness which is wholly and utterly of the dust. When we who name His Name are afraid of Him, the fear is the outcome of our own doubting and our own questioning, and our lack of courage. All criticism of Christ is a revelation of the attitude of those who criticize.

This chapter is a wonderfully living chapter. All these things are still being said about the Christ. We are still being told that He is One of us. Men are still attempting to place Him on the human plane. We are still being told that it is John risen from the dead, an ethical Teacher, with a severer note, and a fuller program, but nothing other. We are still being told that Christ's chief mission is to feed hungry men and women with material bread. We are still being told that Christ is an unreal personality, an apparition, a phantom. Such mistakes arise from imperfect knowledge of the Christ in every case. There is always the element of truth and always the neglect of the whole truth. The truth? Yes, nothing but the truth; but not the whole truth. He is One of us; He is an ethical Teacher; He does care about hungry men and will provide for their need; He is an infinite mystery. But He is not merely One of us, He is more than all, and the very universality of His appeal to humanity is a revelation of His wholeness and His greatness. We can find no other teacher, no other leader that appeals to humanity as such. We cannot take any great leader of whom we may think away from the place in which he lived and see him perfectly fitting and at home in another locality. It is unthinkable to imagine that Oliver Cromwell could have delivered France. He belonged here, and you cannot put him anywhere else. It would be an utterly vain piece of

imagination to bring Abraham Lincoln and put him into this country. He belonged to the New Land, and God put him there, and he did his work there, but he was local. But this Man—man of my manhood, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, human of my humanity—you may put down wherever humanity is and men will gather round Him and find in Him their head tribesman, their chief of clan, their great ideal. The universality of His humanity is demonstration of the fact that He is something more, infinitely more than merely one of us. Ethical teacher, He assuredly was, but infinitely more. And if not infinitely more, then nothing to me—I freely say it to you. I speak as a witness; if Jesus has done nothing for me than give me an ethical system, then that appals me, that reveals my paralysis and leaves me helpless. But He is more, oh troubled sinner. Thank God if you have come so far as to tremble in the presence of the Christ. He is more than an ethical Teacher, He is a Saviour. He is One Who, if Herod will but have it so, will purify Herod's polluted soul. He is One Who, if you will but have it so, will break the power of canceled sin. Infinitely more than an ethical Teacher, One Who communicates to men the new forces that will remake them and enable them to fulfil the ideals of His teaching. A food Provider? Surely yes, but first a Teacher, and we have no right to claim that the Christ shall fulfil His function of supplying material need save in the order of His own revelation. He must be the crowned King, and He must be crowned, not upon the basis that He will care for the body, but upon the basis that He includes in the grasp of His purpose, eternity, and the spiritual things. Not temporal in His power ultimately, but eternal and therefore temporal. He will not remake the social conditions of today by dealing with the decaying material at His hand. He will remake the social conditions by bringing to bear upon them the regenerating forces of God. Unless men submit at that point, they have no claim upon the fulfilment of the function of His kingship for the feeding of men. The multitudes will make Him King by popular acclaim, and He will escape to the mountains. But for the little group, and the growing number, and the ultimate assembly of souls who crown Him Lord in the spiritual and central and fundamental realm, for them He will build the city and bring in the ultimate triumph of righteousness.

But is He an apparition? Let me answer thus. Every day I live and think and preach, I am more conscious that I cannot say the last word about this Christ. I would be very sorry to attempt to tell anyone exactly what my Christology is. Only this I know, that whenever I come into the presence of this human life, so real, so definite, so warm, so tender, so actual, I have to bow and confess, My Lord and my God. Charles Wesley, you remember, put the whole thing into a daring phrase, "God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly man." Let us not be afraid at the mystery, but touch the manifest. Let us no longer stand away at infinite distance from the Christ, afraid of the things that cannot be encompassed in human thought or expressed in human speech; but let us get near to the Jesus of these Gospels as He appears before us, eyes wet with tears, face often beaming with the smile of a great gladness, touching familiarly and healing in His touch, putting His arms about the children, his heart full of infinite compassion; let us get near to Him and know this, that the One Who moves across the storm-tossed waters with the appearance of an apparition is the One Who will look at us and say, "Be not afraid, it is I."

The last word is this. These mistakes about Jesus limit Him in His power. Observe what is said about the men at Nazareth. "... He could there do no mighty work...." Why not? "... because of their unbelief." If we make Him only the Carpenter of Nazareth, He can do no more for us than the Carpenter of Nazareth. We put our limitation upon Him, and He is limited by our limited conception. He had no word for Herod, never spoke to Him; one of the most appalling and awful revelations of the New Testament. Herod never met Him until Pilate sent Him to him; and when He came, He uttered never a word. He refused to be crowned because He was limited by their conception. He could not exercise the power of His Kingship upon that desire. Finally, He could not pass the disciples by. We are inclined to say that is full of comfort! It is not. Study the story carefully. He would have passed them by and better for them that He should. Had He passed them by, what then? Then, they would have learned by weathering the storm in His power, some lesson of His power. He is always passing us by. You know the old story of the woman who saw three women at prayer. She dreamed that the Lord passed by, and to the first He came and bent over her with tender caress; to the next He spoke but a word; but the last He passed almost roughly. The dreaming woman thought, "How tenderly the Lord loves the first; the second is not so dear to His heart; and with the third He is evidently angry." Then the Lord, in her dream, came to her, and said "Oh woman of the world, how wrongly hast thou judged? That first woman needs all of My care and tenderness to keep her following at all; that second woman is of stronger faith, and I therefore am hastening her preparation for yet higher service; but the last one I can absolutely depend upon; and by the very processes by which I deny her My voice, I am preparing her for the highest service of all."

He would have passed them! We are not ready for Him to do so! Then in great pity He will stop and come on board. But, ah me! if I could only let Him have all His way. We limit Him in His power when we limit our conceptions of Him. Let us never forget this. Let me give you the whole philosophy by quotation. D. L. Moody said, in this country many years ago, in his own homely, straight, and magnificent way: "Christ is just as great as your faith makes Him."

Then, what shall we do? We will attempt to know Him better. Paul's last great letters thrill with one desire for all his children in the faith; that they might know; and the measure of our knowledge of Him will be the measure in which we are able to put our trust in Him. We come to the fuller knowledge by following the light of the knowledge we have. As we walk in that and obey it, He will appear fairer and fairer, greater and greater, until He fills the whole horizon; and when He does that, then faith in that great Saviour will result in great victories wrought by Him for us and through us to the glory of His name.

The Shock Which the Spell of Jesus Brings to the Soul

And He called unto Him the multitude with His disciples, and said unto them, If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Mark 8:34

Our text for the morning consists of the four words at the heart of that saying of Jesus, "Let him deny himself." That presupposes our previous meditation on the assumption of the first words of the text: "If any man will, or would, or should desire, to come after Me," namely, our meditation on the attractiveness of our Lord. That attractiveness is as powerful today as ever. Whenever men really come face to face with Him they feel the spell of His Person and character. In these central words, then, we have our Lord's statement of the condition on which those desiring to follow Him may do so: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself."

I want to remark, in the first place, that these words of our Lord express the sense of the soul concerning itself in His presence. When our Lord said these words in His time on earth, when He still says them, He but voices what the soul itself feels.

The sense of the glory and beauty of His character is inevitably also that of the meanness and deformity of self. Really to get near to this Christ of the Gospels is to be conscious of the most staggering, shattering shock that has ever been experienced. Of course, we may hear a great deal about Jesus and never have this sense of shock. It may be that we are made familiar with facts concerning Him from our childhood, and yet it may be a long while before we arrive at this sense. I am referring to the sense of the soul when it really meets Him, apprehends anything of the glory of His Person. Really to know this Man Jesus, to see Him as One Who has the secret of life, and is living a full life while lacking all the things on which men ordinarily depend, to listen to Him, and to be assured that He is speaking the word of truth by the appeal that what He says makes to our deepest souls, to come face to face with Him, and to pass under that matchless influence of the keen, quick sympathy of His heart, is to come to the sense of His perfection; and then invariably that sense reacts on the soul as a revelation of its own imperfection and failure. I see Him, I listen to Him, I follow Him, I become more and more acquainted with Him, and as I do so I am more and more convinced of the beauty and the glory of His character and of his Person, and I start after Him, desiring to be like Him. In that very hour of starting I am halted, because I become conscious of my own unlike-ness and of my inability to be what He is. He lived, and I have not the secret of living. He knew, and I lack certainty about anything. He cared, and so gathered to Himself all human souls in the comradeship of a great fellowship, and I find myself excluded from it, and the poverty of my isolation surges on my soul. I behold Him, and I say already to myself, Yea, verily, this is glory, this is beauty, this is life, this is perfection! But I am not that, I cannot be that. Therefore am I filled with fear, and the fear is generated by the apprehension of the glory and the beauty of Christ.

Now, this is exactly what Christ says. He recognizes that fear. If you desire to come after Me, you must recognize that you are not what I am. Would you be, you must deny self. All the ideals of the past, the purposes of the past, and the passions of the past are to be denied. You are to be at the end of everything if you are coming after Me.

Let us observe very carefully that these words reveal in a flash the difference between the Lord and all others. He was supremely the One Who denied Himself. That is the whole story of His human life. Therefore He says to men, If you will come after Me, you must do what I have done. You must deny yourself. That is the story of Jesus. He was the most self-emptied soul that ever trod the earth, and therefore the most self-possessed. Of other men, the story of life is that of being self-centered, and therefore self-destroyed.

This very spell which Jesus casts on men, then, is a revelation of the malady which affects humanity, and it is a proclamation of the only way by which that malady may be cured. The spell of Jesus is the dawning sense of sickness in the soul, and the word of Jesus is the indication of the way of cure. Let us think, then, along these two lines, the human malady, and its cure, dealing first with the malady.

What is the matter with humanity? The hour in which we live makes the question very vital, very pertinent. The hour is characterized by a vastness altogether too great to be apprehended. I need not stay to argue that. Is not that the difficulty in all our thinking? Is not that the difficulty that statesmen have to confront today? I shall carry you with me, however, when I say that we may sum up the story in a very blunt and brutal word by declaring that humanity today is tossed with a raging and destructive fever. What is the nature of the malady? How are we to diagnose this sickness which, at the moment, has its expression in blood, brutality, and death?

The individual is always microcosmic. If we can understand the human soul, we understand humanity. Our Lord here addresses Himself to the human soul, to one man. If any man, seeing the glory and the beauty of the ideal, feels moving within him some desire to realize it, let that man deny himself. The malady in its vastness is thus diagnosed in a human soul. Yet for a few moments let us take the general outlook as we press this question.

I begin with some negative considerations. Man's intellect is not at fault. Man's emotional nature is not at fault. Man's will power is not at fault. Never in the history of the world were these things more manifestly strong and mighty than they are today. Never have we seen the manifestation of the strength of intellect, the strength of emotion, and the strength of will, as we are seeing it today. These are all essential faculties of human personality, and the essential faculties of humanity as God created it; and today they are all mighty in their operations, and yet we are in this terrible fever.

I say that man's intellect is not at fault. His scientific achievements prove this. Never was the intellect of man so successful along every line as it is today. Man's capacity for visualizing a better order was never keener than it is today. Is there anything more interesting, more arresting, to the thoughtful soul today than this fact, that wherever we turn, whatever newspaper, or magazine, or new book we read, we find that men are seeing through the darkness to a new order? As to what it is to be, there are different opinions; as to how it is to be brought about, there are varied and conflicting opinions; but man is everywhere talking about the new order. Man is visualizing for himself some order of life from which this dire and disastrous fever shall be shut out. The intellect of man was never more active, never stronger.

Man's emotional nature is not at fault. Man still loves unto death; and, thank God, man still hates with the fierceness of the wrath of God everything that is unholy and unlovely. The emotional nature of humanity today is being stirred and is manifesting its power as it never has before.

Man's will power is not at fault, and that is being proved in both camps of this great strife. Whether will power, and the will to power, are the same things I am not now discussing; or, at least, I may say, in passing, they are by no means the same thing. I am not now speaking of the will to power, but of the power of will. The war did not end before Christmas, 1914, and it is not over yet! The will power of our enemy is still strong, and our own is mighty. Moreover, that will power will not be broken by material defeat, however unpalatable a truth that may be. That is one of the truths we have to face. If we look back through the history of mankind we shall find that it is the defeated nation that is often victorious in the long issue. One of the greatest perils that threatens a nation is the peril that is born in the hours of its victory. Unless the victory be consecrated to useful and holy purpose, the very victory generates the evil thing that undermines the life of a nation.

If, then, these things are still stronger, what is the matter with humanity? The malady lies deeper. The malady is something the effect of which, whatever the something may be, is to make all the God-given and Godlike powers of intellect, emotion, and will, forces of destruction instead of forces of construction. Now, there is some reason for it. What is the matter with humanity?

Now I return to the text and I say that here we have a perfect diagnosis of the disease. Let us get back to one soul, and not to the soul of the one man to whom Christ spoke, but to the soul of Christ Himself. The very charm of His personality, the very spell He has cast on me, demands that I should understand the profound secret of that life that lived, that knew, that cared, the life that lures me by its beauty. What is the secret of life? When I have discovered that, I have discovered the nature of man's malady.

In the light of that revelation we discover that no man can control himself, and therefore humanity cannot govern itself. All its blunders, all its raging fevers, all the unutterable and unfathomable agony of this hour, all these things are the result of humanity's attempts to govern itself, to manage its own affairs—or bluntly, yet truthfully, let us say it, the result of humanity's attempts to do without God. Look again at the glory of the Man we have been considering. The secret of His greatness was that He denied Himself. I quote from the great passage in Philippians, beginning resolutely right in the middle of it rather than at its commencement: "Being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient." What humanity needs is to understand that the word "obedient" is a very different word from what humanity really has imagined it to be. We had better return to the individual soul again. The human soul has to understand that the word "obedient" is the greatest and most beautiful word that can be used to describe its attitude. Obedient! How we fight against it! How we struggle against it! Account for it as you will, and I am now at the business of accounting for it, from childhood upward it is the one word we have hated most. Obedient! Yet this is the one great word that reveals the secret of the perfection of Jesus. Being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient. I go a little further back in the same passage and I read concerning Him that He was in the form of God, but did not consider that equality with God was a prize to be snatched at and held for Himself, and that therefore He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant. He was the servant of God. All the story of His life as Man is the story of obedience to the one central perfect will, the will of God. Multiply that Man by the new race of newborn souls—I am now speaking in the realm of the ideal—and what have you? A race of souls obedient, mastered, a race of souls who have learned this as the supreme and fundamental thing, that no man can control himself, that he is too big to manage himself, that he was not constructed to run by his own design, his own willing and his own planning, that he must be under the control of the God from Whom he came. Humanity cannot govern itself. The attempt at self-control is the root of the malady. Intellect is there, but it lacks the true light. Emotion is there, but it has not the true inspiration. Will is there, but it is not mastered by the true principle.

In a recent article in *The Nation*, headed "Minerva at the Cross Roads," a very remarkable article in many ways, the writer describes the present condition of humanity, and speaks of the passion for power prevalent throughout the whole world. Among other things,

he writes:

Power over man, over nature, over land and sea and sky; power we seek everywhere in size and speed and treasure, power over everything but ourselves.

I have nothing to do now with the context of the article. That was the writer's diagnosis of the situation. I have quoted the passage for one reason: says this writer, "power over everything but ourselves." That is true, but it is not our fault, it is our nature. That is the exact point that we are trying to see. Humanity cannot have power over itself. Humanity can master the land and the sea; humanity can have power in size and speed and treasure, but it cannot have power over itself. Humanity is not capable of governing itself. This is the lesson that humanity has yet to learn. Whether it will learn it from this war or not, I will not predict. Whether it will even learn it until He shall come, the flaming of Whose advent feet will usher in the final revelation of God's will for men, I will not now pause to argue. When Jesus said that day at Caesarea Philippi to that multitude, mainly of Jewish men, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself," He was uttering no mere superficial words that affected only the passing hour. The final character of them has not yet dawned on humanity, for humanity has been running on its way, trying to manage for itself by its cleverness, by its policies, by its armaments, which it cannot do. The ultimate issue of such attempts is this appalling and wicked waste of human life and the welter of the present war. Humanity cannot manage itself. My God! Are we going to learn it or not? That is where repentance must begin if ever hope is to be possible. The doctrine of self-control is a doctrine of unfathomable nonsense as well as hopelessness.

I pass back once more from the larger outlook to the individual soul. If I tell this young man that he must control himself, I am talking nonsense. He cannot control himself. He is too big, he is too vast for his own apprehension. He may not believe it, that young man! Some of us who are a little older are finding out that the things we thought were so easy are not easy. Where we thought we had controlled ourselves we were mastered by wrong forces which would have destroyed us but for the grace of God. How can anybody control himself in any way? I am sure you are ready to have patience with me if I take a personal illustration. In the days of my youth my favorite athletic sport was wrestling. Now, how can a man wrestle with himself? The whole art of wrestling is to get your opponent down and put him on his back. Try that with yourself. You cannot put yourself on your back and hold yourself there. When you are there, who is on top? That is the whole business. A man says, I will manage myself. He may sign pledges, and give up, or he may decide to give up without any pledge. He is just cutting off here, and lopping off there, and he thinks he is self-controlled. The fact is that he is more self-confident in all the foolish pride of his nature than before he began to lop off his branches.

Humanity thinks it is able to govern itself. Government of the people by the people for the people is a ghastly failure unless you preface your idea with some other word, or follow it up with some other word. Government of the people by the people for the people under God. Yes, verily. But if we attempt it without God, the last and worst tyranny of this world will not be the tyranny of monarchy or the tyranny of wealth—it will be the tyranny of democracy. A democracy is hell unless it be also a theocracy.

Thus we see the human malady. We have been trying to do without God, and without control, and to manage; and there is no ideal we held, high or low, but that at this moment lies in ruins on the plains of Flanders! High or low, the ideal is broken, and the will to power is defeated. The ideal that we can deal with humanity by treaties and conferences at The Hague is broken into a thousand fragments.

Jesus Christ still stands, His head lifted above the smoke of battle, His eyes still lit with the vision of the eternal truth, and He is saying to men: If you will come after Me, deny yourselves, confess your folly, repent, not first of your drunkenness, and your gambling, and your lust: these are symptoms of that deeper wickedness, the underlying imagination of the nation that God is out of date, and that we can do without Him.

And there also is revealed the cure. To see the malady is to know the cure. The cure is radical and revolutionary. I have chosen my words with care.

It is radical. By that I mean it goes to the very root of the business. Let man deny himself. The word "deny," as it is usually translated, means, as many of you at once recognize, to disown, to abdicate, to put self off the throne entirely. To deny self is a great deal more than to practice self-denial in our modern sense of the phrase. We are all being urged to practice self-denial now, and a few people are doing it! But that is not the call of the text. The word of Jesus is a profounder word than that. Let man deny himself. Jesus calls men to central readjustment. To deny self is to make room for God. And that is what our governments are afraid to do. It is also to believe in God. It is, therefore, to hand the keys over to God. It is to confess folly, and to confess weakness, and to wait for God.

The call is also revolutionary; it demands the readjustment of every other relationship. Through the denial of self in the individual home is revolutionized. Given a home in which those who constitute it know this principle of denying self, and you have music and harmony and love, and all those subtle but marvelous forces that make Home.

Self being denied, the Christian Church is revolutionized. When we in the Christian Church learn the secret, and submit to it; when

self is denied, and the living Lord is enthroned actually, then we shall have done with our conflicts. Not with our differences of opinion. But then we shall be able to sit down, and talk with the men who do not agree with us, and with whom we do not agree, and so we shall feel our way nearer to the truth. It is bitterness of heart that makes schism, and paralyzes power. The Church of Christ itself never has fully realized the importance of the call of Christ to deny self.

It is so also in the national life. It is so in all international relationships. In proportion as man is at the end of himself, and humanity recognizes the necessity for the wisdom from on high, and the strength of God, in that proportion the malady will be healed.

Now let me end by stating that in nothing I have said so far have I been preaching the Gospel. But the Gospel is involved. I have already quoted some words concerning Jesus, and I stopped short. Now is the time to complete the quotation. "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." There was no need for the Cross in the life of One Who was always self-emptying. It was an improper thing for Him, unless there was some larger purpose in it than that of His own Personality. He was always self-emptying. Why, then, the Cross? The Cross created the way of denying self for man who had been self-centered, self-governed, and self-ruined. The Cross is the place where we receive life as a gift of grace. At the Cross of Christ we confess that we cannot lift ourselves or save ourselves out of the depths into which we have fallen, and we take all that is provided in the Cross as His free gift.

That is why the Cross is unpopular, and that is why the Cross is powerful. The real reason in human thinking for attempting to get rid of the Cross is that it denies man; it tells man that he cannot save himself, that he can never govern himself; but that having ruined himself, it can restore that which he has ruined. Christ comes with His Cross to human cleverness, and to human might, and declares the folly of that cleverness and the wickedness of that might. He says to men: You can be made new, you can climb to the height of the ideal; but you must begin here, by the way of the Cross, taking your life from God as a gift of His infinite compassion and His infinite grace. That is where we begin to deny ourselves, not by taking up our own crosses. That comes after. No man takes up his cross in order to be saved. From that other Cross, which is outside us, in the mysterious transactions of which we had no part, there comes to us the gift of life and power and healing. It is a gift of love that keeps us forevermore sensible of our own weakness, a gift of power that keeps us forevermore sensible of our need of control from without, a gift, having received which, we shall walk every foot of the way with the sense of dependence on God.

109 - Mark 8:34 - The Spell Which Jesus Casts On Men

The Spell Which Jesus Casts On Men

And He called unto Him the multitude with His disciples, and said unto them, If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Mark 8:34

This is a very old text, but it is by no means exhausted. It is central to Christianity, being the inclusive message of Christ, having universal as well as individual application. According to Matthew and Mark, these particular words were spoken at that hour of crisis in Christ's own ministry when He inquired of His immediate disciples what the result of His preaching and teaching and living had been. At Cæsarea Philippi He asked them: "Who do men say that I am?" One of their number made the great confession that He was infinitely more than a prophet, being the Messiah, the One to Whom all the prophets had given witness. It was then that Christ uttered the words of our text.

It is evident that these words were based on the supposition that some men desired to follow Him. That is the first arresting note of the text.

Immediately following it, we have our Lord's clear enunciation of the condition on which such a man may follow him. "Let him deny himself." He then indicated a program of life to the soul who would fulfil that condition and so follow Him. Let him take up his cross and accompany Me.

Three lines of thought are suggested by these words. The first is of the spell of Jesus. I resolutely use the word "Jesus," because that is where we must begin. That is where these men began. They had no theory of His Deity, did not know anything about it, in the early days of His mission. They began with the Man Jesus, and that is where we begin. There was in Him something which cast a spell on men, which made them want to follow Him, an attraction which created in the souls of men that desire to which He made His appeal when He uttered these words: "If any man would come after Me..." That is the subject of our present consideration.

We shall consider on subsequent occasions the sense which that spell produces in the human soul. It is the sense of surprise, of shock, of upheaval. Directly a man comes face to face with Jesus this is the result. In the days of His flesh, when men really knew Him, really reached Him, it was so; and directly men come face to face with Him today, really get to Him beyond all the things that hinder, they are staggered and shocked and frightened.

When the soul is shuddering with fear in the presence of the infinite glory and beauty of the One Who has thus attracted, He calls that trembling, frightened soul to come with Him. Let him take up his cross and travel My way.

Let us now consider that which is suggested by the words: "If any man would come after Me." Amid the myriad marvels merging in the mystery of the Person of Christ one of the most patent and persistent is His attractiveness. It is safe to say that without exception He casts the spell of His personality on all who come face to face with Him. That is the revelation of these Gospel narratives. They show how irresistibly He attracted men. I am not saying that they yielded to Him, that they obeyed Him, but that they were attracted by Him. There was something about Him which drew men after Him. They could not leave Him alone. Someone once said, and it was at least an illuminative suggestion, that probably more days of work were lost in the three years of Jesus' public ministry by men running after Him from place to place than had ever been lost in that neighborhood before.

The same sense of attractiveness exercises its spell on all those who read these records, if they read the records simply and naturally. They are the records of a Person Who irresistibly drew men after Him. Read them, and the very attractiveness that drew the men of His own age after Jesus comes through the reading and produces exactly the same effect on men today. Of course, the spell of the Lord is not felt if He be veiled or in any wise changed. If this Person of the Gospel narratives passes under the influence of merely ecclesiastical organization, they retire Him behind veils into some realm of mystery, and men are not attracted. Also, over and over again this Person of the Gospels has been hidden from men by discussions of schoolmen who have dissipated Him by theorizing. I am inclined to go further and say that very often the spell of Jesus has been destroyed by systematic theology, which at least tends to harden Him into formulas and rob Him of that vital principle that drew men in the days of His flesh and that draws men still if only they can get near Him. If we would consider Him we must do so directly, through the only medium provided. In these four brief pamphlets (gospels) we find Him, and we find Him nowhere else. Whatever method we may adopt in our attempt to understand this Person, we must correct our method by these pamphlets, or we lose Him. That is in itself a mystic test of every method that men have employed in approaching Christ. Any departure from these pamphlets ends in changing the Person or veiling Him so that He ceases to attract.

I am not going to attempt to describe Jesus in detail. Realizing the fact of the spell which He evidently cast on the men of His age, and which He still casts on men, I want to speak of the nature of that attraction as I apprehend it. Let us, then, go back and see Him as these men saw Him in order that we may discover what it was in Him that created a spell that irresistibly drew men after Him in the days of His flesh. It seems to me that there were three things about this Man that created that attraction:

First, men felt that He lived, that, somehow, He had the secret of life.

Second, men felt that He knew, that when He spoke it was with authority.

Finally, men felt that He cared, that He was not merely interesting Himself in examining social conditions, that He was not merely occupied in the academic work of collecting specimens, but that He cared.

The men who gathered about Him in Galilee, in Judea, in Perea, in Nazareth, in Jerusalem, in the metropolis and in the village, in the great crowds assembled at the feasts, in the little groups that met Him by the wayside—these men who looked at Him, listened to Him, became familiar with Him, felt, first, that He was a Man Who lived, and a Man Who knew, and a Man Who cared. In these things I find the secret of the attractiveness of the Lord.

First, they felt that He was a Man Who lived. I am well aware how very commonplace a statement that sounds. It may at once be said that we are all living. That, however, is exactly the point. Were not all these men living who saw Him? It is evident that the impression He produced on them was that they were not living, and that He was living. He had a secret that they lacked. In reading the New Testament, all of us have observed how perpetually that great word "life" was on the lips of our Lord, and I think that nothing is more interesting than the fact that over and over again His use of the word, His reference to it, was in answer to men who asked Him questions. Men constantly broke in on His teaching to ask Him a question about life. The lawyer said to Him: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The young ruler came to Him and said: "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Peter, in one of those great outbursts of understanding, said to Him: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words [sayings] of eternal life." All these recognized, somehow, that Jesus had the secret of life.

Now, our trouble in reading these stories often is that we read them evangelically. We get our theological values presently. We shall be driven there. But if we take up the story, and see a young man coming to Jesus and saying to Him, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and think of this young man as going to a mission service and asking what he must do to be saved, in the full evangelical sense of the inquiry, we are wrong. This young man did not understand things as you and I understand them. It was the question of one man, who saw another Man live. In effect, he said, Tell me how you live. You have the secret I lack. What lack I yet?

Now, the arresting fact was that Jesus lived, apparently without possessing the keys of life. The very keys that men thought were necessary to admit to life He lacked. He had none of them. He was without wealth, He was without possessions. He was without

worldly advantage. Nevertheless, the supreme impression He made on men who went after Him and listened to Him was that He was living a full-orbed life, a life that was rich and glorious and satisfying. The rich young ruler had all the supposed keys of life hanging on his girdle. He had wealth. He was a ruler among his people. He had social and worldly advantages. Yet he came to Jesus and said, in effect, You have the key of life and I have not; you are alive, and I am not. Tell me the secret of the life you are living. Through those fields and along those roads of Palestine there walked a Man alive, and as they watched Him men said, What is the secret of it? Here is a Man Who seems to be excluded from everything, Who is limited in every way, but Who is living. I am going to make all this superlative by saying that I think sometimes we are wrong when we speak of the poverty of our Lord as though it was something that we should be sorry for, or that He was sorry about. I do not think Jesus needs pity for being poor in the measure in which He was poor. Do we not sometimes recite great words of the Bible in such a tone as to make them utterly wrong?

"Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

I have quoted these words over and over again with a touch of sorrow in my voice. I do not think now that there was any touch of sorrow in Jesus' voice when He uttered them. It was the declaration of One Who was independent even of those very things which men count to be necessary if they are to live. It is possible to live, without nine hundred and ninety-nine out of the thousand things which we have counted necessary.

Men looked, at Jesus, and saw that He was excluded from no realm of life. He lived and talked, always with reverence, but always as One Who was admitted into the very inner secret of the Presence of Deity, and as One Who knew no veil between Himself and God. He spoke of angels as though He knew much about them, and said things about them that we do not understand today, which yet seemed to be commonplaces in His own life and experience. Then remember that in all the illustrations that I have given we find that He answered questions by giving the secret of life. Said the lawyer, How am I going to live? Said Jesus in answer, If you want My secret of life, this is it: Love God and love your neighbor. That is life.

Said the young ruler, What shall I do to live? Jesus said, Follow Me. Put your life under control. Human life is altogether too big to manage itself. It must find its master.

Said Peter, speaking for the disciples, To whom shall we go? Thou hast the sayings of eternal life. Later on, in the hearing of the disciples, Jesus gave the ultimate key to life: This is life, age-abiding, to know God. Thus He solved the problem. We, however, are supremely interested for the moment in the experience itself and the effect it produced on men. Jesus lived, and men, rich and poor, went after Him, and said, Tell us the secret. You are alive and we are not. How do You live?

That sense abides until this moment. If we could rescue this living Personality from behind the veils of ecclesiastical organization, from the discussions of the schoolmen, from the hardening of theological formulas, so that men could see Him as He is, they would still say: What does this mean? This is life! What is its secret?

Again, men felt that Jesus knew. There are some things in these narratives that really are amusing in a holy sense. One day the Pharisees sent officers to arrest Jesus when He was teaching in Jerusalem. The officers were not prejudiced, but were under orders, and they went. By and by, they came back without their man. The rulers said, Why have you not brought Him? The officers replied, Never man spake like this Man! They forgot all about arresting Him. He had arrested them, and that simply by His teaching, by what He was saying.

Matthew tells us how after the great Manifesto to the multitudes, the people were astonished because Jesus taught them as One having authority. That is not a remarkable statement. So far, the marvel of the statement has not emerged. Jesus taught them as One having authority! Certainly, that is natural. But let us hear the statement to the end. And not as their scribes. That is what makes the story remarkable. The scribes were the men who had authority, but the multitude said, This is not like the teaching to which we have been listening all our lives. We have had authority, official authority, dogmatic authority, but this is different. This is Authority itself! What then was the nature of Jesus' authority? It was not a sense of authority created by anything in the personal appearance of our Lord. Artists never can express all the truth about Him, so they give Him a halo. But He had no halo visible to the men who were impressed with His authority. He had not the insignia of the scribes. There were no signs on Him that spoke of official position. Wherein, then, lay His authority? It was the authority of what He said. It was the authority of the truth. The arresting fact to men was that there was no gainsaying Him, no contradicting Him. Prejudice was ever angry with Him, will was constantly rebellious against Him, but conscience was ever agreeing with Him. I need not speak in the past tense. I can employ the present tense. Take any words that are recorded in either of these Gospels as having fallen from the lips of Jesus, and listen to them carefully. I declare that, finally, you cannot gainsay them. Though prejudice may be against Him, though will may be rebellious, the human soul will always say of His teaching: Yes, that is so; it is authoritative truth. The only criticism of the teaching of Jesus that is at all reasonable, the only thing that can be said, that ever has been said truthfully against the teaching of Jesus, is that His ideals are not practicable. That has been said.

I make no apology for repeating an illustration I have used more than once in this pulpit. A generation ago, full thirty years ago, a

man said to me, "You know, my quarrel with your Christ is that He is unreasonable." I said, "Tell me what you mean by that." And he gave me this illustration, and it is a perfectly fair one. He said, "Confucius said to his followers, Be just to your enemies. I can do that; it is reasonable. Your Master said, Love your enemies. I cannot do that. That is unreasonable." Don't you agree with that man? Where are you living today? Are you finding it easy to love your enemies today? As I said, I was thirty years younger then. I did not quite know how to answer him. I felt the force of what he said. I shall always believe that I was led and helped. What I did say to him was this: "I see your point, but suppose that men could learn to love their enemies!" His answer came sharp as the crack of a pistol. "Why, then," he said, "there would be no enemies in the world." Exactly. Therein is the greatness of the ideal. Not practicable, we may say of the teaching of Jesus, but we must admit immediately afterward that if it could be done, then we would have solved all our problems, social, political, and economic. Herein was, and is, the marvel of Jesus. He taught, and men were very angry because what He said ran counter to their desires, their prejudices; but they knew He was right. He spake as One having authority. Again, to quote the words of Peter with another emphasis, "Thou hast the words [sayings] of eternal life." Jesus had not only the life itself, but the interpretation of it. He interpreted this authority also. He was perfectly willing to tell men exactly how He knew. He said, My teaching is not Mine but His that sent Me. He claimed to be in direct communication with the eternal Wisdom. He gave men only the Word of God. I think on this point there is almost startling light in something John tells us. On one occasion our Lord said: "If any man hear My sayings, and keep them not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day." This is most arresting, differentiating as it does between personal authority and the eternal authority of truth. Christ said distinctly, a man is to be judged at last by His word. Men knew it, and they went after Him. Here was a Man Who never said: It is reasonable to suppose; a Man Who never said: In all probability it is so; a Man Who talked quietly and simply, and as we ponder the matchless words, so full of simplicity that all the children can understand them up to a point, and we know we are hearing the last wisdom of eternity, and we have no appeal. We are often angry! We will not obey! We will crucify Him, silence His voice! But as we do it, we still know that what He said was the truth.

And last, men not only felt that Jesus lived, and that He knew; they felt also that He cared, and that He cared about them. He proved His interest by all the facts of His life. Some of the little sentences of the Gospel narratives reveal simply the exquisite beauty of the fact. Listen to this: "He could not be hidden." Why not? I put over against it another Scriptural quotation which contradicts it: "He hid Himself." Put them together. "He could not be hidden.... He hid Himself." They do not contradict. The paradox is the revelation of truth. Why could He not be hidden? Because out there in the street was a woman in trouble about her child, trying to get help. Ah! He could not be hidden then. The agony of that woman drew Him forth from hiding. He cannot be hidden there. He hid Himself. When? When unbelief and the pride of ignorance were refusing His message and were about to do Him harm, then He hid Himself. But men irresistibly drew Him. If I have said that He attracted men, let me now add that was the deep reason that men attracted Him. He could not let them alone. That ultimately is the meaning of the Incarnation. God could not abandon the sinning world. It brought Him out of His heaven. All that found expression in the manner of life of this Man. Men knew that He cared. The appeal that He made to humanity was not due to His curiosity. You may be curious about men, but that will not attract men to you. His interest, I say, was not academic. He was not studying specimens. His interest in men was not artistic merely. What is art? It is the expression of a truth. But He shared human experience rather than sought to express it. He lived in man. His own consciousness was a self-emptying one, and therefore through it He received the consciousness of others. He felt all the agony of the widow of Nain whose boy, her only son, lay dead on the bier. He felt all the withering paralyzing pain of two women who had buried their brother, and He wept. There is a supreme illustration of this very sympathy. I confess that it is to me a most amazing story and I can understand the expositor and the commentator trying to account in some other way for those tears of Jesus. Suppose I came to see you in the presence of your dead and found you in agony and in tears, and suppose, just for the sake of argument, that I knew that in half an hour I could give you your dead back again, I do not think I could weep with you. But He did. My inability is the result of the comparative coarseness of the texture of my personality. The very fineness of His soul was such that although He knew that within half an hour the light would shine on the tears and make the rainbow, yet He wept in keen sympathy with the sorrow of their heart. Men knew that He cared.

So I see Jesus, living, knowing the deep secrets of life, and caring. Now, this is not the Gospel. I am not preaching the Gospel. But this creates the conviction that a Gospel is needed, and that we shall see more clearly in our next consideration. For the present it suffices me to say, and here I end for now, that the man who is not conscious of personal failure either has not seen Jesus, or has deliberately decided to be content with less than the best. To see Jesus is to say before He says it, If this is life, then I must be done with all my ideals, I must deny myself; everything is changed. The spell of Christ brings the soul to the shuddering, staggering sense of its own failure, of its own poverty.

110 - Mark 10:14 - Suffer the Children

Suffer the Children

Suffer the little children to come unto Me; forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God.

That is the Magna Charta of the children. Its words are of the simplest which ever fell from the lips of our beloved Lord. We are never able to recite them, I think I may venture to say, without feeling some thrill of the tenderness of His great heart in our own. Under whatever circumstances we hear them, they always produce the same result, touching us back from hardness to tenderness. Whenever we hear them recited, or recite them ourselves, there returns a sense of that childhood from which, alas, some of us seem to have traveled far along the dusty highways of life.

And yet, my brethren, if these words of Jesus are characterized by their simplicity, it is not the simplicity of superficiality. It is rather the simplicity of a vast and astonishing sublimity, and I sometimes wonder when I ponder these words—and others like them with which we are all familiar, the simplest things Jesus said—I wonder whether the very simplest of them all are not the sublimest.

To have heard Jesus say this would have been to be saved from misapprehension of the meaning of what He said. A statement like that seems to suggest that we have misapprehended His meaning, and I do think that we have very largely misunderstood that meaning. Not that we have misinterpreted Him, but that our understanding of His meaning has been circumscribed because we did not hear Him utter these words. There are things beyond the fine art of the printer. You cannot print a tone of the voice. You cannot reveal on the cold page, however exquisitely your work may be done, the temper of the speaker. Mark endeavors to save us from that very misapprehension by drawing our attention to the fact of the temper of Jesus at the moment when He uttered these words. "He was moved with indignation." The statement in the connection of these words is almost startling, and we are compelled to pause and consider its meaning. "Suffer the little children to come unto me." All heaven's sweetness is in the great command. It seems, if you will allow me the far-flung and spacious figure of the Bible, as though the very Mother-heart of God were singing itself out in these words. Yes, the voice thrilled in tenderness, but it vibrated in thunder; and when Jesus uttered these words there came together, into the apprehension of the men who heard Him the two things that even to this day it is so difficult to harmonize, and to understand their relation to each other: the goodness and the severity of God. No tenderer thing ever fell from His lips, but "He was moved with indignation." Out of His hot anger came the most gentle and beautiful thing that He ever said about child life.

These things being so, we need to appreciate and study these words the more carefully. Let me, however, say at once that I do not think any exposition can exhaust the meaning of this Magna Charta of the child. What I do hope to accomplish in our brief meditation is to lead you into the atmosphere created by the strong and tender words.

Notice carefully first of all that Jesus made an appeal and used an argument, and that the two constitute His great charge to His people concerning the children. There is an appeal, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and hinder them not." There is an argument, "for of such is the Kingdom of God." If we will take the appeal and the argument together and learn their interrelationship, we come into the atmosphere created by His words, and understand what His charge to His people forevermore is concerning the children.

I take these two first values of the text, the appeal and the argument, but in the other order, asking you to think for a few minutes, first, of the argument of Jesus, "of such is the Kingdom of God," and then, in the light of that argument, to listen to His appeal, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me; and hinder them not."

First, then, as to the argument. I put it first because if we are to understand these words, and become obedient to them, we must catch the profound significance of the argument that the Master used, and His reason for using it on this particular occasion. You will agree with me when I say that an argument is an appeal to conviction. It may be an appeal intended to produce a new conviction, but it is always an appeal to some conviction already held. If I say to a person on any conceivable subject, I want you to do this, because—what follows the "because" will reveal the opinion I hold of the person to whom I make my appeal. I should never appeal to a miser to give on the ground of his generosity! Whatever I make my appeal to reveals my opinion of the person to whom I make that appeal. If we can get back for a moment into the perfect human naturalness of the scene I think you will follow me. Fathers were bringing their children to Jesus. Mothers also, I have no doubt—but all the Greek pronouns go to prove that they were men who brought their children to Jesus, and the Hebrew law was that fathers were responsible for the religious training of the children. Of course the mothers were there. That goes without saying. These people were bringing their children to Jesus, desiring that He should touch them, and the disciples rebuked them, rebuked those who brought them, and so through them rebuked the children. They felt that Jesus had more important business on hand than that of holding receptions for children. They did not believe for a single moment that He could be troubled with these children. His mind was full of great matters. They knew full well that the deepest passion of His heart was a passion for the coming of the Kingdom of God. They knew perfectly well that those eyes that they loved to look upon were eyes that saw through to the infinite and far distances, eyes familiar with all the beauty of the eternal order; and they knew that He desired, for He had taught them so to pray, that there should be established in the midst of the wreckage and ruin of human conditions all the glory and beauty of the heavenly order. "Our Father who art in the heavens, Thy name be hallowed, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth." They knew, therefore, full well that He was there to teach men the meaning of the Kingdom of God, and to do such work as should bring the heavenly conditions into the earthly life. Therefore they

were convinced that He had no time for children. It was a very pardonable thing that the fathers and mothers should desire that the prophet should touch the children, but it could not be. They knew His passion for the Kingdom of God, and so far as they had light they also were men into whom there had entered the selfsame passion. They had caught His enthusiasm because they had seen His vision of the Kingdom of God. This misconception explains the anger of Jesus. He was moved with indignation because, notwithstanding the fact that they had caught His enthusiasm, having seen His vision, and consequently were men who knew something of the coming of the Kingdom of God, they had so little appreciated the real meaning of that Kingdom. Then He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me; and hinder them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God." The disciples hindered the children because they thought that the Kingdom of God was a great and weighty matter, and that because He was devoted to it He had no time for children. This misconception He rebuked and corrected by declaring that children are in the Kingdom, and of the Kingdom; and going still further, He declared that they could not enter into that Kingdom, though they had seen its gleaming glory from afar, until they became like the children, for "of such is the Kingdom."

But now mark the graciousness of Christ's assumption. He assumed the devotion of these men to the Kingdom of God. He used an argument that would appeal in their case. He knew perfectly well if they could but come to understand the nature of the Kingdom of God they would never hinder the child coming. They were men in whom the passion and fire for that Kingdom was already burning, and He made His appeal on that ground, "of such is the Kingdom of God."

Thus, when I consider this argument, and note its assumption, I touch the fundamental matter in all our work for the children. I think, brethren, there are many appeals I could make to men and women in order to arouse their interest in, and attempt to compel their work for, children. I think I could appeal to men and women on the basis of the fact that the child nature is full of interest. I think I could make an appeal to men on the basis of the harmlessness of a little child. I think I could make an appeal on the basis of the helplessness of a little child. But Christ made no such appeal, and yet all these were included in His. His appeal is always "of such is the Kingdom of God." Until we have seen that Kingdom at least in outline, and until the vision has captured us, and until a passion for the establishment of it is the master passion of our life, we have no right to try to help the children. I will revise that statement if you will let me. I will not say if it so please you that we have no right, but rather that we have no power to help the children. We can never help our own children, the children in our own home, the children in our schools, the children of the nation, until we have caught Christ's vision of God's Kingdom, and until that has become the master passion of our lives. The Church, spending its strength on disputes concerning doctrines, wasting its time in quarreling about ecclesiastical formulae, becoming worldly and self-centered, always neglects the child. On the other hand, the church, seeking the Kingdom, restless in the midst of everything that is contrary to the will of God; passionately desiring the building of His city, and the bringing in of His rule—that church always seeks the child. A vision of and desire for the Kingdom of God is the master passion in all work for the children.

But while thus looking at the argument as to its assumption note its plain declaration, and consequently its simple revelation. Jesus said "of such." An old hymn is in my mind all the time this morning:

I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold,
I should like to have been with Him then.
I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,
That His arms had been thrown around me;
And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,
"Let the little ones come unto Me."

Now let us try with all simplicity to see the actual picture. Those little children of Judaea and Galilee, quite foreign to our children, were yet of the same blood, and the same nature, and the same spiritual essence. Let us, then, look at them in their humanness. See them all about the Christ, some of them timid, clinging and shrinking; and others of them eagerly going forward. Get the human picture, do not buy it, but paint it and look at it. Now, said Christ, "of such" of these ordinary children, of these children from the cottage homes, and all the district round, "of such." For I pray you, remember that the children at whom Christ pointed were not even Sunday-school children. They were not children who had been converted in a Special Mission. I am not criticizing the Special Mission for the child, but pre-eminently desiring that we should understand that they were ordinary children. Half an hour after, if I know anything about children, they were playing and quarreling! "Of such" of these ordinary, everyday children. Oh, but you say, He was speaking of the child in the ideal. Ideal nonsense! He was talking about the bairns these disciples wanted to keep back. "Of such is the Kingdom of God."

I make two deductions from this word of Christ. The child is the microcosm of the Kingdom. If we really will pay attention to a little child we have before us, focused, condensed, the Kingdom of God. And therefore, as a necessary sequence, the Kingdom of God is the microcosm of the child. If we take in the larger outlooks, the more spacious conceptions of the Kingdom, then in every little child, the little child you saw this morning, who does not go to Sunday school at all, the child in the gutter, is the picture of the Kingdom of God.

I say, first of all, that the child is the microcosm of the Kingdom. Notice what Christ said to these men. "Of such is the Kingdom," not, "Of such will be the Kingdom," but, "Of such is the Kingdom." The child as I find it today, is not the microcosm of the Kingdom of God in the ultimate, but it is the microcosm of the Kingdom of God as it is: "Of such is the Kingdom." I think, brethren, that we too inclusively interpret the Kingdom in the terms of consummation. We say, the Kingdom of God, and we attempt at once to take in its vast and ultimate meanings and reaches. There are times when we ought to do it, for the ultimate is the inspiration of the present. But that is not what Jesus said. He who knew more about these children than did their fathers and mothers, declared that the Kingdom of God at the present time is as these children are. In a child I find potentiality, imperfection, and therefore, providing always that I have that passion for the Kingdom which is the fundamental necessity, an appeal. All the glory of the oak forest lies in the single acorn which I can hold in my hand. All the glory, or the shame of England, lies in the little child that sits by your side, or that you pass in the street. All the shame of humanity lay in the first child of the race, Adam. All the glory of humanity lay in the young child, in the manger, at Bethlehem. That is potentiality. But in a child there is also imperfection. An acorn is not an oak forest. It is not even an oak. It is imperfect; it is undeveloped potentiality. Finally, therefore, a little child is a perpetual appeal for the treatment that will realize all the things that lie in its personality. The little child is forever saying, So deal with me as to realize all that is in me. That appeal is the true philosophy of education. That perpetual cry of the child should condition all our attitudes toward it, and our relationships with it.

The child is the microcosm of the Kingdom. That Kingdom of God today is a great potentiality. The powers of that Kingdom are everywhere. There is no power being used basely, devilishly, but that if it can be redeemed, and put into true operation, is a power making for the ultimate Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom of God today is imperfect, not realized. The little child reveals to us what that Kingdom is in its present conditions. Just as having seen in the face of a little child great possibilities, and great imperfections, we hear the appeal of its life for treatment that will correct the imperfections and realize the possibilities, so as we look upon the world today we see the possibility, and know the imperfection, and these become the prayer of the world in its need, calling us to active service. Children's Day, did you tell me this was? So it is, thank God. But children's day is London's day, and England's day, and the World's day, and God's day. "Of such is the Kingdom."

Or take the larger outlook, and see how the Kingdom is the macrocosm of the child. We can only think of the Kingdom now in the narrow limit of our own world. Then it means first the right of God by creation, and by redemption. It means consequently that the whole world is crying out after that God Whose it is by creation and by redemption. And, finally, it means the whole world finds eternal life, that is permanence, only in right relationship to God. All these things that constitute your philosophy of the Kingdom of God in its widest application are true of every little child. The right of God in a child is infinitely more than the right of a parent, for every child is His creation, and every child upon which we look, even if our eyes may not see it, has on its face the mark of redemption. Every child is crying out after God, however we may understand or misinterpret its cry. And hear the solemn word, not now to be dealt with at length, but to be stated of necessity, the child can find eternal life only as it has right relationship with God.

And now I turn briefly to the appeal, "Suffer the little children: and forbid them not." It has three applications. There is the first and simplest. It touches the child, it shows me my duty concerning the child. There is the second and the deepest. It shows me what I must be if I would obey the instruction concerning the child. Finally, there is the third and the widest, the application of this to the world at large, and to the Church's responsibility therein.

As to the first of these, I suppose I need hardly stay to deal with it. It is the old, old story, yet hear His words once more. Said He, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." That is the positive application. Not, Bring the children to Me, but Suffer them to come. In order that it may be perfectly clear, He interprets His positive by a negative, "and hinder them not." "Suffer the little children to come." See, they are coming! Suffer them to come, and hinder them not! The negative interprets the positive. If we take this positive, and hear the negative interpretation of it, we find that Jesus meant to say that the child will come to Him if we do not hinder it. The Church's responsibility is not that of bringing children to Christ, but of getting things out of the way that hinder their coming. In that matchless picture in the last chapter of John's gospel, of Peter being restored to position and service, when Jesus gave him his work, He said first, "Feed My Lambs"; He then said, "Shepherd My sheep," and, finally, "Feed My sheep." He did not say, Shepherd My lambs, but feed them. The sheep that has wandered away must be shepherded, but the lamb is here, feed it. I make you this declaration this morning. There is not a child born into the world but that will go straight to Christ unless someone hinders it. I do not know how to go on preaching. I never hear that word of Jesus without having my heart shaken like a tempest. Do not forget it. I would not apportion blame. Original sin, tendency to evil, is in every child; but a Saviour is waiting to receive the child, and if only we will get out of the way, and get everything else out of the way in the child's first home environment, and everywhere else, that child will get straight to Christ. Suffer them, forbid them not! Our business about the children is to see to it that we get out of the way the things that hinder. Hinder them not. Jesus was hot with indignation that men who had seen some vision of the Kingdom should hinder the children. They are trying to come today, and we are fooling the time away quarreling about their education. God have mercy upon us! Hinder them not. I would like to have it emblazoned on every hall in which children meet. Hinder them not. That is our responsibility.

And then He turns upon our own souls this great word, Except you become like the little child, you cannot enter into the Kingdom. Unless you are a submitted soul you are bound to hinder the children. And you must be of the child nature also, understanding the child. My brethren, I am content to leave the application of all that. I think it is better made to this heart of mine when I am alone, and better made to yours when you are alone.

Let me take one minute with the last, and final, and widest thought. Make the application of this to the world. "Of such is the Kingdom." He puts the child at the center, and He puts the Kingdom at the circumference, and if we will keep the child at the center the Kingdom is assured; and if we will keep the Kingdom at the circumference the child is safe. "Of such is the Kingdom." He put the child at the center. When shall we learn to do it? May God lead us there. During these weeks of absence from the country things have happened of which as yet I know nothing in detail.

I do not know about the Education Bill, I do not know about the Licensing Bill; I have not yet read the text of either.

But put the child in the midst, and then you will desire to lock Mr. McKenna and the Bishop of St. Asaph up in one room until they have settled this business once and for ever. I am ashamed; in the name of God, I am ashamed! Let us see to it that the child is made the test.

Licensing Bill! Put the child in the midst. That is the test. Vested interest? What do you mean by a vested interest? If for long, long years we have given a right to men for money's sake to harm a child, then in God's name it is time we had done with the business. No vested interest which harms a child can be permitted to remain. Does it harm a child? Oh, fools and blind, if you ask a question like that! Give some of us half a day in the slum, or in the West End! In the name of God, who is there who has not been touched somewhere by the devilry of this traffic in his own heart and life? Put the child in the midst, put the child in the midst, and fling your circumference of the Kingdom of God round it, and then you will have solved your problems.

I am glad to come back on Anniversary Day. It is a new beginning, and consecration, and I make it in the presence of the little child. We read that second chapter in Matthew for one purpose. Take a blue or red pencil, one that you will never fail to see, and put a line under these words, "the young Child." All the way through the great imperial King, the Lord Christ, Son of God, and Son of Man, is designated in that chapter, "the young Child." Thus God, to lead us and help us, makes the eternal King and Priest the eternal Child; and in proportion as we know Him, and are in fellowship with Him, we shall gather every individual child into our heart and our love; and we shall make a child the test of our Church life, and of our political attitudes; and all the things of life and service will be governed by the presence of the child, and "of such is the Kingdom."

111 - Mark 11:11 - The Looking Of Jesus

The Looking of Jesus

And He entered into Jerusalem, into the temple; and when He had looked round about upon all things, it being now eventide, He went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

Mark 11:11

This was the final incident in a wonderful day, and it was as remarkably suggestive as anything that happened on that day. In the morning Jesus had ridden toward the city amid the plaudits of the multitudes. On the way He had paused, and beholding the city, had wept over it and had pronounced its doom. Then He had entered the city and at last had come to its very heart and center, the temple itself. There He "... looked round about upon all things,..." and departed. That looking of Jesus arrests our attention. The word which the evangelist employed to describe it is a compound word and our translators, in, order to convey its significance, have become almost redundant in their use of words; "... he had looked round about upon,..." and the four words constitute the translation of one Greek word. The prefix of the Greek word suggests a looking everywhere and all round everything, and the idea is expressed by our words round about upon. The base of the word suggests thoroughness in looking. It does not indicate the gaze of wonder. There is such a word in our Greek New Testament—looking with wide-open eyes as does a child—but that is not the word of my text. Neither—and this I would enforce even more carefully—does it suggest the inspection of one not familiar with what he is looking at; it is not the inspection of one who desires to discover. There is a word in our Greek New Testament which stands for exactly that kind of looking, but this is not that word. This word suggests, rather, the voluntary contemplation of what is already known. The idea is that of looking thoroughly at the whole of the facts before His eyes, the kind of looking which suggests thought.

What did He see as at that eventide He looked round about upon all things? What did He think as He looked? The answer to both inquiries may be gathered from His subsequent actions. He came to the temple again, certainly twice, probably three times. I am going to take it for granted that He came three times and if the third coming is not established, at least we shall see that on the occasion to which I shall refer His mind and heart were there. What we shall find Him doing will reveal to us what He saw when He looked round about upon all things, and what He thought as the result of what He saw. He came the next day and cleansed the

temple and for a few brief hours guarded it against all defilement and intrusion. He came the day after and spent the whole day there, judging the rulers, condemning them, and as He left He prophesied the doom of the temple, declaring that not one stone should be left upon another of all the great and glorious building. He came again, as I believe, on Passover night. When in the midst of the paschal discourse He said: "... arise, let us go hence," I think He led the disciples back toward the temple, and there at its most glorious entrance, under the shadow of the golden vine, He uttered His teaching concerning the vine and offered His great intercessory prayer. In the light of these facts therefore, let us answer our questions; what did He see? What did He think?

What then did Jesus see? That is our first question. Let me give an answer from the three incidents briefly, before dwelling upon them at greater length. He saw a den of robbers. He saw a destructive force already at work which would never end its operations until the whole temple was demolished. He saw the Divine victory beyond the demolition.

He saw a den of robbers. He came back on the following day into the temple, cleansed and guarded it and proceeded to teach, giving reasons for His strange and wonderful action in these words: "... It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of robbers." In these words of Jesus His conception of what the temple ought to be is revealed; "... My house shall be called the house of prayer:... The emphasis was; not so much upon the fact that it was to be called the house of prayer, as upon the fact that it was to be the house of prayer for all the nations. He was by no means concerned to defend the temple as a peculiar place of worship for the Hebrew people. He was making His protest against that very misconception. Part of the defilement of the temple lay in the fact that men looked upon it only as a place where Hebrews might worship. Let it be distinctly remembered that what Jesus saw as He looked round about was that a traffic was being carried on within the temple courts but not within the holy places. This traffic was prosecuted in the courts which in the Divine provision had been set apart for the gathering of the Gentiles, the men of other nations who desired to worship the God of the Hebrews. The inner courts into which went the priests or the Hebrews bringing sacrifices were held sacred against the profanation of Gentile feet. The courts appointed for the Gentiles were filled with traffickers. They were making religion easy for the Hebrews. They were setting the Hebrew free from the responsibility of selecting his offering of a lamb or turtle dove. The moment men begin to make religion easy, they cut its nerve.

They were doing more, they were making religion difficult for the Gentiles who ought to have occupied that particular court. The temple courts were being used as a short cut from one part of the city to another. These people were going to and fro through the courts, carrying vessels and merchandise, thus making religion easy for the Jews and difficult for the Gentiles. These were the surface things, but the things upon the surface tell the story of the things that underlie them. As our Lord looked out upon that scene, He knew that the rulers of the temple were guilty in that they encouraged the traffic and permitted this crossing of the courts in order to reach a place in the city more easily; and He knew that the people who employed the method were guilty also. It was not only that they were wronging the Gentiles, in the wronging of the Gentiles they were wronging the God Who was the God of the Gentiles as surely as He was the God of the Jews. He went into the temple, and He looked round about upon all things and He saw the temple as a den of robbers.

Further, He saw a destructive force at work. When, next day, He came to the temple, He challenged the rulers while the rulers thought they were challenging Him; He tried the rulers while the rulers thought they were trying Him; He found a verdict against the rulers while they were trying to find a verdict against Him; He sentenced the rulers and the nation while they thought they were passing sentence on Him. By parabolic method of investigation and denunciation, He compelled these men to find verdicts against themselves and pass sentences upon themselves. Again eventide came and as He was leaving the temple, His disciples drew His attention to the beauty of the building. He looked at them as one who should say: "You need not show Me the beauty of the building, I know it well; Do you see it? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." I need not stay to dwell upon the literal and absolute fulfilment of that prophecy within a generation when the armies of Titus surrounded Jerusalem and not a single stone was left upon another of that temple. That is not the point now but rather what Jesus saw. He saw what Isaiah saw. He saw the whole city, the whole temple, and the whole audience therein, enwrapped in fire, the fire of the immediate nearness of Deity, the slowly burning but surely destructive fire which destroys only that which is perishable, and purifies, ennobles, and beautifies that which is in itself noble, high, and true. We remember Isaiah's great passage: "The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath seized the godless ones:..." Why? "... Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" In the prophet's question there was no reference to the hell that lies beyond. There was reference rather to the very conditions in the midst of which they were living. The prophet saw that God forgotten was not God distanced; God disobeyed was not God defeated. He saw that God was there as the slowly burning fire of which there is a parabolic illustration in all nature. Scientists tell us of the eremacausis, a slowly burning fire in nature which oxidizes iron or steel if we leave it out in the dew, and paints the trees with their autumnal tints, as it destroys the effete for the perfecting of that which really lives. Jesus saw this fire everywhere. He saw the inevitable end therefore. He knew that the symbol, the temple, must be destroyed when its meaning was denied. Material strength and beauty were doomed when they were not the vehicle of spiritual interpretation and moral appeal. Therefore, as He looked round about upon all things He saw, not only the den of robbers, the desecration of the Divine ideal; He saw also doom and destruction, because God is not mocked, neither can He be distanced from human affairs.

He saw more, He saw the Divine victory. If He did not actually come to the temple on Passover night, He was certainly there in spirit.

I personally believe He actually came there on that night and that the last great discourse, the allegory of the vine, was uttered there. At Passover time the gates of the temple were open for pilgrims that they might enter and meditate. The main entrance was never closed. Josephus tells us in his "Antiquities" that over the entrance Herod had constructed a thing of infinite beauty, the wonder and amazement of all who looked at it, the golden vine, the vine being the scriptural symbol of the Hebrew people. Under that golden vine then it is probable that Jesus stood with His disciples when He said: "I am the true vine,...." What then did He see as He looked round about upon all things? He saw a city without a temple. He saw the realization of the Divine ideal symbolized in the vine which Israel had never succeeded in fulfilling. He saw the vine bearing fruit for the nations. Israel had failed and He must curse and denounce the city. But if it be true that God is not distanced, it is also true that God cannot be defeated. Looking out upon all things in the temple, He saw with great clearness a city wherein there should be no temple. The woman of Samaria had said to Him: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus had answered her: "... Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father.... the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth:..." He saw beyond the doom and destruction of the temple, the glad, glorious, wonderful day, when the temple should be unnecessary in the perfected city of God. John saw that city in Patmos, the city of God with no temple therein. Looking through the darkness, He saw a sanctified life in which worship would no longer be special, occasional, but normal and persistent. Looking round about upon all things, He saw a den of robbers, a destructive force, but a Divine victory.

What, then, let us ask in the second place, did He think as He saw these things? Here again we are instructed by the things that followed. When He saw the house appointed for worship, a house of prayer for all the nations, desecrated, He knew that the Divine ideal must be maintained at all costs. Therefore, He returned on the morrow. He cast out the moneychangers and overthrew their tables, and more, He would not suffer any carrying a vessel to pass through those courts. Look at the scene. How long it lasted I cannot tell, probably some hours. Jesus is seen holding the temple, guarding it against intrusion, and turning it to its rightful uses. First of all, He cleared away abuse; turned men out, overturned tables, halted every man who tried to take a short cut through the courts to some other part of the city. Matthew says that two things were going on during the time He held and guarded the temple. It is a beautiful picture; Jesus the Lord and Master of the temple is seen healing sick folk, and all the while the children are singing round about Him—a musical obligato to Divine healing. For a moment He gave the city and the world for all time to see what a house of prayer is; not a place where we go to ask for things for ourselves, but a place where the halt and maimed are healed while children sing. If man has destroyed the Divine ideal, the Divine ideal must not be lost. He gave us a picture in a flash of what He is still doing and what He will continue to do until He has completed the work of driving out the traffickers and overturning the money tables and guarding men's right of access to God.

But He came again and argued all day long with the rulers and condemned them, and as He left He pronounced the final doom upon the city and declared that not one stone should be left upon another of the temple. What then did He think as He looked round about upon all things?

That the human degradation must be destroyed. That human degradation was complete He knew full well as witness His parables in that long day's teaching. These men would kill, not merely the servants sent unto them, but the very Son Who came out from the Father's heart. Because the degradation was complete, nothing must be left which would be of the nature of false security. There are times when the best thing we can do with a church is to close it. Better abandon a sacrament and close a church than traffic with the church and with the sacrament in an unholy way. The temple must be destroyed because if it remain it becomes a false security and a libel on God. Consequently, we find that the fierce fire of His wrath is kindled by the deeper passion of His heart in mercy. He will destroy all false security that the soul in its nakedness may be driven out toward Himself for help, healing, and blessing.

As He looked round about upon all things, He knew not only that the Divine ideal must be maintained and human degradation destroyed, but that the Divine purpose must be realized in the Divine way. When He came back on Passover night, after He said: "I am the true Vine,...." He began to pray. "... Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee." He was praying for strength for the Cross. As He looked round about upon all things, He knew that in order to the final establishment of the Divine ideal and in order to move toward the Divine purpose in spite of destruction, it was necessary that He should gather up into His heart and life in a mystery utterly beyond the possibility of human analysis, all the sin that had wrought the havoc and quench it in His blood.

