UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS

"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and do I forgive him? Until seven times, Jesus said unto him. I say not until seven times, but until seventy times seven."

Matthew 18:21

While this whole story is my subject I am calling your attention especially to this twenty-first verse. Jesus is here dealing with a problem that we have found it so hard to solve, that is the problem of living together. This problem has vexed humanity even since there were two people on the earth. It has become more vexing as our world has grown smaller, and all the nations have been forced to rub elbows with each other. It is tragic that though we have learned how to split the atom, we have not learned how to cease tearing our world into bits. It was the conviction of Jesus that if we are to live together in peace we must exercise toward each other a spirit of forgiveness.

In this matter of forgiving one another, few, even of us who claim to be Christians, have dared to take Jesus seriously. His teaching about forgiveness seems so shockingly impossible that we tend to shut our eyes to his high demand. He tells us to forgive not just once, not just four hundred and ninety times. He tells us
to forgive without limit. A forgiving spirit is to be as constant with us as the flow of water from a gushing spring. If this seems discouragingly exacting, we cannot but be heartened by the fact that since our Lord expects unlimited forgiveness from us he will certainly not give less to us.

I.

We need the lesson taught by this parable because our lot has been cast among trying and cranky people who have a way of getting on our nerves. There are always those whom we find it easy to resent, and therefore, difficult to forgive. Let me name a few of the people who tend to arouse my resentment.

1. I find it very easy to resent the folks about whom I know little. "I hate that man," said Charles Lamb. "I want you to know I hate him." "Why?" asked his friend in amazement, "I did not think you even knew him." "I don't," came the response, "that is the reason I hate him." Even so we find it very easy to dislike people about whom we know little or nothing.

Some years ago a young woman came to see me. She confessed that she had come with great reluctance, that she has not sure even then that she was not making a mistake. What was the matter? The only minister she had given herself an opportunity to know had disappointed her. Hence, she had become antagonistic to all ministers, all churchmen, even to the Christ of the Church. Believe it or not, the rattlesnake is a rather good natured creature except for that brief period during which it is casting its skin. At that time it
is blind. Being blind it strikes at everything in reach. How easy to hate those about whom we know little or nothing!

2. Another group that gets onto my nerves are the folks who are different. Naturally everybody ought to be like me. But there are those who have failed to realize this high goal. Some of these differ in color. They differ in race. For this reason they are inferior and are my natural enemies. Then there are those who did not go to as good schools as those I attended. They are not so successful as I am. They do not boast half as good family tree as mine. They are not connected in the slightest degree with those who came over in the May Flower. Whereas, my uncle John was captain of the Speedwell, the twin ship of the Mayflower. These ships set sail for America together, but sad to say the Speedwell had to put back to port because uncle John was a crook. Still, that gives me some contact with the Mayflower, and thus the right to look down on you, and to hate you accordingly.

Now, if I dislike those who are beneath me, I tend to like even more those who are above me. Some are more successful than I. But, of course, their success is not due to anything of worth in themselves. It is because they got all the breaks. Or, what is worse, they resorted to practices to which I would not resort. Thus I say with the girl who had lost her favorite beau. "I could have won if I had been willing to be as cheap as Mary."

Reference to other may prejudice, Reuben and Western Garvin families.
But having struck out because of my too great virtue, I naturally find it hard to forgive the man who takes my place, and knocks a home run.

Then I find it easy to dislike those who differ from me in their thinking. Naturally what I believe in religion, politics, economics, the right or wrong of war, the President's letter-writing, is the correct belief. Since you do not agree, you are wrong. Being wrong, I find it hard to put up with you. You are likely to be narrow-minded, stubborn or stupid. Even the beloved disciple finding a man who was casting out devils, forbade him because he was not of his group. He could tolerate devils better than a brother who could not see eye to eye with himself.

It is also a striking fact that the closer I am to the one who differs from me in his thinking, the more likely I am to resent him. If I encounter a stranger and find myself differing from him on some particular point, I do not as a rule lose my temper and wish to lay violent hands on him. But if the one who differs is my teen-age son, that is harder to take. And if the unfortunate individual happens to be my wife, that is harder still. Years ago, a husband, a reader of heavy literature, told me how one day he came home and found his wife reading a book of lighter vein. So what? In honest indignation he snatched the book from her and threw it into the fire. Naturally he ended by throwing his marriage into the fire. This he did because he could not bear for his wife to differ from him in her thinking.
3. A third group that I find it hard to tolerate is made up of those folks who do not accord me the consideration to which I think I am entitled. Had you visited the city of Shushan some twenty-five centuries ago, you would not have been on the streets fifteen minutes before you heard about a self-made man named Haman. He had the ear of the King and was the most powerful man in the Persian empire.

