FLAMING YOUTH
Esther 4:14

"Who knowest whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this."

I

Youth of today is in the spotlight. As to what we think of our younger generation may be a matter of question but that we are thinking of them there is no mistake. Parents are worried, teachers are worried, many religious workers are worried. Then our young people are worried too. They are wondering just how they are going to get across to us, that we are at least fifty years behind the time. They are wondering if there is any painless way in which they can inform us that we are fossils, troublesome fossils at times, at other times sweet and easily managed fossils, but fossils always. They regard us as mid-Victorian. That is the very worst thing they can say about us. To be mid-Victorian is infinitely worse than plain savagery. So youth and age are both worried.

This clash between youth and age is by no means new. It has belonged to every century of the world's history. The older generation has always eyed the younger with fear and trimbling. Not long ago a tablet was found in the Orient that was some six thousand years old. This tablet said, "This world is soon coming to an end. This is evidenced by the fact that children are disobedient to parents and everybody wants to write a book." That is, youth was in revolt at that day. They had flaming youth six thousand years ago.

When the Jewish captives returned to Jerusalem, one of their first tasks was the rebuilding of the temple. When the foundation was laid the young men and women burst into shouts of rejoicing but the older people who had seen the former temple burst into tears. How natural! Youth
Flaming Youth

looked on this growing temple and said, "It is going to be a wonder." Age looked upon it and said, "It is nothing to compare with the one I knew when I was a boy." The things we saw in childhood are so often more beautiful and better than the things we see today. I went back to my old home years ago. I found the hills a little closer to the house and the fields a little smaller than they were when I went away. A ditch that I had seen thru the eyes of childhood seemed to me at least one hundred feet deep but in reality was less than ten. That there should be, therefore, some conflict between youth and age is only natural.

But this natural conflict seems to be greatly increased today. At least this is the opinion of many. There are very divergent views of the youth question, but as stated above youth is demanding attention. It is being talked about and written about, criticized adversely and favorably as never before.

There are those who believe that this present generation is the most hopeless, irreverent, rebellious, cantankerous generation that the world has ever seen. They stand and watch their little antics somewhat as a mother hen who has hatched a family of ducklings instead of chickens. They feel that they have a perfect right to be uneasy. They point out the vast increase in crime and remind us that from sixty-five to seventy-five percent of all the crime committed in the United States is being committed by the youth under twenty-five.

2. Then there are those who say that this is the best generation that the world has ever seen. In proof of this they call attention to the fearless way in which youth has broken away from old conventions. They point out their freedom from many of the prejudices that have shackled their elders. They call attention to their passion for brotherhood and
Flaming Youth

for their determination to outlaw war. They emphasize their freedom from hypocrasy. The frankness with which they confess their follies and even their glaring sins.

3. Then there are those who take the middle position. They tell us that the youth of today are just like they have always been, and that is in a measure true. The heart of humanity is the same thru the years. Our fathers and mothers used to worry about us somewhat as we are worrying about you. Thirty years from now you will be worrying about somebody else and somebody else will be worried with you just as we are. But while we are alike in many respects there are also some differences. This differ­ence grows out of the difference in our environment and training. We who are older grew up under circumstances that I feel were a bit more whole­some, certainly less fraught with temptation than those surrounding yours.

II

What are some of the changes that your day has brought? Your difficulties are somewhat greater than ours because your generation has about a maximum of temptation with the minimum of restraint.

1. There is a maximum of temptation. When I was a boy on the farm my hours of work were over long, my amusements were clean and wholesome. They were not shot thru with too many thrills or too feverish excitement. They were confined largely to fishing, hunting, riding a yearling and plowing a mule. I can remember the first bicycle I ever saw. If I were to see a man today jump off the Mutual Tower with nothing but a parasol and land safely in Court Square, I would not be more surprised or thrilled. Our shows were not of such a nature to stir the blood. Punch and Judy was the climax. Then once by paying a dime I heard a graphophone growl
Flaming Youth

for a minute like an enraged dog then creek out "Two Little Girls In Blue" sang by the New York Graphophone Company of New York and Paris. Then there were other growls followed by what meant to be music. When we danced we only touched finger tips while some orator shouted, "Eight hands up and couple to the left."