So He still observes. So He still looks round about upon all things. There are no questions more important for us individually, socially, nationally, ecclesiastically, than those we have been asking in the presence of this old-time story. He looks down upon men wherever they foregather, whether it be a church or in a theatre; whether it be in the halls of commerce or in places of amusement; whether in the capitalist club or the labor church; He looks, He observes, He sees. He looks at the national attitudes and activities and understands them in their profoundest depths, in those depths that no diplomacy will ever discover to statesmen, and yet with which statesmen must deal if nationality is ever to be anything worth the name. He still looks round about upon all things in the church, upon all its worship and upon all its work. We need to remember that when Jesus looks He sees everything thoroughly. He

sees the good, and He sees the bad. He sees that which is high, and that which is low. He sees that which is true, and that which is merely formal. He knows whether, when our lips recite the prayer He taught His disciples, we are indulging in the talk of parrots or praying. He sees thoroughly the internal as well as the external, the motive as well as the manner, the aspiration as well as the achievement. If this be a scorching, burning truth, there is yet more comfort in it than in anything else I know. He sees everything. Your neighbor listens to your profession; He knows the truth about you. Your friend knows how you blundered, failed, sinned. He knows why you did it, and how you did not want to do it, and how your aspiration was a great deal better than your achievement. He knows all about you, the fire in the blood, the deadly, dastardly, devilish poison that drives you; He takes it all into account. He sees everything and sees thoroughly.

Remember, in the second place, that when He looks, He measures everything by the Divine standard. He does not measure anything by the standards of human convenience, or selfishness, or by that of vested interests. They had vested interests in the temple, and He hurried them out overturning their tables. He does not measure the drink traffic today by the standard of vested interests. We ought to be filled with shame that we are not taking out of the way of our sons the possibility of temptation and from devilish men and women the chance of tempting them.

Neither does He measure by the standard of our ability. You say, "I am doing the best I can." He does not measure us that way. That is not all the truth of life. Doing the best we can is a poor business. What then are the standards of His measurement? The purpose of God and the power of God as available for every man. It is not enough that I do the best I can. I am to do the best that God and I can do. "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" said Paul. He expects, not that I shall do the best I can, but that I shall avail myself of all the power that is at my disposal in God. He measures by Divine standards.

Again, when He looks, He always agrees with God in His destructive judgments. His parable of the barren fig tree teaches this. The hour comes, according to that parable, when the vinedresser after long provocation to fruit bearing has to say with the proprietor: "Cut it down." He ever agrees with God. The building must go even though it be the temple, be it never so ancient, never so strong, never so beautiful. It is leprous, it must go. If that be true of a building, it is much more true of the men who have caused the pollution.

One thing more. I would not have said all I have said if I had not something else to say. When He looks, He pities and He provides a way of escape, even from the pre-determined judgments. That was the goal of all His journeyings and that the explanation of the pathway of His choice, the pathway that led Him ultimately to Calvary. When there was no eye to pity, He pitied. When there was no arm to save, He saved. So mighty was His pity and so profound His compassion that when He had to curse the city, he wept over it. Robert William Dale once said that Dwight Lyman Moody was the one and only man he knew who had any right to preach about hell. When asked what he meant, he said: "Moody never talks of hell except with tears in his voice." Jesus never talked of destruction except with tears in His voice. O man, under the destructive judgment of God because of thy pollution, remember there is pity in His heart, and if thou wilt but avail thyself of His provision, He will deliver thee even from that pre-determined judgment. He looked upon all things with love-lit eyes, eyes illumined, irradiated, by the infinite compassion of His heart.

I will end our meditation by grouping one or two Scriptures together. "... He looked round about upon all things...." Then in the last picture of Him in the New Testament, I find this sentence: "... His eyes were as a flame of fire." In a letter written by one of His apostles, I find these words: "Each man's work... is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work, of what sort it is." Then I read again, with new understanding: "... Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?"

Then I come back from the apocalyptic word, the apostolic declaration, and the prophetic inquiry, and standing again in the presence of the One Who looks I hear Him saying: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Then I feel as though I must go, and I hear Him say one other word: "... him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Under the scrutiny of those eyes of fire may we hear the sweetness of that voice of love.

112 - Mark 10:21 - The Young Ruler

The Young Ruler

One thing thou lackest.
Mark 10:21

It seems to us as though Jesus never said a more startling thing to any man who came to Him than this, "One thing thou lackest." Yet whether the "one thing" be much or little depends wholly upon what it is. Some five or six years ago, in an American city, as I stood upon the platform and gave out my first hymn in a series of meetings, I heard the weak tones of a small reed organ, notwithstanding the fact that there was a very fine organ in the building. Turning to my friend, the minister of the church, I said to

him, "What is the matter with the great organ?" He replied, "Nothing." "Why is it not being played?" I asked. "It lacks only one thing, and that is a player," he replied.

One thing lacking! An instrument, fearfully and wonderfully made, constructed to catch the wind and transmute it into music—silent, no harmony, no symphony—why? There was one thing lacking, a master hand to sweep the keys and bring the music out. Which is a parable, helping us to see what Christ meant. "One thing thou lackest."

In order that we may understand what this lack really was, I am going to ask you first to look carefully at this young man. I want to say three things about him. I shall say nothing about his wealth; nothing concerning his position in the nation, except incidentally, for a man's wealth and position are nothing when you are measuring him by the standards of eternity, or looking upon him in the light of spiritual things. Let us see the man as he was in himself.

The first thing I say concerning him is that he was a man of fine natural temperament. This is revealed in his whole attitude toward Jesus Christ. That he was discerning is revealed in the fact that to Christ he said, "Good Master."

He was also a man of courage. He was a ruler, and so belonged to a class which had been critical at the commencement of our Lord's ministry, but now were openly against Him. Notwithstanding this fact, when this man saw goodness, he confessed it, daring to say, "Good Master."

He was moreover, a man of humility, for when he came into the presence of Jesus he knelt. You may tell me there is nothing more in that than the Eastern method of salutation. It was not the method by which a ruler saluted a peasant, even in the East. Peasants knelt to rulers. It was as strange a thing then as it would be for a ruler to kneel in the presence of a peasant in London. Jesus was most evidently, to the seeing of His own age, a peasant. Yet here is a man, who is a wealthy ruler, who dared to kneel in His presence.

At this man, discerning, courageous, humble, Christ looked, and said, "One thing thou lackest."

He was more than a man of fine temperament, he had a clean record. Never allow any man, be he prophet or priest or preacher, to tell you there is any value in pollution. Let no man make you believe there is no value in having a clean record. Even if you are not a Christian man, there is value in it. This man had a clean record. Jesus flashed upon him the light of six commandments from the decalogue, not the first four, which indicate the relationship which ought to exist between man and God, but the last six, which condition the relation of man to his neighbor. "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor thy father and mother." One light after another flashed upon the inner, hidden, secret life of the man, and he looked back into the face of Christ and said, "Master, all these things have I observed from my youth." Now, it has been declared that this was an empty boast, that this man said to Christ a thing that was not true. I do not believe it. I believe his statement was the simple, honest truth. I believe that standing there, confronting Jesus Christ, and looking into the eyes of incarnate purity, here was a man who was able to say concerning these ancient commandments which forbid a man violating the true relationship between himself and his neighbor, "All these things have I observed from my youth." Immediately the evangelist tells us that "Jesus looking upon him, loved him." I do not mean to infer by that statement that if he had broken the whole six Christ would not have loved him. There is, perchance, a man in this building, hiding away from the crowd, who has broken the whole ten. Christ loves that man, and can save him if he will let Him. It is noticeable, however, that at this point the evangelist declares He loved him. I do not think you will ever find it declared that Christ loved a hypocrite or a liar. There is a sense in which he loved even them, but never in the act of hypocrisy or lying. Christ's anger was white-hot in the presence of all lying and hypocrisy. This young man said, "Master, all these things have I observed from my youth." He was a man of clean record.

Once again, he was a man of true aspiration. What is this question with which he comes to Christ, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Let us be careful here in order that we may catch if possible the real thought in the mind of this man. What is the meaning of this phrase, "eternal life"? We have used it constantly in the Christian Church as though it were a phrase indicating continuity of existence merely. I do not deny that this is partially the meaning of the phrase, but there is much more in it than this. Age-abiding life is what he was seeking. This is not merely life which continues; it is life which contains. It is perfectly evident that in his own soul he was conscious of a present lack. All his wealth could not purchase that something which he needed. He was a man of position, but his position could not command that which his soul was supremely seeking. It was life that he needed, more life that he was seeking. He was conscious of the infinite, and yet could not grasp it. In the midst of all the things of time and sense he heard the echoes of the eternal and spiritual. His clean record did not satisfy him. His power of discernment left him still hungry. His courage had behind it an ache and an agony. His very humility did not bring his inner soul into the realization of that for which it was perpetually asking. He wanted life, he desired to take hold of that which can satisfy the deepest in a man. He heard the call of the infinite sighing its way up through his own nature. He knew he was more than flesh. He knew he was more than that which could be fed with the things which were all about him. Life! Let us state the truth at once. This cry after life is the cry of the lost offspring of God after the Father God. He was seeking God, seeking life, and all this before Christ met him. His meeting with Christ, as we see it in the Gospel narrative, simply brings out into clear relief these facts concerning him, a man of fine temperament, a man

of clean record, a man of true aspiration, and to that man Christ said, "One thing thou lackest."

Let us proceed at once to ask what Christ meant. What did he lack? The popular, and I had almost said, the superficial interpretation of the story declares that he lacked poverty. Nothing of the kind. If you leave your story there you have not listened to it, you have not caught the meaning of Christ's strange question at the beginning, "Why callest thou Me good?" If when Christ told this man to sell all that he had and give to the poor. He meant that what he lacked was poverty, then there is no application to the vast majority of us. That surely is not the last word. I am not going to lose that. It has its place in the story. The fact that Christ told this man to sell all that he had and give to the poor is not to be omitted, but it is to be placed in its right relationship. What is the word of Christ to this man? "One thing thou lackest," and then as a preliminary the Master Physician puts His hand upon the one thing that stands in his way. Christ will deal with some of you tonight, but He will not say to you, sell all that you have and give to the poor. He will say something else, put His hand upon some preliminary thing, something, which if you do not abandon you will never be able to obey Him in the ultimate and supreme command. He is moving toward the heart and center of man's need, and it is necessary in doing so to clear out of the way the things that stand between him and the realization of his own life. What is the final word, "Come, follow Me." That is the man's lack. You say to me, Then do you mean to say that what the man lacked was following Christ? Yes, finally, that is what this word really means. Look at it from the standpoint, first of all, not of the Person of Christ, though there we must end, but from the standpoint of the man's real condition. What did this man lack? He lacked a center of authority. He lacked a dominating principle in his life. He had never found his King.

Will you patiently for a moment keep that statement in mind, while I come a little way from it in order to get back to it. Another of the New Testament stories reveals the principle. A Roman centurion once said, "I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers." When he uttered these words he did not intend to state a principle, but he did so. He was speaking out of the natural order of his own life. Remember, he was a centurion. In that sentence of his is revealed the whole system of true government. "I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers." No man ought to have soldiers under him who is not himself under authority. No man—to put this now, not in its application to soldier life, but to all life—no man can reign who does not serve. No man can wield a scepter who has not kissed a scepter. No man can enter into and possess the kingdom of his own life who has not first of all recognized that he is part of a larger kingdom, and has submitted himself to control. "I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers," is a true philosophy of life. This young ruler coming to Christ said, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life," that I may enter into it and possess it, that I may reign in life. Christ said to him, "One thing thou lackest." You have never found your King. You have never bent before the supreme will, even in your religion. In your seeking and your planning you have been self-centered, self-governed. You cannot find life until you have found a King, external and superior to yourself.

Let me take you a little further back for a moment. This man first came to Jesus and said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why callest thou Me good? None is good, save One, even God." I do not believe that was an idle question. I do not believe that it was spoken carelessly. I think that when our Lord asked the question He desired to arrest this man and to leave an impression upon his mind to which presently He would return. Hear the question, and think of it quite simply. "Why callest thou Me Good? None is good, save One, even God." I know there are different interpretations of that question. As a matter of fact, it is one of the sayings of the New Testament which Professor Schmiedel acknowledges to be true, and he tells us it is true because in it Christ evidently discounts Himself, that He evidently meant to say to this man, Do not call Me good. There is none good save God, and I am not God. Did He mean that? Look at the question again. When Christ said, "Why callest thou Me good? None is good, save One, even God," He meant one of two things. He either meant I am not good, or, I am God. I do not think you can escape the alternative. You may escape it by denying the accuracy of the story. If you accept the view that He denied Deity, then if He were true in His philosophy that only God is good, He denied goodness. I do not believe that here Jesus denied good, He denied goodness. I do not believe that He claimed Deity. Looking into the face of this man, He knew that what he wanted was a Master. Man has only one Master, God. There is only one King able to realize the kingdom of human life, and that is God. If a man shall bow the knee to any human teacher, and submit himself to him, he is in peril of his soul, of his very life. There is only one scepter we must kiss, it is the scepter of the Most High. There is only one King Who can govern your complex mysterious, far-reaching life, and that is God. When Christ asked that question, it is as though He had said to the man, You are after life. Your discernment is great, because you have linked life with goodness—"Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" You come to goodness to inquire the way into life. Why do you call Me good? Think what you are saying. If you have seen goodness in Me, you have seen God. If you have recognized goodness as you have looked into My face, watched My deeds, and listened to My words, your life has come into the light of the Divine, into the light of God Himself.

Presently we read, "One thing thou lackest. Go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor... and come, follow Me." That is to say, He confronted this man and said in effect, Fine is the temperament, clean is the record, true is the aspiration, but in order that all these things may be brought to fruition you must find your King Who is God, "Follow Me." He called the man after Himself. This again is one of those stupendous, appalling, overwhelming claims of Christ which either demonstrate Him God in very deed and truth, or prove Him to have been devoid of honesty, purity, and meekness. Standing confronting this man, He says, You need your King. Your King is God. Behold your King. Follow Me!

How is this man to follow Him? What stands in the way? All the things that have ministered perpetually to his own selfish life. Now, says Christ, put them all away. Do not dream for one single moment that if you are really bent on finding your life, and if you are coming after your King, that you can do so by manipulating the things that have ministered to the self life. By drastic, daring, courageous heroism, make an end of them. That is Christ's method with the man, "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor." There is a touch of fine, sweet satire in Christ's terms, "and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." You will lose your treasure for a moment, and grasp it for the ages. Christ recommends this man to invest his money in such a way that rust cannot corrupt it, and thieves cannot steal it. Postpone the possession to increase it, that is all. Put out of thy life all the things that minister to selfish desire. Be at the end of them. "Follow Me."

What happened? I do not know. Alternatively I do know what happened. The story is left at a point full of sadness, full of suggestiveness. You have no right to say that this man never found his way to Christ. You do not know. This you know, "he went away sorrowful for he was one that had great possessions." "Sorrowful" is the most hopeful word in that statement. I make no dogmatic declaration about the actual issue in his case, but I will tell you absolutely what happened as between one of two things. He had heard the voice which spoke to his inmost heart and soul. From the lips of poverty he had heard the language of the infinite wealth. All the light of spiritual truth flashed and flamed about him, and he knew it. Why was he sorrowful? Tell me, did you ever read anything so strangely contradictory if you measure it by the philosophy of this age or any other age. "He went away sorrowful, because," that is the real force of it, "because he was one that had great possessions." You say, men do not go away sorrowful because they have great possessions. Oh, yes they do, if they have stood face to face with Christ and have heard Him calling them to abandon them, and they do not do it. He had stood in the light and had seen the power of the life which he was seeking. He had come nearer than ever before. For years, I believe, there had been a sighing, groaning, sobbing, agony in the soul of this man after life. He had been close to it, had seen it, had heard its music, had heard its demands, and he went away sorrowful. What happened? One of two things. He got back presently to his own home, a home of ease and luxury, doubtless, for he was a man who had great possessions, a home which in all probability the merchants of Damascus had made beautiful. I see him go back to his own house. I follow him home. There came a moment presently when he said: I can no longer bear it, I have seen life and I must have it. Call in my steward, render an account of my possessions; it is drastic, terrible, I shall suffer lack, but sweep it all out. I must find Him again, the Man of the seamless robe, the lowly Stranger Who looked into my eyes and flashed the very light of life upon me. If he did that, sold all, obeyed Christ, and swept away the power and authority of his past life, he found the age-abiding life. If not, he said to himself, That was a strange thing I did yesterday. I cannot imagine what possessed me to kneel to that peasant. I thought I wanted life, and that He could say something about it—and the conscience says, He did say something about it. But no, it was a mere phantasy. Thus gradually he would argue himself out of the thing. If that were his action, the day came when he laughed at the weakness of the moment when he knelt in the presence of Jesus. Not long ago a Member of Parliament laughed in the presence of a great meeting as he told them that he was nearly born again in a great revival meeting years before. When a man has stood face to face with Christ, as that young ruler had done, it is higher or lower, it is either an ascent by the way of the cross, or a descent by the way of selfishness and luxury and sin. I do not know which it was in the case of this young man. Men tell us that tradition has it that this was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. I do not know. It has been said that this may actually have been Saul of Tarsus. I do not know. I do not think so. I know this. From that hour he was never the same. Either the sorrow with which he turned away from Christ was turned into joy when he obeyed Him, and found his life, or else the sorrow passed to numbness and deadness, and he became, to use the terrific word of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, "hardened." That is the one condition of all others against which we need to pray.

My brothers and sisters, the story needs very little application. You tell me it is an old story. It is as fresh as this Palm Sunday. You tell me it is Eastern. It is Western. You tell me it happened long ago. I tell you it is happening here and now. There are those of you in this house who have a fine temperament. I do not undervalue it. Your friends love you. You are generous and kind and discerning, frank and courageous. Some of you have a clean record, so far as the vulgarities of sin are concerned. You have right aspirations. You will not be angry with me if I say that your presence here proves it. You do not come here for entertainment. You have heard the undertone of the eternities in your lives, and you have paused this Sabbath evening for a little to listen once again to a man who will speak to you only of Christ and of your relation to God, and you knew it when you came.

There is in your soul the sob after life. Even now the Christ is confronting you. What is He saying to you? I do not know as to the preliminary. I do know as to the ultimate. I cannot say whether He is telling you to go and sell all you have. I do know that He is saying, "Come, follow Me." He is saying "Go"—but what else, I do not know. You say, I wish you would tell me. I cannot tell you. God in heaven give us two or three minutes of honesty! There is no man here tonight who has not yielded to Christ but knows what stands between him and his Lord. "One thing thou lackest, Go,"—and I cannot fill in the gap. If I gave you one illustration, or two or three, what are they in a crowd like this? Scores of men and women would say, These things do not refer to us, therefore we are all right. Listen, not to me, but for the Voice which makes no mistake, "One thing thou lackest. Go—" You know the thing that stands between you and the "Follow Me." What stands between? Right hand? Right eye? Cut it off. Pluck it out. Brother? Sister? Father? Mother? Wife? Child? Man, you know what it is. Fling it out, and then, "Follow Me." Now one would like to begin to preach again. I

am not going to. Oh, that "Follow Me." No man ever did it but that he found his own life, found its meaning, found its unfolding, its realization. "Follow Me." Here is my last word to you, my brother, you cannot reign in life until you have found your King. There are no words I have ever heard sung that have rung in my soul more than these:—

Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within Thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand.
My heart is weak and poor
Until it Master find:
It has no spring of action sure—
It varies with the wind:
It cannot freely move
Till Thou hast wrought its chain;
Enslave it with Thy matchless love
And deathless it shall reign.
My power is faint and low
Till I have learned to serve:
It wants the needed fire to glow,
It wants the breeze to nerve;
It cannot drive the world
Until itself be driven;
Its flag can only be unfurled
When Thou shalt breathe from heaven.
My will is not my own
Till Thou hast made it Thine;
If it would reach the monarch's throne
It must its crown resign;
It only stands unbent,
Amid the clashing strife,
When on Thy bosom it has leant,
And found in Thee its life.

That is the meaning of our story. Anything that stands between you and the crowning of Christ, I beseech you, sweep it away. You will never be just the same again after this hour, but higher or lower, to the throne or to the dungeon, and that of your own choice and action in the presence of the Christ. May God in His great grace help us to crown Him and follow Him and find our life.

113 - Luke 1:74-75 - Holiness: Definition

Holiness: Definition

To grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

Luke 1:74-75

The Gospel according to Luke is that of the universal Saviour. In it, Jesus is seen as Man, and His work is dealt with in its widest application. The true ideal of God's ancient people Israel is recognized. Messiah is revealed as of the stock of Abraham, and yet as the Saviour of all men. The song of Mary, the prophecy of Zacharias, the chanting of the angels, and the speech of Simeon, all sacred and beautiful utterances peculiar to the Gospel, recognize Jesus both as the Messiah of the ancient people according to their prophecies; and as the Saviour of all such as put their trust in Him, without regard to nationality. The benefits accruing to the chosen people are recognized, but they are ever seen flowing through them to all peoples. In the song of Zacharias, in which our text is found, Jehovah the God of Israel is declared as visiting, redeeming, and raising up a horn of salvation in the house of David; but the purpose of this visitation of His ancient people is that the light may shine on them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

In order to perform this wider mission, the Messiah brings to His own people "salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all

that hate us, to show mercy toward our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He should swear to Abraham our father, to grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days."

These two words, holiness and righteousness, mark two aspects of one condition. Holiness has to do with character; righteousness with conduct. They cannot possibly be separated from each other. They are as intimately related as are root and fruit. There can be no fruit unless there be a root. If there be living root it must issue in fruit. There can be no righteousness unless there is holiness; holiness must issue in righteousness. Holiness describes being; righteousness describes doing.

The particular word translated holiness in this verse occurs twice only in the New Testament; in this passage, and in the letter to the Ephesians, in which the apostle urges those to whom he writes to "put on the new man, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth." In each case it is linked with the word righteousness. Thus in each of these passages the root principle out of which righteousness grows is recognized.

"In holiness and righteousness." The essential meaning of holiness is right but it is right in intrinsic character. The essential meaning of righteousness is right, but it is right in actual conduct.

In the son of Zacharias holiness and righteousness are declared to be the condition of life resulting from the salvation which the Messiah and Saviour should bring to men. In the Ephesian letter righteousness and holiness are declared to be the result of the new man created after God. Thus whether we take the passage from the song of Zacharias, which recognizes the right and privilege and responsibility of Israel, and all the Divine intention to bless the peoples through Israel; or whether we take the specific writing of the New Testament apostle, it is perfectly evident that the work of Christ was directed toward righteousness of life, issuing from holiness of character.

Let us, then, consider this subject of holiness according to New Testament teaching. It is a very remarkable fact that thousands of the saints of God are a little afraid of the word "holiness." I believe a great many Christian people keep away from all sorts of conventions and conferences because of this fear. It is not very long since a very dear friend of mine, a Christian man, said to me, You know, I don't believe in holiness. I told him how very sorry I was to hear it, because the Bible says that without holiness no man can see the Lord. Of course, he did not mean quite what he said. I have quoted it only to indicate the attitude toward this great word, and this great subject, which is alarmingly prevalent in the Christian Church. I recognize the reason of this fear. A great many unholy things have been said and done by those who perhaps have been loudest in their attempt to explain, and in their claim to the experience of holiness.

Yet is it quite fair that we should turn away from a great word, and a great thought, and a great intention of the Christian religion, because the word itself has been prostituted to base uses, and an interpretation of its meaning not warranted by the Scripture has become widespread and popular? It is well that we should understand what the New Testament teaches, for this much is evident, whatever God means by holiness, whatever the intention of the Holy Spirit is by the use of the term, whatever the New Testament writers meant when they used the word, that for holiness Christ came into the world; that the real intention of His coming was that men being delivered from their enemies might be able to serve Him in holiness and righteousness before Him all their days; that the ultimate charge of Paul in this great crowning letter of his whole system of teaching is that Christians should put off the old man, and put on the new, which is created after God in holiness and in righteousness.

Therefore, with the utmost simplicity of statement of which I am capable, I want, first of all, to speak by way of definition. What is holiness? In the first place, let me repeat in one brief sentence the sum and substance of that already said in introduction. Holiness is rightness or rectitude of character, inspiring righteousness, which is rightness or rectitude of conduct. There is no motive for right conduct sufficiently strong to maintain it in all places, and under all conditions, other than holiness of character. Any other motive breaks down sooner or later. Men do right things from self-respect for a very long while, but sooner or later, under stress of temptation, swift and sudden and subtle, or in the presence of some alluring advantage, they will turn to the thing that is mean and low and dastardly and ignoble. A high sense of duty is not enough at all times and under all circumstances to compel righteousness of conduct; and it is perfectly certain that if men are right only from policy they will break down. There is an old maxim I remember writing when I was a boy in my copybooks, Honesty is the best policy. I think it is true, but it is a pernicious thing to give a child to write, because you thereby inculcate an entirely wrong view of honesty. Honesty is the best policy. Is that the reason why I am to be honest? Then I shall become a rogue before many years pass over my head. The man who is honest only because it is the best policy is a rogue at heart. No, policy is not enough to compel righteousness. To do right at all times and under all circumstances is only possible to the man who is right in the deepest of him. There is no other motive sufficiently strong to impel and compel righteousness of conduct than that of holiness of character. Now the thought suggested by the word holiness, as the thought suggested by the word righteousness, is that of a standard. What is the standard of holiness? If holiness be rectitude of character, what is rectitude of character? The only answer possible to such an inquiry, at least to the mind of the Christian believer, is that the standard of holiness of character is the character of God. I know how hard that sounds, and yet what other can I say? Holiness is not

an idea, formulated in experience, by which we measure God. It is an idea in human experience derived from the revelation which God has made of Himself to humanity. And whether men today are worshiping our God after our fashion or not, every true ideal of holiness obtaining in our common life is derived from revelation, and God remains forevermore the ultimate standard both of holiness and of righteousness. Holiness in man therefore is approximation to the character of God. Righteousness in man is partnership in the activity of God. So that holiness and righteousness alike, in the experience of man, result from fellowship with God.

And yet so far that is but to define a method of discovery rather than to state the discovery. I once again ask, and I know the difficulty of my inquiry, what is the holiness of God? Will you allow me to say, talking quite freely and familiarly to you, I have sat down quite alone in the presence of that inquiry and attempted to discover the answer, and all the while I have seemed to know the meaning, and yet have been unable to define it. The only definition, therefore, that I shall venture to make is by quotation of words occurring in the New Testament descriptive of Jesus. For, after all, is not that the only way to know God? Must I not find my way to a knowledge of God through Him? If you take Him away, then I am in the midst of an infinite and incomprehensible and overwhelming Wisdom and Might, which I cannot know. But when I come into the presence of Jesus I know God. I read this wonderful thing written of Him by the seer of blue Galilee, John the mystic: "The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." And to my inquiring heart, in thinking of this subject, and asking what is the holiness of God, that is the only answer that came, from which I could not escape. What is holiness? Grace and truth. I may speak of the love of God, and declare that at the center of love is holiness, and yet is that quite accurate as definition? Is not holiness rather the combination of these two things, grace and truth? Take that word "grace," in its more original intention, not so much as descriptive of the great river of tender compassion and mercy and mighty salvation which, flowing through the ages, heals men. Oh, that is grace, and some of us still like, with our friends of the Salvation Army, to sing

Grace is flowing like a river.

Yes, but what is the nature of the river? Grace is love in action. That is, grace and truth. Love is grace, and its action is truth. We cannot possibly divide these things. Jesus Christ, describing the devil on one occasion, said two things concerning him: "He was a murderer from the beginning." "He is a liar, and the father thereof." Those are the superlative opposites of grace and truth. What is the opposite of grace? Murder, the ultimate of hate. What is the opposite of truth? A lie.

Holiness in God is the combination, or unity of grace and truth. We cannot speak of cause and effect when we speak of these in action. Everything God does is inspired of love, and governed by truth. That is holiness in God; and in the universe, and in all human history, that is the standard of holiness. The holiness of God is the standard of holiness in man. Holiness in man means approximation to the character of God.

I am not now dealing with the methods by which this is made possible, with the earlier statements of this song of Zacharias, that He came to deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, but rather with the result of that great deliverance, "that we... should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness." Holiness in man is right relation to God, resulting in participation in the very character of God. I go back to the very beginning of the story of man as told in the Bible, and I read that man was made in the Divine image, and after the Divine likeness. The enemy entered with temptation at the base of which was the infinite blasphemy that he proposed to present the initial purpose as an ultimate goal. You shall be like gods. Therein lay the subtlety of the temptation. It was suggested that man should realize the highest, be like God, but should do so by a wrong method. I have quoted the Genesis story only to lead on to the ultimate word of Jesus: "Ye, therefore, shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"; and to another word in the Ephesian letter, "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children."

Holiness of character, then, is approximation to the character of God, which is love and truth. If we were less conventional, and could now pass into absolute silence, in order to apply that test to our own lives, what a startling experience it would be for very many of us. How far am I in character a man of grace and of truth? I choose to ask the question personally, rather than of any other, for there are things the preacher cannot say to men, but must say with men. I shrink from the test, yet that is holiness, a life love-mastered, and true in its every activity. Moreover, it was in order that men should be holy that Jesus came. That is the meaning of the Christian religion. The Christian religion is not an arrangement by which a man can sin and escape the penalty. The Christian religion is great and glorious deliverance from enemies in order that in holiness and righteousness we may serve God. And to be satisfied with anything short of this character is to be satisfied with something short of the intention and purpose of the coming of our Lord into the world.

Righteousness, then, is conduct inspired by grace, and governed by truth. In business life, professional life, political life, how far are we righteous? We are righteous in the measure in which we are holy.

Thus, if we take these New Testament words, and interpret them in the light of New Testament teaching, we do not drag the idea of holiness to the dust. We are compelled rather, whether we will or not, to climb the mountain, and feel the rare and searching atmosphere above the snow line. Oh, my God, I am inclined to put my hand on my lips, and say I am a leper, unclean, unclean! By

these standards the life of the past week is unhealthy, and the man who glibly declares that he has been holy for seven years has never seen the light, or climbed to the whiteness of the purity of God.

But if this thing is to search our hearts, and humble our spirits, it is nevertheless part of an evangel. He came to deliver us from our enemies in order that we might serve Him in holiness and righteousness all our days. And if we look back over the life of the past week, and over the whole period of our Christian experience, and know how little we have been love-mastered, and truth-governed, let us remember that it is because of the very enemies from whom He came to deliver us. If we have not yet been delivered our inquiry should be, not how are we to climb to that height of holiness, but how we can submit ourselves to the Christ that He may be able to lift us to the height of holiness? He came to deliver us, and if He has not delivered us it is because we have not put ourselves absolutely and utterly under His control.

Now, brethren, if that is holiness essentially and eternally in God and in man—because I would not for all my soul send away any child of God who is aspiring after the heights and earnestly desiring to attain thereto, discouraged or crushed or broken—let me spend a few moments in speaking of what holiness is experimentally and temporally. I am not going to lower the standard for a moment, but I do propose to declare the measure in which holiness of character is possible, and what the experience is, according to the teaching of the New Testament. And I will do that quite briefly in seven statements, which, in the first place, are negative, but each of which has its positive side.

Holiness is not freedom from all sin as imperfection: but it is freedom from the dominion of sin, and from wilful sinning. I say that holiness is not freedom from all sin as imperfection. Now let me in the simplest way explain that. What is sin? I fall back upon the word most often translated sin in the New Testament, or the Hebrew word most often translated sin in the Old Testament, each of which has the one significance. "Sin," taking the word in its most general sense, is missing the mark, imperfection. Whether I can help it or not does not matter, does not enter into the thought of this particular word. The ideal is recognized, if I do not realize it, that is sin, missing the mark. In that sense holiness for today does not mean sinlessness. At best, we are unprofitable servants, and in the present life we never can come to the absolute perfection of consummation. In the sight of heaven, and according to the infinite standards of God, everything lower than the highest is sin.

But holiness does mean freedom from the dominion of sin. I need not be mastered by sin, and I never need sin wilfully. Surely, brethren, I need not argue that. I know how it has been argued, and yet think, and think quietly and simply and honestly, is there any need that I should wilfully sin? In the presence of a clear shining of light, when two paths are in front of me, and I am called to choose, there can be no necessity that I should walk in the wrong one. Perhaps there is no escape for a man who has never yet crowned the Christ. But He came to deliver me from my enemies, and He has made possible the freedom of the will. I can understand that somebody studying psychology says to me, What do you mean? I mean this, "To me who would do good evil is present." That is the language of the man who has never yet known perfectly the power of Christ. But the language of the man, that same man under the dominion of Christ, is this, "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." I will the good, and do the evil, until I have surrendered myself to the Lord Christ. But when I have surrendered to Him, I will the good, and do it. Thus my will is free, for action follows its choice.

Imperfect still, at the close of every day I hasten back to the cleft Rock, to the shelter of the blood redemption; and yet all the way it is possible, in this life, in the power of the present Christ, not to sin wilfully.

But again: Holiness is not freedom from mistakes in judgment; but it is freedom from the need to exercise judgment alone. To the end of the chapter we may make mistakes in judgment, out of absolute sincerity and loyalty to Christ; but at least remember this, we are not left alone to exercise our judgment if we are under the dominion of this One Who was manifested to deliver us from all our enemies. We can have government and light. You tell me God does not speak to men as He did to Abraham. Will you let me correct that statement? This is the truth, men are not listening as Abraham listened. Right in the depth of the soul, by a direct and definite revelation, He will speak to the man who wants to hear Him. I would to God there might be throughout all the churches of Jesus Christ a return to a recognition of the doctrine of the truth of the inner light. We can have guidance about the business we are to take up, the profession we are to follow, the house in which we are to live. Of course, the trouble is that we seek guidance so seldom.

Again: Holiness is not freedom from temptation, but it is freedom from the paralysis which necessitates failure. So far from being freedom from temptation, holiness means a new sense of temptation, a new attack of the forces of evil; but holiness means freedom from that paralysis, that necessitates failure under temptation. Tempted I shall be to the end, but defeated I need not be.

Holiness does not mean freedom from bodily infirmity, but it does mean freedom from all ailments which are the direct result of disobedience.

There is a vast amount of physical sickness in the Church of God that ought not to be there. And if there were real holiness of life there would be a great absence of very much which we suffer.

Holiness does not mean freedom from conflict, but it does mean freedom from defeat. I know at that point some of my friends do not agree. They say that the life of holiness means cessation of conflict. I do not believe it. I believe that to the end there will be conflict. Against principalities, against powers, the world rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places, we have to fight our way through. But there need not be defeat. The great and gracious word of the apostle comes back to the mind, "Having done all to stand."

Holiness is not freedom from liability to fall, but it is freedom from the necessity of falling.

The freedom of the will remains as an essential part of redeemed human nature, and it is ever possible to choose to turn aside from the path of obedience; but the freedom of the will in the new sense, to which we have before referred, means that we can ever yield ourselves in hours of crisis to "Him that is able to guard us from stumbling."

And once again, and finally: Holiness is not freedom from the possibility of advance, but it is freedom from the impossibility of advance. Holiness does not mean that those who are living the life of present holiness have now arrived at a stage of Christian experience from which there can be no advance. It means rather a condition of life which makes it possible to advance. On a previous occasion I have spoken of health as being holiness, and of growth as being consequent thereupon. Such is the relationship of holiness to advancement. You gave yourself to Christ but recently, but a few days, or weeks, or months ago, therefore you are but a babe in Christ, you have but commenced the journey. You can be holy, and yet there is much for you to know, to learn; and ere the work be done in you there will be long years of advancement and growth and development. Holiness, I repeat, is not a condition from which it is not possible to advance. It is a condition in which it is possible to advance.

And now turning back again for conclusion to the actual word of this great song of Zacharias, I pray you remember that the Christ around Whose name and Whose presence we are gathered this morning came that we might be delivered out of the hands of our enemies, in order that we might "serve Him in holiness and righteousness all our days."

What there is in us therefore that is unlike grace and unlike truth is there because we have never allowed our Lord to win His victory, and have His way.

May He lead us into such close fellowship with Himself that in the measure possible to us at the moment the very purpose of His coming may be fulfilled as we begin the life that is inspired by holiness of character and expressed in righteousness of conduct.

114 - Luke 2:7; Colossians 1:15; 1:18; Romans 8:29 - The Firstborn

The Firstborn

And she brought forth her first-born son.
Luke 2:7

Who is... the first-born of all creation.
Colossians 1:15

Who is... the first-born from the dead.
Colossians 1:18

The first-born among many brethren.
Romans 8:29

We celebrate at Christmas the supreme event in human history, the central act of God in that cosmic order in the midst of which we live. Its importance in the affairs of men is demonstrated by the accumulated results of two millenniums, by the spiritual conceptions which it has created, the moral standards which have resulted from it, and, what is more wonderful still, by the renovation and reconstruction of things spoiled and ruined which have followed. These results, however, are but the beginnings. If we would realize the stupendous meaning of the birth of the One of Whom we speak as Jesus of Nazareth, we need to detach ourselves from the merely local and historic, and endeavor to see it in its place in the economy of God. In order to do this no single word in the New Testament is more helpful, perhaps, than the one which is common to these passages of Scripture, the title "first-born"; and no group of passages is more illuminating.

Before proceeding to the consideration of the teaching of these texts it is of the utmost importance that we most carefully recognize the exact meaning of our word "firstborn," and of the Greek word of which in each case it is the singularly apt and beautiful translation.

We may divide our word into two parts, as indeed it is, in its very nature, already divided: first, and born. In so doing we are at once

helped to a true understanding of the Greek word of which it is a translation. The word "first" means foremost, and is variously used in reference to time, place, order, or importance. This we need to recognize, or we may think of it as referring to time only in these particular passages, whereas, as a matter of fact, it has a far more spacious value, and in some cases the reference is not to time at all, but to that which is beyond time, the timeless and the eternal. The root of the word "born" literally means to produce from a seed, but it must be remembered that it always signifies to bear, or to bring forth, never to beget. The word has no reference whatever to those profounder matters of being associated with the function of begetting. Therefore it does not necessarily give any revelation of the nature of the one born. It always refers to that hour, or event, or method, by which something already in being is manifested.

The compound word is used of Jesus of Nazareth in our texts in different relationships, but always with the same significance, as of One born or brought forth, and of His being born or brought forth in order to take a permanent place in relation to the subject under consideration. The statement that Mary brought forth her first-born Son does not necessarily mean that no son had been born of Mary before that, although, in all probability, that was true. That, however, is not the significance of the statement. It means, rather, that the Son born of Mary in that mystic hour was the foremost Son, the One taking precedence of all her other sons. The description, "the first-born of creation," does not mean that He was the first of the creation in time, that He existed before all other creations. It means rather that He is the ultimate of creation, that toward which all creation moved, its goal, its consummation, its final glory. "The firstborn from the dead" does not mean that He was the first raised from the dead in human history. Lazarus had preceded Him, and if we are to trust our Biblical record, men in the old economy had preceded Him. It means rather that He was the foremost, taking precedence over all others who rise from the dead, and in that sense was the "first-born of the dead." "The first-born among many brethren" suggests not merely His priority in point of time, but rather His eternal supremacy over even all those who are brought into new life as the result of His great and gracious mission.

The profounder questions of being and of begetting are dealt with or referred to in the context in each case. The first-born of the virgin mother was foreannounced by the angel as "The Son of the Most High," "The Son of God." The first-born of creation is described as "The Son of His love," "The image of the invisible God"; and in His own essential being as the One Who is "before all things," the One in Whom "all things consist." The "first-born from the dead" is the same Person, as the continuity of the apostolic argument proves. "The first-born among many brethren" is with equal clearness described in the context as the Son of God.

Thus in every case the Person referred to is the Son of God in the fullest sense of that term, and the very fullness of the term necessitates limitation in our understanding or interpretation of the word. If that statement appears to be of the nature of a paradox let us consider it carefully. "The Son of God" is a term so full that, when we use it in order to explain it, we must limit it. We must limit it as a figure of speech by declining to limit it as we are compelled to limit the term "son" when we use it on the level of our own experience. As God can have no essential beginning, neither can His Son, Who is of His very nature. Therefore the only sense in which the Son of God can ever be spoken of as begotten is in reference to some new manifestation or activity of Deity.

We celebrate at this season the beginning of the central age in the history of man, that which was initiated when the Son of God was manifested. It is an age of consummation and of initiation, and in both cases the Son of God is declared to be first-born.

The four texts I have selected fall into two groups. The first two deal with consummations": the first-born Son of the virgin mother, and the first-born of all creation. The second two deal with initiation: the first-born from the dead, and the first-born among many brethren.

The first two have reference to the original creation of God. "Let us make Man" was the crowning word of that creation. It was preceded by all the lower forms of being. Jesus, as the first-born of a woman, was the first-born of creation, that is, in the sense of being its goal and its glory.

The second two have to do with redemption. Jesus became a man, a member of the race, involved in sin, and as such He passed to death. Suddenly appearing out of the darkness and mystery of death, He was the first-born from the dead. Man having lost the scepter and possibilities of his own being, a new race is to be created by the process of the Divine activity, and Jesus is the first-born among many brethren.

In the first two the redeeming purpose is seen operative in the realm of creation; in the second two the creative purpose is seen as realized through redemption. Thus the movement suggested by these four passages is one, and cannot ultimately be divided. For the purpose of our meditation, however, we may follow the suggested division, being careful so far as possible to observe the relation maintained between the creative purpose of God and His redemptive work, between the redemptive purpose of God and its fulfilment of the meaning of His creative activity.

Let us, then, consider these four passages, not in anything like full or exhaustive treatment, but in order to think of what they suggest concerning the Son of God as the first-born in regard to creation, and as the first-born in regard to redemption.

First, then, the Son of God as the first-born in regard to creation. The words written by Luke in his gospel are full of simplicity, and yet full of sublimity; "She brought forth her first-born Son." In that birth we are brought face to face with One Who is the crown and

glory of humanity. According to these Divine records and revelations, man was made in the image and likeness of God. Whether it is necessary for us to accept the interpretation of the Biblical statement which affirms that man in those earliest experiences had come to the fulness of that image and likeness may be a very doubtful and debatable question. Personally, I should say that Adam did not realize that great ideal in all its fulness of experience, but potentially only. In the Bible, before the story of sin, we are face to face with primitive man, with man, that is, in his probationary state, not yet having come to full realization of the dignity and glory of his being, not yet realizing within his own experience what it is to be in the image and likeness of God. Whether that be so or not, the declaration here is that one "born of a woman"—I quote Paul's words from Galatians—is a Son Who is first-born, that is, One Who realized in Himself the Divine purpose and intention, One through Whom, therefore, is revealed in the universe of God, to the heavens above and to the earth beneath, the thought that was in the mind of God when He said, "Let us make man in our own image, and in our likeness." All who preceded Jesus in time, even at their highest and best, had been but hints and prophecies as to the meaning and purpose of God in humanity.

We must remember that this word was written by Luke concerning the birth of Jesus after the completion of His life, after the crucifixion, beyond the resurrection, after there had come to the disciples the illuminating glory of the Pentecostal baptism. Luke was writing of the whole fact of Christ as he knew it as the result of that Pentecostal illumination, and with the sense of the whole life of the Man Jesus on his mind. When his pen wrote the story of that birth, he wrote it thus: "She brought forth her first-born Son." She brought forth the Son of Man, Who takes precedence and preeminence above and beyond all other of the sons of men in that He was in Himself the crown and glory of humanity. On that day, in the manger in Bethlehem, was born the archetypal Man, God's Man, Man according to the Divine counsel, the Divine purpose, the Divine possibility, the Divine power. Perhaps I may illustrate what I am attempting to insist on concerning the hour in which this was written in the most simple way by saying that I do not think Mary would have used these words at that moment. I do not think the worshiping shepherds would have understood Who was born at that moment. Even if Mary pondered in her heart this strange and wonderful thing that had happened by the grace and favor of heaven, as most certainly she did, I think she had no true apprehension of Who her Son really was in this great movement of the Divine activity. Presently, beyond the life of purity, patience, beauty, and power; beyond the awful tragedy of the death in which that life so resplendent in glory seemed to go out and be eclipsed; beyond that strange, transforming resurrection hour setting its seal on the truth of His own teaching, and transfiguring the mystery of the Cross; and beyond that hour of illumination which appeared when the Holy Spirit came for the interpretation of the Christ—looking back, those who had thus come to know Him said, He is the "first-born Son," the crown and the glory of our own humanity. In Him humanity came to its own, to use the phrase we so often employ in other applications; in Him humanity realized itself. He was, and is, the first-born of the race.

That consideration must be supplemented by another. If in Him the ultimate glory of creation in the purpose of God, which is man, was realized, the whole story of the birth of Jesus reminds us of the fact that this did not happen as the result of a process of creation. There was some arrest, some change, some new and interfering activity on the part of God in order that there might appear this crowning glory of humanity in a Man. This One born was begotten by neither the will nor the act of humanity, but by the will and activity of God in a strange mystic brooding and mystery of the Holy Spirit, by which operation motherhood was sanctified and purified for its sacred office, so that the angel announcing the coming of the Babe did say to her, "That which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God."

When Paul came to write his Colossian letter—the purpose of the letter being that of showing the infinite resources of the believer on Christ—it was necessary in the course of it to speak of this selfsame One, of His peculiar glories, and His relationship to the whole cosmos; and Paul described Him as the first-born of creation. Let us again remind ourselves that that phrase is the exact description of the true place of man in the cosmos. Man is the ultimate in creation. For the purpose of a meditation such as this, it does not at all matter what view we may hold of the process of creation, that is, if we admit that this order is a created order. It does not signify whether we think that the creative process was that of long eons through which creation moved ever higher and higher until it came to its ultimate, or whether we believe that these things came originally into being by some stupendous word of God, immediately producing results. Either view equally demonstrates the glory and majesty of God. To my own understanding the more wonderful and splendid idea is that which—and it is not out of harmony with Genesis, but is consonant with scientific investigation—that which by long, and to our thinking, slow, processes creation climbed higher and ever higher, until it reached its goal in man. Even if men deny the Creator, they are compelled to admit that the last and final glory of the cosmic order is man. That is exactly what the Apostle meant when he wrote of Jesus as the first-born of creation. He saw Him as the One to Whom the whole creation moved, its ultimate goal, the destiny of everything. It was probably a slow-moving process, but it went ever and ever on, until at last Man appeared. That is the Divine order. Here, of course, we must be very careful to allow the Biblical revelation to flash on our thinking, and to correct it; for the Biblical revelation is not that of man finally evolved into separate being, but that of man ultimately created by an act in which the spiritual and material were united in order that the possibilities of the material might be fully realized; and in order that the glory of the spiritual through the material might be fully manifested. In other words, all creation is an expression of God. No flower decks the sod but that is a revelation of the Divine. No single tint of the rainbow or fleck of color on the petal of a flower but speaks of God. In His temple all things say, Glory! That was a great word of the Psalmist. When Isaiah saw the vision of the uplifted throne he heard also this majestic song, not the song of holiness alone, but this also: "The whole earth is full of His glory." All

creation is an expression of God. But its foremost born, its ultimate expression, its last and final word concerning God is expressed in man. The first-born of the virgin is the final Man, the goal and glory of humanity. In that sense He is the firstborn of creation, the foremost One, the last and final voicing of the glory of God in and through creation.

Yet here again we halt. As we have already seen, this Man whose birth we celebrate at Christmastide was not born as the result of what we describe as natural processes. Here was a strange new intrusion on the part of God into affairs and facts which He Himself had originally created and ordered, and which have ever been under His government. The writer of the Colossian letter is careful to tell us in this very connection that Christ is before all things: that is the language of time. He also declares that in Christ all things hold together, or consist. That is the language of continuity.

Let us face the mystery: He Who came, the first-born of creation, the goal to which the whole creation moved until He came, came not by the movement of creation toward Him, but by a new order of God, a new act of God, a new overruling of God. By the power of God He came, the Creator, Who is before all things; He came, the Sustainer, in Whom all things consist. Thus we stand in the presence of a Light that blinds and a glory that is as darkness to our finite minds; in the presence of that kenosis, that self-emptying of which I never can think without remembering that most awe-inspiring, and yet most illuminating, line of Charles Wesley: "God contracted to a span." The first-born came, not by processes of creation, which God originated and governed, but by a new touch and new intrusion, by a new activity of God. In that is evidence of the redeeming purpose of God in His coming. Man cannot redeem his own kind. Man is of the creation entirely, and, while causing, also shares its failure. God only can redeem; He is beyond the creation. The creation is of Him, but in Him is no failure. He Who faileth never, bends to that which fails and touches it anew with power, and enters into it by His own mysterious self-emptying. That is the deeper truth concerning the birth of Jesus.

Thus we come to that of which the mystic light has been on all our earlier considerations. The Apostle directly writes that Christ is not only first-born of creation, but "firstborn from among the dead." The arresting word here is the word "dead." It suggests a condition that ought not to be in human life. Into that condition—a condition expressed in the words, "In the midst of life, we are in death"—He came. He was crowned with glory and honor in order that He might die, not after He had died. Let us read the Hebrew letter very carefully at this point. It does not affirm that Christ was crowned with glory and honor as a result of His dying, but in order that He might die. That is one of the supreme words of revelation: "Crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man." The ultimate crown on the brow of God is that which crowns the Living One Who stooped to die to redeem men. He came into the condition of humanity resulting from sin, lived in the midst of it, passed down into death itself. We can never now celebrate Christmas without realizing the Cross in the midst of it all. I was greatly impressed yesterday with a little poem in a daily newspaper. It may be imagination merely, but listen to it:—

On the night when Christ was born,
In the starlight's gleaming,
Sharp-speared thorn boughs in the shadow
Stirred with troubled dreaming
Of a cruel, piercing crown,
Of a King in death bowed down:
On the night when Christ was born,
And the glad song breaking,
Reeds about a marish pool,
As with long heart aching,
Wailed with pain of that far hour
When a reed should mock His power.
On the night when Christ was born,
To a bleak moon clinging,
Stood a grey, ungladdened wood
With the olives flinging
Writhen shadows—watchers dim
Of the tree which heareth Him.

Whoever wrote that had been very near to Christ. That is a poetic fancy, but it is nearer to truth than much prose and argument. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain."

I want that same poet to write me three more verses about the Cross, telling how those thorns blossomed with the roses of eternity, of how the reed at last became the iron rod of government, of how after a little while the olive wood became the material of the throne of eternal Deity. The cradle and the Cross must always remain close together in our thinking.

We see Him passed to that condition of death, and then we see Him as "first-born from the dead," manifested beyond death as the Living One, passing out of its gloom to the glory of the everlasting day. First-born of dead ones, taking preeminence over all others—

behold Him!

In the context will be found this suggestive phrase: "The Kingdom of the Son of His love." That is a picture of the issue of all the wonder. It means that He Who is the firstborn from the dead is He Who will yet realize all creation and establish the great Kingdom of God. Through His Church, His Ecclesia, His called-out saints, He will make the desert blossom as the rose, heal the salt marshes, give the world its final bloom, and make the whole creation the anthem of the glory of God.

Let us pass to the last suggestive phrase, "The first-born among many brethren." Immediately there rises before the mind a picture of a new race upspringing as the result of His birth, His dying, and His resurrection. From the Roman epistle let me select some illuminative phrases and sentences, for the moment stringing them together like pearls without the complete statements of which they form a part: "Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?... Through Jesus Christ our Lord." "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death." "Heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." "All things work together for good." Through these sayings we gain a picture of the new race delivered from death, through the Spirit of life set free from the opposing forces of life, heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ, conscious that, in the midst of forces, the grind of which sometimes is terrible, but the direction of which is of God, all things work together for good. In the midst of creation the new race is broken, bruised, groaning, travailing in pain; and that new race is groaning and travailing in pain together with creation. The groaning and travailing have to do with birth; they constitute the birth pangs of a new creation out of which at last the Divine purpose is to be realized and fulfilled. Of that race Christ is first-born, "the first-born among many brethren."

We are not celebrating a small matter at this holy season. We are celebrating the coming into time and human history of the eternally first-born. The hour is mystic and marvelous, the hour in which He came in splendid lowliness, bowed to our level, even though it was the level of sin and of death, in order to lift us to His level, which is the level of holiness and age-abiding life.

Thus we take our four texts, and from them we hear the music of hope, of courage, of victory.

We shall gather in our homes, and the bairns will be about us. We shall not check their merriment, but rather laugh and play and romp with them. The glory of all the glad news will be that on the faces of our children we shall see the light that comes from the cradle of the Babe. The first-born Son is our ground of hope when we look into the faces of our children.

Then we shall pause a moment in the merriment, and think of that of which all our newspapers speak every day, of the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain. We cannot read a newspaper without seeing this, if the light of God illumine our reading. Look again. Shining between the lines of the paper is the mystic message of Christmas; Christ is the first-born of creation, and that is the prophecy of the hour in which the groaning shall cease, the travail be over, and God's great triumph be come.

We look at death. I would speak with all tenderness. Some of us will know more of the pain of death at Christmas than ever before. A place is empty! No, it is not empty. Look again, oh ye who are crushed and broken of heart. Look at the vacant chair. Behold, it is occupied by the First-born from among the dead. Now we know that those who sleep with Jesus will God bring with Him.

Lastly, we look at ourselves, and that is the most tragic look of all! Oh, the failings of another year, the deflections from the path of faith, the terrific sense of things that master me. Look again! Cease looking at yourself! "Behold the first-born among many brethren," and in that beholding find assurance in His face that at last He will perfect that which concerneth you. So while the bairns are laughing and angels are singing, let us sing our carols and keep our Christmas. It is a great festival! It is the Festival of the Firstborn!

115 - Luke 2:14 - Peace Among Men of God's Pleasure

Peace Among Men of God's Pleasure

Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased.

Luke 2:14

These words constituted the angelic anthem of welcome to the New Race. The angel messenger had told the shepherds of "a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." In this chorus the angels expressed their understanding of the significance of the event, "Glory to God in the highest." The term "in the highest" does not signify degree but location; "the highest" in the text stands in contrast to the earth, not necessarily separated from it, but suggesting the fact of the two spheres, earth and heaven.

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men in whom
He is well pleased.

This was more than the song that celebrated the birth of the Babe; it was the song that celebrated the race which was to result from the birth of the Babe. The terms are quite explicit: peace, not toward men, but among men. However much we may differ about the

translation and interpretation of that which remains of the passage, about this there is no doubt, that it is not peace or good will toward men, but among men—peace among men in whom He is well pleased. That is at once the limitation of the thought and the indication of the true region of peace.

The significance of the song which the angels sang will be discovered in recognition of the Biblical teaching concerning the interest which angels have taken in this world of ours. Their first song about the world, according to Biblical revelation, is recorded in the book of Job, in that wonderful passage of the Theophany or unveiling of God before the astonished vision of His servant, tried, buffeted and bruised by temptation. In the course of that great unveiling it is declared that when God laid the cornerstone of the earth,

The Morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy.

You will remember that Milton couples these songs—the song of creation and the song of the Advent of the Saviour—in the great hymn of the Nativity, when he sings:

Such music (as 'tis said),
Before was never made.
But when of old the sons of morning sang
While the Creator great
His constellations set,
And the well-balanced word on hinges hung
And cast the dark foundations deep
And bid the weltring waves their oozy channel keep.

Such is the first Scripture suggestion about angel interest. They sang in creation.

If Faber was right when he sang that “There is no place where earth's sorrows Are more felt than up in heaven”,

then angel sons had surely merged from the major shoutings of creation's dawn into minor wailings in view of the miseries of men resulting from their sin. I immediately say to you that I think Faber was quite right, that there is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven. All sorrow there is transfigured by the light that we know not yet; all sorrow there is modified, and experienced within its relationship to the infinite movements; but sorrow is surely there, for it is in the heart of God Himself in the presence of human suffering and misery. I repeat, I verily believe that often the angels had sung in minor wailing over the miseries of men.

Now at last, as the angel said to the shepherds, “there is born... in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” To those angel singers the One born was “a second man,” “the last Adam.” In the view of the angels his birth was a new commencement in human history. From that child lying in the manger they saw a new race springing, and in celebration of the new race they raised their anthem:

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men in whom
He is well pleased.

The first note of the anthem was a recognition of the Source of the New Movement, “Glory to God in the highest.” The central note celebrated the issue which had happened that day, “on earth peace.” The final note revealed the condition of realization, “among men in whom He is well pleased.”

If thus, in this anthem, we discover the note of limitation, and surely it is here, let us remember that the limitation is but declared in order to reveal the condition on which the ultimate purpose may be realized. There can be no question that at last the men of His good pleasure, the men in whom He is well pleased, will be men of all kindreds and races, that, at last, “though a wide compass first be fetched,” His victory is secure; that, although the process may be one of conflict and long and painful struggle in the history of the world, yet finally the note of the angel anthem will be found to be the chord of the dominant, and all the music of human conditions will be true to its suggestion.

Let us briefly consider these three things in a slightly different order: first, the issue described, “on earth peace”; second, the condition revealed, “among men in whom He is well pleased”; and, finally, in a closing and brief word, the source suggested, “Glory to God in the highest.”

First, then, “on earth peace.” Is it not difficult to understand that word? Probably not, in our own hearts and personal experiences as Christian men and women; for already all such as have reposed their trust in this Lord Christ know something of that peace of God which passeth all understanding. But if we look away from these personal experiences, and endeavor to enter into the consciousness of our own times and of the conditions in the midst of which we live, is it not almost impossible to understand this

phrase, "on earth peace"? That is to say, the ideal seems far from realization. If we contrast all that is suggested by this phrase with all that we find in history, how startling is the difference between peace and the perpetual conflict and unrest, the pain and suffering of the world. I do not desire to dwell particularly on matters that are wholly immediate and local, and yet we are all painfully conscious of the actual condition of the world. We are all conscious, for instance, of the fact that the world's national peace is a mockery and a sham, that it is merely an armed neutrality based on suspicion. We are all terribly, and more acutely, conscious of the fact that the very peace of our own life is often rudely broken in on by the shock of strife and catastrophe. Where is peace?

Without staying to deal with other of the evidences of immediate unrest, let us take a broader outlook, and I think a deeper inlook, and inquire what are the underlying reasons of the restlessness of the world? I should be inclined to summarize them thus. First of all—this would not be put first by many, but Christian men must put it first—a moral malady without remedy, that is the profoundest reason of human restlessness. Consequent on that there is the fact of suffering without succor, and often without sympathy. And finally we have the fact of death without hope. Of course, in Christian experience death is not without hope, but neither is suffering without succor, for moral malady is not without remedy. But death without hope is the world outlook; I am not for the moment referring to the larger and more terrible fact of death merging into some experience beyond yet more awful; but to the hard fact of death with its severance, its breaking of ties, and ending of companionship, with no certainty of anything beyond; for there is no certainty apart from Christ. These are the reasons for unrest.

Moral malady without remedy, conflict everywhere between good and evil, between principle and passion. Man is in the midst of conflict, plunged into it at his birth. Whatever theory he may have of the universe, and whatever his philosophy may be, he is face to face with this conflict in his own nature, in his city, in his nation, in the world from the beginning; with this most appalling fact, that victory seems to be forever on the side of evil, "wrong forever on the throne." The outcome is perpetual unrest.

Suffering without succor. Without any attempt now to account for suffering, we recognize that it is here. There is the suffering of poverty—and never believe any man who tells you that poverty is a blessing in the economy of God. It is not so. It would be as untrue as to say that disease comes from God. These things may be overruled by God in the great economy of His grace, and be made instruments by which He perfects character; but poverty has no place in the economy of God for man. But its pain is here. There are also the sufferings of sickness and of persecution. And in Nature there is no proof of the Divine sympathy. Lift out of human history this Christ-child Whose birth we celebrate today, take this Christian fact out of the world, and we cannot prove that God has any sympathy with humanity. The sun will shine as brightly on your dead child as on your living, loving one. Nature will shed no tears for your agony. Poets talk about nature weeping; but in the day of heartbreak nature will prove nothing to you of the tenderness and compassion of God. There are multitudes of souls today suffering without any consciousness of sympathy, and without any immediate succor.

Death without hope. Philosophy has no proof of immortality. In the submerging of the soul in unutterable agony a man will cry out, "If a man die, shall he live again?" That is an inquiry, but, as in the case of Job, it constantly merges into the wail of unutterable despair, without hope or a gleam of light. We have no proof of immortality if this Christ-child was not born. If all this story is myth, then the world has no sure evidence of a life beyond. These are the things that create the unrest of humanity.

But let us turn to the other side of the matter, and inquire what is peace. Peace is, first, moral rectitude, a perfect ethic combined with a sufficient dynamic, and resulting in a conscience void of offense. That is peace.

Or, again, peace is joy without alloy, the result of an inclusive outlook, the measurement of the part by the whole, the ability to sing "Light after darkness"; and, consequently, a heart full and strong, firm and steady, in the midst of problems which are not yet solved.

Or inclusively, what is peace? Eternal life is peace, the secret of the ages, the transfiguration of death, a spirit homed in God. Such is the experience of peace.

The angels sang "on earth peace." Peace can come only as there shall come to men who are conscious of moral malady without remedy the remedy for that malady. Peace can come only to men who are conscious of suffering without succor or sympathy that is more than sentiment, as there comes to them the succor that takes hold of suffering and transmutes the sorrow into joy, and gives them the assurance that not here and now is all of that which is here and now, but that the ultimate meanings lie beyond, and that in the economy of God they are meanings of perfect realization. Peace can come only to a world where death confronts men, when, somehow, death can be transfigured, and men cease to speak of death, and talk, instead of decease, of exodus, going out. Peace can come only when death is no longer looked on as a harbor of refuge into which the ship all battered escapes, but rather as the harbor from which the ship puts out to sea and finds the ultimate fulfilment of all being. These are Christian ideals, and can be realized by men only when they enter into Christian experience.

We now turn to that which is central to this meditation, the suggestion of the angels concerning the condition of peace, "peace among men in whom He is well pleased."

This song was sung, first, because of the birth of the Babe. I take up this gospel in which alone the song is recorded, which is peculiarly the gospel portraying the perfection of Jesus of Nazareth, and I trace the story through a little way in order that we may catch the fuller meaning of the angel song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased."

I turn to the fortieth verse of the first chapter, and I read: And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

That was twelve years afterwards, measuring the life by human measurements.

I run on down the same chapter to the fifty-second verse; eighteen more years have passed, thirty years from the hour of the angel song, and now I read: Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

I go a little further in this wonderful story of His life and I read in the third chapter, verse twenty-two: A voice came out of heaven, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased.

Why, then, was the song sung? Because there in the manger lying was the Babe in Whom God was well pleased, which does not suggest that God is not well pleased in the presence of every child, every babe, but which does suggest a difference. It suggests this initial fact of absolute perfection, a new beginning in human history, a strange wonder never to be finally understood. There was the Child, the first of a new race. There is a sense today in which any child that lies in its mother's arms, every little one, is dear to His heart, dearer than to the mother who nurses it. But there were peculiar facts about this Child. As a Boy the grace of God was on Him; as a Man of thirty it is declared that He had grown in favor with God and man. Then Luke tells us that the heavens were opened and a voice declared, "Here is the Man in Whom I am well pleased. In Him, then, there is peace, for peace is among men in whom He is well pleased."