Therefore, when he came on the scene everybody bowed down to him. That is, everybody except one stubborn Jew named Mordecai. The fact that this one man refused to bow filled Haman with such hot hate that in an effort to avenge himself upon his enemy, he got himself hanged. It is easy for us to resent the folks that withhold the consideration that we feel we deserve.
daughter.

Here is a man who is running for office in his home state. An enemy circulated an ugly lie regarding him, but the lie was so reasonable, so bolstered by circumstantial evidence that it was widely believed. Even the woman to whom the candidate was engaged believed it. "They have lied on me", he said in a bitter interview with the woman to whom he was engaged. "They have lied on me and you have believed it, and I can never forgive you." And, as for the liar, may God in his just mercy damn him." It is awful to be the possessor of a hate like that, but such a hate is quite natural.

Perhaps the hardest man for me to forgive is not the one who has wronged me, but the one whom I have wronged. Why did Judas betray his Lord with a kiss. Surely that kiss was not necessary. He could have merely pointed Jesus out. I think his kiss was born of his hate- his bitter resentment. He had wronged Jesus. Therefore, he could not forgive him. When we wrong another and refuse to apologize we have to keep seeking for faults in the one we have wronged in order to justify ourselves in our resentment.

Now, with all these troubles and folks to deal with resentment on my part is quite easy.

II.

Toward all these who do me real or imaginary wrong I am to extend forgiveness. What is it to forgive?

Forgiveness is more than a mere refusal to strike back. It is more than a refusal to repress an eye for an eye, or a tooth
for a tooth. We may refuse to do the one that we dislike the slightest harm, and yet be the furthest possible from the exercise of Christian forgiveness.

To forgive is to take and maintain an attitude of good will to the one who has wronged us. Our forgiveness is to be like the forgiveness of God. When God forgives he takes us back into his fellowship. He walks with us as we had never let him down.

For instance, when Jesus selected his three most intimate friends to be with him during that black hour in Gethsemane they failed him utterly. Instead of giving him the comfort of their wakeful sympathy they went sound to sleep. More than once he wakened them, but all in vain. Then, when their failure had been utterly and complete, we hear him saying, to the very ones who had let him down, "Rise let us be going." We are to forgive each other in that fashion.

III.

Why are we to forgive? Why is our Lord so insistent upon our forgiving one another? Our Lord insists upon our denouncing hate because it is the supreme enemy of mankind. Hate is the most expensive evil that the world has ever known. Put hate at the center of any organization and it will wreck it. It has gutted our whole world over and over and is now threatening to do it again.
If you desire to help to destroy your church I know of no way quite so effective as to stir up strife between one member and another. There are always those in every congregation who seem to have a fighting interest in the church. They only come alive when there is a row. Yet anybody can see that when church members begin fighting among themselves the devil can take a vacation. His help is not needed any more. As hate will wreck a church, it will also wreck a home. As kinfolk love each other better than anybody else, even so they can hate each other more intensity than anybody else.

Now, as hate is ruinous to the group, so it is for the individual. Hate is a deadly poison. It poisons the body, it poisons the mind. Whatever it may do for you in your life to come, it certainly makes hell for you in the life that now is. I have seen happy sick folks, and happy well folks, happy rich folks and happy poor folks, but I have yet to find a happy hater.

Here is a lovely picture. A beautiful Christian is being persecuted, mobbed, done to death. Yet his is not an angry face. Instead we read"they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." His enemies could kill his body, but they could not kill his spirit of good will. His face is radiant with the light of forgiveness. No hate ever possesses a lighted face.

Hate is deadly, in the second place, because it makes impossible the forgiving grace of God. In this story of the good hater a man is called before his King, who owes an impossible debt.
It took a wa-

ner of twenty years to turn a talent. This man owed
ten thousand talents. He would have taken two hundred mi-
years to have earned that sum. When, therefore, his King ordered
him, his wife and his children, and all that he had to be sold.
He fell at his feet in utter despair, and asked not for forgiveness
but for patience. Yet out of sheer pity his King freed him and
cancelled the debt.

When he came from that interview there must have been a
light on his face akin to that on the face of Stephan, but suddenly
it went out, as a candle that had been carried out into a storm.
That once light face is now black with rage, as he seizes a
trambling man by the throat and orders him to pay him seventeen
dollars. When the poor chap prayed the same prayer that he had
just prayed he refuses to listen. So what? Refusing to forgive,
his own forgiveness is cancelled.

