NEHEMIAH

"The Man with a Job"

The Book of Nehemiah is a very human book. The hero is neither a prophet nor a priest. He is a layman, a statesman. He is a man moving in the atmosphere of royalty. While deeply religious, he has a childlike consciousness of the worth of his own work. Again and again he says in a beautifully naive fashion that "God will remember this to my credit." He has done something well, and he knows it, and he seeks credit for it on the books of Heaven. This is the man that rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

I

How did Nehemiah come to undertake this difficult task? As always he did both in spite of and because of.

1. In spite of. There were many reasons to believe that Nehemiah would never have undertaken this trying and thankless task. Had I been a part of the delegation that interviewed him, I should have gone with little confidence. This would have been the case for many reasons.

First, Nehemiah already had a job. It was more than a job—it was a position. It was a position that to the mind of the average man was simply ideal. He was cup-bearer to the king. That showed that he was a court favorite. As cupbearer he had little to do and drew a great salary for doing it. What a paradise!

Thus to appeal to a busy man, to one with a big and lucrative job, seemed hopeless. Yet it is the busy folks to whom we have to turn for practically all the work of the church. If you turn the pages of the Bible, you will find that when God calls folks into His service, they are the busy people. David was busy when he was called to the kingship. All the apostles of the Lord had jobs before
Jesus found them. The work of the church today is carried on not by folks that have nothing else to do, but by the folks that have much else to do.

Second, not only did Nehemiah already have a job, but he was so rich that he did not need to work anyway. This young man, now not more than thirty years of age, had already accumulated a considerable fortune. This is evidenced by the fact that during the twelve years he was governor at Jerusalem, he did not draw a dollar's salary for his services. Not only so, but he did not depend on the government for the feeding of the scores of people he had with him. He fed his helpers at his own expense. In addition, he took in one hundred fifty Jewish strangers that came to him from the surrounding country. He was a man of wealth.

Now through the centuries there have been wealthy men who have dedicated both themselves and their money to the services of the Lord. But these have been the exceptions rather than the rule. Here is Moses with his foot on the steps of the throne of Egypt. He dares to cast in his lot with a horde of slaves, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Here is aristocratic Isaiah, moving in the atmosphere of royalty, dedicating himself to God as a prophet. But the rule is that God has had to choose his missionaries and his ministers from the ranks of the poor. Here Paul's words are true: "Not many mighty and not many noble are called." Wealth has a strong grip. Few can break away from it. I should have had little hope of Nehemiah's volunteering for this high service, therefore, because he had a position of honor and because he had wealth. But in spite of these he volunteered.

2. What were his reasons? Look at the picture. First, he was a man of vital religion and, therefore, deeply interested in his own people. When a delegation came from far off Jerusalem, he gave them an interview. He had doubtless never seen the city of his fathers. He had been born and had grown to manhood in a foreign land. But he had doubtless had the teaching of pious parents. These had taught him a deep interest in his people. Therefore, when
he asked about the city of his fathers, he asked because he cared. The answer that he received was not flattering. He was told that the city was in a bad way. Its walls were torn down. Its gates had been burned with fire. The people themselves were poor, discouraged, in reproach. They were a bit of a laughing-stock with their enemies. They had refused to mingle with the Samaritans, and the Samaritans had come to hate them and to rejoice in their defeat and failure. This was certainly not an inviting field. Were I asking the average individual to join my church, I should not appeal to him by telling him that the building was little better than a wreck and that the congregation was in disgrace.

When Nehemiah heard this news he took it to heart. It became a personal matter with him. The story says that he actually wept over it. The picture of this highly successful young courtier weeping is a bit startling. These tears were very suggestive. Of course, that is not the case with all tears. There are some tears that are very cheap. I have known folks that could weep tears as large as peas, wipe them away, the next moment, and go on their heedless way. Tears may be not only futile but hardening.

But the tears of Nehemiah were what steam is to a locomotive. They showed that there was fire at the heart of it. There are some tears that lead to action. Jesus beheld the city and wept over it. But having wept, He did not dry His tears and go His way. He went down into the city to cleanse its Temple, to heal the sick, to die for its sinning multitudes. The tears of this young statesman were dynamic. They led to action.

Having cared enough to weep, he began to pray for the city. I can hear him as he reminds the Lord of His promises. He reminds Him how He has said that if they sin they will be scattered abroad, but if they repent, He will gather them again. "Now, Lord, send some one to build the walls of the city." As he thus prayed, he made it possible for God to speak home to his own heart. Therefore, he ceased to say, "There he is. Send him." He came to say, "Here am I. Send me."
It was thus that William Carey prayed himself into the mission field as many have done since then. A true prayer leads to action. It is thus because Nehemiah, the rich young courtier, cared enough to inquire, cared enough to suffer in the defeat of his people, cared enough to volunteer to help share their burdens that he undertook this mission.

A few days later when he stood before the king, Artaxerxes saw at once that there was a change in his favorite. One was not supposed to come before the king with a sad countenance. But this young man had a sadness that he could not conceal. When the king asked what the matter was, Nehemiah prayed before he dared answer. Then he said, "How can I help being sad when the walls of the city of my father lie in ruins, the gates burned with fire, and my people in reproach?" "What do you want to do about it?" asked the king. "I want to go build the walls." The king granted his request, and a few months later Nehemiah found himself in the depressed and seemingly hopeless little city.

II

Upon arrival, his first task was to ascertain the facts. He did not seek his information from others. He viewed the walls of the city himself. This he did by a secret survey during the night. Having made his survey and seeing what was necessary, he called the leaders together, told them of the backing he had from the king, and of his purpose to build. Under his leadership, they were willing. But no sooner had they begun than the opposition began also.

Here is a fact upon which we can always count. Whatever the worthwhile task we undertake, we can always count on opposition. Life has been spoken of again and again as a battle. It is always if it is lived earnestly. Of course, if you merely drift with the crowd, if you never undertake to do anything, nobody will oppose. That kind of life is easy. Any old rotten chunk can float downstream. But if you set yourself to a worthwhile task, you may count on opposition.
Jesus made that very plain in dealing with His friends. Life itself makes it very plain. The opposition that Nehemiah had to face was of varied kinds.

1. Laughter and ridicule. When they heard that Nehemiah was going to undertake to rebuild the walls, Sanballat, Tobiah, and the rest of the enemies laughed them to scorn. So what? So they resorted to one of the most dangerous weapons in the world. Many a man that would face bullets with high courage would grow weak under a scornful laugh. Many young men and women have thrown their convictions into the discard because of a wise and cynical laugh. Ridicule is a dangerous weapon. This does not mean that laughter is bad in itself. We ought to sweeten bitter things with gentle laughter, but people are very afraid of being ridiculed.

That which was so funny about this undertaking, according to the enemies of Nehemiah, was its impossibility. The task simply could not be done. Of course, that has been said of every worthwhile undertaking since the morning stars sang together. "You can never do that," they laughed. "The whole idea is silly. If you were to build a wall, it would be such a flimsy thing that a night prowling fox would tear it down." So they laughed at Nehemiah for undertaking the impossible. But he defied their laughter and worked on.

2. Having failed to defeat him in his purpose by laughter, they resorted to threats of violence. They were no doubt quite in earnest about those threats. They sent word that they were going to waylay them at their work. Before they knew it, they would be upon them. But at this threat, Nehemiah, instead of quitting, armed his workers as well as himself. So they carried on, holding a carpenter's tool in one hand, a weapon of war in the other.

3. Having failed to accomplish their purpose through threats of violence, they tried compromise. That was a more subtle weapon still. "We are not out and out against you," they said, "nor out and out for you. All we want to do is to talk the matter over. Come down into the valley of Ono, and let us have a
conference. You believe in dressing in white, we in black. Maybe we can get together on sober gray." When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, he was unwilling to kill him. He was afraid to let him go. Therefore, he compromised by chastising him. Thus, he lost the fight. But Nehemiah refused to compromise.

4. The last weapon that they employed was an attack on Nehemiah's personal courage. This attack was twofold. First, they tried to frighten him by lying about him. They said, "If you do not treat with us, leave off your building, and come down for a conference, we are going to tell the king that you are planning a rebellion." On one occasion a disreputable young woman suddenly appeared in the room of a seminary student of Harvard University, shut the door behind her, and said, "If you don't do as I tell you, I'll scream." The young man was shaving. He went quietly on with his work, saying, "Scream away." Such was the answer of Nehemiah. Then came the final effort to frighten him. The enemy brought over a prophet, Nehemiah's pastor. He became a fifth columnist. He went to Nehemiah, telling him that a band was getting ready to murder him. The only chance of escape was for him to run into the Temple. They would not dare go into the holy place to tear him from the altar. But to go into the place was forbidden. Nehemiah would have regarded such a move as a desecration of the Temple, and, therefore, a sin. They were asking him to commit sin in order to save his life. His answer is worth remembering. "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." Thus he went on with his work.

III

How did Nehemiah manage to resist these pressing temptations?

1. He was a deeply religious man. He was a man of solid convictions. He was a man who had grown strong through prayer and through fellowship with God.
2. He was a man with a job. He had his work to do. When his enemies invited him to come down for a conference, he gave this splendid answer, "I am doing a great work up here so that I cannot come down. Why should work cease while I come down to you?" A man's work is in a sense his life preserver. Work is ever a safeguard against temptation. The devil is always finding some job for idle hands to do. But the man who stays on his job has a strong arm.

Not only was this man working, but he was working at a worthwhile task. He said, "I am doing a great work." What is a great work? It is not necessarily a work that wins the applause of the crowd. It is not necessarily conspicuous work. Many a conspicuous worker is going to look very small when we come to see values as they are. "Many that are first," said Jesus, "are going to be last, and many that are last are going to be first."

A great work is a work that is done from a great motive. Nehemiah was doing this work not to win the applause of the crowd. He was doing this work not to get a place in history. He was doing this work because he cared for the things that matter most. Any work we do for love's sake is great. The meanest field flower that we give because we care is greater in the sight of God than millions given because we are seeking the approval and applause of others.

Then a great work is a constructive work. Nehemiah was building. No work is ever great that is purely destructive. Jesus said, "I have come not to destroy." It takes less art and less brains to tear down than to do almost anything else in the world. A monkey with a match can destroy more in an hour than a thousand men can build in a year. All great work is constructive.

But you may remind me that sometimes we have to tear down in order to build. True, but tearing down is utterly futile unless it is at once followed by constructive work. Generally speaking, if we live constructively, the tearing down will follow naturally. Think how many old kerosene lamps Edison destroyed! How did he manage? He did not do so with a club. He destroyed them by inventing
The incandescent lamp. The only real foe of emptiness is fullness. The only way to drive out the dark is with the light. The only help that counts is constructive help.

IV

What was the result of this man's loyalty to his task? In just fifty-two days he had finished the wall. He got the job done. In the second place, having finished his job, he made possible the restoration of worship in the Temple. Not only so, but worship took on a new departure. After the return from the Exile, these people learned a new appreciation for their own Scriptures and for the God who inspired those Scriptures. They assembled to hear the Bible read, to hear it explained. This explaining was done by Ezra. I remind you again that he was the first preacher in the modern sense.

Then followed certain reforms. Nehemiah came to discover that these Jews were buying and selling on the Sabbath. This filled him with amazed indignation. He reminded them how such desecration was one cause of all that they had suffered from the hands of their foes. He also rebuked in sharpest terms the inter-marriage with foreigners. All in all, through his building and through his restoration of worship, he helped to restore his nation, he helped to make possible a people that later on made possible the gift to the world of the child Jesus. There is no measuring the power of one man who cares enough to give his best.
NEHEMIAH

The Man With a Job

While Nehemiah was once a part of the book of Ezra, in passing from one to the other we find ourselves in a different atmosphere. Nehemiah is a very human book. Here a man who is neither a prophet nor a priest, but a statesman and man of affairs, is telling us frankly what he did and how he did it. He is congratulating himself too, in a naive fashion, on the success and worthwhileness of his accomplishment. So sure is he of the value of the task that he has put over that he tells us with childlike frankness he hopes God will remember it to his credit.

I

The fact that Nehemiah gave himself to the difficult task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem must have been a bit of a surprise to the worldly wise of his day. Nehemiah was well placed. He had a position of honor and power. It was also a position where the financial rewards were great and the labor not at all arduous. One whose ideal was little to do with a great salary for the doing of it, would certainly have envied Nehemiah.

He was cupbearer to Artaxerxes, king of Persia. How Nehemiah came to occupy this position of such honor and power we cannot say. He was a member of a conquered race. He was also quite a young man. He was only thirty years old, or thereabouts. Yet we find him moving in the atmosphere of royalty and evidently deep in the confidence and friendship of his king. He was evidently
a man thoroughly capable of being trusted. He was courageous and religious, and in addition he must have been a man of rare and winsome personality. Those who knew him instinctively turned to him in times of difficulty and trouble.

Thus it came to pass that when things were going badly at Jerusalem, when the little handful of colonists that had returned from exile were becoming desperately discouraged and disappointed with their adventure, they decided to appeal to this young man who was then living in the royal palace at Shushan. There were a few brave hearts who decided to journey to the Persian Capital to see Nehemiah in person. Personally, I should have advised against it. "What hope is there," I should have said, "to induce a young man who is living his life amidst the enervating atmosphere of an oriental court, to fling aside all his prospects, to give up his ease and his open road to fortune, and cast his lot with this forlorn group?"

But the committee appointed for the task of interviewing the young courtier was not to be discouraged. They made the long journey to the Persian capital. They succeeded in getting an interview with Nehemiah. He encouraged them by asking with keen interest about the welfare of the city of his fathers. Then the committee had its chance. They told him that things were going badly, that the walls of the city were torn down, that the gates were burned with fire and that the people themselves, instead of being honored, were little better than a laughing stock. The young statesman heard them patiently. When they had finished their distressing story, instead of shrugging his shoulders and thanking his stars that he himself was well out of such a distressing situation, he took it seriously to heart. This report touched him deeply.
So deeply was he touched that the story says he sat down and wept and mourned certain days. He actually shed tears over the tragic plight of the city that he had doubtless never seen, and these were no idle tears. Some of our tears are altogether too trivial and futile. They have no driving power in them. They do not send us out to any daring crusade. These tears upon the cheeks of Nehemiah are like the blossoms from the boughs of the apple tree. They show that there is springtime in his heart. He not only weeps. He acts.

First he begins to pray. He so takes the needs of this distant city upon his heart that he prays for them. At first I imagine he has but little thought of going himself to their assistance. He prays God to send help, to raise up a leader, to intervene in such a fashion as to remove the reproach from the city of his fathers. The longer he prays the more desperate he becomes till at last he says, "Here am I, send me."

A few days later the king sees a look upon the face of his cupbearer that he has never seen before. It is evident that something has gone wrong. He asks his courtier and friend for an explanation. Then Nehemiah, with a prayer for guidance upon his lips, tells the king his story. He tells him of the high resolve that has come to him to take upon himself the difficult task of rebuilding the walls of the ruined city of Jerusalem. He asks for the assistance of his royal master. The king graciously consents. Then a few months later this young man finds himself among the depressing and disappointing hardships of the ruined city of Jerusalem. He is there to rebuild the walls of the city.
But no sooner had Nehemiah entered upon the enterprise in hand than he found himself face to face with much opposition. There were those who objected seriously to the rebuilding of the walls. Therefore they threw every possible obstacle in his way.

1. The first weapon they used against him was contempt. They laughed at his endeavor as a sheer futility. They said that he could never carry it through, that even if he should build a wall it would be so weak and useless that a night prowling fox could throw it down. Thus they heaped contempt upon the whole enterprise and laughed him to scorn. And laughter, mind you, is no mean weapon. Many a man will face death with courage who cannot stand in the presence of a scornful laugh.

2. They threatened violence. They planned that they would make a secret attack and destroy those engaged in the work. But Nehemiah, instead of giving over, armed himself and his workers. The men still went to their task, though they were hampered by the fact that they had to hold a weapon in one hand while they builded with the other. But Nehemiah believed in his task so strongly that he thought it was worth venturing for. He thought that if necessary, it was worth dying for, and he inspired his fellows with a like high courage.

3. The third weapon they used against him was compromise. They invited him to a conference down in the valley of Ono. They wanted to talk things over. They encouraged him to believe they could hit upon a compromise that would be satisfactory to all parties concerned. Failing in this they went so far as to and undertake to weaken and ruin Nehemiah by having him flee into the temple in order to save his life. But in
the face of all this the young statesman stood firm and persisted in his work till the task was completed.

III

What was the secret of his steadfastness? I think the answer lies mainly in the third verse of the sixth chapter: "I am doing a great work up here so that I cannot come down." Nehemiah believed in the worthwhileness of the undertaking to which he had set himself. He believed in it so strongly that he refused under any consideration to be swerved from it. While he uttered this word only once, I think it must have sounded in his heart in the face of every foe. "I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down."

In what sense was his work great? It was not great because it was conspicuous in the eyes of the world. It was not great because it won the applause and approval of men. It was not great because of any financial reward. True greatness has nothing to do with mere bulk and noise. We are constantly prone to confuse greatness with what is known as "Jumboism," but a work may be eternally worth while and yet be very insignificant when weighed in certain scales.

This work was great because it was done under the impulse of a great motive. Nehemiah had accepted this task as a call from God. He had accepted it also as a call from his needy people. He was undertaking this difficult work not for love of praise nor for love of gain but for the love of God and man. It was a great work because it was done from a great motive.

One day a widow crept out to service over at Jerusalem. When the offering was received, Jesus sat over against the treasury.
The offering that day seems to have been peculiarly large for the story says that "many that were rich cast in much." But this poor widow came and dropped in only a fraction of a cent. But when Jesus saw it He sprang to His feet in enthusiastic approval. The new was too good to keep. He called His disciples to say that "this widow cast more in, than all that cast into the treasury." The offering was great because of the beautiful motive that prompted it. She gave for love's sake.

2. Then, a work to be truly great must be constructive. No man ever does a genuinely great work who does nothing but tear down. To destroy requires very little of either heart or of brains. Here is a watch. It is practically new. Therefore there is no estimating the thought and the labor and the dreams that have gone into the making of this one watch. It is the product, not of one head and one pair of hands, but of a multitude. Yet an idiot can wreck this watch in the fraction of a minute.

A few years ago Madam O'Leary who was living in the city of Chicago, got home a bit late. Therefore she had to do her milking by lamp light. The cow was a bit contrary. She may have resented the light. Anyway, she kicked it over. The blaze that resulted set the little shed on fire. That fire spread till it burned out a strip one mile wide and three miles long through the heart of the city. This one cow destroyed more with one kick of her stupid foot than thousands of skilled laborers could have builded in a whole year. But nobody thinks of building a monument to that cow.

You may remind me that some things have to be destroyed before better can be built. That is true. But the only way to permanently destroy the second best is by the building of something
better. How many kerosene lamps Edison has destroyed! I suppose if they were put together in one pile they would make a mountain higher than Pike's Peak. How has he destroyed them? Not by dash­ing them upon the rocks one by one. Had he undertaken this method, lamps would have continued to multiply faster than ten thousand Edisons could have broken them. He destroyed them by the making of an incandescent light. That put them out of the way permanently, but in so doing Edison showed himself not a destroyer but a builder. Every true servant of mankind, then, I repeat, is a builder. He works constructively. No work is truly great that is not constructive.

IV

What was the outcome of Nehemiah's faith in and loyalty to his task?

1. Because he believed in it he saw it through. He allowed nothing to turn him aside. He held on in the midst of opposition till the walls were finished. In so doing he helped to furnish an opportunity for the teaching of the law to those Jews that had returned from exile. He helped keep firm the faith of the people who were later to give to the world its Christ.

2. Through faith in his task he himself was saved. Had he given over long enough to go down for a conference with his enemies, he would never have come back. His task was his life preserver. It is often the case. If I am to stand victorious amidst the temptations of our modern life, it is not going to be through sheer determination. It is not going to be by putting our fingers in our ears and stopping them to the calls of evil voices. It is rather going to be for having something better than the world can give. "This I say, walk in the spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."
ESTHER

The book of Esther is a fascinating story. Years ago a certain literary club in England was making a study of the best short stories in the literature of the world. When the study was over, a prize was offered for the member of the club who would write the best original story. One bright member, who noticed that in their study they had neglected the finest fund of short stories ever written, the short stories of the Bible, entered the contest. Instead of writing an original story, he copied the book of Esther word for word, changing nothing except the names of the characters and the historical setting. The result was that he captured the prize. When the president of the club came to deliver the prize, he marveled at where the author had developed such a literary style. Then to his embarrassment and to the embarrassment of the other members of the club, he replied that he found it in an old Book that they no longer read.

But in spite of the fascination of the story, the right of the book of Esther to a place in the Bible has been hotly disputed. This is the case because it contains none of the great religious words that are so familiar in other books. It makes no mention of prayer, though prayer may be implied. It makes no mention of God. It makes no mention of any religious practice except that of fasting. But in spite of this the whole book is pervaded by a spirit that is deeply religious and deeply patriotic.

I

The scene is laid in the city of Shushan, the capital of ancient Persia. Xerxes is on the throne. He commanded the largest army that was ever known in that ancient world. He reigned over millions of people. But in spite of this fact, he was little better than a royal nitwit. It was he that had decorated a
tree with costly jewels for giving him shade. It was this majestic numskull that had had the sea scourged and put in chains for wrecking his pontoon bridge.

When the story opens, this king is giving a feast. The great men of his court and nation are assembled in the banquet hall. They had a unique way of amusing themselves in that far-off day. They were all getting drunk. How refreshingly unique! Now His Majesty was none too wise, as we have remarked, when he was sober. When he was drunk he was more stupid still.

Among the edifying topics of conversation that these great statesmen discussed was the merit of their wives. His Majesty made bold to affirm that his wife Vashti was the most beautiful woman in the world. If they were foolish enough to dispute it, as nobody was, he would prove it. Therefore, he then and there gave a royal order that his queen should display her charms before this bunch of topers that every swimming head might bow in acknowledgment of her beauty. This order was straightway conveyed to the queen.

Now it so happened that the queen was also giving a feast. She had the ladies of the court about her. When, therefore, this order came, she refused to obey it. She might have been too drunk to go herself. But I do not think that such was the case. The command that the king had given was for her with her standards impossible. To have gone before a crowd like that would have been a shame in her eyes. Therefore, Vashti became a rare type of martyr. She was a martyr to her modesty.

In calling her a martyr I mean that she did not get away with her refusal. When the messenger brought her reply to the king and his fellow guests that she was not coming, these notables were stunned. They saw in this rebellion of Vashti a threat to masculine supremacy over all the land. They saw a suffragette movement in the making. They declared wisely that "If we let her get away with this, all our wives will rebel against us and then where will we be?" Just where we are today! And so Vashti was dismissed. Her crown was taken from her, and Persia was without a queen.
Naturally, this vacancy could not stand. A new queen had to be chosen. They went about this high task somewhat as Hollywood or Miami would go about a bathing beauty contest. They ordered all the most beautiful girls to be brought into the city that the loveliest might be chosen. Among those that were so brought was a lovely Jewish girl who had been entered by her cousin and foster-father, Mordecai. Naturally, since she was a part of a conquered race, her nationality was kept a secret.

When these beauties were paraded before the judges, this Jewish girl, Esther, by name was chosen. She was Miss Persia, as we would say today. Having been weighed in the balances and not found wanting, she was made queen. But she had not been long in her place of power until she came to realize that all privilege involves responsibility. Lifted into the bright lights that played about her throne, there was more than mere enjoyment of privilege. There were weighty obligations to be met.

The crisis in which Esther found herself involved came about in this fashion. The most prominent man and the most powerful in Persia at the time was a gentleman named Haman. It so happens that Haman was also a foreigner. He had worked himself up from the ranks. He was a self-made man. He had more influence with the king than any other man in Persia. Almost everybody bowed down to him because he was a man who could help if he cared to help or he was a man to be feared if he happened to be an enemy.

Haman was very proud of his power. He enjoyed having people bow down to him. Many have been like that. But while almost everybody did obeisance, there was one stubborn Jew who refused. This so enraged Haman that he forgot everybody who bowed and remembered only the one man who refused to bow. As so many others, he became so absorbed in his small liabilities that he forgot his assets. The refusal of this one stubborn Jew to bow down to him filled him with bitter rage and a deep thirst for revenge.

So much was this the case that he desired to crush his enemy at all cost. His revenge was not going to be a cheap affair. He was going to destroy not
only Mordecai but Mordecai's people as well. To this end he got the ear of the king and partly by persuasion and trickery and partly by an immense bribe, he induced the pig-headed king to sign a decree that on a certain day all the Jews throughout the empire should be put to the sword and their goods confiscated.

It was this impending doom that caused Mordecai to appeal to his cousin and foster-daughter that he had made queen. He addressed her in this fashion: "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement 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?" It was a wise appeal. Mordecai tells her frankly that if she does nothing she and her family are going to be destroyed. Even if she undertakes to save them and fails, nothing worse can happen than that. Under that appeal Esther decides to act.