And still further we follow the story as Luke tells it, and in the first and second verses of the fourth chapter we read: And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness during forty days, being tempted of the devil.

There He mastered all temptations.

Still reading on in order to discover the music that follows the angelic anthem, we find in the fourteenth verse of the same chapter: And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit.

He went to service and to sacrifice, until, let it be reverently stated, "He offered Himself through the eternal Spirit." All the way from the beginning to the end we see the Man in Whom God is well pleased.

Thus we see peace, focused in one human being, peace in the Man in whom God was well pleased. He was a lowly Man, at first a Babe, then a Boy, then a Man, and through all a Servant. One Who went to death in the fulfilment of His service; and all the way He was a Man of peace.

Now, do not let us be anxious for the moment about the ultimate application of all this, but let us earnestly behold this Man of Nazareth, the Man of peace. If there is one thing more certain than anything else in the revelation of Jesus in these gospels it is that of His peace. In neither of these gospel stories can we find any occasion, any circumstance, any hour, in which He was perturbed. Always He is the Man of peace.

When we come to the final scenes—and I cannot tell you why it is so, but I never come to Christmas now without feeling that the cradle and the Cross are close together—I cannot think of Him Who came and rejoice in His coming without thinking of the ultimate in the mystery of His passion; I say, when we come to those last tragic scenes, we find that the One human being, undisturbed, quiet, and strong, was the Man of peace, not the priests, who were determined to ensure His murder, not the cool, dispassionate Roman Procurator Pilate, who was strangely perturbed; but Jesus only was quiet and at peace.

What was this experience of His peace? A perfect and perpetual victory over sin, the constant transmutation of suffering in His own life, so that under the very shadow of the Cross in the midst of those paschal discourses He could say to His disciples, "My joy"; and, speaking of the deepest thing in His life, the annihilation of death, long ere He was apprehended and crucified, He had 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." Even on the holy mount, having come to the fulfilment of His humanity in the splendor of the metamorphosis, He spoke, not of the death He should die, but of the exodus He should accomplish. In these three things I find the secrets of His peace.

But is that all the angels meant? Nay verily! They sang not only of the Babe, but also of the race that was to spring from Him; not merely of peace in the Man of His good pleasure, but of "peace among men in whom He is well pleased."

Now let us turn from Luke to John, and in that gospel so brief in many respects, and yet so full of understanding of the deepest

things in the life and ministry of our Lord, we find that in the midst of the paschal discourses, with the shadow of the Cross upon Him, and the last things close at hand, talking to a little group of men, He said: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful" (Joh_14:27).

And for these men that was the day when they were more troubled and afraid than they had ever been in their lives; it was the day when all the restlessness of the world seemed to be their portion, the day when hope was dying down and every gleam of light seemed wholly vanishing, the day when high and holy aspirations seemed doomed to utter disappointment in that He persisted in going out to die! Yet on that day He said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you."

Then follow the next pages in the gospel of John, telling the story of dark days for them, days in which there came the end of all peace; the moral malady against which He had protested was victorious over Him, and He was murdered, suffering without succor finding its final expression in His untold sorrow, as they watched Him as long as they were able and then fled for very fear; death, which He had seemed to count as a small matter in the whole economy of life mastered Him, and He was put into the grave; and all that after He had said, "Peace I leave with you." I am in sympathy with these men in their sorrow and in their inevitable sense that peace was no more.

Now let us turn to the twentieth chapter. Here we find ourselves in the midst of a little company of terrified souls gathered in an upper room with doors locked. I have no criticism for them. I would have shared their fear. I think I would have been more fearful than they, and hardly been present at all. Suddenly standing in the midst is the same One, the Man of God's good pleasure. What is the first word that passes His lips? "Peace be unto you." It was His answer to their fear. And again in a few moments, "Peace be unto you." It was His preparation for their service. Eight days later, with Thomas the great believer present, again He said, "Peace be unto you." It was the call to faith.

From that moment the number of men of peace in the world was multiplied. Much later John wrote, "As He is, even so are we in this world." Was there ever such a daring word written under inspiration? Yet in this very matter of peace how true it was! The peacefulness of Christ's witnesses under persecution has been one of the world's perpetual wonders.

What created the peace that possessed these men and sent them out in the midst of the world's suffering and conflict and darkness? They shared His peace. What was His peace? Victory over sin. The transmutation of suffering, so that these men—mark the true and deep mystery of the word in Acts—are seen "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name." Finally, the annihilation of death, for when they write their letters these men will not speak of death as other men speak of death; they will take up His words and use them, and Peter will say, After my exodus, using the very word that Jesus used on the holy mount; and Paul will say, After my departure, that is my going away out into the larger life. These are the secrets of peace, "peace among men in whom He is well pleased."

In a final word, notice the suggestion of the angels concerning the source, "Glory to God in the highest." Salvation must come from God and not from man. Salvation must come out of the heavens to the earth; it cannot arise out of the earth and climb to the heavens. Therefore, glory to God is a necessity as it is a fact.

When the Babe was born a movement began that will issue in a race in which He is well pleased. That was the meaning of Christmas to the angels. Who is this Child? He is the Son of God, the Lord from heaven. He is also the Babe of the new race, Who, not by human will or act, laid hold on humanity and entered therein for a new beginning, for the accomplishment of the larger purposes of God. Those angels, then, sang o'er the plains of Bethlehem not of the Babe alone, but of the race.

Take this Christ away and all the conditions of unrest abide: moral malady without remedy, suffering without succor and with no proof of God's sympathy, and death as an appalling darkness out of which no ray of certain light shines and out of which no voice comes, and we still shall have to describe it as "the bourne whence no traveler returns." Take this Christ-child away, then, and peace is impossible.

But the Christ-child is not taken away. We are not merely celebrating a far-off event, we are gathered around the presence of the living Lord Himself, and around all the great eternal facts focused, and rendered visible, by the mystery of Incarnation and by way of the Cross.

Consequently, if our trust is reposed in Him we are men of peace, we are men in whom God by grace is well pleased. Already in us He finds the forces of His own life and of the Son of His love; and He knows that the deepest facts of our lives are those, and that at last they will bring a perfect and final salvation and an eternal peace. Thus while yet we are in the midst of the clash of battle there is peace.

If you take this Christ away, have you any song to sing worth the singing? I know full well that the tragedy sometimes makes faith falter. I know what it is—and if there are those who do not, then let them be patient with me, for I speak not for myself alone—I know what it is in some hour of calamity to say, Where is God? But my question does not alter the calamity; and if I am allowing my

unbelief to silence these angels, to hush these bells, to deny this music, then, God help me, what is life?

Oh, hear the song of the angels over all sighing humanity. We are celebrating today the infinite mystery, and mystery it is, of incarnate God. From it all light is streaming, and all songs are coming, all hope is flaming, and we believe that at last there shall be peace.

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.

116 - Luke 8:45 - The Touch Of Faith

The Touch of Faith

Who is it that touched Me?

Luke 8:45

In this narrative we have an illustration in the concrete of Christ's relation to the crowds, and in the particular question which constitutes the text a revelation of that principle of discrimination which was always manifest in His attitude toward the multitudes that gathered round about Him. It was a strange question from the standpoint of the disciples who were close to Him on that memorable occasion, and from the standpoint of the multitudes who observed. It was not only a strange question, to them it must have seemed absurd. "Who touched Me?" Peter, spokesman of the rest, said to Him in effect, Lord, how sayest Thou, Who touched Me? Everyone is touching Thee who can get near enough to do so. The multitudes press Thee and crowd upon Thee. In the last half an hour it may be that a hundred people have touched Thee! But He said, Nay, someone touched Me differently, for I perceive—and I like the Authorized Version, although the Revised may be more literal—virtue has gone out of Me. I perceive that virtue—in the old and gracious sense of the word in our English language—has gone out of Me. Who did it? Who touched Me? A hundred men have touched Me within half an hour, but someone has touched Me differently!

Let us look at the picture. I do not know among the pictures of the New Testament another that makes a more powerful appeal to me than does this. At this time Our Lord was conducting an itinerant ministry, passing from place to place, consenting to receive the necessities of His physical life by the ministration of a company of women of substance who loved Him and followed Him. Luke tells us in this chapter that Jesus went about through cities and villages preaching and bringing the good tidings of the Kingdom of God, and with Him were the twelve and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, "Mary of Magdala, Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto them of their substance." This is the only account we have of that fact; it is the only place where some of the women are named. A little company of women, whom He had healed and helped physically, mentally, and spiritually, were now responding to His ministry by supplying His daily needs. So He was passing from place to place, exercising His great ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing, these accompanying Him as He went.

Among other places, He had just been to the country of the Gerasenes, and on the very shores of their country had given an evidence of the meaning of His ministry by casting out the evil spirits from a man who had been the pest of the entire neighborhood, and at the same moment had rebuked their unholy traffic by destroying their swine. They had made a protest, and had besought Him to leave them. There is infinite pathos in the declaration that He entered into a ship, and crossed the sea. Now on the other side of the waters He took up His work again, and that wonderful declaration is made: "And as Jesus returned, the multitude welcomed Him; for they were all waiting for Him." As he proceeded on His way two wonderful things happened, the stories of which are so interwoven that we cannot deal with the one without considering the other, for there are values in the one which belong to the other. These two things were the healing of the child of Jairus and the healing of this woman, the woman who touched Him.

Let us see the picture. Our Lord was passing on His way. The multitudes were following Him. Sometimes, while reading this story and others, I like to sit down and allow myself to attempt to picture the actual scene. I attempt to look into the faces of the crowd, to watch the different expressions on their faces. Strong men jostle each other to get near the Teacher, to get one glance into His eyes. In all probability, mothers lift their children that the little ones may look just once at Him Whose fame has gone so far afield. For the most part reverently, men and women following after Him, interested men and women, attracted multitudes, were prepared to welcome Him, not merely from the standpoint of idle curiosity, but because of their real interest in Him. They went after Him as He traveled, eager that if He should say something they might hear it, desiring supremely to see Him work some wonder, that they might observe it. He Himself was the center of attraction.

Then I see approaching Him a man, a ruler of the synagogue. If I had the artistic sense I would like to paint the picture of Jairus. On his face sits a terrible shadow. Back in his home is a child, his little daughter, twelve years old; and she lies dying. To that nothing can be added, nothing need be added in the case of those who have ever known anything of the experience in their own lives. Look

at Jairus; notice the agony, and anxiety and earnestness in his face. He has asked the Lord to come and heal the child ere it be too late. With an immediate response the Master walked along the highway toward the house of Jairus. If I could paint that picture I would. It is one of the great pictures of the New Testament. If I were painting it as a picture, this procession toward the house of Jairus, I would place Jairus a little ahead of Jesus, walking with eagerness, desiring by any means to hurry Christ to his house. At the center of all the thronging crowd we see the one figure, regal, beautiful, dignified, full of tenderness, the Christ Himself.

Suddenly the procession was arrested because the Master stood and said: "Who touched Me?" Then the protest of the disciples was heard, "Master, the multitudes press Thee and crush Thee." But, said Jesus, someone has touched Me, for I perceive that power has gone out of me. So far, no one knew what had happened except the Master and one other. Then in the hush and the constraint, and amid the almost amused glances of the people who thought it was a foolish question, a woman was seen moving round, until she knelt in front of Him, and there she told Him all the truth. Bending over her, and looking straight into that woman's eyes, He used to her the only particularly tender epithet that He is ever recorded as having addressed to a woman, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."

And where was Jairus while this was taking place? Waiting, eager, anxious, if I know him, and I think I do. I think I know him by actual sympathy with his breaking heart. I think he was almost rebellious because the Lord had halted. Yet I think that when that woman had told her story of how by touching she had been healed, there was a song in the heart of Jairus, new light on the shadowed pathway, a new hope breaking in his soul, for that was a new evidence of the power of the One Whose aid he had come to seek.

Then they moved a little farther forward, and there come messengers from the house of Jairus, who said: Do not worry the Rabbi, the child is dead. In a moment another voice sounded in his ears, the voice of Jesus, saying: "Fear not, believe only; thy child shall be made whole." Arrived at the house, He said: "She is not dead but sleepeth"; and they laughed Him to scorn. He put them all out. It is the only proper treatment for such people! Besides Himself, He kept in that room three disciples, the father and the mother, six of them; and the dead child made seven. Then bending over her, He said—and I am going to take liberty with the translation, and try to express some of the poetry of the Aramaic in our English tongue, not "Maiden, arise"—that is altogether too formal a translation—but "Talitha cumi" that is, "Little lamb, arise." The beautiful eyelids quivered, and the eyes surely looked first at His face. Then He gave her back to her father and mother, and went on His way.

Now, in the atmosphere created by these stories I ask you to fasten your attention on this question of Jesus, so startling, strange, uncalled for, absurd in the hearing of the men who listened to it, "Who touched Me?" There are three things I want to suggest concerning that question. First, it was selective; it separated. Second, it was a revealing question, one that resulted in a revelation, and ultimately in a confession. Finally, in the case of the woman it was causative; it brought her to a new relationship with Christ, in advance of that which had been established when she touched Him.

I say in the first place that the question was selective. It revealed the fact that in that crowd all the multitudes were not on the same footing, that someone had reached Him in a way that others had not reached Him. It was a question revealing, on the part of Our Lord, discernment, discrimination, division. "Who touched Me?" A hundred men have touched Thee! Nay, one soul has touched Me! Everyone is jostling Thee! But someone has got near to Me! But surely they were all near. No, they were far away, though brushing by Him; removed to infinite distances, though looking right into His eyes. Someone has touched Me! It was a selective question, dividing the crowd, and putting some one person in separation from the crowd, revealing the fact that some one person in that curious, jostling, interested, reverently kindly multitude stood on an entirely different footing from the rest. "Who touched me?"

The question, therefore, was revealing in the sense that it reveals the fact that there is a contact which makes demands on Christ, and there is a contact which makes no demands on Him. It reveals that men may come very near to Him, and yet never be near to Him; that men may look into His eyes, and never see Him; catch all the accents of His voice, but never hear Him; jostle His garments, be familiar with the sacraments of His house, observe all the externalities of worship, and yet never make contact with Himself. It reveals the fact, therefore, on the other hand, that there is a contact which, if once made, He must answer. Without the uttering of a word, virtue will pass from Him to the person who makes that contact. I had nearly said—and I will say it, though I have to amend it—without volition on His part. I amend it by saying without apparent volition on His part; not without volition, for did He not know she was near Him, did He not know, was He not prepared for her approach? Surely, yes. He needed not that any man should tell Him what was in man, for He knew all men. He knew the crowds intimately and particularly, and knew every individual life in the crowds. A crowd was never a mob to Jesus. It was always a company of individual souls. There was no need for Him to turn to find her. He knew she was there. His question was not a question asked that he might discover who it was, but that He might bring her yet nearer to Himself; and that He might create a value for another breaking heart, the heart of Jairus. He knew, He knew she was coming; and in that moment when she made contact with Him, far more quickly than the lightning's flash, virtue, power, health, healing, strength passed from Him to her, and all that canceled her limitation and restored to her everything that she had lost.

What, then, was the contact? This question is answered best by a little careful examination of the story, and a little careful observation of the woman. Mark her condition. The story, as Luke tells it in medical terms, reveals a fact, which expressed in the

terms of the Hebrew economy, may thus be stated: On account of the peculiar form of physical disease from which she was suffering she was excommunicated from the temple, not allowed to mingle with the worshipers. By that selfsame law she was divorced from her husband, not allowed to live with him. By that same law she was ostracized from society, and in appalling loneliness she had lived for twelve years. It is quite easy to say all this; but let imagination help us to understand it. Twelve years of a disease that had weakened her day by day, until all her physical powers were feeble. Twelve years shut out from the fellowship of the saints as they went up to the house of God. Twelve years shut away from the comradeships of home and the fellowship of her husband. Twelve years shut out from all the circle of her friends and acquaintances. Twelve years of suffering and weakness. Twelve years in which she had done all she knew for healing; for Luke tells us she "had spent all her living upon physicians, and could not be healed of any," or, as writes Mark, who held no brief for doctors, "She had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse."

Now look at this woman again, thin, emaciated, worn, weary! She heard that Jesus was coming her way. What did she know of Him? Ah, I cannot tell. All I can surmise from the story is that she had heard of Him, that the news of Him had reached her in her weakness and in her suffering; that she had heard how He had healed the sick and given back strength to those weak and infirm. Now the moment had come when He was actually coming by her, coming her way. I never can quite understand how she reached Him at all. It is very difficult even for a strong man to get through a crowd. Yet, somehow, that woman made her way through the crowd.

Now, I pray you, observe her. Was this faith which moved her firm, strong, absolute, settled? I do not think so. What, then, was it? It was a profound sense of need, an acquaintance with a testimony that told of His power; it was hope springing in her heart that perhaps He could help even her. Then it was faith, the outcome of hope, hope based on testimony; but principally it was faith expressing itself in a venture. She found her way through the crowd, and there hung the tassel on His garment, that cord of blue, according to the ancient economy. I see her struggling to reach Him; at last she is near enough to stretch out her hand; and it was not a passing touch she gave; she clutched it, grasped it!

This was an act growing out of need; it was an act inspired by testimony heard; it was the result of hope springing anew within the heart; it was an act of faith inspired by testimony, hope; it was faith venturing to make an appeal, the appeal of a touch. Call it superstition if you will; and the answer of the Lord in power, and the words spoken to her presently, are of infinite value, and become more impressive, the more we see that the act of the woman was not the act of a reasoned and argumentative and logical faith. It was a venture in an hour of great need.

That is the contact that Christ always answers. I have of set purpose attempted to put the event in the light of its simplicity. I do not think that woman came to Him with profound and strong conviction. Hers was a great agony, a great need, a simple willingness to believe a testimony spoken by others, expressed in a determination to make the final venture. So surreptitiously, hidden away, she clutched at His garment. That is the contact that He answers, that is the attitude to which He is compelled, by virtue of what He is in Himself, to make an immediate response. Need, agony, without logic and without reason, but in answer to testimony and to hope, making a venture—to that He responds, and the virtue passes from Him to the seeker, and heals.

Writing of this story, and contrasting the crowds that pressed Jesus with the woman who touched Him, Augustine said, "Flesh presses, faith touches." How true the words still are. Flesh presses; that which is merely of human interest and human curiosity, presses Him; but faith reaches Him, touches Him; and, believe me, this Lord of hope and glory still knows the difference between the jostle of a curious crowd and the touch of a weak and frail and appealing soul. Not the healthy, robust, self-complacent, satisfied, curious jostle of a crowd draws anything out of Him; but the weak, frail, agonized, almost hopeless and yet venturing, touch of a hidden woman is answered by a flow of virtue and a rush of power, and the healing and the health for which the soul is waiting.

But the question in itself was not only selective, and revelatory to us of the difference between the press of the flesh and the touch of faith. The question in the case of the woman was causative. She hoped to get her healing and quietly depart. She hoped to touch, and get her blessing, and quietly to slip away, with no one knowing. How many people hope to do that! But this woman was not permitted to do so. She must come from behind and stand in front. She must come from that attitude of hiding into the open. It was necessary that if she had received a benefit she should confess the Lord, not in order that He might find out who touched Him, not in order ultimately that the crowd might discover why He halted, but that she might come in front and confess Him.

Now notice carefully what happened. First, that confession brought to the woman a yet deeper blessing. She told Him in the hearing of the crowds, and I think there was a great hush over them as she spoke, how she had come, and how she was healed. Then He looked at her, and He said, "Daughter." Oh, after all, what a faulty thing preaching is! I cannot say that as it ought to be said, and I am almost afraid to try. Put yourself in her place—not weak any longer, but strong, for when He heals He heals. He never plays at healing, this Lord of ours. But though healed, she was still excommunicate, with no right of entry to synagogue or temple; still divorced, for even if there would be restoration presently to home and husband, it was not yet accomplished. Still ostracized from society, and likely to remain ostracized, because she had lost all her property. But He said, "Daughter." Then what do you think she

cared about anything else? What did it matter now? She was excommunicate from temple, shut out from home, ostracized from friends; but He said, "Daughter"; He had adopted her, and by the sweet word of ineffable tenderness had brought her to His heart and had given her His own heart. "Daughter!" There is an old Roman legend—very foolish many of them are, and very beautiful some of them—that this was Veronica, the woman who, by the by, in the hour of His dying, was the only one who ministered to Him. It is only a legend, but if it is not true, it might be. He said, "Daughter;" and heaven dawned, all the shadows melted, and new life began. Not merely had He adopted her as His daughter in order that she might be benefited, but He had admitted her to fellowship with Himself in fullest grace. Just before this, according to Luke, He had said, Who is My mother, and who are My brethren and My sisters? They that do the will of My Father in heaven: "My mother and My brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it." Now He added another word, "Daughter." Do you observe the profounder, more glorious blessing that came to the woman when she ceased her attempt to remain in hiding and confessed Him? For her own sake it was necessary that she should no longer be content with gaining the blessing which the fringe of His garments diffused, but should pass to the front, look into His eyes, and come into personal and eternal fellowship with Him as He said to her, "Daughter... go in peace."

But there was another reason why she should make her confession. I hinted at it just now, and will do no more than return to the matter in a brief word. Look again at Jairus. I think I know something of what was passing through his mind. He was surely saying within himself, Why does He wait? My girlie is dying! He will be too late! My girlie is twelve years of age; my home has been full of sunshine for twelve years. Her laughter and tears have made rainbow radiance in my home for twelve years; and she is dying! What is that woman saying? Twelve years of shadow, why that woman has been ill just as long as my child has been with me! She has been under the shadows all the time I have been in the sunshine. What is this the woman says? Her shadows have gone and the sunshine has come back to her! Then if He could heal her, and help her when she does but touch the border of His garment, let us get Him on, and home. For the strengthening of Jairus' faith she must confess.

Yet is not the final word the highest? Not only for deeper blessing she must confess, not only for the strengthening of Jairus' faith; but surely also, and supremely, for the honor and glory of the Lord Himself. It was fit that she should confess Him. In that jostling, curious crowd were men lurking, already planning and plotting for His murder. It was surely fit that the voice of one who had been healed should be raised to confess Him. For His sake then. And so the question caused deeper blessing for the sufferer, strengthened the faith of Jairus, and ultimately glorified the Lord Himself.

So the story itself preaches if the preacher fails. You say, That is a very old story. No, not so very old. It is as new as this wonderful morning. Ere I pronounce the benediction it is all being repeated. We here are interested in Jesus Christ. I think I am safe in saying that. We all feel we would like to be near to Him, for there is something in the very name that calls us to higher things. There is always a beauty in the story of Jesus, even though it be told for envy; it is ever a victorious story; even though Christ be preached for very strife, Paul must rejoice. We have gathered this morning, a part of the great crowd around Christ, reverent, interested. But His question is this: "Who touched Me?" I cannot answer it. He knows who touched Him. We may have been in His immediate presence, and never near Him, even this morning. But someone has touched Him. Some broken heart, some weary soul, some bruised man or tired woman has touched Him, has ventured, and already is feeling the force of the virtue that heals. You were in entire despair half an hour ago. You are going to make another venture. You had almost given up the strife after righteousness when you entered this building, but now you are going to begin again. I cannot interfere, only to say to you that the Lord asks that if you have received the benefit you will confess Him.

"Who touched Me?" Did you? Did you touch Him, brother mine, sister mine, hidden away in the crowd? Do you feel the thrill of the virtue? Has the glory of a new vision broken upon you? Then, in the name of the Lord and Master, confess Him. Or to gather the philosophy of the New Testament story and utter it in the splendid language of the old psalmist, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the adversary." I call you who have received the virtue to confess Him for your own sake. Do not be satisfied with the blessing so received. Confess Him; looking into His own face, avow yourself His own and His follower and listen for the voice that speaks some word more beautiful in its music, more powerful in its values, than any other blessing you have ever received. I call you to confess because of some Jairus hiding in the crowd, anxious, stricken, and smitten. Do you know how you can prove Christ to him and save him? By telling what Christ has done for you.

Finally, and this is the last argument, not for your sake alone, not principally for the sake of helping other men, but for His own glory and honor, and that you may stand by His side, one committed to Him, confess Him.

Brethren, of the things I have spoken this is the sum:

No fable old, nor mythic lore,
No dream of bards and seers,
No dead fact stranded on the shore
Of the oblivious years.
But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;

And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.
The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again.

117 - Luke 9:51 - Christ's Vision of Jerusalem

Christ's Vision of Jerusalem

And 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.
Luke 9:51

Every contemplation of the last month, and weeks, and days in the life of our Lord fills the soul with a sense of solemn and almost overwhelming awe. Through all those movements which culminated in the Cross and resurrection, He stands out, awful in His loneliness, magnificent in His heroism, supreme in His revelation of the highest possible in human life, and of the greatest in God.

This determined setting of His face to Jerusalem is worthy of our closest attention. A superficial reading would leave the impression that the value of the statement is exhausted geographically. This is by no means so. Jesus had just left the mount of glory, and set His face toward the valley, and the multitudes, toward the sin, the sorrow, and the suffering. And "when the days were well nigh come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

This declaration, as a revelation of His outlook, and in the light of the teaching which immediately followed, is of supreme value to all such as bear His name and share His toil.

I shall ask you to consider first this attitude of Christ, and then the things concerning discipleship, which are chronicled for us immediately after this declaration of Luke concerning the Lord.

In consideration of His attitude notice first His vision of Jerusalem, "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem"; second, the consciousness that created the stedfastness, "The days were well nigh come that He should be received up"; and, finally, His action, "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

What, then, was the vision which Jesus had of Jerusalem? First of all, it was that of a city utterly and absolutely hostile to Himself. He was drawing near the end of His ministry. He had walked the streets of Jerusalem, had taught in the courts of the temple, had held intercourse with the leaders of the people, and He knew right well that the whole city was hostile to Him. The religious leaders, the political parties, the multitudes who were city folk, were against Him.

The religious leaders were against Him because His spiritual teaching had been directly contradictory to all for which they stood. There were two great religious parties at the time, which we may broadly describe as rationalistic and ritualistic. There were the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, diametrically opposed, and yet both of them against Jesus Christ.

The Sadducees did not believe in angel, or spirit, or resurrection. That is to say, they were the rationalists in religion, the men who were attempting still to retain the religious ideal, while yet denying all the supernatural element therein. These men were against Christ necessarily. He had ruthlessly swept aside their views by speaking of angels, by referring to the Spirit, by declaring that God was not the God of the dead but of the living.

The Pharisees stood for ritualistic practice, were eager and anxious about the tithing of mint, anise, cummin, and rue; while neglecting the weightier matters of the law. They would not eat with unwashed hands, but were content to stand before the altar of God with filthy hearts.

The political parties were against Him. None of them had been able to capture Him. He had dictated the terms of righteousness to all as they had come to Him with subtle questions, but He had stood aloof from them, not uninterested in the affairs of city and nation, but speaking to His time the things of God alone.

The Jerusalem multitudes were against Him, for I think there is a sharp line of distinction to be drawn between the simple folk of Galilee and the city dwellers. It has been said that the people shouted, "Hosanna!" and within a week shouted, "Crucify!" I do not think so. I think that they were two quite different multitudes. The Galileans who had come with Him shouted, "Hosanna." The people of the city were priest-ridden, and king-enslaved, and they were all against Him.

Jesus had had His day, His opportunity. He had delivered His message. He had unburdened His soul. He had flashed upon them the light of the Divine Kingdom. His message was refused, and they were against Him; and subtle and devilish intrigues were busy, waiting for the opportunity to lay hands on Him, and hand Him over to death. All this He knew, and yet "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

But then He had another vision of Jerusalem. Not only did He see it hostile, He saw it doomed. At last, with a sigh and a sob, He pronounced that doom. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together," and He saw Jerusalem doomed by the inevitable sequence of wrong. False shepherds and scattered sheep. False prophets, and deluded people. False priests, and degraded religion. He knew perfectly well that Jerusalem was doomed by the deliberate rejection of its own opportunity. "How often would I!" That was the desire of His heart. "And ye would not!" That was the choice of their sin. He knew perfectly well therefore that the sentence must be carried out. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Nevertheless, "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," the hostile city, and the doomed city.

He had another vision of Jerusalem, and I have dwelt only upon the first two that I might lead you to the third. He saw Jerusalem hostile. He saw Jerusalem doomed. But He saw Jerusalem rebuilt. He saw through all the mists and the darkness and the opposition and the doom to something beyond.

The men of faith had ever been men of vision, looking "for the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." When Abraham turned his back upon Ur of the Chaldees, and went out seeking a city, he did not go to seek a heaven beyond the earth. His passion, the passion of all the men of faith, and supremely the passion of Jesus, was not that men should pass through earth and win heaven; but that there should be established on the earth the city of God. The vision which had kept the Hebrews a people through all the processes of their failure, was the vision of the ultimate. Read the ancient prophecies carefully, and amid the thunder of denunciation you will constantly hear tones that tell of coming accomplishment in the world, of the day when "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" shall fill the earth, "as the waters cover the sea"; of the day when "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain." All these men had looked toward the building of a city. Cities had been built, but the hopes and aspirations of seers and psalmists had never been realized.

Jerusalem as Jesus looked at it was the home of evil things, and yet it was "the city of the great King," and through it He saw the city of God established, "the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God," the ultimate accomplishment of that which is in the heart of God, not merely in individual life, but in civic life; the setting up of the Kingdom of God in the world, and seeing that, "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

Let us gather up these thoughts. When the time was coming that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face toward Jerusalem. What Jerusalem? The Jerusalem hostile to Himself, waiting to arrest and murder Him. What Jerusalem? That Jerusalem over which hung the sword of God, upon which the judgment of God must soon fall. What Jerusalem? The Jerusalem beyond all this, that which the hostile and doomed city must yet become in the economy of God, a city established, "the joy of the whole earth," because the home of "the great King," and the center from which His government was to go forth to the ends of the world. Jesus saw the city, and deliberately set His face toward its hostility, its doom, and its ultimate triumph. He had a vision of the immediate, but He had that more wonderful vision which sees through the immediate to the ultimate. Beyond the gathering storm clouds settling over Himself and the city He saw the morning without clouds, the ultimate and final victory, when the last stone will be brought on to the city of God, and all tribes of the earth will rejoice in the setting up of His government and the accomplishment of His will. He saw through the process of pain to that ultimate for which He taught us to pray, for the day when God's name shall be hallowed, His Kingdom come, His will be done in earth as it is in heaven. And he set his face toward the Jerusalem of hostility, because He saw through it the Jerusalem of ultimate achievement.

Notice, in the second place, the consciousness which created the vision. "It came to pass, when the days were well nigh come that He should be received up,..." He is coming down. He has just turned His back upon the mountain, and has set His face to the valley, and has immediately cast the devil out of the boy, and is still moving down to the valley of darkness. No, that is not the story. That is only part of it. He is moving toward the day in which "He should be received up." Here the declaration is an incidental one, but in the Gospel of John we find how perpetually our Lord looked upon His mission in its entirety. "I came out from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father." He saw the Cross, but He saw the resurrection. He saw the travail, and shrank from it, but He saw the triumph, and hastened to it. He saw the hostility in Jerusalem, the cruel, brutal hostility. He knew exactly what was awaiting Him, but He saw beyond the hostility to the crowning and the victory, and the position He was to occupy when He was received up. He was going down, but the descent was the preliminary to an ascent. The setting of His face toward the darkness was the lifting of His face toward the light, and although He set His face stedfastly toward Jerusalem, and the sorrow, and the shame, and the pain, and the dying, He set His face toward the victory, and the joy, and the triumph. To Him the Cross was the way of ascent to the throne. To Him all the travail that waited for Him was the very process that made possible the triumph upon which His heart was set. From the glorious height of the Transfiguration Mount He had seen the mists as they lay along the valleys

through which He must pass—the strange and chilly mists of death; but He had seen them from the height of glory, and they had been purple as the light shone upon them. Men are going to nail Him to a Cross, and taunt Him as He hangs there; "If Thou art the Son of God, came down from the Cross." But He knows perfectly well by the way of the helplessness of that hour of His dying that help is to be laid upon Him for all who put their trust in Him, and by the way of that mystery of descent He is moving out toward eternal ascent. He is to be received up.

What, then, was the effect of this consciousness upon Him? That hostility could neither hinder nor anger Him. I wish I knew how to say that so as to arrest you. Is there anything more wonderful in the story of His coming than the fact that hostility never hindered Him? We speak of Gethsemane and the shrinking there, but we must remember that the shrinking was not from human hostility, but from something far more deep and mysterious, into the meaning of which you and I can never enter. But the hostility in Jerusalem never hindered Him, and never angered Him. Is there anything in human history and literature that begins to compare with the patient, unprovoked spirit in which this Christ of ours set His face toward Jerusalem, or in the majestic and exhaustive language of the ancient prophecy, "As a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, He opened not His mouth." The vision of the glory beyond the hostility made Him such a One as could set His face toward the city, and be unhindered and unangered by its hostility.

Again, the doom which He Himself must pronounce upon the city could not thwart Him, could not dishearten Him. Could there be a greater triumph than the triumph of One Who saw through the ruined, doomed city, a greater city, and was not disheartened by the doom?

Yet there is another thing which must be said. He saw Jerusalem hostile, He saw Jerusalem doomed, He saw Jerusalem certainly to be rebuilt; but the vision of the ultimate, the assurance that God must win, did not make Him careless. He did not say because this victory of God must be won in the long run of the centuries, I may turn aside and leave it. He set His face toward the pain, and toward the suffering, and toward the strife. Jerusalem hostile, He is to be received up; but He will go through hostile Jerusalem. Its hostility cannot hinder him. Jerusalem doomed, He is to be received up; but He cannot be disheartened about the doom of Jerusalem, for He knows through what He will do amid its darkness He will create a new day for it. Jerusalem is to be rebuilt, ah, yes, but He must go through the midst of its darkness to turn it into light; through the midst of its sin to take hold upon it and make possible that which He sees in the economy of God.

As I read this word about my Lord, I stand in His presence overawed. "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," because He was to be received up. That is suffering transfigured by the light of the victory which would result from it. The only thing I fear now is that a multiplicity of my words may hide the vision. Behold the Man of Nazareth. There He stands at the foot of the hill where He has been transfigured. The multitudes are all about Him. In the city all the forces are against Him. Over the city hang the dark thunder clouds of the Divine judgment. But beyond is Jerusalem the golden, God's own perfect city! He stedfastly set His face toward the hostility, toward the doom, caring not for the one, gathering the other into His own soul, looking ultimately toward the glory and toward the victory.

Turn now to the things which immediately follow, for they are full of significance for us. What is the next thing that Luke tells us? As He set His face toward Jerusalem they came to a Samaritan village, and the Samaritans would not receive Him. Why not? Mark it carefully, because His face was toward Jerusalem. See how people may put a narrow and local interpretation upon a broad and infinite truth. They simply saw Him as a Jew traveling toward Jerusalem, and because Jerusalem was the objective of His journey, they would not entertain Him. The narrowness of the Samaritan was manifest there. That which was His purpose of blessing for them was the reason of their anger with Him. As He set His face toward Jerusalem it was not for Jerusalem merely, but for Samaria. Presently, having been to Jerusalem, having been smitten to the death in Jerusalem, having been raised from the dead, He will stand among these disciples who wanted to call down fire upon the Samaritan village, and He will say to them, "Ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." His vision had not been the vision of Jerusalem only. It had been the vision of Samaria won and redeemed, of the uttermost part of the earth brought into right relationship with the government of God. And that is why His face was set stedfastly toward Jerusalem, and these Samaritans are against Him because He was going to Jerusalem. All unknowingly and ignorantly they were angry with Him, because of the purpose which was in His heart to bring blessing to them.

Then notice the disciples' anger. They requested that they might call down fire to destroy this village. They respected His person, but they were quite ignorant of His purpose. They were standing outside the great circle in which He lived and moved. They had not the vision of the ultimate as He had; and, consequently, while loyal to Him, and angry because He was not hospitably received, they rather hindered than helped Him.

Now look at the Lord. Mark the patience of His purpose. He rebuked the disciples, and quietly went to another village. The village that would not entertain Him He left, not in anger, but in patience. And yet there is a touch of impatience here in Christ. It is only a great patience that ever can be purely impatient. What impatience is there? Impatience with His own disciples. There is no impatience with the Samaritan village that had not understood Him. There is a touch of impatience with His disciples because of

their blindness. Ah, methinks sometimes He must be impatient with some of us. He was moving toward the city, with all the glory filling His vision, and He rebukes the disciples, and yet is patient with Samaria.

Let us read on. On His way three men came to Him. One of them said impulsively, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." I always love that man. I like the man who speaks out what is in His heart even though impulsively. Christ did not rebuke him, but He flashed before him the truth, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

Jesus looked at another and said, "Follow Me," and the man answered, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father," which does not mean that his father was dead. Dr. George Adam Smith told me, talking about this very story, that when he was in Palestine he very particularly desired to get a certain man to act as guide in one of those wonderful journeys of his into the unknown regions, and was startled when the man said to him in actual words, with the Eastern salaam, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father." His father was alive and hale and hearty. What the man meant was, I have home ties and responsibilities, and I cannot break them. And that is what this man in the Gospel story meant. The word of Jesus is more severe than it seems. "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of God."

A little further on another man said, "I will follow Thee, Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house." To him Christ said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Now reverently I bring the three men together, and I look at the Lord. His face is set toward Jerusalem. Mark the answers. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests." What is that? Detachment from all that prevents progress to Jerusalem. And what next? "Leave the dead to bury their own dead." What is that? Abandonment of the nearest earthly tie in the interest of the heavenly purpose. And what next? "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." "Looking back." Mark it! His face set toward Jerusalem. "No man looking back." The face set. The looking back.

Christ speaking to these men unveiled His own attitude. It was first that of detachment from everything that prevented progress to Jerusalem. I want to say this most reverently, and carefully. Do not pity Him because He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Rather pity yourself if you have something left in your life that makes it hard to go with Him to Jerusalem. It was a declaration of the splendid detachment of Christ from all the things that prevented the progress. I have not where to lay My head. All personal property is abandoned that I may reach Jerusalem, the hostile and the doomed, and make it Jerusalem, the city of God.

Then mark the next word. "Leave the dead to bury their own dead." Abandonment of the nearest earthly tie in the interest of the heavenly purpose. And was not that true of Him? Did He not say upon one memorable occasion, when they said, "Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak with Thee," "Who is My mother? and who are My brethren?" When Jesus asked that question He was not speaking disrespectfully of His mother. In the last consummating agony of His life, when all the sins of the world were sweeping in anguish over His soul, He was able to think of His mother, and provide for the days remaining to her, "Woman, behold, thy son!... Behold, thy mother!" What, then, did He mean? He meant that even so dear a tie as the tie of relationship between son and mother must be swept aside in the interests of getting to Jerusalem the doomed and turning it into Jerusalem the glorified!

And then, again, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back." How they tried to persuade Him to look back! How the devil tried, how His own disciples tried! But He never looked back. He put His hand to the plow, and the furrow was lone and long, but, blessed be God, it was straight; and He reached the ultimate goal, because He never looked back.

Brethren, if this is the revelation of Christ's own heart, and I think it is, then if I am to go after Him, I must come this way. If I am to have anything to do in the building of God's city, it must be by detachment from all that prevents progress to Jerusalem. Oh, soul of mine, what hast thou of thine own that hinders thy progress toward Jerusalem with Him? And I have come in hours of meditation almost to feel myself filled with envy for the men who can say, I have not where to lay my head, I have not a thing that stands between me and this one supreme purpose.

I must also abandon the nearest earthly tie that prevents. I must remember that to look back from this enterprise is to make myself unfit for the Kingdom.

But let me thus conclude. Every city is Jerusalem for the purpose of my application. London is Jerusalem, hostile, doomed, and yet possible. London is as hostile to Jesus Christ as Jerusalem was. And therefore it is as surely doomed as Jerusalem was. Yet it is for Christian men and women in London to see through, to see to the ultimate, to see the purpose of God. And if it be impossible for us to take in the larger whole, take the local, take the thing close to you. Take the hostility that abounds all about the place where you live and serve and work. How much there is of it! And take the fact that doom is writ upon everything that is hostile. It does seem to me sometimes we want to remind ourselves of that. Are we not tempted sometimes to think that all these hostile things are going to win? Never! God's verdict is found, and His sentence passed, and all hell cannot prevent the doom of the thing hostile to Jesus

Christ. Yes, but, brethren, you and I are to look through, and are to see the possible and God's ultimate.

And if it be true that every city is Jerusalem, in this sense of application, then I will say another thing, and it is this. His face is still toward Jerusalem, steadfastly set toward it, coming to it even when it is hostile to Him. Has it never occurred to you that it is an amazing wonder that He has not turned His back upon London long ago? He has not. His face is toward it. Tears are upon His cheeks even now. Call it figurative language if you will, but remember the fact is finer than the figure. His heart is still moved with compassion toward the city. He knows men will bruise Him, and are bruising Him, but He is coming toward it always. The Cross is not over. It is in His heart today, the infinite passion that was manifest on the green hill is there yet.

The Son of God in tears,
The wondering angels see.
Be thou astonished, Oh, my soul!
He shed those tears for thee.

That is His attitude toward us today.

Now, this is the question. Who is with Him? How many see these things as He saw them? How many can see through to the light and the victory? It is the men and women whose eyes are illumined with His love to see through who are prepared today to tread the pathway of shame and suffering. It would be so much easier to do something else.

I said, "Let me walk in the fields."
He said, "No, walk in the town."
I said, "There are no flowers there."
He said, "No flowers, but a crown."
I said, "But the skies are black;
There is nothing but noise and din,"
And He wept as He sent me back:
"There is more," He said, "there is sin."
I said, "But the air is thick,
And fogs are veiling the sun."
He answered, "Yet souls are sick,
And souls in the dark undone."
I said, "I shall miss the light,
And friends will miss me, they say."
He answered, "Choose tonight
If I am to miss you, or they."
I pleaded for time to be given.
He said, "Is it hard to decide?
It will not seem hard in heaven
To have followed the steps of your Guide."

May God set our faces toward Jerusalem!

118 - Luke 9:51-62 - But!

But!

I will follow Thee, Lord; but...

Luke 9:51-62

When the events took place which are recorded in the paragraph from which the text is taken, the face of Jesus was set toward Jerusalem, and the days were days of crisis and testing in the matter of all human relationships to Himself.

While He was a boy, a youth, and a young man in Nazareth, He was beloved, for Luke tells us that He grew in favour, not with God only, but with men also. In the early days of His public ministry. He was the center of attraction, and men of all grades and all classes crowded after Him to see and hear Him. In the process of that ministry, as He began to make clear to those who listened that His mission was a mission of right and truth and purity, the essential things of the Kingdom of God, men gradually fell away from Him; and in these last weeks or months prior to the cross there were great crises in many lives, and all human relationships passed through a time of severe testing.

His own disciples were busy reasoning among themselves as to their relative greatness, and He rebuked and corrected them by putting the child in the midst. John was disturbed because someone had been seen working in the name of Christ, who was not

following with the disciples. Mark carefully what John complained about. He was not able to say that the man was not following Christ, but he was not following with the disciples. Jesus quietly and firmly rebuked his exclusivism. The Samaritans refused to receive Him into one of their villages because His face was set evidently toward Jerusalem. Boanerges, sons of thunder, would have called down fire upon them, but Jesus rebuked them, and passed on to another village.

Somewhere on those journeys toward Jerusalem, while His face was set toward the city which He knew and which He loved—the city which He well knew at this time was so hostile to Him that it was only waiting for His arrival to arrest Him and kill Him; somewhere on these journeyings toward the city, the things happened which are chronicled in this brief paragraph.

One man, for some reason unexplained by the story, in the fulness of his heart, under sudden impulse as it would seem, said, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." Another man, perchance a little farther on the way, Christ looked at, and called him to follow, saying, "Follow Me." Yet a third, with less impulsiveness than the first, and with more of hesitation, said: "I will follow thee, Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house."

Before the first of these men, who declared himself willing to follow the Lord wherever He went, He set a difficulty. It is as though He said to him: You say you are prepared to follow Me whithersoever I go. Do you really know what My lot in life is? "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head"—that is, does not possess as His own a resting-place for His head.

The second man, whom the Lord called to follow Him, declined on the plea of filial duty; for when he said "Suffer me first to go and bury my father," his father in all probability was still living. It was not a case of asking to attend a funeral. I never understood that, until in conversation with Dr. George Adam Smith, he told me of what happened to himself when endeavouring to persuade a young Arab to accompany him into the interior. At last the Arab looked at him, and said, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father," in the very words of Scripture; and the old man was sitting by his side when he uttered them. What he meant was, I have a filial obligation that prevents my coming. To the man who raised that difficulty Christ said: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of God." That is the supreme matter, and its demands are more imperative even than such filial obligation.

Before the third, the man who suggested that he desired to follow, but would like first to bid farewell to those who were at his own house, Christ affirmed the superlativeness of His own claim: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Now, let me at once say to you, I do not propose to follow the incidents that are given here in any further detail. They constitute a background. I am far more anxious to discover the principles involved, and make application of them to the present hour and present congregation. Whether any of these men ultimately followed the Lord, we do not know. There is no reason to suppose they did not, although that has been very generally taken for granted. It has been our habit to consign all these doubtful cases to perdition. We have no right to do so. We know nothing about them. It may be that these men followed Christ at last. We do not know. It is not intended that we should know. The things of value are the revelations in this passage; first, of the call of Christ and of the supremacy of Christ as He calls men; second, of the fact that difficulties present themselves to the minds of many, which are very real and very definite; third and finally, the passage teaches us the urgency of immediate decision, that when we come to deal with Christ, counting the cost is out of place. He calls us to follow, to follow immediately, to follow whatever the cost may be.

Let us first spend two or three minutes with this word of Christ, this call of Christ to follow. On two occasions in the course of this paragraph men made use of the word. In the central one, Christ used it. The first man said, "I will follow Thee." The third man said, "I will follow Thee, Lord, but..." To the other man Christ said, "Follow Me."

I think it is quite fair to suppose that the word of the first man and of the third prove that they had heard Christ utter that call to someone. It was His favourite method of calling men after Himself, "Follow Me." There are other things that He said to other men when He dealt with them as to their spiritual needs, but all His other methods were incidental, and are not often repeated. For instance, He said "Ye must be born again" only to one man, never repeating it. Over and over again, to men when He would first attract them, to the disciples when He would call them into the fellowship of His work, to the apostles when He would call them to higher service, He made use of the same simple words, "Follow Me."

If we consider quietly the suggestiveness of the call of Christ, we shall discover in it a demand made for confidence and submission. Confronting a man sitting in the midst of his daily avocation, let us say, at the receipt of custom, He looked into his eyes and said, "Follow Me," and we at once see that He meant: trust Me, trust yourself to Me, put confidence in Me, and obey Me. It is His claim of supremacy and His call to submission to that supremacy.

There is more in it than the claim of supremacy and the call to submission; there is inferentially the promise of guidance and of victory. The assumptions of this word of Jesus' are very great and gracious. He assumes His own knowledge of the way, His own ability to direct those who come after Him, His own ability so to guide and direct them that they shall come to the fulfilment of all that

is highest and noblest in life.

"Follow Me" is still Christ's word to men. I say this out of my heart. I believe it is the one thing He would say to every man and woman in this house. A thousand things to a thousand of us, all different when dealing with particular and definite individual need, but one thing to all, "Follow Me."

It is His universal call to men, a call in which He claims authority, and assumes ability to guide, and lead, and deliver; a call in which He insists that those who come after Him must believe in Him and demonstrate their belief by obedience. Its simplicity is its sublimity. The very fact that the words are brief, and so natural that any little child can understand them, still does indicate the fact that when they are uttered there is nothing more to be said, "Follow Me." The first step in the Christian life is that of obedience to that word. The whole pathway of Christian experience is trodden in obedience to that ideal. The final triumph of the Christian life will be won when the trusting soul, in final confidence in Christ, passes over the threshold into the "other room"—to quote George Meredith's description of death. It will be but following Him.

But, there are difficulties in the way. There are those who positively and definitely refuse to obey Him, those who reject His claim of Kingship. There are those who hear Him, but are not attracted; they neglect the wooing winsomeness of His call. To neither of these classes is my message tonight addressed. There is yet another class, made up of those who are attracted by Jesus Christ, who admire all they know concerning Him, who are supremely conscious of their own need of just that which He claims to be able to supply, who, in their deepest heart intend to follow Him, but... "I will follow Thee, Lord; but..."; men and women who can make use of the exact language of the last man in our paragraph. "I will follow Thee, Lord"; I recognize Thy supremacy; Thou art Lord; I confess my desire and determination to follow Thee; but... And the following never begins, the discipleship never commences. To such I desire to speak tonight.

I am constrained to do so by the fact that in my correspondence, and quite recently especially, I have heard from numbers, who perchance are sitting in this house tonight, who virtually have said that. Two weeks ago, in our after-meeting, God gave us great and gracious evidences of His power and His willingness to save, and since then message after message has reached me from someone who was present, saying: I want to be right with God; I fain would give myself to Him; but... And they have halted at that point. "I will follow Thee, Lord; but..."

My message tonight, if I may state it broadly before I proceed to deal with it and to illustrate it, is that the claims of Christ are such, and the power of Christ is such that everything which comes after the "but" needs to be resolutely put out of the life. There can be nothing after such a "but" as that, which warrants the halting of a soul. "I will follow Thee, Lord; but..." You cannot add to that "but" anything which is justifiable in the light of the claims of Christ, in the light of your own deep need, in the light of the ability of Christ. Yet, how many and how varied are the things that are thus dealt with.

Many years ago I heard Margaret Bottome, the founder of the King's Daughters in America, speaking to a great gathering in Northfield, and her address consisted of a simple story in her own experience in travel, and of illustrations from it, in application to the young life which she was then confronting. She told us that when she first traveled in the Far East, there came an hour when the guide came to take possession of the party, and lead them through all their journeys. Three simple things happened which revealed to her the meaning of a guide. In the first place, the guide came to them and said: "Will you be good enough to give everything to me? I will take charge of everything." They handed over to him all their main articles of baggage—or luggage, whichever you choose—but they were retaining, she among the rest, those small handbags which ladies carry. The guide said: "You must give everything to me." They made their protest, saying there were in those bags things that would be necessary on the journey. Said the guide: "They will be far safer with me, and you will be far safer without them."

After a little while, they were waiting at a railway station for a train; the guide was attending to the baggage. A train came in, they selected a carriage, and the whole party entered it. As soon as they were seated, the guide returned, and said: "Will you be good enough to come out?" They came out, and then asked why he had required them to do so. He replied: "That is the wrong train. Will you be kind enough not to go before me, but after me?" She had learned her second lesson as to the necessity for a guide. In the course of the next day or two, on a long train journey, they were wondering what provision would be made for them on their arrival at their destination. Some stranger, coming from the place at which they were to stay, had told them there was no accommodation, and the guide was strangely silent. When they arrived everything was ready, and the guide said quietly: "Perhaps you will trust me to prepare for you ahead." Three things: Give everything to me. Follow me; but do not go before me. Trust me about the hidden things of the future.

Margaret Bottome has entered into rest, but I bring you that simple message tonight. Whatever your philosophy of life may be, whatever your intellectual difficulties, the whole suggestiveness of that simple story illuminates the thought in the word of Christ, "Follow Me."

"I will follow Thee, Lord; but..." Surely there is no need to give everything up to Thee; there are so many things I shall need on the

way. Is it not enough to give myself to Thee and keep as for myself and under my own control some of these things that are so necessary—my money, my occupation, my affectional interests? May I not keep these things?

The answer of Christ to the soul that makes such inquiry is: "You will be far safer when I have charge of them, and they will be infinitely safer with Me." In other words, there are those who are holding back from Jesus Christ because they are not prepared to give to Him all—themselves and everything they have. They are not prepared to recognize that the moment in which they become the possession of Christ, their business belongs to Him, and must be under His control. They are not prepared to recognize that in the moment in which they hand themselves over to the Lord, all they have, as well as all they are, must be handed to Him; that in all things He may direct, control, suggest and master. Is that the way with you, my brother? Would you have given yourself to Christ, but that, in the handing over of your life to the Kingship of the Lord Christ, He claims, and must have, authority over everything you possess?

If that be recognized, something else grows out of it. Perhaps you are saying, That is not quite the trouble, though you are approaching it. If I consent to hand over to Him all I possess, I know what will happen. There are things I possess which He will immediately destroy, and permit me to carry no further. In the case of some, there are actual evils in the life, evil habits, practices, friendships; in the case of others there are forces which are mere impedimenta, hindering progress—"weights," as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews calls them. These must be left, dropped, lost. It is all quite true. Let there be no mistake about it. There can be no discipleship, as the Lord Himself said, save as a man renounceth all that he hath. "I will follow Thee, Lord; but..."

How shall we answer? I answer in the exact words of the guide. You will be much safer without them. You will be much safer when you have handed them over to Christ, and they, so far as they are right, true, pure things—your possessions, your occupation, your affectional interests—will be far safer in His keeping and under His direction. The things which ruin apart from His control become the things which make and glorify when He guides and governs.

Again, "I will follow Thee, Lord; but..." I do not desire to give up entirely my own independence. My aim is to be right, but I rebel against being refused permission to think or plan, or initiate or arrange. There are so many things in which the way seems quite plain, and I cannot understand why I am asked to remit every decision to Christ. I am not imagining a case. Sitting in my vestry not long ago was a young lady of position and culture, who said to me: "I have never learnt to submit, and I do not think I can." It is the story of hundreds of people.

I am afraid the trouble is that some of us lead men to suppose that it is not necessary. I am here to affirm that it is absolutely necessary. I can undertake nothing concerning which I have not consulted Him. Discipleship means I cannot choose my own calling, or friends, or place of residence. I must consult. I am compelled to prayer. Everything must be remitted to Christ. Jesus Christ is not asking for that kind of submission to Him which means sentimental acquiescence in the glory of His ideal, or in the accuracy of His ethic, or in the beauty of His own person. He says, "Follow Me." He demands submission of the whole being, and, that from the moment when we begin to follow Him we shall consult Him. Again, to return to the simple figure of the guide, Christ says: "Come after Me; do not go before Me."

There are others who are saying: "All these things are not my difficulties. 'I will follow Thee, Lord; but...' I desire to follow. I desire to be a Christian, but there are difficulties ahead of me. There are great uncertainties in the future, and if I give myself to the Christ of Whom you speak, Whose call I have heard, I do not know what will happen. I am afraid to follow in the direction He indicates. Discipleship with me," says such an one, "means in all probability absolute change in my vocation, the passing out of my life of things essential to my material being. I am afraid to follow because I cannot see how the way is to be made clear, or what I am going to do." I hope I am not stating this too indefinitely. Someone says: "I shall have to resign the position I hold in life, and face possible beggary." I do not think that is so very often, but it certainly is so sometimes. I have seen, in the course of the ministry here, more than once, cession to Christ, which meant loss of all the living. It may mean it to someone else. We halt for fear of the uncertain tomorrow. We see the immediate, and the immediate is that of obedience and sacrifice. What lies beyond it?

How am I to answer that statement of difficulty? I might answer it theoretically. If I did so, I would do it by citation from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. I would remind you of the one who in olden days spoke of a "covenant ordered in all things and sure." I would remind you of one who, in the New Testament, declared that the saints walk in works foreordained of God. I would remind you of that great song of the leader of Israel, who, looking back over the way, told them that God had ever moved before them, choosing them out a place in which to pitch their tents, even when they marched through what he himself described as that "great and terrible wilderness." God was always ahead of them. When at eventide the moving pillar halted, and they pitched their tents for the night, they pitched them in the place which God had chosen.

Such is the ancient picture. Do you say, It is full of poetry? Then let me answer you no longer by citation of Scripture, but in the voice of the experience of the saints of God. No man has ever yet committed his way to this Christ and followed Him, but that, although mists hung immediately in front of him, they dispersed. He leads us surely onward, and we have never missed our way, as we have followed Him. Though all those things in which our trust reposes have to be abandoned for the following, He is equal to all the way;

and when at eventide we reach the place of our abode, we shall find everything prepared, the bread given and the water sure, and shelter provided and secure, and out of every place of temptation the door of escape provided. Such is our final answer to all objections. It is the universal testimony of trusting souls.

Those are but illustrations. Add to my suggestions other difficulties which suggest themselves to you. Nay, rather put in after the "but" the word you yourselves are saying, the thing you have allowed to hinder your following: "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," but—what?

Christ will halt the impulsive man, not to check him entirely, but to show him what following means. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." What shall we say in answer to that? That it were better to be His companion in the loneliness of the longest night than to be homed and housed without Him. It is such an easy thing to say, yet so absolutely impossible to say it as one knows it to be. Does not your heart agree that it would be better, far better for the sake of the joy of life, of the victory of life, to be the comrade of the poor and lonely Christ, though He never comes to wealth, though He never comes to victory? In other words, the heart of the man who has ever looked into the face of this Christ is compelled to own it, were better to be defeated and die with Him, than being apart from Him to win any passing triumph. "I will follow Thee, Lord!"

Let me urge upon you the importance of definite decision, in view of these very words of Christ. If the following be admittedly costly, then remember this also. The things I have been supposing are not the final things. To follow Him means to go with Him by the way of the Cross, but do you remember the last time He said "Follow Me" to Peter? It was by the shore of the Galilean Lake, in the tender, gracious light of the morning hour, when He Himself, the risen Lord, was bringing Peter face to face with the necessity for his own cross, telling him that at last even he should stretch out his hands and die by the death of the cross. He led Peter to the cross by saying "Follow Me." Being Himself the risen Lord, the light of His resurrection flashed back upon the cross and transfigured it. If it be by the cross, you must follow Him, remember that whoever shares the shame of His cross enters into the glory of His resurrection; and that not merely in God's great tomorrow, not merely in that life which lies beyond; but here and now, in the midst of the present life, the way of the cross is the way of resurrection.

The Lord insisted that the supreme duty of life is to follow him. "Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of God." He thus set up a claim upon human life which is absolutely supreme. Neither father nor mother, husband nor wife, child nor lover, must be permitted to stand between the soul and Himself. He calls us to follow Him with all the heart. Following Christ means finding the highest, truest wealth, whatever it may be that we abandon; the highest service, however sacred, we have to leave in order to follow Him; the fullest, most glorious realization of life, however, for the moment we may seem to be impoverished in obedience to His command.

The Master waits for our answer, "I will follow Thee." Now, can we not be away from all theory to the actual business of this. In the quiet hush of this Sabbath evening, I appeal to you once again. How is it that you are not following Him? I do not ask that answer to be given to me. I ask you to remember that the answer is given. You cannot escape it. You are now making reply to that inquiry in the very presence of God. You have declared the reason already. That is a thing that I say with all confidence and with all earnestness. I find men today are trying to persuade themselves that they are not sure of the reason. If you will be perfectly honest with your own heart and with the God in Whose presence you are in this evening hour, you know why you are not following. "I will follow Thee, Lord; but..." But what?

That which comes after that "but" is that against which you must fling all the force of your resolve; for the ending of it, the putting away of it, you must bring to bear your own will and choice, and henceforth say to Him: "I will follow Thee, Lord," though there be no place where I can rest my head. I will follow Thee though I have to abandon all that seems most dear to me. I will follow Thee in order to find my way into that fellowship with Thee whereby Thy name shall be glorified, my life shall be realized, and I shall be at Thy disposal for helpfulness to others in the publication of the Kingdom of God.

119 - Luke 12:35, 36 - Men Looking For Their Lord

Men Looking For Their Lord

Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord.

Luke 12:35-36

Every man has some conception of life as a whole, a conception which affects all his attitudes and activities, even though at times unconsciously to himself. This is illustrated by the different figures of which we make use when speaking of life as a whole. We liken it to a race, to a voyage, to a pilgrimage, to a quest, to a warfare; and in every case a complete conception is presented to the mind by the figure of speech. Under the figure of a race we think not merely of the track along which men run, but of the goal which they desire to reach. Under the figure of a voyage we think not merely of the seas which men cross, but of the harbor which they fain

would make. Under the figure of a pilgrimage we think not merely of the pathway which winds through the valleys and over the mountains, but of that city, the habitation which men fain would reach. Under the figure of a quest we think not merely of the diligent painstaking search, but of that glad hour when what is sought for is found. Under the figure of a warfare we think not merely of the clash of conflict, but of the crowning joy of the ultimate victory.

In every case, moreover, the ultimate is the inspiration of the immediate. Men run in order to win. Men are careful concerning the navigation of their passage in order that they may reach the harbor. Men are earnest in their prosecution of the pilgrimage, that they may finally come to the city of their desire. The diligence of the quest is inspired by the passionate desire to find what is sought. All the earnestness of the conflict is born of the passion for victory.

Every man, I repeat, has some conception of life. He may not express it figuratively; indeed he may never have formulated it for himself; perhaps he has never talked about it, never thought of it, on the surface of his thinking; and yet underneath that surface thinking he has some conception of what his life means to him. To some men life would seem to be a day of business, the goal of which is the amassing of wealth. To others life would seem to be one constant opportunity for pleasure, the intervals being filled with strenuous work in order to secure that pleasure. Whatever his conception of life may be, it determines the conduct of a man and affects all his relationships in this world. Conduct based on conception creates character, and a man will conform in character to what he makes his conception of life.

In this word of Jesus He reveals the true conception of life in the case of those who have yielded themselves to Him. It is the Christian conception, that is, the conception of the follower of the Christ, of whatever man has seen His beauty and heard His call, and responding to both, has passed under His direction, and shares in all the values of His redeeming work. According to our Lord's teaching, that man becomes in all the activities of his life, in all his relationships with his fellow men, in all the conduct of the passing days, a man looking for his Lord.

This conception is altogether too largely lost sight of by Christian men today. When Dr. Denney wrote his volume on the Thessalonian epistles he said some things that are very worthy of consideration. He declared that the bloom of beauty on apostolic Christianity was created by the upward look, by the fact that those early Christians did most certainly live, looking for the Lord. He went further and declared that where that expectant attitude is lost, the upward look abandoned, while there may remain very much of Christian strength, that bloom is lost. I believe all that to be most true and most important. Therefore I have turned this evening to this subject, and I shall ask you to meditate with me the conception of life which our Lord suggests; the attitudes of life which will result from such a conception, and the character which response to the conception will invariably produce.