Why so? There was nothing
arbitrary about it. God does not forgive the unforgiving, simply
because the unforgiving is incapable of receiving forgiveness.
Listen to the words of Jesus—beth 'when you stand praying, forgive
if you have sought against any, that your father in Heaven may for-
give your tresspasses.' Our Lord is constantly offering forgiveness,
but the unforgiving is incapable of receiving it. Forgiveness on
the part of God means a new life, and no one can have the new without
being willing to part with the old.
IV:

How then can I practice Christian forgiveness?

1. I think a sense of gratitude ought to help me. When I realize how much I have to be forgiven. When I realize how greatly I grieve my Lord by refusing to forgive. Sheer gratitude for my own forgiveness ought to make me eager to forgive others.

2. I can act toward the one I dislike as if I liked him. When I first begin to do this I may feel marked antagonism to it, but if I treat my enemy as if he were a friend, the chances are very great that he will cease to be an enemy. It is hard to hate a man while you pray for him, and while you seek to do him good. Perhaps you cannot make yourself feel toward him as you would like to feel. You can make yourself act toward him as you ought to act.

If you do this, your own attitude will undergo a change. Not only so, but such an attitude on your part is very apt to change your foe into a friend. I have had this worked on me. I have had my prejudices and dislikes killed off, by an attitude of friendship. Here is one, for instance, whom I can hardly endure. Then one day, that man does me a kindness. At once I began to say to myself, "he likes me. I must like him, too. I always did know there was something good about him."

Finally, if we are to exercise a spirit of forgiveness we must let God into our situation. Few men have ever been more greatly wrong, than Joseph. He was torn from a doting father, torn from all his hopes and dreams and sold into slavery. Yet, years later when those devilish brothers who had sought to wreck him,
came whimning for forgiveness. He made that seem which might have been ugly, one of the most beautiful in literature. Had he hated he might have wrecked both himself and his brothers. By forgiving he saved them. He was helped to forgive by the realization that God was in the tragedy with him, bringing good out of evil.

To love our friends is easy. To love our enemies is impossible without the help of God. This is one Christian virtue that the world cannot imitate. Pagans can be honest and clean living, but it takes vital religion to make one truly forgiving.

This is a call to the impossible. When Jesus encountered a man whose right hand was withered, he said to him, "Stretch forth thy hand." That was the very thing that he could not do, but as he willed what God willed for him, the impossible became possible.

Here is a story that came out of the last World War. A young British captain wrote a letter to a German mother. "My dear Madam," it read. "During a commando raid I find that I have killed your son. Since I am a Christian, I am writing to ask your forgiveness. Months later, there came an answer. It ran like this: My dear Captain: I, too, am a Christian. Therefore, I find it in my heart to forgive even you, who killed my son. When the war is over, if we are both living, I wish you would visit me, that you might take the place in my home, even if for only a few moments of my son, whom you killed." Forgiveness as beautiful as that is impossible, except in the grace of God.
Uncle John was a crook. Still that gives me a right to look down on you. I can call you common and hate you accordingly.

Now, if I dislike you for being beneath me, I might dislike you even more, for being above me. Some of you are more successful than I am. But, of course, your success is not due to anything of worth in you. It is because you got the breaks. Or, what is worse, you resorted to practices to which I would not resort. I can say with the girl who had lost her favorite beau: "I could have had you for love." If I were willing to be cheap and easy, but having strength out because of my too great virtues, I naturally find it hard to forgive the man who loves my feet past me; it is especially easy for me to resent those succeed where I fail. I take a position and fumble it. I go to the bat in a certain church and strike out. An old friend takes my place and knocks a home run. That is hard to take.

Then I find those folk very kind who differ from me in their thinking. Naturally what I believe in religion, politics, economics, the right or wrong of war, is the correct belief. Since you do not agree, you are wrong. Being wrong, I find it hard to put up with you. You are likely to be narrow-minded, stubborn, or stupid. Do not feel because you were not of the group, the broad tolerant church better than a brother who could not see eye to eye. It is also a striking fact that the closer I am to the one who differs from me in his thinking, the more I am likely to resent him. I sometimes encounter a stranger and find myself not agreeing with him on some particular point. But at all times here comes a sense of new friendship and wish to carry violent points in mind. But if the one who differs is my true enemy, that is harder to bear. And if the unfortunate individual happens to me many times, that is harder still.
in part in a good humour. But I knew a husband some time ago, who
was a reader of heavy literature. One day he came home, to find his
wife reading a book of lighter vein, and his indignation he snatched
naturally. To exasperate the matter more, with the book from her and threw it into the fire. He wrecked his home
because he could not bear for his wife to differ from him, in her
thinking.