But our day has brought many changes. Our amusements have become thrilling to the point of intoxication. They have schooled us to live in the realm of the senses. They have cultivated a woeful lack of capacity for enjoyment without the stimulus of things outside us. Conversation has become a bit of a bore. For many a young couple to have to spend an evening together at home with the doors open would be nothing less than a short prison term.

For instance, we have the automobile. It is a wonderful invention but it has brought changes. It has made the roadhouse easily accessible. It has brought the county courthouse with its senseless marriage escapades within a stone's throw of us, and has removed the place of courtship for many couples from the wholesome environment of the home to the byways of the country. The chaperon is as dead as King Tut.

"Poor thing, she is dead, and they are alone,
'Tis the death that all mortals must pay,
Of all the freedom they have had in their lives,
They were never so free as today."

This does not mean, of course, that the old-fashion way was perfect. Nor does it mean that the new-fashion way is altogether evil. It does mean that it is bereft of safeguards that the other had. There was a time when parents could safeguard their daughters against undesirable lovers. That is vastly difficult today. Such a classic as this, for instance, belongs to another generation.
He is teaching her arithmetic,
He says that is his mission,
So he kissed her once and kissed her twice
And said, now that's addition.

And as she added kiss to kiss
With quiet satisfaction,
She sweetly gave the kisses back
And said, now that's subtraction.

But dad appeared upon the scene
And made a quick decision.
You keep that lad six blocks away,
He said, that's long division.

Then we are living in the days of the movies. Now I am not such a crank as to say that there are no pictures that are clean and wholesome. The picture show has great educational values if rightly used, but too often it is controlled by those whose god is gold. Therefore, we have shows that cannot but be degrading. The love-making is coarse. The kissing is not the flower of the holy and tender regard one for the other. It is often rather a vulgar chewing of each other's faces.

Then the modern dance and the bathing beach have come with their death blows to our modesty. Modesty has not died of a languishing disease; it rather seems to have died of an acute attack. Along with this has come the new freedom of woman. Many young girls have gone to work in offices. Sometimes the atmosphere of the office is clean and wholesome. At other times it is not. At times the man in charge is keen, attractive, experienced and without scruples.

Finally there has been the failure of those of us in middle life. If youth is flamed in an evil way the generation just ahead is largely responsible. There is no criticism that we can make of youth that we cannot make in a fuller way of the generation just ahead. Our example in flaming away from the fine idealism that should have held us steady has set a very poor example for those who are following in our
2. Then this maximum of temptation has come at a time when there is a minimum of restraint.

First, it has come at a time when there is a weakening of the restraint exercised by the home. Many of our young people have been lured by the opportunities of the city to leave their homes. Then those who have remained in their homes have not enjoyed the wholesome training and restraint often times that they needed for a strenuous hour like this. It has been a day when it was easy for fathers and mothers to hand over their responsibilities to others. This has been too largely the case. Therefore, the home has not been in our generation the strong bulwark against evil that it was years ago.

Second, there has been the weakening of a strenuous and chastening public opinion. Every normal soul likes to be thought well of by their fellows. When certain evils met with strong disapproval that disapproval becomes a safeguard. But practices that yesterday would have disgraced us are smiled upon today. Our youth are more frank, but may this not be accounted for, at least in part, by the fact that so few are now horrified by a story of any kind of moral lapse.

Third, there are the lessening restraints of religion. I am not a pessimist. I realize that thru the centuries spiritual tides have ebbed and flowed. We are today witnessing an ebb tide. The authority of the church is not what it was a score of years ago. The authority of the scriptures is being seriously questioned by multitudes, and by multitudes of others it is being utterly cast aside. Modern youth has felt all this and has been affected by it. Therefore, it is not to be wondered at
Flaming Youth

that so many have lost their footing. It is greatly heartening that so many have stood true and are passing thru the fiery furnace without getting more than the smell of fire on their garments.

III

Now what shall I say to you whose lot has been cast in these rather taxing and exciting days?

1. I offer you my congratulations. Long ago when the gladiators were brought to take their places in the contests of the arena, they would stand before the Emperor and say, "We who are about to die, salute you."

So we of the older generation. We do not claim that we have who played our part any too well. We are earnestly hoping that you will make a better job of your task that we have made of ours, congratulate you. Your lot has been cast in a time when hard battles are to be fought, and when you, therefore, have a great opportunity to develop the heroic that is within you.

