Surprises in the Bible
heart.” Of course he does not mean by this that every day is equally bright, but rather that none is so dark as to cause him to quit. “Knocked down,” he puts it, “but never knocked out!” (II Cor. 4:11 Phillips)

2. If Paul amazes us because his claim is so nearly unique, he also amazes us because of its vast importance. In never losing heart, Paul is claiming a treasure that is a fundamental necessity. I daresay that more people fail in every kind of human endeavor from losing heart than from any other cause. If we keep a stout heart, victory may be possible in the most unfavorable circumstances. But if we lose heart, defeat is sure whatever our circumstances.

This is the case for a variety of reasons. First, losing heart slows us down. It makes us walk with lagging steps. I was driving the other day, and my car came to a slow stop. There was nothing wrong with the machinery. It had simply run out of power. To lose heart is to lose driving power.

Then losing heart is a killjoy. A discouraged man is a wretched man. “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Neh. 8:10.) Joy helps us to keep going. Sometimes this loss of joy becomes so oppressive that we fling out of life altogether. Looking one yesterday into the face of a suicide, I questioned in my heart, “Why did you quit before the whistle blew?” The answer from his dumb lips was this: “I lost heart.”

To lose heart is to change from an asset to a liability. On board a storm-battered little merchant vessel of the long ago, there were two hundred and seventy-six men. Of these, two hundred and seventy-five had lost heart. One who was present wrote, “All hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” But one man stood up with a courage born of faith and shouted, “Be of good cheer.” So what? His courage was so grandly contagious that he saved every man on board.

But if courage is contagious, so is cowardice. Chicken Little, in that very wise and silly story, was no great personality. But she was so obsessed by panic that she was able to stampede every fowl in the barnyard. So contagious was her cowardice that she ushered every member of her fear-filled company into the pantry of Mr. Foxy Loxy. To lose heart is to become a liability.

II

But if Paul kept a stout heart, how did he do it? Naturally he did it not simply because of, but also in spite of. What were some of the foes he had to face?

1. He was pitted against a hard day. Every day is difficult. But Paul’s day was conspicuously so. This keen-eyed man was not blind to the grim ugliness of his world. At times he sounds like the rankest of pessimists. In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, for instance, he gives a glimpse of the rotten and rotting society of his day. The sight was so ugly that three times over he affirms of these depraved souls, “God gave them up.”

It is not easy to be optimistic in our day. In some areas we have made amazing progress. Yet a glance at the news-
SURPRISES IN THE BIBLE

paper any morning tends to take the heart out of us. Ours is the day of the "new morality." But the horror of this new morality is that it is impossible to distinguish its odor from that of the old immorality which yesterday flung whole nations onto the cinder pile of burnt-out and blasted things. Such has been its uplift that our crime rate is appalling. And more appalling still, nearly fifty percent of those recently arrested for major crimes were under eighteen.

Ours is also a day in which many confess their loss of faith seemingly with gleeful boldness. How amazing is the fact that when one displays for the millionth time that slick old chestnut, fingered by countless centuries, "God is dead," so many seem to accept it as a new revelation. After the manner of the angels of the long ago they shout to all bewildered souls, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy. God is dead." Indeed, we too are pitted against a difficult time.

2. Paul refused to lose heart in spite of opposition, in spite of the bitterest of criticism. Not only so, but this opposition broke into violence again and again. Look at this bit from his diary. "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys... Through many a sleepless night, and hunger and thirst." By this time Paul's body was little more than an ugly scar.

3. Paul kept heart in spite of physical handicaps. He had a thorn in the flesh. What that thorn was we do not know. Perhaps it was epilepsy. Think of the embarrassment of preaching a Christ of infinite power and being gripped by a seizure even during such a sermon.

Added to his sickness was the handicap of the calendar. Paul speaks of himself as "Paul the aged." Now while I do not look upon old age with the slightest horror, I hasten to confess that the years, while giving us much if we are willing to accept, also take something from us. "Maintain the spiritual glow," urges Paul. (Rom. 12:11 Moffatt.) Certainly, since that is necessary to our highest usefulness. But such is not so easy when one is old. Yet Paul the sick and aged declares, "I never lose heart."

4. He refused to lose heart in spite of failure. Paul had many amazing victories, but he did not win every battle. "I read with keen interest your letters to Corinth and also that thank-you note to the church at Philippi," I said to him one day. "But I failed to find one letter in which I am especially interested; that is the one to the church at Athens."

"There is no such letter," Paul answered sadly. "I went to that intellectual capital with high hopes. I especially sought to appeal to the intelligentsia. But while there was some fruit, it was so meager that no church was established."

But Paul's greatest failure was with his own people. The fact that he had been such a strict and zealous Jew perhaps led him to believe that he would be especially fitted to reach his fellow Jews. But that was not the case. Generally
they rejected both him and his message. This so broke his heart that he tells us frankly that he sometimes caught himself wishing that he might become accursed from God for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. But in spite of all he declared, “I never lose heart.”

III

Then Paul did not lose heart because of what?

1. He had a genuine and growing experience of God. He declared that the same God who said in the beginning, “Let there be light,” had shined into his own heart “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” This tremendous experience that began on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus became a growing experience. “Rise, and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.” (Acts 26:16.) Paul was constantly passing from “these things” to “those things.” He was heartened by a vivid and growing experience of God through Christ.

2. Paul kept up heart because he was being constantly renewed and reinforced. “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.” Paul had learned both to give and, what is equally important, to receive. Having given all to God, he was constantly receiving from God.

Sometimes God sent this reinforcement through human hands. When Paul found himself suspected and rejected by the saints of Jerusalem, Barnabas, that son of encouragement, came to him. To meet this man on the street was to have all one’s tires inflated. To shake hands with him was like getting a handclasp of spring. Others as Demas might prove false, but there were these who helped.

Here is another. One day by chance I met Onesiphorus on the streets of Rome. After greeting me warmly, he said, “Our friend Paul is in one of the prisons of this city. Let’s go see him.”

“By all means,” I answered. So we set out. But when at our first stop we failed to find him, I said, “I am going to be in Rome again in a few days; I’ll look him up then.” But my friend of the beautiful soul and the ugly name answered, “I must see him today. He may need help.” So we parted.

Months later, when Timothy showed me a personal letter from our friend Paul, I read these words; “The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me eagerly and found me.” The fact that my name was missing gave me at once a burning face and an aching heart. Though some failed him, Paul was often revived by loyal friends.

Then Paul was constantly being reinforced directly by the power of God. This came about especially through prayer. It was Jesus who said that men “ought always to pray and not lose heart.” He was sure that prayer and
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losing heart were never long-time roommates. To this Isaiah utters a firm “Amen!” “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.” Paul kept heart through daily renewal.

3. Finally Paul refused to lose heart because he was sure of victory. He was certain that he was not fighting a losing fight. His final word, even about his own rebellious people, is this: “So all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26). Was he right or wrong? That remains to be seen. But he was the stronger and braver for believing it.

Years ago in the Midwest a father was one night overtaken by a blinding blizzard. For desperate hours he fought his way as best he could toward home. At last in utter exhaustion he fell on his face for his final sleep. When his frozen body was found next day, one outstretched hand was only three or four feet from the steps of his own home. Thus it was not the blizzard that killed him. He lost heart. If we by the grace of God defeat this foe, we are absolutely sure to reach home.
S U R P R I S E S  I N  T H E  B I B L E

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1. Life Begins at Eighty

_The Call of Moses_

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people.—Exod. 3:10

“Come, I will send you to Pharaoh.” “Who? Me?” Moses answered with a wild surprise that is perfectly natural. Look at the picture: Here he is an old shepherd going out in front of his flock. Since he is a rather striking figure, I asked one of the rustics standing by, “Who is that old chap?” “He is just a shepherd,” came the reply. “His one distinction is that he is son-in-law to our leading citizen, Jethro.”

“When he came here years ago,” he continued, “he created quite a stir. Rumor had it that he had known better days. Some prophesied that he even yet had a great future. But nothing came of it. For forty years now he has done nothing but keep another man’s sheep. Of course that is all he will ever do, since he is now at least eighty years old.”

Yet, had I been by with the power of foreknowledge, I should have said, “You are dead wrong. That old man
who is going out in front of his flock today will tomorrow be leading another flock. With nothing but a shepherd's crook in his hand and God in his heart he will be going to invade mighty Egypt and to bring a new nation to its birth.”

“But not on your life,” my rustic would have answered. “Somebody may set the children of Israel free, but you can take it from me it will not be this old shepherd whose best days have long ago dropped into the sunset.” That this rustic had reason on his side we all must agree. Moses had at least three counts against him.

1. We expect nothing of Moses because he is now an old man. Revolutions are wrought by those who are in their younger years, not by those who have reached fourscore. We expect little or nothing today from the old except bother. That, I suppose, is one reason why many people are so afraid of getting old. I meet those who are more afraid of the calendar than of the atomic bomb. The thought of growing old is to them the skeleton of all feasts.

Of course the years do take something from us. We might as well face that. “They are afraid also of what is high,” says the author of Ecclesiastes as he speaks of the aged. The passing years tend to freeze our enthusiasms and change our courage, if not into cowardice, at least into caution. As a rule we are not as daring in our old age as we are in youth.

Then old age has a way of stealing our strength. There are few surer signs of senility than for an old body of fourscore to boast, “I’m as good a man as I was forty years ago.” The calendar has already got him. Once this old chap could walk with steady step bearing a heavy load. But now if a grasshopper lights upon that once young shoulder, his knees tend to buckle. He is not as strong as he used to be.

Yet old age is not the tragic something that we usually regard it. Our poets and ourselves have somehow entered into a conspiracy to convince all and sundry that once a man has passed through childhood and youth, the rest of life is a bit of a wasteland to be endured rather than enjoyed. Wordsworth said:

The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature’s priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Now that is often true, but it does not have to be true. Victor Herbert wrote:

Toyland, toyland!
Little girl and boy land,
While we dwell within it,
We are ever happy then.
That is beautiful, but not quite true. You can no more say that every child is happy than you can say that every adult is happy. I was on a pullman some time ago where there was a lovely little savage about four years of age, who was disturbing everybody in the car. At last, having finished with the rest of us, he made a frontal attack on his mother. Even mothers have to defend themselves, if the worst comes to the worst. But when this mother undertook to administer a little discipline, a sweet old lady sitting by exclaimed, "Oh, let him do as he pleases. He won't have any good time when he gets older."

How amazing! As I looked at her I could not but say to myself, "You dear, sweet piece of ancient stupidity. You are wrong on two counts. Childhood and youth are not the only parts of life that are worth living. I can testify to it." Then to say that the way to give a child a good time is to let that child do as he pleases is to contradict the Bible, to contradict experience, to contradict psychology. It is not the way for anybody to have a good time. You may count on this; no child is ever happy whose will is never crossed.

Here is a man for whom life began at eighty. His most adventurous and exciting years were his sunset years. Indeed, life begins at any time that one has a personal encounter with God and puts himself completely into his hands. When he responds to the voice, "Come, I will send you," then life takes on a new departure whether one is eight, eighteen, or eighty.

A second reason we expect nothing of Moses is not only that he is old, but that he has found a kind of security. Though past the retiring age, he has no fear of losing his position. In fact, it promises to grow better with the passing of the years. Soon his father-in-law will be gone, and he will step into his shoes. Since revolutions do not grow in the fat soil of security, the chances of his ever changing are slim indeed.

3. But the biggest reason we expect nothing from Moses is that he is not only old and secure, but an old failure. The very enterprise to which he is now being called is one that he fumbled miserably in the springtime of his years. Lord Morely was right when he said, "For the wettest of wet blankets, give me the man who was most enthusiastic in his youth." There was a time when Moses was an excited and exciting personality. He sprang almost at a single bound from the hut of a slave to the glamor of a palace, from being a nameless nobody to being a royal somebody. Here was one who had both the position and the power to help. Naturally thousands of tired eyes were turned to him in hope.

When the Egyptian princess found him, she held him in her arms and made a threefold decision: (1) that this baby should not be put to death; (2) that she would adopt him as her own, thus guaranteeing that he would be exposed to the best cultural opportunities of that day; (3) that his mother should be his nurse. That guaranteed his faith, his character. Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents. That was the faith of his parents. Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. That was the...
faith of Moses himself, the faith that he had inherited from his consecrated parents.

Then one day the wild whisper came that he had visited his people and had already struck a blow in their behalf. Moses, seeing an Egyptian bully lording it over one of his own people, in high rage had struck him dead. I do not think he intended to kill him, but having done so he was not greatly distressed. Indeed, he felt that he would now be a popular hero. But when he came the next day he found two Hebrews contending with each other. He sought to be a peacemaker, but one of them turned on him with a snarl and said, “Who made you a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?”

That was a revelation to Moses. It showed that his secret was no longer a secret. It showed also that this miserable Hebrew for whom he had sacrificed had no appreciation of what Moses had done, that in his ingratitude he was ready to expose him to the first Egyptian taskmaster that might come along. That did it. “You don’t want to be free,” Moses raged inwardly. “You have no appreciation. I cannot give you what you refuse to take.” He therefore threw down the task, took to his heels, and buried himself in Midian, where for forty years he sought to convince himself that his failure was in no sense the fault of himself.

II

Now it was this man who brought emancipation to the people of Israel. How did it come about? Of course the first move was on the part of God. One day Moses looked up from his task and saw on the mountainside a little bush all ablaze. It did not greatly interest him. He knew that in a moment it would fall into ashes. But when he looked again the bush was still burning. That did interest him; and he said, “I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt”; that is, How does it continue to blaze? It was through this that God brought home his message to Moses. What did this burning bush say?

1. “You once burned like that. Once you were all ablaze against wrong and all aﬂame with enthusiasm for right. You said things are not what they ought to be, but I am here by the grace of God to change what is into what ought to be. You were once sure that you could do something about it, that you could right the wrong.” But the fire that once blazed has now died down to gray ashes.”

How often that happens! I was in a meeting of pastors some time ago where a young chap joyfully told how God had just used him. The president of the meeting, whom I knew well, a man of ability, a dry and thoroughgoing ecclesiastic, listened to this young fellow in seemingly bored fashion. But by and by that rock-ribbed ecclesiastic put his face in his hands and sobbed like a desolate child. I don’t know why he wept, for he said never a word. I could only guess. Once he had been a flaming evangelist. But the fire that once blazed has now died down to gray ashes.

2. A second something this bush said to Moses was this: “Since your fire has gone out, why did it go out?” It
was not the fault of God; it was not the fault of the impossible situation. What did this bush possess, for instance, that Moses lacked? God is the answer. It did not burn of its own resources. It burned because God was in it. When Moses went out in his self-assurance to strike his first blow for the liberty of his people and failed, he at once threw down the whole wild scheme and ran. He had no staying power. This was the case because his reliance was upon himself rather than upon God.

3. But there is this word of hope. Even if the fire had gone out, it did not have to stay out. That is the wonder of our gospel. If you have lost your first glow of enthusiasm, you can have it rekindled. You can yet blaze, you can yet burn, because the power that kindled the fire in youth can kindle it even in old age. We do not have to remain as we are. We do not have to be lukewarm. We do not have to be listless. We can still blaze and glow and burn, if we only give God a chance. That is what Moses was here being called upon to do.