III

This brings us to the climax and closing scene of the book. Mordecai's appeal to Esther was that she go in and make a personal plea to the king for her own life and for the life of her people. The danger involved for Esther in such a course is obvious. First, according to the law of the court, nobody was allowed to approach the king uninvited. In case such a liberty was taken, if the king failed to extend his scepter, then death would be the penalty. Then, there was a danger involved in the fact that Esther was a Jewess. This was not known to the king. He might have her executed for that reason. But Esther took her life in her hand, saying, "I go and if I perish, I perish."

When she thus came, the king did not ignore her. He extended his scepter, asked her what petition she had to present. She was too wise to tell her story so quickly. So she invited the king to a feast. It was almost a private feast. Only three persons were present—the king, the queen, and the great man, Haman. It was at this feast that she proposed to present her petition. But though the
three had a delightful time together, Esther did not think the psychological moment had yet come for the pressing of her petition; so she planned a second feast to which both these guests were invited.

From this first feast Haman went home walking upon the air with his head in the clouds. Everything was coming to him right side up. Sure that he was going soon to get to settle his ancient grudge, he built a gallows on which to hang his enemy, Mordecai. He made this gallows fifty cubits high on the very wise assumption that the higher you hang a man the dearer he will be. So he and his friends rejoiced. Now it so happened after the first feast that the following night the king did not sleep well. Maybe Esther was not a very good cook. Anyway while he was wakeful he ordered the Book of Chronicles to be read to him. He knew that if that did not put him to sleep he was pretty far gone. This Book of Chronicles recorded the story of how a certain Jew named Mordecai had one time saved the king's life. The king had forgotten, as we are prone to do. He then had the decency to ask if this man had ever been rewarded. And the reader answered in the negative.

At once this keen king set his mind to working on a plan to honor Mordecai. A little later it was announced that Haman was in the court. The king ordered him brought in. "What," he asked Haman, "can be done for a man whom the king would like to honor?" Haman in his conceit was sure the king was talking about himself. Who else could he be talking about except the great man, Haman? So Haman chose what he would like above all else. "If you really want to honor somebody," he said, "deck him out in your royal robes, set him on a horse, and let somebody lead the horse through the city, crying as he goes, 'This is the treatment that the king gives to one whom he delights to honor.'"

"Fine," said the king. "Go deck Mordecai in my robes and I'll let you lead the horse." Thus, Haman had to lead the horse of his enemy through the
town crying, "This is the way the king treats one whom he delights to honor." Then followed the second feast in which Esther told her story and who it was that was seeking the destruction of herself and of her people.

Haman begged for his life. It is not a pretty scene. Then he hurries home in utter despair. Knowing that his doom is sealed, he hanged himself on the gallows that he had made for his enemy. Here is a man who in a true sense got what he gave as men have been doing through the centuries. Thus he became a martyr and a victim of his own hate.

What about Esther? She won her petition. But the king could not revoke his degree. They had a silly law that a law once made could not be changed. However, the king got around it by passing a second decree giving the Jews the right to defend themselves. This was their salvation. As through the centuries they have celebrated their emancipation from Egypt by the Feast of the Passover, so also they have celebrated the deliverance brought about by Esther by another feast called the Feast of Purim. This then is a patriotic story, but it was also a religious story. While God is not mentioned, we feel throughout the book that He is standing in the shadows keeping watch above His own.
BOOK OF ESTHER

The right of the Book of Esther to a place in the Bible has long been a point of dispute. This is the case for at least two reasons. First, it seems on the surface purely a book of patriotism. It seems concerned alone with the welfare of the Jews.

Second, it does not contain any of the great words of our religious vocabulary: God, fate, prayer - these great words of religion are not to be found in the book. But in spite of this, the book is vitally religious. Patriotic it is, but patriotism and religion were closely tied together in Jewish thought and practice. Then, in spite of the fact that God is not mentioned, any careful reading of the Book will make one feel that God is standing withing the shadows, keeping watch about his own. In addition to this religious interest, the book is fascinating in itself. A good many years ago I am told that a literary club, in England, having made a study of the best short stories in the various literatures of the world, offered a prize to the member of their club who would write the best original short story. One young chap, who had taken account of the fact that in their study they had neglected some of the best short stories in all literature - the short stories of the Bible - in contesting for the prize did not write an original story. Instead he copied the Book of Esther word for word, changing nothing but the names of the characters and the setting. The result was that he took the prize. When the president in presenting the prize marveled at where he had developed his wonderful literary style, he replied that he copied it out of an old book that they no longer read.

I

One fascination of the Book is that it is a Cinderella story. Here a nameless girl springs into the lime light that plays about a throne with a suddenness surpassing a movie star. No from rags to riches story could be any more impressive and fascinating than this.

The scene is the city of Shushan, the capital of ancient Persia. Xerxes is on
When Young said "Pigmies will be pigmies though perched on the Alps", he might have had this royal despot in mind. The only great thing about Xerxes was his position. Personally he was a bit of a nitwit. This is indicated by the fact that he decked a tree with priceless jewels as a reward for its shade. He also had the sea seized and put in chains because it had wrecked a pontoon bridge.

As we glance upon this royal nitwit, he is giving a feast. He and his coaches have found a unique and fascinating way of having a good time. They are all getting drunk. How up-to-date the scene is. As the wine mellowed them and puts their flabby instincts to sleep, they begin a discussion of the merits of their wives. The king boasts that his queen, Vashti is the most beautiful woman alive. They do not have to take his word for it. He will order her before the guests that they may see for themselves.

Now, it so happens that Vashti was giving a feast to the women at that time. When, therefore, this royal order came, she refused to obey. It may be that she was sufficiently intoxicated to be a bit more daring than ordinary. But I think she refused on nobler counts. For her to have appeared before such a queen would have been to have outraged her code and the custom of her day. She, therefore, refused, and thus became a martyr to her modesty.

No sooner had the report of her refusal been brought to the wise coaches who were about the king got their heads together and decided that such rebellion must not go unpunished. "If the queen gets away with this", they reasoned, "all our wives will follow her example. They will flout our authority. They where will we be?" So in order to nip this suffrage rebellion in the bud, they decided that the queen must be dismissed. Thus Vashti lost her crown.

Now, since the throne was vacant, so far as the queen was concerned, a successor should be chosen. They went about making this choice somewhat as we go about choosing Miss America today. I should not wonder if we have taken a leaf out of the books of these ancient Persians. The fairest of the realm were brought together.
A certain Jewish named Mordecai entered his adopted daughter, who was also a kinswoman, as one of the contestants. Of course, it was not known that she was a Jewess. The result was that she was chosen as Miss Persia and became the queen.

Now, she had not been long upon the throne before she discovered that great privileges involved great responsibilities. She had to learn that a large capacity to serve carried with it heavy obligations. Her foster father, who was responsible for her being queen, put it up to her in this way. "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement 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 decision of Esther became a matter of life and death in this fashion. The most powerful man in Persia at that time was a gentlemen named Haman. Haman was a fascinating man. He, too, was a foreigner. But by dint of great wealth and considerable ability, he had come to a position closest to the king. He was the most powerful man in Persia at that time except the king himself. On this account all men fawned upon him and bowed low when he passed.

No, not quite all. There was one stubborn Jew, Mordecai, who refused to bow. This so filled Haman with rage that he seems to have forgotten all who did bow. "He was obsessed by what he missed that he became stone blind to what he possessed. Nothing seemed quite so important to him as to have this proud Jew bend his knee. I think part of this was due to a sense of inferiority on the part of Haman. If you are perfectly sure of your own worth you are not likely to be too afraid when hearing that another is called king. A good part of Haman's rage must have been born of his sense of inferiority.

Thus outraged, he felt that he must have a great revenge. He must have a revenge to match the greatness of himself and the greatness of his rage. Therefore he was not satisfied just to destroy Mordecai. He was bent on the destruction of every Jew in Persia. Therefore he went to the king and by dint of some persuasion...
and heavy pressure, he induced him to pass a decree that on a certain day every Jew throughout the vast empire should be put to the sword. It was, therefore, in the knowledge that it was a matter of life and death that Mordecai appealed to Esther to go unto the king and plead for her people.

Of course, this going involved great danger. In the first place, the king would discover that she was a member of a foreign and hated race. Then, too, it was unlawful for anybody to approach the king uninvited. Esther had not been invited into the royal presence for some weeks. Should she dare to go without an invitation? Then if the king refused to extend his scepter to her in token of her acceptance, death would be the penalty. Yet, she heard the appeal, she replied by saying, "I am going though it is against the law and if I fail, I perish.

What was it that nerved Esther to make this adventure?

First, she was a woman of great courage. This does not mean that she was not desperately afraid to do what she did. She was afraid. The finest type of courage is not that which knows no fear. The finest type of courage is that which does know fear but defies it. Esther went then because she was afraid. She dared in spite of her fears.

Second, Esther went in to see the king because she had a sense of mission. She knew that she could do something for her people that nobody else could do. She believed that she had gone to the king for the high task that she was undertaking. It was a courage that belonged to the man who feels that he is divinely favored that others do not have.

Third, she undertook this mission to the king because while it was dangerous, it certainly offered the lesser of two evils. Her kinsman had warned her that her failure to go would mean certain destruction. If she did nothing, she was certainly lost. If she made an effort and failed, she would not be any more completely lost than she was already. But she might succeed. Therefore, it was worth a trial. Thus urged, she undertook her dangerous and difficult mission.
What was the outcome?

First, the king extended his scepter and offered to grant whatever request she should make. She did not at once present the request that was nearest her heart. She was too wise for that. She knew that the psychological moment had not come. She contented herself by inviting the king to a feast. Only one other guest was invited and that was Haman. A very select party it was - the king, the queen, and Haman.

No wonder that Haman went with his head striking the stars. He was now sure of himself as he had never been before. In the certainty of getting revenge upon his enemy, he had him a scaffold built fifty cubits high. He seemed to go on the conviction that the higher a man was hung, the deader it would kill him. Thus the outlook for Haman was sunnier even beyond his dreams.

But it so happened the next night after the feast that the king did not sleep well. Maybe the queen was not a good cook. Any way, he was wakeful. Therefore, instead of counting sheep, he ordered the Chronicles to be read to him. In listening to these Chronicles, he was reminded that Mordecai had once saved his life. He asked if his act had been rewarded. When told it had not, he resolved to that evil at once.

Now, while he was casting over in his mind as to how he could honor Mordecai, someone told him that Haman was without. Knowing what a wise and inventive man Haman was, he had him brought in. He was just the man whose wise counsel he needed. "What", he inquired of Haman, "what should be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" Haman, in his conceit, was sure that the king was talking about himself. Therefore, he suggested the thing that he would enjoy more than anything else. "Dress the man whom you delight to honor in the king's royal robes, put him on the king's horse, and let somebody lead the horse about the streets of the city, proclaiming as he goes, 'Thus does the king do him whom he delights to honor'."

The king was delighted with the plan. "Go", he said, "at once deck Mordecai in my royal robes and put him upon my horse and you shall lead the horse. That was the worst possible. When Haman went home from this experience he knew that he was
a doomed man. His doom was made certain at the second feast.

The wise young queen was too shrewd to proffer her request even at the first feast. She contented herself by inviting the king and Haman to a second feast. When they came, this time Esther unburdened herself. She pointed out the man who was an enemy to herself and to her people and Haman went home to hang himself on his own gallows. Thus he got what he gave. Thus he reaped as he sowed.

Naturally the king was eager to save his queen and her people. This he could not do by revoking the law that he had passed. There was an insane law that made it impossible for the king to change any decree that he had passed, but he met the issue by giving the Jews permission to defend themselves. So numerous were they that no attack was made and not a life was lost. Just as the Jews celebrate the Passover in commemoration of their escape from the bondage of Egypt, so these people of too celebrate their escape from slaughter in Persia.
PART I.

The Book of Psalms is one of the most priceless possessions of the church. It is a book of human experience. They express every emotion of the heart. There is not a mood of the soul that is not pictured in these marvelous songs. Whatever may be your condition, whether you are rejoicing over your success, or humiliated by defeat, whether you are thrilled by certainty or perplexed by doubt, whether you are filled with tenderness, or hot with anger, whether you have a sense of divine comfort or are depressed by utter loneliness, you will find your feelings portrayed in these songs.

The Psalms hold up the mirror up to nature. It is not simply one phase of life that is pictured here, it is the whole of life. Here is the experience of the cross section of mankind, stored up for your use and mine. We may draw on this rich fund of experience if we will. To do so would be our highest wisdom.

PART II.

Because the Psalms are records of human experience, they are also records of discoveries. Franklin was a bit harsh when he said, "Experience is a hard teacher, but fools will learn thru no other." There are some experiences that are not hard, but very gracious. Such is the experience of the soul in Jesus Christ. But it is true that we only know genuinely what we learn from experience.

1. Experience is the key to knowledge in the physical world. It is marvelous how rapidly a child learns thru experience. He must learn that fire burns; he must learn that salt and sugar are not alike. He must learn that there is some connection between a dog's tail and his
mouth. He must learn that the law of gravitation does not argue with him but acts; but operates.

What the physician knows about medicine, has come thru experience. He knows the effect of certain drugs, because that has been tested over and over again. He knows, for instance, that quinine will make your head roar until the people on the street corner will stand and listen to the chimes when you go by.

Some of these discoveries have been exceedingly expensive. It was costly to find the cause of yellow fever, and thus destroy it. The same is true of countless other diseases. It has cost many lives to develop the steam engine, the auto and the air ship. But we only learn thru experience.

2. The same is true in the spiritual world. The authors of these songs experimented in the laboratory of the spiritual. They made marvelous discoveries, and mark you that their reports of their discoveries are just as trustworthy as the reports of any scients. If we cannot believe their witnesses; then there is nothing that we can believe.

PART III.

What did they discover? It is impossible to answer this question with any degree of fullness. I am going to mention a few facts that they discovered about God.

1. They discovered that God is a reality. They became so sure of it that to them, the one supreme fool of the universe was he who believed there was no God. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."

2. They discovered that God is near. That was an amazing
discovery. The making it can never be known. "The Lord is near unto the broken hearted, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." The man who made that discovery had had his heart broken, and had also had his heart healed.

They learned that God was close enough to hear when they prayed. "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him out of all his troubles." They found that God was close enough to be seen. "They looked unto him and became radiant."

3. They discovered that God was holy. That too, was an amazing discovery. They saw that His face was against sin. They saw that He could not endure sin. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the face of the earth."

4. They discovered that God was powerful. That was a discovery that they made most easily, I think. It is one that seems hardest for us today. They saw the might of God in creation. "When I discover the heavens, the work of Thy fingers". "The heavens declare the work of God."

They saw His might in His power to save from sin. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103)

They saw His power in His ability to keep. Their confidence as expressed in Psalm 46 and Psalm 91, is the confidence that is possessed by few of us today, notwithstanding the superiority of our opportunity.

5. They discovered that God cared. He thought on themselves. He never forgot. He was tender and gracious. "Thy hath made me great."
His tenderness was like that of a father. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

His tenderness went beyond that of a father. "When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, then the Lord will take thee up."
THE HEBREW HYMN BOOK

It is amazing how fresh and up-to-date this hymn book of the Jewish people is. The latest song in it was written centuries and centuries ago. The earliest comes out of a far distant past. Yet, these songs are thoroughly modern and up-to-date. They have an immortal ring about them, over which the years have no power. To this day they constitute about the best bit of devotional literature that we know.

Why is this the case? It is because they were born of experience. They come out of life and are therefore saturated with life. These songs were felt, they were experienced before they were ever written. As you read them, you will find them speaking your language. Breathing your aspirations, voicing your sorrow or your joy. In fact, there is not a single mood of the human soul that you cannot find reflected here. If you are bewildered by God's strange order of things, you have only to turn the pages of this ancient book to find one to share your bewilderment. If you are hard-put-to and are on the point of surrendering, there is a comrade here who can hearten you by telling how he has traveled your road. "I had fainted," says the author of the 27th Psalm, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." If the stars have gone out of your sky, if the rain is on the roof, if friends are gone, if you sob alone, here is one that will sob with you. If your heart is as joyful as the song of the mocking bird in the early morning, here too you will find one just as radiantly joyful. Here, I repeat, is found every mood of the human heart. These wonderful poems seem to be sown broadcast over the pages of the book as flowers over a field. There is no orderliness in the arrange-
They are not arranged according to subject matter, authorship, or chronology. Here they are a beautiful mixture of bewilderment and certainty, joy and sorrow, faith and doubt, love and hate. Some of the tenderest emotions of the soul are expressed here, also some of the bitterest. There is a tender caress of the Shepherd's song. There is a bitter anguished sob of the broken patriot in Psalm 137 with its pathetic cry for revenge. Babylon has walked over his little nation and trodden it into the dust as a brutal man might crush a worm. He prays that Babylon might suffer as they have suffered. "Blessed is he that taketh thy little ones and dasheth against a stone."

This evening, I am going to call your attention to a few of my favorites of these songs. I am going to be prosaic and mechanical enough to group them. Of course, these studies are most superficial. I am grouping them, not as a student so much, but as a lover.

I.

There is the little group of Psalms written in praise of the law. The law to us is not a pleasant word. It smacks of dryness and deadness. But there were radiant saints among the Jews whose hearts were made to sing by it. One of them though of the truly happy man as happy because of his devotion to the law. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Now, what was the good of this man's love for the law? What came of his feeding his soul on this seemingly tough and non-nutritious food. "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither;" He has four worthful characteristics. (1) He is like a tree planted. That
means that there will be evidence of purpose in the position of which he grows. (2) It means steadfastness. (3) He shall be fruitful. (4) He shall be an evergreen. His life also shall not wither.

The law is also the theme of the 19th Psalm. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Psalm 119 speaks to the same purpose. It is the longest of the Psalms, and the most prosaic.

Here the law is spoken of as an antedote to evil "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." It is not only a preventive, it is a cleansing power. "Wherewith all shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." This law, then that seemed hard and harsh to some were not so to these ancient singers. They loved the law. Loving it, its statutes became their song.

II.

Then there are poems that we may classify roughly as poems of those who seek and find. There is more of this kind of literature in the Psalms than in any other. It is above all else, a radiant record of those who have sought God and found him. Sometimes it tells of those who have lost God, and their hearts are breaking over the loss.

Let us begin with Psalm 32, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my
bones waxed old through my roaring, all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid."

This is a story of a man whose heart is burdened by sin. A man whose heart has become a desert. But, he turned to God and his desert was changed into a garden. His last word to us is, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

2. There is Psalm 39. It begins with a fine resolution. I have made a good many such resolutions; and have broken it quite as often."I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." This man got so set on silence that he refrained from speaking even that which was good. "But while I was musing the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue. Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am. . . . . And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee."

Here is a man then that will live, but be in confusion. His hopes are not in his fellows, his hopes are not in things, his hope is in God. He has gone questing and has found a sure hope.

3. A kindred story is told in Psalm 40. The language of this Psalm has entered into the test of Christians through the centuries. Some have used them till they have become trite upon their lips. But as uttered in the fresh winsomeness of experiences, more beautiful words could not be found. "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God, many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Many shall see and turn unto our God. How much he counts on this, he will give deliverence, freedom, steadfastness, joy, and
usefulness.

4. In Psalm 42, we find expressed the deepest and most universal longing of the human heart. Hardly any finer expression if it has ever been put into words. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?"

I saw a spent deer once with the hounds hanging upon his heels. This was the picture of the Psalmist in his desperate quest after God. It is the longing that is universal.

5. The final Psalms that I mention are those in search of God. In Psalm 51, it is the finest Psalm of penitence in the book. Perhaps the finest in literature. Here is a man that has no good word to say for himself. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit." These petitions voice universal need, the need of cleansing. A new heart, a new joy, a new power to serve.
Then there are songs of thanksgiving. Here we find radiant souls who burst into song out of sheer gratitude. I can mention only two of these.

1. Psalm 34, "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord, the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." You see this man is bent on thanksgiving. He is off for a thanksgiving service, and he invites you and me to join him. "Let us exalt his name together."

But we turn with curious face and see what we have to be thankful for. Then with a full heart, he proceeds to tell, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." That is, he is thankful for personal deliverance. He is thankful for blessings bestowed upon his fellows. One has been besieged by trouble, but have been restored. Others have had their faces clouded by pouring rain, but they looked toward God and became radiant. His thanksgiving therefore is spontaneous and beautiful.

2. But to my mind there is no finer song of thanksgiving than Psalm 103, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." You see this wise Psalmist does not ask us to remember all God's benefits, that would be too much. He only asks that we do not forget them all. Then he mentions a few of the things for which he is thankful. He is thankful because God is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. Because so as a father pitieth his children, so the heavenly father pitieth his children. Here is a song
that we might commit to memory, and say to ourselves everyday with profit.

4. Then there are songs of security. The Jewish people had many foes. Their geographical situation involves them in constant difficulties. Their puny little nation, if you will notice the map, is a bridge joined together by three continents. Great bullying nations were constantly marching over this bridge crushing this weak and helpless people. One day, I can imagine when refugees were pouring into Jerusalem when the smoke of burning villages could be seen upon the distant horizon, when men's hearts were failing them for fear, some poet steadied himself and wrote this Psalm.

"The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge, therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains fall, though the waters there of roar and be troubled." Then he reaffirms his original word, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

2. Here again is a poem that some have thought came out of the wondering of this ancient people. Other nations had homes, they had fixed abiding places. These Nomads saw their fellows going home in the gloaming, but they had no fixed home. That is, they had none that was visible. But, they had an inward one that was God. Therefore, they sang, "Lord, thou art our dwelling place in all generations. From everlasting to everlasting thou art God."

Then there is another that is yet more tender and intimate. Who does not love the 91st Psalm, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Listen to the majestic words with which it closes. This pledge from God to a clinging soul, "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him, I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I
will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.

4. Then there is that tender touch in Psalm 139. It reminds us somewhat of one of Whittier's best poems that assures us that we can drift beyond God's love and care. Listen! "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." Wherever we go, whatever our circumstances, this Psalmist believed we can never run past God. Everywhere we can know that the eternal God is our dwelling place and that underneath are the everlasting arms.

5. Then, I close with the most popular song ever written. It is one that has sung its way into human experience beyond all the others. There is no sea that it has not crossed, no forest that it has not penetrated, no tragedy that it has not faced. Men have sung it in every circumstance of life. In the night by the fireside amidst the flames of martyrdom, it has been lisped by the tender lips of little children, and by the fumbling lips of old-age made more blundering by death. It has an appeal that is universal. We know it as the Shepherd's song. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." So true is that to the nature of God that Jesus could make use of it and say that it was a description of himself. "I am the good Shepherd." What amazed me more than all else about these wonderful songs is this, our keen ancient prophets and poets came to know God so intimately and beautiful before he was revealed in Jesus Christ.
A casual reading of the book of Proverbs, gives one the impression that the book is nothing more than a collection of bright and pithy sayings relating to almost every subject under the sun. It seems a bit like one of our modern books of best quotations from prose and poetry. A more careful reading, however, gives a different impression. While it is easy to discover that all the book is not by the same author, it is also easy to discover that the first nine chapters constitute the best and most spiritual part of the book. Yet it is evident that all these different Proverbs have one simple theme. They are a discussion of wisdom and folly. Or to put it in a more concrete form, they paint the portrait of the wise man as distinguished from the fool.

PART I.

What is the test of the wise man? How is it possible to distinguish the wise man from the fool.

1. The test is not one of mentality. This book gives no hint that the wise man is gifted with a keen mind, while the foolish has been cursed with intellectual stupidity, nor is the wise man distinguished from the foolish by a difference of educational attainment. A wise man is not necessarily a college graduate, nor a fool necessarily one who has never been to school.

What, then, I repeat, is the test? The test as to whether a man is wise or foolish, depends upon his attitude toward God. That is the teaching of the entire book. You may find the simple core of its message in the 7th verse of the 1st chapter. "The fear of the
Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." That is, whether you are wise or foolish, depends not upon something outward, but upon your attitude toward God. The Master taught the same lesson in the parable of the virgins, five were wise and five foolish. But how were the wise distinguished from the foolish. The distinction was not outward. They were alike in their dress. They were alike in their equipment. They were alike in their intentions. That difference was a hidden difference. The wise had oil. The foolish did not. That is, the wise had a present readiness to meet the bridegroom, and the foolish did not, and by this Jesus meant to teach that the wise man had a present readiness to meet God and the fool is one who has not.

PART II.

If our wisdom or folly depend upon our attitude toward God, what is the attitude that marks one as wise. The answer to this question is found in the verse that we have just quoted. A wise man is one that fears the Lord. This is true, however ignorant he may be of a thousand matters. The fool, on the other hand, is one who does not fear God. That is true, regardless of how intelligent this man may be and how wise he may be about a thousand secondary things.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Now fear does not mean, an attitude of terror in the Divine Presence. Fear as it has been pointed out may mean a dread of what God may do to me, or what may mean a dread of some wrong I might do to God. For instance, you may fear your wife. Most men do. You may be afraid of her as Jiggs is afraid of Maggie. You may be afraid that she will break a
break a vase over your head and send you to the hospital. You may fear that you will disappoint her. You may fear that you will cause her grief and pain. You may fear that you will fail to measure up to the high expectation that she has of you. This latter is a kind of fear that is spoken of in this book. It is not the fear of the slave, but the fear of the son.