2. Accept your task as from God. You have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. If it is a difficult time, as it is, it means that He has trusted you, that He is counting on your chivalry and on your courage. When a battle is to be fought, it is the regiment of tested courage that the officer puts in the place of extreme danger. Remember too, if your task is heavy His grace will be correspondingly great, for He says now and always, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

3. Finally, continue to be flaming youth. Let nothing put out your fire. Paul wrote a letter to a young man of long ago. In this letter he said, "Rekindle the gift of God that is within thee." If you let your
fire go out you are old however young you may be by the calendar. There are not a few of our youth of today who are distressingly old. They have lost their enthusiasm, they have lost their spirit of adventure, they bet on their doubts rather than upon their faith. The wise man in describing those who had grown old said, "They shall be afraid of that which is high." To fear high risks and high daring and high tests is to lose your youth even though you are in the springtime and to become prematurely old.

It is your fire that makes you fascinating. A house on fire always draws a crowd, but a soul on fire is infinitely the most fascinating spectacle in the world. Christ was such a soul. It is only those who flame that can walk with Him. The lukewarm, the half-hearted cannot abide. "I would thou wert either hot or cold. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold or hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

It is the coal of fire that gets the task done. Nothing worthwhile is achieved by the half-hearted. It is better to die than to allow anything to quench the holy fires of the soul. Years ago when Nero was Emporer of Rome, persecution and Christianity walked arm in arm. Hundreds of Christians were fed to wild beasts. Others were made into human torches, and others still were hung on forests of crosses. It was then that a certain captive named Lagia was brought into Rome and with her there was a faithful slave named Ursus. These were both devout Christians. Later this charming woman was loved by a Roman patriarch named Benicilus. He too became a Christian and was arrested along with the woman he loved, and held for punishment.

The days were full of excitement. The appetite of the populace that was glutinous for blood was being satisfied, but Lagia and her lover were not among the victims, but the populace was not disappointed.
Flaming Youth

They felt sure that Nero was contriving some exquisite mode of torture for those who were of noble birth. At last their time had come and the vast multitude was gathered in the Roman arena that was lighted by thousands of candelabra. They were on tiptoe of expectancy.

They had not long to wait. A man waived a handkerchief in front of Nero's stand. A door was pushed back and a man walked out into the arena. He was such a man as Rome accustomed as it was to gladiatorial contest had seldom ever seen, a veritable giant of a man, and walked to the middle of the arena, dropped upon his knees and began to pray. The crowds hissed about him. They were tired of seeing men die like sheep. They wanted to see the muscles of this great fellow brought into play. But the hissing soon ceased for they knew not what might happen when he met death eye to eye.

Then there was a blast of a silver trumpet and amidst the cry of gain keepers there dashed into the arena a great mad bull on whose horns was borne the nude form of a woman. The praying man opened his eyes and recognized the woman he loved. He sprang to his feet as if touched by living fire and rushed forward and seized the enraged beast by the horns and stopped him in his tracks. The two now stood so close that the bewildered gazers fancied they were looking at some huge statue. But in their seeming repose there was the contest of two sharply contending foes. The body of the bull was curved into a huge ball while his feet sank slowly into the sand. The hand of the giant sank between his shoulders while his muscles stood out as if they would burst the skin. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly the head of the beast began to turn in the hands of the man. There was a groan and a shriek in the balcony, then silence. So still it was that a fly might have been heard to buzz.
Flaming Youth

on the wing. Then a little faster and a little faster the head of the beast turned at last. Out from his shaggy jaws there dropped a frothing tongue. Then those sitting near enough heard the breaking of bones. The great bull turned on his side, his kneck broken in death. Then with deft fingers the giant untied the woman from his horns, threw a covering about her and gave her into the arms of her lover.

Conflict is as sharp today as it was then. It requires the same courage. Sin has the same deadliness. What is the hope of tomorrow? It is just this, that the youth of today will realize that it has come to the Kingdom for such a time as this and will arise from its knees in the strength of the God who answers prayer, to fight the good fight of faith and to liberate man from the curse of that which destroys the body as well as the soul. "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise from another source, but thou shalt surely be destroyed: and who knowest whether thou art come to the Kingdom for such a time as this."
"The Girl who Dared."