III

“So what?” Moses responded. “Come,” said God, “I will send you.” Moses was as astonished as I should have been. He said, “Who am I?” and God said, “It is not a question of who you are. It is a question of who I am. It is not a question of your age or of your past failures. Put yourself in my hands today, and I will take care of your yesterday and fit you for tomorrow.” So Moses obeyed and won.

LIFE BEGINS AT EIGHTY

Why did he win? Not because it was easy. He met every form of opposition. He met stern opposition from despotic Pharaoh. But his greatest opposition was not from his enemy, but from his friends. It was the children of Israel themselves who proved to be the biggest hindrance. They were a most cantankerous bunch of crybabies whose normal tone was a wail. But in spite of all opposition, Moses won. This he did because nothing could make him quit. He endured. People opposed him, but he endured. They said, “You can never do it,” but he endured. They criticized him, but he endured. They broke his heart with their ingratitude, but he endured. Nothing can defeat us in the work of the kingdom if we only endure. But if we fail to endure, nothing can bring victory.

And now we come back from that distant land to our own. How about you? God is saying to you and me, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh.” Where is your Pharaoh? Lift up your eyes. Pharaohs are far more numerous today than in the long ago. Never was there a greater need for deliverers. Where is your Pharaoh? It may be the ministry. It may be the mission field. The chances are it is your own city, your own church, your own home. Say yes to God and he will accept, remake, and use you to bring to your day a new freedom.
2. An Amazing Discovery

Sorrow of the King of Samaria

The people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath upon his body.—II Kings 6:30

Of all the events that may have taken place in the besieged city of Samaria on that distant day, I am sure that there was none that brought greater surprise to his people than the discovery that their king was wearing sackcloth beneath upon his body. Sackcloth, that symbol of sorrow, that silent sob, that badge of a hidden wound; even that, this king was wearing beneath upon his body. Naturally when his people saw it they were filled with utter amazement.

Look at the story. The king of Syria has marched with a strong army to capture the little walled city of Samaria. Instead of seeking to take it by bloody assault, he chose to lay siege to it. He decided that instead of putting the people to the sword, he would cut off all supplies and wait for famine to accomplish his cruel purpose.

At first the situation, I imagine, was not desperate. The food supply was fairly abundant. But after monotonous day followed monotonous day, the shelves of the food market became increasingly empty. Of course the poor suffered first. But even gold counts for little where there is nothing to be bought. When the rich had to pay twenty-five dollars for a donkey's head, a meat unclean in quality and sparse in quantity, things were desperate indeed.

Soon they were sounding the lowest depth. People who were naturally kind became unkind. The civilized became savage, so savage that they began to practice cannibalism. Then one day as the king was passing by upon the wall, a woman, a harpylike creature, I daresay, little more than "a rag and a bone and a hank of hair," cried out to him: "Help, my lord, O king!" And he said, "If the Lord will not help you, whence shall I help you?"

But he was at least kindly enough to listen to her story. So he asked, "What is your trouble?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we boiled my son, and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, 'Give your son, that we may eat him,' but she has hidden her son."

When the king heard that, in his horror he rent his royal robes. He had known that things were desperate, but he had not realized that they had reached such an utter hell as this. Then, seemingly unable to give as much
as a crust of bread, he continued his walk along the wall. As the people watched him with hard and envious eyes, they made a discovery. They saw that their king was wearing sackcloth beneath upon his body. They knew at once that this sackcloth had not been forced upon him. He was wearing it of his own volition. He was wearing it because he cared, because he was suffering with and for his people. At this their surprise knew no bounds.

II

Why were they surprised?

1. They were surprised because of who it was who was wearing the sackcloth. He was a king. He had vast powers. He lived in a palace while they lived in homely cottages and hovels. He had plenty, they felt, while they were starving. They had never realized that he too, being human as well as themselves, was also capable of being hurt. This is something we are prone to forget. No amount of wealth, no measure of success, no position of prominence and power can exempt any of us from those needs that are universal. I was reading of a minister some time ago who went to see a vastly successful actress who was basking in a nation's praise. But when he congratulated her upon her vast good fortune, she answered with peevish wistfulness, "What I want is peace and rest, rest and peace." That is true of you and me. We are all alike in our fundamental needs.

2. They were surprised because heretofore the king had hidden his sackcloth. He had refused to tell that he cared, that he too was suffering. They knew that he had not supplied their physical needs. He had spread no banquet for them. They knew further that he had failed to do this for either one of two reasons. He had failed because he could not, or he had failed because he would not. Being peevish through pain and suffering, the majority, I daresay, took the latter position. He does not help us because he does not care.

Why, I wonder, did this king hide his sackcloth? We are not told. I think he hid it for the sake of his people. They were already desperate. He did not wish to add to their desperation by parading the fact that he too was suffering. He was hiding his own pain to lessen theirs. He was thus seeking to keep up in some measure their failing morale.

Now there is something big about that. Many of us are prone to display our sackcloth. As a farm boy I went barefoot much of the year. There was freedom about it, but it also had its risks. I seldom failed to accumulate a stubbed toe that was a genuine liability, except when company came and I was able to win the center of the stage, at least for a brief moment, by showing what a great sufferer I was.

I heard a preacher who soon served notice upon us that the night before he had been tortured by a toothache and who said toothache was with him still. What he was really saying was, "You need not expect anything from me today. I am too great a sufferer. I do expect something from you. That is your pity." At the close of the service he still had a toothache. Perhaps he has had the tooth
extracted. But the sermon is with us still. Blessed is the speaker who never makes excuses.

Through the years I have known two types of invalids. I have known some who came to wave their infirmities as a banner. Their one claim to distinction was that they suffered more than anybody else. To tell them that they were looking well was little short of an insult. When someone said this ugly word to such a sufferer, she answered, “I don’t have an ache or a pain right now, but I always feel the worst when I feel the best, because I know how bad I am going to feel when I get to feeling bad again.”

Then I have known others who were so beautiful and brave and patient that to visit them was to breathe an atmosphere of greatness. I have come away from such a visit with the feeling that I have been fanned by the bracing winds of the Upper Room. I love to believe that this ancient king was hiding his suffering for the sake of others. He was one of those gallant souls of whom Holmes sings:

O hearts that break and give no sign
Save whitening lip and fading tresses.

What did this surprising discovery do for these needy people?
1. First it showed them what their king was really like. Heretofore they had seen him parade along the walls, but they knew little about him save that he wore royal robes and was lifted so high above themselves. This discovery told them that their king was not only a king but a man. That he was human. That he could weep. That he could and did suffer with and for them.

2. This sight satisfied a hunger as genuine as was their hunger for bread. We all know that there is “a hunger not of the belly kind that is banished by bacon and beans.” There is the hunger for sympathy, the hunger for the bracing uplift of an understanding heart. By thus showing that he cared, the king braced his starving people as he could have done in no other way.

In James Russell Lowell’s “The Vision of Sir Launfal,” the knight had two encounters with the same leprous beggar. He first met this pest in the morning tide of his quest, as he was setting out with the high ambition of finding the Holy Grail. Now though this beggar was an intrusion, a mere blot on the landscape, the young knight did not ride him down. Instead he threw him a coin. It was a genuine coin that would have passed legal tender in any market of the world.

So what? Did that leprous face light up with joy? Not a bit of it.

The leper raised not the gold from the dust:
“Better to me the poor man’s crust, . . .
Though I turn me empty from his door.”
That is ever the danger of loveless giving. It is especially the danger of organized charity. Therefore even a new society built by nothing but money would simply be a new kind of hell.

From this disgusting encounter, the knight went on his eager way. He had many a struggle. He faced many dangers, but his dream of finding the Holy Grail was not realized. At last, broken in heart and hope, he came home again to find the door of his own castle shut in his face. Then as he was turning in hunger and loneliness away, again he encountered the beggar, more leprous and loathsome than he had been years ago. Once more the beggar asked for help. But this time the knight gave him no gold. Instead he fumbled for his one crust of bread, broke it, and shared it with him. Then they drank together of the water of the brook out of a common wooden bowl.

What a meager offering! “Then the soul of the leper stood up in his eyes,” and Sir Launfal saw that the figure who “stood before him glorified” was no longer a leprous beggar but the Christ of God revealed.

This is Scripture. It is Jesus who shall say unto them on his right hand, “Come ye blessed of my Father, for I was hungry and you fed me, naked and you clothed me.” Then these bewildered saints shall answer (for they are too honest to take even heaven on a misunderstanding), “When did we do those beautiful deeds? We fed and clothed a few nameless nobodies, but not you.” And he shall answer, “Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these, ye did it unto me.”

Nor could this healing come in any other way. Never was truer word than this, in spite of the fact that it was spit out through lips bitter with scorn: “He saved others, himself he cannot save.” That is just as true as it would have been had the opposite been the story. Suppose these scorers had put it the other way around, “He saved

Now this story may seem too old for your interest. But there is that about it that is as new as your latest breath. As these Samaritans of the long ago, we too are being besieged. Ours is a critical and difficult day. As a nation, as a group, as individuals, we are dogged by desperate needs. We have hangers and thirsts that no human power, no political setup, can satisfy.

If these ancient people were heartened and helped in some measure by their king, we ought to be far more heartened and helped by our King. We may be sure that as this very faulty king suffered with and for his people, so Jesus Christ suffers with and for us. That Cross upon Calvary is a wide rent through which we see that our Lord wears sackcloth not upon his skin only, but upon his very heart.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. (Isa. 53:5.)

Nor could this healing come in any other way. Never was truer word than this, in spite of the fact that it was spit out through lips bitter with scorn: “He saved others, himself he cannot save.” That is just as true as it would have been had the opposite been the story. Suppose these scorers had put it the other way around, “He saved
himself." There would have been but one ending possible for that sentence—"Others he could not save."

Nor are we to understand that in thus giving himself, Jesus was robbing himself, that he was thus compelling himself to live a mean, starved life. It was thus that he was able to live so abundantly and joyfully. It was also by this giving that he won his crown. "Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. . . . And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name." (Phil. 2:6-9.)

"It is enough for the . . . servant [to be] like his master." (Matt. 10:25.) If self-giving was essential for Jesus, it is no less for you and me. It is only through self-giving that we can truly help others. It is only by the giving of self that we can truly live. When Jesus said, "He that seeks to save his life shall lose it," he was not uttering a threat. He was simply stating a fact.

While I was pastor in Texas years ago, a tenant farmer was one day plowing his waist-high cotton. He was plowing with a team of mules. With him were his two small boys, about four and six years of age. They were playing in front of his team.

This father looked up past the team and past the boys and saw a huge dog coming down between the cotton rows, snapping at the stalks on either side. He saw at once that the dog had rabies. He could easily have saved himself, but there were his boys. So he ran out between the boys and the dog and said to them "Run to the cotton bin! Run quickly and stay there!" They ran and were saved.

But for the father the dog was too near. Before he could reach safety the great beast sprang upon him and bit him from his face to his feet. At last the father killed the dog, though he had nothing with which to fight except a pocket-knife. But by that time he was so miserably chewed that modern science could do nothing for him. Even so, I was told that in his fatal illness, as he would come to a lucid interval, he would reach for the hand of the woman who sobbed at his side, the mother of his children, saying: "Mary, don't take it so hard. Don't take it so hard. Remember that the boys are safe and I couldn't save them in any other way." In spite of his suffering there was a bit of heaven in that fine word. But suppose it had been the other way around: "Our boys are dead or dying, but I saved myself." That would have been the hottest kind of hell. There is no other place for those whose one business in life is to save themselves. This, I repeat, is not a forbidding gospel, but one of abounding joy and power.

I do not regard Longfellow as one of our greatest poets, but I do regard him as a radiant saint. Charles Kingsley said of him that his face was the most beautiful that he had ever seen. Longfellow's inward compassion had written its name on his face. How had it come about? He gives us a hint in this song:
SURPRISES IN THE BIBLE

How often, oh how often,
In the days that had gone by,
I had stood on the bridge at midnight
And gazed on that wave and sky!

How often, oh how often,
I had wished that the ebbing tide
Would bear me away on its bosom
O'er the ocean wild and wide!

For my heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care,
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear.

But now it has fallen from me,
It is buried in the sea;
And only the sorrow of others
Throws its shadow over me.

How had this come about? As he shouldered the burden of his brother, his own became so light that it seemed to have fallen away altogether. For it is forever true that if we seek to dry another's tears, our own cheeks seem to lose their painful rain. As we seek to bind up the broken heart of another, our own ceases to bleed. It is of such wearers of the sackcloth that Paul was thinking when he said, "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29).

3. His Amazing Anger

Jesus and the Pharisees

He looked around at them with anger.—Mark 3:5

Here is a picture of our Lord that brings not only a surprise to most of us, but a positive shock. When we see him gathering little children in his arms to bless them, when we hear him by the well curb talking to an outcast Samaritan woman of the deep things of God, when we hear him tell even this bit of damaged goods that she can yet have an inside spring that will meet all her needs both for time and eternity—that we feel is altogether fit and pleasing. But when we see this same gracious man with his cheeks aflame with anger and his eyes flashing fire, that seems so out of character that we gasp with amazement.

Why does this anger of our Lord take us by surprise?

1. Anger does not bear an un tarnished reputation. The
ancient Greeks and Romans did not put it among the
virtues. Paul, in naming the fruits of the Spirit, does not
include anger. Jesus, in proclaiming the Beatitudes, fails
to say, "Blessed are the angry."

Anger is not even distinctively human. Everybody can
become angry, but that is no mark of distinction. Beasts
also can become angry. It was my privilege to attend the
famous Webb School in the days of that great headmaster,
William R. Webb. I think "Old Sawney," as he was
affectionately called, was one of the greatest educators the
South ever produced. He believed in and gave special
emphasis to Latin and Greek.

Once a rugged individualist whose son was entering
school objected strenuously to the study of Latin. "I don't
want my son to study Latin," he asserted with some heat.
"I want him to have a practical education. I want him to
know how to milk a cow." "Yes," Old Sawney answered
quietly, "I too want my son to know how to milk a cow,
but I want him to know something else a calf can't beat
him doing."

Have you a quick and fiery temper? It is not necessarily
anything of which to be proud. So have certain beasts. In
my early boyhood I was bitten by a dog. All I did to
anger the evil brute was to catch him by the tail, but he
became so angry that he bit me. Finding him so easily
angered, I have been afraid of all dogs ever since.

A few days ago the press told of an elephant that became
so enraged at a harmless visitor that he snapped his
fetters, took his trainer in his trunk, smashed him to the

ground and walked on him. "How I can rage," the elephant
said proudly. But he was not given a medal for his deadly
anger. He was simply shot. We can all get angry, but so
can the beasts. So can even the reptiles.

2. A high capacity for anger is not necessarily a mark
distinction among men. Brilliant sons of genius can get
angry, but so can morons. Wise and saintly graybeards can
get angry, but so can six-week-old babies. Indeed, if the
average baby had physical strength in proportion to the
fierceness of his anger, few mothers would ever live until
the sweet little angels were a year old. If, therefore, you
have a violent temper, it is nothing of which to boast.

3. Then our Lord's anger surprises and shocks because
the average garden variety of anger does not have a high
batting average in our daily living. It is easy to see why
this is the case. When we "blow up" we do not as a rule
say, "I got angry"; we say "I got mad." That describes our
conduct more accurately. Most of us when we are angry
are less than sane. We push reason off the throne and show
love the door. Therefore we do senseless things that we
would not do if we were not crazy.