**PART III.**

What are some of the marks of this Godly fear. This book enumerates many. It is possible for us to name only a few.

1. **The man who fears the Lord.** The wise man puts first things first. That means in the first place that he has come to a wise decision as to what is best and has been able to recognize what in life is most worth while. He has realized that wisdom is the principal thing. That wisdom means the knowledge of God. He can distinguish a pearl from a bit of putty anywhere.

   In this respect, he is the antithesis of the fool. The fool may be seeking what he thinks is best, but he has no eye for real values. Wisdom in his eyes is a rather worthless thing. That which is really worth living for is secondary, or the positive base and unclean. He says to himself "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." That is evil is his delight, just because it is evil and because it is forbidden.

   I do not think that fools of this kind are at all rare. Judge Ben Lindsey gives an example of such, in his defense of companionate marriage. There was a young couple that lived together quite agreeably
for some months. They then were married, but after marriage they did not get on at all. They separated that again they could live together on terms most agreeable. What was the matter? Even a companionship could not be pleasant with them unless it had a moral taint upon it. Waters had to be stolen in order to be sweet at all.

The wise man not only recognizes the best, but he gives time to seeking and claiming. "Happy is the man who findeth wisdom, and the man who getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst of desire are not to be compared unto her." Lengthy days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honor; Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." The fool, on the other hand, sees nothing in wisdom for which to struggle.

Because the wise man puts first things first; he refuses to participate in anything that would hinder him in his supreme life purpose. These wise words continually ring in his soul. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not into the way of evil men." He does not make the crowd of the godless his associates. He realizes what the bond slave of folly does not realize, and that is that "The companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Not only does the wise man avoid all that will hinder him, but he welcomes all that will help. He even welcomes suffering and pain. He does not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor does he faint when he is rebuked of Him. This is true, because his supreme purpose in life is not to have an easy time in life but to gain wisdom, which is no other than the knowledge of the Lord.
Not only does he accept chastening at the hands of God he even accepts a rebuke from the lips of men. How hard it is for the best meaning of men to correct us and at the same time keep our good will. That is true because we are more concerned with our pride than we are with our attainment of wisdom. But our sensitiveness does not prove us wise. It indicates the opposite. "Rebuke not a fool, for he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you."

2. The second mark of the wise man is humility. He is teachable. He is capable of being divinely guided, because he realizes his own lack of wisdom. He heeds the wise man. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding." Such a man is capable of being divinely led. No other man is. If you are sufficient for yourself, then you will never have God. The fool never has Him, because, "the way of the fool is right in his own eyes." He already knows he does not need any wisdom from above.

3. The wise man recognizes God in the use of his goods. He knows that God is the owner of all. He knows that both gratitude and obligation prompt him to give. "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of thine increase." That is, he not only gives to God, he gives in such a way as to honor God. He gives what God requires. What God requires is at least a tenth. Not only does he give what God requires, but he gives it when God requires it. That is first. The fool either gives not at all, or gives inadequately.

4. The wise man, or he who fears the Lord, makes provision for the future. He makes provision not simply for the few days he may live here, but for the eternity in which he must live. He is a worker. He is active, earnest, energetic. He not only seeks wisdom, he seeks it with all his might. He puts his time and talent, his heart and soul
into the task.

The fool makes no such provision. That is what was the matter with the rich farmer. He was well provided for for the few days that he might live, but he made no provision at all for the eternity thru which he must live. The fool, therefore, is more stupid than the ant. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise."

The fool may be very energetic in the running of his business, or in the pursuit of his pleasure, but he is a spiritual sluggard. He is active on the farm, or the golf links, but too lazy to come to church or too sluggish to stay awake when he does come.

5. The final art of the wise man is that he acts in the present. He seeks wisdom, and seeks it today. The fool is not interested in wisdom today, he is going to be interested tomorrow. That is one of the marks that peculiarly distinguishes the wise man from the fool. The wise man is wise today. The fool is going to be wise tomorrow. The wise man says, "Now is the accepted time, and today is the day of salvation." The fool says, "Not today but tomorrow."

PART IV.

Then this book tells us the rewards that come as a result of wisdom. These rewards are contrasted throughout the book.

1. There is the contrast of road ways that the wise and the foolish travel.

The wise man has a lighted way. "The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." It is a road that he travels with a sense of security, and knows that he is on the right road, that he is headed toward the right goal. He is recognizing God in every step that he takes. Therefore he is finding
that this great word is true, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy path."

The way of the fool, on the other hand is one of darkness. He is always stumbling. He never knows the joy of the light. He has no sense of guidance. He may seem to be getting on far better than his wise brother, but there is restlessness and wretchedness in the heart of him. Bound for no port, no wind to him can be favorable. He lives his life with no sense of the Divine presence, or of the leading of the kindly light.

2. The man who finds wisdom finds freedom, when the fool finds only slavery. "He shall be holden with the cords of his sin." How true that is. Every sin that we commit, becomes a new link in the chain that binds us. It lessens our ability to be free. It lessens his ability to see and in the kingdom of God. When Samson sinned he was bound with fetters of brass. Invisible fetters always bind us, for "He that committeth sin is the bond slave of sin."

3. The wise man is crowned, and the fool looses his crown.

That means that the man who finds God, finds life. He finds the meaning of the privilege of living. That must ever remain a mystery to the fool. Life eternal is his here, and life eternal is his for ever more. Every wise man can shout, even as he faces the grave. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord shall give me at that day."

The fool on the other hand robs himself. "He wrongeth his own soul, he lays wait for his own blood;" He uncrowns himself. He loots his own money saved. He flings away his own credit. Hating wisdom, he falls in love with death, and death is all his prize.

Not only is he robbed in life, but he is robbed thru all
eternity. He refuses to claim wisdom as his own today, therefore there comes a time when his opportunity is gone by for ever. What appalling words are these. "Because I have called and you have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man has regarded; But ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;"

That does not mean that there will ever come a time when God will mock at your suffering or laugh at your wretchedness, but it does mean if today's opportunities are thrown away, there will come a time when he is as powerless to save as if He laughed, and as if He mocked, and the coming of that day means hell.

Therefore, he only is wise who realizes that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and acts according to that realization in the here and now.
BOOK OF PROVERBS

A casual reading of this book gives the impression that one is reading a book of wise and pithy quotations. These proverbs were, of course, not written by one single individual. They are the accumulated wisdom of a whole people through long centuries. Some of these proverbs are very keen and very profound. Some of them are humorous, though their humor does not always appeal to our Western minds. For instance, here is the picture of a man buying something. "It is nothing," he declares. But when he gets away he brags. We have seen that even in the West, but it is far more prevalent in the East.

Here is another saying that has in it some genuine humor, though there is a bit of pathos as well. "As a gold ring in a swine's snout, so is a beautiful woman without discretion." Our generation has coined a phrase "beautiful but dumb," but never was there another on this type of character quite so cutting as is this. What is the matter with the ring? Nothing, it is genuine gold. What is the matter with the hog? Nothing, he is a genuine hog. But that which horrifies us is the contrast. A gold ring and a hog simply do not go together. The beauty of the ring serves only to increase the ugliness of the hog, so said this cutting writer. Even beauty is of no avail to a woman who is a fool. In fact, her beauty only serves to make her stupidity more glaring.

But while this is a collection of wise phrases, these proverbs have a certain unity. They are written in praise of wisdom and in condemnation of folly. They are to give due honor to the wise man and due rebuke to a fool. To these authors, the supreme tragedy is to be foolish. While the supreme triumph is to be wise. Here then is a book which gives praise to the man who is wise.
I.

But what is it to be wise?

What is it that marks a difference between a wise man and a fool?

1. This difference is not a matter of mere intellectuality. A man, according to Proverbs, and according to the holy Bible as to that matter, may be genuinely dull and yet very wise. On the other hand, he may be very keen and shrewd intellectually, and yet very foolish. To be wise is to be right in one's attitude toward God. To be foolish is to be wrong in that attitude. This conviction is summed up in one terse sentence: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

This means that wisdom has in it a moral quality. If wisdom meant simply keenness of intellect, there would be no virtue in it. Your intellect is a gift. If folly meant mere stupidity, then the fool would not be to blame. He would rather be an object of pity. But the fool of this book is universally condemned. This is the case because his folly is self-chosen. Of all the fools, the one worthy of self condemnation is the self made fool. Of all the wise men, the one most worthy of commendation is the one that became wise through choice.

II.

Now assuming that one has become wise, what is the effect of his wisdom upon the practical task of daily living? What difference does it make for one to be wise? How does wisdom tell upon conduct? These authors point out a number of differences. I have time to mention only five of them.

1. A wise man puts first things first. He is able to do this because he knows his values. He can tell the things that are worthwhile from those
things that are not. He can distinguish between the primary and secondary. He can tell a real pearl from a bit of paste. This, the fool cannot do. He fancies the finest values where none exist. Here is an example "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant... But he knoweth not that the dead are there." He thinks it clever to do things on the sly.

But this wise man puts first things first, and that first thing is wisdom. "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom." "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding." The merchandise thereof is better than silver and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies. All the things that thou canst desire are not be be compared to her. Length of days are in her left hand, and in her right hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Wisdom therefore is the greatest good, and the all-inclusive good.

Since the wise man puts first things first, he avoids all those foes that would turn him aside from his quest. He will not allow himself to be taken in by any form of dissipation. Liquor is ruled out. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and he that is tempted thereby is not wise." He rules out all wrong friendships in the realization that these can only hurt. "The companion of fools shall be destroyed." Above all else, he avoids sexual impurity. There is no more appalling picture in literature of a woman whose feet take hold on hell than is to be found here.

2. The wise man is wise in his attitude toward wealth. In the first place he realizes that money is not primary but secondary. "Better is the righteous little that a man hath than the treasures of many wicked." He realizes further that money is to be used, not simply for oneself, but to the glory of God. Therefore he says "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of thine increase."
That is a word that is just as pertinent today as it ever was. "Honor the Lord with thy substance." To make a right use of money is to honor God. Thus to make a wrong use of it is to dishonor Him. When we allow the Church and charitable institutions to suffer we dishonor ourselves. We dishonor those that we were intended to serve. And above all, we dishonor God. To honor it the Lord with our substance, is not only necessary to give adequately, but it is necessary to give when due. You are not to pay your bills first then at the long last pay your church. We are to pay them with the first-fruits of our increase. A wise man is wise in his attitude toward money.

3. A wise man is energetic. He is a worker. The sluggard, the idler, the slothful is one of the petty versions of this Book. There is a premium set on hard work. In the last chapter we have a picture of the ideal woman. One of the most striking features of this ideal woman is that she is a worker. She has a large household of slaves, but she rises before any of them and works harder than any.

Over and over he rings the charges on the necessity of work. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise." The man that refuses to work hasn't as much wisdom as an ant. "The sluggard will not plow by reason of cold, therefore in the harvest he shall have nothing." "The slothful man sayeth there is a lion in the street." This is a joke, he ought to be out working, but he isn't because he is afraid as soon as he gets out in the street the lion will catch him. What a flimsy excuse.

Here is another picture, "I passed by the fields of the slothful and by the vineyard void of understanding, and lo it was all grown over with thorns and nettles covered the faces of all, and the stone wall was broken down." Here is a man letting his life go to ruin because he is too lazy to work. Then there are others that will work for a little while, but will allow their
laziness to defeat them from winning the goal. They stop just before victory and lose all the rewards for their toil. Here is his picture. "The sluggard will not roast what he has taken in the chase." He has been out all day on the hunt. He has captured a juicy deer, but he allows it to rot because he is too lazy to dress and cook it. The wise man, says this Book, is a worker.

4. Now the wise man is humble. To be conceited is not a mark of wisdom, but a mark of folly. "Take the man wise in his own conceit and there is more hope of a fool than of him." One trouble with the conceited man is he is self-sufficient. He does not need any help, not even from God. But no man can get on without God. Therefore, his folly leads to failure. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

But the wise man knows his weakness and his need. God may help him because he is willing to be helped. It is out of his experience of this all self-sufficient help that the wise man speaks to you and me for this is his message: "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy path." A wise man is humble.

5. A wise man lives in the present. A fool constantly postpones life. "A fool's eyes are at the ends of the earth." He refuses to see what is near in space and near in time. Yesterday might have been a good day, tomorrow is hopeful, but today is of no value at all. In the world beyond the hills he might do something, but here where he is, there is simply nothing to be done. He is always looking to the ends of the earth. Therefore, he gives up the only place he has, which is here. He loses the only time he has, which is now.

But the wise man has a wisdom that is available for the here and now. He is not going to work tomorrow, he is not going to hear the voice of wisdom tomorrow, he is going to hear that voice in the here and now. He knows that if he waits till tomorrow he may never hear it. "Because I have called, and
ye have refused; I have stretched out my hands, and no man regarded. But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, therefore, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fall cometh." The wisdom that we spurn today may spurn us tomorrow. So a wise man acts in the here and now.

III.

What then is the effect of such wise conduct upon the character of the actor?

1. The man who is thus wise finds life and happiness a sincere joy. This Book believes it is our duty to be joyous. It makes life richer for us and richer for our fellows. "A cheerful heart doeth good like a medicine." Or as the American Revised translates it, "A cheerful heart is a medicine." To be wise is to be joyous, and thereby to bring joy to others.

2. To be wise is to be free. The only path to freedom is the path of obedience. "Rebellion dresses the soul in chains." Hence this wise book reads, "And he shall be holden with the cords of his sins." Sin binds us gradually, but it binds us securely. Every wrong choice we make becomes a new link in our chain.

3. The fool therefore goes from one form of slavery to another that is more binding and degrading, while the wise man lives a life that is ever expanding into new life and beauty. "The path of the just is as the dawning light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." At first the life of the wise man may have only the promise of light, but as he persists in his way of obedience, the glorious day breaks upon him as a day of splendor. No wonder that he urges upon us this supreme wisdom, "The fear of the Lord."
Proverbs

Proverbs is one of the three wisdom books of the Bible. While it contains much of theology it is intended to be philosophy rather than theology. The first verse gives the title of the book. The next five verses constitute the preface. The seventh verse contains the central truth of the book. All that follows is but an illustration and enforcement of this central truth contained in the seventh verse.

What is this central truth? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It is this fundamental truth that the author seeks to enforce. He illustrates it and drives it home in many different ways. He fairly haunts us with it. Thus the book of Proverbs is not simply a collection of wise and pithy sayings. It is to teach this big truth that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Now, what is the fear of the Lord? It is not an expression that is in very common use today. We do not like fear. In the modern line fear smacks of servility and cowardice. When we say "The fear of the Lord" it suggests some danger that threatens us at His hand. We are afraid that He will inflict some pain or punishment upon ourselves.

But this is not the Hebrew idea at all. Fear may mean the dread of pain that God might inflict upon me. But here it means the dread of pain that I may inflict upon Him. This fear recognizes the sensitiveness of God. It recognizes His capacity to suffer in our wrong doing. The fear of the Lord is the fear that we have that by our wrong doing we may cause Him grief.

It is evident therefore that this fear can only belong to those who really love God. Where there is love there must of necessity always be fear. The mother is exceedingly tender with her baby, not that she is afraid of what the baby may do to her if she is not. She rather fears the harm that may come to the child. If your own mother is still living you are very careful and thoughtful of her. The reason is that you fear her. You are afraid that unless you are thoughtful you may cause her pain.

Thus it is that when a man fears the Lord he genuinely loves the Lord. This fear of the Lord then means a new heart. It means a living right with God. It means that you are a partaker of the divine nature. For this fear of the Lord is to be genuinely and truly Christian. For it is the Christian alone who can sing from the heart

"O how I fear thee, living God,
With deepest, tenderest fears,
And worship thee with trembling hope,
And penitential tears."

The verses immediately following this seventh verse tell where this wisdom that comes as the result of the fear of the Lord is to be learned. Where are we to learn this great lesson of Godly fear? The answer of the wise man is very plain. We are to learn it in the home. "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother. For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck."

"In the home", says the wise man, "wisdom is to be learned. Outside the home it is to be applied and obeyed." First, among friends and companions in the social circle. Here you are to obey the law of wisdom.
That law is this: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." How hard it is for one to obey the law of wisdom out in the world, in the broadways of the city where life is strenuous and hard if they have never learned wisdom in the home. Daniel was able to stand amidst the temptations of Babylon because he had learned true wisdom from the lips of his father and mother.

Next follows a series of wise sayings that illustrate the truth that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Wherein is one wise because he fears the Lord? What is the wisdom of fearing God? The man who fears the Lord shows himself wise, first of all, in what he escapes. To be wise is to escape the tragedy that comes as the result of folly. Folly in Proverbs is another name for sin.

What is the tragedy of folly? "The sluggard will not plough because of the cold. Therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing." Sin leads to want. Oftentimes it leads to physical want. Always it leads to moral want. There is no bread that satisfies but the bread of life. There is no water that slakes our deepest thirst except the water of life. Folly results in spiritual want.

In the second place, folly leads to slavery. The wise man says, "He shall be holden with the cords of his sin." There are those who think that wrong doing means a larger liberty. He who has wisdom knows that it leads to slavery. "He that committeth sin is the bond slave of sin."

In the third place, folly leaves a man helpless and hopeless. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, I will therefore laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh." This does not mean that God in anger retaliates and refuses to answer a man because He has become angry at him. It does mean this, however, that the man who persists in sin will little by little destroy his spiritual faculties. He who neglects prayer for a whole life time will find himself little skilled in the holy task in the day of his trouble. If you are going to know how to appeal helpfully to God in the day of calamity you had better learn it before your calamity comes. Otherwise because of your lack of faith there might be a deadly silence that would mock your want like

Last of all, folly leads to death. "He that hateth me", says wisdom, "loves death." There are many people today who are bored by religion. They have absolutely no interest in the things of God. The very thought of God is an annoyance. They love their own way. Loving their own way means that they love sin. Loving sin they, in reality, love sin's final consequence and that is death. Such men turn from wisdom with her lovely face to fling their arms around a hideous hag whose nature and name is death.

Then it is the height of wisdom to fear God, not only on account of what we escape by so doing, but on account of the fine treasures that we win. The wise man names many of these treasures. I shall name only a few.

First, the fear of the Lord brings freedom, freedom from sin, freedom from the power of sin. It brings also freedom from sin's consequences. It saves from restlessness and wretchedness and dissatisfaction. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."
The fear of the Lord brings guidance. How blind we are! How stupid and ignorant! How greatly we need a hand to lead us! How greatly we need a kindly light to guide us!

"Lead, kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead thou me on!
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

So long thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!"

But, is there really any kind of a light to lead? There is. The wise man's answer is as sure as that of the New Testament. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path."

Then the fear of the Lord brings the treasure of a glorious progress. It is hard to stand still. It is hard even to walk and not faint. The fear of the Lord is to put us on the upward road that leads somewhere. "The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." If we live life in the fear of the Lord we should be attaining higher heights and sunnier outlooks with the passing days.

Then, at last we should walk right past this world and begin the climb of the Alpine heights in eternity. "For we know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." Truly the wise man was right when he said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
ISAIAH

The book of Isaiah is one of the choicest books of the Bible. Its author has been called the Shakespeare of the Old Testament. He was a poet and an orator. He was a man of rare genius. Finer than all, he was a man of great faith, and a marvelous intimacy with God. He was one of the great prophets of all time.

Now in the study of the prophets, we need to realize what a prophet is. The common conception of a prophet is one who foretells the future. We have weather prophets, for instance, who tell us what kind of weather we are going to have tomorrow, or next week or even next year. They are very daring men, as a rule. Usually they miss it. But this fact does not worry them in the least.

But, a prophet in the scriptural sense is not primarily one who foretells. Of course, he often does deal with the future, but the real work of the prophet as has been pointed out, is to be a spokesman for God. As Ezekiel puts it, he is to hear the words at God's lips and warn man for Him. When Moses was trying to get out of going into Egypt, God promised that Aaron was to be his spokesman, or his prophet. That is, Aaron was to speak for Moses. It is in this sense that the prophet speaks for God. A prophet then, is God's spokesman.

PART I.

Since Isaiah was God's spokesman, it is necessary that he get acquainted with God. This he did as we learn from his own lips. His experience is told in the 6th chapter. The king had just
died. Staggered by this loss, Isaiah went into the temple. Here he had a vision of God. He saw the Lord, the story tells us, high and lifted up. He heard the angelic song, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Host". It is thru this experience that Isaiah came to his knowledge of God and of course it was a knowledge that grew with the passing of the years. It was because of this knowledge that he gave to God a new name. That name is used thirty times in this one book. It is used five times elsewhere throughout the Bible. All the authors who use it wrote after Isaiah, and speaks of God as the Holy One of Israel.

1. God is holy. That does not simply mean that He is a Being a part. That was the old idea of holiness. By holiness, Isaiah meant that God was pure. That He was righteous. That He was merciful and good.

Not only was God holy, but he was The Holy One of Israel. Isaiah does not mean by this that God was not interested in any other nation. When the Psalmist wrote, "The Lord is my Shepherd", he did not mean that He was not the Shepherd of any one else. This was Isaiah's way of appropriating God, The Lord was His God. He was the God of his city. He was the God of his nation. It is a pity that we do not claim God more fully in this sense ourselves.

Now God being a holy God, he is interested in having a holy city and a holy nation. The message of Isaiah is a social message. Isaiah, were he here, would be interested in the coming election. He knows that the Holy One of Memphis wants the best possible man for mayor. He wants the best possible for all positions that have to do with the welfare of the city. And it is only true to say that the church has all too little interest in this phase of the Christian life.
PART II,

Isaiah became God's spokesman about sin. He never
minimised sin. He never treated it as a small matter. He knew that
fools and fools only make a mock of sin. Who ever treats sin as a
trifling matter, is a fool, whether he is in the university or in the
gutter. Whether he is in the pulpit or in prison. Sin is terrible
for two reasons.

1. Sin persisted in destroys the faculty by which we lay
hold on salvation. The prophet represents the Lord as telling him to
make the heart of the people fat, to shut their eyes and stop their
ears. That is His way of telling us that sin persisted in puts out
the eyes of the soul. It does stop our ears. It does bring us to
the place where we are past feeling. That is what the New Testament
means by sinning against the Holy Ghost. Then sin is represented as
burning the sinner up. And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker
of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall
quench them." That is, sin consumes man. Sin also consumes the nation.
The truth of that has been demonstrated countless numbers of times.
He tells the people of his day that it is going to be demonstrated
in the case of themselves and their nation. He named his son
Mahershalalhasbas, which meant speed to the spoil, hasten to the prey.
The boy was a living reminder of the coming destruction of the city
and the nation.

PART III.

But Isaiah is above all, the prophet of hope. He lived
thru tempestuous days, but believed in the dawn of the morrow. It was
a three fold hope that flooded the sky of his life.

1. That was the hope of the Remnant. Isaiah believed in the coming destruction of his nation, but he could not believe that God was going to destroy them utterly. He stood firm in the faith that all the nations of the earth were yet to be blessed thru them. Therefore, he preached the doctrine of the Remnant. He lived in the joy of a great hope. He named his first born Shearjashub, which meant a remnant shall return. Thus, day and night his boy preached to him and to the world, the marvelous hope.

2. Out of this Remnant, Isaiah expected the coming King. He is the first of the prophets to give anything like a description of Jesus Christ. He is to be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He is to be as a hiding place from the wind, and cover from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place. As a shadow of a great rock in a weary land. He is at last to make atonement for the people, as we read in the 53rd chapter.

3. It is thru this coming King that a new day is to be born. Isaiah believed that the Prince of Peace was to one day bring peace to a heart torn and war ruined world. He wrote that marvelous sentence, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." To have said that 2600 years ago, when the one pass time, and the one business of Kings and nations was of making war, certainly shows that Isaiah was inspired. Even then, he believed that the world would one day be a warless world.
Devout souls have come to this faith ever since. The inspiration of these words is furtherproved by the fact that they have lived thru the turmoil and confusion they have come. How many spears have pierced them. How many swords have hacked them. How many cannonadings have the stood. How often the rage of hell of war seems to have torn them to pieces. Tonight there are more people who are looking forward to and believing in and praying for a warless world than ever before in human history.

Not only was Isaiah looking forward to a world without war, he was looking forward to a day when peace reigning in the human heart should remain. "Even the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and the child shall play with the poisonous serpent and not be stung." Nothing should hurt or mar in all the land, for the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." What a vision. What a marvelous faith. It is the faith that Jesus had when he taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come." It is the faith we need in days like these. How heartening it is to know that however disastrous may be the conflict, now we are sure to win in the end. Sin is going to finally be destroyed, The devil is going to be cast out, and Jesus shall reign where ere the sun doeth its successive journey run. May the Lord help us to work continuously in the faith of that large faith.
The book of Isaiah is one of the truly great books of the Bible. As a piece of literature it is a gem. Isaiah was a great preacher. He was a great poet. He was a great saint. He was a man of genuine spirituality. He was a statesman. For more than fifty years he was court preacher in the city of Jerusalem. He is one of the outstanding city pastors of all the centuries. He is one of the greatest prophets on the altar of whose heart God's fire ever burned.