Esther, 4: 14.

"For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" The scene of this story is laid in the city of Shushan, the capital of the once great Persian Empire. The king called in the scriptures Ahasuerus is the Xerxes of the same history. If you are at all familiar with the character of Xerxes you know him for a man whose pride of position caused him again and again to play the imbecile. He looked upon himself as a bit of a god. He was, in fact, weak, lustful, pig-headed and childish.

You will recall him especially in relation to his campaign against Greece. He was head of the largest army of ancient days. He set out to the conquest of the Greeks with almost innumerable company. But the Greeks met his land forces at Marathon and utterly defeated them. His sea forces suffered a similar failure at the hands of the Greek fleet. He was idiotic enough to decorate a tree for its fidelity and also to have the waters of the Hellespont whipped and put in chains because they had wrecked his pontoon bridge.

The story opens in a grand way. I suppose there is scarcely a scene in ancient times that would appeal more strongly to many who live in this desert land of today. The palace is alive with gaiety and laughter. The author makes us see something of the beautiful decorations, lovely awnings streaming from silver cords that are stretched from marble column to marble column. There is a feast going on and the guests are reclining upon beds of silver and gold. But the most appealing part of the story is this, the king with his princes are all hilariously and gloriously drunk, which leads me to say, "What a glorious thing is personal liberty!"

Our anti friends are funny folks. They want to repeal a recent amendment to the Constitution. Their reason for so doing is just this, that it is so terribly violated. Men are drinking so much more than they ever did before. I went down to hear Gilbert Chesterton speak the other day. And the man who introduced him, - I never learned his name - could not keep his petty anti-ism even out of his short speech of introduction. He suggested that Mr. Chesterton write an article on the "Wetness of a Dry Country." He was opposed to prohibition because it gave men an opportunity to get drunk. He wants the good old days of temperance to return, when there is a saloon in every block and all men are sober.

The scene of this story is the ideal situation. Here is a veritable paradise of drunkenness. I have heard men say again and again that whiskey is a good thing, that it is good for some things. Truly it is. If a man wants to get drunk I do not know of a better thing in the world to help him. If he wants something that will steal away his brains, blow out the light within his mind, if he wants something that will take the heart out of him, that will brutalize him, that will make him a menace, that will fling him upon the cinder pile here and in the hell by and by - I do not know of a better something than liquor.
Now, it is true to form here. The king and his princes are brought under its ennobling influence. They are drunk. Then what does this kingly man? He bethinks him of his beautiful and charming queen. He sends for Vashti. He wants her to be seen by this august company of drunkards that are assembled about him. They have enough inside them now to appreciate the beautiful. Their sense of the artistic and the aesthetic has been highly developed by countless draughts of liquor. So the king orders in the queen.

But this queen, to her great credit be it said, refuses to come. It is true she lived a long time ago. She lived amidst the enervating and degrading influence of an oriental court. She was a member of the royal harem, but she had not sunk so low as to bid good-bye to her modesty altogether. And so though the wife of that day did not own her own person, yet this queen Vashti dared to say "No" to her royal and besotted husband.

So you see this ancient woman was a martyr to her modesty. May her tribe be multiplied. She did something that it was not easy to do. And you will know that I am speaking truth when I say that it is not easy for the modern girl to keep her modesty. It is a great deal harder, my young girl, for you to be modest today than it was for your sister of just a few years ago. It is harder because the trend of our modern day is strong in the direction of immodesty. There has been a lamentable letting down. Many of our present day girls are cheapening themselves, and the fact that they are doing so makes your position all the harder.

So I commend to you tonight the example of this ancient queen. I know she lost her place by her refusal to obey the king's command. I know she dropped out of the high society in which she had been accustomed to move. I know she lost the crown from her brow, but she did not lose the crown of her decency and of her modesty and of her self respect. The prizes that she lost may have been prizes indeed, but they were articles that cost more than she could afford to pay.

And mark me, heart, there are many seeming prizes that you may covet, but some of them cost too much. There was a young girl who left her modest country home in Tennessee. For a while she rode in the finest of autos and lovely jewels sparkled on her bosom. She was wonderfully gownéd, but Oh, the price she paid! Her magnificent costumes were but "gilded shrouds for the death she died daily." And the rustle of her silken skirts were mingled with the hiss of the adders that stung her soul.