3. A third group that I find it hard to tolerate is made up of
those folks who do not accord me the consideration to which I think
I am entitled. As a young minister it came to me with a shock that
there were actually people who did not believe I was anything
more than a high school student. People were saying about me
something that was very unique. It is easy to resent such silly souls. If you
don't believe it, ask Mr. Haman.

You remember Haman. He was the most powerful man in the
Persian empire. Being a self-made man he had saved the Lord of
therefore when he came on the scene
some embarrassment. Being a man of power, everybody bowed down
to him. That is, everybody except one stubborn Jew named Mordecai.
The fact that this one man refused to bow filled Haman with such
hot hate that in an effort to avenge himself upon him, he got
himself hanged. It is easy to resent the folks that withhold the
consideration that we deserve.

4. A fourth group that I resent is the man who deliberately
does me dirt. I am speaking to some who have suffered deeply at
the hands of others. Maybe you have had a tignant in your home.
Some ungracious invalid, who has had no consideration for anybody
but himself. Maybe you have been cheated of your part of the estate.
Maybe somebody has broken your heart by wronging your son, or your
"A GOOD HATER"

"So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." Matthew 18: 35

The story of which this text is a part is one of the best pictures in the Bible of a good hater. I think it was old Samuel Johnson who said he loved a good hater. Possibly that is the case with a great many. There are a few places when hate looks brawny and brave, but somehow on the pages of the New Testament it does not look good. It is nothing more than a big blot of utter ugliness.

Jesus was lead to tell this story by a question from Simon Peter. "How often," asked Simon, "shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" That is a pertinent question. The art of living together is one of the finest of the fine arts. It is impossible to live together unless we learn to forgive. So Peter was asking a wise question. He suggested an answer himself. "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? - till seven times?" Peter thought he was putting the case on a very high plain. Three times was all that was required of the rabbinical law. Peter was doubling that amount.

But what said Jesus? "I say, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven." Now there is a standard that is high. You are not to forgive once nor twice but you are to forgive persistently. This you are to do regardless of how great the injury. This you are to do regardless of how oft the injury is repeated. This means simply that you are to be possessed by a forgiving spirit. It means that you are to give out forgiveness as constantly as the sun gives out light. There is no law that gives any man a right to hate anybody. We simply must forgive.

I.

Why is this the case?

1. We are to forgive because of the high cost of hating. Of all expensive luxuries, of all the costly sins, there is none I know that is so costly as an un-forgiving spirit. Hate is the most expensive thing in all the world.
First, it is expensive to the hater. Hate robs you of all real treasure. It shuts the door of the kingdom of heaven in your face. No man can become a Christian unless he is willing to give up hate. It is the one condition laid down by our Lord for our forgiveness. "If you forgive men not their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you your trespasses." This is not the case because God Himself is a hater and returns evil for evil. God cannot forgive the unforgiving because it is flatly impossible. This is the case as we shall see later because of what forgiveness really involves. But about this we may be dogmatic, that unforgiving persons can never be forgiven.

Then forgiveness robs us of our joy. Every hater is miserable. "Revenge is sweet," is a saying that has little of truth in it. It has far more of bitterness than of sweetness, infinitely more of hell than of heaven. The man who allows himself to hate any creature thereby shuts the door of real happiness in his face. There is not a happy hater in all the world and never has been.

Second, then hate is anti-social. The hater is a menace to the man he hates. He is in a profound sense a menace to society. There is no measuring the hate nor the harm that hate has done. How many needless wounds it has inflicted. How many tears it has wrung from human eyes. How much needless blood it has shed. However great the harm that hate can do to others, it's greatest harm is always to the hater. When Jesus pictured one ran as owing twelve million dollars and the other owing seventeen dollars, it was his way of saying that the harm that another can work to you is as nothing in comparison to the infinite harm you can do to yourself by hate. We are to put away hate then because it is the most expensive and damning luxury in the world.

II.

But what does it mean to forgive?

What do we mean by forgiveness? It means something more than to ignore the injuries that we suffer. Sometimes when we are wounded, we dismiss it by saying proudly
"I just consider the source." Or we say, "I can't stop the train to throw stones at every dog that barks at us." That is, we do not hit back because the one who is wounding us is not a foreman worthy of our steel, therefore, we ignore him. But this is not forgiveness.

Nor is forgiveness a refusal to strike back or to talk back because we exercise a rigid self-control. When we are hurt, we are eager to wound the one responsible for our own pain. Sometimes we refrain by sheer force of will. Sometimes we say, "I will forgive, but I won't forget." That means that I am not going to hurt you as you hurt me. I wish I could but I am going to break off diplomatic relations with you and have nothing more to do with you. But that is not forgiveness.