First, then, what is this conception of life? Life becomes, according to this view, a period the duration of which, long or short no man knows, a period ending not with death but with the coming of the Lord Himself. According to this view, in that moment when a man yields himself to the Lord Jesus Christ, the boundaries of his life are changed for him. The boundaries of life to the man not yielded to the Christ are his birth and his death; that man looks back through the years to the day of his birth, the day of beginning; and he looks on speculatively, wonderingly, tremblingly toward the day of death; life is bounded for him by the day of birth and the day of death. To the Christian man the boundaries are altered. The boundary of his life begins with his first meeting with Jesus. In the hour when the Lord comes to him, in the hour of the Lord's first advent to his personal experience, life begins. The other boundary is the moment when the Lord shall come to him again, gathering him to be with Himself. All that is expressed by Paul in that one brief and wonderful word, "To me to live is Christ." Those are the words of a man who had lost count of all except that in his life which was Christ-conditioned. He said, in effect, after three and thirty years of personal comradeship with the Lord, Life began for me when Jesus apprehended me, "to me to live is Christ," He is the origin of my life. Before that first meeting with Christ I had other experiences, other ambitions, other values; but things that were gain I count loss, I blot them out, I cancel them; they are of no value. Life began for me, said the apostle in effect, when above the brightness of the sun, the Lord shone upon me and possessed my life. What is the other boundary of life for this man? According to his own writing in that same autobiographical Chapter, it is the hour in which He shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory. To all Christian men life's boundaries have thus been changed. Said the same apostle to the Thessalonian Christians, "Ye turned to God from idols"—such was the beginning—"to serve the living and true God"—such was the process—"and to wait for His Son from heaven"—such is the consummation. The coming of Jesus to the soul is the beginning of the Christian life, and it is to be consummated by His coming again.

This means that the goal of the life of the individual Christian is always out of sight. Finality is never reached, ambition is never fully realized in these passing days. It means that all other hopes are subservient to this one glorious hope of the coming of the Lord Himself, of looking into His face, of being changed into His likeness. That is to be the hour of supreme, perfect satisfaction in the experience of the Christian man. The man thus looking and waiting for the Lord is willing that every other hope should not be realized if but the interference shall be that of the glad hour of the Advent of the Master. The man waiting for his Lord recognized the larger hope in all the smaller; and the smaller hopes are forevermore conditioned by the larger. Every man here is living in the expectation of some event toward which he is moving in the ordinary course of things in his own life; looking for the day of

graduation, looking for the day when he shall commence the stern work of life, looking for the day when after the process of effort he shall have arrived at a place of power. Such hopes are the very inspirations of conduct. But the Christian man, while having all such hopes, has as the supreme, the ultimate, the profoundest hope, the coming of the Lord; and all these lesser hopes are conditioned by that supreme hope. The truly Christian man will have no desire in his heart to postpone the coming of the Lord that he may reach some other goal; he will be perfectly ready, willing, glad, to know that every other goal toward which he properly runs is lost, canceled, because the Lord Himself will greet him.

This conception of life means that all fear is checked, corrected, hushed to rest. The man who lives waiting for the coming of the Lord will know nothing of panic in the midst of catastrophe, will know nothing of despair in the hour of apparent defeat. The glory of that certain Advent of the King will transfigure all the sackcloth, illuminate every hour of bereavement, irradiate with glory every dark cloud that sweeps across the life. The man who lives forever waiting for the Lord, looking for Him, is the man in whom fear never gains the mastery. Fear will assail the soul, for so are we fashioned; fear will threaten the courage, for so are we made; but when fear arises, then the upward look and the eager expectation will check the fear and cancel it so that the soul is again filled with new courage.

Yet I pray you observe that the ideal is this: if the goal is out of sight and finality can never be reached for this man until he see his Master, nevertheless, the goal reached, the hope realized, the fear forever ended, these things are always close at hand. In the midst of the most strenuous running the goal is expected immediately. In the hour when fears threaten the soul, hope is victorious because at once the Lord may appear.

The Christian life is not a race the end of which is seen, nor a course of probationary preparation the length of which is known. The end of the Christian life to the Christian soul, according to the Lord's conception, is always the next step.

"Men looking for their Lord." This is a return to first principles, the life dependent on the unseen. In the terms of the abiding values of the incarnation, that is the true view of life, that it is forevermore linked to the unseen and waits the disturbance of God. The life that is never disturbed is the life that is always prepared to be disturbed. The life that is always disturbed is the life that is seeking never to be disturbed. When a man's life is poised toward eternity and God; when a man understands that God has a plan for his life and is leading, guiding him, and may at any moment change the direction, thwart the purpose, recall the order, issue new commands, then that man finds profound peace and content, and with loins girt about, and lamps trimmed and burning he is ready for the commanding word, undisturbed because forever waiting to be disturbed. So in the terms and value of the incarnation that master principle of life is made real and personal to the Christian soul. As the God Whom no man hath seen at any time came into observation by the way of incarnation, so ere He passed from the earthly scene He left this word with the sons of men: Expect Me again. I shall return, I shall come again in My glory. Live as though expecting Me.

In the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension our Lord trained His disciples to this conception. Have you ever tried imaginatively to enter into the experience of those men during those forty days? They never knew where they would see Him next. Suddenly appearing in their midst, no door opened, no bolt shot, no preparation made; but He was there with them. His presence, parousia, nearness, they were made conscious of! With equal suddenness He disappeared. The appearances and disappearances of the forty days were but to train these people to the consciousness of His constant presence, and to the fact that at any moment He might appear. That is the teaching of the New Testament about the coming of our Lord. Nothing in human pomp or pageantry can express the true idea of this great truth of the New Testament as to our Lord's second Advent. Even in the hymns tonight we were away from Scripture truth. When we speak of the sound of chariot wheels, we are affected by the coming of kings and queens of earthly lands. When King George V is to appear, we wait for him, and there are signs and tokens, outward signs, of his approach. It will not be so when our King shall come. He will come with a voice and a shout, and the voice and the shout will synchronize with the manifestation; and ere we know it, as swiftly and suddenly as He appeared in the upper room, we shall be face to face with the King, we shall see Him, and the vision will be the final movement in our transformation, for we shall be like Him.

This, then, is the true conception of life according to Christ: He came to me in the hour when I yielded to Him, He is coming to me again; when, I know not; and life, between the initial coming when I became His and that final coming when He will become mine in a profounder sense than ever before, is a waiting, looking, watching for Him.

That leads us to the consideration of the attitude of those who hold this conception: "Ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord." That is the old version. The Revised Version reads: "Ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord." In this case I think we suffer loss by the change. Looking for—yes, if we quite understand what we mean. But it does not mean star-gazing! In the word translated "looking for" there is really no thought of the activity of the eye. The real thought is that of men who are eagerly expecting to receive, to receive a guest, men who are expecting to give hospitality. Not men who have abandoned duty in order to look for portents and signs, and presently for the Lord; but men who in fulfilment of duty are forevermore prepared for the King Himself, and in that sense looking for the coming of the Lord.

The attitude, moreover, is that of men waiting for the Master, for the King, for the Supreme One! Not looking for a servant, although,

infinite mystery of His great and wonderful grace, He does say to them that if, when He comes, they are waiting, He will gird Himself and serve them. Not men who are waiting finally to give hospitality to a friend, although they are to give hospitality to Him, and He comes for the reception of that hospitality, for He cometh and knocketh and asks admission. The attitude is that of waiting for the Lord Himself. The thought is that of supremacy, of control, and leads us back to the initial words which reveal the true attitude of waiting: doing His business, "let your loins be girded about"; seeking His interests, "let your lamps be burning."

For an understanding of our Lord's meaning we may go to the scene of His glorious ascension. When He had ascended on high and passed out of sight, the Galileans stood gazing up into heaven, and were immediately, if not rebuked, at least corrected: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven." Then at once the upward gaze ceased, and they turned back to obedience and waiting; and presently, when baptism of the Spirit came to them, they went out into service, with loins girded about, the girding of the loins the sign of bond-service to the King; with light burning, the flashing light the revelation of their care for His interests. So are men to wait for the Lord: with loins girded, and lamps burning, going about the King's business.

We wait for His coming as we fulfil our appointed tasks, as girt about, His bondslaves, we carry the light of His own life, and serve Him and our fellow men for His sake. Such is the true attitude of waiting for the Lord.

So finally let us inquire what is the character that is produced by those who adopt this attitude as the result of this conception of life.

First, the character toward the Master Himself will be partly of separation and partly of submission. It seems to me it needs no argument, and hardly requires illustration. If I really am expecting that He may come, then my relation to Him will ever be that of separation to His will and of submission to His law. Make what personal application of it suits your individual case. Suffer the personal application which I venture to make. If a man shall always preach, expecting that he may be interrupted in his preaching by the parousia, the presence of his Lord, what a difference it will make to his preaching. If a man shall always transact his business through the six days of the week expecting that at any moment in the midst of any transaction, the Lord Himself may be there, to call him away from things material to the eternal habitations, how it will safeguard his transactions.

It will not make him less diligent in his business, but it will make him infinitely more diligent in seeing to it that his business conforms to the will of his God.

The effect of this doctrine on a man's character in regard to his fellow men will be that of the constancy of his cheerfulness, and love. Cheerfulness! I freely confess that to me herein is a problem! I have long been strangely puzzled by the fact that some men who profess to hold this doctrine, and to be waiting for the Lord, are the most cheerless men I know. I cannot understand it. Surely it is the result of some wrong conception of the doctrine itself. Is He coming? Then there should ever be light on the brow, and the eye should never lack luster. Let me speak the things of actual experience. How often my brow is shadowed and my eye lacks luster. It is because I forget. When next you see me in that mood know this, I have forgotten that the Lord is at hand! When we remember, the result is perpetual sunniness, rejoicing forevermore, an eager, glad look of expectation in all our attitude toward our fellow men. That cheerfulness, moreover, will proceed out of a great love; for if I expect to meet Him, I know how He loves all men, and to quote the language of John, I should surely be ashamed before Him at His coming, if coming He found me lacking in love toward my fellow men.

How does this expectation affect Christian service? It has been declared that to hold this doctrine of the New Testament and preach it, to believe that the apostles were not mistaken and that Jesus was not mistaken, is to cut the nerve of Christian service. I declare that to expect that the Lord may at any moment appear to me, coming to me Himself, is to give immediateness and thoroughness to every piece of work that I take up in His name. Immediateness. He may come and the thing He has commanded me to do may not be done. Therefore let me do it forthwith, straightway, lest the opportunity be gone at His coming, and I be found to have neglected the thing that He commanded, and gave me time to do.

Again, to expect Him, is to give the quality of thoroughness to all our work. I should like when He comes that whatever I am doing, whether preaching or playing. I may be doing thoroughly, for there is nothing this Lord of life hates more than halfheartedness: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of My mouth."

Take one larger outlook. If in very deed this be our conception, and we are waiting for the King, that waiting and that expectation will create patience in the soul, patience with God, patience with the Church, patience with the world.

Patience with God. Did the suggestion sound somewhat irreverent? Then bear with me, if perchance I speak only for a few in this audience. There are some for whom I know I may speak. There are hours in which we feel impatient with God; at least—shall I amend the declaration?—there are hours in which we are tempted to be impatient with God. I am not referring to the hour of personal sorrow and suffering; I am not referring to the hour in which we ourselves are buffeted, bruised, defeated, but to those larger hours, those more tragic hours, when the world's agony surges on our souls, when we stand face to face with wrong; then we cry out with old Carlyle, God is doing nothing. If we have never had such an hour it is because we have never yet put our lives very

near to the world's agony and the world's need.

If I take this word of Jesus and believe it, and interpret it, not as men too often have interpreted it, but according to the whole scheme of His teaching; and I see that His coming means, not a catastrophe in which the world will be destroyed, but that it will be the advent of yet another day of opportunity for the world, the beginning of another movement in time; that it will be a crisis as real and definite, and no more mysterious than the crisis of His first advent; and that proceeding from it, His Kingdom will be set up—if I have caught that view I shall count that the long-suffering of God is due to His patience, to the fact that the processes of today are necessary to the perfection of the crisis of His coming, and a preparation for the larger process that lies beyond.

Patience is not laziness! Patience does not say, Therefore, because He is coming, I have no responsibility and have nothing to do. Patient waiting for Christ and patience with the world in the light of the glory of the coming of the Christ mean loins girt about, lamps burning, service rendered, haste upon the King's business, restful haste, peaceful speed, dignified diligence, recognition of the fact that in all the details of my service today I am in co-operation with the great processes by which God is preparing for that Advent, and which are necessary for the larger movements that lie beyond this age.

So to wait for Him is to have the life forevermore full of song and of peace:

My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation
I hear the sweet, and glorious hymn,
That hails a new creation;
Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing.
It finds an echo in my soul—
How can I keep from singing?

Finally, it is a very solemn and searching consideration that our Christian life may always be tested, gauged, valued, by this fact of the Lord's return. His word is, "Behold I come quickly." The true answer of the Christian heart is always, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." Anything that prevents that answer is out of place in our lives. Anything that makes it difficult for us to say, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus," is an element of weakness. That ambition which makes me seriously hope, even though I hardly dare confess it, that He will not come yet is a false ambition. That enterprise, however high and holy it may seem, which makes me desire to postpone the Advent until it be accomplished is a false enterprise. That hope, that new joy, to which I am looking forward, has in it something of wrong, producing in my heart something of disloyalty if it make me desire to postpone His coming. So we are to test all ambitions, all enterprises, all hopes, by this ambition, this enterprise, this hope of the Lord's return.

I have most carefully avoided any reference to human almanacs and calendars, to mechanical and mathematical calculations. Their effect has been to bring this doctrine into disrepute, and thousands of men desiring to be truly loyal to Jesus Christ are afraid of it because someone once said He would come on such a day at such a time, and He did not come! Men have been trying to find out the day and the hour which the Lord said no man knoweth, not even the Son, but only the Father. The moment we introduce into this great doctrine the element of the mathematician, the element of the almanac and calendar, times and seasons, we postpone the sense of the coming of the Lord. If it should be that any man in this house has ascertained for absolute certainty that Jesus the Lord is coming again, let us say, for the sake of illustration, on the 25th of December, in the name of God let him not tell me, because that knowledge would put Him all those months away and I expect Him now. The moment men begin to try to fix a date they controvert the teaching of the New Testament and contravene the purpose of the glorious truth. The Church has been commanded to wait for His Advent.

There are many apocryphal stories of our late beloved Queen Victoria, but there is one story that is certainly true coming on the authority of the man to whom the word was spoken. Talking with him one day on this very doctrine, she said, "There is nothing I should love more than to live long enough to lay my crown at His feet when He comes." That is the true attitude. It was not in His will that she should do so. It may be that I also shall come to the valley all shrouded in mist, but even there the consummation will not be the mere consciousness of death, but the dawning glory of His presence breaking through the mist, the vision of the face of the One Whom not having seen I have loved.

So we are to live, not as men fearing death or thinking of it, but as men looking for the Lord. May the Lord direct our hearts into patient waiting for His coming.

120 - Luke 12:49-50 - The Passion - Baptism

The Passion Baptism

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.

Luke 12:49-50

In the calendar of the Christian Church this is spoken of as Passion Sunday. The day has been devoted to the Church's contemplation of those sorrows of our Lord which, in human history and to human observation, culminated in the Cross.

I propose to ask you to meditate with me through the medium of these words of Jesus, on our Lord's thought of his Cross, in those days when His face was steadfastly set toward Jerusalem.

Perhaps there is no passage in the gospel narratives which has suffered more difficulty of translation than this. It is one in which absolutely literal translation would almost result in misinterpretation. A reverent translation into our more modern speech, greatly helps us. In Weymouth's Testament the text reads thus:

I came to throw fire upon the earth, and what is My desire? Oh that it were even now kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo; and how am I pent up till it is accomplished!

These words constitute what I venture to describe as a soliloquy of Jesus. By that I mean they were not addressed directly to the crowd; nor directly, even to His own disciples. They occur in the midst of a set discourse, but they stand alone. You can omit them entirely, and that particular discourse is not interfered with, its meaning is not hampered, it abides. In the midst of it He broke out into these words. I would venture, very reverently, to describe this soliloquy of Jesus as a heartburst.

Let us look at the chapter. It opens thus, "In the meantime, when the many thousands of the multitude were gathered together.... He began to say unto His disciples first of all." He was speaking in the presence of the multitudes, but first of all to His disciples. The discourse runs quietly on until we come to the thirteenth verse where we find the first interruption, "One of the multitude said unto Him, Master, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." The Lord answered with a parable. At verse twenty-two He resumes the discourse to His disciples, "And He said unto His disciples..."; and proceeds quietly, until He is again disturbed, not this time by one of the multitude, but by one of the disciples, "Peter said, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even unto all?" The Lord answered Peter with a parable. Now let us link verse forty-eight with verse fifty-one, and by so doing we find the true connection of the discourse. Between those two verses lie the words of my text.

If all this is somewhat tedious, it is absolutely important. It is only as we can get back into the very atmosphere of the occasion upon which our Lord uttered these words that we can hope to come into full sympathy with them, or into anything like intelligent understanding of their meaning.

Earlier in the gospel story it is declared that He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. He is on His way to the Cross. He is traversing the Via Dolorosa. His own soul is filled with sorrow, and He is talking to His disciples. A man in the multitude interrupts Him, "Master, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." He rebukes him for his sordidness and resumes His discourse. Peter interrupts Him. He answers Peter in a parable; and there breaks in upon His soul anew His perpetual consciousness of how dull His disciples and the multitudes are. The man who said "Bid my brother divide the inheritance with me" is typical of the crowd, and they do not understand Him at all. They imagine He is there to be a divider of property, a mere social reformer. His own disciples did not understand. Peter said, "Is this parable for us, or for the rest? Is there no difference between us?" While patiently instructing their dullness, the abiding sense of their dullness and of His own limitation, finds expression in a great heartburst; "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

Jesus was straitened, so straitened that the disciples could not understand Him; so straitened that the jostling crowd misinterpreted Him. Reverently, let me say the whole thing. He was eager for His Cross, because He knew that apart from that He could not fulfil His mission.

Mark the opening words of this soliloquy. "I came to cast fire upon the earth." In the third chapter of this gospel, Luke tells us how His forerunner, John the Baptist, had declared to the multitudes who listened to him, "I indeed baptize you with water; but there cometh He that is mightier than I, the latchet of Whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." I turn to the second treatise of Luke, which we call the Acts of the Apostles, and I listen to Jesus now on the other side of His Cross and resurrection, and He says, referring to the very words of the forerunner, "John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." I turn over the page and come to the second chapter, "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly, there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." That was the historic fulfilment of the prediction of John; the Holy Ghost came and they were

baptized, and the symbol of His coming was fire.

Between the prophecy of the forerunner and the historic fulfilment occurred the soliloquy of Jesus, in which in effect He said, "I cannot fulfil John's prediction, I cannot cast the fire that purifies, energizes, and remakes; that enlightens the darkened intellect, enkindles the deadened emotion, energizes the degraded will, until I have been baptized with My own baptism." Pentecost cannot precede the Cross. That is the theme of the soliloquy.

Let us reverently tarry in the presence of the great words, conscious in every word that I utter, and to which you in your reverent patience will listen, that the last things can never be said about that baptism. Yet, let us listen to these words of Jesus because in them there is an unfolding of truth about the passion and the Cross which is full of value.

This fact of the coming Cross was perpetually present to the mind of Christ. He never told His disciples about His Cross until after Peter's great confession; but there are evidences in the early story that He knew of it, and that He was moving toward it, not as a victim, but as a Victor; not yielding Himself to an ultimate disaster because He was helpless, but moving with determination toward the ultimate process, and the final victory.

John tells us that at the commencement of His public ministry He entered the temple and cleansed it. They challenged Him; "What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" His answer was strange and mysterious. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They, materialized as they were, imagined that He was speaking of the temple in the midst of which men were still worshipping. In the days of Pentecostal illumination that speech of Jesus was understood by His disciples, and writing long afterwards in the light of the spiritual interpretation, John declared "He spake of the temple of His body." I look back at that scene and I see Him cleansing the temple; and find that when men asked Him what was His authority for so doing, He answered, not so that they could then understand, but out of His own consciousness, My authority for cleansing the temple, and restoring it to its true purpose is the authority of My coming Cross and My ultimate resurrection.

Again, sitting in the quietness of a starlit night upon the roof of an Eastern house, He conversed with Nicodemus. In honest and splendid perplexity, the inquirer asked, "How can these things be? How can a man be born when he is old?" Jesus, borrowing an illustration from the ancient literature of the religion to which this man belonged, said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life." Nicodemus could not understand the answer then, but in effect the Master said, "You as Me, how a man can be born again, how he can receive new life which shall master and negative all his old life, and My reply is that only by the way of My death, only by My lifting up on the Cross shall I ever be able to communicate My life. You cannot see My life, without My dying. In its truth and grace and glory you never can share it save as I die." The Cross was in His heart when He talked with Nicodemus.

Passing over the earlier days, we come to the glorious scene on the mount of transfiguration; and the theme of His conversation with the heavenly visitors, Moses and Elijah, was that of the exodus which He should accomplish, His Cross and His resurrection.

When the Greeks found Him, and the disciples told Him, "The Greeks desire to see Thee," He said this strange and startling thing, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it bareth much fruit. He that loveth His life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." That is to say, He had declared that if the Greeks desired to see Him and enter into understanding of what He was they could never do so until He was dead and risen. In newness of life won out of death would they behold Him.

These are illustrations taken almost at haphazard from the ministry of Jesus showing that the Cross was ever present in His mind.

In this soliloquy He tells us why it was ever present, as He reveals His own estimate, first as to its necessity; and secondly, insofar as we are able to grasp it, as to its nature.

Let us notice first then the teaching of this word of Jesus concerning the necessity for His Cross. "I am straitened." The difficulty here is lest, in attempting exposition, by multiplicity of words one should darken counsel. I find many expositors teach that our Lord was here speaking of His own sorrows. The word "straitened," however, reveals the reason of the sorrows, which is infinitely more than a declaration of the fact. "I am straitened"; that is I am confined, imprisoned, shut up, limited; or as Dr. Weymouth has it "pent up."

It was a remarkable thing for Him to say. There He stood amid His disciples, a fair and perfect Example; there He stood, the final moral Teacher of all the centuries, and yet He said, "I am straitened"; I cannot do My work, I cannot complete My work; I am unable to communicate My life, the dynamic force that will enable men to obey the teaching, and to imitate the Example.

He was straitened in His teaching. "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them yet." He was straitened in His work. "Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to My Father." There He stood in the midst of a world full of sorrow and sighing and sin, longing to cast that fire on the earth which should purify and energize and remake, yet unable to do it; quite able to teach, to

present the ideal, but these were not the things for which He had finally come, for these are quite useless alone.

If I am told today that it is my business to preach the ethic of Jesus, and that is enough; if I am told that all the Christian preacher ought to do is to call men to imitation of the great Example, and that is sufficient; my reply can only be that such opinion is out of harmony with the opinion of Jesus Himself. He did here clearly affirm, that while He was a Teacher and an Example, and only these, He was straitened, unable to do the ultimate thing for which He had come, unable to accomplish the great work upon which His heart was set. He came, not merely to give men an example, not merely to enunciate an ethic, but to cast fire, the symbol of purity, the symbol of power; fire for cleansing, for energy; but He could not do so until He was baptized with His baptism. When He uttered these words, He was waiting for, setting His face stedfastly toward, that whelming in darkness, the inner and deepest mystery of which none of us can ever fathom or understand; and He said, "I cannot complete My work, cannot scatter this purifying, energizing fire, cannot open these blind eyes, touch these cold hearts, and remake these shrivelled powers, save by the way of My Cross." In these words we have revealed our Lord's sense of the necessity for the Cross.

More reverently still, and with softer footfall, let us examine the light which this soliloquy throws on the nature of the Cross. The passion baptism was to be a baptism through which it should be possible for Him to open those blind eyes, and unstop those deaf ears, to make these men understand the things He could not now make them understand. The word itself is suggestive, "I have a baptism." There is only one meaning for the word, and that is immersion or whelming. That toward which He was going was not an experience in which He would stand by the awful silence of a dead sea, and taste its brackish waters. That to which He was going was an hour in which He would fathom its depths, and enter into spiritual and profound fulfilment of that which had been written long before, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Apart from that whelming in death and in darkness, He could not complete His work; but by that way, He was able to scatter fire, and fulfil His purpose.

If, then, by way of that whelming He was able to fulfil His purpose, we know this much at least, that it was a baptism in which He was able, in some mystic mystery of Divine wisdom and power, to deal with the forces that spoil humanity, to deal with that which, in the spiritual life of man, has produced blindness and inability.

There they stood about Him; His disciples looking at Him with wide open eyes of loving human affection, yet never seeing Him; listening to the words He said with reverent attention, and yet never hearing! The multitudes day by day listened to His teaching, watched Him healing, and imagined He had come to divide property! He said, "Only by the way of the Cross can I fulfil My mission, but by way of the Cross I will open these eyes that they may see, open these ears that they may hear, touch these hearts that they may understand the deep spiritual meaning of My mission. I have come for the remaking, not of accidentals, but of essentials; and through the remaking of the essentials for the remaking of the accidentals. I have not come to divide as between human inheritances, but to put men right with God, and right with each other, that so they may divide their inheritances upon a spiritual basis."

It was only by the way of the Cross, according to His own estimate, that He could accomplish that work. Fire, illuminative, energizing; clarifying the vision, making the pulses of the soul beat, and making eternity a reality; could only be given, said Christ, by the way of His Cross. Whatever we may think about the Cross, that is what He thought about it. It was only by His Cross; by His whelming in death; by His immersion in immeasurable and unutterable anguish and sorrow; that He could take hold of the poison which had spoiled humanity, and negate it, make it not to be, cancel it, destroy it, and so liberate the fire and remake humanity.

We cannot end with the text. Our Lord and Master is no longer saying in the midst of human history, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire? Would that it were already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

These are not the words of Jesus here and now. In reverence I change his words, as in His presence I utter them. He is saying now, "I came to cast fire upon the earth, and lo, it is kindled! I have cast it because I have been baptized with My baptism; and therefore, I am no longer straitened." We have not to do with the straitened Christ, but with the unstraitened Christ. We are not listening to the teaching of Christ under circumstances of limitation because the Cross was not accomplished. The teaching is the same; but we are dealing with Christ on the other side of the Cross, so that He is able not only to teach but to give power to obey. We have not to deal with a Christ, upon the wonder of Whose pure and strong and glorious life we look with amazement and then become conscious of our own inability to copy Him or be like Him. We have to do with a Christ Who brings to us an ideal that captures our admiration; and Who then touches us with power so that each of us says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Let us ever bring into our religious thinking the historic sense, and let us remember that our Lord passed to the passion baptism, was whelmed beneath the infinite mystery of those dark waters; and that He emerged from them in Resurrection, ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, and scattered the fire; and therefore, we may share that gift immediately, and so enter into all the fulness of the meaning of His mission. He is straitened no longer.

"He Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

"All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

He "giveth us richly all things to enjoy."

All that is the result of His passion-baptism. Christianity is not one perpetual agony of sorrow. Your Christianity is not witnessed to by the misery of your countenance. God has freely given us all things, and that to enjoy. All things are ours to enjoy because He went to His Cross. It is by way of the tree that the leaves of healing come. It is by the way of the Cross that the crown is placed upon our brows. It is by the way of passion-whelming, that the baptism comes to us which is the baptism of fire, of purity, and of energy.

Now let me make the final application. There is a sense in which this soliloquy of Jesus is one which we must make our own. If we would enter into life, we also have to say—and yet I pause again to interpolate this warning, let us be very careful of the sense in which this thing is said—"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

I take you back to the chapter we read in Mark. Jesus had His face set toward Jerusalem, toward the Cross and the suffering. He was telling His disciples that He must go to suffering, that He must be killed and the third day rise again, when there came to Him James and John—Matthew says their mother spoke for them—and asked Him to grant them whatever they wished. And He answered, "What is it that you would ask of Me?" Then they said this, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left, in Thy glory." He replied, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink? or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said, "We are able." Is not that the profoundest proof of the fact that Jesus was straitened and unable to make men understand? Think of that answer of James and John, "We are able."

Yet, what did He say? "The cup that I drink ye shall drink; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized." What did He mean? If what we have been saying is true, that He drank of the cup in unutterable loneliness, that His great passion-baptism was isolated and alone, a whelming in which none could possibly share, then what did He mean when He said this to these two men? It was the word of His Grace. It was the declaration that while He would tread the winepress alone, He would carry them with Him into the midst of the sorrow vicariously, and bring them into new life by standing in their place in death. Paul said, "We have been crucified with Him." Historically Paul's hands were not nailed to the Cross; but His hands were nailed to the Cross. Essentially, Paul never went out into the infinite and awful mystery of atoning death, nor could he, nor can I, nor can you; but Paul was crucified with Him. He had gathered Paul into His own personality and heart. He was infinitely more than Man in Himself, He was the sum total of the people He had gathered into His own personality, the sum total of humanity, and in that strange hour of His baptism there also was I baptized. In that strange hour in which He drank the cup, there also I, in Him, drank the cup. You shall drink of My cup, you shall be baptized with My baptism. You cannot drink the cup alone, you cannot be baptized alone or independently or separated from Me, but in Me you shall drink the cup and be baptized with the baptism.

It is as though He had said, "I am going into this baptism not for Myself but for you." The old terms of the theologians must be retained. His death was vicarious.

That is where you and I must begin to live if we would live at all in spiritual fulness. If I declare that there are senses in which we can and must say, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished," I do not mean that by my identification with His Cross in self-surrender I find my way into life. There is a very subtle peril abroad in much of the finest devotional literature of the day; I hear men talking about their identification with Christ as though there were some value in it. There is no value in it. Everything must be of grace. I shall have to come on the last day of life to His Cross, saying, "Nothing in my hand I bring." Because I bear in my body brands that speak of suffering for Him, I am no more worthy of His salvation. Neither the brands I bear, nor the suffering I share, bring me nearer to God. When at last I lay my head on the pillow at the close of the one short day of work I can render to God, I shall die a sinner saved by grace, and in no other way shall I enter into life. Not by the merit of my service, not by self-denials, not by the cross I carry shall I ever enter heaven; but by His baptism and by His cup of sorrow drunk to the dregs. So only shall I ever come into life beyond, and so only can I ever enter into life here.

Those powers of which you boast yourself, those splendid capacities of your magnificent humanity—the anthems of them are being sung in every magazine today; but know this, that the dawning will darken to midnight unless you enter into life by the way of Christ's Cross.

There it stands in the midst of the centuries, the one and only hope of humanity, and only by taking my life from Him as a gift purchased in the mystery of His passion-whelming, can I ever find its fulfilment according to the purpose of God.

But this is the last word of all. The passion is accomplished, the victory is won, the fire is scattered. This is the day of Pentecost. Every man in this house can leave the sanctuary with fire which will enable him to say, to do, to be, to the glory of His name.

The Rights of God

He spake this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none. And he said unto the vinedresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground? And he answering saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not, thou shalt cut it down.

Luke 13:6-9

The similarity between the song of Isaiah and the parable of Jesus is self-evident. In the song of Isaiah concerning the vineyard, the outstanding values may thus be stated; the Lord's vineyard, the Lord's plant, the Lord's expectation of fruit, the Lord's disappointment, and the Lord's judgment upon the vineyard. In the parable of Jesus the outstanding values may be stated in almost identical words; the Lord's vineyard, the Lord's fig-tree, the Lord's expectation, the Lord's disappointment. But there is a value in the parable which is absent from Isaiah's song, that of the intercession of the vinedresser. Judgment in the case of Isaiah was immediate because of failure. Judgment in the parable of Jesus is postponed because of the intercession of the vinedresser. It is, however, as certain in the one case as the other, if there yet be fruitlessness.

It is perfectly patent that the first application both of the parable of Jesus and the song of Isaiah was to the Hebrew nation. The principles have, however, a wider application.

The parable of Jesus was spoken in order to correct a false sense of safety. The earlier paragraph of this thirteenth chapter records that "there were some present at the very season which told Him of the Galilæans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." He reminded them also of others upon whom the tower of Siloam had fallen. The people to whom He spoke imagined that the judgment on the Galilæans, and that on the men of Siloam were evidences of exceeding sinfulness. Jesus said, "I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." He then uttered the words of this parable.

The peculiar value of the parable, therefore, is that in it we find the true standards for the measurement of human lives. Men are still imagining that there are degrees of sin, that the Galilæans are sinners above all, that men overtaken by some catastrophe must therefore have been the most guilty. Christ declares that we cannot so measure sin. "Except ye"—the men whom Pilate has not arrested, the men upon whom no tower has fallen—"except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish."

Life ended by the brutality of Pilate may not have perished. Perishing is not the ending of material life by the accident of a falling tower. Perishing is something profounder, more terrible. You may live out all your days, according to human thinking, and die in quietness and peace, and yet perish, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

In face of so startling a statement, Jesus uttered the parable, and we will consider it carefully because it is one in which Jesus gives us the true standards for the measurement of human lives. Is not this what we supremely need? Is not this what we are supremely afraid of? Is there anything that we shrink more from than being measured by Divine standards? Are we not all in the habit of measuring ourselves by comparing ourselves as among ourselves? And when we do so we usually compare ourselves with those whom we know to be inferior to ourselves, and so we are uplifted in pride of heart, in satisfaction, in contentment.

The matter of supreme moment is not what neighbour or friend, or foe may think of us, but what God thinks of us. How can we find out? In the simplicity of this parable, Jesus has given us the standard of measurement, and the balances for weighing. Let us remit ourselves to Him for measurement and for weighing.

In order to do this, we must begin where we always must begin if we would understand or enter into the things of the Kingdom of heaven. We must listen to this parable as though we were children. This parable is indeed a picture of ordinary, everyday life; a picture of things with which we are all familiar. It is Eastern in colouring. The vineyard and the fig tree are peculiarly of the East; but you do no violence to the intention if you change the word vineyard to garden, and if you change the word fig tree to apple tree.

Three simple matters are suggested by the parable—

The rights of the proprietor.

The interference of the intercessor.

The position of the property.

The first right of the proprietor is the absolute right of possession. The plant was in his vineyard. It was his plant. He had the absolute right of ownership.

The second right grows out of the first. It was the moral right of expectation. He came seeking for fruit, and he had a perfect right to seek for fruit. What is a fig tree for? Ask a little child, and with magnificent abruptness, and with no waste of words the child will tell

you, figs.

As I read on, I discover another right. He found no fruit; and he came years one, two, and three, and still found none. Then he said, "Cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground?" He had a right so to say. His right to destroy was based first upon the failure of the tree to produce fruit; it was enhanced by his patience; but it was supreme because it cumbered the ground, that is, it took up space, soil, and strength which at the disposal of another tree would have produced fruit. That is the first phase of the picture.

Before proceeding to the others, let us inquire into the spiritual suggestions of this. They bring us face to face with the rights of God. This is a phrase which I sometimes think we are a little in danger of forgetting today, especially when we are dealing with human life. I hear a great deal about the rights of man. I do not hear very much in the common speech of today about the rights of God. I am not speaking about man's right in regard to his fellow man, but about man's rights in regard to God; what a man has a right to expect from God. Some men have even been daring enough to write what they would do if they were God. The impertinent suggestion smacks of blasphemy; as though it were possible for a finite mind to come to final understanding of what the infinite Mind ought to do; as though it were possible for a being bounded by horizons that are not many miles away, or at most bounded by one small planet which is but as dust in the balances to the immensity of the universe, as though it were possible for such a being to imagine the things that he would do if he were God. Yet, that attitude of mind is being admired and worshipped today.

Let us attend to this teaching of our Lord in which in the simplest parable possible He has reminded humanity of the rights of God in regard to human life. To my own heart it is full of comfort, whilst full of fire.

The first truth is that of God's absolute right in all human lives. The sovereignty of God is based upon the fact that every man is the creation of God, and so the offspring of God. I am a thought of God. I am God-created; physically, mentally, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, volitionally; analyze as you will, but over all your analysis write the inclusive declaration, man in the image and likeness of God, made by God. I am the property of God. I like to begin there when I am preaching to men about eternal things. I like to look into the face of every man and say, "Thou art not the property of the devil; thou art not the result of the forces of dust. Thou art the property of God." There are senses in which man is the bondsman of the devil; the bondsman of sin; the servant of lust, passion; but in the deepest fact, the essential fact of his being, every man belongs to God. The absolute right of proprietorship is enhanced by the fact that all our lives are lived in God's world. It is said that this is a sad and wicked world. That is not true. It is a glad and beautiful world. When Bishop Heber sang his missionary hymn he sang a great truth,

Though every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile.

If there be a touch of evil upon the world, it is the touch of the human hand that has lost its cunning, because it has sold itself to the forces and resources of evil. This is God's world; His sunshine, His rain. Evil has never made a blade of grass; it has destroyed many. The devil never made anything; he has destroyed much. Evil is destructive, not constructive. It makes nothing, it only breaks. I am in God's world, a world that He has encompassed with a sky of blue, over which He scatters the clouds in a profusion of glory, gladdened by the setting or the rising sun, until I am appalled by the magnificence around me. It is God's world. All the forces of my life are forces which He has given me. I am in this world, of the world in measure, but not wholly and finally. God owns me in His world. His is the right of absolute proprietorship; a more wonderful right than any figure of speech can show forth. The man who owned the vineyard and planted the fig tree therein, did not make the fig tree; but God Who owns the world made it, and every man in it. His right of proprietorship is based upon His creation. What a revolution there will be when we can bring men back to this first, fundamental truth about human life; the right of God as proprietor.

The rights of God are also those of moral expectation. Have you ever noticed how constantly Jesus made the men to whom He spoke juries to decide upon their own actions and activities, and pass verdict upon themselves. I think He meant to do that when He uttered this parable. Do you differ from any of the things He said when He spoke these words? Have you not a right to expect apples from an apple tree in your garden? No one will quarrel with that. Then apply the truth you admit in the higher realm. If man is God's creation; if all the forces of his being have come to him from God; if man is living his life in God's world in the midst of resources which God has provided; God has a right to expect fruit.

What fruit? What has God a right to expect from a man? Here again, be true to the simplicities of the parable and you will touch the sublimities. Ask a boy what a man has a right to expect from a fig tree, and he will say, figs. What have you a right to expect from an apple tree? Apples. Do not be afraid of the simplicity of our illustrations. What does God expect from a man? Manhood. That is all. What does God expect from a boy? Boyhood. From a girl? Girlhood. What does God expect from a woman? Womanhood. I shall thank God if the statement startles you into the frame of mind for consideration. God does not expect that you will ever be an angel; but he does expect that you should be a man. "Oh," but you say, "surely if you preach the gospel you will tell us that God expects us to worship, to pray, to give, to be religious." I decline to make use of those minor and partial terms of description. I will make use of that which includes them all. God requires from a man manhood. God is not seeking angels in London; and that not merely because

He is not likely to find them there, but because to the heart of God, men and women are more than angels. When Father Taylor, the sailor preacher, lay dying, his daughter said, "You will soon see the angels." He replied, "Folks are better than angels." He spoke out of a great comradeship with God.

As God comes into His garden seeking for fruit, and examines the plant of my life, can He find the fruit He wants? That is the question. Can He find manhood? We can only answer that question by asking another, "What is manhood?" There is only one answer to that inquiry. The meaning of humanity has once been perfectly revealed in the Man of Nazareth. That is Manhood. We test our lives, as I have already said, by comparison with others; we stand in the public place of assembly still and say: "I thank Thee that I am not as other men, or even as this poor publican." We sing our way through life upon the basis of a satisfaction in the fact that there are many worse than ourselves. The measurements are false. What is a man? Behold the Man. I am to find out what I am by comparison with the life of Jesus; and when I use the word Jesus in this respect I am speaking of His humanity for the moment, the actual, positive, warm humanity with which we are familiar in the gospel stories. Behold the Man, and measure thy life by His. He was the revelation of God; and of man also. Has it ever occurred to you that we do not know the real meaning of our own lives until we have looked at Jesus? We are conscious of the contradictions of our own personality. We state the fact in differing ways. We say there is in us the angel and the beast, forever fighting. We speak of strange aspirations after high and noble things, and of grovelings amid low things. Oh yes, express it how you will, in the language of the new formula or philosophy the old truth abides, we were born in sin and shapen in iniquity. We are engaged in a battle as between the forces of good and of evil. We are broken human beings from the start. I look at the Man of Nazareth and see man after God's own heart, the archetypal Man, a perfect revelation to me of the true meaning of my own nature. I cannot find the key to my own life in any other man. I have lost it entirely as within my own personality. Song and sigh, aspiration and groveling! What is man? I am unable to answer until I have looked at the Man of Nazareth. How can I tell the story of His Manhood? We are familiar with Him. I will only do it in briefest words. He was a Man homed in the will of God, absolutely at the service of His brother men. That is the Man of Nazareth. Hear the law from His own lips: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." These things He did; but have I done them? As the measurement of that life is placed upon my life; as my life is put into the balances and weighed in the balances of the sanctuary against that life, the life that answered the impulse of the love to God and love to men, that in singing and by suffering served to help others; oh God, how I have failed!

Profane swearer! No, thou hast never been that, neither have I. Brought up in Christian homes you and I were graciously, tenderly sheltered from blatant, vulgar sins; pre-eminently satisfied with ourselves may we be, if we measure ourselves as among ourselves; but if Jesus is the standard then the Proprietor comes into the vineyard expecting fruit, and finds nothing but leaves. My life is a failure when measured by that standard.

Therefore, let it be stated carefully—not with anything of the tone of triumph in the fact, but with solemn consideration of it—because man has failed, God's right is established to destroy him; and not merely because man has failed, but also because God has had long patience with man.

Nothing but leaves! The Spirit grieves,
O'er years of wasted life.

No drunkenness, adultery, profanity; but no fruit that gladdens and satisfies the heart of God. No worship in the way of love to Him. No service in the way of helpfulness to my fellow men. And all this in spite of long patience. Every man who so lives cumberes the ground in that economy of God. It may be that you are not a cumberer of the ground in the economy of the British nation; but in the economy of God the man who is bearing no fruit cumberes the ground. Has it ever occurred to you that another man occupying your place in the office might exert an influence for the healing of humanity's wounds, and the bringing in of the Kingdom of God, which you are not exerting? I remember in earlier years walking through the streets of New York with my friend Albert Swift. He pointed out a great orphan institution in which hundreds of bairns were being cared for. I said, "What a sad thing it is to think of all those children without father or mother." I was startled by his reply; he said, "I don't know; I am not sure it is as sad as you think." I asked his meaning, and this was his answer; "In scores of instances those children only had their chance of life when father and mother were dead." It is appallingly true, and it is more true than we think. It is not merely true of the slum children in the gutter. It is true of the children in the suburbs. You feed your children, clothe them, educate them; but what chance have they of spiritual manhood with your example? Has it occurred to you, young man, that if another man sat at your desk in the office, the next man would have a better chance of purity than while you sit there? In the sanctuary, we see things from the standpoint of the sanctuary. We hear that searching word of Jesus, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and He that gathereth not with Me scattereth." There are only two moral, spiritual forces at work in the world, gathering and scattering; centripetal, and centrifugal forces. That is equally true in the spiritual world. The force of your life is gathering or scattering, hastening the Kingdom of God, or hindering it. The man who fails to be a man after the pattern of God's economy is cumbering the ground, wasting God's earth and sunshine, and all of God's resources. That is the solemnity of the parable. I am not standing in judgment upon this congregation. God knows I am before the judgment bar with you. It is by the words of Christ that we are to be judged, and we stand together before those words tonight. He

comes to us with the revelation of the rights of God, the absolute right of proprietorship, the moral right of expectation; and after He has measured us, and found us receiving God's resources, dwelling in His world, planted in His vineyard, but bringing Him no fruit, He has a right to cut down because of failure, because of His patience, because we cumber the ground.

Thank God there is yet another thing in this parable. It is the story of the intercessor. We will go back for two or three moments to the picture itself. What is this picture of the intercessor? Mark this simplest of things about it. What is the purpose in the heart of the vinedresser? If you say that his purpose is that of mercy upon the fig tree, it is not so! There is no word that speaks of mercy upon the fig tree. Is that astonishing? Look at it carefully. What is the underlying purpose of the vinedresser? Exactly the same as that of the proprietor, fruit. "Lord, let it alone this year also." What for? "Till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not thou shalt cut it down." There is no quarrel between the vinedresser and the proprietor. Let it reverently be affirmed, there is no quarrel between God and Christ about man. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to persuade God to have mercy upon the man who is going to be failure through eternity. Christ came into the world to produce in man the fruit for which God is seeking. There is no difference in the ultimate intention of God and Christ. I am constrained to say, out of profound and evergrowing conviction, that the evangelism which suggests to man that Christ has done something which is merely to provide a way of escape from penalty, is false evangelism. He does that, but how? By freeing men from the disastrous failure, by remaking them that they may be what God wants them to be. Jesus Christ the Lord is not leading into the dwellings of light and glory a vast multitude of failures, of incompetent men and women. If you want to know the kind of people He will introduce to His heaven at last, hear it in the words of inspiration, He will "set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy." If there is any man who names the name of Christ, sings the songs of the sanctuary, professes to be a member of the Church of Christ, and his life is still barren, he is not a Christian. Unless the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, unless that love is expressed in service to our fellow men we are not Christians. We may be Christianized pagans, with a creed upon our lips, wearing the livery of the sanctuary, but we are not Christians. Jesus Christ did not come to ask God to let off the man who refuses to bear fruit. He came, to use the figure of the garden, to dig about the tree, and dung it. He came to provoke it to fruit-bearing by introducing to it new life, and fruitful resources. He came to touch the tree with a new life which shall make it respond with fruit.

And if not, if after all His digging, and all His introduction of new forces, the tree is still barren, then He says, "Thou shalt cut it down." He is one with God in purpose. He is one with God in ultimate verdict and sentence. He is one with God in the desire for fruit, and in that operation whereby He seeks to perfect men to fruit-bearing.

The spiritual values are perfectly patent. What is it that Christ offers to do for me? Why is the judgment postponed upon my guilty soul? In order that he may bring new forces to me; a barren, fruitless, failing man! That I may become fruitful, abounding in fruit to the glory of God. That is the basis of appeal. He does not ask God to be pitiful, to excuse the fruitless tree. He asks God to let Him deal with the tree, to make it fruitful. No man is ever going to be admitted into the high and holy presence of the dwellings of the saints in the light of God, on the basis of pity but upon the basis of perfection. Let us make no mistake about the purpose of Christ.

The last matter may be dismissed in two or three sentences. What is the position of the tree in the vineyard? One word covers the whole story. Fruit! If at last there shall be fruit, then the tree will abide, it has fulfilled the purpose of its being. If at last there be fruit, then the demand of the proprietor has been met, and he will be satisfied. If at last there shall be fruit, the vinedresser will be repaid for all his patience and toil.

What is the first and final matter about my life, and thy life, my brother man? Fruitfulness according to pattern. That I become what God would have me be. That I become a man God-centered, God-governed; a man expressing my love for God in my love for my fellow-men, and my service to them. If that be produced, then my safety, my salvation is assured. If that shall be produced, God's requirement will be met, and He will be satisfied.

If that result be produced in me, then the Christ of the cross will see in me of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

In a very few moments the Sabbath evening service will be over. We shall be taking our way back to our homes, and if these transitory lives of ours be spared and tomorrow's sun dawn, we shall be away to the city, following our profession, in the midst of the daily avocation; but now we pause as in the very garden of God, and He is seeking fruit. What does He find? That is a question not to be answered by one man to another. I am asking no confession. It is a question to be answered by the preacher in the pulpit as in the presence of his God; by every man in the house as in that same great presence.

May all others be reverently patient while I say this final word. There are those who are saying, "If these be the standards, then we come short of the glory of God; if these be the balances, then weighed in the balances we are found wanting. Then what shall we do?" This is the hour of the Vinedresser, and He seeks at this moment to communicate to all who know their failure, the values of His own death and life; whereby failing men and women can be made fruitful; whereby those who fail because they are in the grip of the destructive forces of habit and of passion and of sin, can be made masters over all of them in the power of His indwelling life.

The most appalling and overwhelming thought of the hour is this, that in the magnificence of the dignity of human will you can, I can,

refuse the ministry of the Christ, and choose the barrenness and the failure until the hour of doom and the day of judgment. But in that same magnificent dignity of human will, I can yield my life to Him, all bruised and battered, fruitless; and He will place at my disposal forces whereby it shall be remade, so that not only shall the fig tree in the vineyard flourish and blossom and bear fruit; but the very desert shall blossom as the rose.

In the presence of that Christ, and in the power of that Spirit, by those standards and measurements, found wanting; shall we not begin again by handing our lives over to Christ that He may produce in us the fruit that will glorify God?

122 - Luke 14:15, 27 - The Kingdom: The Oath of Allegiance

The Kingdom: The Oath of Allegiance

Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God. Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.

Luke 14:15; Luke 14:27

Our theme tonight is that of the demand which the King makes in respect of His own enterprises upon those who enter the Kingdom. That is the real signification of His words, spoken in answer to one of those who sat at meat with Him in the Pharisee's house.

By bringing these two verses together, I have desired to direct your attention for a moment, by way of introduction, to the matters which precede my text in this chapter. The complete story with which this chapter, and the following two, deal, is full of interest, and to read it quite simply and artlessly, as for the first time, is to discover the growth of the teaching. We, in company with His first disciples, are led on, and ever on, by our Lord in an ever growing understanding of His mission; and in the heart of this whole paragraph to which I have referred, the words occur, "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be my disciple."

I am going to crave, and perhaps tax, your patience for a moment while we attempt to see all this narrative which surrounds the text, for by extensive examination we shall come to intensive application. In the fourteenth chapter, we have the story of how Jesus went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread, and in that connection the significant declaration is made, that, "they were watching Him." What immediately follows reveals the yet more interesting fact, that while they watched Him, He watched them. Somewhere on the outskirts of the crowd was a man afflicted with dropsy; and the Lord challenged them as to whether it was legal for Him to heal him on the Sabbath; and when they held their peace, He healed the man and let him go. Then He observed how they chose the chief seats, and in a parable rebuked them. According to the law of the Kingdom of God, if a man makes a feast, a dinner or a supper, he will not call his friends, nor his brethren, nor his kinsmen, nor his rich neighbor. Why not? Notice this very carefully, "Lest haply they bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee." I do not know a more caustic piece of satire than that upon the whole business of entertaining even as it obtains today. Do not ask your friends lest they ask you again! That is often the very reason why we do ask them. In that remarkable contrast between the ideal of Jesus, and the habit of our own age, there flashes into view the difference between the self-governed kingdom of the world, and the Kingdom of God. As one of the number listened to Him—and I am never quite sure and I quite frankly say so, whether he was impressed with the beauty of the ideal, or whether he was a cynic and laughed at its impossibility—but whether for that reason or the other, this man said to Him, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." In other words this man said, that is a counsel of perfection, surely it must be a vision of the Kingdom of God that a man shall be so forgetful of himself as not to invite friends lest they should ask him again, but that instead he shall ask and entertain and show hospitality to men who cannot return it. "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." Whether satirically, or in admiration, he meant to say, "That will be a wonderful social order, blessed is the man that is in that Kingdom, blessed is the man that lives there." Then, catching up his own figure, that of eating bread in the Kingdom, Jesus said to him, "A certain man made a great supper; and he bade many"; and went on to describe how all that were bidden made excuses; not one of them gave a reason, they made excuses. One said he had bought a piece of land and must needs go and see it—and either he was an extremely bad business man, or a very bad dissembler, for no sensible man will buy land until he has seen it. A second man had bought five yoke of oxen and must go and try them—and the same criticism applies to him as to the first. The third man said he had married a wife and therefore he could not come.

All these were excuses! "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God," said the man; and Christ replied in effect, Men do not believe that; the supper is made, the invitations have been sent out, but the men invited will not come into the Kingdom, "they all with one consent began to make excuse"; because the bidden guests have refused, the master of the feast is now calling the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind; and because these do not fill the table, he is sending forth again to constrain all to come in. God is anxious for the coming of His Kingdom because of the blessing its coming brings to men. Man is not anxious for the coming of the Kingdom, he is not prepared to pay the price of the Kingdom.

Then multitudes followed Him, and He turned and said, "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, cannot be My disciple."

"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." Do you really think so? said Christ. Listen, the man that is going to help Me to bring in that Kingdom will have to do so through the process of suffering. The man that follows Me in the building and in the battle which issue in the coming of the Kingdom must be prepared to take up his cross and follow Me. Thus He explained the reason of the severity of His terms, and at the close I read, "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto Him for to hear Him. And both the Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying, This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." He then answered their criticism of His attitude by the threefold parable of the lost silver, the lost sheep, and the lost son.

This is the outline of the great paragraph. If we think of it in its entirety, if we take that extensive outlook, we see at once that the mind of Jesus, throughout the whole process, was occupied with the work He had to do in order to bring the Kingdom in. The man who sat at meat with Him had some glean of the social order. There came to him some conception of the beneficence of that Kingdom of God in which men should cease to be selfish and should care for their fellow men, and he exclaimed, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." The mind of Christ was centered upon the ultimate, but it was conscious also of the process that leads to the ultimate; therefore, He sifted the crowds that followed Him in order to find amongst them men and women upon whom He could depend for cooperation in the work that lay before Him. My text, therefore, is Christ's enunciation of the oath of allegiance to be taken by all such as desire, not merely to be in His Kingdom and of His Kingdom, but to be workers with Him for bringing it in, and establishing in the world the order which all men admire and which God desires; but to bring in which, all men are not prepared to suffer and toil.

I am profoundly anxious that before we give a little closer attention to the actual terms of this word of Jesus, we should definitely understand to whom it was spoken, and what it means in broad outline. Jesus Christ was not here laying down the terms upon which men may be saved. He was rather laying down the terms upon which men may become fellow-workers with Himself. We have on more than one occasion in dealing with this passage drawn attention to the fact that the figures which our Lord made use of, those of building a tower, and of conducting a war, are applicable not to the men to whom He spoke, but to Himself. I do not desire to stay with that at any length, only we must understand it. He said to them, "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 in war, will not first sit down and take counsel?" by which He did not mean, if you are coming after Me you had better count the cost, but rather, I am in the world to bring in that Kingdom which you admire; I am here for the building of that city. I must count the cost. I cannot associate with Myself in the work of building, or in the work of battle, any save those who take this oath of allegiance, those who are prepared to take up their cross and follow Me. Christ is the builder. He is the King, and He sifts the rank of the multitudes that admire Him, to find the souls that are willing to suffer with Him, and die with Him, in order to accomplish His purpose.

Accepting that interpretation of the meaning of our Lord, let us observe carefully how in this paragraph our Lord revealed His consciousness of what lay before Him ere that Kingdom of God could come which the man, sitting at the table with Him, had admired. I think the subject is a very pertinent one and a very immediate one. There are multitudes of men who are still saying, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." There never were so many men in the world as now, who admire the ideals of Jesus, His ultimate purposes for men, His great teaching concerning the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity, His great conceptions for human life manifested in such remarkable words as these, "One is your Master... and all ye are brethren." That is but a brief sentence but it is the unveiling of the perfect ideal; one master, and all others brethren. I say men by the thousand today are admiring those ideals. If not in the words of the man who sat at meat with Him, still in spirit with Him, they are saying the social ideal of Jesus is perfect. "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God."

"Very well," says Christ, "if you mean it, are you prepared to go with Me along the road that I must travel in order to bring that Kingdom in? Between chaos and cosmos lies the Cross. Between the disorder that you lament, and the order that you admire, there is travail and bloodshedding and suffering. If you are coming with Me the way I am going, to the goal which you admire, you must take up your cross and follow Me."

Thus our contextual examination enables us to see what was Christ's consciousness of all that lay before Him. I turn again to words already referred to in order to discover that consciousness. He said, "Which of you, desiring to build a tower... what king, as he goeth to encounter another king in war..." "To build a tower"; "to make war upon another king"; these are significant words as revealing Christ's consciousness of what it was necessary for Him to do in order to bring in the Kingdom. All of you who are students of the Bible—not merely of small portions of it, restricted parts, but in the majesty of its sweep and the growth of its revelation—will at once recognize that when Jesus speaks of building a tower there is a remarkable suggestiveness in the illustration. The first occasion upon which we read anything of the building of a tower is in Genesis, in the account of the attempt at Babel. Why did men suggest the building of a tower, according to the Genesis story? I remember a Sunday-school teacher telling me years ago that they attempted to build a tower so high that if another flood came they could climb to the top and be safe! If you go back to the ancient story, you read "Let us make us a name." They said in effect, let us become confederate without God. There

existed in their mind the passion of humanity for the solidarity of humanity, and they were trying to realize it, without God. They said, "Let us build a tower which shall be the symbol of our independence and our federation." Exactly the same thing men are still attempting, to confederate, and disarm the nations without putting God in the forefront; and they will never succeed. The passion is a Divine one. It is the method that is wrong. Go on through the Old Testament, and we read of building over and over again; sometimes it is a city, but constantly the passion for building, for construction is manifest; it is all material, and therefore doomed to ultimate failure. I track the movement from the Babel of Genesis to Babylon of Revelation, where I hear the strange and wonderful music, "Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great." When? When the kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Christ came to build, to construct; to create the federation of men. He did not come into this world merely to save individual souls out of it; He did come to do that; but He came also to reconstruct human life, and the human order; and the mission of the King will never be complete, until the city is built, and the anthem rings through heaven and earth, and all the universe, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men." Then there will be reconstructed human society, reconstructed national life; no longer kingdoms, but the Kingdom; no longer nations, but the nation; no longer peoples, but the people. Confederacy upon the basis of loyalty to God. Thus Christ took the old figure of the Old Testament, and said, "To build a tower; to realize the aspiration of humanity; to accomplish the purpose of God; to lead broken, battered, bruised peoples into unity about the throne of God and in relationship to the most high; that is My work."

Yes, but if the mission of Christ is building, and that is constructive, the mission of Jesus is therefore that of war, and that is destructive. "To make war against another king." He was in the world to make war against the king who offered Him, in sublime impertinence, all the kingdoms of the world if He would give him one moment's homage; against the one presiding over all the things that hurt and spoil humanity. Let us gain the light of another simple saying of Jesus upon this great subject. "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth." There are only two forces at work in the moral realm; the force that gathers, and the force that scatters. The prince of the force that scatters is the devil, and the force that scatters is evil, sin. The Prince of the force that gathers is the King of kings; and the force that gathers is the force of love and light and life. Said Jesus, "I am in the world to gather, to build; but in the process, I am in the world to fight, to destroy the works of the devil, to enter into conflict even unto death with all the things that harm and spoil, to enter into the '... one death-grapple in the darkness twixt old systems and the Word.'"

This is the mission of Jesus, to build and to fight. Which of you if you had a tower to build would not select with definiteness and precision those who would help you in your building? What king of whom you ever read in the pages of history, deserving that name, if he were about to make war against another king did not count the cost, whether he could meet him who came with twenty thousand, himself only having ten thousand? In other words, said Jesus, "I need men upon whom I can depend. I am not in the world to give the world a spectacle. I am in the world to reconstruct, and I can only reconstruct as I destroy. I am a Builder, but I am a Waster too. I am here to fight in order that I may put an end to war, and lead humanity to God and so to peace." To build, and to battle. The coming of His Kingdom, of which we have spoken, can only be accomplished in this twofold way.

Nineteen centuries have passed away since He uttered these words, and the work is not yet accomplished. Nineteen centuries ago someone wrote the letter to the Hebrews, and in it these words occur, "We see not yet all things subjected to Him." The centuries have run their course, yet here and now I repeat the words of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews: "We see not yet all things subjected to Him." The tower is not built; the city of God is not established. The commonwealth does not perfectly exist; the warfare is not ended. The foes of God are in every land, and every city, and every village. I need only state that, you know it; and if you know anything of the ideal, I think you can say as much as this Pharisee long ago said, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." Yet that Kingdom is not perfectly come. The war is on; so is the building. The scaffolding is about the building; we have never yet seen all the beauty even of the outline. The enemies are all about the wall; and he who would have any share in the building must work with the sword and the trowel.

If, therefore, we are going to help Him we must take the oath of allegiance, and this is it, "Whosoever would come after Me, must take up his own cross and follow Me." In the days of Rome's greatness the Roman soldier took what was called the Sacramentum, which was an oath of allegiance, and when he did that he promised to obey his commander and not desert his standard. Our King says, "Those who would come after Me along this pathway of building and battle, toward that ultimate Kingdom, must take the Sacramentum, the oath of allegiance." What is it? Not a formula to be repeated. There is not a word sufficiently strong to express it; no vow that man can make can be depended upon in the day of crisis. The oath of allegiance is not a ceremony. Ceremony in itself forever fails, and there is none imposing and solemn enough to carry the meaning of the building and the meaning of the battle. The oath is an act, of which the Cross is the symbol. If the Cross is the symbol, what is the act? The silent, and actual surrender of the whole being to Christ. I do not know how to say this as it ought to be said! The thing I have said is a spacious thing if I did but know how to say it! If I could only utter it in the true tone, and with the right emphasis; if it could only ring as it ought to ring like a clarion call through this assembly, arresting us, startling us, there might be some hope. If I am to help to bring in the Kingdom of God, I must go after Him to building and to battle; but in order to do it I must take up my cross.

By the shores of the Galilean lake after His resurrection, He talked to Peter, and the last thing He said to him in the wonderful process of restoration from wandering to service, was this, "When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.... Follow Me." John adds in parenthesis, "This He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God." Yes, but He also spoke of the principle upon which Peter should live and serve. In that word of Jesus there is the most remarkable unveiling of the meaning of taking up the cross. "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest." So long as I am doing that, I cannot help Him to build and to fight. Soul of mine, art thou girding thyself and walking whither thou wouldest; is the underlying reason even of thy preaching the pleasing of thyself? Then thy preaching never helps Him to build or to fight. You may be very popular with your friends, but you cannot help Christ to build. But, when you stretch out your hands and let Him gird you, and let Him command you; when you will take that life of yours with all its powers and possibilities, and all its resources, and sincerely hand it over to Him; when you will take up your cross; then you will help Him to build, and you will help Him to fight; your blow will tell on the strongholds of evil, and the influence of your life will hasten the coming of the day of God.

"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." We all come as far as that. I think the whole audience comes as far as that. I do not believe there is a man or woman or child in this house who has seen anything of the vision of the Kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus, but would say, blessed is the man who lives there. Jesus saw the great multitudes; He sees them now; He holds us for the moment; let Him speak. Oh, that I could be silent and be hidden, and Christ only heard and seen! The pierced hands seem to me to be sifting amongst us tonight, beginning here in the pulpit. He is after men and women who will help Him to fight. Am I prepared? If any man will come after Me toward that Kingdom, he must come My way. If any man will help Me in the building and the battle, he must take up his own cross. That is the Sacramentum. Are we prepared to take the oath of allegiance? Presently, many of us will gather about the table which we call the sacrament; and in that sense it is well so named. Any man who sits at that table and takes that bread and fruit of the vine, who does not at the same time deny himself and realize his responsibility to the world and to Christ, is a traitor as he partakes. "This is My body broken, My blood shed, for you." Let a man examine himself, and eat. This is the sacramentum and the symbol of it. Not that the taking of the bread and wine is sufficient; but it is the outward and visible sign of the inward and invisible attitude. There may be men and women here who have never yet enlisted under the banner of Christ, who have never yet begun to follow Him even for their own soul's salvation; let such begin to follow Him tonight for His sake, for the sake of the world, for the sake of His battle and His building; and if you will do so, I invite you to this table. Tonight there is no after-meeting, no inquiry room where we can speak together; none is necessary. Sit at this table, as one who says, "Tonight I will take up my cross and follow Him." By such act you take the oath of allegiance. God grant that the King may tonight find some men and women for His building and His battle.