For instance, out on the golf course not so long ago a
chap made a bad shot. He blamed that wrong shot not
upon himself, but upon the club. Therefore he proceeded
to break the club and toss it into the rough. But that was
a stupid bit of insanity. The club didn't mind in the
least, nor was anyone helped. All it came to was that the
golfer had to invest in another club, one that might enrage
him as much as the one he broke and threw away.
I used to know a successful mill owner. He knew machinery. As a rule, when something went wrong with the most delicate bit of that machinery, he could mend it. But often as he worked, his wrench would slip and thus cause him to skin his hand. He would then smash that delicate bit of machinery with the wrench and then throw the wrench into a pond. So what? Neither his machinery nor his tools ever blushed over their misconduct, but the owner went broke. He went broke because he went momentarily crazy.

Of course one who would smash a bit of machinery in hot anger is not quite sane. But he is ahead of the man who would smash a friendship for the same reason. He is far ahead of the one who would smash a possibly happy marriage out of sheer rage. Television is a wonderful invention. But it has to give what it gets. Among the many falsehoods that it proclaims about this remedy and that, there is none that I find quite so offensive as the one that pictures some member of the family going into a rage over naked nothing.

Here is one. A husband is home from work. “Get ready,” says his eager wife. “We have a meeting tonight.” That turns loose a volcano. “Don’t rush me,” he shouts, as terror fills the room. A bit later he takes a pill and at once becomes all sweetness and light. What a silly lie! Such insane rage needs more than a pill.

4. Anger does not have a high rating in the Bible. Paul had a fiery temper. It got out of control in a conspicuous way when a certain high priest ordered him to be slapped. Paul burned with hot indignation and retorted: “God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall!” But a little later he recovered himself and apologized. Thus he learned from his own experience the wisdom of that word from the Psalms—“Be angry, but sin not.”

Thus we see that while anger is not strictly forbidden, as other high explosives it needs to be handled with care. “Be angry, but sin not.” That last word is added because anger often gives birth to sin. Anger often makes us break off diplomatic relations with our fellows. At times it causes us to fret, puff up, and pout. It even causes some to break with the church that they deeply love. I was called to see a man some time ago who was far into the years. Once he had been an earnest and active Christian, superintendent of his church school. But he got angry at his pastor. Thus angered, he quit the church. This he did just as his children were growing about him. Now, an old man, he was sorry. Of course God was eager to forgive, but his repentance came a bit late. Every chick and child had been alienated from the church. But in spite of all these charges against anger, we face the fact that Jesus sometimes blazed with hot and fiery indignation.

II

How could this be the case?

In spite of its many dangers and defects, anger may be a virtue instead of a vice. In this respect it is akin to money. Money is not an evil in itself. Money is power. Rightly used,
it can do much good. Wrongly used, it can do endless harm. The same is true of anger. It is power. An angry man will often dare and do what he would not do without his anger.

The anger of Jesus was right, not simply because it was his anger. It was right in itself. It was right because Jesus himself was right. I take it that Simon Peter was telling sober truth when he said, “He knew no sin.” Jesus himself urged every man to pray for forgiveness. But though none other was ever so sensitive to sin, not once did he ask to be forgiven. Hence from my heart I can sing with Sidney Lanier, the poet,

Oh, what amiss may I forgive in Thee,
Jesus, good Paragon, thou Crystal Christ?

What angers you? If you give a right answer to that question, one can tell the type person you are. What angered Jesus? Glance briefly at three events that filled him with flaming anger.

1. One day on going into the synagogue he encountered a chap with a heavy handicap. One of his hands was withered. Luke tells us that it was his right hand. That day had no place for the physically unfit. The handicapped were driven to beggary. But Jesus was eager to give this man a chance. He longed to give him the privilege of becoming a giver rather than a getter.

Now it seems that everybody would have agreed with Jesus in this desire, but there were certain religionists present who did not. They thought far more of their petty rules and regulations than they did of giving this needy man a chance. These fairly dared Jesus to heal him. So what? Jesus looked at them with anger. It was an anger that fairly scorched and blistered and burned. It was an anger so hot that all the rain of the centuries has not cooled it. Wherever any man of any race, of any creed, of any color is robbed of his chance, the anger of Jesus burns against that evil.

2. On another occasion Jesus went into the temple. The temple, as Jeremiah tells us, was to be a house of prayer for all nations. But prayer was next to impossible here. It was so nearly completely drowned by the pandemonium of buyers and sellers. There were also those who fairly shrieked at each other over the price of cattle and sheep for sacrifice. Equally shocking was the shrieking of the money changers and their victims, whom they were seeking to cheat.

At this shocking sight Jesus became intensely angry. Not only so, but he went into action. He did about the most shocking something of his entire ministry. He seized a scourge and drove those buyers and sellers out, along with the sheep and cattle. It angered him beyond words that needy souls were being robbed by the church itself of a chance to meet God.

Nor does his anger blaze any less against any service in our own churches that may tend to hide the face of God.
rather than to reveal it. Not all services send people away with a sense of having met the Lord. I am afraid I have participated in more than one that failed in this respect. There are services that are little more thrilling and life-giving than a wide yawn. Robbing a man of his right to be his best, robbing one of his right to meet God, filled Jesus with holy anger.

3. Jesus blazed with anger when his misguided friends got in the way of little children who were being brought to him to be blessed. “When Jesus saw it,” we read, “he was indignant.” I think there is nothing that so fills the heart of our Lord with hot indignation as robbing him of the privilege of blessing and keeping little children. So tender was his love for them that he walled them in with a wall of millstones, declaring that it would be better for one to have a huge stone about his neck and be drowned in the sea than to cause one of these little ones to go wrong.

In order to be guilty of this sin, we do not have to teach our children to lie and steal and get drunk. Indeed, we do not have to teach them anything. We can send them to school to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, but depend on mere chance to put into their hearts those fundamental integrities by which the soul lives and the nation lives or it rots down. One of the supreme tragedies of this day is the tragedy of the broken home. Another that runs it a close second is parents who, though their homes hold together, are too undisciplined themselves to give any right discipline to their children.

34

Why was this anger of Jesus right anger?

1. It was right because it was never born of self-love. He never blazed because of some insult or injury directed against himself. When Simon wrote many years later of that characteristic of Jesus that amazed him most, it was this: “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return.” Simon, who had “inflammable” written all over him, could never cease to marvel at this. He knew how different was this Jesus, who never got angry at a wrong done to himself, from most of us, who never get angry on any other grounds. Many can look with quiet eyes as might triumphs over right, as splendor rides on the bony shoulders of squalor. It is only when they themselves are wronged that they blaze.

2. The anger of Jesus always led to helpful action. When I get angry, I want to strike back at the one who angered me. Not so our Lord. He longs to give the wronged and the wrongdoer a chance. When he cleansed the temple, he was seeking no less to help those who were cheating. He cleansed the temple on Monday, then went to die both for robbers and for robbed on Friday. The anger of Jesus was born of a right motive.

Now we could use such anger today. A man said of his friend recently, “He is not afraid of anything.” That is always a bit of a slander. A man who is afraid of nothing is not wise but foolish. Fear may be destructive. It may also be constructive. Even so, to say, “Nothing can anger
me," is not to compliment yourself. If that is true, you are morally flabby. You certainly lack at least one characteristic without which Jesus could not have been a complete revelation of God, and without which he could not have accomplished what he did accomplish. If we truly share his love, we are also likely to share his anger.

In the mountains of east Tennessee, a rugged son of battle, with a vocabulary that was as picturesque as it was fiery, was converted. A few months later he made this confession to his devoted pastor: "I haven't had a single fight and I haven't cussed a single time since I became a Christian. But I have just come from a very narrow escape. If I was wrong, I hope you and God will forgive me."

Here is what happened: "Yesterday I went into my doctor's office for a little patching up. But just as I was arriving somebody brought in a small Negro boy who had been hit by a car and terribly battered. One of his arms was so badly broken that you could see the bone protruding from the skin. The doctor glanced at him and then said to me, 'Come in and I'll fix you up.'"

"'No,' I said, 'attend to this boy first. He is suffering greatly. I am not.' 'No,' said the doctor, 'Come in. He can wait.' I said again, 'No, I can wait. He is the one who is in pain.' At that the doctor said, 'Do you think I am going to keep a white man waiting while I fix up a little nigger boy?' Maybe my answer was wrong, but I said, 'You will fix this boy now or I'll beat hell out of you.'"

Perhaps the language might have been improved upon, but not the deed. When I got a glimpse over the shoulder of the recording angel at the record of the event, the best I could see this son of battle had made an A. If we love as Jesus loved, we too shall sometimes share his holy anger. Sharing that anger, we shall go out to fight where the victory is to the brave.

His Amazing Anger
4. An Amazing Tragedy

**Judas' Betrayal**

Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.—Luke 6:16

In considering the surprises in the Bible I cannot pass by this man Judas, even though I have a chapter about him in another volume. What a surprise he must have been to those whom he had sought to serve. As treasurer of his group he dispensed their charities. There were doubtless those scattered throughout Galilee and Judea who had been helped by him, and who remembered him in their prayers of thanksgiving every night.

Second, he was a surprise to his fellow disciples. When Jesus announced in the Upper Room, “One of you shall betray me,” I should have expected every eye to have been turned toward Judas. I should have expected rugged Simon to have pointed him out and have said, “There is the man.” Yet the fact is that not an eye was turned to him. With a humility that did not always characterize them, each man looked into his own heart, and each man asked the question, “Lord, is it I?” And when Jesus dismissed Judas with, “What you are going to do, do quickly,” no man had the faintest idea that he was going to betray his Lord. His treachery was a surprise to his intimate friends.

Doubtless it surprised Judas himself most of all.

Not only were he and his friends surprised, but the centuries have been both surprised and confused. I suppose there is not a better known name in the Bible than that of Judas. Yet it would be hard to find one that we tend so to misunderstand. This is due in part to the fact that we have judged him by one single act of his life, and that the worst he ever did. We have fixed attention on only one picture of him, and that not with his hand outstretched in help to the poor, though that happened. The one picture we have of him is with his face ugly with the leer of treachery. We misunderstand because we remember him by one single act.

I was pastor in Washington during much of the administration of Woodrow Wilson. I think he had about the most keenly intelligent face into which I have ever looked. But in making the grand circuit in behalf of the League of Nations he suffered a stroke that blew out his light. Had you seen him after that for the first time, you would doubtless have said, “What a stupid face!” But honesty would have answered, “Don’t say that. You should have seen him before the stroke.”

Some months ago two beautiful girls from our state disputed a railroad crossing with a fast train. The result was that their lovely bodies were so mangled they had to be picked up in baskets. Suppose after the undertaker had
done his artistic best I should have looked into those caskets and said, "What hideous creatures." You would have answered, "Don't say that. You only saw them after the wreck." We only look at Judas "after the wreck." But suppose we look at him before the wreck. The surprise of his tragedy will be even more compelling.

I

What do we know about Judas?

1. We know that he was not born a traitor. I have heard people misquote the Scripture by saying that he was a devil from the beginning. The Bible says nothing of the kind. Nobody is a devil from the beginning—not even the Devil himself. Babies are not so much born as made. That is the teaching of the Bible. It says, "Train up the child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." That is also the teaching of science. It has been demonstrated that a child can be trained to fear a kitten and pet a snake just as easily as it can be trained to pet a kitten and fear a snake. That is the voice of experience. A child is a product of his training. Although Judas became a traitor, we know that he was not born a traitor.

2. A second fact we know about Judas is that he was a disciple of our Lord. How did he become a disciple? How did you become one? How can anybody become a disciple? Nobody is ever forced. Our Lord stands at the door and knocks, but he never crashes the door. One day this young Prophet knocked at the door of Judas and invited him to become his disciple. And such was the spell that Jesus cast over him that Judas then and there accepted the invitation.

3. A third fact we know about Judas is that he was an apostle. How did he become an apostle? Not as he became a disciple, simply by his own choice. He became an apostle by the choice of Jesus himself. After a whole night spent in prayer, our Lord chose twelve men as his most intimate followers. Strange to say, among these twelve was this man Judas.

Here then are three facts that we know about Judas. He was not born a traitor; he was a disciple; and he was also an apostle.

II

Why did Jesus choose Judas? We are not going to claim that he chose him because of ignorance. We may be sure that Jesus knew Judas and understood him fully. No more did he choose Judas because he needed a rascal for the working out of his plan. When Huey Long explained a certain appointment by saying, "I appointed him because he had the hide of a rhinoceros and did not have a straight bone in his body," there were those prejudiced enough to believe that Huey himself might have a few bones that were out of plumb. Jesus did not choose Judas because he wanted a rascal.

Yet one of our greatest preachers of a generation ago
made this amazing statement: “Judas was not a man in the real sense of the word, but a monster sent into the world to do a special work which was hell’s work.” Now it is impossible to accept that. If Judas was sent of God to do a certain work, and did that work, he is just as entitled to a place in the kingdom as was St. Paul. The sum total of all vital religion is the doing of the will of God. If Judas did the will of God, then that means he was not only a good man, but that he was perfect.

Why then was he chosen? He was chosen as were his brother disciples, because of what he was and because of what he was capable of becoming. Not one of these men whom Jesus chose was perfect. Simon was a fluctuating, blundering man capable of telling the most brazen and cowardly lies. Had you known him and heard Jesus say, “You’ll be a rock of Christlike character one day,” you would have fairly laughed out loud.

John, whose name today is a synonym for love, was at first so cruel that he was eager to burn a little Samaritan village with its babies and innocent children because that village had refused a night’s lodging to his Master, his friends, and himself.

An Amazing Tragedy

Judas was the only man of the twelve who was not a Galilean. He belonged to a more cultured group. He was from Judea. He was in a sense a Bostonian, a Harvard man. Naturally he felt superior to those roughnecks from Galilee. Yet when Jesus chose an inner circle it was made up of Peter, James, and John. Judas was left out.

2. Then it was not long, I am sure, before Judas discovered that Jesus was not as keen a politician as he himself was. One day the people became so enthusiastic that they sought to take Jesus by force and make him king. Judas was all for it, but Jesus, instead of consenting, actually went and hid himself. At that Judas raged inwardly, saying, “How can I successfully support a man who runs away from preferment?” Judas was disappointed in the political sagacity of his Lord.

3. There came a day, I imagine, when Judas felt the need of some ready cash. Being treasurer, he made himself a loan. That has been done countless thousands of times before and since. I think he felt honest in saying to himself, “I’ll pay it back when my revenues come in.” But things did not get more promising, but less so. At last he decided that he would change the name of that loan. He changed it to “salary.” He told himself, “I’m doing all the work. I deserve some remuneration.” So he changed the ugly name of stealing into the more pleasing name of “salary.”

Meantime, none of his fellow disciples knew of the rascality of Judas. But Jesus knew. Nor did he have to tell Judas in order for him to be sure that he knew. The
heartache, the disappointment that looked out from the
keen and kindly eyes of his once dear friend told Judas
that his ugly secret was known. That fact at times angered
him, shamed him, all but broke his heart. There were even
times when he was half persuaded to fall at the Master's
feet and tell the whole ugly story. But he put it off. Then
the horrified faces of his fellows would come across his
vision and make him hesitate. So he waited with the
result that his confession was never made.