What then is forgiveness? We are to forgive somewhat as God forgives. What does forgiveness mean when we accept it at the hands of our Lord? It means, I fancy, something far bigger than the average man realizes. "Of course, God will forgive," said the poet, Heine, "that is His business." To make a statement like that is to show an utter ignorance of what forgiveness really means. When God forgives a sinner, what happens?

There are those who think of forgiveness as nothing more than a remission of a penalty. But forgiveness goes far deeper than that. Some think of it as the privilege of escaping from the consequences of one's sin. But forgiveness does not always bring escape from consequences. In a few instances it does, but generally, it does not.

I went to see a woman some years ago who was dying of bi-chloride of mercury poison. She had taken the poison herself. In her terrible hours of torture, she had become penitent. She sent for me and asked me this desperate question, "Will God forgive me?" I could say with perfect confidence, "Indeed He will." I am sure He did. But her forgiveness did not save her from the consequences of her foolish deed. She died in spite of her forgiveness.

What then does it mean for God to forgive? It means that He takes us back
into His confidence. He re-establishes the broken relation between Himself and us. He trusts us. He trusts us as if we had never disappointed Him and never sinned. "Woe is me," we hear Isaiah saying one moment, and the next he hears a voice saying, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" And he dares to volunteer, "Here am I, send me." God's forgiveness has restored his broken fellowship. When we forgive, we too must restore the broken fellowship. Forgiveness that does not go that far is not the forgiveness of which Jesus speaks.

III.

Now to forgive every injury of whatever nature and however oft repeated is a high and exacting standard. How are we to do it? Let us face the fact at once that it is not easy. One has called attention to the truth that it is not even easy for Jesus to forgive. He looked upon forgiveness as a bigger and more difficult miracle than the making of the lame to walk. When the paralytic was laid at His feet, He asked the question, "Which is easier to say, thy sins are forgiven, or to say, take up thy bed and walk?" Far bigger than the miracle of physical healing was the miracle of forgiveness.

There were two reasons that the author suggests that made it difficult for Jesus to forgive one reason was that He took sin seriously. To Jesus, sin was a terrible and hideous and hellish thing. And because He found it so horrible and so hateful, it was not easy for Him to forget it. Here is a husband who has betrayed his wife's confidence and sold his honor. If his wife loves him, she will forgive him however ghastly his sin. But if she dismisses it lightly with a flippant, "It doesn't matter," she means she is not so much forgiving his sin as condoning him. If that wife is high-minded and honest and pure, she will still forgive but she will forgive at the price of a cross.

Then Jesus found it hard to forgive because He loved. Here is a mother whose boy has suffered a great wrong. The greater her love for her son, other things being
equal, the greater her difficulty in forgiving the one who has wronged him. When Jesus blazed with indignation against those who robbed little children of their rights, when He said it were better that a great millstone were put about their necks and they would drown in the sea than to offend one of those little ones, that was brought on because of his love. He found it hard to forgive those who despoiled little children because of his intense love for children. If forgiveness was hard for Jesus, it is not going to be altogether easy for you and me, but here are a few considerations that may help us.

1. We ought to forgive because, as hinted above, hate is so deadly both to the hater and to the object of his hate.

2. We are to find it a bit easier to forgive because of our realization of how much we, ourselves, need to be forgiven. That is what Jesus meant by this story. There was a certain man who owed his king an enormous debt of twelve million dollars. When he was called upon for payment, he was penniless. "Sell him," said the king, "and his wife and his children and all that he has, and let the receipts go on the debt. Of course, it will be but a very small fraction, but it will be better than nothing."

When this poor wretch heard that, he fell down before his Creator and prayed a desperately earnest prayer, "Have patience," he said, "and I will pay thee all." Of course, that is not true. He could not have paid it not in a dozen lifetimes. The debt was far beyond his reach. But in spite of this fact, the king became sorry for him. So much did he pity him that he forgave him the debt and let him go free. I met this chap as he came out from the presence of the king. His face was radiant and his eyes sparkled from sheer joy. "What is the matter?" I asked. "Matter, I am the luckiest man in the world. A moment ago I was facing utter slavery, not only for myself but for all that I love, and now I am free."

I fell into step with this man. I like to be in the company of such a sunny soul. But suddenly I saw the light fade from his face - it was quicker than the passing of a cloud over the sun. His lips curled in scorn, his eyes flashed with anger. I looked up to see him gripping a poor chap by the throat and shaking him unmercifully and saying,
"Pay me that seventeen dollars you owe me." The poor chap falls down before his tormentor and prays the same prayer he himself had prayed a few moments before, "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all." But he refused to listen and had the poor chap thrown into prison. It is unbelievable. It does look like he could have had imagination enough and heart enough to have put himself in the other fellow's place. The thought of how much we have to be forgiven ought to make it easier for us to forgive.