There are some books that we have studied that to the modern reader are not keenly interesting. But here is a book that is just as up-to-date as the day in which it was written. It speaks home to the needs of this time and of every time as if the prophet were speaking at this moment. Any intelligent reader who will give himself the opportunity will be profoundly interested and helped by the study of the prophecy of Isaiah.

A few years ago H. G. Wells, who is one of the keenest intellects of the day, wrote a book called "God, the Invisible King." It is a very disappointing book to me. Mr. Wells seems to have fallen far short of his usual ability. However, he sets himself to the task of solving in a few hours the problems that the master minds of all the centuries have given themselves to since the birth of history. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he falls short.

Now the title that Mr. Wells gives his book would not be a bad one for the prophecy of Isaiah. The theme of this great preacher is the Throne of God. He makes us realize the presence of God, the invisible King. First, there is the fact of God's kingship. We are haunted with it from the beginning of the book to the end. We find it in the very opening paragraph: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." They have rebelled against the father. They have rebelled against the divine Father who is the divine King.

The kingship of God is seen not only among the Jewish people. He also reigns over those outside the covenant. He speaks through the lips of Isaiah to say of Cyrus, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me." Isaiah has constantly shown us God on the throne, God reigning, God amidst the people and the kings of the earth, crowning and discrowning them according to His own holy purpose.

It was this realization of the divine kingship that came to Isaiah when he was called into the ministry. Listen to his experience: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne." Uzziah had been one of the great kings of Judah. For fifty years he had reigned and the record says that "he was mightily helped until he was strong." Isaiah was then a young man and this great king was no doubt his ideal. He was his hero. His highest hopes for his nation were centered in Uzziah.

But suddenly Uzziah slipped from the throne. Leprous they dragged him to an outside house and then into his grave. It was a terrible shock to the young man Isaiah. He did not see how the nation was going to be able to get on without its great king. As he went into the temple brooding over this loss there came to him a vision of the King.

There are times when God has to remove the secondary before we can see the primary. Isaiah had had this human king Uzziah so much in his eye
that he had lost sight of the divine King. The throne had to be made va-
cant for him to see that throne that is always filled. I know a house to-
day beautifully shaded. Frost has to come and clip the leaves from the
trees before you can get a vision of the stars. There are some of you who
have seen God more clearly since some peculiar treasure slipped out of
your life.

Isaiah was never the same after this vision. He never lost heart and
hope again. However visible kings might fail he knew there was one who,
as he himself expressed it "should not fail nor be discouraged." However
earthly kings might weary and have to lay down the burden of state there
was one king eternal who would never tire. "Hast thou not heard, hast
thou not known, that the Lord, creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth
not, neither is weary?" The sense of divine kingship gave the man courage
for more than half a century of tempestuous ministry. He was able to join
in the song of the psalmist: "The Lord reigneth; let the people rejoice."

There was a special reason for joy in the fact of God's kingship be-
cause of the character of the king. When Isaiah saw the King, high and
lifted up, he learned something about His character. He had a true and
spiritual insight into the heart of God. The first big fact that he dis-
covered was the holiness of God. "Above him stood the seraphims; each had
six wings; with twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his face,
and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy,
holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."

Our God is a holy God. As the New Testament puts it: "God is light,
and in Him is no darkness at all." This, I know, sounds a bit trite and
commonplace, but it is the commonplace truths by which we live. Isaiah
was in a peculiar sense the prophet of the commonplace. So much was this
the case that they spoke of him as one who talked to them as if they were
children: "Line upon line, and line upon line; precept upon precept, and
precept upon precept; here a little and there a little."

But as commonplace as is this doctrine of the holiness of God it is a
truth that we need to get a profound grip of today. For as God is holy He
is calling us to the same high place. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." If we
walk in the light as He is in the light we can claim fellowship with Him.
But if we claim fellowship with Him and then walk in darkness, then the
apostle of love says that we lie and do not the truth.

This reigning king is not only holy. He is also mighty. He is infin-
ite in power. He is able even to gird a great Persian king who does not
know Him and to Sennacherib He speaks in keenest scorn, "I will put my
hook in thy nose and turn thee about." He is to treat this world conquer-
or as a man might treat his ox. His army He was to utterly destroy.

"But the angel of death spread its wings o'er the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed,
And the eye of the sleeper waxed deadly and chill,
And the heart but once heaved and forever grew still."

Not only is He mighty for the overthrow of His enemies. He is mighty
to help the weak. "To them that have no might He increaseth strength.
Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly
fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they
shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they
shall walk and not faint."
This reigning God is not only holy and mighty. He is also loving. The book of Isaiah is made tender and winsome by the presence of the divine love. We see the cross that is in the heart of God long before we see it as an actual fact on Calvary. It is in the very opening sentence: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled." There is disappointment in that word. There is tenderness and there are tears. God is grieving in the loss of His children, grieving because He loves.

Not only does He grieve because He loves. He also suffers in order to save. There is nothing in the New Testament finer than Isaiah's declaration of this fact. The writers of the Gospels give us but little clearer picture of the face of our Lord.

"Who hath believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground, He hath no form nor comeliness and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Then Isaiah kept very clear before him the purpose of the King. Isaiah never put the emphasis in his preaching on the life to come. Do not understand me to say that he did not believe in the life to come. But the salvation that he preached was a salvation for the here and now. He was confident that God was seeking to establish a kingdom in this world. He was confident that it was the purpose of God that the kingdoms of the world should become the kingdoms of the Lord and His Christ.

This is a fact that he emphasizes again and again. There was hate and battle and turmoil and confusion in his day, but he never ceased to dream of a better day, a day when they should "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks, and the lion and the lamb should lie down together." He looked forward to the day when "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose. It shall blossom abundantly . . . and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Then the preacher shows us the method by which this reigning God is seeking to establish His kingdom. He is seeking to conquer the nations, but His first step is the conquest of the individual. We see this fact in the personal experience of Isaiah himself.

Listen to his story once more: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord . . . . Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for me? Then said I, Here am I; send me."
This is a fascinating personal experience. It tells how Isaiah accepted the kingship of God as the supreme fact in his own life. Look for a moment at the process: First, "I saw the Lord." "Then said I, Woe is me for I am undone, For I am a man of unclean lips." A vision of God brought him a vision of himself. In the light of the divine countenance he realized his own sinfulness.

Such was the experience of Peter when he had witnessed the miraculous draft of fishes. He said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, oh Lord." The same was true of Job. He held fast to his integrity against his accusers. But when he had a vision of God it was different. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

First the conviction of sin, then confession and with confession pardon and cleansing. It is ever so. "For if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Thus cleansed, thus made a partaker of the divine nature, thus coming to share in His holiness, he is ready to enter into His service. Having found God and pardon and cleansing he found also his mission. He is ready to say, "Here am I, send me."

Now it is the service of a man thus cleansed that is effective in setting up the kingdom of God on earth. It is a man whose lips have been touched with heaven's own fire that is able acceptably to speak in the name of the King. Out of holy character there naturally flows a stream of holy ministry.

But mark you, there is no substitute for this personal purity that comes through surrender to God. No amount of ritualistic service can take the place of that. How terribly plain the prophet makes us see that fact. "Who hath required this at your hand?" He says in scorn, "to tread my courts? Your new moons and your feasts are hateful to me. And when you spread forth your hands, when you give yourselves up to prayer, I will hide my face." Why is that? He gives the answer: "Your hands are full of blood."

What does he mean by this? He means that no man can pray acceptably and no man can render any service acceptably till he has at first submitted to the King. You cannot make church attendance, you cannot make giving, you cannot make work a substitute for personal holiness. No amount of going to mass and bead tolling will take the place of a Christ-like character. God is seeking to establish His reign over the earth. But the method of His conquest is first to conquer the individuals and through them to conquer the world.

That was the method that Jesus used. He called to him Andrew and John first. They had a quiet hour together. Then He sent them to bring James and Peter and Philip. And one by one He drew individuals to Him till He forged the chain "and dragged Caesar from his throne." Now, as you accept the kingship of Christ over your own life you take the first step in making Christ king of the world.

So we have here the message of the book. First, there is the fact of the throne of God. God reigns. This God who reigns is holy and mighty and full of love. Isaiah might have sung this song as well as any modern poet:
"O Love divine, that stooped to share
Our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear!
On thee we cast each earth-born care;
We smile at pain while thou art near.

Though long the weary way we tread,
And sorrow crown each lingering year,
No path we shun, no darkness dread,
Our hearts still whispering, Thou art near!"

He declared the purpose of God was to set up His kingdom in the world. And
the method was the conquest of the individual heart.
"Once giving, that tends to give more.
On the other hand, one little cost.
On these we can save every cent.
We will at least, when time to rest.

'('money long, the west may we reach'
And slowly does, each succeeding year.'n
It's better we spend, to get these items.'n
Can realize with experience, than at waste.'n

He saw the meekness of God was to seek the kingdom in the world.
And the meek was the conqueror of the indignant heart.
Jeremiah

The Prophet Jeremiah is one of the great hearted men of the bible. He is sensitive and tender and yet magnificently strong. When Jesus asked His disciples as to what the men of His day thought of Him, they answered, "Some say that you are Jeremiah." That, I take, was the most accurate guess that was made. Of all the prophets, then Jeremiah was the most Christlike. You cannot read his message without being reminded of the Prophet of Nazareth.

PART I.

Jeremiah begins his book with the study of his own personal experience.

1. How did he come to be a prophet? He did so at the call of God. God tells him explicitly that He had planned his life before he was born. He had brought him into the world for the one big purpose of being His spokesman.

2. Not only had God called him to his task, but He had also given him his message. When Jeremiah tried to excuse himself, God would not accept his excuse. "Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak, I am but a child." In reply to this, the prophet tells us that God touched his lips, and told him that He would put His word within his mouth. God had not only called him to be a prophet, but He had supplied him with His message.

PART II.

But though Jeremiah knows himself called, and divinely gifted, he yet shrinks from his task. In fact he continues to shrink throughout his long ministry of more than forty years. The role that he is called
upon to play is thoroughly distasteful. We find him exclaiming against it again and again. "Alas, my mother that thou hast borne me a man of contention against the whole world." Again he cries, "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for a wayfaring man, that I might leave my people and go from them."

Why does he wish to leave?

1. He is by nature a very sensitive and timid and shrinking man. He loves quietude, yet he is forced to live in the midst of the tempest. He loves seclusion, yet he is flung out into the limelight. Being the timid, shrinking, sensitive retiring man that he is, the role of the prophet is never to his liking.

2. Then the congregation to which he is called to preach is not the kind to make his work agreeable. They are stubborn and rebellious, they are heedless and resentful. He himself is a clean minded and a high souled idealist. They are the very opposite. He can find nothing better to say of them that they are a crowd of idolaters and adulterers and slanderers.

3. Then his message is largely one of denunciation. How relentlessly he attacks sin. He lives in the midst of National disaster. At times his city is besiegéd by foreign armies, but always he is compelled to say the unpopular and discouraging thing. He tells them that their city and nation is going to be destroyed. He tells them that the one reason for this destruction is their sin against God.

4. He shrinks from the persecution that naturally resulted from preaching of this kind. He is a great lover, therefore he likes to be loved. Yet in place of love there is hate and persecution.

(1) Sometimes this persecution took the form of cold neglect.
When he preached, no one congratulated him, they simply passed him by in contempt. "I sat alone," he says with a sob in his throat. How lonely he was. I know of no one more utterly alone, except the man Christ Jesus.

(2) Again his persecution took the form of ridicule. Men sneered at him as fanatic. They scorned him as a knocker. They ridiculed him as an unpatriotic prophet of evil. One of the most dreadful weapons that was ever wielded is ridicule, and scorn can inflict some of the sorest wounds from which we can suffer.

(3) Again this persecution took the more material form. One day he was stoned out of his native village as though he was a wild street dog. Another day he was publicly whipped. Again we find him in stocks. He even comes upon the scene on one occasion with the mud of the dungeon upon his hands and feet.

(4) Then he shrank from his task because it seemed so utterly hopeless. His preaching won him nothing but antagonism and persecution. It is easy to fight if you are winning. It is easy to work if you are getting some where. But to battle and struggle, and win nothing and less than nothing. That is hard, and that was the lot of Jeremiah.

PART III.

How did this prophet manage to continue to keep true to his calling through all the long years.

1. He kept true to the sense of duty. God told him to keep speaking and he dared not quit.

2. He kept true because he had a mighty conviction. He was convinced that the ruin of his nation was sin. He was convinced that if they repented of sin, that God would yet forgive and save. He was convinced that
there was salvation in no other direction.

The larger part of Jeremiah's message is one of denunciation but he is also a prophet of hope. He shared with Isaiah his belief in "the remnant". He stated that hope, however, somewhat differently. Isaiah's was, a vessel of clay that had been marred in the making. But it was Jeremiah's faith that there was yet hope, so he wrote this sentence. When the cup was marred in the making, He made it again. Therefore there was to be the dawning of a new day, when the false nation should repent.

3. He was held true by a mighty love. He longed to leave his people, and yet he could not because he was held by a love that would not let him go. At times he blazed upon them with hot anger. But it was an anger that was born of love. It was an anger like that of Moses and also like that of Jesus Christ.

4. Finally he stood true because God was his strength. When Jeremiah complained of his weakness, God promised him that He would make him an iron tower and brazen wall and a defense city, and that promise was grandly kept. Jeremiah is one of the finest examples in all history of the power of God to make a shrinking and timid man strong, with the strength of granite.

PART IV.

What was the outcome? Jeremiah stood true to his task. In his own day, his ministry was a failure. His people refused to listen. In refusing they rushed headlong into ruin. But in after years they did listen. Not only did his own people listen, but other nations have listened as well. Jeremiah, the seeming utter failure has at last put his tender hands upon all the continents and pushed them into new zones of living.
LAMENTATIONS

This book makes no reference to its author. However, Jeremiah has been regarded for many years as the writer of this exquisite book. It bears marks of his tenderness and his tears. The Septuagint begins with a verse that is left out of our Bibles. It runs something like this: "It came to pass after the distress of Israel and captivity of Jerusalem that Jeremiah wept and lamented with this lamentation."

It strikes me that the book is far more than a number of lamentations. There is magnificent preaching in it. There are very inspiring passages that are exceedingly heartening and full of hope. These five chapters are really five separate poems, but they all blend together in a book of rare richness and beauty.

PART I.

Amidst the ruin and desolation of his city, the prophet sits down to record again the causes that lay back of the terrible disaster. He is a member of the chosen race. This ruined city, whose streets are full of famine, desolation and death, is the city of Jehovah. This being the case, why is it so completely overthrown? Why is it such an utter wreck? The prophet finds but one answer to that.

What is the answer? He does not find the solution of this problem in a combination of untoward circumstances. It is true that his people had made unfortunate alliances. But this was not the real cause of their failure, nor did they fail because of the weakness or the forgetfulness of God. They failed because they had forsaken God. That is, the one sole cause of their failure was their sin. The utter disaster that lay all about them was but another open declaration of the fact that sin finds the sinner out.
In this book, however, the prophet names those specific sins that had wrought the nation's ruin.

1. There was the sin of the prophets. Jeremiah, assuming that he is the author, lays much of the blame for his nation's ruin to false leadership. The religious leaders had not been faithful. They had not met their obligations. They had utterly failed in their duty. He mentions very definitely the failures they had made.

(1) They had uttered a false and flattering vision. They had been bent on prophesying smooth things. They had said peace, peace when there was no peace. That is they had taught the people after this fashion. You are God's chosen. Since you are His, He is going to care for you and protect you regardless of your present attitude toward Him. You are God's chosen, therefore you are going to continue to be His whether you obey or disobey. Whether you are faithful or unfaithful.

Now that was dangerous preaching. It is no less dangerous today. Yet, I think it is safe to say that there has never been a time when such a gospel was any more prevalent or popular. How many there are who believe that God will save us if we repent. But they also believe that He will save us if we do not repent. The popular conception of God is that He is a goody goody kind of being who will save us whether we trust Him or whether we do not. He is little more than a great big Santa Claus, distributing tickets to heaven both to the regenerate and the unregenerate. Such a doctrine is and ever will be dangerous and damning.

(2) Not only did these prophets give a false vision, but in so doing they failed to compel their hearers to face the facts. The charge made by this author, is that they failed to make Israel see her sin.
For some reason they refused to bring home the fact that their hearers were disobeying God. They refused to make them see that such disobedience involved guilt, and that such guilt involved infinite danger. When they preached, everybody felt comfortable. When they preached nobody smote upon his breast and said "God be merciful unto me a sinner.

Not only did they fail to rebuke sin by their preaching, but they failed even more disasterously to rebuke it by their lives. This, after all, is the supreme rebuke. I am afraid there is little use for any of us to utter any tirade against sin, unless we show by our lives that we really hate it. The greatest rebuke of sin is a white life. Elijah had not said a word to that woman with whom he stayed about her sin, yet his very presence brought conviction. Now when a man rebukes sin both by what he says and what he is, that rebuke cannot but bring about conviction.

But these prophets failed both in their preaching and in their living. Therefore, their work did not make for salvation, but for the opposite. Jeremiah speaks to the same purpose in the book of Jeremiah. "I sent not these prophets, yet they ran; I spake not unto them yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then would they have turned from their evil ways, and I should have healed them."

2. The second cause of disaster was the sin of the parents. It was the failure of the home. Notice the charge. "The daughter of my people hath become cruel like the ostrich of the wilderness." Wherein is the ostrich cruel. It is not that she slanders her young. It is not that she devours them. Her cruelty consists in this, that she lets them alone. It is the cruelty of neglect. If you want to
destroy a home, neglect it. If you want to destroy a church, neglect it. If you want to destroy a child, neglect it. If neglect was a danger then, I do not know but that it is even more pressing now. Life has become so intense. We are in such a hurry. There is so much to do. We have not time to get acquainted with our own children. In ancient Sparta, when a baby was born that did not promise to grow into a healthy man or woman, it was not killed, it was simply left to die. It was neglected. To neglect a child is to murder it. To neglect a spiritual life, is often times to allow it to become dead in trespasses and sin.

3. The third cause of failure was the sin of the people.

(1) The first sin charged against the people as a whole, was the sin of thoughtlessness. "She never thought of what would follow." That is Moffatt's translation. How significant is the word, or how many a tragedy it might give the reason. Here is a man a slave of evil habits. He is bound hand and foot by some terrible disease. What is the reason? He never thought of what would follow. Here is a girl shunned and robbed of all that makes life beautiful. How did it come about? The answer, she never thought of what would follow.

(2) The second sin of the people was that of indifference. Probably not all of them were thoughtless, but those who did think did not care. The most pathetic sentence in the book is the wail of this broken hearted man, as he looks upon the utter indifference of those about him what to him is a tragedy too bitter for tears. And this is his cry. "Is it nothing to you, oh ye that pass by."
What an old sin is indifference. And yet how new. How little we care about the things that matter most. How God would burn this word into our ears in the presence of the evils that are about us today. When we see lives being wrecked by lawlessness, he cries, "Is it nothing to you oh ye that pass by?" When he sees cities governed by scoundrels instead of the righteous, he asks the same question. When he sees His church compelled to beg in the streets, He asks the same question.

There are some who care. Let us thank God for that. They care enough to give. They care enough to give sacrificially. They care enough to work. They care enough to pay. They care much. Then there are those who care little. The burden rests upon them very lightly, a little heavier than the spider web. Then there are those who care not at all.

But as trifling a matter as indifference seems, it is not trifling at all. It is a deadly sin. It is a destroyer of character. It is a destroyer of churches. It is the wrecker of homes. It is the blaster of nature. All that is necessary in order to bring in the Kingdom of God, is to get a sufficient number of people to really care. All that is necessary in order to wreck the world is for that world to become the victim of indifference. How much are you concerned with human need? How much do you care? This is a lost world, but it may be saved. Is it nothing to you, oh ye that pass by?

PART II.

The disaster that would come as result of sin is too terrible for tears. It had brought ruin to the individual, to the home and to the nation.

1. It had resulted in weakness. Sin always means weakness.
Sampson is strong only so long as he is loyal to God. That is the case with you and with me. There is nothing that weakens the individual, there is nothing that weakens the church life like sin.

2. Sin had brought them to famine. The prodigal in the far country is in want. Every man is in want who has not the bread of life.

3. It brought them to slavery. The prophet uses most fitting language when he said "The Lord has twisted his sins together and brought them as a yoke upon his neck.

4. It had wrought them to death. This truth is always the case. "The wages of sin is death."

PART III.

The most amazing thing about this book is its hopefullness. The author sits among ruin, utter and complete, yet he voices this fine sentence. "I have hope." What is the secret of his hope? It is not in the nations about him. It is not in his own people. It is in God. He has made certain discoveries about God, that makes him hope even in the midst of his black surroundings. What has he discovered?

1. God's love is unfailing! We accept that as a common place. We say, "Of course," but the man who says "of course" usually does not really believe in the love of God. It was amazing to the point of the miraculous that this man could still love his torn and scattered and destroyed people.

2. He declares that God's compassion, that His mercies are new every morning. Every day God gives the lost man a chance to start again. He gives us a chance every morning to enter into new fellowship with Himself. Every morning he offers us an opportunity to begin to begin again. His mercies are new every morning, therefore every
morning offers new hope and new possibilities.

3. God is unfailing in His faithfulness. He is absolutely dependable. All else may disappoint and deceive. He never will. He never can. Therefore this man sitting among the ashes of his burnt out hopes, continues to hope; because he believes in the faithfulness of God.

4. Then he hoped, because he believed it was a purpose even in the horrible disaster that had come upon him and his nation. Here is a marvelous discovery that he made. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of man." He faces the fact that God has to punish at times, but He never does so except with pain. In all our afflictions, He is pained. In all our suffering, He grieves. Therefore, God is punishing here, not because He wants to wound, but because He wants to help.

PART IV.

How is the prophet's hopes to be realized. It will not be realized through rebellion. If these people become bitter and give way to despondence, they will never realize the prophet's hopes. There is only one way of realizing them and that is the way of repentance. If they will only realize that their punishment, severe as it is, is less than they deserve, if they will only say with the prophet, "It is of thy mercy that we are not consumed" if they will pour out their hearts in repentance, then God will help and heal and save. Since sin caused the ruin, only the putting away of sin can heal. What a message to that day of disaster! What a message for your day and mine!
Ezekiel was thirty years of age when he began his ministry. He tells us that this was five years after the exile. Therefore, he begins in the year 581 B.C. He was twenty-five years of age when Jerusalem was captured. He was therefore a contemporary of Jeremiah. He had been brought into contact with this wonderful personality during the most impressionable years of his life. It is not strange, therefore, that we see indications of Jeremiah's influence in the prophecies of Ezekiel.

PART I.

His Preparation.

The prophet Ezekiel had a five fold preparation for the work to which God had called him.

1. His experience with God. He tells us that on a certain day on the River Chebar, the heavens were opened and he saw a vision of God. Of course the place where Ezekiel was at the time is not significant, nor is the method. The one significant fact is that he came into a personal realization of a personal God. This marks the beginning of his ministry as it marks the beginning of the ministry of every real prophet.

Some of Ezekiel's visions seem to us very queer and very perplexing. There is no doubt that his images were colored somewhat by his environment. But what he saw came to be to him a revelation, in part at least, of the nature of God. He begins by telling us of a living creature surrounded by wheels. This creature had the face of a lion, and the face of a man, and the face of an ox and the face of an eagle. The lion seems to signify supremacy. The face of the man indicates the humanness of God, his likeness to ourselves. The face of an ox indicates service and sacrifice. The face of an eagle excites majesty.
2. The second part of Ezekiel's preparation growing naturally out of this vision was that he was filled with the Spirit. He declares that the Spirit of God entered into him and he set upon his feet. That is, God made him an erect man. A man spiritually upstanding. He made him a man of lofty character and of lofty purpose. Christ spoke to the same purpose, and Paul: "Rise and stand upon thy feet." Whenever God has His way, he always makes us spiritually up. He causes that we be characterized by loftiness of aim and motive that does not belong to the children of the world. He makes us peculiar people. Our peculiarity does not consist in our dress or in our circumstances, but in the fact that we show forth the virtues of Him who has loved us and saved us by His grace.

3. The third step in Ezekiel's preparation was his personal appropriation of the Word of God. The language in which he tells his story is highly figurative. God presents him with a roll, as we should say, a book. He does not take this book and wrap it in a napkin and lay it away. He does not merely reverence it and defend it. He eats it. That is, he himself feeds his own soul upon the Word of God. "I commend you to God and the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up."

The course of the prophet was eminently wise. Reverence for the Word of God is good but it does not go far enough. It is not even enough to declare your faith in the truth of it. It is not enough to defend it. It is certainly not enough to abuse those that seem to be hostile to it. If the Bible is to do for you and me what God had intended we must appropriate it. We must feed upon it. We must open its pages with this prayer. "Break thou the bread of life, dear Lord to me."