Naturally Judas increasingly found that he no longer
enjoyed the presence of Jesus, but was rather embarrassed
and made uncomfortable by it. By skillful rationalizing
Judas soon convinced himself that all this was the fault of
Jesus rather than of himself. The promising Prophet had
let him down and had thus done him a deadly wrong.
Therefore, he had a right to hate him. Do we not all hate
those who do us dirt?

But if we hate him who has done us wrong, there is
another that we hate even more. That is the one whom we
wrong, unless we are willing to apologize and right the
wrong. The reason for this is quite clear. When I wrong
you, every fine thing in me tells me that I ought to ask
pardon. If I am too bitter or stubborn to do this, I must
give myself a reason. I must convince myself that the fault
is all yours. This I do by looking for the worst in you
instead of the best. Here as always, "He that seeketh
findeth." Look for the worst even in Jesus, and you will
find it. Judas did, and his love was changed to hate.

Now having thus become an enemy, Judas decided to
do something about it. Knowing his onetime Master to be
a wanted man, he offered his services as an informer. His
offer was readily accepted. Why so? Why were the foes of
Jesus so eager for the services of Judas? I do not think it
was because they could not have found Jesus without him.
I do not think that he was an essential part of the tragedy
at all. There were hundreds of people in Jerusalem, I feel
sure, who could have pointed Jesus out to them. But I
think they wanted Judas for one reason: They knew that
they were going to be called into question for their conduct
and this would enable them to say, "It was one of Jesus' own friends who betrayed him."

Why did Judas consent to betray Jesus? I do not think it
was for a paltry thirty pieces of silver, though Judas
probably loved money. I think he consented to betray
him because, as already stated, his friendship had been
changed into enmity, his love into hate. His kiss was an
expression of contempt, an act of revenge.

I think this is the case because it makes sense of the
method of betrayal. If money had been all that was in-
volved, there would have been no necessity for the kiss.
All Judas would have needed to have done was to have
pointed Jesus out—at most to have touched him, saying,
"This is the man." If you desired to turn a wanted man
over to the F.B.I., you would not do so by kissing him.
You would simply say to the officers, "There he is." But
Judas kissed Jesus. It was his way of saying, "I want to
express to you my contempt for the fact that you have let
me down."
Now when the betrayal was over, how did Judas feel about it?

It broke his heart. The first thing he did was to hurry to the priests, such as had been the teachers of his childhood, to find consolation. “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood,” he sobbed as he flung the money down. “What is that to us?” they answered. “See to it yourself.” Had they studied a thousand centuries, they could not have found a more devilish and repellent word. From this heartless rebuff Judas went out to his doom.

What was that doom? Simon puts it like this: “He fell that he might go to his own place. Wherever a traitor will fit in, there may we expect to find Judas.” I am sure that Jesus is calling his name when he said, “None of them is lost but the son of perdition.” He surely seems to be saying of Judas, “I’ve lost him.”

Why did Judas blunder out into the dark? “After a sin such as his,” we answer, “there was no other place for him.” But it was not the treachery of Judas that wrecked him. No man is ever lost because of what he does. Every man who suffers final defeat does so because of what he fails to do. Judas, though he had been with Jesus for almost three years, in his most desperate hour seems to have trusted a hangman’s noose more than he trusted him who came to seek and to save the lost. Judas went out into the night because of what he failed to do.

If Judas, after his treachery, after he had helped to hang his Master on the cross, had only come back and given Jesus a chance to forgive him, he would have gladdened all heaven—not only so, but his name today would be among the most beautiful in the gospel story. How surprising that Judas should have betrayed his Lord! But the supreme surprise is that having known Jesus he did not come back and give his wounded friend a chance to forgive. What a tragedy!

Bunyan found that “hard by the gates of Heaven there is a by-way to Hell.” Judas might have found that hard by the gates of hell there is a wide-open roadway to heaven. But he missed his chance. He thus became guilty of the unpardonable sin, the one sin that dooms. What is that? It is the refusal to accept pardon. Such refusal will prove as fatal for us as it was for Judas. But we may go right where he went wrong and thus find a place at the feast of the fullness of life.
5. Surprising Tears

Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem

When He came into full view of the city, He wept aloud over it.—Luke 19:41 (Weymouth)

These words are part of the story of what is known as the Triumphant Entry. It is evident that Jesus planned this entry to the minutest detail. Indeed, the plan had been taken in the main from one of the Old Testament prophets. The fact that he was riding into the Holy City upon a donkey does not mean that he had chosen a humble and lowly way to travel. The donkey of that day was a far finer beast than the one that we know. It was the donkey, not the horse, that furnished transportation for kings when they traveled on missions of peace. As Jesus thus rode into the city, he was proclaiming in dramatic fashion that he was the King for whom the ages had waited.

Some of the greatest of the prophets had thus dramatized their messages. Isaiah, for instance, had done so more than once. When his weak nation was threatening to turn to pagan powers for deliverance instead of to the Holy One of Israel, he warned them that their reliance upon such nations as Ethiopia and Egypt was futile. These very nations themselves were going to be plundered and peeled and led half naked into exile. In order to enforce this prophecy, for three years he went about the streets of Jerusalem barefoot. Not only so, but he was so sparsely clad that he would have made spectators gasp with amazement, even in our day when the wearing of clothing, especially on the part of women, threatens to become obsolete. He was thus proclaiming to every seeing eye that his nation was going to be led into exile.

Now that is what Jesus was doing here. As he rode along this road that was carpeted by the garments of his devoted followers, he was saying in language more emphatic than words, “I am the coming King.” This was so understood by his friends. It was the happy hour for which they had long waited. Sometimes the candle of faith had burned low. But now at last Jesus was going to act. He was going to claim his crown. Girded by this conviction, they knew boundless joy.

Since this bold claim of Jesus was understood by his friends, it was no less understood by his foes. When certain Pharisees heard this excited crowd shouting, “Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord,” they were horrified. They knew how dangerous was such a shout in a despotism that knew no king but Caesar. But knowing that it would be futile to appeal to this excited crowd, they appealed to Jesus himself. “Master, rebuke your
disciples.” But Jesus answered, “If I were to rebuke them, the very stones would cry out.” That is, joy is so at home here that dumb nature would shout if people should hold their peace.

Now, as this joyous procession made its way over the Mount of Olives, they came upon a bit of road where the whole city was spread out in panorama before them. What a loved city it was! No people were ever more patriotic than these Jews. There was the city of their fathers; a city of sacred memories; a city of holy hopes. At last the King had come to take possession, thus fulfilling this dearest dream. Naturally their joy knew no bounds.

Then it happened. Somebody began to sob. I think those standing closest to Jesus at first looked about with mingled horror and anger that anybody should disturb a scene so perfect. Then, when they saw that the one who was weeping was none other than the King himself, their anger gave place to horrified amazement. At once those nearest the Master lapsed into silence. Then a wave of silence spread over the whole multitude. There was only one sound, the loud sobbing of Jesus. No wonder all were filled with utter amazement.

I

Why were these people so surprised?

1. They were surprised because these tears were so unexpected, so out of place. The preacher in Ecclesiastes says there’s a time to weep and a time to laugh. Of course there is. It is good to laugh. It is just as religious to laugh as it is to weep. One had better have bad eyesight than to have no sense of humor. But blessed is the man who knows when to weep and when to laugh. To do either at the wrong time is shocking.

Now this was a time of all others when these people thought that tears were most out of place. Everybody was rejoicing. The great day for which they had longed at last had come. Then, just as they were on tiptoe of gladness over the triumph of their Master, the Master himself burst into tears. His shoulders were shaken by loud sobs. Almost nothing could have been more surprising, more utterly out of place. Were a minister to burst into loud laughter by the casket of your dead, it would not be so surprising as these tears of Jesus.

2. They were surprised because of who it was that was weeping. Some of these had been with Jesus for many months. They knew him as a man of compassion. They knew that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But above all else, they knew him as a man of joy, a man who could laugh and sing. He would go a little later from the Last Supper to his crucifixion with a song on his lips. He was so joyous that the rock-ribbed religiousists of his day didn’t think he was one of the saints at all. John the Baptist might pass, he wore a camel’s hair shirt and lived off locust and wild honey. But this Jesus, who never refused an invitation to dinner, was no saint. He was a glutton and a friend of publicans and sinners.

Not only was Jesus joyous, but if we may believe that
quotation in the letter to the Hebrews, his was the gladdest face that ever looked out upon our world. God had anointed him with the “oil of gladness” above his fellows. If Jesus had not been a joyous man, one would almost be driven to the conclusion that he was less than sincere. Again and again he spoke as only a sincerely joyous man could speak.

Listen to him: “O the joy of the poor in spirit! O the gladness of the merciful! O the holy laughter of the pure in heart!” How did Jesus come by these Beatitudes? They were not born of speculation, but of experience. They were intensely lived before they were written down. He knew that they would work because he had tested them in his own life.

There is a second phrase that he often used. That was, “Be of good cheer.” Did Jesus really possess the cheer that he recommended to others, or was he merely preaching? Did he with the night in his soul dare to recommend morning to others? By no means. There are few things more futile than seeking to cheer another when you have nothing but gloom in your own heart. Jesus never did that. Therefore, when these friends saw his usually glad face wet with tears, his strong body shaken by sobs, their amazement knew no bounds.

II

Why was Jesus weeping?

1. He was not weeping for himself. This does not mean that he faced the cross with a kind of stolid indifference. He dreaded this lonely and bloody ordeal with a dread beyond words. There was only one horror greater than that of the cross, and that was the refusal to do the will of God. Hence that prayer in the garden, “If thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” Luke tells us that Jesus set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. It took all his determination, fortified by the power of God, for him to face Calvary. Yet, in facing it, he never gave way to tears of self-pity.

2. If Jesus was not weeping for himself, no more was he weeping for his friends. He knew that he was soon to leave them in a hostile world that would persecute them to the death. Yet he never asked for them a sheltered place. Indeed, when a little later he told his beloved friend, Simon, by what a horrid death he should glorify God (John 21:19), there was no touch of tears in his voice. He was weeping neither for himself nor for his friends.

3. For whom was he weeping? He was weeping for his deeply loved Jerusalem, whose people were rejecting him. He was weeping for those who were rejecting him with colorless neutrality. He was weeping for those who were rejecting him with an aggressive hatred that would soon hang him on a cross.

Why did these foes thus move Jesus to tears?

1. He was weeping over their blindness. Though gifted with eyes, they had refused to see until darkness had closed upon them. Having ears to hear, they had refused to listen till they had all but lost their capacity to hear.
“Past feeling” is the phrase Paul used to describe such.

When I was a boy on the farm, one of the joys of springtime was setting my feet free from the bondage of shoes. But my first few steps were seldom pleasant. My feet were too sensitive. However, since I persisted in going without shoes, by the time autumn came I could almost crack a chestnut burr with my bare heel. Kindred toughness of conscience is a characteristic of our day. Almost nothing is wrong enough to wound.

2. He was weeping over the awful consequences of their blindness.

It was preventing them from recognizing the greatest event that could ever come their way. The most tremendous something that even God could bring to pass was taking place before their very eyes, and they were completely blind to it. God in Jesus was paying them a visit. But they were totally unaware that anything of worth was taking place. Failing to see God in Christ, they missed him.

Thus missing God they missed all that deeply matters. No nation, no individual, can ever win without God. “Where there is no vision, the people break loose” (Prov. 29:18 Goodspeed); or in the language of the King James Version, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Both translations are true. These fanatically religious people, believing themselves to be God’s chosen, believing that therefore he would see them through whether they were obedient or disobedient, took their own way. They rebelled against Rome some forty years later and were destroyed, not because of God’s anger, but because of their stubborn refusal of his guidance and help.

III

Now this is a single event in history, yet it is something that is constantly taking place. As we walk among the tombs of once great nations and ask how they came to their death, we find, as one of our greatest living historians seems to indicate, that not one of them died for lack of a proper army, not one for lack of a proper navy, not one from lack of a proper economic setup. They all died fundamentally from blindness; losing their vision, they lost themselves.

God is visiting us today. He has something to say to a world that, while vibrant with wise words, yet seems doomed to hang over hell every morning. Someone spoke recently of the need of a gospel for a space age. What kind of gospel would that be? One of the best and brightest of our astronauts after his high and daring adventure came near to killing himself by falling in his own bathtub. Two entities do not change—God and human nature. Since this is true, it might be wise to give heed to the gospel we already have.

God is speaking to us as a nation. We were never before so busily employed. Never were wages so high, never luxuries so abundant. Never were living conditions so good. Yet our crime rate was never before so high, riots never before so plentiful and bloody. The press has just
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reported the proposed visit to our land of a certain European psychiatrist. He gives as his reason for this visit that we are at once the richest and most wretched nation on earth.

Surely God is visiting us and speaking to our need—“Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace.” Ours, as theirs, may be a dark present, but it still holds the possibility of a radiant future. This is true because our Lord is still saying, “Even today.”

“Even today”—that is our hope. We ought to use today because it is all we have. Yesterday has gone; tomorrow has not come. We ought to use today because it is all we can manage. We can handle one day by the help of God, but we cannot manage one hundred, or even two. We ought to use today because it is all we need. If we get within the will of God today, he will take care of yesterday. Not only so, but he will fit us for tomorrow.

Here, then, is our big chance. If we take it, we must act. We must give ourselves to his leadership. We must be positive in our dedication. All we have to do to refuse to become the saving and salty souls that Jesus made it possible for us to become is nothing. Some years ago I was preaching to a congregation of youths. Eager to know if they were taking me seriously, I held up a dollar bill and said, “I will give this dollar to any boy or girl who was sixteen years old your last birthday, if you will come and get it.”

At once I could tell who was sixteen. Sixteen looked at sixteen and smiled wisely, but nobody moved. “All right,” I continued, “sixteen doesn’t want it, but how about fifteen?” Fifteen looked at fifteen saying, “We are just as smart as sixteen,” but nobody moved. Then I counted down fourteen, thirteen, twelve, and nobody moved. Meantime I could see a little chap just hanging onto the edge of his seat. He looked like a runner waiting for the gun to go off. “Nine,” I continued, but before I could fully finish the word boy was joyfully grasping his dollar.

The next morning a woebegone young chap came to see me. “When are you going to give away some more money?” he questioned. “Son,” I replied, “I’m not going to give away any more, but did you get the dollar I gave away yesterday?” “No, I didn’t,” he answered sadly. “How old are you?” I asked. “Twelve.” “How old was the boy that got it?” “Nine.” “Oh,” I said, “I see how you missed it, I started at six and worked up to sixteen.” “No,” he said, “you started at sixteen and worked down.”

“How old,” I continued, “did you say you are?” “Twelve.” “How old was the boy that got it?” “Nine.” “Son, how did you miss it? How did you miss it? How did you miss it?” He didn’t miss it because he threw a songbook at me. He didn’t miss it because he sprang up in angry protest and ran out of the house. He missed it because, though he was as decent as decency and as respectable as respectability, he let it alone.

