

A Difference

This law works with mathematical exactitude in the realm of the spiritual. Law reigns here just as it does in all other departments of God's world. What you are today morally is not an accident. It is a result of the preparation of yesterday. The disciple Judas becomes a traitor. He did not reach that abysmal depth at a single bound. The dark destiny that he achieved was a result of previous wrong choices. He entered the door for which he was ready. A certain man Daniel climbs the stairway and flings open his window and prays when he knows that it is a matter of death. How did he find courage to do it? His present might and power and courage were no accidents. They, too, were the outcome of his yesterdays. He entered the large and heroic door for which he had made himself ready. He had begun his preparation in his very childhood. He had furthered it as he purposed in his heart years ago that he would not defile himself. He had perfected it by his fidelity all through the intervening years.

Two men, faithful soldiers, at least outwardly, Macbeth and Banco, come home from the battle. They both are met by wierd sisters. Both have pledges made tending to rouse within them a lust for power. The seeds of unholy ambition find a prepared soil in the heart of Macbeth. But they can not take root in the heart of Banco. Macbeth listens eagerly, hungrily, believingly. Banco listens with a kind of unheeding indignation saying, "Speak thou to me who neither beg nor fear your favors nor your hate." From this scene Banco enters the door of a larger fidelity. Macbeth enters the chamber of horror where lie the corpses of his victims. Each enters the door for which he is ready.

So the choices you make determine the characters you form. This is a law as fixed as the law of gravitation. Two young fellows, one of whom has behind him a life of loyalty to principle, and the other a life of petty disloyalties, meet the same temptation. One enters the door of a larger strength and the other enters the door of the penitentiary. That is no more to be wondered at than the fact that the same men dumped into the river, one having learned to swim and the other had not, that one goes to the shore and the other goes to the bottom.

Herein lies the logic of heaven and hell. It is marvelous to me how any intelligent man can fail to believe in at least some kind of Heaven and hell, if he believes in the immortality of the soul at all. Because different choices do make different characters, and different characters must lead as inevitably as night follows the day to different destinies.

Here are two children in a home. They are equally loved, but one day one is carried out into a lonely spot, a hole is dug in the ground, and he is placed there, and the dirt is thrown on him, and those who love him never look on his face again. Why? It is not because that he is not as much loved as his brother who is still petted and cared for in the home. The difference is just this: that one is alive and the other is dead.

Now, wrong choice means sin. "And the wages of sin is death." Sin kills the soul; "whereas he that has the Son hath life." The necessity for Heaven and hell grow out of the stern necessity for the different treatment for the living and for the dead. Hell is simply the burying ground of souls that through wrong choices have killed themselves, have become dead in trespasses and in sin.

So that Heaven and hell cease to be arbitrary matters. If you go to hell it will not be because an angry God flung you there. If you

find yourself at last upon the eternal rubbish heap it will be because you prepared yourself for just that sort of a destiny. You are going to the place for which you have fitted yourself. If you have fitted yourself for hell by selfish and unholy living, God Himself has not the might to bring you into Heaven.

Do you remember those two that came to Jesus and asked for a place on the right and left in His kingdom? Do you know what He said? He said, "I can not give it to you." He said, "There is such a place prepared, but it is waiting for the man that prepares himself for it." (The bow of Ulysses.)

Heaven simply means an adaptation to one's environment. This being true, there is no way of getting any man into Heaven when he has hell in his heart. (The man who got in the hell of a fix.)

This, then, brings the question squarely up to you. For what are you preparing yourself? You hold your destiny in your own hand. The man who claims that he is going to make a lawyer, but throws away his days of preparation and is never found in his office when he enters upon his practice, is not preparing himself for law but for failure. The same is true of every other profession. The man who is preparing himself for a life of Christlike service and yet ignores Christ, ignores His claim upon him and ignores the church, is preparing himself also for moral failure. The man who, knowing himself to be a child of eternity, lives as a child of the world, is not getting ready for Heaven, because you can not go to Heaven the way of hell.

So the thing that counts both in this world and the world to come is preparation. And this preparation must be made before the time of testing. It is too late to prepare for the examination when the questions are on the blackboard. It is too late to prepare for the storm when it is already upon you. It is too late to prepare for eternity when the curtains are already lifted. The preparation that counts is a present preparation. So I can find no more fitting word with which to close this lesson than just this: Prepare to meet your life's responsibilities in society, in the home, in the church, and thus preparing, you will also prepare to meet God.

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