4. The fourth step of Ezekiel's preparation was the training of his sympathies. In the third chapter of his book, we have this significant
sentence. "I sat where they sat." He went among those disappointed and heart broken and sinful and sinning men and women, and sat down among them. He looked out upon the world through their eyes. He bled through their wounds. He entered into sympathy with them.

What a qualification is this. How we need the same schooling, all of us. It is safe to say that a very large part of unkindness and therefore unhappiness of the world comes from our inability of putting ourselves in the place of another. The strong man needs to sit in the seat of the weak. We who are well need to look out upon the world sometimes through the eyes of the sick and suffering. Old age needs to sit down in the chair of youth and youth in the chair of old age. The high service, I am confident can only be rendered by by him who can say, "I sat where they sat."

5. The final step in his preparation was the gift of a heart that could grieve. This was the natural outcome of his fellowship with God and his fellowship with man. He came to care. What a searching passage that is where he describes God as calling to him a man with an ink horn in his hand. This man he tells to go through the city and as he goes to set a mark upon the brows of all those who sigh and cry for the abomination and sins that are wrought in the city. I wonder upon how many of our foreheads the man with the ink horn would set his mark upon our brows if he passed our way tonight.

Then how terrible is the penalty of those who do not care. Mark you, the punishment of which the prophet speaks was not meted out to those who had done some horrible wrong. It was not meted out to those guilty of murder. It was meted out to those who did not care. To the indifferent. To those upon whose hearts the burden of the world's woes
rested lightly. What happened to those whose brows were unmarked. The Lord commanded that every one of them should be stoned for their
They died of their indifference. Indifference is a deadly sin. It is murder. The only way to avoid the terrible guilt of it is to care.

PART II.
The Prophet's Duty.

What is the prophet for? His duty is that that rests in some measure upon every one of us today.

1. First he is a watchman. He is to stand upon the city wall and warn the inhabitants of the city of the approaching danger.

2. Second he is spoken of as a shepherd. How stern is the denunciation of the faulty shepherd. There were such in Ezekiel's day. He charged them with devouring the flock rather than feeding them. They did not sustain the weak. They did not bind up the wounded. They scattered the flock. We shepherds are guilty sometimes. We drive the sheep away rather than lead them to the fold.

3. God's prophet, God's servant is to be a man who can fill a gap. "I sought for a man" said God through His prophet "to stand in the gap of the land". We are to be the protectors of our fellows, the protectors of our homes and our church and our nation. We are to be the salt of the earth.

We are to do this in a two fold fashion. First we are to hear the words from God's lips. That means listening to God. That means prayer, That means consecration. Then we are to speak the message that we hear. We are to speak it by our lips. Then we are to speak it by our lives.
PART III.
The Prophet's Message.

What did Ezekiel have to say to his generation.

1. He brought home to them the fact that sin is an individual matter. Isaiah had dealt with sin almost solely as a social something. He dealt with the sin of the city and with the Nation. Ezekiel brought home the fact that sin belonged to the individual. The nation sinned because the individuals that composed the nation had sinned.

This message was peculiarly needed at that time. You see Ezekiel's congregation felt that they were suffering for sin not their own. Their nation, their fathers had sinned and they were bearing the penalty. They made themselves feel as comfortable as possible by quoting, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are on edge." He declares that no man is guilty because his father had sinned. Your sin is your own. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

2. Ezekiel's message is a message of repentance. No Old Testament writer, I think, so clearly defines what repentance is. He shows us clearly that to repent is to change the direction of your life, so that at one time he says repent and at another he says, "Turn ye turn ye, for why will ye die."

He preached repentance as a necessity. Not to repent is to die. He preached repentance as a privilege. To repent is to find life. He preached repentance as something pleasing to God. "I have no pleasure in the death of him that die." He already saw what Jesus makes more plain to us, that "There is joy in heaven in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents."

3. Ezekiel preached regeneration. He declared that it was possible for God to give us a new heart. He promises that master message, the taking away of the heart of stone and giving of a heart of flesh.
He is the prophet of the new birth. He believed in regeneration for the individual. Because he believed in the regeneration for the individual he also believed in it for the nation. Therefore, he had hope even as he preached in the valley of dry bones.

4. Ezekiel is the prophet of apostasy. He was a thoroughgoing Methodist. In this, that he was convinced that it was possible for a man to backslide. Therefore he warns against it again and again. Could anything be stated in plainer words than this. "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abomination that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: In his trespasses that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die."

5. Ezekiel's message was preeminently a message of hope. He believed that the church of God was to be an ever going power for good in the world. It was to him that the vision of the river going out of the sanctuary was given. At first the water was only up to the ankles, but the further he went the deeper it became and wider until at last it was a river that could not be passed over. He believed that that river was to one day cover the earth as the water covered the sea. And the glory of it was that everything lived where the river came.

PART IV.

The Response To His Message.

What were the results of Ezekiel's preaching? So far as his own generation was concerned, they seemed to have been very small. God warned him at the beginning that they were a rebellious people and hard
hearted. There is every indication that they lived up to this description. This does not mean, however, that they were bitter against the preacher as was the congregation of Jeremiah. They never stoned him. They never put him into stocks. They never threw him into prison. They seemed to have been decent and respectable. "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear they words, but they will not do them: --- thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear they words, but they do them not." You see, these people came to church. Not only did they come to church, but they listened to the preacher with great decency. They not only listened to him but they admired him. They enjoyed what he said. His preaching was like a lovely song, sung by an excellent singer. It was a regular lullaby. They slept sweetly. But when the benediction was over, they lived just as they had lived before.

Surely this is the eternal heart ache of the faithful preacher. How he is made to wonder, at times, if anybody is really taking to heart what he says. How he is made to wonder if any life is made abundantly and abidingly changed. These people heard, enjoyed, approved and continued in sin.

Why was this the case? It was not because they were antagonistic to the preacher. It was not because they did not believe what he said. One reason is very clearly stated. They said of his sermon "The vision that he seeth is for many days to come." That is, they never brought the message down into the here and now. They always heard for tomorrow instead of today. Thus, they defeated the preacher. Thus they defeated themselves. Thus they defeated God, insofar as their own lives was concerned. Thus people by the millions defeat him still. "Now is the accepted time, and today is the day of salvation."
Daniel
The Sufficiency of God.

The book of Daniel, roughly speaking, falls into two parts. The first six books are historic. The remaining part of the book is prophetic. This does not mean, of course, that there is absolutely nothing prophetic in the first six chapters. Neither does it mean that there is nothing historic in the latter part of the book. But the first division is, in the main, historic, as the latter part is, in the main, prophetic.

For this reason we are not surprised that the first six chapters are far more easily understood than the others. Daniel himself says toward the close of the book, "I heard, but I understood not." And this is one particular in which I am entirely like Daniel. I have to confess an entire lack of understanding of much that he says. His "time" and "times" and "half times", etc., are totally beyond my comprehension. Possibly it will need the unfolding of the future to bring to us an adequate understanding of the meaning of much of the prophetic part of this book.

But in spite of what is hidden from our understanding, there is sufficient made clear to make the book of Daniel one of the most inspiring and helpful books of the Old Testament. It preaches a most convincing sermon on the sufficiency of the grace of God. First, it shows God's sufficiency in times of defeat and failure. The book opens with a terrible calamity. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hands."

Now when this victorious king marched away he carried with him the flower of the youth of Judea. Among these was a youth named Daniel. This young man went at once from the shelter of a religious home into the degrading atmosphere of an oriental palace. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." And he was enabled to make that purpose good, not in his own strength simply, but through help from God. God gave him favor with those in authority and made his victory and triumph possible.

Daniel next proved that God's grace was sufficient in times of success and prosperity. Daniel and his three companions came early to places of prominence. After his successful resistance of temptation in the king's palace this youth became the king's favorite. When Nebuchadnezzar had his strange dream it was Daniel who gave him both the dream and the interpretation. But this did not turn the young man's head. Defeat is sometimes dangerous. Success is still more dangerous. Then came another great victory for Daniel. When Belshazzar was feasting a hand came out of the black coat sleeve of nothingness and wrote upon the wall. Here again Daniel was the interpreter. And neither the gifts nor the praise of the king nor the honors that came to him inflated him. They were powerless to turn his heart from God.

In the third place Daniel proved the sufficiency of God in the midst of the sternest opposition. He was virtually the head of the nation when he was commanded not to pray to any one but Darius for thirty days. But this command did not move him in the least. He went quietly on his way and ended in the lions' den. But the lions had no power upon him.

The story of his three companions brings home the same lesson. Ordered to worship the king's image they refused. They were then cast
into the fiery furnace. But all the fire was able to do for them was to loose their bonds and to bring them into visible and intimate fellowship with one likened unto the Son of man. The same fire that freed them destroyed those who cast them in.

Thus the book of Daniel makes clear to us the great truth that Paul stated when he said, "Our sufficiency is of God." Daniel and his associates showed the four dynasties in their day that God was real, that he was "able to do exceedingly abundant, above all that men asked or thought."

How did Daniel come to prove this sufficiency of God's grace? He did not prove it by idle wishes. He did not do so by good resolutions. He proved God's sufficiency first, by a life of separation. Wherever we find Daniel and his associates they are living lives separated from all things that are displeasing to God. This does not mean that they did not mingle in human affairs. They were at the heart and center of them. But they kept themselves unspotted from the world.

Second, they were not only separated from the unclean. They were separated unto God. They were given up to Him in prayer, in worship. When Daniel prayed before being cast into the den of lions he prayed as aforetime. Prayer was a fixed habit of his life. Men do not learn to pray as Daniel prayed in a single moment of crisis. Daniel had given himself up to God. As the windows of his room opened out toward Jerusalem so the windows of this man's soul were kept constantly open toward the heaven of Jerusalem.

Third, Daniel was able to enter into this experience by his willingness to do life's common, ordinary duties. This fact is brought out by the very last verse in the book. Daniel wants to know something more of the events of the future. But God does not see fit to reveal the knowledge that he desires. He rather addresses to him this command: "Go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of thy days." Your duty now is to go your way. Your present duty is to do the present task. Speak the word that needs to be spoken in the present hour. Heal the wound that needs to be healed in the present moment. Do the duty that lies nearest thee. And that is all that God requires.

And just as Daniel proved God's sufficiency, so it is our privilege to prove it this day. If we are living lives of separation from sin, of separation to God in prayer, of devotion to God in service, we too shall know. Christ's message shall speak in a very genuine sense in our hearts and we shall hear him say, "My grace is sufficient for thee."
There are two parts in Daniel. There is the part that relates to visions, and the part that relates to tests of character that came to Daniel and his three brothers. The first part has two divisions.

(1) There are the visions seen by others that Daniel was called upon to explain.

(2) That of the great image and of the great tree as seen by Nebuchadnezzar. The other was the hand writing on the wall. Then there were certain visions seen by Daniel himself. He tells us that they related to the future and that he did not understand them.

In this respect, I am entirely like Daniel.

The most practical part of the book for ourselves is that part that tells the story of testings of character to Daniel and his brothers while in Babylon. There were three of these tests.

PART I.

First there was the test of youth. When Daniel and his brothers reached Babylon they were selected to become candidates for positions in the King's Court. There were three factors that entered into their being chosen. First they were good looking. Second, they were educated. Third, they were intelligent. Of course it is possible to be educated and yet not be intelligent, but the most hopeless fool in the world is the educated fool. To fail in common sense is to fail utterly. Common sense has been well described as "that sense about which all other sense is nonsense."

While in process of preparation for office, these young men were to eat the king's meat and to drink the king's wine. This was
contrary to their conscience. They could not comply without doing moral injury to themselves. Yet there seemed every reason for their proving untrue.

1. There was the compelling power of their ambition. They wanted to get on. This was the way to the realization of their hopes.

2. There was the compelling power of custom. It was customary to eat the king's meat and drink the king's wine.

3. There was the compelling power of the crowd. Everybody was doing it.

4. There was the compelling power of fear of death. Daniel and his brothers were absolutely in the hands of the King of Babylon.

To meet this compulsion, Daniel had not one single visible resource. He had to face his conflicts with no backing that the human eye could see. But in spite of this, Daniel stood true.

We read of him this fine sentence. "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself."

What was the outcome. The story says that Daniel prospered. Living in obedience to God he prospered physically, intellectually and spiritually. Not only so, but because of his real worth. He prospered in his ambitions. He got on and made good.

Now we are not to understand that every man who stands by his conscience is going to win out, so far as the world sees. Daniel might have lost his job. He might even have lost his life, but even then he still would have prospered. He would have surely gained that wealth that outlasts the world.

PART II.

Then there was the temptation that came to Daniel in the
days of his maturity. By this time he had become so strong that he
was the envy of all the lesser men in official life in Babylon. They
feared him and wanted to get him out of the way. It is a high tribute
to his character to see the method that they employed in seeking to
gain their purpose.

How did they set about trying to ruin Daniel? The men
about him knew him. Therefore they did not try to bribe him. They
did not try to frighten him. They knew it was useless. They said,
"Daniel is a religious man, if you bring Daniel to the place where it
is either loyalty to his God or loyalty to his King, he will be loyal
to God. With him God comes first." What a tribute from a body of men
who were trying to conquer him. They were facing the facts in the case.

Daniel was forbidden to pray to any but Dura for
thirty days. He was not prohibited to pray forever. He was just
ordered to postpone his praying for a month. That is easy enough for
most of us. Nothing is easier than to wait. We are willing to put off
our religion, our consecration, our praying.

Daniel might even have made the command more mild still.
He might have gone on praying and yet been secret about it. There are
many who try to be disciples without openly confessing Christ. He might
have slipped upstairs, got in bed and covered his head and prayed, and
nobody would have been any the wiser.

But instead he went upstairs and opened his window
toward Jerusalem and prayed just as he had afore time. He had the prayer
habit. It is a good thing to form good habits. It is a fine thing to
have habits of honesty, habits of clean thoughts, habits of church going,
habits of prayer, habits of giving. A good life is made up largely of
A good life is made up largely of good habits. The pigmies heard him pray and hurried away to tell their master. The king was much worried. He did not wish to lose Daniel. But the law had to be obeyed. The king had a bad night, but Daniel had great peace. The next day the king came with searching question. "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee --?" Daniel answered out of his stormy experience, "He is able."

The king’s question is the supreme question. It is the fundamental question. There is no use to believe after the orthodox fashion if you

The final test is this. Is the Christ that you know and serve able to do for you what he claims to do. Do you know that Jesus is a Saviour because he has saved you.

PART III.

Just as there came a test to Daniel in his mature years, so did there come to his three brothers. Nebuchadnezzar set up a great statue. Everybody was ordered to worship it. Of course in worshipping his statue, they were worshiping him. There were three men who refused to bow down. They were the three brothers of Daniel.

When the king heard of it he was very angry, but because they were men of high character, and great value, he decided to give them the second chance, but he warned them that unless they complied with his commands, they should certainly be cast into the fieryfurnace. Their reply makes noble reading. "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter, O King." The God whom we serve is able to deliver us and He will deliver us." Then it seems that a doubt crept into their minds. They have known innocent men to suffer. Therefore they continue.
"But if not, be it known to you, that we will not serve your gods."

Notice what they say.

1. They have a conviction that God may deliver them. They know he is able, but they are not sure that that is His will. It may be best that they die for Him.

2. They declare that if he fails to deliver them, then they will die. They say, "It is not necessary for us to escape, but it is necessary for us to be true."

The outcome of this bold declaration was, they were cast into the furnace, but when the king looked in, there were four in the furnace instead of three. The form of the fourth was godlike. That form is always with those who suffer for the truth. The fire did nothing for them but to burn up their bonds and set them free. They won the victory, but had they died in the furnace, they still would have won. Whenever a man stands true to God, God stands true to him and that is victory, whether it means life or whether it means death.
Micah is the youngest of the quartette of prophets that ministered in Judah and Israel during the latter half of the 8th century before Christ. Amos is the oldest of this quartette while Micah is perhaps the youngest. The four, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah were the most influential group of their day. Not only is this the case, but it is to be doubted if any group in any day ever had so great an influence on religion as did these four men. While they are all distinct personalities, they all have something in common. This is especially true of Amos, Isaiah and Micah.

Amos and Micah are alike in that they both came from the country. They were men of the people. Isaiah, on the other hand, was a city man. He was also an aristocrat, or a blue blood. He was at home in king’s palaces. Amos and Micah are alike in that they were both prophets of doom so far as their immediate future is concerned. Micah, however, has hope for the far future while Amos has none. Isaiah is more optimistic toward the near future than Micah. At times they utter the same words, so that one evidently borrowed from the other. Micah, along with his fellow prophets had a profound sense of mission. He felt a definite call to a ministry of denunciation. "I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sins." This does not mean of course, that his ministry was one purely of denunciation. No such ministry could be vastly helpful. It is little use to tear down unless you put something better in its place. Nature abhors a vacuum, the throwing out of the evil is vain unless the good is brought in. Micah, as the Master years later, might have summed his ministry up in language similar to his. "Think not that I have
come to destroy but to fulfill."

But while denunciation is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end. It is necessary that men and nations see themselves as they are. They must realize their sickness before they seek health. They must realize their ignorance before they seek wisdom. They must realize their moral and spiritual rottenness before they set themselves earnestly in quest of moral and spiritual cleanliness and purity.

This task of rebuking is difficult. Micah made himself unpopular. "Stop," they cried, "Such carping criticism is not prophecy. Shame can never happen to Israel." Jehovah was their God, for anybody to say that God could ever let them down whether they obeyed Him or disobeyed was to speak what amounted almost to blasphemy. It took deep courage and conviction to carry on in the face of such opposition. Micah was able to persist in his difficult course because he had a profound sense of the undergirding of God.

"I am full of might by the Spirit of the Lord, and of wisdom and of judgment." You do not look for help to men but to God. "I will look unto the God of my salvation," he declares. There were no doubt days of depression and days of discouragement. There were times when he seemed utterly defeated, but out of these times he came triumphantly by the power of God. "Rejoice not against me, 0 mine enemy. When I fall, I shall arise, when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." Along with his brother prophets he was strong because he had a compelling sense of God.

II.

We have already reminded you that Micah claims that his is to be a ministry of denunciation. He is to declare unto Judah her sins and to Judah her transgressions.

What were the sins that he rebuked? They are quite similar to those
that were rebuked by the prophet Amos. Micah declares his indignant denun-
ciation especially against four classes. These four classes made up the
leaders, the men of influence and standing among the people of that day.

1. He denounced the nobility, the princes, the aristocrats for their
sins—especially those of greed and unfair and dishonest dealing. He
declared, "these devised plans of wickedness upon their beds at night and
with the coming of day, they put them into execution." They take away the
property from the needy. He declares that these powerful people skin the
poor. It is a word that has come down to our day. We still speak of skinning
one in a trade. He makes the language even stronger. He declares, "That
these rich cut up the poor as flesh and eat them. That is, they are so
oppressive that they are murderous.

2. The second class that he rebukes are the Justices. These men have
been chosen to see that everybody gets a square deal whether he is high or
low, rich or poor. But instead of administering justice, they administer
injustice. They are bribe takers. Like many present day politicians, they
are in office for what they can get out of it, with eyes blinded to every-
thing except self-interest. They hate the good and love the evil. That is
wickedness at its worst. There is no surer mark of utter inward rottenness
than that.

3. Next the prophet rebukes the priests. These were the religious
teachers of the day. They were intended to be a kind of go-between between
man and God. They were to go into God's presence for His mercies and to
bring those mercies to needy men. But these had forgotten their high pur-
Like the corruptible, you are in the priest's office for what you can get
out of it.
4. Finally, he rebukes the prophets. His indignation seems to reach its highest here. What is a prophet? A prophet is one who speaks for another. When Moses complained at his call that he could not speak, God told him that Aaron should be his prophet. That is, Aaron was to speak for him. So the prophet is to speak for God. As one of the greatest of prophets stated, "he is to hear the word from God's lips and warn men for Him." Isaiah claimed that that was the secret of his power. "Thou hast given me the strength of him that is taught that I might be able to speak to him who is weak. Thou wakest me morning by morning to hear." The prophet is to listen to God and to speak what God has first spoken to him. But these prophets that so aroused Micah's indignation were not speakers for God. He calls them "diviners". They were mere fortune tellers, sooth-sayers. Worst still, he declares that they say whatever they are paid to say. Regardless of what the truth is, they are ready to cry Peace! Peace! if they get paid for it. That is, if they are fed for it. Thus they feed themselves while the hungry people look up and were not fed.

Micah realized that the moment the prophet made it his supreme purpose what would please, instead of what was true, he ceased to be a prophet. Yet, such prophets have appeared in every century. There is an interesting story in the Old Testament to this effect: Jehosaphat was visiting Ahab. Ahab was eager to secure the aid of his brother king for the conquest of a certain city. Jehosaphat being a religious man desired to know the will of the Lord. Ahab was perfectly agreeable. He called in four hundred prophets who declare with one voice that the expedition would be a success.

But Jehosaphat looked the crowd over and shook his head, then he asked a question that should have shocked Ahab, but it did not. "Hast thou not here a prophet of the Lord that we may ask of him?" Ahab did not get angry and say, "All these are the prophets of the Lord." Instead he answered after this fashion, "Yes, we have a prophet of the Lord, named Miciah, but I hate
him because he always prophecies evil against me. What I require of a prophet is that he lie to me. I do not wish to hear anything unpleasant. Such were the prophets that Micah rebuked in words that blistered and burned.

The leaders being thus unfaithful to their responsibility, the people naturally suffered morally and spiritually. The sin in high places had percolated down into the lower stratus of society. Then to add to the prophets indignation, it was all so needless, so inexcusable. He pictures God as coming to reason with them. "What unrighteousness have you found in me," he asks. Then he reviews their history. God shows how he has led them from bondage to freedom, but all to no purpose. In base ingratitude, they have flung away from Him. And this they have done with their eyes wide open.

There is a hint that these people and their people plead ignorance. They say, as many say today, we are doing the best we can, the best we know how. It is hard to tell the difference between right and wrong. You speak of the will of God, how are we to know His will? This prophet of religion is all up in the air. I have no heart for it. Listen to this, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

To this question Micah gives an answer that is as up-to-date at this moment as when it was uttered. I doubt if any finer definition of religion can be found in the Bible or out of it. What is it to be religious in a true and helpful sense? Here is Micah's answer. "He has shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." That means in simple language, fellowship with God, rightness with Him, and rightness in all
human relations. There is no finer nor fuller definition than that.

But in spite of the fact that their indignation was so plain and so simple, the leaders have failed. And failing, they have involved the people in their failure. Because they have thus failed, God is going to punish them and their sins. Here Micah speaks in the same stern tones of denunciation as Amos. "Both Samaria and Jerusalem are to be plowed under, and the walls are to be torn down, and the judgment that they pronounced came to pass a few short years later.

III.

But Micah has a brighter side to his message that we miss in the message of Amos. If the immediate future was black without a ray of light to relieve it, not so of the distant future. This prophet with a hot heart and a clear seeing eye believed in the dawning of a better day. Nor was this a mere dream. This new day was not to come about by magic. It was to come through the power of God. Micah saw the coming of a new and greater King. "Thou Bethlehem Ephratah though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." As some other of the greater prophets, he looked forward to a day when the Messiah should come to banish the evils that were destroying the peoples of his own time, and bring in a new and better day.

This better day be described as a day of peace. This peace was not to be confined to his own people, it was to be shared by the nations of the world. It would be hard to imagine anything more marvelous than the one living in that distant time should even dream such a marvelous dream as this. I do not think we can begin to account for it in any other way than to say Micah was inspired. Listen to what he says, "They shall beat their swords
"Micah"

...into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." He declares also that the fear war always engenders shall be over forever. What a marvelous and wonderful dream.

How can he believe that this will ever come to pass? He bases his conviction, not upon man primarily, but upon God. He had discovered a God that was so marvelous, who was at once so loving and so mighty that he felt that the evils born of man's inhumanity to man must at last be done away, and that a day of righteousness and of brotherhood would take its place. The amazing God that he knew could do no less. So he closes his book with a shout of amazing joy and victory. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." This is a word that is as hopeful as it is tender. It has in it the very tenderness and hope born of an insight into the heart of the Eternal God. It is a message that is as old as man. It is also as new as your need and mine. Let us be thankful that we have a God who delights in mercy.
It is thought by many scholars that Joel is one of the oldest of the prophets. His book seems to be a unit and not a compilation as is the case with many of the prophets. Either a large part of his book is made up of quotations, or he is extensively quoted by others. Eight of the prophets quote from him, if he does not quote from them. Since his book has such close coherence it is thought that he must be the original.

The theme of the prophet is "The Day of the Lord." By this he means a day when the Lord in some peculiar way manifests Himself. Of course there is a sense in which every day is the day of the Lord. God is always active. "My Father worketh even until now and I work." God has never withdrawn from our world for a single instance. The trouble with us is that we do not look on life through the eyes of faith. Hence, we see few marks of His activity.

PART I.