123 - Luke 15:2 - Jesus and Sinners

Jesus and Sinners

This man receiveth sinners.

Luke 15:2

These words were uttered in condemnation of Jesus of Nazareth, and yet to us they contain an inclusive statement of the truth concerning Him as the Saviour of men. It is a very interesting thing to notice in the reading of the Gospel stories how the wonderful personality of Jesus transmuted things spoken in condemnation into declarations of commendation. Indeed, it may fairly be said that one might gather from these Gospel narratives a selection of passages which would constitute a fifth Gospel, and we might call that the Gospel according to the enemies of Jesus Christ. They said of Him, with disdain in every tone of their question, "Is not this the carpenter?" By which they meant, "We know all about Him. He is one of us. Who is He that He should set Himself up as a teacher in the Synagogue at Nazareth, where He has wrought at the carpenter's shop?" Today we are asking the same question about Him, in another tone, knowing that by the lowliness of the long years in the carpenter's shop He came into close comradeship with all toilers forevermore. They said of Him upon one occasion, "By Beelzebub the prince of the devils casteth He out devils," and thus came very near to the confines of unpardonable sin. Yet even that has come to be in some senses a truth, for He has overcome the prince of ill, and compels him into the service of perfecting the saints by testing. Said they of Him in that dark and overwhelming hour of His supreme agony, flinging the cruel taunt into His face when He was all alone in His sorrow, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." In that sentence, all unknowingly, they uttered the deepest truth about that death. Had He saved Himself He never could have saved others; but because He could not save Himself He is able still to save all who come unto God by Him. Among all these statements none is more wonderful, because none is more simple, than this statement of my text, "This Man receiveth sinners."

Let us endeavor to understand this criticism. First of all, I pray you mark that it is a criticism. The first word of this chapter links it, and indeed the great and glorious threefold parable which follows, with all that immediately preceded. Jesus had been saying some strange and hard things in the listening ears of the multitude. I do not hesitate to say that they were strange and hard things. I do not

hesitate to declare that many of you who are children of God never read these words without somehow, in the deepest of you, half wishing He had never said them. I do not defend the wish. I know that when my heart rises in half rebellion against some of the words I have read tonight it is because of some evil thing that abides in my life. Even today, though nineteen centuries have demonstrated the imperial dignity of the Christ, and though this whole worshiping congregation is prepared to acknowledge His Lordship, still, when He stands confronting us and says to us that unless we hate father, mother, wife, brethren, sisters, and our own lives, we cannot be His disciples, we are startled, we are afraid, we are half inclined to draw back from every attempt at discipleship. Yet Luke tells us of that strange thing, which has been repeated ever since, and is being repeated still, that when Christ said His severest things the greatest sinners crowded to Him. Severity which on other lips would have repelled, attracted, for there was something besides severity in the tone of His voice, something in Himself which, in spite of the fierce scorching fire of His severest word, drew men to Him. "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto Him for to hear Him." The Pharisees observed that when these people came to Him He received them, He received them in friendliness, He received them in the very spirit of comradeship. He did not stand aloof from them notwithstanding that He had said such severe things. He was even prepared to sit at the table and eat with them. "And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." This exclamation of criticism was a revelation of their sense that His action was not in keeping with His teaching. The severity of His ethic did not seem to harmonize, as they looked at Him, with the looseness of His friendship for these men.

I go one step further, and ask you to notice that what they said of Him was perfectly true, had He been such as they were. They meant to say that no man can take fire into his bosom and not be burned. They meant what some of you remember being told when you were children, You cannot touch pitch without being defiled. They meant, if this man becomes the friend, the comrade, the companion of sinners, he will be contaminated. I think there was a tone of genuine disappointment in their voices. They had hoped great things of Jesus—and that is no piece of imagination, for you cannot read these stories without seeing that at the commencement of His public ministry the rulers, the men in authority, the teachers, were interested in Him, followed Him, listened to Him, invited Him to their houses. As they watched Him receiving sinners they said to themselves, This man is going to spoil His career. He is going to cut the nerve of His influence. They were quite right, if He had been such as they were. There is a young man in this house, perchance, who quite recently came up to the great city. Show me his friends and I will tell you what he will be in half a dozen years. If he is making his first friendships with sinful men, he will be spoiled, ruined by his comradeships. He cannot escape it. I should say with keen and bitter disappointment of some young man, full of promise, who made his companionships among sinful men, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Yet nineteen centuries have passed away and a Christian congregation gathered together in the heart of this city hears this text, and to all such as know Christ it sings the one anthem that is worth singing. "This Man receiveth sinners." How are we to account for this fact?

The text is a great text, because the Person concerning Whom the statement was made was a great Person. The text has become an Evangel because of the unique personality of the Man at Whom the Pharisees were looking. They did not understand Him. They did not know how He stood at infinite distance from themselves and from all other men. They did not understand how when He received men to Himself, instead of being contaminated by the pollution which He received, the men were uplifted and healed by the purity which He communicated. It is by that distance which is yet nearness, and by that nearness which is yet distance that my text is made a great Evangel.

Let us, then, consider two matters: first, the Person referred to, and then the pronouncement.

Reverently, then, let us attempt first to see "This Man." I am going to speak of four things about Him; of two in which He is in close association with all of us, and of two in which He stands at infinite distance from us. Before naming these, let me say it is not by the things of identification that I am helped or saved, but by the things of separation is it made possible that I may come near to Him and find all the virtue and healing of His life made mine.

First, the two things in which He is identified with me; He was a man of probation, and He was a man of sorrows. Then the two things in which He stands far away from me. He was a man of victory, and He was a Man of atonement. If I find Him near to me as I think of the first two, I shall yet by the contemplation of what He was in these first two respects discover how unlike Him I am; the very likeness will reveal the unlikeness, the very nearness will create a sense of infinite distance. It is when I see Him in the twofold fact of His separation and distance that I shall begin to hope that I may indeed come into a fellowship with Him which is age-abiding.

A Man of probation. He was a Man Who lived His human life upon the same level on which I have to live mine. He was a Man of toil. He was a Man of temptation. He was a Man of trust.

He was a Man of toil. This is an old story, full of beauty, yet it is well for us to think of it for a passing moment. I do not think that in this particular Jesus Christ entered into limitation or suffering. Toil is the proper lot of humanity. God did not intend that any human being should live apart from toil. I know there are very many people who read the Genesis story, and imagine that man commenced to work after the fall. But that is not the Genesis story. The story of Genesis is that God put unfallen man into the garden "to dress it and to keep it." There are some very curious ideas about the garden of Eden. Half the things which men attack in Genesis are not in

it. Some people have an idea that the garden of Eden was a garden something like those which we see as we travel through this beautiful land of ours, with flower beds carefully laid out. I do not so read my Bible. I think the garden of Eden was a mass of potentiality, waiting for development. The Lord God planted it, filled it with possibilities, and man was put into it to bring out what God had put in. It was a garden waiting for the touch of man's hand in order that there might come out of its russet commonplace the flaming beauties of all the flowers. Man was made for toil. This Man was a toiler. He knew what it was to have to face a day's work in order to win a day's bread. God have mercy upon the man who does not know what that is! I care not whether it be with sweat of brain or brawn, every man should earn his living, or cease to live. I want that some of the comfort of the contemplation should come to you. Some of you are almost sighing as you think of tomorrow morning. Remember this Man is your comrade tomorrow morning, just as much as He is your Lord here and now. When tomorrow morning comes, if your calling is an honorable and holy calling, you are in fellowship with Jesus just as much as you are in the holy place.

A Man of temptation, He felt the force of temptation keenly because of the perfection of His humanity. I think that is a statement with which some of you, at first, will be inclined to join issue. There is a popular conception in the world that the proportion in which a man is morally weak is the proportion in which he feels temptation. Not so. It is the strong man, physically, mentally, spiritually, morally, who feels the full force of temptation. A man weakened in his moral fiber by sin is weakened in his sensitiveness in the presence of temptation. No man has had anything to do with young life as it turns to Jesus Christ without having had this question asked, "How is it that since I gave myself to Christ and began the Christian life I have been more tempted than I was before?" The answer is, You are not more tempted, but the very life of Christ in you, strengthening you, makes you keen, quick, sensitive to the force of temptation. In the perfect man temptation has a larger area of attack. The Perfect Man, "This Man" was a Man Who felt temptation as it came against Him through every vulnerable point of His being. The story of the temptation in the wilderness is not merely the story of one hour, one event, one lonely incident, it is a story which reveals the lines along which temptation always comes. Temptation is first directed against the physical, then against the spiritual, then against the vocational, and it has no other avenue of approach. In proportion as a man is physically strong he feels the force of material temptation. In proportion as a man is strong spiritually he feels the appeal of the spiritual assault. In proportion as a man sees clearly his vocation, and earnestly desires to fulfil it, he feels keenly the suggestion that he should reach it by a short cut and an easy road. He was a Man of temptation, and there is no temptation that assaults my soul but that He felt its force.

A Man of trust, He lived a life of dependence upon the highest. He received His messages, His words, and His life from Another. He was a Man Who lived so far the limited life of humanity that He could say, "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him.... I do nothing of Myself, but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things." He was a Man of probation, living upon my level, toiling, tempted, trusting.

Yet in some senses He comes nearer to us when I say that He was a Man of sorrows, entering into all the experiences of human suffering. The sorrow of poverty, the sorrow of loneliness, and that most terrible sorrow of all to sensitive souls, the sorrow born of sympathy.

The sorrow of poverty. I know there are those who very glibly tell us that poverty is a blessing. Who said so? Whoever said so, it is a lie. No one ever said so, it seems to me, save such as live apart from poverty, and contemplate it from a distance. I know perfectly well that there have been many souls who have been poor in this world's goods, who have recognized that God was overruling the pain of poverty for the making of character. That is quite another matter. He transmutes the base into the pure, but poverty is no part of God's provision for the race; it is a part of man's mismanagement of what God has provided for the race. This Man was poor. You can tell all the story of His human poverty in a very few sentences, tragic sentences. Chapter one, There was no room for Him in the inn. Chapter two, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Chapter three, What shall we do with Him? He is dead. Bury Him in a charity grave in a rich man's garden. Do not imagine that so keenly sensitive and fine a soul as that of Christ was not conscious of the limitations of poverty.

But there was the sorrow of loneliness. Think how lonely a Man He was. No one ever understood Him. The rulers were interested in Him, but they never understood Him, and at last became His enemies, hunting Him to death. His mother never understood Him. I for one am inclined to pause in the presence of that and think, for if a man's mother does not understand him, he is generally unutterably alone. I think we of the Protestant Church have made a great mistake in our neglect of the virgin mother. I believe that in very deed and truth she is to be held in high and holy honor. We will not worship her. That is sacrilege and blasphemy, but we will hold her in high honor, highly favored amongst women. Yet she never understood Him. Her misunderstanding was the misunderstanding of love, but it was misunderstanding. The souls who came into closest touch with Him were the souls of such as did the will of God first, last and always. Did they understand Him? "They all forsook Him, and fled." His pathway became more and more lonely, until at last there was no eye to pity, no heart to sympathize. Moreover, He was a Man of sorrows in that final and most terrible way, of the keen sensitiveness of soul and spirit which gathers all the pain of others into its consciousness. I am now saying something in which perhaps you do not follow me or agree with me at once. I make my appeal to the fathers and mothers. Tell me, when do you suffer most, when you yourself are in physical pain, or when your child is in physical pain? If you have ever stood by the side of some suffering loved one, you have felt honestly that you could have sung for joy if you could have gathered that sorrow

and pain into your own life and freed your loved one from it. Forgive that low level of illustration, and come into the presence of this Man of spirit so perfectly poised and so full of sensitiveness that every tear fell upon His heart like a storm. Among all the stories there is nothing which so beautifully illustrates this as the story of how He wept in the presence of the tears of Mary. There is something about that story very difficult of interpretation. Commentators—I make my apology to them—have been busy trying to account for the tears of Jesus. Read the story simply, and you will know why He wept. He wept out of sympathy with Mary's tears. But, you say, that can never be. He knew that within an hour he would unlock the tomb and give her brother back to her. There, again, you are measuring Him by yourself, as the Pharisees did. I am not criticizing you. I would say the same thing. If you were in great sorrow and I came to see you in your home, and knew that by some act I could remove the cause of your sorrow, I really do not believe I could weep with you in your sorrow, I should be so eager to bring you the joy. He will give to you, His trusting ones, heaven presently, but he weeps with you today in the midst of your sorrow. He knows perfectly well that out of all the darkness He is bringing light, but in every pang that rends the heart the Man of sorrows has His part. We read that little phrase, "He was moved with compassion," very carelessly. His whole inner life was shaken and swept as by a tempest in the presence of human need and human sorrow. What the ancient prophet said of Him long ago was literally true, "His visage was so marred more than any man." He was a Man of sorrows.

As we have contemplated the things of His nearness to us we have all been conscious that we are away from Him. A Man of toil. How have we failed in our toil! A Man of temptation. How have we yielded thereto! A Man of trust. How have we trembled in trust! A Man of sorrows! Oh, heart of mine, was there ever sorrow like His? He is near to me, and yet away from me in the very facts of His nearness.

So I come necessarily to other things. He was a Man of victory. There is the difference. I have already hinted at it, now I declare it. Along this way of the probationary life in the midst of these sorrows that have come to me, I have failed. I have failed in my toil and done it meanly, ah me, how often! I have failed in temptation, yielding to the seducing allurements of evil. I have failed in trust. But this Man never failed. This Man never failed in toil. When He made yokes in which the cattle should plow the plains of Bethshan, He made them perfectly. When He, the house-builder, erected a house upon the rock He knew, that which Michaelangelo learned from Him, that angels of God saw the hidden things, and they were perfectly wrought. I have failed: He never. In temptation He refused every seduction of evil and trod the lonely way of truth and uprightness, even though it was a way of suffering and of shame. He was a Man of victory. Victory over circumstances, victory over sin, victory over sorrow, victory over all the forces that were against Him, moving in quiet, kingly dignity against all difficulties, until at last He stood in the midst of a group of men and said to them, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth." Here is the difference between this Man and myself. It is not the ultimate difference. It is not the final distinction, it is only the first, but it is so great as to make me know that I am other than He, and He is other than I. He is the one Man in all the centuries Who by common consent of the Church, and of the world, so far as it has thought, is the sinless, Perfect, victorious Man, climbing to the throne of the mightiest, not upon the policy of cunning, or the force of arms, but upon integrity of character and perfection of ideal in thinking and speaking and doing. How far am I away from Him!

Finally, this Man became the Man of atonement, the One Who was able at last to ransom His brother, the One Who by dying entered into an experience which had no true place in the story of His life save as in it He was dying in the stead of another. This Man, and I cannot so end the story: I feel as you feel that when I approach this final fact I am in the presence of something which demands a new term, a new explanation. A Man, yea, verily, a Man of probation and of sorrow, yet a Man of victory, and of such victory that I am compelled to say that He is infinitely other than Man. A Man through Whose heart it is possible for God to outwork into human vision infinite and eternal things. A Man Who has become the perfect instrument of the Divine speech and of the Divine working, and of the Divine heart of Love. A Man into the presence of Whose death I come, and say with the old Roman centurion who saw more that day than he had ever seen before, "Truly this was the Son of God." This Man, ye Pharisees of old, ye have mis-measured Him, and ye philosophers of today, ye do not know Him. This Man, so near that I can touch His warm flesh and call Him Brother, so far that I cannot see the ultimate height of Him, or encompass the full blaze of His glory. This Man, if we see Him thus, of the race and apart from it; kin of it and King of it, near to it and far away from it, immanent, transcendent, then we shall hear the Gospel. "This Man receiveth sinners."

Now for a closing word concerning the pronouncement. What is this that they said of Him? Let us dismiss them. We have no more to do with the Pharisees. What is this that we are saying of Him? What is this the Spirit of God says of Him? What is this the Bride says of Him? "This Man receiveth sinners." "Receiveth" here means infinitely more than we sometimes mean by the word. I shall do no violence to the thought behind this word "receiveth" if I translate it thus, This Man receiveth unto Himself sinners. This Man does not patronize sinners. He takes them into His comradeship, makes familiar friends of them, takes them to His heart. That is the Gospel. He is not high seated on a throne bending down to you and offering you pardon if you will kiss His scepter. He is by you in the pew, He is close to you in your sin, and He will take you as you are, with the poison and the virus within you, put His arms about you, and press you into a great comradeship.

These men said, If He does this He will be contaminated. What was the fact? He received them, and never a dimming of His white

purity, but rather an ending of their scarlet corruption. He took to Himself Mary of Magdala, possessed of seven devils, embittered, hot, worldly, evil in her temper and disposition, and she became the lone watcher through the night of His burial, the first preacher of the resurrection. Down in the quiet village outside Bedford is a tinker, and he swears and blasphemes so that even the low and the lewd are ashamed of him. "This Man receiveth sinners." He received this tinker, wrapped him to His heart, communicated to him His own purity, opened his eyes, and he became the celestial dreamer.

Those are far distant examples, and if I stay in the Gospel story you feel the distance. You are not sure even about Bunyan. Then there are witnesses here tonight. Here is a man who was a low-down, lost drunkard in New York streets, and was brought into the old Hippodrome in the days when Dwight Lyman Moody was preaching this Gospel there. "This Man" took him to His heart and the passion for drink died and the man was remade. Let the preacher tell his story, at least in such sentences as he may utter. "This Man" has received him also. Not yet is the work all done. Much is there yet to do, but I bear witness in your presence tonight that the tides of His life have quenched fires of passion, stilled tempests of upheaval, and are leading me out toward the ultimate. "This Man receiveth sinners." This is the Evangel. This is the Gospel. There is none other.

You never can be such as He in that respect. You never can be a Saviour, receiving other men, communicating your purity. You can share the fellowship of His sufferings, not as you bring men to yourself to save them, but as you lead them to Him that He may save them. "This Man receiveth sinners."

124 - Luke 18:1 - Prayer or Fainting

Prayer and Fainting

They ought always to pray, and not to faint.

Luke 18:1

Such is Luke's interpretation of the meaning of the parable which Jesus uttered to His disciples concerning the uprighteous judge "which feared not God, and regarded not man," but who granted the request of the importunate widow from the purely selfish motive which he expressed graphically and accurately in the words, "lest she wear me out by her continual coming." This is one of the most remarkable things in some senses that the Bible says anywhere about the prayer life, "They ought always to pray, and not to faint." It is one of those statements that stagger, and in the presence of which Christian men and women are always in danger of indulging in some measure of that criticism which is the outcome of unbelief. The first objection raised is to the word "always." It is suggested that this does not quite mean what it says, that the evident intention is that we should be men and women of prayer, having our appointed times, and seasons, and habits of prayer; that believing in the power of prayer, we ought to take advantage of the great possibility whenever we are able so to do, whenever we are in need. That is not what the text says. That is not the interpretation placed upon the parable of Jesus by Luke. The text says, "always to pray." If this is one of the most remarkable things said concerning prayer, and one which does undoubtedly challenge the criticism of our unbelief, it does not stand alone in Scripture. There are other passages that indicate the same necessity. When he is closing his letter to the Thessalonians Paul utters in epigrammatic form great injunctions concerning the Christian life. One of them is, "Pray without ceasing." Of this it is also affirmed that he did not literally mean that we are to pray without ceasing. We are to pray every day, two or three times a day, as regularly as possible. We are to be men and women of prayer. But that is not what the apostle wrote. He wrote, "Pray without ceasing." You will not at all misunderstand these introductory words. I recognize the difficulty. You say, I have been too busy today with work for God to take time in prayer. I was so pressed with the business cares of last week that I had very little time for prayer. I prayed at morning, noon and night, and often in the midst of the city's rush and din, when some great need crowded on my heart I lifted that heart to God. I prayed often, but I did not pray always, I did not pray without ceasing. I quite recognize the difficulty; but I am so perfect a believer in the inspired infallibility of Scripture that I abide by the words of it, "always" "without ceasing." It behooves us, therefore, to ask very carefully what this really means. I submit to you immediately that this particular text of mine in which Luke gives the inspired interpretation of the meaning of the Master's parable lifts the whole subject of prayer on to a very high level, and reveals to us the fact that there is infinitely more in prayer than the offering of petitions, than the uttering of words, than the taking of time, than the attitude of the body or of the mind; that there are deeper depths and higher heights; and that if we would enter into the prayer life with all its fulness of virtue and of victory we must discover what this really means, "They ought always to pray," "Pray without ceasing."

First of all, I would ask you to notice very carefully the slight change in the Revision which is an interesting and important one. The Authorized Version reads, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." The Revised Version reads, "They ought always to pray, and not to faint." To whom was He speaking? If you go back to the previous chapter you will see how wonderful a chapter it is, full of solemn warnings and prophetic utterances, strange and mysterious many of them. At its twenty-second verse I find these words, "And He said unto the disciples, The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it." Then He continues His teaching of the disciples right on to the end of that chapter, and immediately and in that connection,

whether uttered at that point or not is of no consequence, in that relationship, according to the placing of the story by Luke, He spoke the parable "unto them," that is to His own disciples, "that they ought always to pray, and not to faint." The distinction is an important one, and it is fundamental to our meditation. I am not for a moment suggesting that Jesus Christ had one philosophy of life for His disciples and another for men of the world. On the other hand, I affirm that He had one philosophy of life, and He called all men to accept it. Here, however, He is laying His instructions upon such as have heard His call, and having obeyed it, have become His disciples. They are such as are described in the letter to the Hebrews—which I believe Luke wrote, although the thinking is the thinking of Paul—"He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." If a man do not believe these things He will never pray. If these things are indeed believed, if this is indeed the truth concerning God accepted by the heart and mind, then of such as believe, the Lord by His parable affirms that "They ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Having drawn attention to the fact that these words were spoken to disciples, to those who believe that God is and that He is a Rewarder, let us notice the circumstances of this discourse. He is talking to His disciples in view of the fact that the life of faith is a strenuous life, characterized by stress and strain and conflict and difficulty. Mark how He ends His exposition of His parable, "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" In the previous chapter I find Him telling these men that to gain their life they must lose it, and to find the real value of eternal things they must turn themselves away from all the allurements of the material and the sensual. He is putting into contrast the life of faith with the life that is lived on the material level. I turn over the pages of the Gospel of Luke a little farther on and I find Him saying almost exactly the same thing. Speaking of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and of the fact that in those days men would faint for fear, He charged His own to watch and make supplication. So that the message of this parable and the declaration of this text have application to such as are His disciples, and declare to them the supreme truth concerning the secret of prevailing life in the midst of the stress and strain of discipleship. I need hardly stay to argue the fact that the Christian life is one of stress and strain. I am perfectly well aware that there are senses in which it is a life of peace, and ease, and quietness. I remember the great promises of Scripture concerning peace for the children of God. There is granted to the child of God the peace from God our Father. There is granted to the child of God the peace of God in the heart, and, moreover, the presence and comradeship of the God of peace. Yet these very facts create the strain and stress and difficulty. There is no man in this house who is attempting to live a godly life who does not know the absolute truth of this. Surrounded every day by things material, in the midst of an age which in its outlook is as absolutely godless as any age which has preceded it, it is not easy to live the life of godliness. It is not easy to bear perpetual and prevailing testimony to the unseen things to the ordinary crowd of men and women with whom the man of faith comes into contact, living, as they do, as though there were no God, no hereafter, no spiritual verities. To live the life of godliness in the midst of this age is still to live the life of conflict. Because of the allied forces of godlessness, the Christian life is the strenuous life, and there are scores of men and women in this house to-night—perhaps the affirmation is a strong one, but I believe it to be true—who are weary in the midst of the Christian life, who are tired because of the pressure of the forces of the world upon them—fainting, filled with weariness. To these people Christ says, "They ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Before laying further emphasis upon the "always" let me take the terms of my text in order to understand Christ's philosophy of life for His own disciples. What is the real suggestiveness of this word "pray"? If you take it as to its first simplicity and intention, it means—and this is not complete but it will help us to reach the complete thought—to wish forward, to desire toward the ultimate; or if you will have that interpreted by the language of the apostle in one of his greatest epistles, that to the Colossians, it means the seeking of things which are above. That does not at all suggest that the Christian is forevermore to be sighing after heaven, and expressing his discontent with the present world, and longing to escape from it; but rather that the Christian is to seek the upper things, setting his mind upon them, and everywhere and everywhen he is to be hoping for, and endeavoring after, the ultimate. That is the simple meaning of prayer. Reaching forward, wishing forward, desiring forward, seeking the upper, the higher, the nobler. So that in prayer there is included, first, always first, the thought of worship and adoration, that content of the heart with the perfection and acceptability and goodness of the will of God which bows the soul in worship. That is the first attitude of prayer. To pray is forevermore to set the life in its inspiration and in all its endeavor toward that ultimate goal of the glory of God, "Being justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through Whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and let us rejoice in hope of the glory of God." That is the first quantity of quality of prayer. The vision of the ultimate with a corresponding attitude of life toward it, which is that of perpetual endeavor after it. This means not merely that in the midst of battle and strife and din and smoke, and wounding and blood and tears, that we see a better day, a golden age, but that the soul, seeing that golden age as in the will of God, and realizing that the supreme fact of the vision is that of God Himself, the supreme attitude of the life becomes that of submission, and the supreme effort of the life is that of co-operation with God toward the ultimate upon which His heart is set. That is prayer. Prayer is not merely position of body, or of mind. Prayer is not merely asking for something in order that I may obtain it for myself. Prayer forevermore says when it asks for anything, "Not my will, but Thine be done," which means, if the thing I ask for, however much I desire it, however good it seems to me to be, will hinder or postpone, by a hair's breadth or a moment, the ultimate victory, will be denied to me. Those who know the real secret of the prayer life have discovered the fact that denial is over and over again the graciousness of overwhelming answer. To pray is to desire forward, to seek

forward, to endeavor after. It is to have a new vision of God, and of the ways of God, to be overwhelmingly convinced of the perfection of God, of the perfection of all He does, of the certainty of His ultimate victory, and then to respond to the profound and tremendous conviction by petition, by praise, and by endeavor; and so men "ought always to pray" and to "pray without ceasing."

Now notice another term of our text, "to faint." This is our Lord's recognition of the strenuous nature of the life of the believing soul. What is this word, "to faint"? Quite simply, to be paralyzed, to be weak, to be worthless, to feel the force dying and the vigor passing, to be beaten, to be broken down and helpless. I need stay no longer with definition at that point.

We may now consider our Lord's philosophy of life. He puts these two things into opposition. He declares in effect that this is the alternative before every one of us, to pray or to faint. There is no suggestion of a middle course. To pray or to faint. According to this word, this inspired interpretation of the meaning of our Lord's parable and teaching, if men pray they do not faint. If men faint it is because they have ceased to pray. If men do not pray they faint. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." Interpret your prayer by the negation. Prayer is the opposite of fainting. Fainting is a sudden sense of inability and helplessness, the cessation of activity, weariness which is almost, and ultimately is, death. Pray, and do not faint. To pray is to have the vision clear, the virtue mighty, the victory assured. To pray is to "mount up with wings as eagles," to "run and not be weary," to "walk, and not faint." Suffer me one moment with that. Have you imagined that the great Isaiah at that point failed in his rhetorical method, and that having said the great thing, there was nothing greater to say, and therefore he climbed down, and there was an anticlimax, and perhaps something of bathos? It is not so. As a matter of fact, he began with the easiest thing of all to "mount up with wings as eagles." Then he took the next thing in the order of difficulty, to run, and the hardest thing last, to walk. In the day when you first caught your vision of God you mounted up with wings like eagles. I am not undervaluing that day. Thank God for the experience. We thank God for it whenever it returns. He gives us the vision ever and anon, and we "mount up with wings as eagles." A defeated and disappointed man once said, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! then would I fly away and be at rest." What a mistake. A man with the wings of a dove could not fly away and be at rest. When the inspired seer speaks of a man flying, he says "wings as eagles." Mark the significance of it. The eagle is forevermore the symbol of Deity. To wait upon God is to use the pinions of Deity, and mount and soar away. Every young believer has those pinions and that great beginning, and God gives them to us ever and anon all the pilgrimage through. Presently, however, there comes a day when there are no wings and no mounting above; we must run through. Yet "they shall run, and not be weary." And yet there comes another day, some of you are in it now, it is almost night, so dark has it all become. You cannot run, the way is not clear enough, the enemies are too many, there are difficulties all about you—you must walk, "They shall walk, and not faint." Mark Isaiah's word and Christ's, "They shall walk, and not faint," "They ought always to pray, and not to faint." Prayer is the opposite of fainting. It is mounting with wings. It is running without weariness. It is walking the uphill, rough and rugged road, and never fainting. That is Christ's great philosophy of life. If men pray they do not faint. If men faint it is because they have forgotten to pray. "They ought always to pray, and not to faint."

How are we to do it? Take the parable and notice carefully one fact about it. It is an exposition of the philosophy of the prayer life by contrast, by contrast all the way through it. The moment you forget that, you miss the beauty and the glory of it. First, all that the judge was, God is not. The judge did not fear God, that is to say, he was not submitted to the highest authority. He did not regard men. He was absolutely careless, and you may sum up the whole thing in Christ's illuminative word, he was unrighteous. All that the judge was, God is not. God regards man. Mark the word of Jesus, "longsuffering over them." God is righteous. "He will avenge," and the word "avenge" there is not the word "revenge." It means to do justice to. The widow came to the unrighteous judge and said to him, "Avenge me of mine adversary," Do me justice in connection with my adversary. He was an unjust judge, an unrighteous man. God is righteous and just and will do justice by all who come to Him. That is the first contrast. There is another contrast, and it is the second contrast that we often miss. In order to persuade the unjust judge importunity was necessary. Importunity is never necessary to persuade God. That is the point where we generally break down in this parable. We make the contrast between the unjust judge and God, but not between the consequent action of the widow and that of the Christian. This parable is constantly taken as teaching that we are to be importunate toward God. It teaches us rather that if we are always praying, importunity in the sense of begging is not necessary. The prayer life does not consist of perpetual repetition of petitions. The prayer life consists of life that is always upward, and onward, and Godward. The passion of the heart is for the Kingdom of God; the devotion of the mind is to His will; the attitude of the spirit is conformity thereto; and the higher we climb in the realm of prayer, the more unceasing will prayer be, and the fewer will be the petitions. It is the opposite of importunity that is taught here. The thought that Jesus gave of God is that of One compassionate, just, mighty, quick to respond to the forward wish of the weakest soul, so that in the midst of the stress and strain and struggle there need be no fainting. The life uplifted in prayer, the whole desire Godward, brings an answer, and there is no comparison equal to showing the celerity of that answer. Quicker than thought or the lightning flash. There is in one of the old prophets an illustration of this in one realm of prayer, where he speaks of God as "a God ready to pardon." This is only an illustration, but notice it. There is a man here tonight while I preach, God grant there may be, who is tired of his sin, broken-hearted on account of it, who determines that without any after-meeting he will seek the pardon of his God. Will he have to be importunate and wait and beg and beseech? No, "ready to pardon." Yonder is a great battleship, the decks are cleared for action, every man is at his post. At last, as the awful moment arrives, the commanding officer says, "Ready?" "Ready, aye ready!" comes back the answer, and he gives the order, "Fire!" You know what happens. That is slow work compared to God's answer. He is ready to pardon, ready

to answer your prayer. The unjust judge did not regard God or man. He was selfish and self-centered. Because the widow went and went and went to him, to get rid of her, to save her bruising him, he gave her what she wanted. That is the picture by contrast. God is the opposite of that. Your method in prayer is the opposite of that. Therefore men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." Because of such a God, so full of compassion, so full of might, so full of infinite and strict integrity and justice, the forward wish of the weakest, feeblest, frailest soul brings an answer. He is a God ready to hear and to answer.

If all this be true, if this be what our Lord said to men, and if Luke's inspired interpretation of the meaning be correct, allow me for a moment to lay emphasis upon another word in the text, "They ought always to pray." It is a duty, not a privilege. Men ought. All omnipotence is at the disposal of the saint who prays. God is willing, then men ought to pray, which means, men ought not to faint. There ought to be no fainting. You will understand me, I am not preaching to you. I am talking in the presence of Christ's words with you. I have fainted and still do faint: I ought not. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." I have no right to faint. Oh, but how strenuous is the life! I know a little of it. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." How fierce the battle! I know something of the conflict, but I ought not to faint, because I can pray. All which means that in God there is resource equal to every demand that can be made upon the trusting soul. There is no hour so dark but that if I will stay upon Him—once again to use Isaiah's fine language—I shall discover His readiness to support me as I stay. There is no battle so fierce but that if I pray I may not stand, "withstand,... and, having done all, to stand." No temptation so swift, so sudden or subtle, but that if I am always praying I may not find at once the wisdom and the might that enable me to overcome. Men ought not to faint, because men ought to pray.

The whole life of the believer should be prayer—and this is the summary and conclusion—every act, every word, every wish. The act that is not prayer in the ultimate, and the word which is not prayer in the last analysis, and the wish that is not prayer in the profoundest depth, are to be put away, they do not become the life of faith. They are things that produce fainting. How can every act be prayer? Ask yourself about your next act, why you are doing it. The Sabbath will soon be over, and we shall leave it behind, for it is the day of prayer. To-morrow morning you will face the calling of the day, in the shop, the office, the school; in professional life, in the Houses of Parliament, in whatever is your calling. What are you rising early and toiling all the day for? The answer of the average man will suit me for the moment. That answer will be, I am working for my living. Perfectly right, but what do you want to live for? Why should you endeavor to support your life and keep it? You have been overwhelmed with the stress and strain of actual physical and mental toil, and you are away to the mountains, to the sea for rest. Why are you going for rest? Why do you want rest? I ask. That I may regain my strength. For what? Cross-examine yourself and see the meaning of your activity. Analyze your own wishing and desire, and see what inspiration lies at the back of it. If by His infinite grace and by the indwelling of the Holy Christ Himself, at the back of all the activity and of all desire and all speech there is the perpetual aspiration, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," then every act, every thought, is prayer. "To labor is to pray" they say. That depends. If your labor is merely for the making of your own name and fortune, if your labor is to build up your own reputation and to gratify your own sensual desires, then to labor is not to pray. If the reason of this day's toil is the maintenance of a life that is God's, all the forces of which are at His disposal to work His will according to His own appointment, then that life is prayer, and the mountain climb, the rest day by the sea, the toil in the shop and office, the drudgery of professional routine, and the agony of life, all are prayer.

"They ought always to pray, and not to faint." If we do not pray always, we never pray. The man who makes prayer a scheme by which occasionally he tries to get something for himself has not learned the deep, profound secret of prayer. Prayer is life passionately wanting, wishing, desiring God's triumph. Prayer is life striving, toiling everywhere and everywhen for that ultimate victory. When men so pray they do not faint. They mount up with wings as eagles, they run without weariness, they tramp the hardest, roughest road, and do not faint.

My desire tonight has been to arrest irreverent and unintelligent prayer, to indicate a line of contrast which will reveal to men the fact that prayer is infinitely larger than we have often thought it to be. I charge upon you my comrades in this life of faith, do not degrade prayer to a low standard of experience, or make it that by which you attempt to gain things—and mark the startling language of Scripture—that you may spend them on your own lusts. "Ye have not because ye ask not," or "ye have not because ye ask amiss." What is it to ask amiss? To ask for things that I may spend them on my own desires. That is praying that is not answered. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." I have come near fainting often. I have fainted mentally, spiritually. The fault is mine. I pray that I may learn the infinite lesson of Jesus that God is other than the unjust judge, and that my method with Him may be other than that of the importunate widow, and that if I do but know what prayer really is, I live homed in omnipotence, and I need never faint by the way. May this strength be ours.

125 - Luke 18:14 - Exaltation and Humbling

Exaltation and Humbling

Everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Luke 18:14

This is Christ's application of His own parable. Whatever other suggestiveness it may have, it is quite certain that here we are at the heart of the teaching. Most of the local color has faded from the picture; the temple has gone, and therefore prayers therein have ceased; the Pharisee and the publican have changed their names. The principles revealed in the parable abide until this hour; the man who exalts himself is still among us, though the form of his prayer may be altered; the sin-stricken soul still humbles himself and uses the identical prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner"; and Christ still watches both, and pronounces exactly the same judgment, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

The passion for perfection is in every life. Many men give up the search after it in despair. Many have wrong conceptions of what perfection is. Many others are seeking by false means to attain it. The passion for it, nevertheless, is found in every life.

The more conscious a man is of the strange and subtle forces within his own life; the more conscious he is of the complexity of his own nature; the more he is surprised by the dawning lights that break out of his own life, or by the shadows which reveal the possibilities of his own evil; the more he is conscious of the conflict within his own personality; the more that man is conscious also of the possibility of some high and noble destiny; the more that man hungers after realization. We all desire exaltation in the true sense of the word. None of us desires to come to the humbling of defeat, disaster, despair.

Listen to the voice within; the voice of your own life. It will startle you. It will inspire you. It will fill you with despair. It will sing the song of your possibilities. It will change the dirge of your helplessness. Such listening will make you desire the fulfilment of your life, the realization of possibilities that are within you. Then, this is the word of Christ to you, "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Whoso shall take the business of his own life into his own hands, and attempt to realize it according to his own way and his own wisdom, shall ruin it; but whoso shall recognize that his life is so wonderful a thing that he himself cannot know it, cannot legislate for it, cannot realize it, and shall humble himself according to the true law of that life, that man shall find it, that man shall come to life, not foreign to his own nature, but to the realization of what God meant him to be when God made him man.

What then is the supreme sin of all life? It is that of self-exaltation. All the sins of man's life are the issue of this sin; not lust, slavery to drink, or lying, or any of the specific sins which we so often denounce, these are not the sins for which a man is lost. They are the symptoms of a deeper sin, the evidences and activities of a profounder malady. What is that deeper sin, that profounder malady? Self-exaltation. The essence of sin is revealed in this phrase of Jesus; for remember, according to the perpetual teaching of Jesus, according to the whole message of revealed religion, self-exaltation means the exclusion of God; not necessarily intellectually, or not even necessarily emotionally, but volitionally so far as the actualities and activities of life are concerned; self-exaltation means the exiling of God, the dethronement of God, the forgetfulness of God, rebellion against God. That is the root sin. Self-exaltation is manifested in human life in different ways. It manifests itself in self-satisfaction. It manifests itself in a spirit of independence. It manifests itself in an attitude of definite and positive rebellion against religion. It manifests itself in a pride which fears to make confession of Christ and admit obedience to the law of God.

Self-exaltation, as self-satisfaction, is the peculiar sin of moral and respectable people. I do not want to be misunderstood. There is value in what the man of the world calls morality. When presently we have left the Sabbath day, and the sanctuary, and are back again in the market place, we must inevitably recognize the value of that lower level of morality which does not take into account the spirituality of human life, but which does avoid offence against human laws. That morality has its place, it has its value. But now we are in the presence of God; we are attempting to deal with things in the light of eternity; and as in the consciousness of that eternal and awe-inspiring presence we attempt to think of our lives, the moralities and respectabilities of common everyday life are out of sight, nay, they become in thousands of cases a severe and dangerous peril. Self-satisfaction is born of the fact that men have set up a standard of perfection lower than the Divine; and that the standard of perfection they have set up is the result of comparison of themselves with other men, and forgetfulness of the Divine purpose in their human life.

Of that attitude the pharisee is the supreme example. The expression of self-satisfaction is that of despising others, holding in contempt the man who has descended to the depths. You who were never drunk, look with profound contempt upon the man drunk in the gutter. That you would not do if you held the highest standard of morality. That you will never do again when you have seen what is God's purpose in your own life. That you will never do when you have come into living fellowship with the great ideal of life presented to men by this Lord Christ of ours. You hold in contempt the man who has descended to vulgarity because your own standard is a low, base, mean standard.

When we cease comparing ourselves with other men, and compare ourselves with God's meaning when He made us, then we begin to discover the unutterable failure of the life that can be satisfied with such morality, and has never attempted to enter into the spacious inheritance which includes eternity and God, the things that never pass and perish.

Self-exaltation is manifested also as independence. Independence is the peculiar sin of those who are gifted with physical strength and with mental acumen. It is the sin of the man who takes his way from Monday morning to Saturday night, makes his plans, carries

them out, accomplishes his purpose and never gets tired. Is that an evil thing? By no means. Let every man remember that is something to be thankful for. Ah, but there is the sin!! The man I am referring to is not thankful. He makes his boast that he has never been helped in his life, that he has had to carve his own way, that he is a self-made man. That attitude is born of that man's failure to recognize that God is the Author of all the possibilities and powers in human nature. That man's attitude is the result of the fact that he has forgotten God. Moses long ago warned the Hebrew people not to forget that the very strength of their right hand, and their wit and wisdom, were gifts bestowed upon them. These men forget that the very substance of their everyday life with which they are doing business and are successful in this world are gifts bestowed upon them from above.

The expression of such independence is the prayerless life. This man never prays. He may bend the knee in the service of the sanctuary, a great many men do that who never pray. There can be bending of the knee but no bowing of the spirit. There can be repetition of words but no prayer. That is a life of self-exaltation.

Again, self-exaltation manifests itself as definite rebellion. This is the peculiar sin of the licentious. It is born of antagonism to Divine interference in human will. It expresses itself in contempt for religion and in attacks made upon religion. I am not speaking of the attitude of the man who has come face to face with the spectres of the mind, who is honestly facing intellectual difficulty in the realm of faith. I am thinking of the man who attacks religion, who laughs at Christianity, who attempts to undermine the faith of other men by his ribaldry. Attacks upon morality are always evidences of immorality in those who make them. A man objects to religion because he is in revolt against restraint, and that because restraint demands that he shall not commit the sin he is committing.

Once again. There is a pride of heart which is of the very essence of self-exaltation. It is the peculiar sin of people who are perfectly familiar with the will of God, perfectly familiar with the requirements of Jesus Christ, who know the evangel and know the terms of human salvation, and not only know them but believe in them. In what sense can these people be charged with pride? In that while the gospel is to them a pleasant song, they have never obeyed its commands, they have never yielded themselves to its truth. Over and over again the reason is to be discovered in a pride of heart which is born of the fear of the opinions of other men; there are hundreds of young people in business houses who would be Christians but they dare not. There are scores of people in this West End who would be Christians, but they dare not. I would like to say in passing that I cannot understand that attitude of mind. I will try to be sympathetic with it. I will do my very best to urge men to abandon it, but I cannot understand it. The air is full of political strife, but there is no man who is a man who is ashamed, on the proper occasion, in the proper circumstances, in private or in public life, to avow his political conviction. In the name of God, what is it that makes a man ashamed to avow in private or in public that he is a Godly man, a Christian man? Wherein lies the explanation of this mystery? It is self-exaltation. To confess Christ is to share the reproach of Christ, for the offence of the Cross still abides. We have gilded the cross, we even wear it as an ornament—alas that we should, but we do—but we have not taken the offence away, the sting is still there. Of that men are afraid, and this pride keeps them from the Christ, and therefore from the fulfilment of the meaning of their own lives.

All such self-exaltation is followed by humbling; and in every case the humbling is the necessary outcome of the exaltation. The humbling is not a capricious act whereby God does punish a man as in any sense apart from the folly of his own choice and activity. The humbling is the necessary outcome of that activity and of that attitude.

The humbling of the self-satisfied will consist in the discovery of self in the light of Divine requirement. The man that is perfectly satisfied with himself because he is no worse than other men comes then, when the light breaks upon him and he sees himself in the light of what God meant him to be, to the experience of humbling. It was Robbie Burns who said—

Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as ithers see us.

Oh would some power the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as God sees us. That is far more important. I do not mean now, although that also is true, that we might see our failure as God sees it, but that we might see our possibilities as God sees them. I sometimes feel I would sacrifice life itself if I could but give to my brothers a vision of the glory of their own lives in the purpose and economy of God. There are so many who do not understand the dignity of their own manhood, who never see that it is given to them to enter into fellowship in travail and pain with God for the redemption of the race and the remaking of the world! Oh the tragedy of it! When a man comes to see what God meant him to be, and puts by the side of it the things that have satisfied him, his morality, his respectability by the standards of men, he comes to the most terrible humbling.

The humbling of the independent comes in the discovery of failure resulting from refusal to seek Divine guidance. There are men here who understand that. There are men here who have come to that humbling, but thank God it has been their salvation. Do you remember that hour in which you came to see the unutterable failure of your life simply because you had not sought Divine wisdom? There are tragedies of pain and suffering that come to us mysteriously, and for which we can give no account; we believe these God overrules also; but how much tragedy there is in human life because men do not seek to know the will of God. Oh the tragedies in human lives because men do not ask God what He wants them to do, whether He wants them to be ministers or carpenters. There

are tragedies in the ministry because men choose to enter it as a profession, and then find it to be hell, as every man does who enters for that reason. There are tragedies in the workshop, because men ought to have been preaching, or ought to have been on the distant field, and did not ask God. High dignity and noble fulfilment may be ours in the humblest walk of life. I read a life of Garfield once; a wonderful life, with a wretched title, "From Log Cabin to White House." That title suggested that there was something derogatory in the log cabin, and more of dignity in the White House. That is not so. We can fulfil the function of eternity in a log cabin if God means us to be there, but we cannot if He wants us in the White House. The trouble is we fail in the log cabin or the White House if we forget God. The humbling comes to a man when he says, "I have played the fool" because I forgot God, and thought that by my own wit I could carve out my own career and make a success of my own life.

The humbling of rebellion against God will come in the discovery of the disaster resulting from that rebellion. I need not pause to argue that. You know it. May God make you true to the knowledge. You know perfectly well that the sin which is the real reason of your attack upon religion is unmaking you. It is almost vulgarity to argue it; the hidden sin which makes you laugh at religion, is working paralysis and ruin in your life. You can tear our parable out, fling the New Testament away, shut the Bible, but you cannot escape from that. The humbling of the man who, through continued sin, turns his back upon and opposes religion, comes in the discovery of the disaster that follows upon his own line of conduct. The humbling of pride will come in that dread and yet great hour when the Son of Man shall come in His own glory and in the glory of His Father, and all the holy angels with Him," and then, in Christ's own words, "Whoso is ashamed of Me, of him will I be ashamed." The Son of Man is coming. I have no anxiety and no care to dispute now with you as to how or when He is coming. He is coming into His Kingdom, He is coming into His glory, He is coming to vindication, He is coming to triumph. If you are ashamed of Him while the conflict is one, He will be ashamed of you in that day. Not that He will indulge in reprisals and say, "Because you treated Me so I will treat you thus," but because your shame and fear of Him today will so undo you that He cannot recognize or receive you in the day of His ultimate triumph. You will be out of place in the society of righteousness and truth and loveliness; for you will be untrue, unrighteous, unlovely, if after having heard the winsome music of His call you decline to crown Him, and for fear and shame turn your back upon His high ideals, and upon the matchless music of His great evangel.

Now turn to the other side of the declaration for a closing word. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." What is self-humbling? This is it, "The publican... would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

That is first a taking of the right place, "God be merciful unto me." I draw your attention not to the petition. "Be merciful," not even to the description "a sinner," but to this revelation of the true relation of human life, God and me. There is no room for a third person there. There is no priest there, thank God. There is no prophet there. The preacher is not there. He is done and out of the way. The real business between the soul and God begins when I have finished; God and me! Every man who will come as far as that tonight will win his own life. That will correct all the false attitudes and outlooks; God and me! Whether you will have it so or not, it is so. You are quite alone with God. How I love to linger on this. I think it is a recent revelation to me, the fact that a man in a crowd is all by himself with God! Oh, the glory of it! I sometimes guess secrets through the windows of your eyes, but at last I cannot tell. Thank God He has secured the loneliness of every man with Himself.

Then follows the necessary confession of truth. I am a sinner. Measure yourself among your fellow men and you will stand erect. Compare yourself with the average man and you will proclaim your morality. But get alone with God, think of God, of His high holiness, His love—and there is nothing that brings conviction of sin to the heart as quickly as the real consciousness of the love of God—and you will say I am a sinner.

Then what? Praying the true prayer, "Be merciful unto me." No demanding from God your rights. I am weary to death of the men who tell me what they would do if they were God, and talk of their rights in the presence of God. What right has the barren fig tree to object if the proprietor should say, Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground? "Be merciful to me" is the only plea.

One other thing. When a man gets there and is conscious of his sin and breathes that prayer, he is giving expression to faith. No man will ever say that to God, save as there is in his soul the activity of faith in God. You will never ask blind fate to be merciful to you. You will never ask a "double-faced somewhat," consisting of intelligence and power working in cooperation, to be merciful to you! It would be no use. You will never pray to dynamite to be merciful to you. When a man says "Be merciful," he has heard the music of the Divine heart. Such a prayer is the expression of faith. That is the humbling for which Christ calls.

He says that if a man shall so humble himself, he shall be exalted. What is the exaltation? Christ gives it in the parable, and therefore I need no speculation. "I say unto you, This man," the publican, "went down to his house justified rather than the other." Do you say justification was a Pauline word? I ask you where he learned it. He learned it there. It is Christ's word! What is justification? God's answer to faith. What is that? The outflowing of mercy in reply to the cry of a man who claimed no morality but flung himself upon the compassion of his God. Justification, what is it? The sinner is a sinner no more; he is pardoned, cleansed, reinstated, remade! Justification, what is it? The realization of the position you assumed, God and me. The answer of God is, "Yes, you and I will have

fellowship one with another!" Justification is the exaltation; forgiveness of sins, and the consciousness of that forgiveness in the soul, not by argument but by the direct touch of the Saviour God. Do you know it, my brother? If you do, it is a little difficult not to break out into song,

My God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for His child
I can no longer fear.

It is possible to stand outside that hymn and criticize it, laugh at it, philosophize concerning it, until you say there is no meaning in it; but you cannot take it out of my heart, out of my consciousness, you cannot take it out of my soul; the forgiveness of sins by the outflowing of infinite mercy, mercy that I know experimentally, and consequent fellowship with God. That is justification.

What then? Then the finding of my own life. When God made me by first creation—for He did make me in my first creation—He made me for some purpose and when I get back to Him He realizes it. "He that loseth his life shall find it."

Shall we not humble ourselves before God? Shall we not isolate ourselves with Him and let Him put upon us His measurement; and then yield ourselves to His mercy, casting ourselves upon His compassion. If we do, then all the strange mystery of our own life will be explained; not immediately, but progressively and gradually; through discipline and by patience, we shall work out our own salvation because it is God that worketh in us both to will and to work of His good pleasure.

May we find our way to Christ in humbling, and so to the crown and throne of realized life.

126 - Luke 22:37; Hebrews 7:26 - Christ and Sinners--Identified and Separate

Christ and Sinners – Identified and Separate

"... He was reckoned with transgressors..."

Luke 22:37

"... separated from sinners...."

Hebrews 7:26

These two statements concerning Christ are not contradictory; they are complementary. To understand them correctly is to see that one is the necessary outcome of the other in the case of the Person, the imperial Person, concerning Whom they were both written. To appreciate their unity is to discover the very heart of the great gospel of the grace of God. The first words were spoken by the Lord Himself. He was making quotation from the ancient prophecy claiming the fulfilment of the prediction in Himself. The last words from the letter to the Hebrews constitute a statement made by one who was showing the superiority of the Priesthood of Jesus over all priesthoods which had preceded. The first statement "... He was reckoned with transgressors..." refers ultimately to His death. The second statement refers finally to His indestructible life. The first statement finds its fulness of meaning in the Cross. The second statement has its ultimate demonstration of truth in the Resurrection and the Ascension and the session in glory of the selfsame One Who was crucified. Taken together, they reveal the method by which Jesus Christ became the Saviour of men. "... reckoned with transgressors,..." but "... separated from sinners...."

I think perhaps the truth may thus be stated. Christ's separation from sinners in identification with them, made possible their separation from sin in identification with Him. "... reckoned with transgressors,..." He came into their midst but was always by infinite distances separated from them; but by the identification with them of the separated One, He made possible their separation from sin as He brings them into new and living identification with Himself.

Now, because that seems to me to be the very heart of the gospel of the grace of God for weary and sinning souls, let us reverently consider it. First, we will take these statements as declaring the truth about Him, Who was at once "... reckoned with transgressors..." and yet "... separated from sinners...." Then, we will consider them as revealing the relation creating the salvation which is at the disposal of man. Finally, we shall see that these two statements not merely indicate something true more than nineteen hundred years ago, but true here and now as they reveal the perpetual method of Jesus with men, that of identification with sinners in separation from them, that by such means He may bring them into separation from the thing that blights and spoils and ruins, by living identification with Himself.

First, then, let us take these two statements quite separately. "... He was reckoned with transgressors...." He was "... separated from sinners...."

"He was reckoned with transgressors..." in His place in the world. He was reckoned with transgressors in His own choice of companionships. And in the economy of the grace of God, He was reckoned with sinners even unto death.

"... He was reckoned with transgressors..." in His place in the world. Born of a woman, He so entered into the very life of man, coming into the currents of that life in personal and close and intimate identification. To use the very graphic phrase of a New Testament writer, He "took hold" upon our human nature, made it part of Himself, made Himself part of it.

Then even by the outward sign and symbol of human process of the Roman taxing and the imperial counting, He was reckoned, counted among sinners. There went out a decree from Caesar that all the world should be taxed. In the process of the Roman taxing and the imperial counting. He was in the world, one more added to the number of the Roman census, another life added to the great whole. He was one of the crowd, so small and insignificant that none knew of Him, or would have known of Him apart from heavenly revelation of His coming in songs of angels to the waiting shepherds and the shining of a star to men who sincerely gazed out into the heavens and attempted to unlock their great and profound secrets. Apart from these supernatural signs, He was One amongst the rest, reckoned amongst them. It is very wonderful how Jesus Christ has sanctified all life, even the taking of a census. There is no phase of human life, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to understand, but that the sanctifying touch of Jesus is upon it. It is such a prosaic thing, this taking of a census! Think on the morning when you write your name down that He "... was reckoned among transgressors,..." conformed to the economy of man, part of the great bulk of sinning, suffering, sorrowing souls; reckoned among sinners, even in the commonplace of His placing in the world.

He was reckoned among sinners strangely and wonderfully enough in the choice of His companions. Think of those boyhood days at Nazareth! Remember that He was reckoned among the children in Nazareth, and never believe the picture that shows you the boy Jesus with a halo. All such pictures misinterpret Him. He wore no halo other than the sweet halo of a disposition strong and gentle, heroic and tender. They loved Him in Nazareth. Until He began to preach, Nazareth never tried to fling Him from the brow of the hill into the valley. I read that He "increased... in favour with God and man"; He was one of them, just one of the children of Nazareth. They said later, "Is not this... the son of Joseph...?" It was a mistake, but they were to be excused, for "... He was reckoned among transgressors,..." one of themselves all the way through. One of themselves also, presently, when passing from youth into manhood, He worked for His living as a carpenter. There is infinite music in that statement to all who toil for their living. He was one of us, working, toiling, tempted, trusting; reckoned amongst us, reckoned amongst us by heaven's decree of infinite love, reckoned amongst us by earth's observation, reckoned amongst us by hell's attacks; one of us, "... reckoned with transgressors...."

But, presently, He left Nazareth, left the carpenter's shop, left the quietness and the seclusion and came into public life. Now, let us see His friends. Who are the men who were His companions and gathered about Him? Let me be careful here to use only the statements of Scripture. Who were the people that He received unto Himself? It is very difficult to translate the word. We talk today in certain sections of society of "receiving." What is it to receive, according to the word here, according to its real meaning? We may read it, "He receiveth sinners to Himself"; that is, He takes them to His heart, He takes them to His secret love, He takes them to His confidence. That is the thing that startled and appalled the whited sepulchers who pretended to be teaching God's law and God's Kingdom. He received sinners; sat down at the table and ate with them. He was the friend of publicans and sinners.

Let me tell you what so eminent a scholar as Dr. Bruce once said about this. Speaking to Mr. Samuel Chadwick, he said, "You know, Chadwick, that word 'friend' is not good enough; it does not really catch the meaning of the word behind it." Mr. Chadwick looked at him and said, "What would you put there?" "Well," he said, "the face of the matter is, the only word that catches it is the word the boys use—'chum.'" He is the chum of publicans and sinners. I tell you who said that as you might object to it if I said it. He so lived and acted that these men who stood for righteousness—the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees—said, "That man is the companion, the chum, the intimate friend of publicans and sinners."

"... He was reckoned with sinners..." by His own deliberate choice. Oh, if we did but know Him, how surprised we would be! If we did but understand this radiant Son of God, how startled we should be if we watched Him! The scribes and Pharisees would have been more astonished if they had known Him better. Imperial mentally, He might have been the chosen companion of the savants of His time. Imperial artistically, He might have taught painters how to express in colors the visions which they saw. He might have whispered symphonies to waiting musicians as He has been doing ever since. But He passed the learned and the great and found the sinners and made friends of them. "... He was reckoned with transgressors...."

What did this identification with sinners finally mean? First, by way of incarnation He was reckoned in the human census as one of a crowd. Then by chosen companionships, so that He became the butt and scorn of the unrighteous and blind teachers by whom He was surrounded. We never understand all that means until we see Him at last on the rough Roman gibbet. With whom was He there? With political prisoners? No! With those guilty of first-class misdemeanors—what a curious phrase that is, as though there could be a first-class criminal!—No! Numbered with whom, then? Oh, my masters, would God we could see it, with robbers, thieves, or to take the wholly expressive word of our translation, "malefactors," evil-doers, numbered with them, in the midst of them, by His own choice! Listen to the gibe of the men in front of the Cross, to the cruel, devilish, cynical, self-satisfied sneer, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save...." Oh, how they lied! He could have saved Himself. He could have come down from the Cross. He could have called for ten legions of angels who would have swept the unholy mob that mocked Him into hell.

Yet, again, He could not, Why not? Because He had chosen to be "... reckoned with transgressors,..." and in His dying there was a sacramental symbolism in those hands outstretched between two men—the refuse of humanity, malefactors. He was reckoned with transgressors!

But He was "... separated from sinners,..." first in His character, therefore in His conduct, and finally, beyond the brutality of the Cross, in the marvel of the Resurrection.

"... separated from sinners..." first of all in His character. When He was coming into the world, in one of the wonderful New Testament songs concerning Him, it was said that God had visited and redeemed His people in order that they should serve God in holiness and righteousness before Him all their days. Mark those two words, "holiness and righteousness"—not two things but two manifestations of the same quality and quantity and fact. What is holiness? Rightness of character. What is righteousness? Rightness of conduct. Holiness refers to the inward, righteousness to the outward. Holiness is something internal. Righteousness is something external. They belong to each other. Apart from holiness there is no righteousness; apart from righteousness there is no holiness. That is to say, if a man sing to me of his holiness and I see no rightness in conduct, I deny the holiness he claims. These two things are always together, and we have perfectly learned their meaning in human history from this Man.

In these facts He was separated from sinners—reckoned with them but always separated from them. Separated in that character of holiness, separated from them because He was a Man of true conceptions, of pure desires. These are the two things that underlie all life: the conception which is intellectual, the desire which is emotional. These are the things that create the volitional, drive the will, and help it to make its choices. If I can only find out what your conception of anything is, if I can only find out what your desire is, then I know which way you will choose. That is the revelation of your character. I can only learn it as I wait for the activity. I trace back from the external activity to the internal character, and there in the making of the character I have the conception, the desire, the choosing. That has been the trouble in my life, has it not in yours? My conceptions have been false, my thought of things has been wrong. I wish I could put this into one sentence. Every sin committed externally is the outcome of a sin committed internally. Whatever I do that is wrong in conduct is due to the fact that I am wrong in my underlying conception of things.

But this Man sat down at the table with men of impure conceptions, of untrue thinking, and He was of true thinking and pure conception. He saw everything in its true relationship to everything else. There was nothing distorted in His outlook, nothing out of place. True in His thinking, in His conception, and pure therefore in all His desires and so separated infinite distances from the men whom He made His friends, from the men among whom He sat and with whom He ate. Reckoned amongst them for He sat with them at the board; separated from them by the distance between high heaven and deep hell.

Thus He was not only apart in character, which is holiness, but also in conduct, which is righteousness. Never deceiving, never oppressing, never taking advantage of weakness. I will not argue it. We know it.

But my text having all that as supposition, yet in absolute fact, makes a statement that goes infinitely beyond all. Now for one moment let us look at the context. "For such a high priest became us, holy,..." that is the first thing; "... guileless,..." that is, without deceit, without crookedness; "... undefiled,..." that is, not taking into His character any defilement by which He was surrounded in other people. Now, hear this, and mark the continuity, "... separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." What, then, is the real meaning of this passage, "... separated from sinners..."? Not separate, but separated. The final thought is of the Resurrection. He Who had been reckoned among transgressors unto death, and yet had been separated from transgressors in all His life, was at last separated from sinners by the act of God, when He took Him out of the midst of them, out of the grave into which they had put Him, separated Him from them and made Him higher than the heavens. That is the final fact in Christ's separation from sinners.

The Resurrection of Jesus in some senses is the severest, the profoundest condemnation of the sinner. In some senses, when God raised Jesus, He said to the listening race, "this is the Man of My choice. This is the Man Who satisfies My heart. This is the Man Who has accomplished My purpose. This is the Man I choose to come back to Me out of death. I separate Him from sinners and make Him higher than the Heavens."

Reckoned with transgressors by the stoop of the incarnation, by the reckoning of human governments, by the choice of His own free will in friendship, by the mystery of His passion in the economy of God. Separated from sinners in the purity of His character, in the rectitude of His conduct, and therefore in the splendor of His crowning.

And now, I pray you notice how these two things create the gospel. The gospel at once smites me with condemnation and heals me with salvation. The gospel makes me know my sin as the law by Moses never did. The gospel frees me from sin as the law by Moses never could. This paradox and contradiction of the great Evangel only has its explanation as we see that both these things are true concerning Jesus. Because of His separation from sinners He was powerful; because of His identification with sinners He brought that power into touch with the sinner; and wherever the sinner consents to unification with Him, He communicates to the sinner the power which is His by separation from the sinner.

Separation is the cause of power. Identification is the contact of power. Unification is the communication of power.

Separation is the cause of power. We must come down from the Son of God who is infinite—and consider finite things if we would understand. Tennyson sang about Sir Galahad:

His strength was as the strength of ten,
Because his heart was pure.

Look through that little window of poetry and imagination and see this tremendous truth flaming in letters of fire. Purity from sin is that which creates power to help men beaten by sin. Look at it in your own life. If you want to help a sinning man, the measure of your ability to help him is the measure in which you do not sin yourself. We know perfectly well it is utterly useless for us to say, "Be pure," to a man if there be impurity in our own heart. Fathers—God Almighty say it to me!—it is no use telling your boy to be pure if you are impure. Power to make other people pure consists in personal purity. Now we are all agreed. Separate from sinners so that no taint of impurity was on Him, blessed, holy, perfect Man of Nazareth, and in that purity which man misinterpreted and hated lay the power by which He lifts men. Said the Pharisees, "This Man receiveth sinners...." Now, do let us be fair, even to Pharisees, though it is very hard. What did they mean? They meant, "You cannot touch pitch without being defiled." They meant, "If this Man is going to make a friend of sinners, He Himself will become a sinner." The Pharisees were quite right, they were perfectly correct, if I had been the one they were talking about, or you. If I make a companion of sinning men, I shall be contaminated. Young man, you have just come up to the great city. You have been a month in the city. Tell me, who are your friends. If your friends are impure, for God's sake and your soul's sake, quit them now. They will make you impure.