So I beg you today do not make the prevailing standard about you your standard. It is not necessary that you do a thing simply because the other girl does that way. Do not feel called upon to cheapen yourself simply because she cheapens herself. Do not be so dead anxious for a beau that you will take up with any man who offers you a bag of pop-corn and a grin. The fellow that you can catch in that fashion is not worth the catching. And one that would have you under those circumstances is an idiot. Do not be cheap. I used to have a dog that would hung almost anything in the world except a possum. He had no enthusiasm for possums. He despised them because there was no fight in them.

And mark me, the young fellow today who is any account will like a bit of a chase. The hunter does not want to be hunted. Do not be like the young lady who received a telephone call. All she knew about the caller was that he had a masculine voice. And he said, "Will you marry
The girl who dared

me?" And with a thrill she said, "Yes indeed. Who is it please?"
"Yes", you say, "but I will be an old maid." All right, go to it. That
is no disgrace. The reason some of you are old maids now is because you
would not take some of the worthless scraps that other women are trying
now to get divorces from.

With the fall of Queen Vashti, Esther came to the throne. She was
selected from a great company of girls that were brought in before the
king. The reason for her selection was not the fact that she was a girl
of sense and character and courage. She had all these, but of course
they did not appeal to the sensual mutton-head, Xerxes. She was chosen
because she was beautiful. She was a regular Venus personal charm.
And physical beauty is a real asset if used right, as it is a terrible
danger if wrongly used.

Now, this young girl had not been long in her place of dignity and
position till she learned that these meant responsibility. Haman, a
court favorite, had got the consent of Xerxes to have every Jew in the
Empire killed. His motive for so doing was his personal hostility toward
one Mordecai. Mordecai had refused to bow to him and the ambitious and
prideful Haman could not endure his being on the earth.

So there came one day to this beautiful young queen a startling
message. It came from this man Mordecai. Mordecai, you remember, was
her foster father. He had raised her. He had loved her as his own
child and the message that he sent to her was this, that the whole
Jewish race was in danger of extermination, that she was to appeal to
the king on their behalf and seek to save them. Fearing that she might
waver, he urged it upon her using the strong language of the text:
"For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall re­
lief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and
thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art
come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Thus it is that he impresses upon Esther that while she is in a
position of greatness, while she is in a place of power, while she has
been crowned queen, - she has not been crowned for her own selfish
interests or for her own pleasure. She has been lifted to her high
position in the providence of God for such a time as this. She has
come face to face with this great privilege that she might from her high
position be able to grapple with the great and grave perils that now
confront God's people.

Thus it ever is. Opportunity is always a call to service. What­
ever of privilege comes to you comes not for yourself, but for others.
You have been privileged to live. It is a marvelous opportunity to
live. This life of yours brings to you weighty and eternal obli­
gations. You are honor bound to use your privileges that life brings, for the
others.

Esther was lifted out from among the captives and crowned and set
free. So you have been set free by the grace of God. If you have not
been, it is your privilege and obligation to be. You have been saved,
or you may be saved, but your salvation is not a thing for your own sel­
fish enjoyment. It is not simply to get you into Heaven. It will do
that, but it is to help you to get the other fellow there. Every ability,
every privilege, every opportunity you have is a call to service.

Esther came to the throne at a trying time. There were great
The girl who dared

perils facing her people. But it was her duty to change these perils into
privileges. It was her call to change this opposition into opportunity.
It was in her very problems and trials and difficulties that she was to
find her chance for the living of a great life and the doing of a great
task. To meet the needs of the hour God needed somebody He could use.
He always works His deliverances through men and women. She was the one
who was needed for that hour.

These are trying times in which you and I live. If you are an
earnest person I doubt not you find it hard sometimes to keep up your
courage. There is so much that is wrong. Our enemies seem to break upon
us as a flood. We feel at times that people are so far from being what
they ought to be. Our difficulties are so numerous and so obstinate.