The Day of the Lord meant for Joel, first of all, the day of judgment. Joel believed in a final judgment because he believed that God was judging men and nations day by day. It was the judgment of God upon his nation that was the immediate occasion of his prophesy. Joel, as all the prophets spoke especially to his own generation. He did not have us in mind so much as he had them in mind. He was speaking to the needs of his own time, just as I am trying to do.

The judgment that Joel was facing at this time was a plague of locust. If you will read the first thirty odd verses of his book, you will find a most marvelous description of the invasion of these terrible pests. He tells how they swept down from the North and destroyed every green thing as they came. Before them, he said, it was
like a garden of Eden. Behind them was a desert. They not only
destroyed all the green grass, but the very bark from the trees.

This plague is a reoccurring experience of that country. The last one,
so far as I know, took place in 1915. A writer for the Geographic
was present and gave an account of it. He tells how this terrible army
came in such countless multitudes that the sun and the moon and the
stars were dimmed just as the prophet says. They had heads very much
like horses. The Germans called them hay horses. The Italians called
them little ponies. In this particular instance they ate every living
thing, even to the bark of the trees, as in the days of Joel. Not only
so, but children that were exposed, would have their faces eaten off
before they could call for help. The Government required that every
man from the ages of sixteen and sixty, bring in eleven pounds of eggs
every day. This indicates something of their numberlessness. Now this
plague had brought utter desolation. Drunkards had to go without their
drinks. Prohibition was rigidly enforced for once. There was nothing
to drink. Even the sacrifice had to be left off in the temple. There
was nothing to offer. The starved cry of the cattle rose to the Lord,
the prophet tells us. But while some looked upon such desolation as an
utter calamity, Joel did not. He said it had come about as a result
of the people's sin. There was something more deadly than the locust
and far more destructive, that was their rebellion against God. The
Bible again and again emphasises the fact that God brings judgment
upon men and nations for their sins. This was the secret of the de-
struction of the old world before the flood. God sent a judgment upon
Babylon, upon Israel, upon Judah, upon Greece and Rome, upon nations
of our modern day. He said to them, "Depart from me, ye cursed."
We may well believe, therefore, in a coming Day of the Lord, because the Day of the Lord is a fact of revelation and a fact of human experience.

PART II.

But the Day of the Lord is more than a day of judgment. It is also a day of opportunity. A day of blessing. Joel occupies a unique position among the prophets in that he is the prophet of Pentecost. It was given to him in that far off day, to see the glories of the coming age that was yet centuries ahead. "It shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your young shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams. Upon my slaves and handmaidens I will pour out in that day of my Spirit, saith the Lord."

We are not left to guess the subject of this prophesy. Centuries later this event took place. "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all of one accord in one place. Suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the mighty rushing of wind, and there appeared to them tongues parting assunder like fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Such a marvelous event demanded an explanation. Peter gave it in these words. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." We are living, therefore, in the day of the Lord. It is not a day that is characterized so much by judgment as by mercy. It is a day of opportunity, a day of privilege. It is a day of the outpoured Spirit of God.

PART II.

I do not believe we have begun to realize the importance
of this day, the richness of the privileges that it brings to us.
How much do you think it would be worth to you to have Jesus Christ
as your personal friend, just as John did? Suppose you were privil-
egaged to have Him under your roof night after night. Suppose he was
your guest at every meal. Suppose you were privileged to take long
walks with Him and to discuss with Him the problems that perplex you
and the burdens that were upon you. What effect would such a fellow-
ship have upon you? Suppose you could see the pain in His face when you
did the mean thing. That you could see His eyes light up when you did
that which was big and unselfish. Would not all of us, grow unto higher
and finer souls? Are there not times when all our hearts respond to
these words?

I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Christ was here among men,
How He called little children like lambs to His fold,
I should have liked to have been with Him then.

I wish that His hand had been laid on my head,
That His arm had been thrown around me,
I should like to have seen His kind look when He said,
Let the little ones come unto me.

But there is something even finer than that. I think I would
hardly dare say so, had I not had the authority of Jesus Himself, but you
remember His words when He was having His last conversation with His
disciples. He did not pity them. He knew he was going away, but He did
not say, I am so sorry to leave you here, Orphans and leaderless and
friendless. He knew they were a mere handful in a big cruel world.
But instead of pitying them he said calmly, "It is for your good that I
go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come, but if I
depart I will send Him unto you."

With these words He departed and the Comforter came and the
disciples learned that His plan was best. Heretofore they had had Christ with them. He had been at their side. They were privileged to feel the touch of His hand. They were privileged at times to lean upon His bosom, but now he was not only with them, He was within them. He was not only at their side, He was within their hearts. They realized that He had kept His word. "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you." Jesus was still with them in the power of the Holy Spirit.

PART III.

What is Christ doing through the Holy Spirit in this Day of the Lord? It is the work of the Holy Spirit,

1. To convict the world of sin. You cannot do that. I cannot, but He can.

2. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to regenerate.

3. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to give power. This He does by making Christ real to us. This He does by forming Christ within us. It is our privilege to say as Christians, "Christ liveth within me". But if we make that high claim, we must be living somewhat as Christ lived.

PART IV.

The prophet makes clear that this blessing is for every one of us. What an amazing thing for a Jew to say in that distant day. What wonderful vision to see the day coming when not upon Jews only but all men irrespective of race or place, God would pour out of His Spirit. This blessing is for every man.
Because it is the privilege of every man, it is also the solemn duty of every man to claim him. Jesus found it necessary in the doing of His work. He would not allow His apostles to go to their task until they had entered into this experience. It is your obligation and mine.

And what is the road way? The same direction was given for receiving the Spirit as for avoiding the judgment of God. Joel and Peter use the same words. Joel told his impoverished people that if they would really repent, if they would really repent, if they would rend their hearts and not their garments, God would cease to judge them. Peter declared to his people that if they would repent they should receive the Holy Spirit.

That condition is not changed. Into every heart that truly returns from sin and yields itself into full obedience to God, Christ comes still in the power of the Holy Spirit. "For we are His witnesses of these things, as is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him."
The Prophecy of Joel

The Prophecy of Joel centers around this favorite expression: "The day of the Lord." To him"the day of the Lord" meant the time when God showed himself active in human affairs. "The day of the Lord" might be for instance a day of judgment, a day when God visited His people because of their sins. Such was the situation at the time that Joel wrote. His country had just suffered from a plague of locusts that was unusually severe. It was spoken of as an unavoidable calamity, as a plague that it would have been impossible to have prevented. But Joel, as the spokesman for his God, declared that this seemingly inevitable calamity had come to the people as a result of their sin; that they were, even then, living in the presence of "the day of the Lord."

Wherever then this man saw God active in judgment, that activity he termed "the day of the Lord." For instance, when the ancient world rotted down and had to be destroyed by the flood, that, in the mind of Joel, was "the day of the Lord." When the Jewish nation failed and had to be swept away into exile, that was "the day of the Lord." When Jerusalem rejected her Savior and declared that she had no king but Caesar and as a result of her rejection was destroyed, that again was "the day of the Lord." It was "the day of the Lord" when France was overwhelmed by a baptism of blood during the days of the French Revolution. It was "the day of the Lord" when Napoleon was turned back from his world conquest and chained to a rock in the sea.

Then there was a nation, you remember, that used to drink to the day. They did not call it the day of the Lord. They called it the day of German supremacy; the day when German arms should have triumphed over all the world; the day of the Kaiser; the day of autocracy. But even that turned out to be "the day of the Lord," a day when that most proud and mighty nation slipped from the place of its supremacy and began its long fight with defeat and bankruptcy.

"The day of the Lord" is not only a day when God visits judgment upon His people. It is also a day when He comes in mercy and in blessing. Jesus uses the same expression when He weeps over Jerusalem and says: "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem! If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!" The day of His personal ministry was the day of peculiar opportunity to the people, the day when God drew exceeding close in the person of His Son.

When is "the day of the Lord"? In the mind of the man of faith, in the mind of a spiritually minded man like Joel, it is every day. God is always upon the throne acting, arranging, dominating, working out His holy and divine will. But while this is true every "day of the Lord" is not alike. First, there was a day in which this prophet lived, a day of great privilege, but not of the greatest privilege. There was much that was depressing and discouraging in the day in which Joel lived. Righteous was far from dominant. God's personal conquest of the world certainly seemed distant and all by impossible. And Joel saw beyond "the day of the Lord" in which he lived to another and more glorious day.

It was given to Joel to be the prophet of Pentecost. He saw across the centuries the coming of the blessed day in which we live. He did not know just when that glorious day of the Lord was to be ushered in, but he knew that it would come. He spoke of it as he said: "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream.
dreams. And upon my servants and upon my handmaidens will I pour out on that day of my spirit, saith the Lord." Beyond that day of the spirit he saw another day of the Lord, a new dispensation into which we had not yet come, but into which we will come as surely as the word of prophecy is true.

But we want to think especially this evening of Joel as the prophet of Pentecost, as the man who centuries before saw the horizon glowing with the golden dawning of the day in which we live. This is his declaration: "It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." Then hundreds of years afterwards we read this word: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind; and there appeared unto them tongues parted as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. . . . the multitude came together greatly wondering, saying, "What do these things mean?" Some were ready with an explanation. "These men are full of new wine." But Peter replied: "These are not drunken as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith the Lord God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh."

So this is a promise to our own age. It is a promise for you and for me. This is a message peculiarly for our times. What is its content? First, the prophet declares that in the day in which we live it is the privilege of every single believer to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. It is possible for the learned and the unlearned, for the high and the low, for the prophet and the king and also for the slave and the outcast. And what this ancient prophet says is reaffirmed and re-emphasized in the New Testament. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, declared: "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

How do you think this is a promise to be treated lightly? Do you think this a blessing to be simply looked at and idly wished for, or is it one to be most earnestly desired; to be sought for with all our enthusiasm, to be claimed by us at any price? Jesus, before He ascended, told His disciples that upon His going He would send them this promised blessing and that it would mean more to them than His own personal presence. "It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I go not away the Comforter will not come, but if I depart I will send Him unto you."

Suppose you were privileged to know Jesus Christ in the flesh today as His disciples knew Him. Suppose He lived in your home. Suppose He sat day by day at your table. Suppose He slept night after night under your roof. Suppose you were privileged to take long walks with Him. Suppose His desk were next to yours down at the office. What influence do you think He would have upon you? What new strength do you think He would bring to you? Do you not believe that your life would be entirely made over? Are you not confident that no sorrow could break your heart and no defeat could conquer you? Do we not join again and again in singing:

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

But you have a privilege far beyond that. The promise to you is something even greater than the promise of knowing Jesus Christ personally in the flesh and that is the promise of the Holy Spirit.

What is the work of the Spirit? It is to convict of sin. We cannot convict people of sin. We fail at it again and again. But when the Spirit is present in the life of the Church, those who come into that fellowship are brought under conviction.

It is the work of the Spirit to regenerate. He it is that makes us to share in the Divine nature. "Ye must be born again." We read it sometimes as if it were a terrible ordeal. We read it as if it were something to be dreaded. We ought to read it as the highest possible privilege. It is our glorious, blood-bought privilege to be born again. Through the birth of the Spirit we are made into new creatures in Christ Jesus the Lord.

The Holy Spirit empowers. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost hath come upon you." One secret of the power that comes through the Holy Spirit is this, that it is through Him that Christ becomes real to us. "He shall bear witness of me", declared Jesus. No man can call Jesus, Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Spirit empowers, in the second place, because the real sense of the Divine presence always makes for power. The reason we are so fear filled is because we see so dimly the infinite resources that are at our disposal. The difference between Elisha and the servant was that Elisha saw. He had a realization of unseen reality and his servant did not have this realization. When Christ is real to us our sins vanish as the stars vanish at the rising of the sun.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to beget within us those Christ-like virtues with which we can be winsome and victorious Christians. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control."

How then is this blessing to be ours? It is not simply by idle wishing. It is to come through our genuine and true repentance of sin. "Repent everyone of you", was Peter's direction. And this prophet Joel told the people of his day to turn unto the Lord, to rend their hearts and not their garments. No mere external repentance is sufficient. There must be a real heartturning to God. That means a genuine renunciation of everything to which God objects and a real and determined yielding up to God. It is this repentance and this alone that brings this necessary blessing into your life and mine. But if we come in full surrender we will not be disappointed. "For we are His witnesses of these things, as is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

Now there are certain facts that we need to face as individuals and as a church. We are accomplishing something in the work of Christ
but it is certainly true that we are not doing what we might do. We have some spiritual power but we are certainly not the strong and vital Christians that we might be. What are we to do about it? Why not highly resolve to claim your privilege. Say this to your own heart: "I may be filled with the Holy Ghost. I must be. I will be." And God has yet to show the world what He can do with that individual that is wholly given up to Him and wholly filled with the Divine presence.
Amos was the first of the prophets to commit his words to writing. He is known to us as one of the Minor Prophets. He is not minor, however, in the sense of being of small importance. What is minor about him has to do with the quantity of his work rather than the quality. Amos left only a few fragments. His sermons are little more than brief and broken outlines. Yet, as meager as his contribution so far as quantity is concerned, in quality they are enormous. In fact, he said in germ, regarding the nations treated by him, about all that has been said by the greatest of thinkers during the centuries that have passed since his death. He is therefore in the strictest sense, not a minor prophet, but one of the greatest.

It was the task and privilege of Amos to inaugurate a new era. We can explain most men in terms of the times in which they live. They are the product of their generation. What they thought is largely the result of the mass thinking of their time. But such is not the case with Amos. It is not the case of any of the great prophets of the Old Testament. They were not the products of their times. They did not speak the language of their generation. What they had to say was often contradictory to the accepted views of their day. Therefore, what they said often amazed, startled, and angered their hearers. They were a company of men who accounted for themselves in terms of God. They claimed that God had called them, and had made known to them his will. In my opinion, they spoke sober truth. Certainly to this
day we can find no other explanation quite so sane as that given by the prophets themselves.

I.

Let us look at Amos the man. His brief message is full of fine insights into his own life and character. What does Amos tell us about himself?

1. He was a shepherd. He was a man whose work kept him in the great open spaces. He lived in the village of Tekoa, some twelve miles south of Jerusalem. The land in which he worked was wild and rugged. It was on the edge of the desert. Here he was much alone. Here he had time to commune with nature, with himself, and with his God.

While he watched his flocks, he had time for another employment. He tells us that he was a dresser of sycamore trees. This sycamore was a species of a wild fig tree. Not on its branches, but on its trunk grew a fig-like fruit. This fruit was of little value at its best. But it could not be eaten at all unless it was mellowed by the human hand. This mellowing also punctured its skin and allowed a worm that lived within it to escape. While Amos watched his flock, he also attended sycamore trees.

2. This rustic preacher was a layman. He tells us that he was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. In those days there were schools of prophets. There were professional men who gave themselves to this particular kind of work. But Amos was not of their number. He escaped, therefore, the bain of professionalism. Every calling tends to set its mark upon those who follow. There are those who fancy they can tell a preacher anywhere. That is too bad. Whenever we degenerate into ecclesiastics, we lose our tang. There is nothing more dull, and dry, and deadening than professionalism in the ministry. There is absolutely nothing of the professional about Amos. He was a layman.
3. Amos was a man of vast ability. He was a rustic genius. There is an alertness about him that thrills to this day. He looked on life wherever he went with a clear and seeing eye. He was alert to the sights and silences of the desert. He spent much of his time in the presence of danger. To protect his flocks he had to keep his wits about him. He knew that the roar of the lion meant that he had already slain his prey. He does not roar upon the hunt lest he frightens his prey away.

The same keen and seeing eye that enabled him to live in the desert he carried with him to the city. Though he was a rustic, he was not ignorant. From time to time he had to go to the city to sell his wool. Here he was brought into contact with the business men of his day. Here he saw the wealth and luxury, the showy sins that he believed were destroying his people. What he saw in the city did not fascinate him as it might a man of duller vision. These open sins and injustices filled him with horror and indignation because he saw them for what they were. He saw not only his own nation, but the world. He had no "township mind." His keen vision made him an internationalist.

4. Amos was a man of tremendous courage. It was his lot to walk a lonely road. He prophesied sometime about the year 760 B.C. Jeroboam II, was then king in Israel. His reign was highly successful. The kingdom of Israel was the strongest kingdom between the Nile and the Euphrates. Everybody was enthusiastic about this prosperous era except Amos. Amos spoke out against it with words that blistered and burned.

Naturally, he stirred up keen opposition. They resented him because of what he said. Then he was from the southern kingdom of Judah, what right had he to come into Israel to prophecy? No wonder Amaziah told him to go back and prophecy to his own people. Then, he was a plain, rough, rustic. What right had he to come uttering his crude sermons of denouncement to these
cultivated people of the city? But Amos was neither awed nor silenced by this opposition. He was a man of such courage that it made him at times positively harsh.

5. Finally, Amos was a man with a tremendous sense of mission. He felt himself divinely called. "Jehovah has spoken," he declared, "who can but prophecy?" Again he says, "Jehovah took me from following after the sheep and said go prophecy to my people of Israel." This sense of call has characterized all the great prophets. They have felt that a divine compulsion was laid upon them. The apostle Paul voices a conviction that is characteristic of all the great prophets when he says, "Woe is me if I preach not." Amos was made strong and unspeakably courageous because he was undergirded by a profound sense of mission.

II.

When we listen to the message of Amos, we are amazed at what this shepherd has to tell us about God. Let us listen to him. Certainly there is no man quite so worthy of attention as a man who has a sure and vital word to say about God. What does Amos have to say?

1. Amos discovered that God was not the God of Israel only, but of the whole earth. He was Jehovah of hosts. That sounds a bit like a common-place word now, but it was profoundly revolutionary. Every nation of that day had its own god. It was in this conviction that Amos had been trained. Yet, here we find him declaring, at least by implication, that God is one. He declares further that He is all-powerful, and that He is God of the whole earth and of the heavens. I do not see how he found that out except by revelation.

2. Amos discovered that this God was a righteous God. That was a discovery as revolutionary as it now seems common-place. "Of course, God is
righteous" we say today. But there is no "of course" about it. The philo-
sophers of Greece declared that the youth of this time were being debauched
by the gods of Olympus. That is not surprising. Men are always like the gods
they serve. The gods of all the nations in the time of Amos were gods without
morals, without any sense of ethics. Amos, along with the other Old Testament
prophets, first brought ethics into religion.

What did Amos mean by righteousness? He did not mean what God desired
of us was certain religious performance. These were of value only as they
served ethical purposes. The Israelites of that day were making such observ-
ances a substitute for right living. This filled the prophet with horror.
"Take away from me the noise of your songs," he hears God saying. What then
is righteousness? It is an inward rightness that leads to the observance of
those rules of right living that appeal to the average man of today and every-
day. Rightness in personal conduct, rightness between man and man.

3. Now, since God is a righteous God, since he requires that a man act
rightly toward his neighbor, both as an individual and as a group, to fail in
such righteousness is to incur judgment. Amos, therefore believed that God
was a God of judgment. This fact, he emphasizes with burning earnestness.
By implication he believes that God is a God of love and mercy. "Hate evil,
love goodness, practice justice." In that case he feels that God may spare.
But his supreme emphasis is the fact that God being a God of righteousness is
also a God of judgment. It was for Hosea to emphasize the tenderness and mercy
of God. Amos has a sterner message. His is one of judgment.

III.

Notice some of the sins prevalent in that day. There are sins that Amos
believes that God must of necessity punish.
The Prophet begins his message by pronouncing judgment against the surrounding nations. "For three transgressions and for four," he declares, "God will not withhold his judgment." By this he means for repeated transgressions. What are these transgressions? They are summed up in the one sin of unbrotherliness. He pronounces the doom of Damascus, of Tyre, of Edom, and of other nations. Such a declaration on the part of Amos, was very welcome to his hearers. All these nations were the enemies of Israel. But having thus won their attention, he reached his climax by his rebuke of Israel. But all alike were rebuked for their cruelty and hate, their slaughter one of another in war, in short for their unbrotherliness.

Having reproved the nations and pronounced their doom, he turns to the sins of the people of Israel. While he feels that he has a mission to all the nations, it is more especially to Israel that he is sent. This is his testimony, "The Lord took me from following after the sheep and said to prophecy to the people of Israel." Notice some of the sins that he rebukes in his own people.

1. He is bitter and biting in his rebuke of the prominent society woman of the day. He calls them cows. He accuses them of saying to their husband, "Let us have wine that we may drink." In luxury ridden Samaria women drank along with their husbands. They shared that type of debauchery which in most generations is profoundly masculine.

This drunkenness, on the part of women, the fact that they openly share the vice of men marks this as an especially evil generation. It is one of the charges that the prophet would bring against our day. There has always been drinking among men. Doubtless some women have in every generation been liquor drinkers. But this type of debauchery reaches its worst when men and women drink together. We can gauge the moral temper of any generation by the standards set by its women. Whenever womanhood cheapens itself, we have a cheap
generation. I doubt if there was ever an era in America when men and women drank so openly together as they do today.

What was some of the results in the day of Amos?

One of them was sexual vice at its worst. People even got drunk about the altars of God. That relationships are low between men and women at a time of much drinking is only natural. A woman or a man may be as chased as Diana, but neither of them is to be trusted when they are drunk. This drunkenness also was expensive. Those that spent their time lolling at their ease and drinking bowls of wine had to have money to keep up such a gait. This money they did not get honestly. They got it through every form of injustice.

"They sold," Amos said with hot indignation, "the righteousness for silver, and of the poor for a pair of shoes." That is, some them fairly stripped the clothing from the poor in order to indulge themselves in their drunk orgies.

2. A second sin that Amos rebuked was that of injustice.

The rich were growing richer. Not because they were creating wealth, but because they were extracting it from the poor. They were so impatient to get gain that they could not wait for the Sabbath to be over before they began their trading. Then, he tells us that they made Epha small and the shekel large. They won from the poor by trickery. Thus the rich of Israel were growing richer and the poor were growing poorer. The top was rotting down with too much luxury, the poor from too much poverty.

"Ill fairs the land
To hastening ills of prey
When wealth accumulates
And men decay."
3. In the midst of this widespread moral rottenness and injustice, the people, especially the leaders, were strangely indifferent. The stern prophet tells them that they kept the best of the oil for themselves, but they had none for the wounds of the people of Israel. He pronounced woe upon them because they were at ease in Zion. The times were prosperous, the people were going through their religious observances, therefore all seemed well. Hence those that should have helped looked upon the whole festering mess with dull eyes and with a deadening indifference.

4. Finally, these people were the victims of a strange blindness. The great empire of Assyria was even then gathering its strength for their destruction. Amos could hear very clearly the mutterings of the thunders that told of the approaching storm. But these people, weakened by their inner rottenness, were blind to their danger. God had blessed them most richly. He had also rebuked and punished again and again. But they had not received correction. Fancying themselves the chosen of the Lord, they went about their wickedness and worship with a bewildering sense of security.

IV.

What was to be the outcome? To the keen eyes of Amos, only one outcome was possible.

1. God was going to come in judgment upon them. Amos believed that God sometimes punished directly, but he was wise enough to see that generally God punishes through natural law. Amos knew that God hates hate. He knew that thus hating it, he must punish it. But how does he punish it? He does so by allowing it to run its bloody and murderous course. This is a most timely word for ourselves. How the nations of today are being punished because
of their unbrotherliness! They are living upon the verge of disaster because of their hate.

2. It was the faith of Amos that God's judgment is in proportion to the crime. He believed, in other words, that God's judgments are just. The greater the sin, the greater the punishment. Listen to this word, "You have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore, will I punish you for your sins." What is God saying to Israel? Just this, "You have been favored above all other nations. You have had more light than others. Therefore your punishment will be greater."

That keen insight is sanctioned by reason. It is also sanctioned by no less in authority than Jesus Christ himself. He declares that the man who failed to do his Lord's will when he did not know what that will was, should be punished with few stripes. But that he who failed when he knew, should be punished with many stripes. Men are punished, both for and by their sins. Their punishment is in proportion to their light. The greater their light, the greater their obligation. The greater the obligation, the more sore our judgment if we fail to live up to it.

It must strike the reader how timely is this message that was spoken some twenty-seven centuries ago. Human nature is the same today that it was then. The sins that rotted these men and this nation are rotting men and nations today. The sins that worked their ruin will also work ours. God is still able to save us if we give him an opportunity. But if we persist in our unbrotherly hates, our social and individual sins, our end as theirs, must be disaster.

"God of our fathers known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle line
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine,
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget."
The prophet Amos declares that he himself is neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. He does not mean to say by this, however, that he is not God's spokesman. He is only declaring that he is not a man of the schools. He is not a regularly ordained minister. He is a layman. Before entering the ministry he was a shepherd of Tekoa.

His reason for assuming the role of prophet then is not professional. He does not speak of any traditional knowledge that he has inherited. The truth that he utters is that that has come to him individually. He does not give us second-hand preaching. What he says he has hammered upon the anvil of his own soul. He is speaking under the compulsion of mighty convictions. The messages that he utters are those that he saw. The urgency back of his prophecy is the urgency of Almighty God. "The Lord hath spoken. Who can but prophesy?"