But there is a difference in this Man. Why is it if I make a friend of sinners, I shall become contaminated? Because in me there is sin, there is that to which sin appeals; there is corruption calling to corruption and answering back to corruption. But in Jesus purity was not negative. It was positive, and so it was power, and when He took a poor, wretched sinner to His heart, and sat and ate with him, instead of the defilement of the sinner spoiling Him, the virtue of His purity lifted the sinner. "... reckoned with transgressors,..." but, Hallelujah!—separated from them! In that infinite separation of His purity lay the dynamic by which He was able by contact to lift the man who was impure.

That leads to the next thing. If He had not been "... reckoned with transgressors...", His separation from them could never have saved them. His purity cannot save a man until He identifies Himself with that man. You may be pure as the snow, and if you stay on the mountain top where pure snows are, you will never make pure some loathsome thing that lies in the valley. You may be pure, but if you shut yourself up within convent walls and never touch the sinning masses without, you cannot help to make them pure. The greatest saint is not the person who cultivates his or her own life within such convent walls by severe austerity. The greatest saint is the slum sister in the Salvation Army who puts her sweet womanhood against the surging sorrows of her fallen sisters. Where did we learn this lesson? From the Man separated by the distance of the infinite snows, Who came down and lived among sinning men, made friends of them—yes, I will say it, made chums of them. He took them to His heart in an embrace of tenderness and brotherhood and so helped them to feel the tides of His purity and to sob out upon His dear and wounded heart the sorrows of all their sin. "... reckoned with,..." and therefore by such contact able to bring the power of His purity into touch with men.

Yet He could only finish that great work which He began in life by dying. How far must He go with me if He is to correct my impurity by His purity? He must go all the way. He must go on and on until in His soul He fulfils the prophetic word that was always so mysterious, "... the pains of hell gat hold upon Me...." May God have mercy on us if we lose sight of that Cross and its deepest meaning. Oh, brutal Cross of Calvary, oh, hateful Cross; but it is my Cross—that is the place of my sin. This selfish heart of mine ought to be transfixed with wounds. These evil hands of mine ought to be nailed there. These unholy feet of mine, swift to run in the ways of evil, ought to be there.

In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood,
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

"Reckoned" with me there when the pains of hell enwrapped the soul, and the darkness of the hiding of the face of God broke upon the spirit; reckoned with me there! That is the mystery of salvation, and because of that, if I come to that Cross, and coming to it say,

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save me from its guilt and power,

then by such reckoning with me in the power of His infinite separation from me, He takes my guilt and gives me His purity; or in the far finer and more majestic and wonderful language of Scripture, "... He was made to be sin on our behalf: that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The last thing I want to say is this—that was not merely His method historically; it is His method now; it is His method here. Then what? He received sinners, He ate with sinners, He was the friend of sinners, He was without sin. And tonight, what? Are you a sinner? I will leave the whole congregation now, except the man who says, "Yes." I have no gospel if you say, "No." I am not here except to preach to the people who are sinners, because I have been ordained by the One Who said, "... I came not to call the righteous but sinners." I have no message for the righteous man. Are you a sinner? Is the burden of it on your soul? Is the filth of it on your character? Is the poison of it in your blood? God help you, my brother! Did you creep in here tonight thankful that nobody knew all about you? Are you sitting somewhere in the midst of these people, a leper, and conscious of it? He is by your side. If there should happen to be in this house a hundred righteous people who need no repentance, He is not with them, He is with you. These are not distant things that have passed, these are present living realities. He is down there by the man who is an outcast from his own self-respect, by the side of the man abhorring himself, loathing himself, and yet sinning.

He is calling to you. Oh, He is unlike you, absolutely unlike you, pure as the white light in which God dwells. Oh yes, you say, "I am afraid of the white light." My brother, the white light in which God dwells is the red, passionate love of His heart, and if the light of God enwrap you until you are afraid as it burns to save, the Man is with you tonight—this Man, Christ, God-Man, mysterious and wonderful, calls to you, but He is unlike you.

Now, what will you do? Will you turn from all His pure presence reproves, and will you yield to all His pure presence approves? That is the final question. You know your sin as you have never known it before. Will you turn from it?

To what shall I turn?

To Him.

To what in Him?

To His purity. Will you choose it?

Ah me, but that is the one thing I cannot do!

Behold Him again,

In His feet and hands are wound-prints,

And His side;

and know this, that as you turn from the impurity His separateness reproves to the purity that separateness approves; because He was "... reckoned with transgressors,..." because He still is near to every sinning heart, by the mystery of His death He will blot out your transgressions like a thick cloud, He will cleanse your inner life of the very forces that have ruined it, and He will make you like Himself.

Will you let Him? More marvelous, more mysterious, more overwhelming than anything else is this final fact to which we ever have to come. He stands and waits and asks, and you can say "No!" I beseech you as though God did beseech you. I pray you in Christ's stead, "... be ye reconciled to God," and be reconciled to God by yielding your life to Christ, Who was "... reckoned with transgressors..., "... separated from sinners...,..." and therefore is the supreme and perfect Saviour of sinning men.

127 - Luke 24:32 - The Burning Of Heart

The Burning of the Heart

Was not our heart burning within us, while He spake to us in the way,
while He opened to us the scriptures?

Luke 24:32

Burning of heart. That, I take it, is the supreme need of the Church today. We have principles, but we very largely lack passion. I believe that our understanding of Jesus Christ is more spacious and correct than ever before in the history of the Christian Church. I do not mean to say that we are not still making mistakes concerning Him, for let it be remembered that He can be appreciated only by that whole Church of the firstborn of which He is the Head. No man can ever know all there is to be known concerning Christ, and no age will ever be able perfectly to comprehend the height and breadth and length and depth of the riches of His grace and His glory.

Yet, in spite of all the failure of the Christian Church, there has been slow and sure progress in her understanding of Christ. I repeat, therefore, that we have more spacious and more correct comprehension of Him than ever before. Yet sometimes I am afraid that our

sense of emotion and fire was never less. We are afraid of anything in the form of passionate enthusiasm, lest we should hear some cynical grumbler on the outside edge of the crowd murmur the dreaded word "fanaticism." I am sometimes inclined to think that the "Jesus, Lover of my soul," of whom we so often sing, is standing in the midst of His people sighing after their lost first love. I am not pleading for anything like an attempt to manufacture passion which is not real. Painted fire never warms anyone. There may be a great deal of noise, which is not significant of power. There may be a great deal of protestation of love, while the overwhelming and majestic passion is absent. I am not suggesting that a single person in this audience should go away to talk more of love for Jesus Christ. I do say that the Church sadly lacks burning of heart, fire, fervor, passion, devotion.

The story which I read to you, and from the midst of which my text is taken, is most interesting, and I venture to think most suggestive in the light of these opening words. It is one of the post-resurrection stories, and we are still living in post-resurrection times. Christ as He appeared to these men was the same as before His crucifixion, and yet utterly and forever different. We are the followers of that selfsame Christ in the identity and disparity which characterized His relation to men after the cross. Such a story as this has a very great value for us, because these men were exactly in the condition which I have just described. They had lost their devotion—not their love altogether, not their faith, save in some senses, but their devotion—their passion, their fervor, and their fire.

I shall ask you to think with me first of what this story reveals to us of these two men as to their possession and their lack. I shall then ask you to look with me at the Christ, as to His quest, His method, and His victory, all of which is not merely that we may contemplate an old story, but that we may find its new, present, living application to our own souls.

Looking back, then, to the road that leads to Emmaus, and to the two men, one named Cleopas, the other a nameless disciple, I ask you carefully to observe what they still possessed. They still loved their Lord. They still believed in Him. Jesus had said to Peter not very long before His crucifixion, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat"—that is, the whole of you, for there the pronoun is plural—"but I made supplication for thee,"—and though this pronoun is singular, no one imagines that all the rest were outside the prayer of Jesus—"that thy faith fail not." I am bold to say that that prayer of Jesus was answered. Peter's faith never failed. The faith of none of these men failed; I mean that peculiar quality of faith which saves a man. Their faith in Jesus did not fail. Their journey to Emmaus was not one of forgetfulness. They were still talking about Him and the things which had happened. Amid bitterness and disappointment, amid the darkness of disgrace, they still spoke a kind word for Him. When Jesus joined Himself to them they did not know Him, they did not suppose but that He was a stranger journeying the same way. He entered into conversation with them, and asked them what they were talking about, because they looked so sad; and they answered: "Dost thou alone sojourn in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come to pass there in these days?" And He said, with that fine art which characterized Him, in order to draw them out to confession, "What things?" Listen to their answer, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word."

That is their testimony to Him. They had not lost their faith in Him. They had not lost their love for Him, and even though He had been beaten, crucified, and is dead, they loved Him. They loved His memory. They believed that He meant well, that He did good, that His ministry was a blessed ministry, and they were journeying toward Emmaus with faith in Him and love for Him still in their hearts.

Yet listen to them for another moment, and you will discover what they lacked. They had lost their hope, and they had lost their confidence in His ability to do what they thought He was going to do. Their attitude toward Jesus was the attitude of men who should say, "Oh, we believe in Him, we love Him, He meant well, but He has not succeeded." "We had hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel." I pray you mark carefully the past tense. Their hope was gone. He meant to redeem Israel. He meant well, but He has been defeated. He tried but He failed. The hope which had been burning like a beacon before them in the days when He was still amongst them had died out into gray ashes; but they will not say anything unkind about Him. They love Him still, and still speak a tender word for Him. "He had tried to do something He could not. He was a good man, a loving man. He was a prophet mighty in deed and word, but there were things to which He was not equal. We had hoped that He would break the chain of our oppression and lift us back, out of our ruin, and redeem Israel and set up the Kingdom. We hoped—but it is all gone. We have lost our hope."

Consequently, there was a cooling of enthusiasm, and instead of tarrying in Jerusalem they had started for Emmaus, and there was sadness upon their faces, a lack of gladness in their tone. The fire was burning low. There was no passion, no vision, no virtue, no victory, no force, no fervor.

That is the picture of these men as they set their faces toward Emmaus, and it is largely the position of the Church today, as it seems to me. Personal loyalty to Jesus Christ is undoubted. It is impossible to meet with assemblies of God's people, or to meet with individuals anywhere, without finding men who still believe in Him personally, and yet there is manifest a very widespread cooling of the Church's passion, and a dying down upon the altar of the fires which blaze in the day of the conflict which makes for victory. We are not quite confident in His ability to do what we thought He was going to do. The movement seems so slow. The chariot wheels are tarrying, and the victory does not come. We are inwardly, if not confessedly, pessimistic, and this pessimism manifests itself in the prevalent consent to compare Him with others. We hang his name on the wall beside the names of others. We

put some picture of Him in our galleries beside the pictures of other men, and we say, "Of course, He was easily first. We love Him. We admire His ethic. We admire His ideal, but He was sadly mistaken, and He took His way in semidarkness toward failure." We are comparing Him with others. We are modifying our conceptions of His victories. We are even allowing ourselves to read and discuss magazine articles which suggest that perhaps, after all, the religion of Buddha is more suited to Eastern lands than the religion of Jesus Christ. We are discussing the possibility of His ultimate triumph, and are asking whether, after all, the victories in Japan recently did not prove that another and a finer ethic is finding its way into the thinking of our age. And all unconsciously the fire of the Church is cooling. She is not so passionate as she used to be in her endeavor. She does not break into song so often, or sob in tears in the presence of the world's agony.

This attitude is born, not of the fact that we are individually less loyal to Jesus Christ, but of the fact that we are not quite sure whether the ancient psalmists were right who sang of His Kingdom extending to the ends of the earth. We are not sure, and are not perfectly at rest. He is so near to us, and yet we do not see Him. He is walking with us along the shadowy pathway, but our eyes are holden. There is today an appalling lack of the clear vision of the Christ which makes the step elastic and the spirit buoyant, and the outlook spacious, and the heart burn with fire and fervor and passion.

How does Christ deal with these men? For, after all, I have said we shall have to reduce this to individual application. We go back again to our story. If I am surprised, looking back over these centuries, at the attitude of the men, I freely confess I am far more surprised at Jesus. I am surprised at the wonder of His coming to these men. I know my confession of surprise is a revelation of the fact that I have not perfectly learned the lesson of His love. I know it, and yet I am surprised. If I may turn aside from the main line of my argument I would like to say to you, Be very much afraid of yourself if Jesus Christ is ceasing to surprise you. If you are losing that sense of amazement that startled you in the olden days there is something wrong in your life. He is always surprising us if we will but follow Him simply. He surprises us now by the fact that He comes to these men. Listen to His own estimate of them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe." That is not my criticism of them. That is His estimate of them, and He knew them. O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe; and yet He comes to them and joins Himself to them, and walks at their side, and deals with their foolishness, and stirs up the slow heart until it burns and flames. That is the grace of God, and I am amazed. It is a radiant revelation of the tenderness of His heart and of the strength of His love for us.

Why does He come? He comes because He is seeking love. It is there in those doubt-shadowed hearts, and He knows it, and He will come and renew it. He always seeks the beautiful. Christ always sees the beautiful, and therefore seeks it where you and I would never look for it. There is an old legend about Jesus. I really do not know whether it is true. But suppose it is not true, still there is a principle involved which is true. They tell how that one day He was passing out through the gates of Jerusalem, and there lay on the roadway a dead dog, the horror of all the Hebrew people, to be held in supreme and bitter contempt. As one and another of the teachers and scribes and rabbis, and the ordinary people passed by, they but kicked it farther away with contempt. But Jesus, as He passed, stopped and looked down on it, and said, "Behold the pearly whiteness of its teeth." You are quite at liberty to reject that legend, but do not give away the truth which underlies it. Jesus can always see something of beauty and glory which other eyes cannot see. Perhaps a few of you do not know what I am driving at. Some do. I have lost the fire in my life, my passion and my fervor. I want to say here—out of place if you like—that Christ sees the little that remains, and will say to me today, "I have come to seek that. Strengthen the things that remain." In the case of these men He saw personal loyalty underneath the hope abandoned and the confidence shaken, and He went and joined Himself to them in order that He might fan to flame the fire which was dying out upon the altar of their hearts.

How did He do it? Mark His method. He made their hearts burn by giving them a new interpretation of familiar things. I would like so to say the next thing that you remember it if you forget everything else. In the memory of it you will have the very heart of the message I bring to you. He made their hearts burn by talking to them. Their hearts did not burn within them while they talked to him, or while they talked about him. Their hearts burned within them when He talked to them. That puts everything I want to say into a few words. Not in their questioning concerning Him was the fire rekindled. Not in their pouring out of complaint to Him did it burn, but when they had ceased talking to, or about Him; when they were silent and listened, then the fire burned. "Was not our heart burning within us, while He spake to us in the way?"

What were the things that He said? Nothing new. I am increasingly impressed with this. He did not bring to them any new message. It was the old, so said as they had never heard it said before. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets He interpreted to them in the scriptures the things concerning Himself." Have you not felt as I have, that you would have given almost everything to have walked to Emmaus and heard Him interpret the Scriptures? It did not take Him very long. It was not a long journey, and they had done a good deal of talking before He commenced. He talked of the Scriptures with which they were perfectly familiar, of Moses, of the ancient history and the law, of the prophetic writings in which they had been instructed from childhood, and tracked for them all the pathways that culminated in the Man Whose loss they were mourning, Who had been crucified. He showed them how all the prophets gave witness to Him, and all the symbols of the ancient ritual found their fulfillment in the work that He had done. They did not know the Man talking to them was the One of Whom He was talking. They did see a new meaning in their own Scriptures concerning their long-hoped-for Messiah and His relation to the cross. They began to see a new light and glory flashing back upon the cross where

their hopes had been blighted, and the fire seemed to have been put out. He interpreted in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. I have often felt that it would have been worth a whole lifetime to have walked with Him and heard Him tell how the shadow of the Mosaic economy found its fulfillment in Him.

Then when He took their prophets one by one, how wonderful to hear Him explain, and how marvelous the rapture of their heart as they heard Him tell how all the prophets led up to the Messiah Who died just as they had seen that Man die, of Whom they had been speaking so kindly. As they listened to Him they would find out that He was David's King, "fairer than the children of men"; and in the days of Solomon's well-doing He it was that was "altogether lovely." He was Isaiah's child—king, with a shoulder strong enough to bear the government, and a name Emmanuel gathering within itself all excellencies. He was Jeremiah's "Branch of Righteousness, executing judgment and righteousness in the land"; Ezekiel's "Plant of renown," giving shade and shedding fragrance; Daniel's stone cut without hands, smiting the image, becoming a mountain, and filling the whole earth; the ideal Israel of Hosea "growing as the lily," "casting out his roots as Lebanon"; to Joel "the hope of His people and the strength of the children of Israel"; the usherer in of the great vision of Amos of "the plowman overtaking the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed"; and of Obadiah the "deliverance upon Mount Zion and holiness"; the fulfillment of that of which Jonah was but a sign; the "turning again" of God of which Micah spoke; the One Whom Nahum saw upon the mountains publishing peace; the Anointed of Whom Habakkuk sang as "going forth for salvation"; He Who brought to the people the pure language of Zephaniah's message, the true Zerubbabel of Haggai's word rebuilding forever the house and the city of God; Himself the dawn of the day when "holiness unto the Lord shall be upon the bells of the horses" as Zechariah foretold; He the "refiner's fire," "the fuller's soap," "The Sun of righteousness" of Malachi's vision. All these things passed in rapid survey as He talked. He was taking their own prophets and unlocking them, flinging back the shutters and letting the light stream in. He talked to them, and they were silent; and there broke upon them a new vision of the truth, a new understanding of things with which they were perfectly familiar, and in this new vision they found new understanding of all the things which they long had known.

Their burning heart, what was it? The thrill of a new discovery of their Lord and the shame of the past failure to appreciate Him, and the passion of a new endeavor which should set their feet in the pathway which led to ultimate victory.

All this came when they listened, not when they spoke to Him, or of Him, but when He spoke to them. Here, then, as it seems to me, is the supreme need of the hour, that we should "strengthen the things that remain"—the doctrines which we hold as true, the ordinances of the Church which we observe with painful regularity lacking passion, the service to which our hands are placed, which so often becomes dull as mere routine duty. We need that these things should flame with a new meaning, that the doctrine that we hold as true, and about which sometimes we fight, should flame into passionate vision, driving us into actual service. A man may talk generalities for half an hour and get no further. What did I mean by the doctrine we hold as true, driving us? Let me give you one small quotation from Jesus' last words. He said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age." We have recited it, we have sung it, and once or twice we have felt it burn; but in the majority of days we do not feel it burning, driving us. That declaration of Jesus that He was always with His disciples was made in connection with His command, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations." If you want to know why we are not moved with the fire and fervor of the promise, it is because we have been attempting to appropriate the promise without fulfilling the condition, because we have not sat still and let Him tell us His deepest meaning about this thing. If once we sit in His presence and listen quietly we shall feel moving in our heart His own great passion for the nations of the earth, and we shall hear His "Go," and then we shall know that the supreme thing to hear is, "Lo, I am with you alway." When He whispers it, it will be to us as the driving force of God sending us out upon the pathway. We have not listened. These things have become so familiar that we are not at all familiar with them in their actual power. The cooling of our passion is due to the fact that we have attempted to spell these things out for ourselves, to explain them by our own philosophy instead of sitting down while He talks to us.

What, then, is the message I bring to you today? It is this. In the midst of your discussion, I beseech you, at all cost, make time to sit still while He speaks to you. I think I am safe from the possibility of misunderstanding when I say we supremely need a little more sitting still, a little more silence, a little more time of listening to the voice of Jesus. I am speaking as much to my own heart as to the heart of anyone in this house. There is a terrible danger that in our attempt to discuss Jesus Christ, and in our attempt to serve Him, we should fail to remember that no discussion can ever place Him finally. He defies the grasp of the intellect merely as such. We may discuss Him in our colleges and theological halls, and all the while we discuss Him the fire burns low. That is the peril of the age in which we live. We may be so busy running on His errands and attempting to do His work as never to sit still and look into His face.

I do not want that application to evaporate as a mere generality. I pray you test it by any day in your life, and test it by asking yourself, How long have I taken today to listen to Him? Someone will ask, "Do you really mean this? Are you practical, or are you indulging in some kind of sentimental talk? Are we really to listen to Him, listen for Him? Men do not hear Him today as they did of old." Shall I make your statement from another standpoint. It is not true that men cannot hear Him as they did of old. Men do not wait to hear Him as they did of old. In this present age they do not listen enough. Listen in the morning, listen amid the babel of other

voices, listen at eventide for Him. In the Scriptures, those selfsame Scriptures through which He spoke to men of old, listen for Him. The study of the Bible will curse us in the next ten years if we are not careful. Men will tabulate and analyze, and think they know everything. Man, listen, for, unless as a result of your study of the Bible you hear the imperial tone, the voice of the living Christ talking in your inmost soul, your Bible knowledge is a mere technique that will burn you and ruin you within the next ten years. Listen, listen for His voice. Cease petition sometimes, cease praise sometimes, cease your questioning every now and then, and listen. No man or woman, young man or young woman, youth or maiden, will cultivate the habit of waiting to listen for the direct message of the Christ and be disappointed. Then your Bible will be a new book. Then your organization will throb with the propulsion of a new power. Then the missionary fire will blaze and drive you out upon the path of service.

There must be more burning of heart. We are in danger of being overwhelmed with our principle and our machinery. My plea today is that we take time to listen, that by His interpretation of the meaning of the things we have, they may flame with light and with fire, and create in us that holy passion which sings and sobs, which serves and waits, which travails and makes His Kingdom come. May God give us all the opened ear that we may hear what He says to us, for His Name's sake.

128 - Luke 24 - Led Out--Led In

Led Out – Led In

He led them out until they were over against Bethany:
and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them.

Luke 24:50

After His Resurrection from the dead, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ lingered on the earth for forty days, as though He were almost reluctant to leave it. He lingered, as we have no doubt, for very special purposes of revelation and manifestation, lingered in order to bridge over for His own first disciples the difficult period of the early days, when they would no longer have Him with them in bodily sight, and when it would be necessary, therefore, for the high faculty of the soul, faith, to be called into full play. He lingered for forty days, occasionally appearing and disappearing. The second part of the statement seems as though it were unnecessary, but, as a matter of fact, the disappearances were as important as the appearances, in both their manner and their purpose. He appeared to them sometimes when gathered together peculiarly as disciples, and sometimes to individuals. Coming suddenly and unexpectedly upon them, baffling them by the method of His coming, He yet always unveiled before their eyes some new wonder and glory of His own Personality and His own work. Then, with equal suddenness and strangeness of method, He vanished. This lasted, as I say, for forty days.

In the verse that I have taken as text we have the account of the very last act of Jesus before His Ascension. This was His last appearance, as the last disappearance was the Ascension itself. We are now to consider what these men saw in Him on this occasion: "He led them out as far as Bethany: and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them."

This Person, lifting His hands in blessing, is One who has been rejected in a threefold rejection: rejected by the priesthood of the time, rejected by the earthly government which was in the ascendancy at the time, rejected by the people on their own vote and claim. I am not now proposing to stay to discuss the reason of the priestly rejection, or the governmental rejection, or the democratic rejection. I simply face the fact as we look at this last appearing of Jesus. He was rejected.

Rejected, in the first place, by the priests of His time, and, consequently, by priestcraft. Here we pause for a moment to consider this question of priesthood in the light of Biblical revelation. In the divine economy as therein revealed, priesthood was really an accommodation to human weakness, and never a divine intention or provision. The history of the priesthood emerges in the most startling way. In the eighteenth chapter of Exodus we discover that when God emancipated a people from slavery and led them out with a high hand and outstretched arm into a large place, He brought them unto Himself, and the words that Moses was commissioned to speak to them were practically words of the New Testament, which came with greater meaning in the fulness of time: "I have chosen you to be unto Me, a kingdom of priests." In that declaration there is not the slightest suggestion of the creation of a caste of priests in the divine economy and purpose, but rather the creation of a nation in which every individual was to be a priest. I will make you unto Me a kingdom of priests, that was the divine original ideal for Israel. The people shrank from the high and awful function, were filled with fear in the presence of Jehovah, and naturally so: they were so filled with fear because of the consciousness of their sinfulness and inability. Then the principle obtained that runs through all the Divine dealings with men, accommodation to human weakness. Because the people were not able to rise to the high level of realizing their personal priesthood, a caste was created for a while to fulfil the function of priesthood on behalf of the people.

Through the centuries the story of priesthood runs on, and from beginning to end it is the story of failure, from beginning to end it is the story of corruption, of partial light eclipsed in darkness, of movement toward a higher forever falling to a lower, until the last act of priesthood was the inspiration that resulted in the murder of the Son of God. As I look at Him standing on Olivet's slope I see One

Whom priesthood had cast out.

I also see here One Who had been cast out by government, by monarchy. Monarchy in Judea at that time was a poor and insignificant thing struggling to make its power great when, really, it was entirely paralyzed. Herod and those associated with him in the governing authority of the tetrarchies were under the mastery of Rome, that brutal bully in human history that for once subdued the world by brute force, and initiated the Pax Romana, which was but the pause of palsied inertia resulting from war. When Jesus was born, He was born into that peace, a peace not worth the name, and which happily was disturbed by war ere it had long continued.

But let me interpret this fact of government Biblically. What do we find concerning monarchy in the Bible? It was originally an accommodation to human weakness, just as was priesthood. I go back to this one nation that God chose, not in order that He might have a pet on whom to lavish His love, but to be the illustration of His Kingdom in the world for the uplifting of the nations. He said to them: "I have called you unto Myself." In the first glimpse of the history of the people, who were in many senses rude, almost barbaric, there shines a glory such as the world had never seen elsewhere. It is the glory of a theocracy, of a people governed by God, having no other king, and no other form of government. The history runs on for a little while, until there came a day in which this people said: "Give us a king like the nations." Then Samuel, brokenhearted by their failure, cried to God in complaint, and the answer of God, in the soul of Samuel, was this: "They have not rejected thee; they have rejected Me from being king. Therefore, go thou and anoint Saul, and give them what they ask." That was an accommodation to human weakness. Then followed the rapid exaltation and tragic fall of Saul, a king like the nations; the story of David, one gleam of light as to what kingship might be ending in black failure; then that of Solomon, the most disastrous failure in the Old Testament. Next, the kingdom was disrupted, and entered on a long period of conflict, until we see the people once again, a remnant weak and small, and Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah setting them in order, after which they were locked up to law, until Christ. Thus government by monarchy in the Bible is marked as being a necessary accommodation to human weakness, a story of ghastly failure and loss which resulted in the crucifixion of the Lord of Life and Glory.

And what of the people? Christ was rejected by the people also. The people entirely failed; they submitted to the dominion of false rulership, so that they themselves caught up the cries of the false rulers, and hissed between closed teeth, "Crucify! Crucify!" The people! May God deliver us from a democracy which is not first a theocracy.

What is the history of the people according to the Bible? Their failure antedated that of priest or king. Babel is the first chapter of the federation of the people in order that they may manage themselves, and make themselves a great name in the world. From that first chapter the movement runs on through all your Biblical literature until, thank God, the day is coming, which is not yet come, when the supreme anthem of earth's emancipation will take the form: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen! The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ."

I look, then, at this Man, with the little group gathered about Him on the slopes of Olivet. Priesthood has rejected Him, government has flung Him out, the people have given their vote, consenting to the self-same rejection.

Then I look at Him again, and what do I see? I see the one Priest of humanity, the great High Priest of the race, fulfilling the function of priesthood by the mystery of His Person as it could not possibly be fulfilled in any human being. Jesus could never have been the High Priest of humanity merely in His human nature. By oneness with God, and identification with man, He can be that which Job in his agony sighed for—and in that cry the sigh for priesthood is found, perhaps as nowhere else. Would that there were a daysman who might lay his hand on God and on me. That was the great cry of a soul for the meditation of one who is in himself in true fellowship with God, and in himself in perfect identification with humanity.

As I look I see that Jesus as the One human Priest, the power of Whose Priesthood was created, as the Writer of the Letter to the Hebrews said, by the power of an endless life, which is more than a human life, but which is human in its qualification also. By His oneness with God and identification with man He is the One Priest of humanity.

I look again, and I see Him as the one and only Governor and King of humanity, the One on Whose shoulder the Government is to rest, the one King Whose kingship is based on His eternal authority and His temporal associations—I did not say, "temporary." I used my word with care. I referred to associations that have to do with time. We have to do with time, and we shall always have to do with time. There is a sense in which we are not eternal nor can be. We have eternal life. We come into an atmosphere that keeps, and sustains, and enlarges; but we are not without beginning. To be eternal there must be no beginning. God is eternal. King is One Whose authority is eternal, Who comes out of eternity, out of the necessity of things, out of the infinite wisdom that lies at the back of everything; the One Who initiates a law for a race, a nation, a man; which is not a law resulting from the manipulation of things as they seem, but which is a law resulting from the perfect knowledge of things as they are. This King's authority is based on that. His authority is based also on temporal association. He Who is the Logos, the eternal, has been made flesh, has brought the eternal into the compass of the observation of the temporal. His Kingship is based now and forevermore, first, on that eternal authority, and, second, on the fact that He tabernacled in the flesh, and walked the ways of men. God came into no closer sympathy

with man by incarnation; but by incarnation God did reveal Himself in the exquisite tenderness and eternal strength of His sympathy. God, apart from incarnation, is an abstract idea, vast, terrific; but there is no warmth in it, there is no life in it, there is no inspiration in it. But when I go to a King, and I know His word is the word of eternal authority, and yet hear it stated in the words that my mother taught me and that I lisped when I was a baby, lo, I have found my King! I see Him, outside of the government of the world, but God's appointed Governor.

I see Him again as the ensign of the people, according to the prophetic word concerning Him: "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." It was but a little group about Him on Olivet, but think how many are gathered about Him today. Yes, let us think of that sometimes even today, when, it may be, we are tempted almost to imagine that the whole Christian ideal is being blotted out in blood. He is still the rejected One, but He is also the Crowned. He is even yet cast out of the councils of the nations. Ah! but He is considered and obeyed by a vast sacramental host, a sacramental host the extent of which we cannot measure by our Church statistics. His sacramental host includes the membership of churches, but runs far out beyond that membership, gathering into its ranks all souls pledged to name the Name and live according to His law. He gathers the people to Himself, for the realization of a democracy under the reign of the one King, a democracy great because it is a theocracy. So He stands on Olivet's slopes, rejected by the priests, the governors, the people. There He stands, the One Priest, the One King, the One to Whom the gathering of the peoples shall be.

Having thus looked at the principal matter, the Person, let us consider the statement, "He led them out." He took them towards Bethany. There were tender associations there. It was at Bethany that He found what was nearer to a home in His experience than any other place. There Lazarus lived, and Martha, and Mary, whom He loved. There He had often tarried; There He had spent those last tragic nights of the last terrific week. He led them that way. There was no temple there, no kingly palace. It was not the place where crowds ordinarily assembled. He led them out to Olivet, to some slope from which Bethany could be seen. He led them out from the temple, and the priests' ministrations. He led them out from the government, and its protection. He led them out from the people, and their permissions. They would have to run counter to all these things in the coming days, as He Himself had done. The priests would seek to destroy them and their testimony as they had sought to destroy Him. The governors would be against them, and would even declare that they were seditious; and ere very long a corrupt emperor-master of the world would amuse himself and his licentious profligate friends by watching them burn. All these things He knew, and that leading out signified that He appealed to none of these things to protect His disciples when He was gone. By that leading out, He suggested to His own disciples that they were not to look for help in their propaganda from priests or governors or people. He led them out into association with Himself, in testimony to all that which He had set up, and which He came to make possible in human history.

He led them out from the temple and the priests; He led them into the true temple through a rent veil, where they might exercise their priesthood as appearing in the presence of God on behalf of humanity, and then passing out to appear in the presence of humanity on behalf of God.

He led them out from the protection of human governments; but He led them into the protection of His own Government, underneath His own sway and kingship and power.

He led them out from the promises and the voting of the populace; but He led them into association with the new democracy, consisting of all souls yielded to the Kingship of God, through Whom, at last, the Kingdom shall be established.

That leading out was thus, indeed, a leading in. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says: He went outside the camp to suffer, to die; we must go after Him, bearing His reproach. But the writer of the letter to the Hebrews also says: The veil was rent, and He opened the way into the holiest of all; we may go in with boldness. The people around Him are people led out to be led in, led out from the false into the true, led out from failure to the place of assured victory, led out from all the forces that disintegrate and break up humanity and into association with all the forces that construct and build up humanity. So He led them out, and so He led them in.

From that day to this, He has been leading out and leading in. In proportion as we understand the occasion of that last appearing, we shall discover that the Church of God must never depend on priesthood, or governments, or democracies for her strength or protection. Every form and fashion of religion, every form and fashion of government, and all the hopes of the peoples, are centered in Him to Whom we have come, and in Whose Name we go with gladness, and singing, and hope, back to every form of religion, not to destroy it, but to fulfil the essential truth within it, and purge it of its dross; back to governments, not to proclaim anarchy, but to declare that every form of government must be finally related to the government through Whom it may realize its high ideals; back to the people, not to descend to the devilish barbarity of men who speak of them as canaille, but to love them, serve them, giving our own life blood to lift them into the great Kingdom of our God. He led them out, not for their sakes alone, but, in the infinite mystery of His marvelous work, for the sake of the very things from which He led them out.

His last act was to give a blessing. He lifted up His hands and blessed them. In those Hands were arguments, scars of battle, stigmata of pain, the insignia of royalty. It was the High Priestly act. It declared that sin was atoned for, that death was vanquished, that sorrow was commandeered, captured, in order that, finally, it may do duty for the Kingdom of God. Henceforth sorrow is the

most powerful agent in the sanctification of human life, in the deliverance of nations from their perils, and of individuals from their foolishness. That High Priestly act of blessing was the act of One Who had grappled with the darkness of sin, and mastered it, Who "death by dying slew"; and He had apprehended sorrow and taken it into His own control, that henceforth it might be the minister of His will in a gracious and infinite mystery. In the uplifting of those hands was no act of forgiveness, no act of intercession. Those acts also lie within the priestly function; but that was the uplifting of hands in blessing, and blessing means bestowment. He uplifted His hands on men whom He had led out from all the forces that seemed great in the world, denying to these men the protection of these forces, but He lifted up His hands, and blessed them; and as He did so He gave them fulness of life, He gave them fellowship with God, He gave them perfect confidence for all the service that He was about to appoint to them.

Christ is thus seen to be the fulfilment, and, therefore, the center of priesthood, of government, of humanity.

When He leads men out from things that seem so necessary it is always to lead them into the possession of the real things. No man loses anything in his individual life; no society loses anything in the true passion that creates it a society; no nation loses anything of the underlying nobility of its national life by being obedient to Christ. He fulfils. He is always leading out from things effete to Himself. Things effete are not necessarily things evil. They have become effete, but they were not in the first case things evil. Things effete are things that have done their work. He taketh away the first that He may establish the second. Yes, but He established the first. Yea, verily, but when it has done its work He takes it away that He might establish the second. Sacrifice and offerings Thou wouldst not! But He appointed sacrifices and He appointed offerings! Yea! verily; but when they had fulfilled their work, He destroyed them. That is the perpetual method of Christ. If, when they have done their work, we cling to things that were necessary, perchance for us in our individual lives as Christians at the beginning, they will destroy the life they helped to make. Grave clothes are necessary for a dead man; but when he lives, loose him, and let him go! The law written on tables of stone was necessary in the first period of religious revelation; but when the Spirit of God through the infinite mystery of the atoning work of Jesus comes into the life and writes with the Finger of God on the table of the heart, then I do not want tables of stone. When I put myself in bondage to a table of stone written with the finger of God two to four millenniums ago, then I am in bondage to a thing effete.

Christ ever leads men out. One of the greatest troubles of the Christian Church has been that she so clings to things that were necessary yesterday, forgetting that Christ ever leads forward into something greater and grander. He led men out from things which in themselves had been necessary and had their place, a place made necessary by the bitter necessity of accommodation; but when these things had done their work He led the men out. The meaning of what He did that day had been revealed in His teaching previously. He said to a woman in Samaria: "...Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father." The day is coming when you will not need a temple, but wherever the soul is in need it may find access to God.

Christ's last attitude, the last appearing, the last manifestation of Himself in these days of appearing and disappearing, was in the attitude of blessing, the attitude, not of the Aaronic priesthood, but of Melchizedec. He is a Priest forever, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedec. We find Melchizedec in the first book of the Bible. Melchizedec met Abram when Abram was weary from a warfare that he had conducted in answer to a demand for righteousness. Melchizedec brought forth bread and wine for Abram, and ministered to his need. Melchizedec blessed Abram, and then passed out of sight, and Abram confronted the king of Sodom. The king offered him part of the booty. In possession of that spiritual blessing which had come to new consciousness in his soul by the ministry of Melchizedec, Abram declined to take a hoof of anything that the king offered. Then God spoke to his soul: "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

Jesus lifts up His hands in blessing on the souls who dare to follow Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. He is the High Priest Who brings bread and wine to refresh and renew us in our weariness. He is the High Priest who brings the consciousness, who steadies our faith in God, who enables us to say to every bribe that may be offered us: Not a hoof of anything. We have all we need in God.

129 - John 1:4 - Light and Darkness

Light and Darkness

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 1:4

The text consists of two statements:

First, "In Him was life."

Second, "The life was the light of men."

These are related to a group of ten, with which the seer opens his writing:

"In the beginning was the Word."

"The Word was with God."

"The Word was God."

"The same was in the beginning with God."

"All things were made by Him."

"Without Him was not anything made that hath been made."

"In Him was life."

"The life was the light of men."

"The light shineth in darkness."

"The darkness apprehended it not."

These are not arguments, but affirmations. I do not propose to discuss them, but to proceed on the assumption that they are true.

In the two which I have selected two principal values arrest the attention: first, the Person referred to, and second, the proclamation.

As to the Person referred to, the first demand on honesty is that we should interpret the writer's reference by his own presentation. By that I do not mean that we begin at the mystic distance where he begins. The inclusion of that will be necessary ere we have done with the writing. At first it is enough that we recognize the Person as those who saw Him, who were, in company with the writer, familiar with Him.

This Person, then, is first named in the account of the ministry of John the Baptist, in which the writer declares, "On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This in itself is an interesting introduction, revealing as it does the human personality—"Jesus"; the Divine relation—"the Lamb of God"; and the avowed mission—"which taketh away the sin of the world."

Adhering closely to the simplest method of observation, this Person is seen as a Man of natural thought, and speech, and habit; Who in the course of His public ministry wrought signs of a supernatural order, and uttered words of stupendous meaning; and Who was brutally murdered, but by resurrection from the dead gave the company of His disciples a new understanding of the meaning of His life and of the nature of His death.

It is perfectly evident that the wonder of that resurrection gave the writer a new conception of the Person, and the prologue of his treatise is assuredly the result of his certainty of that fact.

This leads us to the proclamation of our text. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." The demonstration of the first of these was the resurrection. By that it was made certain that in some way Jesus had the power of an endless life. Being so demonstrated, the proclamation is in itself the most stupendous of claims, and can be interpreted only by what has preceded it; that He was the Creator, of which claim it is undoubtedly part, and the final and inclusive affirmation.

The second proclamation reveals the application of this supreme truth to the case of man as the crowning glory of creation. Presently the writer, with his gaze fixed on the Person as visible to the eyes of men, said of Him, "There was the true Light, which lighteth every man, coming into the world." By that affirmation he declares that every man has light, that light being the peculiar and distinguishing quality in human life, separating it from all lower forms. In the Person under observation this universally present light came into visibility.

In order to comprehend the light, the whole Person as presented must be seen, and that can be done only as He is observed in all the activities of His life and death as interpreted by His resurrection.

That revelation is unique, stupendous, overwhelming, and affords the one and only explanation of the missionary enterprise of the Church. In the early days of clear, if imperfect, vision, the Church was missionary. Every new unveiling of Christ has been the occasion of new missionary devotion. A supreme illustration is that of the Evangelical Revival, in which the London Missionary Society and nearly all the other great Societies now at work were born. To-day we are in the midst of a process not unmixed with conflict, out of which is coming a yet clearer and more spacious conception of this light, and new missionary enthusiasm and activity are already manifesting themselves.

May we then in reverence, and yet with confidence, attempt to see in broadest outlines the missionary enterprise as explained by this Person and this proclamation?

I propose three lines of consideration of that enterprise as interpreted by the light of the Person of Jesus:—

First, the fundamental conceptions; the ideal-Righteousness.

Second, the impelling motives; the actual-Sin.

Third, the commanding evangel; the possible-Salvation.

We begin with the fundamental conceptions of the missionary enterprise. These are created by the light Christ has given us concerning God, and man, and the law of the universe. They may be briefly summarized as conceptions of the unity of God, of the unity of humanity, and of the unity of law. Each of these deserves attention in turn. However, let it be recognized at once that simple and self-evident as these things appear to us today, they are so as the result of Christ's revelation, and of His revelation only. In the Hebrew religion there had been insistence on the idea of the unity of God. Its foundation word was, "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one." Yet the mass of the people had been slow to learn the lesson, as a study of their history reveals. The idea of one humanity was totally foreign to humanity, for Judaism had emphasized separation rather than unity. The unity of law was unknown, as is evidenced by the fact that the interpreters of the highest system of law known had divided as between less and greater laws.

As the result of the light which came by Jesus, we now know the one living and eternal God. We know Him as transcendent, that is, as being infinitely greater than any creature or the sum total of creation. We know Him as immanent, that is, as being near to, and interested in every creature, and the sum total of creation. We know Him as operative, that is, as actually working through all history and all life toward a "far-off Divine event."

This conception of the unity of God has been at once the grandest and most gracious possible. We have not yet discovered all its meaning. Its acceptance has always meant the canceling of terms which, apart from it, are in constant use. To believe it is to cease to know great and small as opposed or unlike; for the smallest is kin of the greatest, and the greatest is co-operative with the smallest. The near and the distant are no longer far removed, for all are held in one consciousness, and upheld by one power. The high and the low are not opposite, and antagonistic; but related parts of the one whole, which lives and moves and has its being in God.

This vision of God is the rock foundation of the thought of those who have come to know Him through Christ.

Closely related to this conception is the conception of humanity which has resulted from the light of the Person of Christ. There is no subject more full of fascination than that of the universality of Jesus. In humanity, apart from Him, different races have had different qualities, and different nations different ideals. In Him all peoples have found the finest fulfilment of all that was best in their peculiar qualities and ideals. Thus, in the very simplicity of His humanity He has brought to light the underlying unity of the race. In Him all the separated notes merge into the one perfect harmony, and therefore in Him there cannot be Jew or Gentile, bond or free. The Man of Nazareth has become the rallying center of men of all races, and thus we have come to recognize that beneath all diversities of race or color or position, humanity is of one blood and one spirit.

This conception of the unity of humanity is awe-inspiring in itself, and in its creation of human interrelationship is most remarkable. To believe it is to be forever unable to be patriotic with the patriotism that thinks only of one's own country; or parochial with the parochialism which has no fellowship with the next parish. It is to see in every man and woman a blood relation, however far they may be separated from us by distance, or temperament, or position. It is to feel a new joy in the infinite variety which is, after all, but the evidence of the richness of the underlying unity.

These two conceptions create a third, which the light given by Christ does moreover directly reveal, that, namely, of the unity of law. To grant that unity is at once to recognize law as being love-inspired. There is no other motive for law which holds within itself all the qualities which make for the present realization of order among the members of the one humanity under the government of the one God. This unifying inspiration of law was, moreover, the supreme fact revealed by Christ. His message was delivered, in the figurative language of John, from "the bosom of the Father," and His summary of the true and all-sufficient law of human life was, "Thou shalt love."

This law of love is the severest possible; that is to say, its requirements are most minute and mighty. It can never deny itself by allowing activity which harms and hurts to continue. It makes the standard of action, not what weak and incomplete things are able to enforce in a struggle against strong and complete things; but what strong and complete things are able to do, to ensure the strengthening and perfecting of the weakest and most incomplete. Therefore this law of love is, in its keeping, the condition of perfect joy. Love ever finds its greatest delight in the well-being of all. The mightiest find greatest joy in the measure in which, in love, they care for and make joyful those who are weaker. The weakest find chief joy in the gladness they give to those who in love help them when in love's response to love they gain strength.

All this is but to touch in barest and roughest outline on the great conceptions created by Christ. The application in detail must be left. Nevertheless, these are the fundamental conceptions of the missionary enterprise. They create an impulse which is irresistible under certain conditions. Those conditions are next to be looked at. It is well to remember that these conceptions do not in themselves call for missionary activity. These are the facts of the ultimate order, of heaven set up on earth. When that final goal is reached, missions will cease. The triumphs of Christianity constitute the measure in which missionary operations cease, because

these conceptions are realized. The difference between darkness and light is the difference between ignorance of these truths and life lived in obedience to them. When these conceptions have won their ultimate victory in human history our missionary activity will be at an end. Until that hour come, they constitute the deepest reason, and create the most abiding passion for missions.

We now turn to the impelling motives of missionary enterprise. These result from that consciousness of the existing darkness, created by the epiphany of light. The apostolic outlook, as revealed in the New Testament writings, was characterized by an almost overwhelming sense of the darkness in which men lived, apart from Christ. Paul wrote of "the works of darkness," "the hidden things of darkness," "the world rulers of this darkness," "the power of darkness." Peter affirmed that the elect race was called "out of darkness." John declared of the loveless man, "The darkness hath blinded his eyes." These men having seen the light were made conscious of the conditions in the midst of which they lived. The contrast was sharp and appalling. Their joy in the light created their agony in the presence of the darkness. Their absolute rest in the perfection of the ideal order was the inspiration of their ceaseless unrest in the midst of the chaos. Thus it has ever been, and thus it continues to be. To walk in the light is to know the darkness. Conditions which are eminently satisfactory to those who have never seen the light are appalling, heart-breaking, disastrous, to the children of light.

The darkness may best be described by contrast with the light. In Christ we have found the One God. In the world we find humanity living without God, having lost its vision of Him. In Christ we have discovered the oneness of humanity. In the world we find humanity broken up and in perpetual conflict. In Christ the one law of love is revealed. In the world we see the mastery of selfishness producing suffering everywhere.

That humanity has lost its vision of God is demonstrated as we watch it at its worship. That there is a light, lighting every man, is evidenced by the fact that the instinct for worship is universal. No human being has been found so degraded that the sense of forces outside the material is wholly absent. We may speak of superstition, and barbarism, but the man with a fetish does by his thought of it demonstrate this sense of the spiritual, and recognize some relation to it. Yet how awfully the light that is in him is darkness. The highest conceptions of God, when held in the light of His manifestation in Christ, are dark indeed. They postulate a being, or a number of beings, hard, cold, distant, relentless, capricious. Descending in the scale, gods of selfishness, of greed, of corrupt, and degrading passions are worshiped, until at last the conception of deity is that of antagonistic devils, who are worshiped by being persuaded not to hurt. Darkness in very deed, but we have come to know it only because we have seen the light.

This lost vision of God has produced everywhere the break up of humanity. We have already referred to the fundamental word of ideal Hebraism as being, "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one." The immediate outcome of that declaration was the command, "Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." This is significant in that it suggests that the recognition of One God makes for the unification of every individual life by the one law of love, and thus makes possible the true social order. The words of the Preacher, "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint," are demonstrated true in all human history. All anarchy is the outcome of atheism. National strife and bloodshed, social conflict and cruelty, individual bitterness and brutality, alike result from lack of the knowledge of God, which is life and not death, light and not darkness, love and not hatred. Yet these are the conditions in which the greater part of men are still living.

The absence of love as the law of life issues in the mastery of selfishness, and this is the secret of all individual sin, and the source of all the woes and wounds and weariness of the peoples.

That these are the conditions we need not stay to argue. Eyes lifted from the contemplation of the Light of the World, in which have been seen the facts of the unity of God, the oneness of humanity, and the perfection of the law of love, and turned to the great lands in which the families of the earth are dwelling, see with awful distinctness the darkness of the lost vision of God, of the consequent tearing and agony of humanity, and of the cruel and blasting tyranny of the mastery of selfishness.

It is this vision of the darkness as seen by the light which is the impelling motive of missionary enterprise, consuming, and driving like a fire in its almost terrific passion for the passing of the darkness and the victory of the light.

Yet we have not so far found the real secret of the victories won, or the most compelling cause for continued toil. The case is hopeless indeed if there be nothing more to be said. The problems are but suggested by the vision of the ideal, and the consciousness of the actual. How is the actual to be changed into the ideal? That is the supreme question, and all missionary endeavor has been the result of the possession by the Church of the one and only answer. To that we finally turn.

The superlative factor in missionary enterprise is its great evangel. That evangel is infinitely more than a revelation of truth about God and man. It is the declaration of an activity of God which is in harmony with His nature, and through which man, notwithstanding his failure, may be restored so completely that all the highest ideals revealed in the Person of the Christ may be perfectly realized. As we said at the commencement, the light of men which came into the world with the coming of Jesus needs the whole of His life and mission through death, if it is to be perfectly understood.

The perfect ideal is not the complete evangel. Indeed, in itself it is not an evangel. It is a glorious presentation of the magnificent and

beneficent purpose of God; but if the only light is that of such revelation, then man learns from it only how far he is falling short. But when there is superadded to that unveiling of an ideal the story—awe-inspiring and full of mystery—of a death which is the ultimate of all human woe and anguish, which, nevertheless, merges in a resurrection of unquestioned triumph; and in the claim of the risen One to all authority in heaven and on earth, and in His command to His disciples to proclaim the evangel, then hope springs in the heart, for we realize that through that Person a work has been wrought which makes possible the correction of the false and the establishment of the true.

The truth is the great deposit of the Church, possessing which, she is in debt to every land, and people, and age, until hearing and obeying, the darkness pass and the perfect light of the true order is the brightness and joy of human life in its individual, social, national, and racial experience. Every land where His light is unknown is a reproach to the Church. All the peoples who, sitting in darkness, still sin and suffer, are by their sinning and suffering calling to the children of light to be honest and pay the debt they owe.

May we, then, reverently inquire what are the essential notes of this great evangel? In attempting to name them I shall studiously avoid making any statement in the realm of those unfathomed secrets of the methods of God which are forever beyond human understanding. The things revealed are for us and our children.

Taking, then, the whole fact of the Christ—His Being, His teaching, His death, and His resurrection—we find that three declarations constitute the evangel. It may be well, first, to state them in all brevity. They are:

First, that God cannot deny Himself, and therefore obeys His own law of love at infinite and amazing cost.

Second, that humanity must return to that same law by accepting the grace provided at such cost.

Third, that because of God's action, wherever man makes such return the past can be blotted out, and the highest and most glorious ideal be fully realized.

I am almost painfully aware of how each of these assertions opens the way for very much elaboration, and nothing would be more delightful than to be able to carry it out. That is, however, made impossible by the fact that we are still straitened by the limitations of time. Moreover, it is not absolutely necessary to the present intention, which is that of examination of a great theme in broadest outline. We must content ourselves therefore for the moment with a few brief sentences in each case.

As to the first. By incarnation God did not actually come nearer to man. Neither was the death of Jesus of Nazareth a point of new departure on the part of God. Incarnation was the method by which God revealed to men who had lost their vision of Him the fact of His perpetual nearness, and the nature of His Being. By the death of Jesus of Nazareth He wrought out into visibility, so far as that was possible, an attitude of His nature, and an activity of His grace, whereby, and alone whereby, man could be saved. The eternal and still finally incomprehensible facts are those of the existence and nature of God, and of that suffering of the infinite Love, whereby the very guilt of sin is canceled, and its power broken. In order to have right relation with these facts it was necessary that they should be manifested, and therefore the life and death of Jesus were necessary. The first note of the Gospel is the absolute certainty that God can and does forgive sin and break its power.

As to the second. The messenger of the evangel must ever be true to the statement of necessity on the part of those to whom the message is delivered. He cannot be true to the message of the Divine pain if he tells men that sin does not matter, or that it is merely part of a process toward its opposite. He forever declares that it is all wrong, and that its ultimate is the distance and the disaster which its direction indicates. The conditions of restoration are those of return to obedience. Here, however, is the matchless beauty and surpassing loveliness of our evangel. God has made the method of return to His law that of accepting as a gift of His grace the forgiveness of sins, and all the resources necessary to the remaking of the broken life. That gift of grace is not a cloak for sin, but a cleansing from it, not an excuse for unfitness, but an energy for fitness. To refuse it is to choose sin and ruin. Thus if the first note of the evangel be that of the grace of God, the second is ever that of the responsibility of man.

As to the third. Far be it from me to seem, by any words now to be uttered, to minimize the value and importance of the things already spoken. They are the profoundest and mightiest, the things rooted in God, and thrilling with His power. Yet this last note is so full of delight that in it one exults, and is constrained to perpetual song. Because of God's action in grace, wherever man obeys, the best can be realized in spite of all the worst.

In the return of man to God through Christ the true God is known, and all the false ones are swept away. It is when God is so found that every willy and sinful Ephraim exclaims, "What have I to do any more with idols?" When man sees the one Lord, and exercises in Him the one faith of submission, and is baptized into life and light and love by the one Spirit, he finds the one God and Father of all, Who is over all, transcendent; and through all, operative; and in all, immanent. In that moment he finds the one humanity, and in that moment self is smitten to the death, and love enthroned. Then begins the healing. Bitterness passes from the heart like a pestilential vapor driven forth before the rush of the wind from the snow-capped mountains. Round the new center of love-governed life all the circles of family, of society, of nation, and of race feel the thrill: and hastened is the day of the new heavens and the new

earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. This is our evangel. Its notes are Love, the love of God; Faith, the answer of man; Hope, the certainty of victory. This evangel is not parochial, national. It is Divine, and therefore humane, and wherever it is proclaimed man finds it in very deed the one and only Gospel.

Brethren, my theme is inexhaustible, but my time is not. Those of you who know the Light most perfectly are most conscious of how human expositions of it are ever in danger of dimming its effulgence. For that in this message which has obscured the one Light of life I most sincerely pray the pardon of my gracious Lord. But if in any measure I have been able to speak, so as to be understood, the things that are deepest and most awe-inspiring in my own life, I thank God. Let us remember at least the great text, and so much of the suggestions made as will help us to clearer understanding of the unique and lonely splendor of our evangel.

In Christ to have found God, and man, and the law of Love, is to have become awfully conscious of the gross darkness that covers the people.

In Christ to have found the grace of God, the way of human salvation, and the assurance of the ultimate victory of Love; is to be filled with a passion for the proclamation of the glad good news to all lands and peoples for the glory of God, the healing of man, and the establishment of the Kingdom.

The Vision creates the passion; the passion compels the mission. If we lack missionary devotion it is because we lack passion, and if we lack passion it is because we lack vision.

130 - John 1:11, 13 - The Coming of the Word - Rejected or Received?

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 blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:11; John 1:13

Perhaps one of the outstanding characteristics of Scripture is the simplicity with which the sublimest things are stated. There are times when one wonders whether we have not allowed the simplicity of this statement to rob us of the sense of awe which ought to possess us in the presence of the truth which it declares. In some senses the whole fact of the mission of our Lord by way of incarnation and all related thereto is perfectly and finally declared.

In this paragraph we have the third stage of one declaration; and all that which has preceded it is necessary to the full understanding of the sublimity and grandeur of these words of our text.

This prologue of the gospel of John opens with what I think I may without irreverence characterize as the most sublime and stupendous statement of the whole of the Divine library, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," a statement suddenly bringing us into the presence of matters that far transcend the possibility of human understanding, or interpretation. I venture to say in regard to this wonderful word at the opening of the gospel that one of the purposes of the Spirit in writing these sentences through John was to remind men that behind the fact of Christ are mysteries too sublime for their comprehension or final explanation, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That is an eternal fact, and therefore spiritual; and it is forever beyond the perfect comprehension of the finite mind.

Then follows a great parenthesis, in which John describes for us facts growing out of the eternal. In the opening word we have the statement of eternal facts concerning our Lord and Master, and immediately following we have the statement of temporal facts, that is, facts related to time. Time is but a term of human and finite life. There is a sense in which it would be accurate to say that in the being of God time is not. "The same was in the beginning with God," and in those words we are carried far down from the sublime, stupendous height of the first verse; for this beginning is the beginning of Genesis, of creation. Yet we see the same Person present when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy in the presence of the wonder of primal creation.

The apostle continues, and declares that the One Who was there has continued through all the processes of that which He originally created; nothing has been created subsequently, or by any development, or by new intrusion of power, apart from this selfsame Person. Then he inclusively affirms that He is the fountain of all life, in the words "In Him was life." Life in man became light as it is in no other part of the creation. Nothing in creation apart from man has light in that sense. Nothing in creation looks back into the face of the Creator and is capable of knowing the Creator.

Coming still further down in the order of statement, the apostle tells us that this selfsame One, the Word, the Light, has ever been in the world, even though the world has not known Him.

Then, at last, having made these statements concerning the far-flung splendors of the age-abiding past, and concerning the mystic, mighty processes of all creation, he declares that He, the One from Whom all things came, "came unto His own." The whole tragedy of human sin, if we can but understand it, is packed into the next word, "They that were His own received Him not." The whole glory

of infinite grace sings its anthem into the word immediately following, "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God."

Now let us try to fix our attention on the last fact. Leaving behind us all the mystery and glory of the eternal fact that He was with God and was God, leaving behind us from this moment all the mystery and glory of the process of creation, and that through all time He was in the world though the world knew Him not, we come to that central fact of human history, that He came, and that He came to His own.

In order to have a clear understanding of the teaching, we need to distinguish carefully between the two phrases which in our versions and in our translations appear to be identical, "His own." The phrase is twice repeated, "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not." As a matter of fact, there is a very clear distinction between these two phrases, as all those familiar with the Greek New Testament, or the Vulgate, where the difference has been most carefully maintained, will recognize. "He came unto His own"—there the word is neuter—"and they that were His own"—there the word is masculine—"received Him not." I draw attention to the distinction in order that we may see how inclusive and comprehensive a declaration that is. "He came unto His own"—there the reference is not to people but to place. There are those who suggest that this should read, He came unto His own land. Bishop Westcott suggests that it should read, "He came unto His own home." I feel that neither is quite final, or quite satisfactory. Perhaps I have no right to say this, because I cannot supply the word that seems to be necessary. "He came unto His own"; why not leave it there? Or perhaps we take it as having application to the Creation, His own creation.

"And they that were His own received Him not"; there the masculine form stands for people, and is most certainly used in reference to that peculiar and separated people in the midst of human history which had been created a people for the purposes of God in reaching the world, and witnessing to Himself; and ultimately for the coming of Messiah, Who should be the Saviour of the world, the One for Whom the salvation of Jacob and the calling back of Israel was too light a thing according to Isaiah, and Who should be set for the proclamation of salvation to the ends of the earth.

He came unto His own land, if you will, home if you will; or, in the larger sense which reveals the economy and purpose of God, to His own creation; and His own people—in the midst of His own creation, those to whom after the flesh He did belong, those who constituted God's elect people for the purpose of revelation and who had so disastrously failed—received Him not. He came, the Messiah, Shiloh, the Branch, infinitely more than any prophet had dreamed or known. He came descended from David, according to Jewish genealogy, to exercise His ministry among His own, these people chosen for the purposes of the Divine economy. He spoke in the Jewish synagogues, He referred to the children's bread being given to the dogs; and He lived in the midst of degeneration, and in circumstances of limitation, but in perfect harmony with God in His own life. With what result? "His own received Him not." They tried to entangle Him in His talk, and His very own, the men of Nazareth, would fain have thrust Him headlong down the hill and destroyed him; and, at last, to make the whole tragedy brief in reverent statement, they delivered Him to Roman rule, and clamored for His blood. The end, on the human side, of that which we celebrate today, the coming into human history of the Child Who lay in a manger, was the Cross.

I know the difficulty and imperfection of that survey. No man in this house is more conscious of it than I am. The infinite past—to us past, but to God ever present—the beginning; and the word suggests our limitation, for there is no beginning with Him and no end; but therein the infinite mystery of the Person. Then creation, the stars singing, or if we did but dare to translate the Hebrew literally and accurately, the stars vibrating, and the angels singing, and presiding over all the mystic, majestic processes, this same Person. At last, because of human failure, and human sin, He came in circumstances of such lowliness that you may tell the whole tragedy of His human life in brief, brutal chapters. Chapter one, No room in the inn! Chapter two, The foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head! Chapter three, Crucify Him! Chapter four, A borrowed grave in a rich man's garden! If we could come to these things as we ought, and see them as they are, in the light of all the infinite glory with which John's gospel opens, then we should know what sin is, and how far humanity has sunk, and how profound and appalling is the ruin of human nature. "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not."

Was His coming, then, a failure? Were all those years of toil for nought? Was that unveiling of Light, by its veiling, of no avail? Let us go again reverently to the culmination of it all, and behold the Man, despised, rejected, bruised, dead! "His own received Him not!"

But there were some who received Him. There were some who believed in His name. There were those who turned and followed Him imperfectly, but they followed; falteringly, but they followed; unworthily, but they followed! What of them? "To them gave He the right to become children of God." Some of us this morning meditated the anthem of the angels over the new race,

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased,

that is, among the children of God who result from the presence in the world of this One, those who have the new life. Again, above the glory of the declaration of His coming, and the tragedy of the story of human refusal, we listen to the gospel. Here it is, singing to

us even out of the wonders of John's prologue, "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God." Let us endeavor to understand this better by considering the privileges and responsibilities of children.

What are the privileges of children? Is my word the best one here? I hardly think so in relation to the first fact, for something deeper than privilege is the first note. Children are such as partake of their father's nature. That is the infinite, profound mystery of the thing resulting from the coming of our Lord. He gave men the right to become children of God. He made those to whom He gave that right, partakers—and do not be afraid of the word, it is Peter's word in his letter—partakers of the Divine nature. Adoption is a word of the New Testament, a great and gracious word, but it is not exhaustive if we attempt to interpret it by what we know of adoption. In very love you may adopt a child which is not your own, you may give it all the things it would have had, had it been your own child; but you cannot give it your nature. So far as that is true, your adoption fails to describe the new relation resulting when a man receives the rejected Saviour, which is that He gives that one the right, not to call himself, but to become, a child of God.

Let us think of this. Are you a child of God? Then already you are a partaker of His nature. I state it so because it is an amazing declaration. Sometimes the heart is tempted to be fearful and afraid in the presence of such revelations or statements of Scripture because we are so conscious of being unlike God. Think again, and always think patiently of your own life as a believer, with God's patience. What is the Divine nature? It is essentially love. It is therefore holiness. It is also infinite wisdom. Every child of God partakes of these facts of the Divine nature. Every child of God becomes in measure love-centered, in measure holy, in measure wise with the wisdom of eternity. First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Let that principle be remembered by all such as tremble in the presence of the great revelation.