All that one has to do to miss any value is nothing. God is visiting us today. If we open the door, he will be our guest and change our longing into laughter, our emptiness into fullness, our want into marvelous wealth. God grant that we may open the door “even today.”
His Surprising Prayer

6. His Surprising Prayer

*Jesus in Gethsemane*

Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.—Luke 22:42

I

Jesus is here facing the hard ordeal of the cross. We are not surprised, therefore, that in that black hour of crisis he betakes himself to prayer. There is a sense in which prayer is all but instinctive. If you suddenly aim a blow at me, I seek to avoid it without asking how heavy the blow might be or why it is aimed. When people face some grim tragedy, most of them pray. They do this almost as spontaneously as they shrink from a blow. But prayer meant far more than this on the lips of our Lord. Though in every crisis he prayed, he did not confine his praying to such hours. Instead, prayer was the habit of his life. Always he put prayer first.

To be convinced of this, we need only to run over in our minds the gospel story. Here we find Jesus moving at times with an assurance, an ease, and a serenity that fill us with wistful wonder as we see his calm face across the far spaces of the years. There were other times when he was obviously putting forth every ounce of his mighty energies, when his sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to the ground. When were his times of ease and serenity and poise, and when were his times of conflict and struggle? His times of conflict were his prayer periods. Having prayed, he went to his work as a victor might go to receive the spoils of his conquest.

Some time ago I delivered the commencement address for a certain school. A student of the school received a scholarship medal. All that student had to do was rise from one side of the platform and walk to the other and stand while an official pinned a medal on his lapel. Yet, as simple as was the procedure, the people burst into enthusiastic applause. At once I said to myself, “If one can receive such applause for so simple a task as accepting a scholarship medal, I am going into that business as a profession.” But when I found that the chap had to do some work behind the scenes, I gave it up. Jesus, having won in the secret place, went as did that young chap to receive the fruits of his victory.

That our Lord therefore should be on his knees here in Gethsemane is, I repeat, not surprising, since prayer was the habit of his life. But what is surprising is the prayer he is offering. Certainly it is not what I should have expected. Listen to it: “If thou art willing, remove this
cup from me.” But had not Jesus already accepted the cross as a certainty? Indeed he had.

After Simon had made his great confession, Jesus thought that he was far enough along to hear of the certainty of the cross. But such was not the case. Instead, Simon became utterly indignant. “Heaven forbid,” he said. “No, Lord, this shall never happen to you.” But the reply of Jesus was about the sharpest word he ever spoke to a friend, “Out of my way, Satan” (Phillips). Why did he call Simon that ugly name? Because he was using exactly the same argument Satan had used during the temptation in the wilderness. Satan was perfectly willing for Jesus to save the world, if he would only save it while avoiding the cross.

Not only had Jesus accepted the cross as a fact for himself, but he had even given thanks to God for the cross. “He took a cup, and when he had given thanks...” Do not look upon this as a mere perfunctory asking of the blessing. Jesus is here thanking God for the privilege of laying down his life for those whom he loves. Love is always joyful so long as it can do something for the beloved.

What was it that enabled Sydney Carton in Dickens’ immortal story, A Tale of Two Cities, to say, “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done”? What gave proof of the truth of what he was saying? It was this: When his executioners looked into his face, they found it the most peaceful face into which they had ever looked. Sydney Carton was glimpsing something of the joy of Jesus; the joy of laying down his life for one that he loved. Jesus had accepted the cross for himself and had accepted it with joyful gratitude.

Not only had he accepted the cross for himself, but he had declared it to be an absolute necessity for every man who would be his disciple. “If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind; he must take up his cross and come with me.” Naturally, therefore, it is surprising to hear this man who has accepted the cross both for himself and for his disciples offering this prayer: “If thou art willing, remove this cup from me.”

Why did Jesus seek, even at this late hour, to bypass that skull-shaped hill outside the city gate? Of course, here we can only grope. But, remembering that Jesus was as human as we, I think one reason was this: When he saw the cross at close range, when he had come so near to it that he could almost touch its hellish ugliness with his own hand, he found it even more horrible than he had expected. Here he realized more keenly than ever before the hellish ugliness of the cross, found it
hard to believe that such an ordeal could be the will of his infinitely loving Father.

Jesus is here for the moment in doubt. That is his second reason for this prayer. But what is he doubting? He is not doubting God. Never for an instant did he doubt his Father's love and wisdom and care. Even when he uttered that wild cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" God was still his God. "My God," he said. He still clung to him with a faith that was firm; nor is he doubting God in this hour of sweat and agony in Gethsemane. What then is he doubting?

He is doubting himself. He is doubting his understanding of the will of God. He is not quite sure that he has understood God aright. He is still willing to do God's will. Though he dreads the cross with a dread unspeakable, there is one something that he dreads far more, and that is flouting the will of God. It is this "nevertheless" that saves Jesus in this grim hour. "Nevertheless," in spite of all the bitterness of it, "not my will, but thine, be done." But he is for the moment uncertain as to what the will of God is.

Jesus had to pass through an ordeal like this if he was to be tempted in all points as we are. I think, aside from the story of the Passion, the saddest word in the New Testament is that question of John the Baptist, "Are you he that is to come, or shall we look for another?" John was sure that he had heard the voice of God. He had staked everything on that conviction. He had suffered for it. Even now in a profound sense he is in prison for it. As he languishes in his cell listening for a sure word all he hears is a rumor that the Prophet for whom he has given everything has come and is now in that outside world doing deeds beyond the human.

This only adds to his perplexity. "Why then," questions John, "does not he do something for me? Is it possible that I misunderstood God? Can it be after all that my life has been no more than a mistake?" There is no measuring the tragedy of a doubt like that. Yet countless serious souls have been tortured by it.

III

Now what did Jesus do when his black night was upon him? He betook himself to prayer. He prayed this prayer, without any surprising "if": "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." That was the wisest possible prayer. Without such prayer Jesus would have utterly failed in his mission. That was the least prayer he could offer without failing both God and man. It was costly beyond words, yet nothing less would do. Had he failed thus to pray, his tormentors could not have taunted him with this great word, "He saved others; he cannot save himself." Instead, a hopeless world would have wailed, "He saved himself; others he cannot save." "Thy will be done" was the least that Jesus could ask.
But if it was the least, it was also the very best and greatest. With all his wisdom he could not have prayed a greater or more worthful prayer. It is at the center of the prayer he taught us to pray. There is one petition of this model prayer that Jesus never used. He taught us to pray for forgiveness, but never did he thus pray for himself. But this petition, “Thy will be done,” he made his very own. It is a prayer without which every other is in a sense futile. Thus Jesus here prayed at once the least prayer that any disciple can pray, yet also the greatest that even the Son of God could pray.

Now this perfect petition, fitting the clean lips of our Lord, is no less fitting for you and me. It is all men’s prayer. Not only so, it is for all an absolute necessity. To fail to pray it is to open the door to every form of wrongdoing. Being wrong, we naturally do wrong.

That wise father in The Merchant of Venice had the right idea. Fearing that he would not live to witness the happy marriage of his daughter, he went as far as he could toward guaranteeing such a marriage. He took three caskets—gold, silver, and lead—in one of which he hid the picture of his daughter, fixing it as a condition that the man who chose the casket that held the picture should be the fortunate suitor.

The first two caskets, of gold and silver, were alike in this: They were inscribed, “Who chooses me will get . . . .” If the father had been eager for his daughter to marry a “getter,” he would surely have placed her picture in one of those caskets. But instead he put it in the plain leaden casket that bore this inscription: “Who chooses me must give and hazard all he has.” He knew that happy marriages can only be had at the price of mutual self-giving. That is just as true in our religious lives. Victorious living can come only at the price of mutual self-giving. Jesus has given all, and we must give all to him as we pray this prayer, “Not my will, but thine, be done.”

That does not mean that all self-pleasing leads to the same goal. One man can make self-pleasing the law of his life and become a pauper. Another man can make self-pleasing the law of his life and become a millionaire. One man can make self-pleasing the law of his life and end in the gutter. Another can make self-pleasing the law of his life and end on the platform of a popular pulpit. It is not the different goals that are fundamental. It is the common motive of self-pleasing that lies behind both goals. No wonder, therefore, that “Thy will be done” stands at the center of the prayer that the Lord taught us to pray. It is the sum total of all prayer.

Now what happened when Jesus thus prayed? He found assurance. He passed from uncertainty into certainty. It is a striking fact that the one calm, poised, and unruffled figure of the whole grim tragedy of the crucifixion is that of the man who was crucified. On the night of his arrest, who got excited? Who gave way? Not Jesus, but the disciples. They ran like frightened sheep. Even the men
who arrested him were so disturbed that they staggered back in the presence of his compelling majesty. On his way to Calvary some onlookers burst into tears. But no tears wet the face of the man who was staggering under the weight of his cross.

When the work of crucifixion was finished and he was hanging on the nails, the mob about him had eyes fiery with hate, cheeks burning with anger. His own friends standing at a distance had eyes too leadened by despair really to see him. The one poised personality was the man who in that frantic hour prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Then a little later, he dropped his tortured body into the Everlasting Arms, with this “Now I lay me” upon his lips, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!”

Here is victory complete and abiding. It was won because our Lord passed from the frail “if” of his first petition to that steadfast “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” This is not the easiest prayer to pray. It is not, as we are prone to think, a prayer of mere resignation. It is a prayer that has in it a battle cry. It is a prayer that often costs sweat, blood, and tears. Yet nothing less than this prayer will do. If we pray it in sincerity, God will take care of our yesterdays. He will both forgive and forget our sins. Not only so, but he will fit us for tomorrow. To pray this prayer aright is surely to find a place at the feast of the fullness of life, both here and now and in the everlasting yonder.

7. The Supreme Surprise

The Resurrection

The Lord has risen indeed.—Luke 24:34

This book we call the Bible is a thrill with the astonishing. It is in a sense a handbook of surprises. The Old Testament again and again brings us face to face with the unexpected. But with the New Testament this is even more true. Here Jesus is constantly making folks, especially his disciples, to gasp with amazement. But of all his surprises, there is none other quite so great, especially to those intimate friends, as his rising from the dead.

The need of a resurrection was for these friends at first a complete surprise.

Before there could be a resurrection, there had to be a death. Those who knew Jesus best, his own disciples, did not expect their Master to die. In fact, his death seemed to have taken them completely by surprise. This was the case
in spite of the fact that he had warned them over and over of this coming tragedy. They heard what he said, but they simply could not take it in.

For instance, on the Mount of Transfiguration, when the cross was very near, Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah of the exodus he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. As they came down from the Mountain, he warned his three most intimate friends, Peter, James, and John, that they keep what they had heard a secret until after he had risen from the dead. But somehow they heard this without hearing. So in bewilderment they came from this experience discussing what the rising from the dead might mean.

It was this certainty that their tremendously vital Lord could not be conquered by death that gave rise to the conviction on the part of many that Judas was not a traitor but the most ardent and firm of believers. Being utterly sure that no foe could destroy his Master, he seemingly betrayed him without fear. He did not for a moment believe that he would thus bring about the death of Jesus. He would only put him on the spot where he would act in accordance with his power, and thus hasten the coming of the kingdom. Personally I do not agree with this theory, but it has some reason in it. Matthew tells us that it was when Judas had seen that his Master was condemned that he went and hanged himself.

According to this theory, Judas was scourged out of the world by two foes—remorse for his seeming treachery, and despair at seeing one for whom he was sure death was impossible die the death of a criminal. But be that as it may, as we read the record there seems to be no indication that a single one of the disciples believed that their tremendously vital Master was going to allow himself to be put to death. In spite of all warnings, this tragedy came upon them as a complete surprise.

II

Now these friends, surprised by his death, were even more surprised by his resurrection.

How can this be, we ask? Had Jesus not told them he would rise from the dead? Indeed he had. He had foretold this tremendous event just as he had warned them of his coming death. But not being able to accept his dying as a possibility, they were still less able to accept his rising from the dead. Not one of them, so far as the record goes, during those black hours immediately after the crucifixion, recalled one word Jesus had said about his resurrection. It is significant that the only mention of this promise of his rising came from the lips of his enemies. When these went to ask Pilate for a guard to set about the tomb, they gave as their reason for the request the fact that Jesus had said that he would rise on the third day. Of course they did not believe him, but they did remember that he had so promised.

Not only did these disciples not expect the resurrection, in spite of what Jesus had said; but they did not expect it in spite of certain circumstances that might at least have given a hint of its possibility. For instance, there was the
empty tomb. Just when it became empty we do not know. In my opinion it was empty when the first visitors arrived early Easter Sunday morning. If not then, it was empty soon thereafter. We may be sure of this because the preaching of a resurrection in the presence of a tomb that remained exactly as it was when the body was laid to rest would have been such sheer folly as to verge on madness.

Now, since the tomb was empty, these disciples knew that in all probability it was emptied in one of two ways—either by the power of man or by the power of God. If it was emptied by the power of man, it was emptied either by the friends of Jesus or by his foes. Naturally they knew that it had not been emptied by his friends. In the first place, for them to have emptied it would have been impossible. They had neither the fortitude nor the power. Having fled like frightened hares in the presence of the living Christ, they would not likely have rallied about a dead body that was under guard. They would hardly have dared to defy the red seal of Rome.

Naturally also they would realize the futility of such a move. Had they succeeded in obtaining the body, it would have been of no worth at all. Their one gain would have been the privilege of living, fighting, and dying for a known lie. The accusation that they stole the body, therefore, does not make sense.

The assertion of these women, had he believed it, would have meant far more to Cleopas than life itself. Yet he did not have enough faith in it to induce him to remain in Jerusalem even for a few hours to find if it were true or false.

When this same message was brought to the disciples and a few friends that were gathered with them, how did they react? Did they begin to hope? Did they go even
beyond hope and shout for joy? Not a bit of it. Their reaction is expressed both by Moffatt and the New English Bible in one word “nonsense.” This strong hint did not seem to awaken in their darkened hearts one ray of hope.

Later still, after Jesus had appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room, they went out from that marvelous experience to tell their story. They told it to Thomas, who had not attended the meeting that day. He had held aloof, not from disloyalty. No man had been more loyal than Thomas. None, I dare say, had suffered more than he had suffered and was suffering now. But when these friends whom he knew and loved and trusted came with the best of good news that they had seen the Lord, did Thomas burst into loud hallelujahs? Not a bit of it. Instead of bringing joy, this testimony seems to have made him half angry.

“I don’t believe it,” he said by his whole attitude. “I saw Jesus nailed to the cross, I saw him die, I heard him say, ‘It is finished.’ I think he was telling the sober truth. All the mad dreams we have dreamed are over. Before I believe what you say, I will have to put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into his side.” By that Thomas meant to say, “I will not believe under any circumstances.” Thomas was by nature a bit more pessimistic than his fellows, but they were alike in this: No single one of them expected Jesus to arise from the dead. Those who knew him best were taken completely by surprise.

Yet we face this amazing fact. These very men who had been so certain that Jesus was dead forever came to be equally certain that he had risen from the dead. I think this is a fact beyond dispute.

Their certainty of the resurrection is indicated by the change that took place in themselves. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Pet. 1:3.) From men without hope they had been transformed into dauntless optimists. From fearful deserters who had turned their backs on their Master in his hour of greatest need, they had become heroes not to be frightened by any foe. With possibly one exception, they died to a man a martyr’s death for proclaiming that their Lord had risen from the dead.