Now this layman is almost entirely wanting in the pathetic tenderness that characterizes some of the other Old Testament prophets, Hosea for instance. His message is rather a message of judgment. It was his task to denounce. He does not congratulate. He does not flatter. He spoke to a prosperous and proud generation, but his message is ever one of stern rebuke and bitter denunciation. There is only one hope for those to whom he addresses himself, and that is in a whole-hearted repentance.

The prophecy opens with a declaration of coming judgment upon the surrounding nations. "For three transgressions, and for four, I will not turn away." That is, God does not always punish sin immediately. He is patient and long-suffering. But while He is patient, yet punishment is certain. Some people are deceived by the delay. They think it means slackness. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily therefore the hearts of the sons of man are sure set in them to do evil."

There is no doubt that the prophet held the attention and the admiration of the audience during the opening part of his message. Judgment against the heathen nations was familiar. Denunciation of the enemies of Israel was altogether popular. But from these the stern prophet of Tekoa passes on to the denunciation of his own people. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." You can almost see the elders nod their heads when they hear that statement. They have profound faith in themselves as the chosen of the Lord. They are the enlightened. They are the highly privileged. "You only have I known." Then followed the rest of the sentence. It came like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. "Therefore will I visit you for all your iniquities."

That "therefore" took them utterly by surprise. They expected the sentence to end: "Therefore I am going to continue to keep you and to honor you and to enlighten you." But when it ended as it did end they were angry and amazed. They had hardly heard such language before. This man was daring to tell them not only that God punished sin. He was also informing them that the degree of their punishment was in proportion to the light they had had.

Responsibility is ever measured by our opportunity. These people had been greatly privileged. Amos reviews a bit of their history. He tells how God had liberated them. He tells how God had driven out their enemies before them and had given them an inheritance. He tells how He had taught
them and enlightened them through His messengers, the prophets. They had great opportunities. Therefore they were people of great responsibility. Therefore in being disloyal to their responsibilities they were guilty of the greater sin. And if the prophet could speak so to the men of his day, how much sorer rebuke would he administer to us who are the possessors of light so infinitely greater than the light that belonged to ancient Israel.

Amos not only tells what is to be the measure of punishment, but he makes you understand the end at which God aims in punishment. Why does God judge the nations of the earth? Why does God judge in the here and now individuals as well as nations? It is not because He is vindictive. It is not that He is a seeker after revenge. God is love eternally, and as such it is impossible for Him to have a thought of taking vengeance. God punishes as a kind and skillful surgeon operates. He is seeking to save from rottenness. God is desperately in earnest about setting up a kingdom in this world that now is. He is desperately in earnest about the task of bringing in a reign of righteousness in the here and now. Therefore He judges those that would stand in the way of the realization of His purpose.

It is tremendously interesting, too, and helpful to notice the sins for which God judged His ancient people. They are sins that are altogether familiar and modern. First, these people, though enlightened, were guilty of the sin of violating the common principles of justice. He charges them with selling the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes. He spoke of those that were eager for the Sabbath to be passed so that they might reap and make the shekel small, and the shekel great. That is, they gave short measure. When they sold and when they received they had scales that weighed too lightly, and thus they cheated both ways. Then when those who were wronged sought justice at the courts the judges were bribed. So there was great wealth rubbing elbows with pinching poverty. But the prophet informs those that had built houses of hewn stone that they would not be allowed to live in them, and that those who had planted lovely vineyards should not eat the grapes thereof. They were guilty of the sin of injustice.

A second sin mentioned is that leading to social impurity. One of the bitterest denunciations of Amos is the declaration against the womanhood of his day. He calls them by the ugly epithet of the "kine of Bashan." They were cattle at heart. And because they were what they were they were greatly helping the nation on towards its impending ruin.

It has been claimed that the moral condition of womanhood indicates with fair accuracy the moral condition of any age. She is the thermometer. Wherever womanhood is cheap the society of her day will be cheap. Wherever she lets go of God ties of iniquity come in like a flood. This is true from the simple fact that she reigns at the center of things. She is the queen of the home. She is the rocker of the cradle. She is the shaper of the world. And irreligious womanhood means an irreligious nation. And Amos is stern in his denunciation of the women of his day, especially the society leaders that had turned aside from religion and had given themselves to drunkenness and to impurity.

A very arresting parallel might be drawn between the situation in that day and in our own. One of the leading novelists of our time says that the most startling phenomena of today is the terrible lowering of the standards of modern womanhood. This is not, understand, any compliment to
Amos - The message of judgment

Their standards are certainly not greatly heightened. But no one could look intelligently into the face of modern society and not realize that what the novelist says is all too true. And the fact that what he says is true makes our day one of peculiar peril. Because what he says is true we need to bestir ourselves to earnest prayer that God will "revive His work in the midst of the years."

A third sin charged against Israel is the sin of stubbornness. God has not only enlightened them through His prophets, but He has sent them one chastisement after another. But what they have suffered has been all in vain. Five times over He declares after stating some punishment that has come to them: "Yet have ye not returned unto me." They seemed to have exhausted the very ingenuity and resourcefulness of God. He has tried kindness and they have resisted. He has tried punishment and they have resisted that.

Isaiah has a similar word in the opening of his prophecy. "Why" he cries, "should ye be stricken any more? Ye would rebel yet more and more." It is a pathetic cry. It is full of sorrow. It is soaked in the tears of a disappointed father; a father that has tried kindness to have it rejected and misunderstood; a father who has tried punishment only to find the child hardened by it rather than softened. What a terrible thing it is when God's kindness in blessing us, when God's kindness in causing us to suffer for our sins only serves to make us more stubborn in our rebellion against Him.

A fourth sin of which Israel was guilty was the sin of a heartless worship. They were still religious people. They went to Gilgal and to Bethel to offer their sacrifices and to pay their tithes. But instead of this being pleasing to God, He was offended by it. He said, "I despise your offerings." And Amos cries with biting scorn, "Go to Gilgal and transgress. Go to Bethel and multiply transgression."

It is a terrible state of affairs when our very worship, our very prayers and our offerings fill the heart of God with displeasure and disgust rather than with joy. But that sometimes happens. Isaiah was conscious of that fact. He said: "I hate your new moons and your solemn feasts. Who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts? When you stretch forth your hands in prayer I will turn away mine eyes."

Why was God displeased with this worship? He was displeased because it was not a worship of the heart. It was not a worship that was based upon a desire to conform to the will of God. It had no foundation in a hunger and thirst after righteousness. It was an effort rather to buy God off from punishing them for the sin that they were unwilling to give up. Isaiah declares that God would turn away His eyes when they stretched forth their hands to Him in prayer because their hands were full of blood. It is useless, it is worse than useless, it is mockery, it is positively an awful sin to come to God in prayer for forgiveness of sin that you intend to continue to commit after you have prayed. Wickedness and worship only tend to harden the heart and make it impossible for God to visit you except in judgment.

These were the positive sins of Israel. Then there were those who sinned negatively, who sinned by doing nothing at all. These were divided into two classes. First there were those who flattered themselves that they were vastly in earnest about religion. They were terribly concerned about the moral conditions of the day in which they lived. They lamented
the sins of the people, but they did not do anything to help. Instead they spoke piously of the coming of the day of the Lord. They told themselves that one day God was going to come and set up His reign upon the earth and cast out all that was evil. But they did nothing but talk and left God to do it all.

This stern old prophet has a word of rebuke for these. He let them know that the day of the Lord for which they claimed to long would be no day of joy to them. Whether they had joy in the day of the Lord would be determined by what they were and what they were doing. The day of the Lord was to be a day of joy to some people, but not to all people.

It was a day that was to burn as an oven and the proud and they that worked wickedness should be as stubble. It was only to those that feared His name that the Son of Righteousness would rise with healing in His wings. But the whole tragedy of their faith was summed up in the fact that it resulted in nothing more than pious and platitudinous twaddlings.

The second class were those that faced the facts of their day with eyes somewhat opened and yet remained indifferent. Upon these the prophet thunders with all his power. "Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion." "Woe" he says, "unto you people who can point out the inconsistency of priest and prophet. Woe unto you who have much to say about what is wrong and yet remain entirely indifferent to those wrongs. Woe unto you who have no burden. Woe unto you who do not care. Woe unto you who are never driven to sacrificial toil because of a yearning desire to help."

Amos looked upon indifference as a deadly sin. It is so regarded throughout the Bible. The man who does not care will not seek to bring a remedy. The sternest judgments that Jesus Christ ever pronounces are against the people who did it not, the folks who do nothing simply because they do not care. So you see in the presence of the great evils of that day just as in the presence of the great evils of this day there were those who pretended great earnestness and did nothing. There were those who were indifferent and did nothing. One sinned just as deeply as the other. Both sinned to their utter undoing.

Now what is the hope that the prophet holds out to this sinning nation? His message is not all denunciation. He offers them a hope that is absolutely sure. It is not a hope that is based on anything worthy that is in themselves. He tells them that they have no possible chance of escape from coming judgment through flight. He declares that if they dig into Hades God will find them and if they climb into Heaven He will drag them back. There is no escape through their cleverness. There is no escape through the indolence of a careless God.

What is the hope? It is a very old hope and yet one that is very new. "Return unto me, saith the Lord, and ye shall live." Their one chance of life is this; they must repent of their sins. Nothing will take the place of that. All their prayer saying and giving will come to naked nothing.

And there is great urgency in this call of the prophet. The people of his day are conscious of the fact that they had to reckon with enemies. There were great nations that were threatening to overwhelm them. But Amos said, "This is not your danger. Your greatest danger is in your sin." Therefore he presses home this earnest word: "Prepare to meet thy God. If you will do that you will be ready for all emergencies. If you fail to do
that you will be ready for no emergency." They failed and the penalty fell, and the nation is dead today. And wiser did God's judgment for sin fall upon these people than it will fall upon you and me. Therefore, "because He will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God."
The message is: "Now, the message of judgment. They fell to ring the bell for judgment. You will be reared to go to judgment. May your action be taught today. And to enter thy God's judgment. We all know thee people there. If thy judgment now may me. Therefore, because we will go free unto thee, prepare to meet thy God."
This is a short book containing only twenty-one verses. And yet there is a message in it that will amply repay our careful and earnest and prayerful study. The supreme teaching of the book, I think, centers around the seventeenth verse: "And the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions."

That is a rather strange statement. There is implied in it that the house of Jacob is not possessing it possessions; that God's chosen people are not claiming that which they have a right to claim. There is coming a time, says the prophet, when they will do so, but they are not doing it now.

It strikes me that this is an exceedingly common and up-to-date tragedy. What was the matter with Israel as they came to the borders of the Jordan? It was not that they were not able to enter into Canaan. It was this rather: they did not dare to possess their possessions. They did not take what their God was so willing and eager and able to give.

What was the matter with the elder son? It was not the fact that his father was poor. It was not the fact that his father was mean and niggardly and unwilling to give. The reason that this son had lived as a starvling and as a slave was simply because he did not claim his own. He did not possess his possessions. And that is not only the tragedy of the elder son, but it is the present blighting tragedy of many of us as well.

What are some of the possessions to which we have a perfect right through Jesus Christ. We have a perfect right to cleansing. We have a perfect right to enter into the divine fellowship and friendship. We have a right to expect and to claim victory over sin. We have a right to expect and claim entire sanctification. We have a right to expect and claim the power of the Holy Spirit for the doing of the work to which Christ has called us. If we do not claim these blessings we are not possessing our possessions.

Why do we fail to claim our own? Some of us fail through our own pride and self-sufficiency. That was the story of Edom here in the text. Edom felt amply able to look out for herself. She was able to conquer her own enemies. She was able to win to her own goals. She disregarded God because she had no sense of need. A foolish and prideful self-sufficiency kept Edom from claiming her own.

Sometimes we are kept from possession our possessions because of known wrong doing. We insist on clinging to the thing that God hates. Before we can be saved there must be personal willingness to give up sin. As long as you hold on to that to which God objects, as long as you cling to that which constantly comes between your face and God when you get on your knees, you will never possess your possessions.

Sometimes we fail because of our unwillingness to obey God. We refuse to do some duty, to take up some task to which we feel ourselves impelled by the spirit of God. That was why the children of Israel turned back at Kadesh-barnea.

There were several reasons why they were unwilling to obey God by going forward. They had no faith, for one thing. Then they had no religious self-respect. And last of all they were unwilling to pay the price. Since this was the case it was beyond God's power to enable them to possess their possessions.
There are many robberies in the world today. Some are being robbed of goods, some of life, some of purity and of love. But the most awful robberies that are performed are the robberies that we commit against ourselves. How passing strange it is that we face day by day the unsearchable riches of Christ and refuse to claim them!

But you say, how are we to do it? Christ makes it plain in the seventh chapter of St. John, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." If you desire to possess your possessions, if you daily long to be all and to do all that God made it possible for you to be and to do, then come to Him and drink. That is, come to Him and claim the fulfillment of His own precious promises. And He will not disappoint you. And for you will be fulfilled the promises of the text: you shall possess your possessions.
OBADIAH

Who Obadiah was, no one knows. Where he lived, no one knows. Everything that we know about him is that he was a prophet and that he wrote the shortest book in the Old Testament. But while this book is very brief, it is also very full of helpful teachings. There are three parts to the book. They seem to stand out quite clear and distinct.

PART I.

There is a pronouncement of doom against Edom, "As thou hast done; it shall be done unto thee:" That is Edom is to pay the penalty for its sins. This nation, made up of the descendants of Esau is to reap as it has sown.

What was the nature of Edom's sin?

1. Pride of heart. They were the very opposite of those who are poor in spirit. This pride of heart had expressed itself in self-sufficiency. It is said of Esau that he was a fornicator or a materialist. So were its sons. They were Godless materialists.

2. This pride of heart, by isolating them from God had also isolated them from their brothers. They were not brotherly. Pride is always a divider.

3. The way this isolation had expressed itself was not so much in positive violence as in ruinous The charge brought against them is this, that they stood on the other side. Then their brothers, the sons of Jacob were destroyed, when Jerusalem was pillaged they were not the conquerers. They simply stood aside and did nothing. That is the sin that is most universally condemned in the New Testament.
Dibes. It was the sin of the man of one talent. It was the sin of the barren fig tree. It was the sin of the priest and the Levite.

Now this sin of cruelty found Edom out. There is an afterward to every sin. Their father Esau found it true. It is true individually. It is true nationally. They were paid off in their own coin. America stood on the other side at the close of the war. For this we are sure to pay as God lives.

PART II.

God's promise to Israel. It is this. The sons of Jacob shall possess their possession. There is implied in this that possessions must be possessed. There is further implied the fact that the sons of Jacob were not at this time possessing their possessions.

How is this to be done? We find an excellent answer in the study of Jacob himself on that memorable night of the wrestle. He was first brought to a sense of need. Then he repented. Then a new name was given him. He entered then and there upon his inheritance.

PART III

Then there is a promise to Edom and to all the world. The declaration is that when the sons of Jacob possessed their possession that they should judge Edom. There is judgment for ends of righteous. The outcome of it all is that the Kingdom shall be the Lord's. That is God is moving amidst all the turmoil and strife toward that day when the Kingdoms of the world shall become the Kingdoms of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The prophet Habakkuk wrote a book. This is one of the gems of the Old Testament. This book was not born in the heart of a man who lived on the sunny side of the street. Like so many precious things, he came out of conflict. It was refined in the furnace of fire. This prophet wrote out of a stressful and bitter experience.

PART I.

Look at his difficulties:

1. His nation is in ruins. The Chaldeans, a "bitter and hasty nation" has come up to plunder and destroy, to kill and to enslave. They are the chosen people and here they are the play-thing of one of the most heartless and cruel of people.

2. Not only is this nation in ruins but it is being ruined by another nation that the prophet cannot but see is more wicked than the people of Israel. He does not shut his eyes to the sin of Israel, but it perplexes him beyond measure to see his nation over run and destroyed by another that is so morally inferior.

3. Then the prophet is perplexed because God seems to do nothing. He has believed that God is a God of justice. He has clung to the faith that He that is allpowerful will not behold iniquity. But here is injustice and sin in its most cruel and awful forms and God meantime is doing absolutely nothing.

PART II.

What does this prophet do with his difficulties? He did the wisest thing possible.

1. He took them to God. The book opens with the cry of his
Habakkuk.

pained and puzzled heart. "How long O Lord shall I cry of violence." He did not complain about God, but he complained to God. Such complaint God is always ready to hear. As you turn the pages of the Bible you will find the saints here and there speaking quite plainly and bluntly to God. But they are never rebuked. God loves sincerity. He wants us to tell Him what is in our hearts.

2. Not only did He take his difficulties to God in prayer, but he persisted in so doing. Where can you find anything finer than this. "I will wait me upon my watch. I will stand upon the tower -- I will see when he will answer me." This man has prayed. Now he is on his watch-tower waiting for the answer. If God were to answer many of our prayers, we would not be at home to receive the answer. In fact, by the time many of us would receive the answer we would have forgotten what we had prayed for. Habakkuk persisted. He said if the vision tarried he would wait for it.

3. Not only did he pray, he persisted in prayer and he obtained an answer. This man knew what it was to pray successfully, victoriously. He had learned the greatest of all secrets. He had learned to do that which most of us do so poorly and so faltering at this time. The Church is weak in many respects today, but in no way is it weaker than in its prayer life. In spite of his difficulties the prophet prayed through. God gave him an answer.

PART III.

And what an answer it was. Notice its contents.

1. He told him why his people were suffering. "The secret of the Lord is with them that feareth." He let him know why his nation was in ruins. He said that they were suffering because of their sin. The
tragic situation in which they found themselves was born of their disloyalty to God. But while these calamities had come because of their sin, they yet had come because of God's love. God was seeking thru suffering to bring them back to Himself.

2. He had an answer to his question as to why such a cruel and godless nation as the Chaldeans were allowed to punish and over-run them. This nation was nothing more than the scourge in God's hands. They were in rebellion of God and as such were not going unpunished. In fact, Habakkuk learned that sin is its own punishment. Sin always drags a ghastly penalty behind it. This is true even when sin seems successful. The most warlike nations have been swept from the face of the earth by their very victories.

Then He utters five woes against this nation. They were woes that told of the coming penalty that was to be the natural outcome of their sin. The first two are uttered against those who come into possession of illgotten gains. The man who plunders shall be plundered.

(3) Woe to a man who builds a city in blood.

(4) Woe to him who giveth his neighbor drink.

(5) Woe to the idolater.

God made it plain that this nation thru its sin was hastening to destruction.

3. The final truth that this prophet learned thru prayer is the supreme truth of the book. It is one of the great passages of the Old Testament. It is quoted three times in the New. God said to him, "The just shall live by his faith." There were two great facts enunciated here.

(1) The just shall live.

(2) How shall he live? He shall live by his faith. And Habakkuk
Habakkuk demonstrated the truth of this text. He had done so in some measure before, but now in a fuller and larger sense he illustrated the truth that a righteous man does live by his faith.

4. Look at the content of his faith. Every man lives by his faith, but some men live mainly because they have a fine faith. Habakkuk had a great faith. What was it?

He believed in a present God.

(1) First, That sounds easy for us sitting in the snug contentment of this present day civilization. But it was not easy for a man in his situation. Yet, it was he who said, "The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth silent before Him." Moffatt gives a brief and concise translation. "Hush, God is here."

(2) Believing in a present God he believed in present possibilities of the better day. Since God is present sadness may be changed into song, and death into life. So Habakkuk had courage to pray a prayer that is more needed today than any other prayer that we could possibly pray. "Revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee."

(3) Then Habakkuk in spite of surrounding tragedy came to believe in the final triumph of righteousness. What a victorious faith. Surely this man is upon his watch tower. Therefore, he can see something more than the present disaster. He can see future triumph. Right is on the scaffold but it is not going to be so always. How marvelous it is that in the face of present disaster, he sung of a good day when the glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

PART IV

What did this faith do for him personally.

1. It made him joyful in spite of his trying situation. The note of triumph with which this book reads is one of the finest things im-
Habakkuk.

Aginable. Though the fig tree fails to bloom and though there is no fruit on the vine and though the olive fails to bear and though the fields are barren and though the herds are wanting and though there are no cattle in the stalls, everything gone, yet says this dauntless man, I will joy and rejoice in the God of my salvation. There is absolutely no defeat possible for such a faith as that.

2. His faith steadied him. He said, "Thou hast made my feet hind feet." A deer can walk over rugged and slippery places where you and I would be likely to lose our footing, but Habakkuk says the true faith in God has been as sure footed as a deer. Like the Psalmist, his feet had well nigh slipped but God steadied him.

There has never been a time in recent centuries when prayer has so lost its footing as today. Now and then one whom we would never suspect utterly slips off his feet and loses his moorings altogether. Sometimes we ourselves feel that we are standing on exceedingly slippery places. Where shall we find safety. In God. We can give the same testimony that Habakkuk gave. God is my strength and He has made like my feet/hind feet.
ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah is doubtless the youngest man who had anything to do with the writing of the Old or the New Testament. Of the sixty-six books of the Bible, a large part of them were written by men in their matur3r years, but Zephaniah was a young man. He was extremely young. He was the great great grandson of Hezikah. Hezikah lived in the latter part of the eighth century before Christ. Zephaniah prophesied about 625 B.C. He was, therefore, probably in his early twenties when he wrote this book. He might possibly have still been in his teens.

If we read the book with this in mind I think we can, may be, better understand its lack of tenderness. There is no critic, whose purposes are good, that is quite so sharp as the youthful critic. Of course, there are those who are older grown who have become hard and cynical, that like to thrust and slash just to give vent to their rages against life and mankind in general. Swift was such a man. But men who criticise with the hope of bettering usually grow softer with the years. The youthful critic, even when good and dead in earnest is likely to be harsh and sharp.

PART I.

The theme of this book is "the day of the Lord." Zephaniah speaks with intensity and conviction of a coming day of the Lord. By the day of the Lord he means a day when the Lord is going to manifest Himself in some particular and conspicuous fashion. Here he means He is going to come in judgment. This book is an earnest prophesy of a judgment to come.

As to the time of this impending judgment, the prophet does not seem quite so sure. There is one time, he says, that it is at hand and others it seems postponed to the far future. The truth is that
Zephaniah.

Zephaniah believes both in a judgment at hand and in a judgment that is distant. He believes that God's judgments are near and far. He seems to be the first of the Old Testament prophets who caught a glimpse of the day of the Lord, which means the final consummation of all things earthly.

In believing in the day of the Lord both near and far, this prophet was in harmony with the whole tenor of the scriptures. The Bible teaches a final judgment. We accept that teaching. It is easy to do so because judgment is a fact of history. There has come a day of the Lord many times in the centuries gone by. When the flood came. When Ninevah fell. When Babylon was destroyed. When Israel and Judah were led into captivity. These were times of "The Day of the Lord." The prophets would have spoken of each one of them as the Lord's. Judgment then is a fact of the past. It is a fact of the present. We can, therefore, reasonably believe it will be a fact of the future.

PART II.

Why is God coming in judgment? Zephaniah has no doubt as to the answer of this question. He is coming in judgment because the people have sinned. They have sown to the flesh. Of the flesh they cannot but reap corruption. Sin always involves judgment. This is the case whether their judgment comes thru natural law or thru direct invention on the part of God.

The prophet proceeds to point out the cause of their sin. They had had a false leadership. Of course, this does not relieve them from their own responsibilities, but a wrong leadership made it easier for them to go wrong. There is a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of those who lead. That means upon the shoulders of the parents or the
Zephaniah.

Sunday School teachers, or the teachers and preachers. The right sort of leadership will result in a better day.

But this leadership was bad. It was bad politically. "The princes are lions," says the prophet, "and the judges are wolves." That is, the people who were in authority, who were to enforce law, who were to dispense justice were themselves morally rotten. They were no better than beasts of prey. They were seeking not a chance to serve, but a chance to enrich themselves.

Then the prophet can see nothing better about the spiritual leaders. The prophet here says they are light and trashy. They have no weight. They have no force. They are totally wanting in the power that belongs to those who ought to really see the Lord. The priests are no better. They have corrupted the temple. The very men who were to mediate between God and men had lost all touch with God. Therefore, they had lost all power to lead those who would follow them in any direction but downward.

As a result it is only natural that marks of moral decline are everywhere. Jerusalem is spoken of as a city of depression. There was injustice between man and man. Many of its people were idolaters. You will not obey, he tells them. You will not receive correction. They had become hard and stubborn. They refused to face the fact of the disasters that had overtaken them were but the result of their disloyalty to God. God's people in name -- they were practically godless, hence they were right for judgment.

PART III.

The nature of the judgment.

1. Notice its contents. There were two elements in this judgment.
Zephaniah.

A. The spiritual element. Sin had already brought a wast, bringing spiritual judgment upon them. Such is the case in our day. Such will be the case in every day.

(1) They had become blind. The man who refuses to see loses his capacity to see. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Wretched are the impure for they fail to see. There is nothing so blinding as sin. Refuse to hear the voice of conscious; disregard your own orator and the voice will become silent, and God will become to you a vague reality. He is such to multitudes today. I think it safe to say there are many thousands in our Christian America today to whom God means little more than Judas.