But what are we to do? It is not ours to whine, nor is it ours
to surrender and give over the fight. I recall the very wise word that
my old teacher, Mr. Webb, said to me a few years ago. I was teaching
school at the time and invited him down to lecture in the town where I
was teaching. He came and delivered a lecture, but very few came to
hear him. I was much discouraged by their lack of interest, a bit hu­
miliated too. But when I apologized to him, his answer was this, "My
son, if everything and everybody was just as I ought to be, then they
would not need you and me." But because things are not right, we have
a job, the fascinating job of making them right.

Now, this beautiful and lovely queen who was come to the kingdom
in the providence of God to meet the very needs that are now facing her,
is in her great danger. What is her danger? It is not that she will
turn positive enemy to God's chosen people, who are also her people.
Mordecai was in no sense afraid that she would go to the king and ask him
to make good his promise to Haman. He was not at all afraid that she
would urge the extermination of her race. What he was afraid of was
this, that Esther would do nothing at all. He was afraid that she would
simply keep silent. He was afraid that she would say nothing.

That is what I fear for so many of you. I am not afraid that you
will ever become vicious. I am not afraid that you will ever be crim­
nals. I am not afraid that you will ever rob anybody. I am not afraid
that you will end your life in the penitentiary. I am afraid that you
will do nothing. I am afraid that you will take a negative attitude
toward the questions of supreme importance. I am not afraid that you
will fight against Christ and His church - I am afraid that you will simply
let them alone or that you will give them a half hearted support.

Yes, her danger was that she would keep silent, that she would
simply say nothing and do nothing. There were many reasons for her taking
this negative attitude. It seemed the expedient and the worldly wise
thing to do. Sometimes to speak out for God seems so inexpedient. But
expediency, as one has well said, is man's reason, to do right is God's.

She was urged to silence by her own pride. She was the daughter of
a captive race. The king did not know that. She was now a queen. It
would have been very easy for her to be ashamed of her humble origin.
I have seen folks that were who did not have one hundredth of her oppor­
tunity. Pride of position usually belongs to folks who get their position
because they are kin to somebody else who has won theirs. My step-aunt's
husband gets a job and I strut over it. Or somebody remotely connected
with me makes money and I stop associating with my old neighbors.

Do you happen to know in the wide world anything more contemptible
The girl who dared

than that? A swelling pride over what came to you at the hands of somebody else - truly collapse is ahead of the individual like that. You have possibly heard of that frog who wanted to migrate. He found two geese who were willing to help him, but they did not know how. The frog set his head to work and invented a plan. He secured a string. He took the middle and gave an end to each goose. The geese mounted into the air, the frog holding on to the middle of the string. He was elated. He got above the tops of the trees. He had never been so high before. All was going well till somebody looked up and saw the performance. The individual shouted, "Who invented that?" The frog swelled with pride, and unable to resist, shouted, "I invented that." And you know what happened. That man looked on the pavement at his feet to see a pile of minced frog.

Yes, it would have been very easy for Esther to have said, "I am queen now. There is no use in my letting the king know that I am a Jewess. I am just more fortunate than the rest. If they had been as beautiful as I, they might have escaped." It is a privilege to be beautiful. I have seen girls that were at once beautiful and unselfish, but the sweetest characters that I have known have not as a rule been those of most beautiful faces. I recall now a girl who was marvelously beautiful. She was perfectly conscious of the fact too. And she made that beauty count for all it was worth. She depended upon it to take the place of sympathy, thoughtfulness of others, kindness. She depended upon it even to take the place of intellectual equipment. She drifted through some ten years of boarding school life without ever having made any appreciable advance. And the years have passed and she has become a disappointment to herself, and a disappointment to her husband, and a disappointment to all who love her.

Esther might have been held from speaking by her own selfishness, by her love of ease. To speak might cost her her place. It might cost her endless trouble every way. Certainly the easiest way was simply to let it alone. The easiest way was simply to do nothing.

That is the easiest way for you. This is a needy world. The hope for this world, I am sure, and you are sure, is in the religion of Jesus Christ. God has no way of spreading this religion except through men and women like ourselves. I may refuse. That is the easy way, but it is not the best way. (The woman who wanted to work for the Lord.)