Here is one of these friends who had in an hour of testing sworn that he had never met Jesus. He is standing now with a fellow disciple before the same court that had sentenced their Master to death just a few days before. But he is no longer shaking with terror. “When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered.” (Acts 4:13.) When this powerful court laid the command on them that they were not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus, they answered, it would almost seem with quiet laughter, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” This
change was not brought about by a dead Jesus, but by a risen Savior.

The fact that these men were sure of the resurrection is indicated not only by the change that took place in themselves, but also by the change that they brought about in the world of that day. This certainty of the resurrection that had wrought a revolution in themselves sent them out to work a revolution in their world. These otherwise ordinary men did actually accomplish the impossible. They brought about beneficent changes that no intelligent person of their day would have thought possible. By their preaching of the resurrection, they shook the tradition-bound city of Jerusalem. Not only so, but they shook the whole Roman Empire. We feel the mighty impact of their message to this hour.

This is a fact of history. It would be as futile to deny it as to deny the Battle of Gettysburg, the discovery of America, or any other historical fact. Every church around the world on Easter Sunday is declaring that somebody really and tremendously believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

IV

Now these men, once certain that Jesus could not rise, became equally certain that he did rise. Why? They must have had some reasons for their new faith. They were not credulous nitwits. They were reasonable men, even as you and I. Why then did they believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

It would seem that not one of these disciples believed in the resurrection because of what he read in his Old Testament. No more did they believe because of anything that Jesus had said. His sayings became evidence after the fact, but they counted for nothing before the fact. No more did they believe because of what a brother disciple had told them. Why then, I repeat, did they believe?

They believed because every man of them had had a personal encounter with the risen Christ. To some he had appeared when they were in a group. To some he had appeared individually, as to James, to Simon Peter, and to Paul. But their faith was based not on hearsay, but on personal experience. Mary of Magdala voiced the one reason for their belief, “I have seen the Lord.”

Now as we join in worship on Easter day, many of us do so girded by the certainty that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. But it is well for us to know that the certainty of the resurrection as a historic fact is not enough. It is possible for me to believe that Jesus rose, and yet be no more transformed by it than by my faith in any other fact of history. If I do not go beyond that, Easter will be for me only a date in the calendar.

But there is a way to change Easter into more than a day of pomp and pageantry. I can change it into a personal experience. This I can do by a dedication of myself to our risen Lord. “If any man’s will is to do his will, he shall know.” (John 7:17.) Up to Calvary, Jesus made his appeal
as a physical Savior. People felt his touch. They heard his voice. During the brief forty days between Easter and the Ascension he appeared and disappeared. The New Testament does not tell us why he did this, but it seems obvious. Our Lord was seeking thus to show that he was as near and real when he was not seen as when he was seen. He was preparing us for today, when he no longer reveals himself to the physical eye, but to the eye of the heart. All who will act as if he is risen will come to know him as their living Lord.

Now, when this risen Christ becomes a reality, we become sure of the resurrection, not simply for Jesus, but also for ourselves. We are certain that he will say to us, no less than he said to that dying highwayman, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” We can be sure that life goes on. That it goes on in his fellowship. That it will go on forever. We can be sure that John was speaking truth when he said, “We know that when he appears we shall be like him” (I John 3:2).

Let us face together this fact. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, our faith is vain. We are yet in our sin. But if he did rise from the dead, then all our dearest dreams can come true. Living with him here, we know that we have victory—even over death. Countless thousands have dared both life and death undergirded by that conviction.

Recently I found somewhere an excerpt from a letter written to a close friend by that dedicated English preacher of a generation ago, F. B. Meyer. It read something like this: “I have just learned that, somewhat to my surprise, I have only a few more days to live. Indeed it may be that before this letter reaches you I shall have entered the palace. Do not bother to answer. We shall meet in the morning.” That man was already living amidst the spendors of Easter.
8. A Successful Father

The Roman Official

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way.—John 4:50

The hero of the story of which my text is a part is a father. Of course this is not altogether unique, but it is rare enough to be a bit exciting, for here is a father who took the business of fatherhood seriously.

I will always remember the first Mother’s Day sermon I ever preached. It was in a college chapel. That congregation was not much given to expressing emotion, but on that day we all wept bountifully—indeed, we needed towels to take care of our tears. Feeling that it often helps people to weep, that it purges something mean out of them, I was thrilled.

Now because this service was so victorious, I was eager for another of equal value. Therefore I set a special Sunday for Father’s Day. But for some reason that service was little short of a flop. In comparison with Mother’s Day, it was like passing out of a garden into a desert. We had no fit songs. Those who had sung “Tell Mother I’ll Be There” with tearful enthusiasm seemed hesitant in singing “Tell Father I’ll Be There,” as if they were in doubt as to where the old boy was. No towels were needed for our tears. A single Kleenex would have been sufficient.

Since that day, father’s stock has risen a bit. I believe the present-day father takes a little more responsibility in the work of the home than young fathers did in my day. Mother’s stock, on the other hand, has gone down somewhat. This is due in part to the fact that so many present-day mothers work outside the home. Too many parents are so busy working, or so busy amusing themselves, that they have little time for their children. It is one of the tragedies of our day that many boys and girls grow up with only one parent or none at all, though both father and mother are alive.

Fathers have often been too busy. A young father said to me rather gleefully, “I hardly know my own children. I am up and away in the morning before they rise. By the time I get home at night they are asleep. So I’m hardly acquainted with them.” Well, that has become more common perhaps in our day, but it has been in some measure a trait of fathers throughout the years.

Here is a story that comes out of a long-gone past. A little laddie is allowed to go out in the field where his father is harvesting. Soon he is taken desperately ill. He rushes to his father, crying “My head! My head!” What does the father do? Drop everything and gather him in his arms and hurry to a physician? Not a bit of it. He is too busy. He does not even speak to the lad. He orders a
servant: “Take him to his mother.” The servant obeys. But the story ends on this tragic note: “The child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died.”

Our text, as I have said, shows us a father who took fatherhood seriously. His story is a drama in three acts.

As the curtain rises, we see this father hurrying on his way to meet Jesus. How did he come to make this first encounter with our Lord? He came on behalf of his boy who was desperately ill. This man was a royal official. He was a man of means and of standing. He had doubtless already called to the aid of his son the very best physician he could find. But in spite of that the boy was slowly dying. He was now convinced that unless he could find help beyond what he had found before, he was going to lose his son. Therefore he came to this young Prophet.

What did he know about Jesus? I am sure that he knew very little. I am further sure that that little was by hearsay. Someone had doubtless told him that while Jesus was in Jerusalem he had wrought certain cures. So this troubled father with a very imperfect faith decided that he would appeal to Jesus on behalf of his boy. If you had asked him as he left Capernaum to journey twenty miles to Cana to see Jesus, “Are you sure that he will be willing to cure your son?” he would have answered, “No, I am not sure. I don’t know.” “Are you sure that, even if he is willing, he will be able to cure him?” “That too I do not know.”

“Well,” I would have said, “don’t you think it is a bit of a fool’s errand to journey this twenty miles when you do not know whether he is either willing or able to cure him?” Then the father would have answered, “Even though I do not know of his willingness or of his ability, I do know this, that unless something is done, my son is going to die. If I go to this young Prophet and he is not interested, or if he is interested and is not able, then I will not have lost anything. It will certainly not make my son any the worse for me to go. But, on the other hand, if I go and he is willing and able to cure, then I have saved my son. I am simply giving my son and myself the advantage of the doubt.” So he went to this young carpenter.

Now, when he reached Jesus, he prayed this simple prayer: “Sir, come down before my child dies.” You notice that he not only asked Jesus to cure his son but told him how to do it. He must do it by coming down. He had no conception of a Christ who could heal at a distance. That great pagan whose faith took even Jesus by surprise, having asked healing for his slave and having seen Jesus on his way to his house, sent him word not to come. He said, “It’s no use. I know, because I have soldiers under me, and I can give orders and they are carried out. You have the force of the universe under you, so there’s no use for you to come.” He didn’t ask for the presence of Jesus. But this man had no such faith.

Now what response did Jesus make? If I had been that father, I would have been quite discouraged, and possibly even offended by it. He said, “Unless you see signs and
wonders you will not believe.” This “you” here is not singular, as we should expect. It is not “unless thou,” but it is “unless you.” It is plural. He is putting this official in with the crowd. He is saying, “You’re like the excited mobs in Jerusalem. You are a sign seeker, just as they are. You say seeing is believing.”

We say that to this day, though far more often believing is seeing. It was by believing that a ship heavier than air could be made to fly that the Wright brothers came to see. It was by believing that the world was round that Columbus came to see that it actually was. And so this man stood among the crowd who demanded a sign.

How did he react to this rebuke? Well, he didn’t resent it. He didn’t deny it. He didn’t get angry. He was an improvement over General Naaman. You know when Naaman came to be cured of his leprosy, the prophet told him that all he had to do was to go dip in Jordan seven times. Proud Naaman went away in a rage. Why was he so angry? When a friend met him down the street, he asked, “What are you doing in Samaria?” Naaman said, “I came to be cured of leprosy.” “Did you get cured?” “No!” “Why didn’t you get cured?” “I didn’t get cured,” he answered hotly, “because the prophet didn’t cure me as I had made up my mind to be cured. I thought he was going to come out and strike his hand over the place and cure the leper. You see, I want to be cured, but on my own terms. Indeed, if I am not, I am not going to get cured at all.”

But nobody gets cured on his own terms. When you consult a physician, it is he, not you, who decides the treatment. You don’t get anything on your own terms. If you decide to raise a garden, you needn’t say, “I’m not going to act as these other folks—plow the land and plant the seed. I’m going to raise a garden just as I please.” I decided as a young chap that I was going to learn to play the violin. I spent almost two days at it, but when I found that I couldn’t play the violin on my own terms, I gave it up.

You certainly can’t be saved on your own terms. This is true not because God is narrow and stubborn. It’s simply true in the nature of things. So this man, when Jesus told him that he was a mere sign seeker, accepted it. He did not try to defend himself. He had just one weight upon his soul, the need of his boy. He said, “Sir, come down before my child dies,” and Jesus could not resist that earnest and impassioned appeal. So he said to him, “Go; your son will live.”

II

Now what was the father’s reaction to this simple promise? He had come to this meeting with just one item of business on his agenda. That was the securing of healing for his son. So when Jesus said to him, “Your son will live,” that ended the matter. In the light of what I should have done, I find it surprising that this wise official, instead of asking Jesus to prop up his promise, at once adjourned the meeting and set out for home.
SURPRISES IN THE BIBLE

But we don’t always do that. Sometimes when we bring a petition to our Lord and have his definite promise before us, we don’t take it. We simply ask over and over again for what he has already promised. Or we ask him to make a simple promise stronger than a promise. We want it backed up by our emotions. We say, “I don’t feel as if my son’s going to get well.” Or we want him to prop it up by another promise, and another. Now our Lord simply does not act like that.

“I wouldn’t believe him on oath,” we say of a certain individual. Well, if you wouldn’t believe his bare word, neither could you believe his oath. What prompted Jesus to say “Swear not at all,” was the fact it had become a custom among the Jews to look upon a promise as binding only when it was sworn to. Then they went a step further; even if it was sworn to, it must be sworn to by a certain kind of oath. Thus they continued until lying became the accepted thing, even a fixed habit. If you can’t take a man’s simple word, you can’t believe him on oath.

Jesus said, “Go; your son will live.” At once this father took him at his word and set out for home. There is an added touch; he did not go home that day. It seems to me that had I been in his place I should have secured the fastest horse in Cana and run him all the way to Capernaum to see if the boy were really well. But “He who believes,” the Scriptures say, “will not be in haste.”

If I had met this official down the street, I would have asked, “How is your boy? “He’s all right.” “When did you hear from him?” “I haven’t heard from him at all directly. I heard from him indirectly through a young carpenter up the way. He said that he’s going to get well.” “Have you been home to see?” I would have asked. “No, I’m not going today.” He had some important business, perhaps, to transact, and so he either stayed with a friend in Cana or stayed with someone on the road. At least he did not get home until the next day. Nor did he lie awake that night, I am sure, wondering if his son was really getting well. He simply rested his head upon the promise of Jesus and went to sleep.

Now the next day as he was going home some sunny-faced servants met him. They doubtless rushed forward fairly shouting the good news, “Your son is alive!” This father was not as astonished as they expected him to be. His face didn’t take on any new light. It already looked like a miniature sunrise. I daresay they were a bit surprised at how quietly he took it. Instead of shouting over it, he simply asked, “What hour did he begin to mend?” And they gave this amazing answer: “He didn’t begin to mend; he just got well. Yesterday at one o’clock he was burning with fever, and yesterday at one o’clock his fever left him and he was well. It was instantaneous.”

Now our Lord sometimes heals that way today. He heals both instantly and as a process. Years ago as a young teacher I boarded in a country home where the mother, a nominal Christian, became ill with a lingering sickness. When the doctors seemed baffled, she began to pray for her own recovery but got nowhere. Then she began to plead that she might live in order to mother her...
four growing boys. Still she got nowhere. Then one day in a moment of high faith she said, "Lord, the boys were yours before they were mine. I trust them and all else into thy hands. Thy will be done."

So what? That very hour she rose into newness of life. I can give my personal testimony that from that day she moved about that little community like a rich and rare perfume.

III

The next scene is his reaching home.

I can imagine that when these servants had met the master one of them turned on his heels and hurried home to tell the household of his master's coming. When the official arrived, they were all out to meet him. Among them, of course, was his small boy, now fit and well. As the father ran forward and lifted him into his arms, he knew the joy not only of having recovered his boy as a fresh gift from Jesus, but of having received the Giver as well. So when they were in the house, all gathered about this father as he told his story. "Now," he said, "the man who did that for me, who led me from a vague faith to be sure of him—that man can have my life now and forever." So joyous and contagious was his faith that every member of his household was caught under its spell. Thus it was that the most important institution on the face of this earth was established, a Christian home.

The one who made this possible was a father who began with a vague faith but, because he was loyal to what he believed, was led into a larger faith. There is nothing truer than this, that if we live up to the light we have, it will lead us into the fullness of the light. But however bright may be the vision now, if we fail to live up to it, it will change to darkness. "For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." (Mark 4:25.)

Here is the open road to victory. "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him." That same Jesus has spoken and is speaking to you and me. He is saying, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." He is promising, "Him who comes to me I will not cast out" (John 6:37). All you need to do is to take him at his word and go your joyous way.
9. A Surprising Encounter

Philip and the Ethiopian

And he went on his way rejoicing.—Acts 8:39

Here is a story with a happy ending. It tells of a surprising and enriching encounter between two men who were complete strangers, and in other respects very far apart. They were separated by leagues of desert, by the wide chasm of race, by position. One was a statesman, the other an evangelist. They were far apart in what they had found through their religious faith. One had come to radiant certainty while the other was still reaching a hand into the encircling gloom. Nobody expected that these two should ever meet. Least of all did they themselves expect it. Yet they did meet, to their own enrichment as well as to that of countless others.

There are three actors in this bracing story. First there is the Holy Spirit. His guiding hand brought this unexpected and all but impossible encounter to pass. He is always present to give guidance and thus to bring us to our best. Then there are those two men, this high officer from Africa and Philip the Evangelist. I am going to devote my attention mainly to these two human actors in this thrilling drama.

Look first at the Ethiopian. He still takes us by surprise somewhat as he did Philip. What do we know about him?