(2) Failing to see God, they became practical atheists. They were not professed atheists, but they came to the place where they did not think that God mattered in the least. Here is their creed. God does nothing either good or ill. That was the creed of Napoleon. God is on the side of the strongest battalian. That is, He does not count.

Now if you remember I said Habakkuk in his difficulty felt that God was doing nothing, but his attitude was as far from that of these atheists as night is from day. Habakkuk still believed in God. He believed that God had a reason for acting as He was acting. Therefore, he took the matter to God in prayer and sought an answer. He stood on his watch tower until the light broke upon him. But these men heaved a sigh of relief as they said "God does nothing." They were glad to be rid of God.

(3) Being practical atheists, they became criminally indifferent. "They settled on their lees," the prophet says. Wine that settles on its lees loses its tang. It becomes thick and syrupie. By and by it tends to rot. So these had settled down into an indifference that was
Zephaniah.

hastening them towards total disintegration. Towards moral and spiritual drift wood.

B. Then this judgment had its physical side. God was not only going to punish spiritually but physically. This he was going to do by wiping the people off the face of the earth. Dead spiritually, he was going to bring them to a physical death. Now we have a tendency to look on this physical death as the great calamity but it is not. That is a small matter. The greatest tragedy is the spiritual death. The supreme calamity is not that they had ceased to live physically, it is that they had already ceased to be fit to live. That has been true of the nations and the individuals on whom God has come in physical judgment in the past.

This judgment had a fulfillment that was very near. It is yet going to be fulfilled in the distant future.

2. Notice next the extent of this judgment. It includes God's chosen people. It includes the nations round about. It includes the whole world. But, of course, here the prophet has the far view. He is seeing the vision that Paul saw more clearly centuries later when he said, "God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness." The whole world is to be judged. "Every man must give an account of himself to God.

3. The purpose of this judgment. God does not punish in a spirit of anger. The purpose of the judgment is to give goodness a chance. That is His purpose in the immediate future. The society of that day had been corrupted. There was nothing that God could do but scatter them abroad and destroy them. He declares that he will leave behind a rem-
Zephaniah.

nant afflicted and poor that shall trust Him. This was a kind of spiritual surgery. Society had become so corrupted that the only way to save any of it was that a part of it had to be amputated and thrown away.

This is the purpose of judgment at the end of the ages. God is going to see that goodness gets a chance. Therefore, he is going to gather out all things that are thin. When John wrote of the heavenly home, he said "there shall not in any wise enter into it anything that corrupts." To take one who is spiritually dead into heaven would not help the dead. Therefore, there is coming a time when there is going to be a separation of the good and the bad, between the living and the dead. Such is the teaching of this prophet. Such is the teaching of the whole Bible.
HAGGAI

PART I.

The prophet Haggai did his work about one hundred years after Zephaniah, the man whom we study last Wednesday. He was a man whose entire ministry was given up to the realization of one purpose. This book does not impress the reader as being so profoundly spiritual as some other books of the Old Testament. In fact there are those who regard Haggai as very inferior. This they do because they do not regard the object for which he prophesied as of great importance.

What was Haggai's one purpose? It was building the temple. It was to that end that he struggled and prayed and preached. He regarded the temple as of fundamental importance to the people of his day, and I am convinced that had Isaiah or Jeremiah been in his place they would have been gripped by the same conviction. This for the simple reason that religion never prospers without a house of worship. It was so then. It is so now.

Sixteen years before these people had returned from the exile. They had come into their home-land with great expectations. Almost at once they had laid the foundation for a new temple, but opposition arose. Difficulties multiplied. The undertaking was abandoned. During all these years they have been without a house of worship. They had not prospered spiritually or otherwise. They were depressed, discouraged, almost sudden in their despair. Therefore, I take it that Haggai could have rendered no greater service than he did render them, in inducing them to rebuild the temple.

PART II

How did Haggai induce them to begin this great work?

1. He himself became ablazed with zeal and enthusiasm for the
accomplishment of this task. He believed profoundly that God was stirring them up to get this work done. In urging them to life he spoke with authority and assurance. He was convinced beyond peradventure that God was speaking thru him. No wonder he inspired others— he was inspired himself.

2. Then he made the people see the real reason why they had refused to build. Of course, they had excuses for not building. They told the preacher that it was not time to build. The psychological moment had not come. Just why it is not time we are not explicitly told, but the situation indicates that it was not time because they were too poor. Crops had failed. Money was scarce. Therefore, they could not be expected to build.

We have always been skillful for finding excuses for the neglected duty. This is the favorite excuse of the unconverted. Few men would tell you that they had no thought of ever being saved. They expect to be some day but now is not the time.

Few people living in neglected duty intend to keep it up, but they are simply putting off the day of beginning. It is not time. You intend to speak to your friend about their salvation, but not now. These folks were friendly toward the temple, they believed in the temple, but they were not at present ready.

But all duty is present duty. Now is all the time we have. Therefore, now is always the accepted time and today is always the day of salvation. To refuse to act in the now is to miss our chance.

"Procrastination is the thief of time,
Year after year it steals till all is fled,
And to the merits of the moment,
Leaves the vast concern of an eternal scene."
Haggai.

Then he showed them their real reason for the delay. They were not delaying because the time was not fit. They were not delaying because they were unable to build. In proof of this, he pointed to the fact that they had meantime builded handsome houses for themselves. They had found it necessary to economize in doing so. They had cut down their contributions to the Church rather than their expenditures on themselves.

When we find it necessary to compromise, where do we begin? The answer to that question indicates the kind of Christian we are. If we begin to economize on the Church of Jesus Christ instead of on gasoline and the movies, then I am uneasy about your brand of Christianity.

Why had these people not builded? Answer, because they did not want to. That is the reason for every neglected duty under the stars. In fact, there is no reason. If you cannot do it, then it is not your duty to do it. But the only reason that you do not do what you clearly ought to do is because you do not want to. Why do not more people come to Prayer-Meeting? Because they do not want to. Why do not more folks do personal work? Why do not more folks give? (I do not mean largely.) The answer is the same.

3. Then he made them see how they had cheated themselves by refusing to build. He indicates that their spiritual poverty had brought in its wake material poverty. That does not happen every time. It happens sometimes. Loyalty to Christ sometimes brings material prosperity, but here again we must say that is not always the case. These people had neglected God. But what had they gained by it.

Listen to a partial list of their returns. "You have sown much but reaped little. You have eaten and have not been satisfied. You have earned wages and put them in bags full of holes." Some how they simply
Haggai.

had not gotten on. Everything had gone dead wrong. When they tried to count their expenditures at the end of the month, for the life of them they could not tell where it had gone. This is a picture of millions of lives that are in the world today. Some folks have neglected God and lost their money and their position. Some have neglected Him and got on famously, so far as the world sees, but to every one of them has come restlessness, wretchedness and dissatisfaction. Their wealth, real or fancy, has been put into bags full of holes. They have nothing to show that is of real value.

Now it was by this preaching that Haggai succeeded in getting his discouraged people to set to work. He is not ranked as a first-class preacher, but this we must say for him, that he got results. That, in my opinion, indicates great preaching. The good marksman is not the one who holds the gun most gracefully, he is the one who hits the bull's eye. Haggai did that.

PART III.

But Haggai had to bestir himself to get his people started. He found it even more difficult to keep them at the work. They were more ready to quit than they were to begin. They set to work in September. In October they quit. There were three dangers that he had to help them overcome.

1. It was the danger of discouragement growing out of comparison with the old. When the walls of this temple began to take shape, some of the old men who had seen the former temple came to at it and burst into tears. The younger generation had been delighted. They thought they were doing well, but these sobbing old folks told them that their temple was nothing in comparison with their temple when they were boys,
and they all got to looking so hungrily back to the good old days when they were young that they quit and did nothing but look.

Now the desire to get back to some golden age has hampered us through the centuries. We want to get back to the Pentecost, or back to the days of early Methodism. The young prophets of long ago wanted to get back to Elijah. But we need to realize that God is not in the past simply, but He is in the present. What we need is not to get back to form, or to some personality of yesterday, we need to hear God's voice in today. Our God is a God of progress. He is going to deal mightily with our own generation when we give Him a chance, but He is going to do so in a bit different fashion when we give Him a chance.

"New occasions make new duties,
Time makes ancient grow uncouth,
We must upward still and onward,
Who would keep abreast of truth."

Haggai told them that God was with them and that the glory of this temple was going to be greater than the glory of the past. Thus encouraged they set to work again.

2. But a few weeks later they had quit again. The reason they had quit this time was because they had not found themselves greatly increased in prosperity by the work they had already done. They got it in their minds that as soon as they had begun to build the temple they would begin to prosper materially. In this they were disappointed. They expected to find material results for spiritual service. But no such results had followed. Therefore, they were ready to quit.

This too, is a present temptation. You have begun to tithe, but you have never been any more hard-up financially than now. Therefore, you are going to quit. You have set out to read some of the scripture every day and to take a little time for prayer. You are at
preaching services on Sunday, and even at prayer-meeting, and yet you do not feel like shouting, and you say "what's the use."

Remember this, God does not pay wages. All things being equal, right living leads to material prosperity, but even if we do not prosper, it is right to do right in scorn of consequences.

3. Then these people threatened to quit, because the power of the foes round about them made the task so hopeless. They were so weak and their enemies were so strong. Such being the situation, they could never hope to win. But the prophet showed them that God was greater than all their foes.

This too, is a temptation that is thoroughly modern. It is easy to be discouraged in a day like ours. The forces of righteousness seemed so weak in comparison with the forces of evil. It is true in the individual life as it is true in the life of the world. But we must realize that His grace is sufficient and that defeat is impossible while we keep in touch with God.

What was the duty of these people in the presence of their difficulties. It was not to deny them. It was not to quit. It was not to sit down and whine and say nothing could be done. The prophet expressed their whole duty, as he expressed ours, in three words, "Be strong and work." Do not give yourself to the task of counting results. Do not waste your time feeling your pulse. Do not frighten yourself by keeping your eyes fixed on your enemies. Stay at your job. "Be strong and work." That is a message that is both timely and timeless. It was needed in the sixth century before Christ. It is needed in the twentieth century after Christ.
ZACHARIAH

Zachariah began to prophesy one month after the prophet Haggai. He too was deeply concerned about the building of the temple. However, he approached the question in a different fashion. He was a man of far keener vision and of far deeper spirituality. His book is an Apocalypse. That is an unveiling of the unseen.

Zachariah was in a peculiar sense a prophet of the coming Messiah. I do not believe there is any other prophet who makes more reference to the coming of Christ than does this man. He tells of His entry into Jerusalem. Christ uses his exact words when He tells of His coming desertion by His disciples. "They shall smite the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." Zachariah speaks of His wounded hands and declares that they shall loom on Him whom they have pierced. The book falls naturally into two parts. The first eight chapters constitute the first part and the remaining six the other.

PART I.

The message of the book might be summed up largely in the three verses of the first chapter. It is a call to repentance. The book is a great evangelistic sermon. These three verses is in a sense the text. "Turn unto me saith the Lord of Host, and I will turn unto you.

PART II.

This invitation to turn to God implies certain facts of tremendous importance. They are facts that have, in some measure, lost their power to startle thru their familiarity. "Turn unto me." Why did the prophet use such language?

1. He invited these people to turn to God because they had turned away from Him. That sounds commonplace I know, but if it is commonplace
Zachariah

That runs throughout the entire word of God. On the very first page of the record we find man turning his back on God. And it was God that came to seek and not man. Adam did not say "Lord where art thou," but the Lord said, "Adam where art thou?"

Man tends to lose God. He has lost him. That is a truth of the Bible. That is a fact of personal experience. There are tens of thousands today who have no more consciousness of God than they do of Judah. Therefore, the prophet cries to his people and to those that should come in the centuries after him, "turn unto me saith the Lord of Host."

2. This invitation implies the possibility of our returning to God. God will not invite us to do what in the nature we cannot do. He means to say the door is open. He means to say that any of us, all of us, may find our way back into His friendship and fellowship. We can do this because as this prophet tells us there has been opened a fountain for cleansing. Here is spoken of that same fountain of which Cowper sang centuries later. "There is a fountain filled with blood."

How can a man be forgiven? "There is none that can forgive sins but God only." That He can do so is a profound mystery. He does so only thru the Cross. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission. But on the Cross He cried, "It is finished." Hudson Taylor felt this fact and said there is nothing for me to do but to fall upon my knees and claim the finished work of Christ. That is all any of us can do. But since it is our privilege to do this, we can come singing "Just as I am Without One plea, but that thy blood was shed for me."

3. Now since a man may return to God, it is his own fault if he does not do so. God disclaims all responsibility for any man's loss.
"I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies," He declares. He has but a heartache. Because the way is open and because you can return, if you are lost you can blame no one but yourself.

PART III.

How can he return? How can a man who is out of touch with God come to know Him? That is a big question. That is a question that this prophet undertakes to answer. It is a question that is answered over and over again in this book. It is so important that it was necessary that it should be so.

How, I repeat, can a lost sinner find God? He can find Him by repentance. And what is it to repent? Zachariah tells us by a picture. He pictures one standing in the presence of God with satan there as his accuser.

1. This man is convicted of sin. That is a step towards repentance, but, of course, it is not enough. He is possibly sorry for sin but that is not enough, but the fact that he realizes his guilt and his need, that is the first step.

2. The second step is turning from the wrong. He is clothed in soiled garments but he casts his filthy rags away. That is, his sin must be forsaken. He must not only be sorry, but he must be sorry enough to quit sinning.

3. He was clad in garments clean and new. That is a picture that Jesus might have had in mind when he told the story of the prodigal son. This prodigal came to himself. He realized his wretched condition. There was conviction. He turned his face from the hog pen towards home. That was the second step. Finally he came to his father and received the best robe at his father's hands.
PART IV.

Why we should return.

This prophet gives some excellent reasons why his people and all why/people should return to God.

1. We ought to return because sin hurts the sinner. Every man who sins suffers. Not only does sin hurt the sinner himself, but it hurts others. The prophet had proof of this right at hand. "Your fathers, he said, "would not listen to the voice of the prophets years ago." They sinned and they suffered, but they did not suffer alone, you are suffering with them. They changed this lovely land into a desolate waste. Sin hurts the sinner. It hurts everyone else.

2. Sin wounds God. Sin causes suffering on the part of God.

"They shall look on Him whom they have pierced." In what sense did they pierce Him? In what sense do we pierce Him? We pierce Him by our sin. "Whence those wounds in the hand?" one is represented as asking. The only adequate answer is this, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

3. But the prime reason for turning to God is that if we do so He will turn to us. He needs us as much as we do Him. He longs for us more intently than we do for Him. Now when we find God, we find life. We find all that makes life worth living.

4. We shall not only find life for ourselves but we shall find it for others. "I will save you," He says, "and you shall be a blessing." Ten men are represented as taking hold upon one man and saying, "Let us go with him for we have heard that the Lord is with him."

PART V.
PART V.

This prophet believed in the final triumph of his message. He believed in the conquest of righteousness. He pictures a young man setting out to measure the city of Jerusalem but he argues and shows him that it is impossible. "You cannot measure the size of the Kingdom of God. The city of God is going to include men, kindreds and tribes and people, for He is going to reign from sea to sea and from the rivers to the ends of the earth.

The city upon which this prophet looked was a small impoverished city. A city inadequately protected from its enemy by a stone wall. That other city, the spiritual Jerusalem of the future is going to be populous nor is it simply going to be made up of the strong. There are going to be old men and women present. There will be boys and girls playing in the streets.

This is the prophet's way of saying that the spiritual is finally to triumph. As long as we trust in physical force, the physically strong are going to survive. But the prophet says that "It is not by might nor power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord." Those possessed of the spirit of God are strong in spite of the physical weakness. Even the feeble, he tells us shall be as David in that day that has come and is yet to come. The measure of a man's greatness will be the measure of his spiritual power. This day has not yet come, but is coming. So the prophet believed and conviction filled his face with sunshine.
MALACHI

Nehemiah is the last historic book of the Old Testament. Malachi is the last prophetic book. If you read these two books together it is easy to see that they were written about the same time. They describe practically the same conditions. Malachi was written in all probability a few years after Nehemiah, possibly about 432 B.C. Therefore, it was written nearly a century later than Haggai and Zechariah. Conditions prevailing at the time of the writing of this book were to the mind of this prophet very distressing. It is evident that the ministry of the two preceding prophets had not resulted in any deep repentance. The age was one of moral decline. Yet the book has a distinct modern flavor. To my mind no prophet speaks home to the needs of our own day more clearly than does the prophet Malachi. This generation, just as his, is in the midst of a moral slump.

PART I.

The Cause.

The prophet puts his finger upon the heart of the disease at the very beginning. "I have loved you saith the Lord." That is God's declaration here. It is His declaration throughout the Bible. It is His declaration through all the centuries. "I have loved you." That is the gospel in a sentence. That is the message of the Cross. It was the teaching of the entire history of these people.

But what response do they make to the love of God? Did it soften them? It did not. It left them hard and sceptical and cold. "Wherein hast thou loved us?" They answered. They had ceased to believe in God's love. They demanded to be shown. They wanted the prophet to prove to them, after all His patient and tender dealings with them, that the love of God was a fact. They had utterly lost faith in God's love.
Malachi.

Having lost faith in the love of God they had quite naturally lost all love for God. "We love Him because He first loved us." When you cease to believe in His love, then you cease to love. When you cease to love then your religious life becomes a dead and unsatisfactory something. A religion without love is a religion that satisfies neither God nor man. The Church at Ephesus was an active church, but it was a disappointing Church because it had left its first love. When we cease to love we cease to be really Christian.

PART II.

The Outcome of this loss.

Now, "All have sinned." Against which the prophet speaks with such earnestness, was just the out-growth of this loss of love to God. Having ceased to love they were ripe for every kind of sin.

1. Their service had become an altogether faulty and worthless service. This is true for the following reasons.

(1) It was a cheap service. Instead of bringing the best to offer to their Lord, they brought the worst. Instead of bringing the lamb that had no blemish they brought that which was lame and torn. Instead of giving God that that was too choice to give any one else, they gave Him that which no one else would have. Thus they polluted His Altar. Thus they showed their contempt and lack of love.

Lovelessness has the same effect today. when we cease to love, we may continue a form of service as these people did. They did not renounce their faith altogether. They did not close the doors of the temple. The prophet tells that it would be better if they would do so. They continued to serve with a service that was cheap. They gave only w
what they did not want. That is still true. If there is nothing else to do there are some who will go to Church. After we have spent upon our necessities and our luxuries, we will fling the balance to God. We make offerings to Him that we not only would not dare give a king, we would not dare give such to a Pullman porter. If your service is cheap it is worthless.

(2) Having no love their service was a joyless service. When they went to Church they went listlessly and with leaden feet. The Psalmist was glad when they said unto him, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." These people were very sorry. They said, "What a weariness it is!" That is what tens of thousands who belong to the Church say today. "What a weariness!" They can go to a dance and stay till four o'clock in the morning and come away rested. They can go to a movie and stay for three hours, and it seems little more than three minutes. But they can come to Church where the service lasts for one hour and can't stay until the benediction is pronounced. "What a weariness!" It is a weariness born of a lack of love for the best, of an interest that is

Such service not only wearies the one who renders it, but it wearies Him to whom it is rendered. Therefore, we are not surprised to hear the Lord saying thru His prophet, "You have wearied." In plain English, "You make me tired." How can He help it? Think of coming stupidly and reluctantly to worship God; Think of going to the place of prayer like dumb driven cattle or "Like the galley slave at night, scourged to his dungeon." The service in which there is no love is not pleasing to God any more than it is to you. It is a source of pain and disgust and weariness.

(3) Such service does not help, it hinders. The prophet tells the
Malachi.

priests who had rendered such service that they had turned many away.
their ministry had been one not of blessing but of cursing. He tells the
people that their words had been stout against Him. He accuses them of
openly slandering Him, of openly misrepresenting Him. They answer in
amazement "Wherein have we spoken against thee." "You have said that it
is vain to serve God."

Now the prophet does not mean to say that these people had gone
among their friends warning them against being religious. He did not
say that one man had told another that loyalty to God was a fruitless
and foolish thing. They had not said so with their lips. They have said
so in a far more effective and disastrous way. They had said so with
their lives, by their unwillingness to serve God, by their unfaithful
service, by their mean and shoddy living they proclaimed to the world
that there was really nothing in their religion at all. Every worldly and
useless Church-member is making this same declaration today. He is de-
claring to the world that there is nothing in Christianity.

2. Failing to love God, these people did not love each other.
The prophet cries to them in pathetic perplexity. "Is not God our Father?"
"Did not one God create us? Yet why do you deal treacherously one man
with his brother." Today with a far deeper understanding we pray "Our
Father who art in heaven." We are the sons of a common Father. We bow
at the feet of a common Lord. Yet we are still so far, so very far from
being brothers. Why? Lack of love to God. When you and I become really
in love with the same Christ we are going to love each other regardless
of race or creed or color.

3. The lack of loyalty and love to God had led to disloyalty of
husbands to wives. It was a day of easy divorce. And God declares here emphatically what He is declaring still thru the tragic failures and losses of those who prove untrue. "I hate putting away." There was no excuse too small to give a man the right to divorce his wife. He only had to say, whereas she was once my wife she is mine no more.

And now modern that is. Never in the history of America was the divorce evil such a deadly danger as it is today. There is one difference between our day and that of the prophet. In the prophet's day the responsibility was largely upon the man. Women had no rights to be regarded. Therefore, they were comparatively free from responsibility. Today women have rights. Therefore, eighty per cent of the divorces that are being obtained today are being obtained by women.

Now there are scores and hundreds of serious minded social workers who can improve on the divine plan of marriage every day in the week. They are as far ahead of the God who made them as a mature philosopher is a child in the kindergarten but the sactity of marriage exists in the nature of things. Therefore, to disregard the laws of God in the matter is also to disregard the laws of man, those laws that are conducive to our highest happiness. I know there are folks today who divorce and marry without the slightest regard to the law of God, but I do not know one single one that has found happiness. They claim to be free but their freedom has only ended in slavery.

4. Then the prophet charges the people of his day with dishonesty with God. "Will a man rob God?" Will he indeed! I know he will rob his brother. I know he will sometimes rob his own child, but "Will a man rob God." "Yes," declares the prophet, "a man will do this rash and wicked thing." There were those among his audience that were guilty.
Malachi.

There are those among mine that are also guilty,

Yet they could hardly believe it. So they answer indignantly, "Wherein have we robbed Thee." "In tithes and offerings," is the reply. You have heard it all before. May be so, but what difference has it made? You have heard it till it does not startle you any more. May be so, but if it has not set you to tithing, then if what the prophet says is true you stand condemned as guilty of rank dishonesty in the sight of God. It is not my accusation. It is the accusation of Him in whose hand your breath is, and in whose are all your ways.

5. Then is the climax of their tragic failure. Their repentence had only been a sham. Their groans and prayers and tears were only a substitute for right living. "You have covered my altars" he says "with your tears and crying out," but though you weep your tears are little more than a mockery, because they do not lead to the renunciation of sin. You can cry and sob and pray from now until doomsday but if you do not renounce your sin it will not get you any where. God could not look with anything but of abhorrence on a man who sobbed at His altar and yet, continued to be unfaithful to his wife. It is well enough to weep over sin, but it amounts to nothing unless you quit your sin.

PART III.

But in this day of moral decline, of spiritual bankruptcy that seemed all but complete, there were those who still held true to God. There were those who still feared the Lord. How were they sustained in those days of conflict and moral failure?

1. They thought on His name. The word he used is the same as Paul uses when he said, "If there be any virtue, or if there be any
Malachi.

praise, think on these things." They thought about God. Thinking they turned to Him in grateful love. "I have thought on my ways and turned my feet." Thoughtlessness spells ruin. Thru the prophet Isaiah, God put His finger on the cause of failure when He said, "My people doth not consider." They simply refused to think. These folks thought on the name, the character, the power, the love of God.

2. They spoke one with another. When they came together the man who was thinking on God spoke to his brother. Told him something of the rich discoveries that he had made in God. These spiritually minded people encouraged one another. They held testimony meetings. They brought their kindled hearts together till a real fire began to burn. They found health in spiritual fellowship just as we may find it today. And their meetings were so delightful that God lessened His hand and gave him a secretary and kept all the proceedings written down in a book.

3. Finally these people encouraged themselves by the forward look. They believed in the dawning of a better day. And they were right in so doing. The prophet tells of a coming day that shall burn as an oven. He tells also of the day in which the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing beams. This is not two different days, it is the same day. And the same sun that scorched the wheat that was on stony ground and made it wither, caused the wheat that was in good ground to grow. The same day that is going to be a day of destruction to the godless is going to be a day of eternal healing for those that fear Him. That day has come, is come, and is to come. If I should die tonight, death would either mean to me a larger freedom or a larger bondage. The effect of that event upon you depends upon your relation-
Malachi.

sippi to God. A blessing may be a curse without Him, but with Him all things work together for good.