3. The example of our Lord should help us to forgive. He did not wait for men to ask His forgiveness or for them to deserve it, He gave without it. When they had hounded Him to His death and finally hung Him on a cross, He prayed for them this prayer, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." If we are to be like Him, we must share in His spirit of forgiveness.

4. But the supreme step in forgiving is the accepting of the forgiveness of our Lord. When we are really forgiving, we become possessed of a new nature. Jesus Himself enters into our hearts in the person of the holy spirit. Forgiveness is often spontaneous. It comes about as naturally as the blooming of a flower. Where this is not the case, if we are only willing to forgive, our Lord will enable us, and that is one of the most arresting miracles in all human experience.

A friend of mine told me this story: I preached a sermon one Sunday on the necessity of forgiveness. After the service a member of the choir called to see me. She was an excellent woman but in great distress. "Did I understand you to say," she inquired, "that it is absolutely necessary for me to forgive in order to be forgiven?" I answered in the affirmative. "Well," replied the woman desperately, "that shuts me out. I cannot forgive. Did you see that man sitting on the front seat in church today? He shot my husband down in cold blood. He did not even give him a chance. I have hated him ever since that happened, and always will."

Now the preacher was too wise to be critical. He was too wise to demand the utterly impossible. After she had told him how unhappy her hate had made her, he asked if she would be willing to be rid of it, if she would be willing for God to take
it out of her heart. She declared eagerly that she would. They knelt in prayer together. And being willing to forgive, she was enabled to forgive. When she got up from her knees, she went to see the man who had killed her husband and told him she had come to forgive him as Christ had forgiven and that hard man with innocent blood on his hands and on his consciousness broke under the crushing blow of a forgiveness like that and himself came into newness of life.

Do you hate anybody? If so, what is your hate doing for you? What did it do for this man in Jesus' story? It inflicted some small injury upon the man he hated but it locked the hater himself in an eternal prison. "So likewise," said Jesus, "shall my heavenly Father do unto you if you forgive not every one from his trespasses." That does not mean that God is a God of anger and vengeance. It does mean that the man who refuses to forgive is incapacitated to accept forgiveness. It means that he shuts himself in a dungeon of his own making and throws the key away. No man can ever be at home in the Kingdom of God here on earth or hereafter except as he is possessed with a spirit of good will toward all men.
THREE BUSINESS MEN

"For to him that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."
Matthew 25:29

The Parable of the Talent is a parable of three business men. Each of them received an entrustment from the hand of their employer. Each of them made a certain response, and as a result, met certain consequences. This is the explanation of Jesus of how they reaped according to their sowing. Those who proved faithful received an increase. The one who proved unfaithful lost everything.

There is at least one advantage of a text like this. It compels attention, if for no other reason than it arouses our antagonism, it stirs our resentment. In the modern world we could picture an employer like this one, declaring that he was unfair to the poor. Here is taking from the practically empty hands of the man that had almost nothing to give to one whose hands were already full. "It is not right," we exclaim emphatically.

But in so saying we are mistaken. Such a course is not only right, it is inevitable. It happens in every realm of life. For one to refuse to use his physical powers is little by little to lose them. If I want to go blind, it is not necessary for me to get some physician to cut my optic nerve. All I would have to do would be wear a blindfold and my eyes would go out.

Many a man comes in from the farm or from an athletic career in college with a body strong and fit, but he shuts himself up in an office all day long, he rides to work in his car and goes home from work in his car. He takes no exercise until he becomes fat and flabby. Then his physician reminds him that he needs exercise. He rushes out to the golf
club and plays thirty-six holes of golf and falls dead. From him is taken away even that which he had.

This is also true in the intellectual world. I used to have a teacher who was a good geologist. In all fairness, when we went walking among the cliffs, I ought to have been the one to receive the more because as a geologist I was a bankrupt. But he could see wonders where I could see nothing. In the realm of books, the more you read the more you can enjoy. The same is true in the realm of art. The more I study and listen to great music, the greater will become my appreciation of it. The more I neglect it, the less. Charles Darwin complained in his old age that he had lost all taste for music and poetry. This was not due to prejudice. He had given his mind entirely to the study of science.