1. We know that he was a man from Africa. He could have been a Jew who had been born there and who was coming to worship in the city of his fathers. But in the light of the whole story, I feel confident that this was not the case. He was Secretary of the Treasury for his nation. Such a high position would have more probably been given to a native son than to a foreigner. Therefore, I feel sure that this high official was a native, an African Negro, in the service of his queen.

2. We may be quite sure that he was a proselyte. He had been brought into contact with the religion of the Jews, the highest and the most vital of that day, and had embraced it. He was, therefore, not only a religious man, but he was one who took his religion seriously. This is indicated by the fact that he made this long journey to Jerusalem to worship. This was a taxing task in both time and money. His religion, therefore, was not cheap.

3. A third fact we know about this man is that though he was in earnest, though he put into his religion his best, he had not yet found what he was seeking. He had gone to church in Jerusalem and was coming away disappointed.
He was one of the hungry sheep that looked up without
being fed. It may have been his own fault. It may have
been the fault of the service. But be that as it may, he was
coming away from church with no new light in his eye,
with no new spring in his step, with no new warmth and
courage in his heart. He felt that the service had let him
down. He had not found what he was seeking.

4. The final fact to which I call your attention is this:
Though he had been disappointed; though he was still
saying, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so
paneth my soul after thee, O God"; though he had gone
out on a high quest and had not found his heart's desire,
he refused to quit. He refused to say, "These heights,
however desirable, cannot be climbed by my blundering
feet. This prize, however desirable, can never be grasped by
my hands." Having failed, he still continued to face in
the right direction. There is no future for the man who
quits. There is no final defeat for the man who refuses to
quit. This African statesman was of that type.

Therefore, when Philip the Evangelist came upon him
in the desert that day, though he found him disappointed,
he also found him still following the gleam, still ready to
go out into the deep and let down his nets for a draft. He
found him even then in pursuit of his quest, climbing
among the great mountain peaks of the fifty-third chapter
of Isaiah. Faint he may have been, but he was still deter-
minded to reach his goal, though that goal might seem as
elusive as a sinking star.

A SURPRISING ENCOUNTER

II

Now look at Philip.

Today we call him Philip the Evangelist. He had not
begun as an evangelist. When he had been converted and
had been assigned his first task in the church, he was a
member of the official board. He was to help handle the
material affairs of the church. He was to distribute bread.
He was to wait on the table. But no task in the church is an
end in itself. We are to perform every task with the ulti-
mate purpose of winning folks to Christ and building
them up in Christ. Philip undertook so to distribute the
bread to this semi-pauper church as to win those to whom
he distributed it to a deeper desire and a deeper experience
of the bread of life.

Thus he came a little later to be known as Philip the
Evangelist. I think that name began to attach itself to him
before he was driven from Jerusalem. It is a beautiful and
winsome name—evangelist. I am sure that Philip was
proud of it. But for most of us it is a name that has lost
its charm. Too often it is as ugly to our ears as the clash of
instruments played out of tune. Somehow in its journey
from the Jerusalem of yesterday to the Jericho of today it
has fallen among robbers who have stripped it of its
beauty and wounded it and departed leaving it half dead.
Indeed, one must be a rather rash Samaritan even to stop
and render first aid.

But if Philip began his evangelism in Jerusalem, he
carried it on in greater power outside that city. With the
death of Stephen, the Jews began to persecute the church. All the disciples except the apostles were driven out of the city. Philip was one of those who ran for their lives. He took refuge in a city of Samaria. Arriving there, he might have said to himself, “Discretion is the better part of valor. If I am going to keep living in this country, I’ve got to be a little more circumspect about this business of evangelism.” But he did not take that position. No sooner had he reached the city than he began to do the work of an evangelist.

It is significant that Philip received no definite command from the Lord to do this. When he went on his mission to this high official he was definitely led, but not so here. Why? Because he already knew the will of God. Jesus had said as his parting charge, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” We do not always need specific orders for doing the work of an evangelist. Someone warned John Wesley, you may remember, against speaking to individuals as he had opportunity, instead of only to those to whom he felt definitely led. What was the result? He found that he was not speaking to anybody at all. We have already received our marching orders, and our danger is not speaking too much, but rather not speaking at all.

Now Philip, having begun the work of an evangelist, did it so effectively that there was a real revival in the city. Revival is another great word that has lost caste. If we dare to undertake a revival today, we often have to slip it in under an alias. That ancient psalmist upon his knees praying, “Revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee,” evokes too few hearty amens. Some might even say by word and deed, “God forbid.” Therefore, there are multitudes in our churches, good, decent, hungry-hearted people, who never saw a revival.

Now while Philip was engaged in this revival, there came this surprising command: “Arise, and go toward the south into the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza.” Since this was a desert road, it would seem as if the evangelist were ordered to leave the crowd and go into solitude; to turn from everybody to minister to an unseen nobody. Surely he needed definite leading for a situation like that. On the surface it failed to make sense. It was hard, I am sure, for Philip to believe he had heard aright. Yet he did believe enough to act on it. Though he did not know his goal, though he was traveling in a sense under sealed orders, he did know his direction. He dared to take the first step in that direction.

So what? He soon found himself coming into fuller light. That is ever the case. Here is a crucial test that we ought to take seriously. To live up to the light we have is to come into fuller light. To shut our eyes to the light we have is to lose that light. There is nothing surer than this: “He that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.” Philip met the crucial test. He took the first step and ended by reaching his high goal.

III

See how it worked: Philip set out not knowing whither he went. But he had not gone far before the day began to
dawn. He found there was some life in that solitary country. He saw a chariot being driven along the road that led south from Jerusalem. That chariot perhaps had about it an imposing retinue, since this traveler was a high official. Philip was near enough to see that this important personage was a man of another race. He saw also that this official was quite busy. He was absorbed in reading a scroll that he held in his hand.

Then came another surprise: "Go near," said the Spirit, "and join thyself to this chariot." "Don't be silly," cautioned another voice that is never silent in such situations. So what? Philip listened to the higher voice. We read that he ran. Why did he run? He might have run out of sheer eagerness, because he was fairly aflame to tell his story. But I think there was an added reason. He ran because he was frightened. He said, "If I don't go right at once, I will never go at all." At least that has been my experience. What one does in a case like that he has to do quickly.

So he ran and found, to his great joy, that this busy official was reading aloud a choice passage from Philip's own Bible. The evangelist, I daresay, knew every word of that bit by heart. It ran something like this: "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we have been healed." "About whom, pray, does the prophet say this?" questioned this earnest seeker. "About himself or about someone else?" Surely his is a vital question. Who does free us from our sins? By whose stripes have we been healed?

In answering that question Philip might have loosed upon this official a Niagara of words. Certainly volumes have been written about it. Scholars have debated the question for long centuries. But Philip, not knowing the speculations of the wise and prudent, "opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus."

Was this answer wise or foolish? Was the road that he pointed out to this seeking soul a right road or a wrong road? I am persuaded that it was a right road because it was a road that led home. It may be that Philip was quite limited in his knowledge of theology. But, be that as it may, he was able so to instruct this high official as to send him on his way rejoicing.

What a privilege Philip had that day! What a high and holy responsibility! For one brief moment those men came together at the crossroads. If Philip had failed, that Ethiopian would doubtless have gone back to his native land without this transforming experience of a personal encounter with our Lord. The one chance he had that day under God was at the hands of this evangelist. If Philip had failed him, it would perhaps have been a final failure.

Something like this happens at times to almost all of us. I remember years ago seeing a friend coming toward me on a crowded street. He was a man of some prominence. He was also the one member of his family who was not a professed Christian. In spite of the unpromising circumstances, I decided not without fear and trembling to try
once more to win him for our Lord. So what? It looked ticklish enough. But instead of taking offense he seemed to be waiting for me to invite him to take his place at the feast of the fullness of life.

Some three hours later, I think even before he had an opportunity to tell his family his experience, a fatal accident ushered him into eternity. What a joy it was to be able to say at his memorial service: “Yesterday on a crowded street this man made a definite committal of himself to Jesus Christ. He then and there put his hand in mine in token of the fact that he had already put it into the hand of our beloved Lord.” For once, after the example of Philip, I took my final opportunity. Would I had always been equally faithful!

10. An Incredible Escape

Paul's Shipwreck

They escaped all safe to land.—Acts 27:44

How utterly surprising! If ever doom seemed an absolute certainty, it is here. This is not the verdict simply of an onlooker. It is the verdict of a very wise man, Dr. Luke, who suffered through the ordeal. “All hope,” he said, “. . . was then taken away.” Yet, “they escaped.” Such is the surprising ending of the best and most dramatic sea story in all the Bible. We may divide this drama into four scenes.

As the curtain rises, we see a little merchant vessel anchored in the port of Fair Havens off the coast of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. It is one of autumn’s rare days. Summer seems to have come back to give the world a return engagement. The skies are unspeakably blue. A gentle south wind, as soft as the breath of an infant,
caresses the face. The sea spreads out in smiling beauty, as calm as a shimmering mirror. Nothing could be more beautiful and more peaceful.

Now on the deck of this little merchant vessel are four men engaged in earnest conference. The personnel of this little committee is interesting. Chairman of the group, and the one whose word is final, is a young, gentlemanly centurion named Julius. He takes precedence even over the captain, though this would not be true in our modern day when the captain's voice is always final. But this vessel has been leased by the Roman government, and so this centurion has the final word. Present also is the captain of the vessel. We expected him. Present too is the owner of the vessel, who perhaps owns the cargo as well. With so much at stake, he naturally would be there.

But the presence of the next man takes us completely by surprise. He is neither a soldier, nor a sailor, nor a capitalist. He is instead a preacher—a preacher of a despised race, and of a still more despised sect. He belongs to the sect of the Nazarenes. He is a Christian. Not only is he a preacher, but he is also a prisoner. He is on his way to stand trial before the emperor. Certainly we did not expect him. Certainly also it speaks volumes for the personality of this great man that he was allowed to participate in this important conference.

Now the question before the group is this: Shall they remain in the small port of Fair Havens, or shall they go fifty miles up the coast to the more commodious harbor of Phoenix? It is an open question because it is autumn, and sailing the Mediterranean Sea in the autumn in that day was dangerous. But the day is so perfectly beautiful that the captain of the vessel thinks they may make the venture with a minimum of danger. So he agrees to go to the more commodious port. The owner of the vessel, who has most at stake, joins the captain in his willingness to try to make the larger harbor.

But here is another surprise. This landlubber, this man who is, as we said, neither soldier, nor sailor, nor capitalist has a different mind on the question. He is convinced that the adventure will be deadly dangerous, not only to the ship but to the lives of all on board. Thus sure of the rightness of his position he speaks his mind with boldness. Here now are two against one. Then comes the vote. The captain votes "yes." The owner of the vessel votes "yes." Paul votes "no." Julius now has the deciding vote. How does he vote? He votes as you and I should have probably voted in his situation. "These two men, he says, are men of the sea; they vote to go. I am going to vote with them, since they know the sea as this preacher cannot know it." So the decision is made that they should leave Fair Havens for the harbor of Phoenix. At once they put their decision into action.

II

In the second scene nature does an about-face. The blue skies become black with scudding storm clouds. The gentle south breeze whips to the northeast and rises quickly into
the dimension of a hissing hurricane. The once placid sea, as if in resentment, begins to rage and curl its lip. Every member of the committee knows that a mistake has been made. Those who had no vote in the matter know that a mistake has been made. They know also that they have reached the point of no return. They cannot alter their decision. They must now face the consequences of their wrong choice.

But these men are neither parlor soldiers nor millpond sailors. They are men who have been hardened by facing many a danger. More than once they have had to fisticuff with death. They are too brawny and brave to take their fate, whatever it may be, lying down. So they set about at once, taking every possible measure to guard against disaster. First they run under the shelter of a little island and take up the lifeboat, which in those days trailed behind the vessel. But, of course, in time of storm it became a menace rather than a help.

Next they tie up the ship, using frapping cables. They are trying to keep the frail thing from falling apart. So they rope it somewhat as we used to rope an old-fashioned trunk. Then on the second day they throw out part of the cargo. That is, they throw away a bit of the purpose of the voyage in order to be able to make the voyage. On the third day they even go to the extreme of throwing out some of the tackling of the ship.

On the fourth day what do they do? They do nothing. There is nothing to do. They have gone as far as their human ingenuity can take them. Then comes that inevitable rotting down of morale that always goes with idleness, whether voluntary or enforced. With nothing to do but wait for coming tragedy; with nothing to do but face the grim fact that they will soon be just bits of human wreckage among the crawling things at the bottom of the sea, no wonder that they go to pieces. Luke writes of them, and he was among the lot, “All hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” As a result of their decision they reach despair.

III

The third scene brings a hint of the dawning of a new day. It comes about, as great movements so often come about, through one God-girded man. There are two hundred and seventy-six men on this vessel. Of those two hundred and seventy-six, two hundred and seventy-five are whipped. They have given up hope. They huddle together on the deck, blaming their officers, blaming fate, or blaming the storm. But they are without hope. Then there comes the hint of day.

“After long abstinence,” we read, “Paul stood forth in the midst of them.” “Paul stood up” is the modern translation. While others are despairing, Paul, who faces the same danger, the same ordeal, does not despair. He believes that though all the ingenuity of man has gone for nothing, that though their self-efforts have proved futile, there is still something God can do.

Thus believing, he gives himself to prayer. We can
easily tell the nature of his prayer. For whom does he pray? He does not simply pray, “Lord, save me.” He does not even confine his prayer to, “Lord, save me and my fellow Christian, Luke.” He prays for all on board. They are all on the same vessel. He prays for the soldiers and the sailors. He prays for the pagans. He prays for those who are hard to live with and for those who are kindly. He puts his arm around every man on board. Therefore he comes with this word: “Be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all that sail with thee.” God has given Paul all on board because he has asked for them. I am sure, too, that these men who were without hope listened to this amazing word from one who stood up when everybody else was down.

Paul stood up. I like that. It is easy to stand when everybody else is standing. It is easy to recite your creed when everybody else is reciting it. But when one has to stand alone and recite alone, that takes something. What a man!

Though giant rains put out the sun,
   Here stand I for a sign.
Though Earth be filled with waters dark,
   My cup is filled with wine.
Tell to the trembling priests that here
   Under the deluge rod,

Paul stood up because through faith he was braced by a strength that could not have been his except for the undergirding of the Everlasting Arm.

Now, when he has thus delivered himself, though these people do not fully believe him, yet they do listen to that command, “Be of good cheer.” What a futile appeal it would have been if Paul had not had cheer in his own heart! Yet they listen to him, though they may have said, “I can’t believe it, but this I can believe: Paul himself is sure of it. This amazing man really expects his God to do something for us! By some mad chance maybe he will.” Thus their skies begin to be lighted by a little gray touch of dawn. They begin in some measure to share Paul’s faith.

“I believe God,” he shouts. That is the foundation on which he has built his hope. No other foundation will serve. “Be of good cheer.” “I believe in the weather”? No, the weather is just as black as it has ever been. “I believe in the seaworthiness of the ship”? No, it is threatening to go to pieces under their feet. “I believe in the centurion, in the captain, in the owner”? No, they are good, decent men, but powerless. “I believe in the soldiers and the sailors”? No, they are utterly futile and are huddling together in despair. “I believe God.” That is something one can stand on with assurance. Though the very ribs of nature may break up under his feet, it will be for him
only the rocking of an infant's cradle, while he is safe in
the arms of him who loves him and saves him by his grace.