Think again. A man who becomes a son of God, a woman who becomes a daughter of God; men and women who become children of God, immediately share His nature of love. Here is something that has often been pointed out, and it cannot be too often repeated. The first movement of the communicated life of the nature of God to the soul of a human being is a love movement; the first true consciousness of the Divine nature in the soul of a man is one that negatives self and reaches out in strong desire to help another. Children of God, sharers of the Divine nature, primarily, fundamentally, are men and women first of all in whom love becomes the central fact.

It is equally true that the child of God has as desire, as impulse, as the central inspiration, a passion for holiness; but, oh, how we fail, how we sin, those of us who bear His name! But God understands—and it is true—that we do not want to sin. That is the life of God within us, the holy seed that cannot sin, that within us which is against sin. In all the complexity of our personalities that is the deepest thing. We sin against it, violate it, wander into bypaths; but that passion for holiness, the strong, urgent desire after purity, is the sharing of the Divine nature, and it is the result of having become a child of God, because we have received the rejected Christ.

We share also the wisdom of God. This I need not stay to argue, but I ask you to remember it in this way: the moment a man shares His life, becomes a son of God, in that very moment he knows things which before he did not know, he has an absolute assurance and certainty of things which before he wondered about. That is why, if you are not a Christian man, you cannot understand the quietness and peace of the man who is a Christian. I do not say that the truly Christian man has no intellectual difficulty, no problem of the mind; but I do say that no argument can shake his confidence, or remove his trust. It is sharing the nature that brings new wisdom, new comprehension, new certainty.

The child is a partaker of the father's nature. The love of God becomes the central fact in the life of the child of God; His life creates the passion for holiness, and the wisdom of God is communicated to the soul, so that it enters into absolute assurance of things not seen and which never can be demonstrated by the processes of the logician, or be made certain by the argument of the senses. These are some of the first and fundamental values of this great word of John.

But children—and these are the implications of the text—are the recipients of the father's love and especial care. They are the special treasure of the Father, God's treasures. We have sometimes said that God condescends to take our name, "father," in order to teach us what He is. There is an element of truth in it; but I do not think that is the profoundest way to state the truth. I would rather say that God lent us His name, "Father," in order to teach us what we ought to be to our children. Yet it is perfectly fair to take the argument in the other way. If tonight, buffeted, bruised, storm-tossed, lonely man or woman, you want to know what your Father feels toward you, if you are a father or a mother, remember that your care for your child, your thought for your child, your patience with your child, your undying, unquenchable love for your child, all is but the faint shadow of God's love for you. He never forgets us, never abandons us, never gives us up.

Another implication is that children of God are heirs of their Father. That is stated explicitly in Scripture, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. All His treasures are ours and are at our disposal so far as we are able to use them. He has treasures He will not give us yet because we do not know their value or use, and therefore possession would but harm us. He withholds nothing from us which would be for our healing, helping, and happiness. He Who spared not His own Son but freely delivered Him up for us, shall He not with His Son freely give us all things? The world with its store of wonders untold is ours. We enter into the treasure-house of snow and ice, and all the wealth of creation. He Who was and is the Word, the Son of God, God the Son through Whom creation

came, has brought us into the same relationship to His Father as He Himself is bearing, and we have entered into all the riches of God.

Again, children have a right to the Father's home. One does not often dwell on this fact, perhaps not enough. The saintly Rutherford said, We dwell too much in the wilderness, and lift our eyes too little to the city to which we go. It is good sometimes to enter the city, walk its streets in imagination, and examine the dwelling places, and become familiar with the habits of the home that lies beyond. His home is ours. Homeless the children of God can never be.

A tent or a cottage, what need I care?

They are building a palace for me over there.

He is preparing a place, but it is in one of the Father's many places, and all the home of God is ours.

Such privileges bring corresponding responsibilities. The first responsibility of the child to the father is that of the obedience of perfect love. Put it that way, think of it in that way. Think no longer of Him only as King, though King He is; think of Him no longer merely as Judge, though Judge He surely is; think no more of Him solely as Lawgiver, though Lawgiver He certainly is; but remember He is Father, and that interprets the government of the King, and explains the method of the Judge, and unlocks the secret of the law. Therefore, as His child, let me hasten in the way of His commandments and let the answer of my life be the obedience of my love.

We have another responsibility for a little while, not only that of the obedience of personal relationship, but that of the honor of His name and character in the presence of His enemies. As the son of a famous house will move out to the ends of the earth and never forget the name he bears, so surely we who bear His name, and share this nature, must remember that upon us depends the honor of the name we bear, as we move among the sons of men, as children of God.

Now hear this final word. "He gave the right to become children of God." The word suggests man's helplessness. The word reveals the fact that having come to His own and being rejected by His own, and being rejected of the whole world, all those who had rejected Him, by that very rejection had manifested the fact of their distance from God. The word, then, first implies man's utter helplessness. How far away man is from God!

The word next implies Christ's power to communicate. "To them gave He the right to become children of God." How? The next verse is the full and final answer to that inquiry, "which were begotten, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." There we are face to face with the mystic, central miracle of Christianity, which defies all analysis and explains all Christian phenomena; that is the central thing, begotten of God, that which cannot be seen in its happening, but which is demonstrated by the results it produces. The rejected Son of God is received by that man, believed on by that man, and that man is there and then not by his own act or will, but by the answer of omnipotent power, begotten. That is the central secret. This right to become children of God is not merely sentimental; it is not merely a covenant made between two; it is a vital fact.

Some man listening to this word, meditating the word here in the sanctuary, will come to the hour of decision, will receive the Saviour, and even though there be no lightning flash, no roll of reverberating thunder, that man will be begotten, born again, touched in the inner deep mystery of His life with the life of God, changed in his very nature. This is the mystic miracle of Christianity, Christ's power to communicate life.

Wherein lies His power to communicate life? Not in the fact of His eternal nature. Not in the fact of His creative ability. But in the fact of His Cross! Let Him interpret Himself, and let Him do it through this gospel of John, "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." What for? To give it to the sheep, for that is the setting of this declaration, to communicate His very life to others.

What word shall I use? Suffer me this, it is very imperfect, but I know no perfect word, to liberate it through the mystery and tragedy of His death, that He might give it to men, and that they might share it, and come by the Cross and by the Cross alone into living union with Himself, and thus become children of God by virtue of the fact that they have His life, the life of the only begotten Son of God. He gave them, who were begotten, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of the will of God, the right to become the children of God.

That implies our authority, nay, declares it, to be children of God. It is a right based on power, on life, on identification. Unless I share Christ's life I am not a Christian. Though I sing the songs, though I make a great profession, unless I share Christ's life, I am not a child of God.

What, then, is the final word of this meditation? What are the conditions on which a man, a member of the rebelling, refusing, sinning race may become a child of God? "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God." Then, in order that there may be no mistake—I am thankful always for this interpretation—"even to them that believe on His name." Take

the two phrases and use the one which helps you most, to receive Him, or to believe on His name. What is it to believe on His name? To receive Him. What is it to receive Him? To believe on His name. Avail yourself of that which helps you most, now at this moment. Receive Him, for He is rejected today. We sometimes read, If Christ came to Chicago—If Christ came to London. I do not like the suggestion, for it is false. He is in Chicago; He is in London. Yet let me borrow the idea for a brief moment. If He came what would London do with Him? London would not crucify Him in the way they did of old; but it would get rid of Him! Christ is rejected today. The human heart is still in enmity against God. Man is still fast bound in sin and nature's night, in spite of all his progress and intellectual advancement. Christ is rejected. We know it. There are whole circles of what we call cultured and refined society which, alas, and alas for the blasphemy of it, are celebrating Christmas who will have none of Christ. His very name is taboo, not to be mentioned! He is the rejected One.

Will you receive Him? Will you find room in your heart and life for the One for Whom there was no room in the inn of old? Will you crown Him Lord of your life? Will you yield all your being, bruised and battered and broken by your sin, incapable of finding God by your own wit and wisdom? Will you crown Him? Then to you He will give the right to become a child of God! And mark the spaciousness of it, whatever your theory may be, whatever your doctrine about sovereignty, elections, reprobations—all of which are true if you understand them—"as many as received Him!" Rich or poor, bond or free, black or white, these are incidental things that matter nothing; but a sharp dividing line is running through this audience tonight in the eyes of God between the man who has received Him and the man who has refused Him. Where are you? "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God." If you passed into this place tonight, reverent, interested, but nothing more, will you now receive Him, believe on His name and all the name stands for? Will you give Him your life and let Him come into your life and master it? Then, when you pass from this building and walk the streets, you will be a child of God.

What is the application of all this? The first application is to the children of God. Let us answer by unqualified surrender. What is the application of this to those who are His, but are wandering away, backsliding, if I may use the word that we all know? It is this. He is waiting to receive you again. His word to you is, "I have somewhat against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." But this also, "Repent, and do the first works." Come back as you came at the beginning; and the word of gracious promise is, "I will heal all thy backsliding, and love thee freely."

The last word is to the man, the woman, young or old, in this house, who never yet has received Him. You have heard the Christmas bells again, and the Christmas carols, and you are entering into all the merriment of Christmas which may have in it much of blasphemy; but will you open the door of your heart and let Him in? Then He will keep Christmas with you, and you with Him, in the fellowship of the one life, He the Son of God, and you the child of God.

131- John 1:13 – Regeneration

Regeneration

Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:13

The principal and inclusive thought of the text is contained in the phrase "begotten... of God." By this phrase we are ushered into the presence of the central miracle of Christianity, the first, fundamental work of the Holy Spirit. All the powers and the wonders of Christianity proceed from this center. The new social order which ought to be established within the limits of the Christian Church, the influence on the world which the Church exerts, its message to men—of all these the power ultimately results from this initial, central, and fundamental miracle of the new birth of the individual soul. The dynamic in each case is that of the new life in the individual. That new life, mutually related in the Church, becomes the heavenly nation, and enables that nation to show forth "the excellencies of Him who called them out of the darkness into His marvellous light." That new life in the sacramental host creates the force of the Church's aggression in the world.

Therefore, although it is indeed the old, old story, and a theme most familiar in many of its aspects, it is perennially new; and the application of it can never be exhausted nor its consideration ever be out of place.

In order that we may think intelligently on all that is suggested by the phrase, I shall ask you to notice with me with some amount of care the interpolated negatives of this text, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." I shall ask you, in the second place, to consider the immediate statement in all its sublime brevity, recognizing the mystery but insisting on the fact, "begotten... of God." I shall ask you, finally, to consider the instructive context, for in some senses my text is wrested from its context, not in order to forget it, but to return to it.

In the first place, then, we turn to what I have described as the interpolated negatives. A threefold negative statement breaks in on the general phrase and demands attention by the centrality of its position. These words sweep away all false ideas concerning the

nature of personal Christianity, and leave the mind clear for contemplating the sublime fact itself. The theme is that of the origin of life. Christianity here is looked on properly and necessarily as life, something infinitely more than creed, something infinitely more than a cult; life, ultimately perfected in the whole Body of Christ, which is the Church; life, fundamentally realized in the individual soul. The subject is the origin of that life. In the whole text I find the answer to a question of Nicodemus. He said to Jesus, "How can a man be born when he is old?" People who criticize Nicodemus for that question, and think that it was flippant, have surely never understood the deep agony of soul out of which it proceeded. This question men must always ask when they come to any sense of God, of themselves, of sin. It is a question that suggests impossibility: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" How can a man start anew untrammelled by the past? How can a man escape from the insistent, haunting pressure of the things that lie behind him in his own life? How can a man be born anew? The answer is in my text; he can be "begotten... of God." Now all the difficulties are really suggested by these negatives: "Not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." In these three phrases we have a revelation of the only methods of which any man could think when he began to consider the possibility of a new beginning in his life. All man's theories concerning the origin of life are suggested by these phrases. Not of bloods, which is to say that the new, peculiar life of the Christian cannot be accounted for by the combination of anything that is material. If I may borrow a very modern phrase, this life cannot be accounted for by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms—"not of bloods." "Nor of the will of the flesh"; this life is not generated naturally, in any sense of the word. "Nor of the will of man"; its origin is not even in the rationality of humanity. That threefold line covers the whole ground of philosophic discussions on the origin of life. Within the three phrases of the inspired Word lie all the suggestions that have ever been made on the origin of any form of life. The apostolic word sweeps them all away and says, This life is not so to be accounted for.

In my text, in these negatives, I find, however, recognition of spiritual conceptions. I believe here is the answer of inspiration to sincere souls who are earnestly desiring, as was Nicodemus, something higher, nobler, earnestly desiring to escape from the bondage of the past and the paralysis of the present. How can a man be born again? Here are three ways in which it is impossible.

"Not of bloods," that is, by no mere process of nature. In that statement lie at least two suggestions: not by descent from our forebears after the flesh, and not by the evolution of anything that is homed within the material. A man begins his life again in the power of an entirely new life. In the first place, these gospels were written by Hebrews and undoubtedly were largely studied by Hebrews, and it was necessary that they should understand that this new, mystic, Christian life could not be begotten in the soul of a man by the fact of his relationship to what lay behind him, by descent, for instance, from Abraham. The truth abides. I am not a Christian because my father was a Christian. I cannot transmit my Christianity to my children. "Not of bloods." We may make our boast in our blood, and may even name it by certain colors, which seem to suggest some kind of aristocracy, but there is nothing in any blood inherently of the spirit-life, and there is nothing in any blood which secures to the man in whose veins it runs the possibility of the new birth and the new beginning.

Again, "nor of the will of the flesh." This suggests the sincere and passionate desire after the better, which expresses itself in personal effort, so that here we are taught that the new birth does not result from the determined throwing off of the evil that is within or from the persistent imitation of the good that lies without. Not by any natural force can a man enter into the new life. I am not undervaluing the attempt a man may make in his loneliness, apart from the revelation of the gospel, to master evil forces; I am not undervaluing the attempt a man may make to imitate that which is high and noble. In the final dealing of God with men I have no doubt whatever that the heathen who has never heard our gospel and has never walked in our light, but has answered the light within him, fighting against the beast within himself and climbing after the higher ideal, will have a far better chance than the man who names the name of Christ and sings the songs of the sanctuary and is content with some orthodoxy of the intellect, but has no response within his own soul and no obedience in his own character. Not thus, however, can a man be born anew.

Once again, "nor of the will of man." No decision of man generates life. Even though Christ is presented to me, and I will to believe in Him and honestly do so, it is not of my willing that I am born again. The act of my will is not that which generates new life in me. Neither can any man bestow by life on man. These negatives completely sweep everything false from beneath us, and leave us face to face with the one and only method by which the soul can be born anew and enter into the Christian life. The gateway into the Church is the gateway of a life which never comes through blood, through effort, or as the result of rational and intellectual activity; which never comes by the soul's own effort.

So we come necessarily to the central fact itself: "Begotten... of God"! We have no explanation of the process of the mystery. We must not be deterred from the consideration because that admission is properly made. That is true of all life. The methods of the generation of life are absolutely hidden. The secret of life in every realm is unfathomed today, and in spite of all scientific investigation. Life eludes analysis and definition. The mystery of the budding and blossoming flower is as profound as the mystery of the new birth of an immortal soul. Involved within your personality as you know it, apart from spiritual things, there is a mystery which is as profound as the mystery which you have to face when you hear the central Christian doctrine of the necessity for the new birth. The phrase of my text speaks of the Agent, God; and of the begetting and the beginning of new life. It is for us to consider what the phrase suggests, remembering here also that "the secret things belong unto God: but the things that are revealed belong unto us

and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

The communication of life is from God; it is new life, different in quality from the life which we have lived until we receive it; but it is life as definite and positive as any life, finding its demonstration in the results that follow its possession. The mystery of its coming none can explain. When Nicodemus asked his question, the Lord employed the simple symbol of the wind to help him to understand that he could not understand: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The thought of the text taken in its simplicity is that the life bestowed is of a new quality, different from any other life, the very life that is needed if a man is to begin again and is to realize all that in which he has previously failed. In the discourse contained in the tenth chapter of this gospel our Lord made this declaration: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." In the course of the same address He said: "I lay down my life, that I may take it again." His argument and teaching is that His life was laid down in order that that very life might be communicated to others. Again, the mystery of the process abides; but here is the declaration of the fact, and the demonstration of its accuracy to be found in the results produced. Peter, James, and John were never born again until the day of Pentecost. Until then they were disciples, the Hebrew disciples of a Hebrew Messiah, following His teaching, obeying His commands so far as they had light, naturally shrinking from His cross as the natural man forever shrinks from the cross—but pressing after Him with fine loyalty though with much trembling. In the strict sense of the word they were disciples only. They never shared His life while He was among them. They never saw with His eyes, though they saw His eyes and the love light shining from them. They never heard with His ears, though they heard His speech and were astonished. They never felt with His heart, though they loved Him and knew the warmth of His affection. There was no identification with Him in those early days. They were never born anew, until on the day of Pentecost there came the Holy Spirit, by which they were baptized into union with Christ. This union was not of a common sentiment, not a union born of a common admiration; it was a definite, positive, real, though mystical, union in life. From that baptism of the Spirit they began to live one life with Jesus Christ; He, now ascended, glorified, Man of their humanity, at the right hand of the Father; and they, on the earth, in the world, in the midst of its temptations and its sins and sorrows, burdens and responsibilities; but their life was His life, His life was their life. They were living one life with Him.

You say that is theory. No, it is a fact, demonstrated by the change in the men. Look at these disciples in the gospels, and then look at them in the Acts of the Apostles: the change is radical, and marvelous. They were changed from men, struggling, climbing, endeavoring, failing, to men newborn, living one life with Christ, mastered by love, illumined by light, doing exploits in the power of the dynamic actually communicated to them, of which they were devoid until that time. I look at them before Pentecost, and I hear them saying in the presence of the Cross and passion, the shame and suffering, Not that, Lord; that be far from Thee! I find them almost immediately after, their backs waled with rods, bruised and bleeding, and I read that they were "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name." They were newborn men, men mastered no longer by their own lives according to their first birth, but by this mystic life which did not destroy the capacities of the first birth, but fulfilled them, glorified them, ennobled them. This being born of God is the communication to the soul of the very life of Christ which is at once human and divine. The newborn soul is one who has received into his humanity the humanity of Christ in its perfection and the Deity of Christ in its fellowship, and so that soul has become, to use Peter's illuminative word, a partaker of the Divine nature. That new life never comes of bloods, or of effort of the flesh, or of rational, intellectual struggle. It comes directly from God.

This new life means renewal of the dead. Here is its supreme wonder. The Christ-life, given to the individual, shared by the Church aggressive in the world, is always life bestowed on those who were dead. This Christ-life God bestows not on sinless beings but on sinners, so that the great and marvelous fact is that the new birth, the new creation, is life out of death.

The new creation is after the pattern of the story we find in the book of Genesis. In the first verse I read, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." That is a complete story in itself, there is nothing else to be said. Then what? "And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." That is not how God made it. Isaiah declares, "He made it not waste and void." Between verses one and two in Genesis, something happened, some cataclysm, some catastrophe, some upheaval. God has not revealed to us what happened. It may be that this very earth of ours was the place which angels first inhabited, where their probation was spent. I do not know. Between the original creation of God and the picture of the second verse it is certain that there was a cataclysm. Perhaps some day, in the fuller light, we shall discover that back there is the solution of the problem of evil and the genesis of it. What next? "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light: and there was light." In all that remains of that chapter we find, not creation, but restoration; a new creation out of a dead creation, the bringing forth of cosmos out of chaos. Things did not begin with chaos. God is not the God of confusion. Chaos never originates with God. It is held in His grasp and never allowed to escape that grasp; but the first thing is cosmos, order, beauty. Then, somehow, chaos; and then what? A new creation, restoration; the brooding Spirit of God, the uttered word of God and the first fiat, "Let there be light."

That is a perfect picture of the new birth of a soul. This Christ-life, with all its glories of grace and truth, its final, absolute, wondrous perfections, is not bestowed on perfect souls. God is not gathering into His heaven essentially new creations, having formed them in the likeness of Christ, without relation to past failure; He is bestowing this mystic, wondrous life on souls that may be described as waste and void, in darkness; on which souls He comes by the Holy Spirit, brooding on them, touching them with new life;

communicating it to them, so that they rise to the realization of all that which in themselves was waste and void, to the fulfilment of all that which lay in chaotic disaster. The new birth is for finding and fulfilling every distinct capacity created by God in the first birth. To the individual soul born of God is communicated the very life of Christ, which, being possessed, takes hold of that life to which it comes, cleansing it, purging it, renewing it, energizing it, enabling it to rise to the fulfilment of that which lay within it, but in destruction; and, higher yet, to a range of being which is far beyond anything possible to humanity apart from sin, and apart from the redeeming work of Christ. The great possibility of that birth was that for which God became flesh and tabernacled among men. To make that birth possible He granted the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The first thing in the Christian fact is the new life of a soul; it is also the fundamental thing in the Christian witness in power by the Church in the world.

In the third place, and finally, let us notice the instructive context. The previous statement is linked to the text by the word "which," "which were born." Who are they that are thus born? Let us read. "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not." In that declaration we have the whole account of the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ by those who were His own, and there is a sense in which all men were His own, all races were His own. As presently all things are to be summed up in Him because all things proceed from Him, then all were His own. The verdict against Him was the verdict of humanity. It was the angry refusal of chaos to crown the King of order. It was the hot, rebellious refusal of the human soul, generically in revolt, to give Him His right of way. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God." Preliminary to the birth, then, is the reception of the Christ. The people who received Him were born of God. There is a parenthetical word which interprets this: "Even to them that believe on His name." We may take for the illumination of our own souls whichever of these words does most profoundly appeal to us, for they are mutually interpretative. Believe on Him—what is that? Receive Him. Receive Him—what is that? Believe on Him. Only we must understand that belief here is not mere intellectual assent, it is reception of Him. All this is theory, not therefore untrue, but perhaps not powerfully appealing. Let us go back to the picture suggested by these words of John: "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not." Of that rejection the Cross was the ultimate expression. The rulers have said: "We will not have this Man to reign over us." Will no one receive Him? Yes, there is one soul who will receive Him. A dying malefactor, nailed to the cross, in extremis, there and then came to faith, than which there is no more wonderful faith in the whole of the New Testament or the Bible itself. Illuminated in his dying, he saw the Crucified coming into a Kingdom. Can anything be more impossible than that? Can a crucified peasant ascend a throne? Can a murdered reformer ever come to the imperial purple? The only crown He wears is one of thorns, the only throne He has is a Roman gibbet, the only purple is that of His own blood as it flows from His wounds. He is the despised and rejected of men. But one soul crowned Him: "Jesus, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." That is believing on Him; that is receiving Him. With infinite, majestic dignity, and all supreme authority, the answer came from the dying One to the man who received Him: "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." He opens the Kingdom of heaven to all believers! In answer to that act of faith, by which that soul did receive this Christ, that soul received the gift of life. Presently the King was dead to all human appearance, and then in all probability they broke the legs of the malefactor that he might die swiftly; and now He was dead. So the world looks on, and goes its blind and ignorant way, measuring reality by the transient and trivial things that appear on the surface. Just out of sight the King meets the malefactor, and they are together in Paradise. And not to that dying malefactor only, but to others, and yet others; and on down through the ages the mystic wonder runs, and the sacramental host of God has been multiplied:

Part of His host hath crossed the flood,
And part is crossing now;

and the great, holy Catholic Church of the first-born grows into the holy temple of the Lord, always by the gift of life to individual souls who were dead, and always by the communication of the dynamic of infinite order and beauty to souls that were ruined and in chaos. It seems to me that heaven must be silent with wonder, and the angels forget to sing in silent adoration, as they watch the wonder of the process by which the Church grows to its finality, as individual souls are born again.

All this is worth while only when it becomes personal. If our Christianity falls short of that experience, then remember we are not Christian in the New Testament sense of the word. We may be admirers of the teaching of Jesus, we may most sincerely hold that His example was perfect, we may even be trying in our own strength to obey His teaching and imitate His example; but nothing short of new life creates the Christian soul.

To any who are asking the question sincerely, not with the flippancy born of intellectual arrogance, but with the earnestness begotten of spiritual agony, How can I be born again? my message is this: There is new life for you which God alone can bestow. That life He does bestow without favor on all souls who crown His Son Lord and Master of their lives, and trust to Him their destiny, and yield to Him their weakness, resting wholly on His merit, confiding only in His mercy, going forward alone in His might. So may it be ours, all of us, to know this life which is begotten of God.

132 - John 1:14 - The Word Became Flesh

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Whatever, in the complexity of present-day thought, may be our view of the method of the advent, it is impossible to deny that nigh two thousand years ago that happened which has absolutely and completely revolutionized human thinking and human life. The student of history is always interested in tracing great streams to their sources. The rise and fall of dynasties, great discoveries, revolutions, all of them are important and interesting, and yet in some senses all these things are related directly or indirectly to the one event described in the mystic language of this text.

In this advent of Jesus there was both a crowning and a comprehension of all that was excellent in the past; and the conception and initiation of all the ideas and movements which are lifting humanity ever nearer to God.

We come to this statement of John the mystic in order to consider what it teaches concerning the fact of the advent, concerning the revelation resulting from that fact, and, finally, concerning the values resulting from the revelation.

In order that we may see the simplicity of the statement, I have omitted the parenthesis. It is important. It states a truth concerning the Person Whom we are to consider from a slightly different standpoint. It lies in the heart of this verse by way of explanation and exposition, and yet it may be omitted without doing any violence to the thought. We consider, then, this simple and sublime statement, "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us... full of grace and truth."

The statement of fact which this verse contains can be understood only as we remember that in this prologue of the Gospel of John the verse in which the text occurs is intimately connected by way of declaration with the first verse of the chapter. The intervening verses constitute a parenthesis. Consequently we bring these two verses together in order that we may understand the facts declared in our text. I will read them in intimate connection. "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... full of grace and truth." This is one continuous statement, and the fact that there is a great descent from the first statements to the second demonstrates the wisdom of inserting the parenthesis, for this helps us to see how great is the descent.

While the first and second statements present one complete declaration, they nevertheless constitute a perfect balance. The first three statements must be borne in mind as we consider the second three, for the second three need the first three.

There are three first statements: "In the beginning was the Word"; "the Word was with God"; and "the Word was God." There are three second statements: "The Word became flesh"; "and dwelt, pitched His tent among us"; and "full of grace and truth." Now, if we take these two series and bring them together, not exactly as one continued statement, but part to part, we shall see that the whole declaration tells how infinite and hidden mysteries came into the realm of finite and revealed things. "In the beginning was the Word"... "The Word became flesh." "The Word was with God"... "and pitched His tent among us." "The Word was God"... "full of grace and truth." Let us attempt an examination of these three couplets.

Taking the first half of the first, every phrase defies us. Every word is beyond our comprehension. "In the beginning"! We may at once reverently declare that the thought transcends the possibility of our understanding. It is one of those matchless sweeps of inspiration that go beyond all the thinking of man. "In the beginning." I lay my hand on anything in this world, and I begin to ask questions concerning its origin. I begin to track it through long and tedious processes back to the point of its initiation. No man has ever been able to do this successfully. We have never been able to say the final thing concerning origins by the processes of investigation and discovery, but we are always attempting to find them, and rightly so. Man has more than once formulated a philosophy, has more than once suggested a solution, but as surely as he has done so, within a decade, or quarter of a century, his philosophy has passed away, and his solution is found to be false. This phrase takes us behind all the processes, behind the fact of the initiation of all things material and mental, behind all the things of which man can be conscious, and we bow in the presence of the statement, and reverently declare that it transcends us.

Or if I take the other expression, "the Word," I am equally conscious of disability to comprehend its final meaning. I am personally inclined to think we get to the sublimest meaning as we take the simplest, and remember that a word is an expression. A word is that by which one person expresses his thought to another, so that the other may be able to understand it. A word spoken by one person to another is the revelation of something in the mind of the one that the other did not know, and could know only through that word. A word is a revelation made, a thought communicated. "The Word was in the beginning," a method of manifestation, a method of speech, that in and of God by which He made something of Himself known to those without Himself, apart from Himself, beyond Himself.

You inquire whether the Word was a Person, and I reply, What do you mean by a person? Until you have defined your term "person"—which, by the way, never occurs in Scripture—I cannot answer you. If you tell me that man is a person, I say, Yes, undoubtedly he is; but he is finite. Now, a finite person is an incomplete person, and therefore not a perfect revelation of what a person is. A perfect Person must be infinite also.

This at least is declared, that in the beginning there was an expression of Deity. But that is not helpful to us, for it was beyond our

finite comprehension. "The Word became flesh," that is where the help begins. When the infinite Person—and I do not quite know what that means—becomes a finite Person Whom I can understand, I do pass into some new appreciation of the character and the value, and the fact of the infinite that transcends me, "In the beginning was the Word.... And the Word became flesh."

A few words only are necessary concerning the second of these couplets, "And the Word was with God." That which was the method of Divine speech and manifestation was with God, and again I freely confess to you here are terms, finite terms struggling to express infinite meaning, and failing even though they be the words of inspiration. Then I read, "He pitched His tent among men"; and the thing that has baffled me and perplexed me, and overwhelmed me in the realm of Deity, which is beyond my comprehension, becomes something I can look at within the realm of human life: "He tabernacled among men."

And then, finally, when I read in the great introductory word, "the Word was God," both with God, and God; both method of Divine expression, and that which expresses itself, again I am overwhelmed, I cannot understand. Again I feel that I have read a simple sentence that is so full of mystery as absolutely to defy my explanation. Then I read "full of grace and truth," and I have an unveiling of the nature of God, though perhaps no explanation of the method. I have seen One Who is flesh, and pitches His tent by my side in the valleys where I dwell, upon the mountains to which I climb, in the midst of the life I live; and in the life of this One grace and truth flash and flame in glory. I am told that that is God, and I feel, not that I have been able to encompass all the mystery of Deity by revelation, but that I have been taken through a wicket gate, and my eyes are gazing out upon light such as I had never seen. I have at least been able to look through a veil at that which unveiled would have blinded me: "In the beginning was the Word," and I do not understand it. "The Word became flesh," and it has come within the reach of my hand. "The Word was with God," and I cannot comprehend the meaning of the statement, but the Word "tabernacled among us," pitched His tent near us, and I at least may draw near and behold. "And the Word was God," and there is no more in the statement than there was in all the other things that men had said long before. But "full of grace and truth," and here are two essential facts concerning God which will help me.

Pass over this ground with me again. "In the beginning was the Word"... "the Word became flesh." What does this signify? Eternity, the ageless age, coming into time; expressing itself in the language of time, manifesting itself in the method of time. "In the beginning was the Word," the utterance of God; not letters, or syllables or words merely; not a literature which I can commence here, and finish presently, but the Word of God. Not only that which fills the whole fact of space so far as I can imagine it; but "the Word became flesh," that is, came to a locality; it came to a place to which I can travel; it came to a place to which coming, I can see.

"The Word was in the beginning," the infinite, but it became flesh, the finite. "In the beginning was the Word," the infinite Wisdom, the all-encompassing Wisdom, the Wisdom that lies at the back of all manifestation, the Wisdom of which the preacher sang long ago in the Proverbs. But "the Word became flesh," that is, Wisdom began to spell itself out in an alphabet. We sometimes quote the words of Jesus uttered to John in Patmos as though they were full of dignity. So they were, but they have another tone also. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last." There is some sense in which in God there is no first, no last; and, consequently, that is not a figure of completeness intended only to create amazement and wonder. It is the symbol of simplicity, it is the figure of the alphabet. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," the alphabet which the little child may learn. Yet remember that all literature lies within the compass of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Do not talk to your children about a thing being as easy as A B C. It is the hardest thing we have to learn. You have forgotten the task, but it was such. You did not know it, but in that task you were beginning to climb up to that literature which you love, and all its vast reaches lay before you. So when the Word became flesh infinite Wisdom expressed itself in an alphabet. That began nineteen centuries ago. There had been attempts before, hieroglyphics before, but at last the mysterious hieroglyphics of the past found the key of interpretation in Alpha and Omega—the Alphabet. We must be little children to begin; but we never arrive at the infinite literature to which it introduces us until we have learned it. The Word, the infinite Wisdom, dwelt with God, and was the mighty Workman at His right hand when He created, by whatever process I care nothing. That Wisdom became an alphabet when a baby Boy lay upon His mother's breast in the Judean country.

But notice the next couplet of contrast. "The Word was with God." There are those who can explain it to me. I cannot. I make no attempt to do it. But I will attempt the next. He "tabernacled among us." This Person Who defies definition—for I do not know the meaning of "person," as I have already said—this Person "tabernacled among us," and John of the mystic vision had looked at Him, and warm-hearted Peter had gazed upon Him, and all the rest had seen Him. He "tabernacled among us." Now for the parenthesis a moment. "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father." "We beheld," we saw that which was with God, and the statement overwhelms us. I love the other rendering of that, not accurate translation perhaps, but certainly correct interpretation. He pitched His tent by us, and came to live where we lived. He pitched His tent down by the side of my tent. It is the figure of the Arab nation, and of one who is going to take the same journey with me and be under the same rule with me. He "tabernacled among us." We are pilgrims through the world, coming out of darkness, and passing toward the darkness. He "tabernacled among us," put His tent down by the side of our tent.

Yet that is not all, and we must interpret this word "tabernacled" by the religious thinking of the man who wrote the words, by John's religious conviction and upbringing. If you do that you will see that this word "tabernacled" has its explanation in the religious

mysteries of the past. I go back again to the kindergarten days of religion, to the hieroglyphics of the past, and I find the Tabernacle. You remember how in the Old Testament that word "Tabernacle" is written descriptively in two ways. Sometimes it is called the Tabernacle of witness, and sometimes it is called the Tabernacle of the congregation, and both are faulty. May I take the same ideas, and express them in other words? The Tent of meeting rather than the Tabernacle of the congregation. The Tent of testimony, rather than the Tabernacle of witness. That is to say, when in your Old Testament you read that the Tabernacle was the Tabernacle of the congregation, it does not mean that it was the place where men congregated for worship, but that it was the place where God and man met for fellowship. The Tabernacle of meeting was the place, God-appointed, where He met with man, and to which man came to meet with Him.

It was the Tent of testimony, which did not mean that it was the place where men proclaimed the truth of God. The Tent of testimony was the place where God spoke to men, and men listened. Now, wrote John, who had been brought up in that religion, and to whom that symbolism was always luminous, the Word pitched His tent among us. That was the Tabernacle for which we had been waiting, toward which we had been looking. He became at once Tent of meeting between God and man, and Tent of testimony through which God spoke to man. And so in this Word, the infinite and incomprehensible mystery of the eternities, Who became finite and comprehensible in time, by becoming flesh, I find my tent of meeting with God. He is all I am, but He is all God is. And when I lay this hand of mine upon His hand, I have touched the hand of a man such as I am; but I have taken hold of the might of God. And when I look into the eyes of the Man Who pitched His tent among Galilean fishermen I have looked into human eyes all brimming with love, but through them I have looked out into the very heart of the Infinite God. He is the Tent of meeting. I find God in Christ, as nowhere else. I cannot find Him in Nature. I see His goings; I hear the thunder of His power; I mark the matchless beauty of the delicate touch of His pencil on the petals of the flowers; but I cannot find Him, I cannot reach Him. But here, as God is my witness, I come to the Christ—warm, sweet, tender, even yet:

A present help is He:
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

I feel in my spirit the consciousness of the human Christ; but enwrapping me all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And because He pitched His tent by me, and pitches it by me still in all sympathy, I have found God, and if you take that away I have lost God. "He tabernacled among us," He pitched His tent by us. It was the Tent of meeting, and it was the Tent of testimony. Through that life God spoke so that I might hear; and to explain that I must use terms that seem to be contradictory, but the relation of which I am sure you will see. In Christ, the long, long silence became speech. But in Christ the thunder became a whisper. Silence became speech. Men had been waiting and longing and listening, climbing mountains for stillness, getting into loneliness to hear. They had heard, but they had never heard. They had heard the thunder of His power, but they had never heard all that they needed to hear. But in Him Who pitched His tent by the side of the fishermen, they heard. And the long silence and all the loneliness became the sweet speech for which men had waited; and all the thunder that had reverberated around the rocky fastnesses of Sinai became love whispers in the ears of listening individuals when He became flesh. "The Word became flesh, and pitched His tent among us."

"And the Word was God," and again I remit the mystery, "full of grace and truth." All that men saw and heard in Jesus was an unveiling of Deity. The attractiveness of His grace, the awfulness of His truth, were revelations to men of God.

If that is the fact of the incarnation, what is this inclusive revelation that it has brought to us? "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth." Grace. You may express that in another way, in another phrase, in another sentence, of this selfsame writer. "God is love," "full of grace." Truth. You may express that also in another way. "God is light," "full of truth." Out of the grace came the redemption. Out of the truth was manifest the righteousness. The supreme revelation that Jesus made to men was not a revelation first of grace, or only of grace; not a revelation first of truth, or only of truth; but a revelation of the relation between "grace" and "truth."

Look at them in separation. Do not rob this word "grace" of its beauty by reading into it merely the ideas of a human system of theology. We behold him "full of grace," full of tenderness, full of gentleness, full of pity, full of all that winsomeness and attractiveness that made Him dear to children, and to needy men, and to sinning souls. We behold Him full of grace, full of grace to children, gathering them into His arms, putting them into the midst of His disciples; full of grace toward the afflicted, forevermore moved with compassion in the presence of any limitation. No cripple ever crossed the vision of Christ without Christ feeling the pain of all the cripple's limitation. Full of grace toward sinners. Take the New Testament and read it once more, and see if you can find one harsh thing He said to a sinner. Harsh things to oppressors and to sinners in that particular respect; but to someone taken in an act of sin, overwhelmed with the burden of sin, never an angry word. Full of grace, full of winsomeness, full of beauty. That is human. I am not dealing with all the infinite values of the word "grace," but with the simplicity of it as manifested in the life of this Man.

But "full of truth," capable of anger, capable of severity, capable of cursing as well as of blessing, with lips that could frame a "Woe"

of unutterable terror as well as a "Blessed" of unutterable tenderness. Truth, and truth manifesting itself in anger against all selfishness, all tyranny, all sin. Grace acting in truth because it is grace. Truth acting in grace because it is truth. Here is the revelation that surprises. We have put these into two compartments. We often still speak of the grace of God and the righteousness of God as though they were poles asunder. They are never separated. They cannot be separated, and in the moment in which you deny truth, you deny grace. If there be no severity in God He is incapable of tenderness. Because there is love there is light, and it is love that will make no peace with the thing that spoils and harms and ruins. Grace and truth always go together. I have referred to His grace as manifested in His welcoming of the children. I have declared that truth could be manifest in anger, and these two things were operating at the same moment. When He said the most beautiful thing that men ever heard concerning little children, there was the tone of anger in His voice. The voice which was brimful of tenderness was vibrant with thunder. The disciples would have kept the children away. Why should He be angry for a small thing like that? It is not a small thing to keep a child away from Christ. It is a misunderstanding of God and the child; and the man who misunderstands God and the child is a curse to society, find him where you will. Jesus was angry, and through the tenderness of the welcome to the bairns throbbed the anger of truth against a false idea of dignity that excluded bairns. That is but illustration of grace and truth acting together, as they did from beginning to end. This was the revelation that came to the world.

So, finally, we see the values of this incarnation, truth concerning God and man, and grace joining men to God. In Jesus man found God. In Him man finds himself. These were the two things that men had lost, their knowledge of God and their knowledge of themselves. The great and final word of the teaching of one of the greatest Greek masters, Socrates, was, "Man, know thyself"; but men could not obey him, and Socrates had to say so. He confessed that it was not given to him to do anything but teach humanity to ask questions. He said some other teacher must come and answer the questions, and in that word he revealed how much of heaven's light he had in his own soul. Jesus came to answer the questions, and man found himself again, and realized the meaning of the mystery of his life, when the Word became flesh, and tabernacled, pitched His tent, by the side of him. And that tabernacling meant not merely truth concerning God and man, but triumph for God and man. It was God's highway to accomplish His purposes for man. It was man's highway unto the purposes of God.

Let me say in conclusion that we underrate the infinite value and meaning of this fact of incarnation when we speak of it as something in the past. The incarnation is an abiding fact, not something merely past. At this very hour that same Person is at the center of the universe of God, the risen, glorified and enthroned Man. And if you tell me that that is to state something that cannot be believed because it transcends the possibility of belief, I tell you that it no more transcends the possibility of belief than does the fact of the historic incarnation. If He came into human flesh, and tabernacled among us, and if while there He could speak of Himself as yet in the bosom of the Father, and as yet being the Word with God, so remember that today He abides for manifestation at the center of the universe of God, the risen and glorified Man, at once a prophecy and a promise, hearing which we dare believe that at last He also will perfect us, and we shall see Him, and be with Him, and be like Him.

133 - John 1:43 - Follow Me

Follow Me

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

John 1:43

I have selected these two words for our present meditation because they seem to have been the favorite form of invitation on the lips of our Master, and I have selected them from this particular verse because it gives us the earliest recorded use of them.

Other occasions of their use we read as lesson. A little later on one of his disciples expressed a desire to remain with his father, saying, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father," which, by the way, did not at all mean that his father was then dead; in the Eastern idiom he was expressing the fact that he was devoted to his father, and desired to abide with him until the hour of his death. To such a one Jesus said, "Follow Me... leave the dead to bury their own dead." A little further on, passing on His way, He saw Levi (Matthew) sitting at the receipt of custom; looking at him, He said, "Follow Me," and immediately Matthew left the seat of custom and went after Christ. The words next occur, so far as we are able to arrange them chronologically, in that memorable scene at Caesarea Philippi, when Peter came to the hour of his great and glorious confession concerning Christ and thus made possible the great and glorious confession of the Christ concerning His Church, which was immediately followed by the Master's declaration of His coming suffering and triumph as He spoke of going to Jerusalem to be buffeted and bruised, and killed, and on the third day to be raised from the dead. Against that word as to His coming suffering, blind but intense affection made this protest, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee," and was sternly rebuked by Jesus, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art a stumblingblock unto Me; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." Immediately, in that atmosphere and in those circumstances, Jesus uttered these words again, making them most emphatic in application to His own disciples, "If any man would

come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Yet a little later in that period of public ministry when the Lord was even nearer to His Cross, there came the young ruler, clean, upright, straightforward, yet conscious of a lack in life, as his question gives evidence, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" To him the Lord ultimately replied, "Follow Me." Then again, beyond the Cross and the resurrection, in the flush of that wonderful morning by the shore of the lake as He restored Peter after his deflection from faith, the Lord's last word to him in that connection was, "Follow Me"; and again beyond it, Peter, still the same in temperament, inquired what John was to do, and in words that have in them an ultimate rebuke thrilling with tenderness Jesus said to him, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me." There is a most illuminative sequence in our Lord's use of this particular term, "Follow Me."

Let us first inquire the simplest meaning of this call which Jesus uttered in so many different circumstances, and with such varied application, "Follow Me." Let us first carefully observe that there is a marked difference between this word and another which our Lord made use of in other circumstances. Subsequently to the initial call of Peter and Andrew, James and John, Jesus found them fishing and He called them, no longer to Himself as disciples, but to definite co-operation in service. Our old version reads thus, "He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"; the Revised Version has drawn attention to the difference as it translates, "Come ye after Me, and I will make you fishers of men." In one of the passages which we have read the two ideas are present, the one containing the word spoken by our Lord at Cæsarea Philippi, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"; there are two ideas, to come after, and to follow. If we were dealing simply with English words, this might be spoken of as a distinction without a difference; to come after is to follow, to follow is to come after; but we are dealing with the words which our Lord used, and in them there is a very distinct difference. He did not say, Come after Me, to Philip when He first found him. He did not say, Come after Me, to Peter when He last left him. What, then, did He say? The word He employed is one, but it is constituted of two parts, the first of which I shall speak of as a particle of union, and the second as a simple word which means a way. What, then, did Jesus say? Come in the way with Me. This is My way; I am walking this way, Come after Me. The thought involved in following is included, but there is more in it than that. I shall make no attempt to minimize the imperial call of Christ, I will attempt to emphasize it presently; but let us at first emphasize the sweetness and tenderness and grace of it. I shall attempt to interpret it thus—this is not translation, this is interpretation—"He findeth Philip: and Jesus saith unto him, Join Me in the way." He said to Peter by the shore of the Sea of Galilee; "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee, whither thou wouldest not.... Join Me in the way." Presently, when Peter said "Lord, what shall this man do?" Jesus answered, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Join Me in the way."

I go back to the ancient prophecy of Isaiah and I read this, "We have turned every one to his own way," and in the same prophecy, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." It is that One Who spoke to Philip and said, This is My way, join Me in this way. It is an imperial call, an unequivocal demand for surrender, but thrilling with infinite grace, calling men at once to subjection to Him, and to comradeship with Him, in the way.

This is perhaps the simplest and the sublimest formula of the Christian life to be found in the pages of the New Testament.

It is the simplest. It is Christ's word at the wicket, and it is simple enough for the tiniest child. It presupposes nothing as necessary but need and trust, and trust acting itself out. Do not forget that, I pray you, when you are dealing with children. Do not ask your child to accept a doctrine in order to be a Christian. Do not demand of your child some experience through which you have passed. Say what Jesus would have said to the little one, and try to say it, so far as you can, in our Anglo-Saxon speech, with the same thought there was in His speech. Jesus says to the little one, Come along with Me, walk My way, come with Me.

But if it is the simplest, it is also the sublimest. If it is the King's word at the wicket gate, so simple that every child can hear and understand it, it is the King's perpetual demand. He never changes it from the wicket to the homeland. If it is so wooing and winsome that the little one can hear it and obey it, it is severe enough for the most highly developed man, demanding renunciation of all that hinders, surrender of all that a man is, and absolute, unquestioning loyalty to the Lord. If it presupposes nothing other than trust and need as necessary on the part of the one to whom it is addressed, it assumes the wisdom, power, and right of the One Who utters the word; for we must interpret this word of Jesus in the atmosphere of His ministry and revelation. We must remember that He came to reveal, and to reveal God; that He claimed it as His supreme business to speak to men in the realm of the spiritual and eternal. When He said to Philip, "Join Me in the way," He was not thinking merely of a journey from Galilee to Judæa, He was thinking of that pathway that a pilgrim must take ere he find his way to the everlasting habitations. Consequently, when He said, "Follow Me," there was on His part the assumption of infinite wisdom, absolute right, and perfect power. So that whether I think of the little child unable to appreciate high doctrines of grace or of the man fully intellectually equipped for facing the final problems of life, the King has the same thing to say and He says it with wooing winsomeness to the little one, "Follow Me," Join Me in the way; and He says it with superlative, unequivocal authority to the proudest intellect that has ever faced life's problems, "Follow Me," I will

solve the mystery and fulfil thy life.

Let us turn now to examine some of our Lord's uses of the words. As hurriedly as we may we will glance at the passages I have read to you, and see what He meant when He said, "Follow Me."

The first occurrence of the word arrested and guided the slow man. Some of you will remember that three years and nine months ago I preached on the same text dealing wholly with Philip and tracing his story. He was always the slow man, the quiet, unobtrusive man. As Mr. Elvet Lewis beautifully says, he was the man who was always on the fringe of the crowd, and was therefore able to help people whom others might have missed. He was a man who did not seek Christ, not I think because there was no longing in his heart for the things that are high and holy; but because of his slowness. He was the man whom Christ went and found, knowing perfectly the secret in his heart though no one else knew it. He was the man, the slow man, who made no impression on his fellow disciples, or so little that Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us nothing about him except that he was one of the twelve. It was only John who could appreciate all the silent, subtle forces that did not impress others in that man on the fringe of the crowd. All the stories about Philip are in John. To that slow man Jesus came and said, "Follow Me," Join Me in the way. Philip was arrested, and from that moment found his Guide.

The next incident in chronological order is of a strange and startling nature, a contrast to the first. As I have already said, a disciple of Jesus asked to be permitted to return to his father and take care of him. It may be interesting—I say this especially for young people—that I should remind you again of the light on this passage that came to me from a conversation with Dr. George Adam Smith. He told me how on one occasion he was in the byways of Syria and was anxious to secure a certain young Arab to be his guide. The young man sat in the door of his tent, and there by his side sat his father, hale, hearty, patriarchal. Dr. George Adam Smith was trying to persuade the young man to accompany him on a somewhat perilous adventure, and he refused, saying: "Suffer me first to bury my father," thus using the actual words we have in the gospel story. Here, then, was a man who asked to be permitted to bury his father, to stay by him and care for him until his earthly life was run. Jesus said to him, "Follow Me.... Leave the dead to bury their own dead." Mark this, I pray you, this call of Jesus brooks no burying of the dead if that interferes with loyalty to the Lord. If the first illustration shows us the infinite tenderness of this call, the second arrests us and shows the absolute severity of this word of Jesus.

Take the next in order. Matthew was sitting at the receipt of custom. We must be Hebrews to understand this picture, or at least we must get back into the Hebrew atmosphere. What was he doing? Matthew's calling was the degradation of a high ideal. Matthew had bent to the Roman yoke, in order to collect from his brethren the taxes of the oppressor. You say, Why do you call that the degradation of a high ideal? Read his gospel. Mark his quotations of the ancient prophetic writings. Watch very carefully the whole method of the gospel of Matthew. Matthew's ideal was that of kingship, empire, authority. He was a man molded on imperial lines. I believe that was the reason why he had hired himself to Rome. The glamor of Rome had possessed his soul, and he had lent himself to Rome—a Levite to collect taxes from his brethren. It was the degradation of a high ideal. It was an attempt to come into touch with the great conception of authority and empire. Jesus Christ, passing, saw him, knew him, understood him; knew his devotion to this high ideal of empire, knew that the prophecies which had charmed him in his youth were such as foretold the coming of a great King Messiah; and He said to him, "Follow Me." He took him with Him, led him through the years and revealed to him the Kingdom and the King, and fitted him for the writing of the gospel which stands out in the Bible as the gospel of the Kingdom of God and of God's anointed King. If the ideal was a high and noble one, and if it had been degraded in an attempt to realize it, when this Christ passed by the man He took hold of him, redeemed his ideal, and enabled him to fulfil it on the highest possible level.

Take the next illustration, that at Caesarea Philippi. I go back to the distinction I made at the beginning. In this verse I find the two ideas. "If any man will come after Me" that literally means, If any man will come behind Me, follow Me, in our usual sense of the word, then let him join Me in the way. The text from which we have preached over and over again in order to emphasize the supremacy of Jesus does emphasize His supremacy, but it thrills with His grace. Peter had just said, "Thou art the Messiah," and Jesus had said, "I will build My Church.... I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of heaven." Christ had said to him, In order to enter into that Kingdom and build that Church I must go to Jerusalem and suffer and die and rise again; and Peter had said, That be far from Thee; God have mercy on Thee, not that. That word of Peter was almost profanity. Now the Lord said, "If any man will come after Me"; if you really mean to follow Me, if you, My disciples, desire to come with Me, your coming must be thorough, your coming must be complete, you must come by the way of the Cross, the way of resurrection, the way by which I am going. But if any man would come after Me, let him join Me in the way; he must come My way, but let him come with Me. You cannot shun the Cross; but share it with Me. You cannot escape the severity of My terms, but let Me be your Comrade as you tramp the via dolorosa. This formula of Jesus in this application insisted on the closest association with Himself in the pathway of obedience; therefore it was a word of severity, yet a word of infinite grace.

I go a little further and see the rich young ruler. Notice in what sense He used the word in speaking to that young man. He asked, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied to him, "Thou knowest the commandments"; and in brief form He

repeated the six of the second table of the decalogue, the six which condition human interrelationships. The man looked back into the eyes of incarnate Purity and said—and it was no empty boast but an actual fact—"All these things have I observed from my youth up." What did the King say to this man? "One thing thou lackest yet." What was the one thing? Hear the Lord through before you decide. "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come join Me in the way." What did this man lack? Poverty? Nay verily. The element of control, mastership! When Jesus said, "Follow Me," to that man, it was necessary that He should first point out to him that which, though not evil in itself, was nevertheless destroying all the forces of his humanity, in that while ministering to the self-life, it was shutting him out from all high heroisms and noble motives. Christ would sweep away the forces that destroy in order to realize the heroic dignity of human life. "Follow Me" was the supreme word of command, and it revealed the secret of victory over the forces that destroy. How is this man, nursed in the lap of luxury, of fine temperament, of clean record, but being destroyed for lack of fine heroism, how is he to be saved? He must follow the Christ, and in order to do it in his case there must be the parting with all that which ministers to the self-life. But even here the call was of grace, as He invited this man to comradeship, by saying, "Join Me in the way."

Take the next illustration, "Follow Me," spoken at the seashore to Peter. What did the word do then? It transfigured the Cross. It was to make clear Christ's intention that I omitted the parenthesis in reading this evening. I want you to ponder that passage again at your leisure. I have not suggested that John's parenthesis is out of place or unnecessary; I believe it was inspired by the Spirit of God, and must remain. In order to make impossible any doubt as to what Christ meant when He said to Peter, "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not," John said, "This He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God."

Let us, however, forget for a moment that interpolation of John, and remember that without any break Christ added to that foretelling of the Cross, this word, "Follow Me." What did that mean to Peter? The word was spoken by the side of the lake on a memorable morning. What relation did that morning bear to the past? It was the risen Lord Who spoke. At Caesarea Philippi Peter had shunned the Cross, and had been rebuked. By the side of the lake, Jesus brought him back to the Cross, to his own personal cross, and said to him, if reverently I may change the words of the Lord, Peter, you shunned the Cross for Me, you were afraid of it when you first saw it; you have been afraid of it through all the intervening months; but you must come to it, actually come to it, stretch out your hands and be crucified, die by the cross; follow Me, join Me in the way. And immediately Peter would say to himself, He went to the Cross, but He passed beyond the Cross and is risen from the dead. When Jesus, in that connection, said, "Follow Me," to Peter, it transfigured the coming Cross by revealing to him the fact that whatever man shall follow Jesus by the way of the Cross also shall follow Him beyond the Cross into the light and glory of the Easter morning that lies on the other side.

The last illustration seems almost commonplace by the side of some of the others, yet it is wondrously placed. "What shall this man do?" asked Peter concerning John, and Jesus replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me." It revealed in a flash, in which there was light, humor, satire, tenderness, the awful dignity of one man's life, and the fact that in this following every man must follow for himself, and that is enough for a man to do. If I were given to announcing sensational subjects, I think I should take this for a text, and announce as my subject, "Mind your own business." If the phrase sounds commonplace, think it well out. Mind your own business; in this respect it will take thee all thy time and eternity to realize My purpose for thee: "Follow thou Me." It was the individualizing of the man as to his personal relationship to Christ; and at the same time it was a word that declared to Peter that if the Lord demanded all his loyalty, He was not unmindful of John. Leave him to Me, I can care for him also. "Follow thou Me," the emphasis is there.

This hurried survey will enable us to see something of the breadth and glory of this word of Christ.

Hear it again, "Follow Me," Join Me, Come My way. What was His way? How shall I answer my own inquiry. Let me do it for a moment by mentioning certain names which will carry a congregation such as this to associations, which are revelations concerning the Lord. It was the way of Nazareth; long years of the daily round, the common task. It was the way of the wilderness, the short, sharp, fearful struggle of a naked soul with wickedness stripped. It was the way of the crowds and human sorrow, perpetual ministry and virtue going forth. It was the way of Gethsemane. It was the way of Calvary. It was the way of the high places and the outpoured Spirit. "Follow Me," join Me in the way. Set thy soul in the direction of My soul, and relate thy spirit to God, as My spirit is related to God.

Is that it? Then in the name of God I am helpless, I cannot do it. But in the strange, wonderful economy of Christ's dealings with men we begin where He ended, and work backward through the processes of His life. You will find that all through your Bible. I will give you one illustration, without turning to it. Take Exodus and read again the story of the pattern which God gave to Moses in the mount; then read the story of how Moses made the tabernacle, and you will find that it moves in the opposite direction. The pattern given begins at the center and moves outward to the finish; the work done begins where the pattern ended and works in to where the pattern began. It is always so.

Where am I to begin this following? I begin where He ended. I begin with Pentecost. That is the fulfilment of the great word. There were senses in which this word was never fulfilled in the experience of these men until Pentecost. We begin when we receive the Spirit of God, "He hath poured forth this which ye see and hear." When that Spirit comes to me I begin my following. That immediately admits me to the resurrection life which is life indeed, and it is by the way of that resurrection life that I come to personal experience of the Cross, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings." By that identification with Him in the Cross I enter into fellowship with Him in the agony of the garden. Through that and through that alone I pass into fellowship with His ministry amid the crowds of men. It is then the temptation becomes hardest in the normal Christian life; not to the man who never has yielded to Jesus has ever come temptation of the fiercest fury which appalls the trusting soul. Take it as a demonstration of nearness to your Master if the enemy is assailing your soul with fervor. Remember, tried, tempted heart, that temptation is not sin. It is the saint most closely associated with his Lord who knows the power of temptation most keenly. Then what? The most difficult thing of all Christian life, Nazareth and the commonplace.

I do not wish this to be divided into compartments as though I would teach that to those who have been called to public service there will presently come the lonely pathway. There is always a lonely pathway to the Christian soul. There is always a Nazareth for all of us. The teacher who regularly faces a congregation on the Sunday, whose work is largely in the glare of publicity, has a Nazareth, a home, and that is the place where it is most difficult to be true, true in the commonplaces.

Yet that Master says one thing, "Follow Me," join Me in the way. You can never enter it save as you crown Him Lord, and no man can call Him Lord but by the Holy Ghost. Pentecost is the first thing. I cannot be in the resurrection life save as I come there with Him. He says, Follow Me, walk with Me in the way. This intolerable agony of sin mastering humanity, and demanding sacrifice in order that men may be delivered, who can deal with it? The Lord says, You shall indeed drink My cup and be baptized with My baptism; come with Me, join Me in the way.

Leave out these things and come to the last. Oh, you business men who say the preacher has no temptations, do not believe it! To the man who preaches is granted the freedom from observation which is of the essence of opportunity to sin, for indolence, and for incipient blasphemies. How can I be true when my door is locked and I am alone? There comes into the room, though the door be never unlocked, One Who says, "Join Me in the way," "Follow Me! That is the answer.

What is the secret to the great call of Christ? A vision of the Lord Himself. That vision will create the enthusiasm to follow. That enthusiasm constitutes the secret of abandoning all that hinders.

In this evening hour Christ is saying this selfsame thing, "Follow Me." What that means to me today I cannot tell you. What it means to you I do not ask you to tell me. We know, each man, woman, youth, maiden, for himself and for herself, what this means now. Shall we not obey? Shall we not say, Lord Christ, we will follow Thee, only let it be with Thee. Take us by the hand and lead us; we would come after Thee, but it will be easier if, sweet paradox of Thine own words, we may come after Thee by walking with Thee!

134 - John 2:23-25 - Christ's Knowledge of Men

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, during the feast, many believed on His name, beholding His signs which He did. But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men, and because He needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man; for He Himself knew what was in man. John 2:23-25

The closing statement of these verses explains why Jesus did not trust certain men who trusted Him. The outward commitment of the life to Him, and the belief which was merely a persuasion toward Him on account of signs seen, were nothing when the heart was not wholly and absolutely abandoned to Him, when in the deepest of the life there was still reserve. The trust was not complete and Christ can never commit Himself to any man who does not commit himself to Christ. I remember once hearing Dwight Lyman Moody says, "Christ is as great a Saviour as your faith makes Him." The perpetual law of Christ's dealing with souls may be expressed in this very simple formula, "All for all." If I have reposed in Him some imperfect and partial trust, He cannot trust me with all His confidence. He cannot commit to me all that He is unless I have committed to Him all that I am. Had we been in Jerusalem at that time, and had we seen the people crowding to Him, and trusting Him, in all probability we should have been eager to count them, to number them; the fever for statistics would have been upon us as it is until this hour. We should have been inclined to say to Him, "Lord, everything is going well! See how these people are trusting Thee!" Then we would have been surprised to notice that He did not commit Himself to them. Why not? Because "He knew all men." He did not require any testimony borne to Him concerning them, "for He Himself knew what was in man."

This statement concerning Christ must be interpreted, not in the light of this immediate paragraph merely, but also in the light of the whole Gospel of John, and particularly in that of the prologue. "He knew all men." Who? To Whom does the personal pronoun refer. For answer we turn back to the opening words of the Gospel. "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." "He—the Word—knew all men.... He—the Word—needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man; for He—the Word—Himself knew what was in man."

The theme, then, of my message is the knowledge which Christ has of man, and the result of that knowledge in His dealings with men. In the coming weeks—as God shall help me—I propose to consider some illustrations which this Gospel affords of these great truths.

I begin with the general terms: Christ's knowledge of man and His consequent method with men. That will be a message of comfort or of fire according to what we are. There was a time when it was a very common thing to see on the walls of nurseries and schoolrooms a motto which read: "Thou, God, seest me." That statement is perfectly true, God does see us, but I have often thought that the tone in which it was recited was utterly false. If it was so recited to a child as to make the child think merely of God as present as a moral policeman, watching, it was wholly bad. Do not be surprised that your child has run away from God if you have riot interpreted Him. It is a great truth. We need still to put it in the nursery where the child can see it; only God help us so to interpret God that when we put that truth before the child he may know what God is. You say, Would you take away the sternness of the truth of God's knowledge of men? By no means, but neither would I take away the infinite compassion, the love and beauty of the truth. That old truth printed for us to look at as children is fire or comfort according to what we are. Is there some sin gripping your life, mastering you, to which you are yielding yourself. A solemn hush fell on all the congregation tonight as I read, "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off." How did the reading of the psalm affect you? If you came with sin cherished, you trembled! Are you a broken-hearted sinner, knowing your sin and desiring to break with it tonight? Then, oh, the comfort of the words, "Thou knowest my thought afar off. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether." Oh, there is such relief for the sinner when he is found out. Man, you are found out. He knows. "He knew all men."

This passage is more particular in its assertion than appears at first. To read it carefully is to see that the writer was indeed most careful in his choice of words. He declares that this knowledge which Christ had of men was immediate, was profound, was universal.

It was immediate knowledge. Notice the word Himself.

"Jesus did not trust Himself unto them... for He Himself knew what was in man." He knew man in Himself and of Himself. He needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man. We are brought into the presence of a knowledge of man that is peculiar to Christ, to that Christ Who is God incarnate. Here is knowledge of man that no other possessed. I cannot know any man apart from testimony. He needs no testimony to give Him knowledge of man. This is brought out in one of the ancient prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, the perfect Judge of men. "He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: but with righteous judgments shall He judge." How? He knows all men, and, mark this, He knows what is in man. This is the truth of the Bible from cover to cover. It is a fundamental truth of Christianity, a great and startling truth, and yet we do not remember it, or live in the power of it. The meaning of the incarnation is in part that this truth was wrought out into human consciousness. I take up the Gospel of John and in the light of this text I read it through again, and am impressed by the fact that Christ moved amongst men, and had perfect knowledge of them.