Esther was urged to keep silence, in the third place, by her fear. Cowardice came to her and said, "Do not speak. It may cost you your life! You know it was a death penalty to go unbidden into the king's presence unless he should see fit to extend to you his scepter. There was not the least telling what this imbecile king would do. He had thrown other queens away. Esther incurred an immense danger when she dared go plead for her people. But she would not let her cowardice conquer her. She would not turn her back on her plain duty. She would not be either bought by position or cowed by danger, but went straight to the task with this noble word on her lips: "If I perish, I perish."

Mark you, she did not have to go. She might have refused to do God's bidding, just as you and I may refuse. No man is compelled to be a hero. No human soul is compelled to do his duty. You may throw away your chance. You may desert your post. You may disappoint your friends. You may disappoint the dearest expectations of those who love you. You may turn your back upon the dearest longings and the dearest dreams of those who have lifted you into the light and given you your chance to be and to do and to serve.
"Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat;
Chose the one thing of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote.

"Blot out his name then; record one lost soul more.
One task more declined, one more foot-path untrod,
One wrong more to man,
One more insult to God."

(Grace Darling.)

Yes, Esther might have refused her task. She might have thrown away her opportunity. Many a man has. Many a woman has. You may stop your ears to the call tonight that comes to you. For mark you, a call does come. But I want to say this to you, you can not refuse except at an awful price. If you refuse then you must pay the penalty.

It is not that the world will be ruined and the church will be wrecked. "If you fail to help", said this wise Jew, "deliverance and relief will arise from another place." God needs you, do not forget that. He wants you. He wants you for just this time, and just this place. That is the reason you are here. But you may thwart God's purposes in your life. You may refuse. If you do God is not going to be finally defeated. Every man is needed, but no man is essential. God can run His world without you, and win His world without you if He has to.

How silly it is then for any of us to think that we are absolutely essential. "I will build my church", says Christ, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." You are not going to prevail against it and I am not. When I leave this church I expect it still to run on and when I leave this world I expect it still to keep on going. And yet we sometimes act as if we thought we could wreck God's church by our pouting. A woman came down here the other Sunday and the church was crowded and she could not get a seat. And she got mad at the usher and swished out and said she would never come again. Whether she has kept her word or not I do not know. There are too many others for her to be missed.

But while your failure will not wreck God's church, it will exact a terrible penalty of you. What is that penalty? The first penalty is this, you will miss the chance of rendering the help that you might have rendered. Do not say that there is nothing that you can do. There are opportunities big as eternity that knock at your door every day. There is an unsaved friend with whom you work in the office. Have you ever spoken to him pointedly and personally about Jesus? There is a godless crowd in which you are forced to move. Have you been brave enough to hold the standard up and keep true to your ideals in the trying situation?

I am not afraid that you will fail because you have no opportunity. I am afraid that you will fail because you refuse to seize the opportunity that is yours. Remember that that is the opportunity for which God is going to hold you responsible. There is a story of how a fierce battle was raging one day. A noble prince was fighting against great odds. There was a miserable craven who went to fight under his banner. But as he heard the din, as he saw men dying under the black shag of battle smoke, he said, "I too would fight if I had a keen blade like that of the prince, but this worthless thing, it is useless." And he broke it and threw it on the ground and hurried away.
The battle waxed hotter and hotter and the king was sore pressed. At last beset by many enemies, he found himself where the coward had stood. All hope seemed gone for he had no weapon in his hand. Then it was that he looked and saw the broken sword that the coward had thrown away. He seized this and with it he won the day and saved a noble cause. But the coward missed his chance.

In the second place, we will not only miss the privilege of rendering the service we might have rendered, but you will lose yourself. All the harshest words of Jesus are uttered not against the great criminals, but against the men who did nothing. The fig tree He cursed not because it bore thorns, but because it bore nothing. The vine was ordered to be destroyed not because it bore poisonous grapes, but because it bore nothing. The men of one talent was cast out not because he robbed his lord, but because he did nothing. The wicked who were turned into hell were not cast out because of anything wrong recorded against them. Their sentence was just this, "Inasmuch as ye did it not."

Oh heart, this fact is written broadly across every page of revelation. God has made an investment in you. He is expecting a return in terms of service. It is not simply that a man ought to help. He must help. It is not that a man ought to give - he must give. The penalty for refusal is certain destruction. "For he that saveth his life shall lose it and he that loseth his life shall keep it unto life eternal." (King Arthur's sword.)

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