IV

Now, having thus delivered himself, what next? Paul
does not sit down and leave it all to God. There are times
when we have to leave all to God because there is nothing
we ourselves can do. But in almost every instance faith
leads to cooperation. If I shout “Fire!” and nobody moves,
it is because nobody believes. If one believed, he would
make for the door. My father was a Christian farmer, but
when spring came he did not pray God to plant corn in one
field and sow wheat in another. He told me to do that.
Had he done nothing but pray, we all would have starved.
Even when the crops were made and the food put on the
table, if we had refused to eat, we still would have starved.
We have to cooperate with God. Almost everything we do
is a matter of cooperation.

Having given assurance that God is going to see them
through, Paul says, “You’ve got to do your part. For one
thing, you must eat.” During this storm they have been
unable to prepare food and would have been unable to eat
it if they had prepared it. Thus they are too weak to
cooperate with God in their own salvation. “You must eat
something,” Paul urges. But he does more than urge. He
takes a bit of bread, and standing there on that storm-swept
deck he asks the blessing and begins to eat. So what?
“Then were they all of good cheer.” Faith is such a

beautifully contagious something! So cheered are they that
they themselves take bread and thus help to fit themselves
for the hard task ahead. God works through human
bodies as well as through souls, and one is as sacred as the
other.

Then, when the sailors are seeking to play the coward
by deserting the ship and leaving their fellow voyagers to
their fate, Paul, discovering their contemptible and
cowardly purpose, says to the centurion, “Unless these
remain in the ship, you cannot be saved.” That is “We
are all on the same boat. What will hurt one will hurt the
other. What will wreck one will wreck the other. We
must be saved together, or we won’t be saved at all.”

How slow we have been to learn that! Almost all the
tragedies that have come upon our world have come
because we have never learned that we cannot have a
New Testament salvation unless we are willing to share it
with somebody else. I believe in individual salvation with
all my heart. But I believe it is something that simply has
to be shared. No nation can be saved alone. No group can
be saved alone. No church can be saved alone. No indi­
vidual can be saved alone. What hurts one nation hurts the
other. What hurts one group hurts the other. What hurts a
white man will hurt a Negro man. What hurts a Negro man
will hurt a white man. We all of every race, creed, and
color are bound up in a bundle of life with each other.
We can no more loose ourselves from our brothers than we
can loose ourselves from our own shadows. “Unless the
men remain in the ship,” Paul said, “you cannot be saved.”
They remain in the ship, and instead of every fellow being for himself, each helps the other. The command is given that those who can swim jump into the sea first and then those who are more helpless can come later. Those who can swim help those who cannot. And so it is that the story has this happy ending: "They escaped all safe to land." What a surprise! It is a surprise to this day. But how incredible their escape must have been to those who participated in this very exciting ordeal.

Who was the most useful man, the most essential man, on board that ancient merchant vessel? If a vote had been taken when the ship was anchored in the port of Fair Havens, I know at least one who would not have been elected. That was a Jewish preacher named Paul. The only vote he would have stood a chance of winning would have been from his fellow, Dr. Luke, and the few other Christians who might have been on board.

But after they had reached land in safety, if someone had asked, "To whom of all that sailed with you do you owe the most?" Paul would have been elected unanimously. He saved every man on board as truly as if he had swum out with each of them on his shoulders. Paul took Jesus seriously when Jesus said, "All things are possible to him that believeth." There is no greater service that we can render in our generation than being, after the manner of Paul, believing men. "Lord, increase our faith."

11. An Unexpected Conversion

James, the Brother of Jesus

Then he appeared to James.—I Cor. 15:7

According to the New English Bible, Paul begins this great passage by affirming that he is handing on to us certain facts. He is not speaking of "true facts," but just facts. I remember a debater of my boyhood, quite a keen one at that, who had a way of saying, "My opponent makes this assertion, but I deny that fact." Of course such an argument was futile. No denial is explosive enough to wreck a fact. Paul then is here dealing with facts.

Among these facts he asserts that Jesus made separate appearances to three different individuals. He appeared unto Cephas. We can understand something of the reason for that. Cephas had denied him. In a moment of cowardly weakness he had sworn that he had never met this Master he deeply loved. So tragic was this downfall that Cephas had ceased to count himself among the Master's friends. It was, therefore, necessary for Jesus to send this special
word, “Go tell my disciples and Peter.” Even that was not enough. He appeared unto Cephas personally.

Then Paul affirms that Jesus has appeared to him. That was the central fact of Paul’s experience. The story of this appearance is told three times in the brief book of Acts. Without that appearance the Paul we know would never have existed. But Christ did appear to this bitter enemy and win him to himself.

“Then he appeared to James.” When I first really read that word, it took me by surprise. Why to James? It seems that of all others James would have been least in need of such an appearance. He knew Jesus in the flesh. I doubt if even mother Mary had had as much fellowship with Jesus in the flesh as did James. These two had played together as boys. They had eaten together, slept together, gone to the synagogue together. Together they had rambled the hills about Nazareth. For more than a quarter of a century they had lived in the same home. Yet it was needful that the risen Lord should appear to James. Why?

There are three periods in the life of James to which I wish to call attention.

I

Look first at James’s relationship with Jesus before Calvary. When James was born, Jesus was in all probability a toddler. Very soon it became a part of the duty and privilege of Jesus to look after this baby brother. They were both bright, well trained, deeply and earnestly religious. It was not long, we may be sure, before this older brother began on behalf of James to cultivate his genius for storytelling. Some of the stories were original. But most of them had to do with their own people. James had listened with wide-eyed wonder as Jesus had told of Israel’s cowardly and heroic yesterdays.

But they had hardly reached their teens, I daresay, before they ceased to see eye to eye. They were of different temperaments. James was by nature a conservative and a literalist. He was a born Pharisee. He clung with desperate tenacity to the letter of the law. Jesus was the opposite. He was inclined to be what we would today call a liberal. He looked behind the mere externals to the heart of things. He soon began to tell James stories that showed this liberal and progressive view.

James could not take it. This progressive brother of his grieved him deeply. Doubtless he tried hard to set him right. But, though Jesus was always sweet tempered and patient, he flatly refused to change. By and by, I imagine, they were less free and frank than they had been in their boyhood years. Though working in the same shop, they began little by little to grow apart.

Then came an event that should have brought them closer together but perhaps pushed them farther apart. Father Joseph died. James, of course, grieved over his death. I have an idea that a large part of his grief was that Jesus, now being the head of the family, might taint his younger brothers and sisters with his too liberal views.

Soon there was a second shock; Jesus began to talk of
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going on a mission. He seemed bent on playing rabbi, in spite of the fact that he lacked the training that James was sure a rabbi ought to have. Naturally he sought to persuade him against such an adventure, but in vain.

Then one day Jesus tumbled the responsibility of the little shop and of the family onto the sturdy shoulders of James and set out on his mad mission. Nor was this mission an entire flop, as James expected it to be. Wherever Jesus went, he won attention. He attracted even more attention than James was willing for him to attract. The rumors that blew in, while in some respects encouraging, were, to James at least, discouraging. Though this strange brother of his seemed to be on the way to success, James could not fully approve.

Then came his return to his native village and his appearance in his home church. I do not know that James and his family knew that Jesus was going to be the preacher of the day. But the family was there. When Jesus stood up to read, I see that James was clenching his fists. His calloused palms became wet. He was saying to himself, “There is absolutely no telling what this strange brother of mine is going to say.” However, he began better than James could have hoped. Jesus took a great text, brushed the dust of the centuries off it, and said, “Today in your very hearing this scripture has come true.” As the congregation listened with eagerness, James relaxed, wiped his damp palms, and whispered, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

But hardly had he relaxed and begun to take pride in his brother before that brother got off on the race question.

AN UNEXPECTED CONVERSION

In so doing he did not say that the Jewish people were not really the chosen of the Lord. Indeed, he had no definite word to say against any member of the congregation or any member of the Jewish race. He did remind them that when God wanted a boarding place for his hunted prophet, Elijah, he had to find that place among pagans, even in the land of Jezebel. He also said that though Elisha was gifted of God with the power to cure leprosy, the only man who got cured was an outsider named Naaman. That was too much. At once the congregation exploded into an active volcano. The preacher would have been mobbed had he not in hot haste made an all but miraculous escape.

How strange, and yet how human and up-to-date! These people were deeply religious. But a great deal of their joy in religion was not the conviction that they were right, but rather the certainty that all outsiders were wrong. When the Lord called Jonah to go to Nineveh and cry against it, he flatly refused. Why? Because he thought the Ninevites had no capacity for repentance? Not a bit of it. He refused to go not because he was sure they would not repent, but because he was afraid they would. If that should happen, then God would love them as well as he loved the Jews. That would never do. Hence he took to his heels.

On the streets of our town, a gentlemen said to me one morning, “Brother X told his congregation yesterday that they were not the only ones that were going to be saved.” In astonishment I answered, “Did he really say that?” “Yes,” was the reply. “Well,” I prophesied, “he will not be here another month.” He was not there another week. What
was the matter? Did he tell his people that they were pagans? No. Did he tell them that they were strangers to the light? No. He only told them that they did not have a corner on the light. That was enough to cost him his position. It was even so in ancient Nazareth. Heartbroken James went home that day confessing to himself, “I would have joined the mob but for my peculiar relationship to the preacher.”

In afterdays the utter blackness of the situation took on for James at least a touch of gray. Rumors were blowing about that Jesus was not quite sane. Indeed, some affirmed that he was mad. This was disturbing, but a lack of sanity was less offensive to James than a lack of orthodoxy. Then, too, this gave James a chance to do a gallant and, as he thought, a very liberal thing. He decided to go after his mad brother and bring him home.

So with Mary and his brothers he set out. They had no trouble finding the house where Jesus was stopping. But that house was so crowded that they could not get in. Therefore they sent this word to Jesus: “Your mother and brothers are waiting outside to see you.” Then they waited until at last the messenger returned alone.

“Isn’t he coming out?” questioned James. “No,” was the staggering reply. “Well, what did he say?” “He said that his mother and brothers were those who did the will of God.” At that James’s face must have flamed with anger. Then, I think, he dusted this benighted brother off his hands, vowing, “I’ll have nothing more to do with him.” To that vow he remained true to the bloody end.

Not only did James hold to his resolve, but it would seem that he made the other members of his family do the same, with the exception of Mary. When the storm clouds began to gather, and when there came the shadow of a cross, she could not hold aloof. But it is a very significant fact that when Jesus died, so far as his family was concerned, he was utterly alone except for the presence of his mother. It is doubtful if even she was there to the ugly end. Her new son, the beloved apostle, had probably already taken her to his own home. Thus James let the curtain fall on a tragedy that he refused to share.

Where was James when Jesus died? Nobody knows. We only know that he was not by the cross. How did he react to this grim tragedy? Again we are not told. But wherever he was, I am sure he did not react in this fashion: He did not boast that he had held out firmly against this mistrusted brother to the bitter end. He was not affirming with devilish glee, “I never went about that skull-shaped hill. Not only so, but I saw to it that not one of my younger brothers and sisters was there. I am glad to say that I did my best to see to it that he died alone.” James was a hard man, but he was not that hard.

I feel sure that the grim night that settled over Calvary was brighter than the noonday sun in comparison with the blackness that made hell for James. Now that Jesus was gone, a thousand memories of glad yesterdays flooded his
cold and broken heart. He remembered the tender relationship that he had known with this strange brother in youth's bright morning. How tender Jesus had always been. How strong and patient and loving. The realization of his own stupid blindness tortured him as the very fires of hell.

Not only was James sorry for his neglect in the Nazareth home, but he was more sorry still that he had been too blind and stubborn to share the heavy burdens of Jesus. He felt that he could never forgive himself for allowing him to tread the winepress alone. He felt that his own hands had pressed the thorn crown on that innocent brow, that he had driven the spikes into those hands that were so often lifted in blessing. This he had done by standing aloof and doing nothing at all.

Then it happened. This crushed and desperate man stood face to face with the risen Lord. What was said? Nobody knows. I can imagine that, like Thomas, James fell at his feet, sobbing, “My Lord and my God.” Of this we may be sure: The wintry heart of this hard man burst into spring. As in Bunyan’s immortal story, his too heavy burden fell from his bowed shoulders, and he was free. Having become willing to do Jesus’ will, James had at last come to know.

III

What was the outcome? James became a disciple. When we see the friends of Jesus gathering in the Upper Room, Mary is there. But she is not alone. All the family are with her. When James came, his brothers came also. If he had helped them to stray, he also helped to bring them back.

Not only did James become a Christian, but he became an apostle. This was due in part, I daresay, to his leadership and ability. But it was perhaps due even more to his relationship to Jesus. The fact that he was the brother of the Lord seems to have caused Simon Peter to regard him with an almost superstitious reverence. One of the shabby scenes in Simon’s life is when he turned away from the Gentiles because of certain messengers that had come from James.

Not only did James become an apostle, but he became the president of the church, where he rendered a very distinctive service. When a meeting was called to decide whether Christianity should be just another Jewish sect or a world religion, it was James who presided over this meeting. It was this hard-core conservative who made perhaps the decisive speech, and who certainly cast his vote in favor of the liberal view.

What kind of man was James? Tradition gives him certain names that indicate his character. He was never the passionate and devoted lover of men that Paul was. He never put his arms around the world as did the apostle to the Gentiles. His ministry was confined to Jerusalem. They called him James, the Just. Now justice is not the most beautiful of the virtues. It is not one that always makes its possessor lovable. “Even for a just man,” said Paul, “one of us would hardly die, though perhaps for a good man
one might actually brave death" (Rom. 5:7 NEB). He became James, the Just.

James is also called a bulwark of the people. That is, James was a sturdy man, a staunch man. In the Old Testament we read that God sought for one to stand in the gap for the land, but could find none. James was a man who could fill a gap. He was a salty soul who could take a position that required sturdy courage and hold it. He was a man of strength.

Finally he was called "camel knees." He was a man so given to prayer that his knees became calloused like those of a camel. In his epistle he tells us that one reason our lives are empty, that we are often without any power, is that we do not pray. "You do not have, because you do not ask." He tells us further that the prayer of a good man is a mighty force. James had discovered that in his own life.

"Then he appeared to James." So what? James never, I repeat, became such a radiant saint as Paul. But in this he was like the greatest of apostles. He saw the risen Savior and was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. That was enough. That made the best possible James. If you thus obey, he will not make you like your hero. He will make you into your best possible you.

12. An Amazing Boast

Paul’s Steadfastness

Hence I never lose heart.—II Cor. 4:16 (Moffatt)

“I never lose heart.” It is not necessary to define that word. We all know what it is to lose heart, both from our own experience and from that of others. When I was a boy, we had a neighbor, Zan Pigg by name, who eked out a meager existence on a little hillside farm at the head of White Oak Creek. Though Zan could calculate interest with the accuracy of a computer, he could neither read nor write. Zan explained the tragedy of his ignorance in these words: “I went to school for three days, but I just couldn’t get the blank stuff in my head.” There you have it. Zan failed because he lost heart.

Why does this boast of Paul amaze us?

1. It amazes us because losing heart is so nearly universal. All sorts and conditions of men lose heart. It is