There was no hesitation in His dealing with them. They passed before Him, man after man, woman after woman, and in a moment He spoke the word that needed to be said, dealt with them in the one way that met their need. He knew them. He asked them no questions in order to discover the truth concerning them. He perpetually questioned them in the light of truth possessed. He knew men. The Gospel of John works out into visibility this tremendous truth, which, if men can but grasp it, will alter all their lives, mold their character, and drive them in the way in which they should go. His knowledge was immediate, apart from testimony.

Then His knowledge was profound. I have already touched upon it. Let me emphasize it again. You notice the Apostle says two things. "He knew all men," individualities, units. "He knew what was in man," the generic term, human nature, the human heart, and all the deep truth concerning it. He knew all men, the varied manifestations of the one common humanity. He knew what was in man, the essential being. We fail of knowing men because we do not know man. Here in the presence of the men of His own age stood One Who to their seeing was a man, and yet standing there in their presence as they passed before Him He knew them all. Simon, thy name is Simon, it shall be Peter. He knew the whole make-up of the man. Nathanael, I saw thee under the fig tree. Thou art a worshiper in whom there is no guile. So on and on, with perfect ease flashing the truth of each man's life into the open word so that others knew the man, and the man knew himself as never before. It was profound knowledge. He did not form His estimate of human life and character from external manifestations, but He set the external in the light of the inward fact. He knew what was in man.

This knowledge was not merely immediate and profound, it was universal, as we see from the Gospel instances. Christ's knowledge of men was not the intuition of kinship. By that I mean that a man of one race understand the men of his own race, but this Man understood all races. If He was dealing with a Hebrew, He knew exactly how to speak to a Hebrew in the language of Hebrew

thinking. If Greeks came, saying, "We would see Jesus," He used language in reference to them which revealed His intimate acquaintance with the Greek mysteries which were unknown to Hebrews of His own time. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone." To the men who stood about Him on that day it was a strange thing to say, but the Greeks understood it. Only recently we have come to know something of these Greek mysteries, and we have discovered that at the heart of one lay the representation of the cutting off of the ear of wheat in order to gain more abundant life. The two Greeks came up to Him. He was a Hebrew prophet, and they found Him a master of their own mysteries. Standing in their presence He knew them, He knew all that was in them.

He knew men of different temperaments: whether it were the retiring, shrinking Philip, having to be called before he followed, and forevermore living, as my friend Mr. Elvet Lewis has beautifully put it, on the edge of the crowd, or whether it was fiery, impetuous Peter, He knew them and dealt with them according to their temperaments. He so spoke in metropolitan Jerusalem as to arrest the attention of the leaders of the day, men of light and leading, and as to make them say, "How hath this Man letters, having never learned?" He so spoke to the great crowd of poor people that they heard Him and trusted Him. He won them. He knew men of all ages, men of years, young men, little children, men of all habits. He knew man, and because He knew man He knew men. If you and I try to study humanity by studying men we shall never understand humanity. If we come to know man in the light of God's revelation we shall know how to deal with men. Here standing in the midst was one who knew them.

What knowledge had He of man? I take the whole of the Gospels, and I find, if I study them, Christ's conception of humanity. He looked upon man as spiritual in being, as sinning in experience, as salvable by grace.

He dealt with man as spiritual in being. They crucified Him because of that. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God" was a great spiritual word, startling the valleys and mountain heights of Judea. "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand," was a clarion call from dust to Deity, from material-ism to spirituality. "Be not afraid of them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," evinced a fine scorn for the life that did not count eternities or deal with God. Whether He looked into the face of the impotent man at the pool, a pauper seeking charity, or into the face of the mitred high priest, He dealt with the spirit behind. His conception of humanity was that it was spiritual.

His conception of humanity, moreover, was that it is sinning in experience. Sin was that with which He had come to deal in tears and passion and blood. When He spoke to men upon their highest level and recognized the best in them, He flashed into the midst of His recognition the revelation of man's evil as well as his good. "Ye know how to give good gifts to your children." That is the finest thing you can say about man, it recognizes his tenderness, his compassion, his fatherhood, the most beautiful thing in man. What else? "If ye, then, being evil." He knew that man in experience was sinning, and always dealt with him as a sinner.

But this knowledge did not produce hopelessness in Him, for He dealt with men everywhere as being salvable by grace. Sometimes one finds oneself limited, straitened to find words to tell some great truth! So am I now! How shall I tell it? How shall I say what I mean? Thus—He treated men as worth dying for. He looked upon man as possible of being remade through His passion and His death! How a man would like to stay here were he preaching to Christian people rather than to an assembly in which there are those who are seeking Christ. These are the views of humanity which create the evangelistic fervor. Every human face is the outward manifestation of spiritual being. Every human being is in the grip of sin in some form. Every human being can be saved. In the power of these things we dare preach and work. He knew what was in man.

If you look at the truth and ask the question. What did Christ know of man? you are simply overwhelmed by the variety. You find as you go through the Gospel of John that no two men appeared alike before Him, and that He did not deal with any two men alike. We are saying to men perpetually, to every man who crosses our pathway, You must be born again. There is a sense in which it is true, but Christ said it to only one man. It was true of every man, but He did not approach every man from that standpoint. Of the personalities that came into contact with Christ, this Master Winner of souls, He did not deal with two in the same way. He knew the personal peculiarity, the individual idiosyncrasy, and He dealt with it. He was always leading men to recognition of their spiritual being, to abandonment of their sin, to the river of grace which would heal them, but He acted in a thousand different ways. Every man who came to Him was dealt with by the method demanded by his immediate need. Christ knew what was in man.

That leads me to the second thought, some of the general results of this great knowledge. I begin with the broader facts. What did His knowledge of men produce in the Christ? My first answer is the answer of the whole book. His incarnation is the first result. He expressed God to man through man's own nature. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." How? By being made flesh. That was the first thing He came to do. That is the burden of my message. If I can see how Christ looked at man I shall know God's attitude. If I can discover the diversity of His method and learn therefrom, that though I am a lonely man, there being no other like me in the world, having peculiar sins and temptations, so that I cannot be classified, Christ can yet deal with me, I shall know that God can deal with me. The incarnation was not the beginning of a new fact, it was the initiation of a new revelation. When the Word became flesh and eternal nearness of God blossomed into visibility, but the psalmist of the olden day had sung the great truth, Thou knowest me, I cannot escape from thee.

God was ever present, but the fact became patent when the Man of Nazareth took form and substance and shape, so that these very eyes could see, and this very hand could feel, and this life of mine could come to understand. He did that because of His knowledge of man. His knowledge of man compelled Him to express God for humanity that humanity might have knowledge of God.

Incarnation is not all. It is the way into the mightier, and the next word I use is salvation. He knew man, and what did He? He came, let me not use any words of my own. We fall back upon His own words, they are so familiar to us, and they are music to us tonight, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

Plunged in a gulf of dark despair,
We wretched sinners lay.
He saw, and, oh, amazing love,
He flew to our relief.

Then mark, I pray you, what follows. This is the thing of all things that I want to say in the closing words of my message tonight. Being in human life, visible by incarnation, being there for the saving of men, watch Him carefully, see how He treats every case alone: one issue, but many ways. I take up this Gospel and run through it and see Him in contact first with John the Baptist, and what does He do? He so deals with the prophet who has seen the flaming vision as to make the prophet content to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Andrew approaches Him. The adventurous seeker who turns from John with all sincerity to follow and see what some new teacher has to say. Christ turns and sees him. Andrew asks, "Rabbi, where abidest Thou?" How will Christ deal with him? "Come, and ye shall see." You are curious about Me, come along and I will show you where I live. If you had been a worker in some inquiry rooms you would perhaps have put Him outside because His method was not right! Peter, the man of possibility, what will Christ do with him? Tell him his possibility and then through processes realize it. Philip, the reserved man, Christ sees him, calls him. He would never come unless called, so He will call him and Philip comes. Nathanael, the guileless worshiper, brought by another to the Christ. Christ fulfils all that there was in this worship and brings him into such fellowship with Himself that he becomes Bartholomew the apostle. Mary, His own Mother's supreme human affection, He corrects, and at last commits her in human love to John. Nicodemus, the intellectual seeker, the man who thinks that everything is to come by way of knowledge; pure and upright in character so far as he had light, Christ brings him to the wicket gate and says, What you want is not learning, but life, "Ye must be born anew." The woman of Samaria, the flippant sinner who is ready for a theological argument but not for repentance. He searches her, flames upon her His knowledge, and then sends her to be the messenger to the city, having saved her. The nobleman, the sorrowing father with his boy ill, persistent in his appeal, what will Christ do? Heal his son and so win the father, for the whole house believed. There in the porches of Bethesda is an impotent man, utterly unable to lift himself. He will approach him, renew his hope, set him upon his feet, pronounce him whole and bid him sin no more. A woman taken in adultery, condemned. What will He do. Deliver her and lay upon her delivered spirit the great charge not to sin. A man born blind in the great and mysterious economy of God in order that God's works may be manifested in him. He gave him sight and made him the first worshiper outside the Jewish economy. Martha, honest, restless, He will patiently teach. Mary, the lowly disciple, He will fill her soul with His great grace. To Lazarus dead He will give life. Judas Iscariot, the thief, He will expose and exclude. Thomas, the skeptic, He will give him patient and gentle instruction. Annas and Caiaphas, mean and false, He will rebuke and then be silent in their presence. Pilate, the time-server, He will strive to save and then abandon. Joseph of Arimathea, the secret disciple, He will at last bring into such circumstances that his discipleship flames into light. Mary of Magdala, devil possessed, He will cast out the devil and make her the great messenger of His love and of His resurrection. John the rare dreamer, the man seeing visions and attempting to listen to the mystic music of the spheres, He will give him the apocalypse, the unveiling, signs and wonders in the heavens above and the earth beneath. He deals with every man according to his need.

Now hear me, I bring you tonight, in conclusion, the word of the herald in the first chapter of the Gospel, "In the midst of you standeth One Whom ye know not, even He that cometh after me, the latchet of Whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose." He knows you absolutely, perfectly, profoundly, finally. Not only better than your neighbor knows you, better than you know yourself! That is the final comfort to me. As God is my witness, during the last few months if only I had known myself I would have abandoned hope in more than one dark hour, but the memory of the fact that He knows me better than I know myself, that He looked into the face of Peter and said to him, "The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled," trust Me, is my comfort. Man, where are you? Would God that I could lay hands, violent hands of love, upon you. He knows you. All things are naked and open to His eyes, and He loves you notwithstanding, and is able to save you to the uttermost, and He will deal with you along the line that is necessary to your making. I pray you turn to Him for perfect understanding, for His perfect understanding of you. I said it was a comfort to be found out. Many a man has hidden a sin, a felony, for years, attempting not to be found out, but the morning in which the hand of the law arrested him was a morning of comfort, it was a relief to be found out. Man, you are found out. He knows, God help you, He knows. What does it matter that mother, or wife, or brother or sister, or neighbor or friend does not know, He knows. Oh, but you say, it is not merely sin, it is weakness, difficulty, I cannot get anyone to appreciate the peculiar difficulty of my life. He knows. There is nothing in the wide world so precious as someone who knows. That is friendship. The measure in which you know and understand me is the measure of your friendship. It may make you rebuke me, but it is friendship. He knows. It is the basis of

friendship. Oh, if I could get you to Him! I do not care anything about your getting to me. I care nothing about your getting into the church, you will do that after; you cannot help it. Get to Him for perfect understanding and know as you come to Him that there is no necessity for subterfuge, and no use therein; He knows you.

Know also that when you come to Him you will have not merely perfect understanding, you will have faithful dealing. He will not put His hand upon you in false pity and say these things do not matter. If your right hand offends you, cut it off. If your right eye is making you stumble into lust, gouge it out, fling it away. That is what He will say to you. No man here wants a medical man who faces a disease and tells you it does not matter. You want a man who will take hold of it and with knife and strength cut it out. The Physician of souls is such. He will be faithful with you.

Blessed be God, there is another word. You come not merely for perfect understanding, faithful dealing, but for certain salvation. Demonstrate to me that He cannot save you and I quit preaching. Prove to me that your case is beyond the power of Christ and the evangel breaks down. But you cannot prove it. Oh that there may come to us sooner or later a great baptism of passionate honesty. Witnesses are everywhere here, men and women who know His power; who could not, but can; who were fast bound in sin and nature's night, but who awoke as a ray of light came into the dungeon from His presence, whose chains fell off and who went forth to live, serve, and follow Him. If you will but come to Him because He knows you and let Him deal with you in all His faithfulness, you will find Him able to save you. May God in His grace bring you to this Christ Who knows you, that He may save you.

148 - John 20:28 - Was Thomas Mistaken?

Was Thomas Mistaken?

Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God.

John 20:28

In the Biblical order this is the eighth day after Easter, and consequently, the anniversary of the day on which Thomas uttered his great confession; and our Lord, His final beatitude. The confession of Thomas was the greatest of the confessions which fell from the lips of disciples of Jesus during the period of His presence among them in manifest and bodily form. The final beatitude of Jesus, the beatitude meant not for Thomas, not for the other apostles, but for us who name His name, and, believing thereinto, have received that gift of abounding life which comes in answer to such faith.

This confession of Thomas was without ambiguity in its terms. The evangelist was, moreover, most careful to state that the words were not in the nature of a declaration which might have been addressed to the Almighty Father, but that they were addressed to the Lord Himself. Notice the carefulness of the words, "Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God."

Was Thomas mistaken? That is a serious question; and upon our answer to it must depend our intellectual, emotional and volitional attitude toward Christ Himself. If Thomas was mistaken, then our attitude toward Christ cannot be that of Thomas. If Thomas was right our attitude must be that of his great confession.

Let us first consider the confession of Thomas as to its nature and as to its reason; and, secondly, inquire the bearing of this confession upon our attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

I need hardly tarry above a few moments with the first suggested matter—that, namely, of the nature of the confession. As I have already said, it was a confession without ambiguity, perfectly clear and simple, from which there can be no possible escape. Thomas, looking into the face of his Lord, said to Him, "My Lord and my God." "My Lord," which was a confession of the absolute sovereignty of Jesus, and therefore a confession of absolute submission to Him. Yet, had there been no other word spoken, it would not have arrested our attention, or perhaps demanded so serious consideration. The disciples had called Him Lord so often; and, indeed, it may be said that the title as it was then used was not as significant as I have indicated in my present definition of its meaning. The title "Lord" as used at the time had in some cases very little more significance than the title "Sir" as we use it in addressing men today. As it fell from the lips of this man, however, I think I am warranted in saying it came with full and rich and spacious meaning. I do not think for a moment that you will differ with me when I say that Thomas, saying to Christ upon that occasion "My Lord," did in that word recognize the sovereignty of Christ over his own life, and did by that word yield himself in willing submission to that sovereignty.

The second word of the great confession is even more arresting, and, indeed, it is by the second that I interpret the value of the first. Not only "My Lord," not only the One Who is sovereign over my life and to Whom I am prepared to render whole-hearted submission, but "My God." The word stands without exception for absolute Deity; and therefore indicated, on the part of the man who employed it, that he bowed before the One so addressed not only in submission but in worship. "My Lord," the confession of sovereignty and of submission; "My God," the confession of Deity and of worship.

Let us inquire into the reason why Thomas made the confession. Let us first of all look at the man. We did not see very much of him in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark and Luke all name him, simply placing him among the number of the first twelve disciples who subsequently became apostles. Luke also tells us that he was with the twelve in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. These are the only references which the evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke make to him. It was reserved for John to give us pictures of him; and these are few, but they are full. We see him first in the eleventh chapter on the occasion when the Lord was turning His face toward Jerusalem, with the intention of bringing back Lazarus out from among the dead. It was Thomas who said in heroic despair, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." The next picture of him is in the upper room, when the Lord was delivering His final discourses, which we call the paschal discourse. Thomas was the second to interrupt the conversation. Christ was talking about His own going away, and it was Peter who first interrupted Him. As our Lord answered Peter, He said, "Whither I go, ye know the way." Thomas, who would never pretend to believe anything of which he was not sure, said: "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; how know we the way?" Jesus answered Him: "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one cometh unto the Father but by Me." Then Philip interrupted: "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." The answer came tenderly and quickly: "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Thomas was listening. The next time we see Thomas is in this chapter twenty. Once again and only once again. He was one of the seven who stood on the shores of the lake when Jesus restored Peter to service. These are all the pictures we have of the man, but they are certainly enough to enable us to say two things concerning him. He was a man at once cautious and courageous. We speak of Thomas as a sceptic. Yes, but let the word be redeemed from our abuse of it. He was a sceptic. He was a man who was compelled to investigate, to inquire, a man who "would not make his judgment blind," a man who would "face the spectres of the mind," and would make no confession of faith, of hope, of confidence, unless it were a confession absolutely honest, true to the profoundest convictions of his mind. He was cautious; he was courageous. This is the man from whose lips the greatest confession fell that was ever uttered in the listening ear of Jesus during the time He was present among His disciples in bodily manifestation.

The confession was the result of a triumph over difficulty. Wherein lay his difficulty? He knew perfectly well that his Lord was dead, dead as both Thomas and all the disciples expected He would be if He persisted, in spite of all their warnings, in going up to Jerusalem. I believe that Thomas had either watched the crucifixion from a distance, or else that he had taken one last agonized look at the dead body of the Lord. I think when the disciples told him that they had seen the Lord, in his answer there is a revelation, not of hard, cynical scepticism, but of a broken heart: "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." The impression of the wounds was upon the spirit of the man. Perchance that was why he was not present on that Easter morning when the Lord was manifested. No hint is given as to the reason of the absence; only the fact is chronicled.

Thomas said, "Unless I see what you saw, I will not believe." He did not ask for something other than they had received. He did not ask for some special revelation, denied to the rest. He asked for the same proof, and for that alone. Jesus was dead; Thomas saw the wounds, and knew that He was dead. Eight days passed away. Thomas was now in the upper room with the rest. Suddenly Christ stood in the midst. Now what were the evidences that produced this confession? First, the things he saw. He saw Jesus, and he knew perfectly that it was the very Lord and Master he had seen nailed to the Cross, and Whose wounds had been apparent to him. There He stood, wounded, dead, alive with the very scars displayed. He was alive out of death. Then Thomas believed.

What did he believe? Not that Jesus was alive. Do not let us read these stories carelessly, or we miss our way in the very heart of the confession. When Jesus said to Him, "Because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed," He did not mean he believed He was alive; that required no exercise of faith. The fact that Jesus Who had been dead was alive was demonstrated by sight. Then he believed. What did he believe? Not that Jesus was alive. That, he saw and knew. Of that, vision was proof. It is not true, even though we still repeat it, that seeing is believing. "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed." There are two separate statements; seeing first, believing followed. Seeing that He was the living Christ, what did he believe? He believed what he confessed, "My Lord, and my God." He believed that the One Whom he had seen die, and known dead, but Whom he now saw risen and alive, was the Lord, that He was God.

So far I am not arguing as to whether he was justified in his belief. I am only trying to show the process by which he came to that belief. Thomas—cautious, courageous—had seen his Master die, had seen His wounding; knew He was dead. Then he saw Him alive, confronting him; and as a result he believed, first, that the risen One was his Lord, and, secondly, that He was his God.

The inquiry of supreme importance is this: Was that conclusion justified? Though I weary you with repetition of the circumstances, I want us to get back into the naturalness of the scene. Thomas saw Him dying, saw Him dead, saw the gaping wounds. Was he justified in saying "My Lord, and my God"? Was that conclusion justified upon the basis of that evidence? That is the heart of the inquiry.

If the conclusion that Jesus was God was based merely upon the fact of resurrection, I declare it was not justified. The resurrection did not demonstrate Deity. The Hebrew Scriptures told of the actual raising of certain men from the dead. This man Thomas had seen three dead ones come to life during the ministry of Jesus. He had seen the child of Jairus after resurrection. He had seen the

son of the widow of Nain, lying dead upon the bier, carried out to burial, raised to life. The very last sign of the Lord had been that of the raising of Lazarus, and he did not say, "My God," because Lazarus was alive from the dead. If the confession was merely the result of the resurrection, then I declare it was not justified, that the fact that Christ was risen from among the dead is not enough upon which to base a doctrine of His Deity; but if he believed on the basis of that resurrection as the sequence of all that had preceded it, then I claim that he was justified.

In that hour when Thomas became convinced that the One he had seen dead was alive from among the dead, there came back again to him with gathered force, focused into one clear, bright light, all the facts in the life and ministry of Jesus which had preceded that resurrection. All the way from Caesarea Philippi to Calvary, Jesus had told Thomas and the rest He was going to die and rise again, but they had never believed Him. Now Thomas looked at Him and saw Him alive: He had said He would come back from the dead so repeatedly that you cannot find me a single instance when Jesus foretold His coming Cross, that He did not also predict His resurrection. No one had believed Him. I do not mean to suggest that their unbelief was malicious or unkind, or that they questioned His sincerity, but they thought He was mistaken. Had they believed what He told them, that He would rise again, they would not have been scattered at the crucifixion, or they would have gathered back again into Joseph's garden, waiting to see if He would come; but they never believed. Thomas, now looking into His face, remembered all that He had said as He stood confronting Him. In that moment all the predictions of Jesus were fulfilled by His standing there alive, and He was vindicated in those claims He had made. In that, His resurrection was differentiated from that of all others; it was part of a fore-ordained purpose.

Yet, more than that contributed to produce the conviction which made Thomas add "My God." Let me rapidly group what Thomas had seen before the Resurrection. I am simply trying to interpret by looking through the lattice windows of the pictures already referred to. What had Thomas seen in Jesus? First of all, he had undoubtedly been captured by the charm of His personality. Then he had been impressed with the splendor of His ideals. Still later, he had been amazed at the foolhardiness of His heroism. I am trying to speak out of Thomas's experience. There had entered into the mind of the Master the conviction that He was bound to go to Jerusalem, when every sane man knew perfectly well that His enemies were waiting to kill Him; and He Himself knew it, yet with splendid heroism but awful foolhardiness He would go. That is what Thomas felt. What next? Thomas had seen an exhibition of His power more wonderful than he had ever seen before, when He called Lazarus out of the grave. Then what? Arrived at Jerusalem, Thomas had been impressed by the mysticism of His teaching in those paschal discourses in which He talked so strangely. We really do need to get back into the atmosphere to understand how these men must have felt as He uttered His last words to them. We read them over and over again in the light of the Spirit's interpretation until their great teaching flames and flashes in eternal value; but these men did not understand these things as we understand them. They had heard Him say, I am going away, and where I am going you can come. None of you ask Me where I am going; I am going to the Father, and if I go, I will come again to you. I came from the Father. I have been in the earth. I am going again to the Father. Put yourself in the place of Thomas, and listen to such words; they must have sounded mystical, mysterious, the words of a Dreamer, with no logical sequence or connection. When He said, "Where I am going you know the way," Thomas could bear it no longer, and he blurted out: "We do not know where You are going; how can we know the way?" Finally there had been the tragedy of the Cross, the horror of it, the shame of it, the brutality of it, the devilishness of it!

All these things were in the past, separated from each other, with no relation to each other, separated because seeming to contradict each other. The irresistible charm of His personality, the splendor of His great ideals for humanity, the apparent foolhardiness of heroism that marched straight toward murder; the wonderful power that tarried on the march to bring back out of death a man, while He Himself was going straight into death; the strange mysticism of His teaching about going to the Father when they knew there were those in the city that would murder Him; and the end of it all when they arrested Him, and swore His dear life away, nailed His kind hands to the Cross, plunged a spear into His side. Thomas turned away, and there was no Easter Sunday for him. Do you wonder at it?

He was there the next Sunday, the next first day of the week, and there stood his Master, the same; the same charm of personality, the same light flashing from His eye, undimmed even though He had been through death; His heroism vindicated, for He had been to death and had mastered it; the wonder of His power greater than ever, for He had not been raised by another—He had come back Himself; more mystical than ever, for no door had opened to admit Him; and, finally, the Cross of shame was seen shining in the light of resurrection. In that moment Thomas said: "It is my Lord; it is my God!" The isolated, separated incidents merged into a great whole and captured the man, so that he bent in worship. I, perhaps, should not have had clarity of vision enough to come so quickly to conclusion, but I must eventually have made the same confession had I had such experience of this One, infinitely more than man, "My Lord, and my God."

Take any one of those impressions alone, and you can nearly account for it, but never quite. Take them all and merge them in the mystery of resurrection, and you cannot account for them. Yes, we have known people with great charm of personality. We have known people with great ideals. We have seen foolhardiness in heroism, but there we must halt. We have not seen men raise the dead, although we may be able nearly to account for that. We have heard great mystic words from others. That day, in the upper

room, the whole of these impressions came back surging upon Thomas, light meeting light, tone merging into tone, until harmony from the heart of the universe swept through him, and he said, not "My Lord" alone, but also "My God."

When he made the great confession, Jesus looked at him and said: "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed." He did not deny its declaration; He did not refuse its implication; He did not say to Thomas, "This is a mistake."

Can we believe that Jesus is Lord and God? Can we say of Him "My Lord, and my God"? We have not seen; can we believe? What evidence have we? John writes: "Many other signs, therefore, did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe." John said: "I have grouped together here words and works of this self-same One, crowning all my story with this story of the resurrection; I have put before you in the writings the things that Thomas had before him, that though you have not seen Him you may also believe." All the evidences Thomas had we have in these writings. What is this Gospel of John—a biography of Jesus? Certainly not. Some of you have often heard me say it; forgive me if I repeat it. Arrange this book chronologically, and you have not the happenings of twenty days. It is a document of signs, words uttered and works done, and the whole of them interpreted finally by the resurrection. In the presence of this writing, if Thomas was justified in saying "My Lord, and my God," I am also justified in saying it.

Yes, but you say: "Are you sure of the writing? Are you sure it is a true story?" You must let me answer that after my own fashion. If it be not true, I still earnestly desire to find the men who invented it. There is nothing in literature like it, no dream like it in all your dreamings, oh masters mine!

But we have more than the writings; we have the witnesses. We have the witness of those who have had life in His name. John said, "These are written that ye may believe." Can you find any people who have read the writings, and have believed what Thomas believed, and who as the result have had life in His name? The question is an absurd one. That is the history of nineteen centuries of Christian effort; the writings, men believing, men receiving life, men sealing the accuracy of the writings by the witness of their own victories won. Life, what kind of life? Life that masters sin, that realizes holiness, that is growingly conformed to the image and likeness of God. These are the victories of the writings through nineteen centuries. I need not go back to apostolic times. All this host, not one or two, not occasional individuals, but tens, twenties, hundreds, thousands, millions who have believed in the Christ of these writings and have received life; and I know they have received life not because they say so, but because I have seen it working dynamically in them until the evil things that mastered them have dropped off like leaves from a tree smitten by the lightning of God, and fresh, beautiful things have been manifested in their lives. The witnesses to the accuracy of the writings compel me to say: "Seeing that I have in the writings all that Thomas had, and I have in the witnesses those who seal the writings, then also in the presence of this Christ who has been winning these victories, the Christ of these writings, I must say, and I can no other, so help me God, He is my Lord and my God."

What is faith? Mark Rutherford says: "Faith is not belief in fact, demonstration, or promise. It is sensibility to the due influence of the fact, something which enables us to act upon it, the susceptibility to all the strength there is in the fact, so that we are controlled by it. Nobody can precisely define it.... All we can say about it is that it comes by the grace of God, and that failure to see the truth is not so lamentable as failure to be moved by it." Thomas was convinced of truth when he saw the risen Christ. That was not faith or belief. He felt the whole fact of the truth and its appeal, and he answered it when he said, "My Lord, and my God." That was belief. I may or may not be able by my argument concerning the writings or the witnesses to bring you into intellectual conviction of the truth; but if I do it is quite useless. It is not by conviction that man receives this life. It is by answer to it, by uttering that voluntary confession.

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The experience growing out of faith is an experience of blessedness, and it seals the act of faith which at the beginning is a venture in response to conviction; and no man has ever made that act of faith in the presence of this Lord Christ, but that there has been such answering experience.

Our decision as to whether Thomas was right or wrong will make a very great difference. Supposing Thomas was wrong, what then? Supposing it was a mistake, that this Jesus risen from among the dead was not God, absolute God, very God, what then? On highest levels let me state it. Our intellectual conception of Christ is one which makes trust impossible. I may be able to have confidence in His ideal and in His endeavor, I may admire it and even seek to imitate it; but trust him—no. No man of my own nature can command my perfect trust. I cannot trust Him. Why not? He is as finite as I am. He cannot see any further beyond the horizon than I can see, or if He can see further than I can, there is yet more beyond His seeing, and I must have a guide who can lead me there. I cannot trust Him if He be only man.

Our emotional attitude must be changed. If Thomas was wrong, our emotional attitude toward Him is one of sympathy and nothing more. I can sympathize with His great ideals, I can wish He had been able to establish that Kingdom that men thought He was going to establish. I can sympathize with the tragedy of His death, and say He is Brother to all suffering souls who have walked such ways of darkness. I can enter into sympathy with Him, but that is all.

If He be not very God, my volitional relation to Him is immediately changed, and I speak on the highest level only. What is my volitional attitude to Christ if Thomas was wrong? It is one of friendship, which takes His advice, but is able to better it, friendship which gives as well as takes advice. If He was not very God, then indeed He was a child of His own age, and today we know infinitely more than He did. I catch gleams of truth, but I can better them from later teachers. That is the consistent attitude, if Thomas was wrong.

If Thomas was right, then I worship. Then, though I say I love Him, I am almost afraid to sing it glibly, for my love is reverent, adoring love, which, while I touch the warm flesh of His condescending humanity, is conscious of the splendors of Deity; not the love of friendship, which takes and betters advice, but the love of worship which when He speaks asks no question; when He seals truth concerning my own life, concerning God or the Holy Scriptures, know that truth is final. That is my Christ. I do most definitely and solemnly affirm that the confession of Thomas is my confession, "My Lord, and my God."

We must understand that those two attitudes, both of them honest, cannot merge, cannot mix, cannot walk together. They must in honesty stand apart, for if the thing I believe of this Christ is true, then those who rob Him—for me, at least—are degrading Him. Whereas I may respect them, I cannot work with them. If the thing they say is true, then I am an idolator, for I am worshipping a man.

The question is a supreme question, and it is one we are bound to ask, and we are compelled to answer; and upon our answer must depend the whole of our attitude both toward the Christian religion and all those who bear His name. The hour is an hour in which loyalty demands that if we believe Him to be very God, we reaffirm the truth with lip and life.

149 - John 21:1 - Manifestations of the Risen Lord

Manifestations of the Risen Lord

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and He manifested Himself on this wise.
John 21:1

Our subject is the whole of the twenty-first chapter of John in the light of this first verse. Whatever there is in the story is qualified by this opening statement, and especially by the word which is twice repeated in the course thereof, a word which is well rendered in the Revised Version, "manifested." The literal meaning of the word is "to shine forth." In this particular verse, moreover, the verb is in the active voice, thus showing that John considered that it was the intention of the Lord to reveal Himself in some special way. Taking this, then, as the keynote, we find the viewpoint for our meditation.

The story is another of the Post Resurrection stories. It would seem to have been added after the conclusion of the narrative in its more systematic form. The verse with which chapter 20 ends formed a natural ending to the scheme of the Gospel. The probability is that the Gospel did end there, and that at some later period, perchance for some very special reason, John added this chapter. I am not going to argue about the writer. I take it for granted that John wrote it. I think the internal evidences are absolutely conclusive that whosoever wrote the first part of the Gospel wrote this also.

In very many ways this chapter is peculiarly beautiful, and its different parts often have been considered in detail. I now propose a quiet meditation while we attempt to see the Lord as in the fresh light of early morning, He is manifested in the whole movement by the sea of Tiberias. In order to do this, we will first consider the succeeding incidents that make up the whole movement, and then notice some facts which here have special manifestation and outshining.

First, then, let us look at the incidents. There are three. First, the Lord is seen directing fishermen in their fishing, then providing breakfast for the toilers, and, finally, dealing with Peter—here, as always, the representative disciple—on the future.

As I thus merely name the three incidents, there is almost a shock of surprise in the mind. Directing fishermen about their fishing, preparing breakfast, and uttering high and wonderful words concerning a spiritual campaign! It seems as though, after mentioning the first two incidents, we have to readjust ourselves to speak of the third. That sense of incongruity is our fault, our failure, and an immediate revelation of one of the marvels and glories of the story. Here our Lord is seen relating these things to each other: a common calling—fishing, a very persistent necessity—breakfast, and some of the most wonderful things He ever said about the whole campaign of His Church. The three follow naturally and regularly and beautifully. There is no real break in the story. The break comes in our mind, because we think we must put some gap between breakfast and spiritual work, that we must put some great gulf between fishing on Saturday and worshipping on Sunday. So we are face to face with one of the values of the story at the very beginning, to which we shall have to come back presently.

Let us, however, look at the Lord. First, we see Him standing on the beach directing fishermen in their fishing. Now, whether these men ought to have been fishing does not matter. I know there are different opinions as to whether Peter, on this occasion, when he

said, "I go a fishing," was warranted in doing so. I am very willing to give my personal opinion for what it is worth, and then it can be dismissed. I think he was wrong. Our Lord distinctly told the disciples to wait until they were endued with power from on high. But this must be added: whatever the Lord felt about their going, He did not rebuke them.

These men knew the business of fishing, at least it is certain that three of them did. Peter and the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were fishermen. They knew the Sea of Tiberias well, just when it was likely that the fish would be best taken, where the currents ran, what effect the driving wind would have on the waters, how to cast the net, how to be silent, and how to act. They were fishermen, and yet that night they had failed. I do not say that they were to blame. It was fisherman's luck. They had taken no fish; there was no harvest of the sea that night. There, on the beach, in the gleam of the morning, stood a stranger. They did not know Him. They were only about a hundred yards from the shore at the time. Then Jesus' Voice came across the waters: "Children, have ye aught to eat?" The answer came back clear and sharp, and, perhaps, with a slight tone of disappointment, "No." "Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find."

Now, whether this was miraculous or not does not matter. Whether our Lord here may have been exercising His sovereignty over all nature; or whether He was merely observing the sea and saw the shoal of fish there does not signify anything. The great value of the story is that He was interested in the men fishing, He directed their operations, and He gave them success. The most obvious thing here is the most important. He Who did this was the Risen Lord of Life and Glory. He was interested in the fisher folk while they were fishing, and directed them in the hour of their failure, so that they became successful.

In the next incident Jesus is seen providing breakfast for the toilers. When these men found their way to land, they saw a fire of coals there. I would like to use a more literal translation, They saw a fire of coals laid. In that word laid there is the simple significance that the fire had been carefully prepared; it was built, it was laid. Moreover, fish was laid thereon, and bread was provided.

Now, again, whether in all this there was anything supernatural or miraculous, to use our very imperfect words, I care nothing. Here is the fact. Jesus is seen on the seashore building a fire and preparing food for hungry fishermen. The Risen Lord of Life and Glory, Whose persistent mission had been to ransom a race and establish the Kingdom of God is seen on the seashore, while men are absent fishing. What is He doing? Getting breakfast ready for them! One man on that boat knew Him, and said to his companion, "It is the Lord." Immediately that splendid man, that impulsive man, the friend, girt his outer garment about him and flung himself into the sea and reached the shore. At last they all arrived. None of them durst ask this stranger who He was. They were afraid. Then Jesus came nearer and invited them to sit down and eat, and waited on them. That is the second picture. Jesus was manifesting Himself; He was shining forth on these men. A mystic glory had enveloped His Person in consequence of His Resurrection which seemed apt to remove them from Him and Him from them. Here He was seen understanding their hunger, sympathizing with their necessity, serving; and in the Hands that built the fire and placed the fish thereon were wound prints! It is a picture of the world's Redeemer getting breakfast ready for cold, tired fishermen.

There is yet another scene, equally familiar and equally wonderful. Finally, Jesus is seen here dealing with Peter on the future—dealing with him, as I have already hinted and will now again remark, as a representative man. All the way through Peter is the representative disciple; he is more intensely human than is any other man; he is a man in whom all the elemental qualities of humanity are discovered—intellectual, emotional, and volitional. When the breakfast was ended, Jesus began to deal with this man, and to challenge him three times in order to utter to him a threefold commission, which covers the whole of the Church's campaign to the end of the Age. It is not sufficient only to declare what has been declared, that at this point our Lord handed to Peter the Crozier—that is, the Staff of Office of the Pastor of the flock when the flock is folded. In other words, He was not thinking only of the Church when He spoke of "My sheep" and "My lambs." He was thinking of the race.

Now, whereas I am perfectly sure there is a close connection between the threefold denial uttered in the presence of a fire the enemies of Jesus had built and this threefold confession made in the presence of a fire that Jesus had built—I do not think that our Lord was especially concerned with that matter. He had had a private interview with Peter before this, since His Resurrection, in which the whole business of Peter's deflection had been once and forever settled. Our Lord does not go back on such settlements. That is the mistake we too often make. When He forgives He blots out. It was in view of a larger commission that a threefold confession was necessary, because of the threefold character of the work it included.

What is the first thing our Lord wants to say to the Church through Peter? "Feed My lambs." In the view of Christ all the lambs are already included in the flock, and the business of the Church is to feed them. The second phase of the great commission is, "Shepherd My sheep," that is, gather them, guard them, guide them. When speaking of His own work, Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd." The Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep. The Good Shepherd layeth down His life that He may take it again. The Good Shepherd entereth into conflict with the wolf, and when the wolf can be destroyed only by the Shepherd's dying, then the Shepherd dies to destroy the wolf. All that was surely in His mind when he said, "Shepherd My sheep." Finally, He said: "Feed My sheep." In these commands we have the whole commission. In order that Peter may be able to do it, in order that the

Church may be able to do it, there is one supreme necessity, which is revealed in the challenge: "Lovest thou Me?"

In the next place, the Lord proceeded to deal with Peter about his personal pathway of service. He told Peter what lay ahead of him in the consummation of his earthly service:

When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.

With all reverence, if I may change the wording, this is what Jesus said to him: In the days of thy young manhood thou hast made thine own choices, and thine own decisions; even in the days of thy fellowship with Me thou hast asserted thy will, protesting against My Cross, that yoke under which I serve. But now thou must walk My way, and the culmination of that walk shall be that thou wilt, at last, suffer apparent defeat. The Cross waits for thee actually. But Follow Me.

As Peter heard Him say this he remembered that the Lord had gone to the Cross, but that the Cross had not been the end. Jesus was alive from among the dead. Peter understood there and then that if he himself must go by that restricted, pressing, agonizing way of the Cross, it was a way that led out into life and fulness of victory.

Then all the glory and the beauty of the story once again seems to switch back, almost with vulgarity, to the commonplace. When Jesus said: Follow Me, evidently He began to walk away, and Peter, literally following Him, turned round and saw John. Then he asked Jesus: What shall this man do? Will he die, too? Will he suffer? With swift suddenness Christ definitely and sharply rebuked Peter. What is that to thee? Follow thou Me. If, again without irreverence, I may translate into the language of today, this is what Jesus said: "Mind your own business! Follow thou Me!"

In this simple looking at the story, as it seems to me, there is almost all we need of help and encouragement. Yet let us pass to the second and the last line of consideration, and notice some of the facts that are revealed as we look at the manifesting of the Lord in this page of incidents.

What first impresses me as I watch Jesus is the sanctification of all life, and the cancellation of many false human terms. Let us remember Who this One is, and where He stands; that He is the Son of God and the Son of Man; that He stands on the other side of the forces of sin and sorrow and death against humanity. As I watch Him I know that all life is sanctified. I know that fishing is sanctified, and not merely as a figure of speech concerning spiritual work, but as an actual occupation for every day in the week. That would appeal to us more strongly if we were fisher folk. And yet why? We shall destroy the beauty of it if we think only of fishing boats. I will try to make the lesson superlative by saying that Jesus Christ would never have said to me, I will make you a fisher of men. He knows perfectly well that I am no fisherman. He did come to me one day, when I sat at a desk with boys around me teaching, and He said: Follow Me, and I will make you a teacher of men. I went after Him on the line of my capacity. Suppose He had not called me to this work as I sat at the desk. Then that work would have been as sacred as is this. Or suppose He has not called you to give up your office in the city, but to stay there. Then your office is a holy place, if you are a holy man. Suppose you are called on every day of the week to work at the carpenter's bench, to superintend the building of houses, to place brick on brick therein! It is all sacred. The Lord is watching you when you are fishing, watching you as you write your letters, watching as you build your house, as you do your work. Then all life becomes sacred. If we could but realize this, then we would go back to a week radiant with light and glory. Ah, yes, that particular work that is so very commonplace, hidden away in some quarter in London, up some back stairs—that work and that office would be radiant with glory if you remembered that the Lord is watching, that all life has become beautiful since you stood on the seashore and watched Jesus taking an interest in fishermen.

Yes, all life is sacred, and here I want to speak with reverence. I say this, not in pleasantry, but with real reverence. The greatest work that is done in London on any given day is that done, not in the office, but in the home. The place of drudgery, the place of the commonplace, of monotony, is the home. You men, think of the commonplace of having to get breakfast ready in the morning. My sisters, I speak to you with reverence. You who preside over our homes and our households—and not only those of you who preside, but also those who serve therein—when tomorrow morning you are up betimes, laying a fire, preparing a breakfast, remember that the Lord of Glory built a fire and cooked a breakfast. This is a wonderful sanctification of life; this is an illuminating glory that transfigures the commonplace and makes it the special. Let us cancel the word, "secular," or at least some of our uses of it. There is nothing secular. Our Lord transmuted the commonplace, base metal, and made it the fine gold of the sanctuary of God, when He prepared that breakfast and waited upon those hungry men.

He has sanctified human life in its larger outlooks also by the fact that when He looked out with those wonderful Eyes of His, He saw humanity, and He said, "My sheep." Oh, but you say, surely He meant His people! Yes, but who are His people? We must interpret our Lord's word here by our Lord's thought and teaching elsewhere. In a superlatively revealing passage, at the dividing of the ways, when Jesus was about to send these men out for the first time, Matthew has told us how our Lord went through all the villages and cities teaching, beholding the multitudes, and was moved with compassion for them. Why? They were as sheep without a shepherd. Here, then, in the simple words, "My sheep," "My lambs," He includes all humanity—the bruised, the degraded, and the vicious.

Then on each He setteth,
His own secret sign.

That secret sign is not merely on the brow of the saints worshiping; that secret sign of a love ineffable and a passion unfathomable is on the brow of every man and woman and child. Our Lord sanctified humanity when He spoke of the multitudes as "My sheep" and "My lambs." He sanctified all human life. Let us never again think contemptuously of any human being.

Again I look, and I see Jesus manifested here, not only as the Sanctifier of all life. He is also manifested in His Sovereignty. It is seen in that first incident in the direction of the fishermen, in the fact that He told them where to fling the net. Whether His sovereign will impressed the strange harvest of the sea, or whether it did not, He knew how to direct the fishermen, and in the act I observe the easy grace and equal beauty of a Sovereign Lord and Master. I hear the strong authoritative note of His Sovereignty also in the tender terms by which He described humanity: "My sheep, My lambs!" when I put the emphasis on the possessive, "My sheep, My lambs!" Our Lord had entered into conflict with the wolf, and had destroyed the wolf; and now He claimed authority over the sheep among whom the wolf had ravened. It was the tone of His sovereignty.

I find that evidence of supreme sovereignty, moreover, in the test He imposed on those who will serve Him, revealing as it does the one and only fitness necessary for spiritual ministry: "Lovest thou Me?" Observe the superlativeness of this, for, said Jesus in effect to this man, If you love Me, then you are fit for this high and holy office to which I appoint you. He made Himself the spiritual Master of the affection, claiming that in love to Him there was transforming and transmuting power, enabling a man to do the most glorious work of the centuries.

Yet once again His sovereignty is revealed in this narrative in the fact that He taught Peter that the one and only business of His followers is to follow. Peter, there is the Via Dolorosa that thou must tread, there is the girding and the binding and the veritable cross. Follow Me! Yes, Peter, and here is this man John; but you do not need to know My arrangements for him. It is not necessary for you to know them. Follow Me! That is the Voice of supreme sovereignty.

Once again, and finally, as I look at these incidents, I see Our Lord's devotion to His own, His devotion to their physical necessities, and His devotion to whatever their spiritual obligation required. I see His devotion to His own in their suffering. I see His devotion to them in their weakness, in that He will make no peace with their folly, but will sharply rebuke it in order that they may realize the fulness of their fellowship with Him, and consequently with the Father.

As I close, I go back to the beginning of the chapter, to the things that immediately follow my text. For just a moment I want to look at the men. Who are these men round about our Lord? I see, first, Simon Peter, the impulsive, the great human; then Thomas, the magnificent, the skeptic—which simply means the man who looks hard, the man who by now was not only trustful, but trustworthy, having heard His Lord's words to him when they met on that eighth day after the resurrection. Then there is Nathanael, the man who was guileless, the man who would never have made a politician, the man who was so guileless that he admitted it. Observe that! Jesus said to him when he saw him: Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael said: "How knewest Thou me?" By now he had seen the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. James and John Boanerges were also there, the men who asked to sit on Jesus' right hand and on His left, and were admitted to the sacramental preparation of cup and baptism that they might do it. And who else? Two others. Thank God for these representatives of the anonymous multitude. No! no! not Andrew and Philip. Many an expositor has tried to prove to me that they were Andrew and Philip. Nothing of the kind. If it had been so, they would have been named. They were not of the twelve. They were two men of the outside crowd, of the anonymous multitude, the multitude which create the dynamic, in the force of which the named and prominent men go forward. I am perfectly honest in saying this. How could I preach except for the unnamed souls that pray for me? Two others! I like that group of men. That impulsive, hot, magnificent Peter; that critical, cautious, splendid, trustworthy Thomas; that guileless Nathanael; those Sons of Thunders, and two others. To these Jesus manifested Himself.

Jesus is the Lord of Life and Glory. He will be interested in the daily callings of His people to the end of time; He will sanctify all household duties so that they flash with the splendor of service heavenly; He will direct our spiritual campaign, and comfort us in all our sufferings. Think of the effect of these manifestations on subsequent days of fruitless toil. By His action we know that He overrules our failures, and makes them the processes of His successes. Think of what it meant afterwards to these men in days of weariness and hunger, when they were shepherding the sheep and feeding the lambs. Think of what it meant afterwards to these men when they had to confront death. Think of what it meant afterwards to these men in those days when they would be tempted to fussiness about other people.

I am not proposing to allow any man to take from me this twenty-first chapter of John. For thus He manifested Himself!

My Lambs – My Sheep

Feed My Lambs... Tend My sheep... Feed My sheep.

John 21:15-17

These words constitute our Lord's final commission to Peter, and as Peter stands ever before us as the representative man, the words were spoken through him to the Church. We need to rescue these words from an altogether too narrow interpretation. It has been said that, on the shores of the lake in the flush of the early morning, Jesus handed Peter the crozier, the staff of the pastoral office, and thus entrusted to him the oversight of the saints of God. This is undoubtedly true, but the whole truth is more than this. That narrow view of our Lord's meaning is due largely to the fact that our minds are obsessed almost by one particular utterance of our Lord, in which He drew a clear and sharp distinction between sheep and goats. It is well to remember that Christ only once made such distinction.

If in that great chapter of Matthew, our Lord was referring to a final assize, when individuals will appear before Him for sentence, then we must recognize that He never makes the division until the day of final assize, never suggests that men are goats on the one hand, and sheep on the other, until the day of final destiny. I do not believe that our Lord even then had any such meaning in His speech. The picture of that chapter of Matthew is not that of the assembling before Him of individuals for individual sentence. It is, rather, the picture of the assembling before Him of nations for national sentence. When He makes His division as between sheep and goats, the division is not between individual men, but between nations. The prophecy had special reference to Israel.

The spaciousness of these words spoken to Peter on the shores of the lake can only be discovered as we adopt the usual line of teaching suggested by the figure of the shepherd and the sheep in the Scriptures. The seers and psalmists of the old economy, in moments of highest exaltation and clearest vision, saw that the supreme truth concerning the Kingship of Jehovah is that He is a Shepherd, and that the direst woe fallen upon the sons of men is that they are as sheep without a shepherd.

In that very brief paragraph, which I read from the Gospel of Matthew, we have something we need to attend to very carefully. Matthew tells us that Jesus went through all the cities and villages preaching, teaching and healing, and that when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd.

In that matchless discourse recorded in the tenth chapter of John, Jesus said, "I am the good Shepherd... other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring."

When Peter, who heard these words on the shore of the lake, came to write his letter afterward to Christian men and women, he said: "Ye were going astray like sheep, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

The words spoken to Peter must be interpreted in harmony with these uses of the figure of the sheep. When Jesus, looking into the eyes of Peter as He restored Him by challenge, confession and commission, said, "Feed My lambs... shepherd My sheep... feed My sheep," His holy, lovelit eyes were looking far beyond the first narrow circle of His own disciples, to the vast multitudes of all nations, all peoples and all tongues who were in His heart, because He was the good, the great and the chief Shepherd.

These words are suggestive, as they reveal to us the nature of the work committed to the Church. It is not my intention to deal with them now in that way. I ask only that you ponder, at your leisure, these simple facts. Of the lambs He said, Feed them, and there is profound significance in the fact. He did not suggest that our first work should be that of finding them. He spoke of the children as already His own. When He referred to the sheep, His first word was, shepherd them; that is, find them if they have gone astray, seek them if they are lost, then fold them and guard them. Then, beyond that, "Feed my sheep."

I desire now to direct attention first, to the assumptions of Christ which these words suggest, and, secondly, to what they reveal as to the preparation that is necessary for all such as seek to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep.

First, let us listen to the words as revealing the assumptions of Jesus: "My lambs... My sheep." The note that first impresses the heart is that of infinite and tender compassion: "My lambs... My sheep."

Let me illuminate this by reference again to the passage in Matthew. When He saw the multitudes, what effect did the vision produce upon Him? As God is my witness, I hardly know how to cite these words to you. I am afraid of harshness of tone. Yet I am also afraid that if I attempt to do other than recite them with the natural harshness of tone, I may but libel the exquisite tenderness that ought to be heard in them. "He was moved with compassion for them."

How familiar we are with the words. Would that in the quiet hush of this moment, they might come to us with all their infinite meaning. "He was moved with compassion." The final outcome of that compassion was the cross.

Why was He moved with compassion? Because He saw them "distressed and scattered." Take the words and let them be pictures, as they really are, and in a moment we discover their true significance. I do no violence to them if I say that our Lord saw the sheep

harried by wolves, bruised, wounded, flung to the ground, faint and weary; and it was that vision of humanity in its degradation, spoiled and ruined, that moved His heart with compassion. "My lambs... My sheep." We cannot hear these words, interpreted by the declaration of the Gospel of Matthew, without discovering in them the note of infinite tenderness and compassion.

Yet, there is infinitely more in them than the note of compassion. There is that of supremacy. It was Homer who once said that kings are the shepherds of the people. Perhaps it would have been more correct to have said kings ought to be the shepherds of the people. It is at least perfectly true that the master figure of kingship in the Old Testament is that of the Shepherd. All God's chosen, ordained kings and leaders were of the shepherd heart. If Moses was to lead the people, he had to learn the art of leading them by being a shepherd for long years. If David was to come to the throne, he had to discover the secrets of victory by slaying the lion and the bear that came against the sheep of his father's flock. The idea of kingship in the economy of God is always that of the shepherd, who feeds rather than is fed, who guards rather than seeks to be guarded. It is the true ideal of kingship.

Ringling through this word of Jesus, coming up out of the old Hebrew economy and ideal, is the note of supremacy, "MY lambs... MY sheep." Standing in the midst of humanity, speaking to His own disciples, He claimed absolute Lordship over all the race.

We have not yet touched the profoundest note. We go to the tenth chapter of John, and listen: "I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep." Then, with a touch of fine scorn: "He that is a hireling and not a shepherd... fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep." The Good Shepherd enters into conflict with the wolf, and even though He die, He dies to slay the wolf. Jesus saw the sheep distressed and scattered as by wolves, and He was moved with compassion for them; and then, as King, He entered into conflict with the forces that spoil, and, though dying in the conflict, He despoiled and triumphed over the foe in His cross, making a show openly of such as were opposed.

There is yet another note, that of resurrection victory. Once again we go to the same chapter of John for exposition. He not only said, "The Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep." He also said this strange, mysterious, overwhelming thing: "No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." That was an empty and a vain boast, unless He rose from among the dead. I need not argue it. He rose. He took again the life laid down, and, standing there on the shores of the lake, He said: "My lambs, My sheep." I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down My life for them. They are Mine by virtue of life laid down. I am the Good Shepherd. I have taken My life again for them. They are Mine by virtue of resurrection.

We think of the Galilean lake, and, in imagination, see all humanity gathered around that central Person; the men of His own age, of every successive age, this congregation, the whole of this city, all the nations of the world, and of them all He said: "My lambs... My sheep." In His voice there is the note of infinite compassion, the ring of absolute authority, the passion of the cross and the triumph of resurrection.

Now, in order that we may understand the commission itself, and our responsibility, let us inquire at what point in the life and history of this man, Peter, our Lord gave him the commission. In order to gain anything like a full and adequate answer to that inquiry we need the whole story of Peter. My comfort is that we know it. We are very familiar with it. I need therefore stay only to refer to the outstanding facts in Christ's method of preparing this man for the hearing of this commission. The work began when Jesus first met him. In that hour, and upon this alone I dwell, the glamour of Christ's personality fell upon Peter. He did not understand Him. He had no theory as to His Person, no doctrine as to His mission, but he felt the irresistible attraction of His personality. He was not yet ready for Christ to commission him to feed the lambs and gather the sheep, but the first stage in his preparation was accomplished.

What next? All the patient training of the weeks, months, years over which we pass, until we come to Caesarea Philippi, and again we have a familiar story. I need but refer to it for illustration. There at Caesarea Philippi this man looked back into the eyes of Christ, and said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Christ, for Whose coming Jeremiah had watched, shedding bitter tears; Whose advent John had announced; for Whose work Elijah had sighed; the One to Whom all the prophets had given witness. Peter had reached the second stage in his preparation for hearing this commission when he uttered that confession. He had come to the hour in which he no longer placed Christ on the level of other teachers, but had discovered His absolute supremacy; knew that all the light that burned in others was derived from this one essential source of light; knew that all the aspirations, and hopes, and longings in the hearts of men were to be fulfilled in Him.

The third stage in preparation followed immediately, as for the first time he beheld the tragedy of the cross. I think sometimes that we are unfair to Peter and the rest of the disciples about that cross. We preach sermons upon their frailty and folly. Had we been among their number we would have shared their disappointment when Jesus spoke of the cross. It was absolutely revolutionary. There was nothing in human philosophy that could understand it. Who ever heard of a man coming to crowning by way of a cross? Who ever heard of a man winning universal victory by the way of disastrous defeat? "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom." These are the things to be desired. And immediately He declared He was going to Jerusalem to die, to be mauled by brutal hands, to suffer and be crucified. Ere we criticize Peter, let us get back into Peter's place. In that moment, he saw the tragedy of the cross, to use Paul's great word, the offence of the cross, the scandal of the cross, scandal in the true sense, the thing in the way that prevents progress. He had to see that, to feel the agony of it, before he

was ready to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep.

One final and revealing matter. When Jesus gave him this commission He was the risen Lord. It is so easy to say this, but can we put ourselves back into his place? What does Peter say about the resurrection? He declares we were begotten again "unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"—a most graphic and wonderful statement—by which he meant this: I saw Him die, and was certain that by that death all my hopes were put out in darkness, all the high and noble things I had hoped for Him and through Him were defeated; but when I saw Him alive beyond death, I was born again, I came to a new vision, a new understanding, and the very cross from which I had shrunk was transfigured with light, and became glorious with a glory that amazed my heart and soul. It was never until Peter had seen his risen Lord that the Lord commissioned him to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep.

Mark the four stages. First, he felt the glamour of His personality. Second, he came to conviction of His absolute supremacy. Third, he came to the horror and tragedy of the cross. Finally, he came into the light of the resurrection, and saw that selfsame cross transfigured until it shone with a beauty and glory of which he had never dreamed. Never before was Peter ready for the great commission, for the great and sacred work.

These four experiences of Peter coincide exactly with the assumptions of Jesus. The first note is that of His compassion. Peter felt the glamour of His personality. The second note is that of His supremacy. Peter came to the confession of this at Caesarea Philippi. The third note is that of His cross. Peter had felt the offence of the cross. The fourth note is that of resurrection. Peter stood in the light of it.

Does not the meditation carry its own lessons? Christ still stands amid the multitudes of the world. The more I think of my Lord, the more I study His teaching; the more I strive to come into fellowship with Him; the more I recognize that in His presence there are no divisions. He will have none of our adjectives such as home and foreign. He stands in the midst of humanity, universal in His own humanity, whether it be east or west, a Man among men, standing in the midst of the multitudes of our own city, and of the far distant places of the world, moved with compassion for their sorrows and their sins.

If we are to fulfil His commission, we must pass through exactly the same experiences of spiritual life. No man can feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep until he himself has felt the mysterious attraction of the Person of Christ upon his own life. No man can feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep until he has put Christ in the place of final supremacy. If I am a mere discussor of comparative religions, if I put Christ's name by the side of that of Buddha, or Confucius, or any other, I cannot feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep. Until I see that He is above them all, that every gleam of light in their teaching, every touch of truth in the things they said were derived from Him, that He is the supreme, absolute, final Lord, I cannot do His work, neither can the Christian Church. If there be paralysis of missionary endeavour, that is the essential reason of it. We are not sure about His supremacy. We are not absolutely convinced that He is the one lonely Lord and Master of the race. We are trying to put others into comparison with Him, and to admit that perhaps other lords are better for other men than this Lord Christ of ours. All such comparison cuts the nerve of missionary endeavour, and paralyzes the possibility of obedience to this great and gracious commission.

We can never fulfil this commission until we ourselves have come to a sense of the horror of the cross. We must see the offence of it, or we cannot serve. I know that in the light of resurrection we see the glory and beauty of it, but let us be careful lest we miss all that lies behind—the offence, the scandal, the horror of the cross of Christ. That is the danger of the present moment. It is affirmed by some that the doctrine of the cross is vulgar. Hear me now patiently. The cross is vulgar; nothing in human history is so vulgar, nothing so dastardly, nothing so unholy. But what is the vulgarity? Listen to this awful word of Scripture. "He was made sin." There is the vulgarity. It is the vulgarity of the sin that made the cross necessary. Until I have felt it, the horror of it, the scandal of it, and have come to a sense of the shame of the sin that erected it, I cannot shepherd the sheep. We cannot heal humanity's wounds with rosewater. We cannot touch the sheep with their festering sores until we see the horror of the wounding. Who else saw the multitudes as Christ saw them? Not the disciples of those early days. Not the rulers of the people. Not the people themselves. But He knew the poison of sin, the awfulness of sin. That led Him to the cross. We must measure the ruin of humanity by that cross ere we can hope to help it, or serve it, or save it.

That is not the last word. We must know Christ as risen, and so understand the cross as infinitely more than the revelation of sin. It is the revelation of grace—triumphant grace, rich and spacious and overwhelming word of the Christian Church, altogether too lightly and too glibly used in these days. Grace, let the first Pentecostal preacher tell the story of the cross. He fixes your attention upon the Person of the Christ, and says: "Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay." There is your sin: Lawless men mauled the Christ of God. There is God's grace, "Delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." We never see the cross in that way until we see Christ risen from among the dead. We are not prepared to feed the lambs or shepherd the sheep until we know the risen Lord, and know Him for our very selves.

When He had prepared this man for the work, He brought him face to face with these four matters. Let us state them in sequence. "My sheep." That is the note of compassion. The first thing that Peter ever felt when he came to Jesus was the glamour of His

personality. Now Christ begins there, "Lovest thou Me?" You know, of course, that the word Christ used for love is not the word that Peter used. The revisers in the margin have drawn attention to the fact that these words are not the same, and thus they have only made darkness visible by not distinguishing between them. The word of Jesus suggested love illuminated by intelligence. Peter dared not climb to it, and he said, using a simpler word which seemed a warmer one, "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Christ challenged him again—"Lovest thou Me?"—on this high level, with love governed by judgment and understanding, and Peter kept to his own word. Then Christ came down to Peter's level. That is why Peter was grieved, not because He asked three times, but that the third time He came down to his word. But the essential matter is love. The first condition of service is love. That is the first question, not do you love the heathen, but do you love me? If we go to the heathen because we love Him, we shall come to love the heathen also.

What next? He said to Him, "Feed My lambs... Shepherd My sheep." Mark the grace of this. What did He give them to do? His own shepherd work. We have been saying that the shepherd is king. Kingly work, then, is that of feeding lambs and shepherding sheep. He says to Peter: Prove your loyalty by sharing My royalty. I am King. You have crowned Me King. They are My lambs, My sheep. My work as Shepherd is to feed them and gather them. Share it with me. Do it by My side. Prove your loyalty by fellowship in the exercise of My royalty.

Then the cross. "When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. Now this He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God." Jesus brought him back to the cross, and said to him: You can only feed My lambs and shepherd My sheep as you have fellowship with My cross. It is a very actual, definite word, believe me. In the case of Peter, it was an actual, positive cross to which he came. We say that has no application to us. No! And yet, think again. I have a newspaper clipping at home. I have had it for more than twenty years. I have read it scores of times for the discipline of my life. It was from the pen of Thomas Champness, and it is headed "Sheer Hard Work." He declared that no minister of Christ has any right to lay his head upon the pillow on any given day of the seven until he is worn out in work. What is true of the minister is true of every man who bears the name of Christ. We have not begun to touch the great business of salvation when we have sung "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying." We have not entered into the business of evangelizing the city or the world until we have put our own lives into the business, our own immediate physical endeavour, inspired by spiritual devotion. We must get to the cross in actual fellowship, in weariness and pain and suffering. When the Church of God gets there, we shall hear no more of decrease and languishing exchequers, the impossibility of raising funds for missionary work, no more of the necessity for calling home missionaries and closing doors. It is to go back to the cross, to individual toil and pain and suffering, that is our supreme need.

But there is one other thing. When Jesus said this final word to Peter about the cross, He did not finish there. He said, "Follow Me." That is to say: When I first named My cross you shunned it; you must come back to it, but "follow Me." You saw Me go to it; you lost hope. You have seen Me alive again. "Follow Me." The man who comes to the cross with Me comes to resurrection with Me. The man who comes along the pathway of suffering in fellowship for the doing of My work comes to the hour of absolute and assured victory with Me. The Lord challenges us still to follow Him to the cross, but to follow Him to the cross is to follow Him to resurrection and to triumph.

Now we must leave these words of His that are more than all the preacher has tried to say, infinitely more! As we scatter to our homes, those who bear His name and sign, let us listen to His voice, as He says, "My lambs... My sheep." Yes, those children you saw in the street, "My lambs." Yes, those bruised and broken men and women, those far distant peoples sighing and crying in desolation and darkness, "My sheep."

If we hear His own voice, we shall want to get very near to Him, and to obey Him, when He says: Feed them, shepherd them, feed them!