Naturally, this same is true in the realm of the spiritual. The more you yield to temptation, the weaker you become; the more you resist, the stronger you become. The South Sea Islanders have a conviction that when they destroy an enemy, the strength of that slain enemy enters into their own stout arms. That is certainly true in the realm of the moral and spiritual. We gain strength from the battles that we fight victoriously. We become weaker by every failure.

The same is true of our faith. The more we venture on faith, the stronger it becomes. The less we venture upon it, the weaker it becomes. At the close of the service in Charleston, West Virginia the other day a man asked me what I would say to be the secret of a good memory. Of course, there is a sense in which memory is a gift but such gift would be utterly useless if one other factor did not enter into it. The only way to have a good memory is to trust it. As every other
faculty, memory becomes strong through use. Therefore, when Jesus said "to him that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance" he was stating, not the caprice of a capricious God, but a fundamental law that is just as true as the law of sowing and reaping.

Now, this Parable that commonly call the Parable of the Talent is a beautiful and concise drama in three acts.

I

The first act shows us an Oriental employer distributing his goods to his employees. There is nothing strange or at all bewildering about this. It is something that happens in the world of business throughout the years.

1. The first fact we notice in this distribution of talents is that every man received something. Even the man who received only one talent received a bestowment of great value. In that day it would have taken a laborer twenty years to have earned that much money. God gives to every man his work. Therefore, he gives to every man capital with which to work. You can do something for God that nobody else can do. He has made an investment in you that he has made in nobody else in all the world.

Now this talent with which we are all entrusted has a wider meaning than we generally give it. It aggregates the sum total of all our powers to serve our fellows. So often we regard the talent for singing or talent for playing some musical instrument or talent for speaking or writing with envy, but to have a talent for being agreeable is just as needful and sometimes far more helpful. We read of a certain man in the New Testament who had a talent for encouraging folks. So much was this the case that they gave him the name "Son of Encouragement."
What a talent that is! How could one use his life better than to put heart into the hopeless? Everybody then has a special gift from God.

2. While everybody received some gift, we do not all have the same or equal gifts. When the Constitution declares that "all men are created equal", the equality here mentioned is not that of ability. We differ widely in our ability. That is not a calamity. It is a blessing. It makes for variety instead of dull, drab sameness. What a pity it would be if every tree were alike, even though all of them should be giant red wood trees, if all flowers were alike, even though they should be sun flowers. We differ widely in our gifts.

Because this is the case, you can do something that I can't do. Because this is the case, I can do something that you can't do. I have reminded you before how silly it is for any of us to declare, "I can do anything that anybody else can do." It is utterly false. If that statement were true, you would certainly be the most super of all super-men. We differ widely in our gifts. One of these men received five, and another two and another two, and another one talent.

3. A third fact we need to bear in mind is that the man who received the greater wealth, the man whose wealth was medium, and the one whose wealth was the smallest of the three all accepted their talent as a bestowment, as a gift. We speak of people who are greatly gifted. That does not of necessity reflect credit upon the recipient, but rather upon the giver. Anybody can receive a gift. It does not follow that the greater the gift, the greater the. It rather follows the greater the gift the greater the responsibility. Here, then, we face these three facts. Everybody receives some gift from God. We are
not all equally gifted. The greater our gift, the greater our re-
sponsibility, both to God and man.

II

In the next act we witness the different responses that these
three business men made to the confidence that their master had reposed
in them.

1. You will notice that the two men of the greater gifts made
exactly the same response. They both went to work immediately. Not
only did they go to work but they worked with skill and with success.
Each doubled the original sum entrusted to him. But their success is
purely incidental; their skill is incidental. The one fact about them
upon which our Lord would focus our attention is this, that both the
man of five talents and the man of two went to work and did his best.

Now, you may remind me that it is easier for one to work who is
gifted than one who is not. Of course there is a sense in which this
is true. One of the vast gifts can work with greater ease than one of
small gifts, because he can make so much bigger show and therefore re-
ceive so much greater applause from his fellows. When Jesus witnessed
the offering in the temple years ago, it said many that were rich cast
in much. It was easier for a man to fling in a handful of gold and
witness the approval of his fellows than for the widow to cast in her
widow's mite. And have her gift greeted with neglect.

But along with this, the gifted have temptations of their own.
They can accomplish so much and win approval so easily that often times
they do not think it necessary to put forth their best effort. When
I think, therefore, of the greatest failures that I have known in the
ministry, I do not think of those men of small gifts who spend their
uneventful lives going from one poor mission to another - I think of some in whose roomy hands nature spilled almost heavenly charm. These sons of ability did something with their gifts but that something was a mean and meager fraction of what they might have done. Both of these gifted men did their best.

2. But what of the man of one talent? He did nothing at all. While the gifted worked, he loafed. While the gifted ventured, he buried his talent in the earth. Nor did he do this because he had a grudge against his master. He did not do it because he preferred defeat to victory, failure to success. He failed to use his talent, according to Jesus, for one reason - he was afraid.

Now, fear is not an unmixed evil. If you declare that you are afraid of nothing you are not flattering yourself. There is a constructive use of fear. I am afraid of crossing the street without looking. I am afraid to jump out of the second story window of my house. I am afraid to take bichleride of mercury, liquor, rough-on-rate, and other poison. I am afraid even to ride with a man who has several drinks under his belt.

But, while there is a constructive use of fear, most of us use fear in such a way as to make it purely destructive. If you drive through the country you will find here and there in gardens, in strawberry patches, an effigy that we call a scarecrow. It is harmless. It is put there just to frighten away the birds. The things of which this man was afraid were scarecrows that couldn't possibly hurt him. Of what, then, was he afraid?

1. He was afraid of himself. He was afraid of the smallness of his gift. No doubt he was proud of the confidence that his master had placed in him until he discovered that a friend of his had two talents and another
friend five. These towered so far above his one talent that he came to have a contempt for it, a loss of self respect. He came to be gripped by an inferiority complex, called himself a "worm of the dust" and declared that he didn't amount to a thing in the world.

It is a real achievement when we face the facts about ourselves and accept those facts. I used to hear a gifted man preaching and wonder why I could not preach like that. I will not tell you how many years it took me to be willing to exercise my own gifts, to preach my own way.

There was a certain type of preaching in my day to which everybody was expected to conform. I tried, but when I couldn't I decided to use my own gifts. This man was afraid to be himself.

2. He was afraid of wounding his own pride. He would have shrieked an his applause over the ____________; "I would rather be first in/ Iberian village than second at Rome." If he could not play or sing or teach or preach as well as anybody else, he would simply do nothing at all. He was afraid of making a failure. He was so afraid that he might fall down that he never stood up. He was so afraid of striking out that he never went to bat.

Now, this is fatal. Whenever you find a man of great skill not doing anything, you may be certain that he has gained that skill at the risk of thousands of failures. I have seen Bobby Jones and Byron Nelson playing golf. I have seen them make what seemed impossible shots. There is no measuring how many times they failed before they perfected their skill. When I went to Harvard I decided to learn to skate. I went out to the pond and I saw boys and girls cutting figure 8's. All I could cut was __________; I fell down so many times I became black and blue but I finally learned because I was willing to fail in order to learn.

3. This man did nothing because he was afraid to work. His master
called him slothful. Suppose you who are finding your religion such a
tame and worthless thing that you are ready at any time to give it up
and call it quits were to put the same determination and energy into it
that you put into your daily tasks, you would find that it would make your
life over. We do not expect to be proficient as musicians, as artists, as
business men without hard work. It is only Christlike character that we
think we ought to win either in our sleep or by sluggish half-hearted
efforts.

So much of the work of the church is being done today by people on
the altar of whose hearts the fire has gone out. We sometimes act as if
it were a positive sin to make a success of our church work. You remember
the chap who came back from the West declaring that he had seen a Petrified
Forest in Arizona. He said that the trees were petrified, that he saw a
bird sitting on the branch of a tree, singing a song, and the branch and
the bird and the song were all petrified. Not only so but there was a hunter
shooting at an eagle flying up in the air, but the hunter, gun and eagle
were all petrified. When he got that far his friend stopped him and said,
"That won't do. If that eagle was petrified, he would not stay up there.
The law of gravity would not allow it." "Yes," he said, "but the law of
gravity was petrified." Sometimes we allow our best efforts to become
petrified out of sheer laziness and indifference.

4. The final and all inclusive reason for this man's fear was a
wrong idea of his master. He said "I know that you are a hard man.
You are requiring of me the impossible. You expect as much at my hands
from my one talent as you do from the man who has five." Of course, the
fact is that his Lord expected nothing of the kind. All he expected, all
he asked was that he be faithful, that he do his best.

There is nothing quite as important as that I have a right idea of
God. How should we think of God? I think of him always in terms of Jesus Christ. Whenever I find any Old Testament writer say something of God inconsistent with the character of Jesus, I know he is wrong. There is nothing beautiful and lovely in our Lord that we cannot be sure of finding in God. If Jesus was telling sober truth when he said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the father."

In saying that, God is like Jesus, we are not saying that he is so much a father as a grand father. Jesus did not go about smiling indiscriminately on all whom he met. There were some that he scourged with the sword of his tongue. He called them hogs and dogs. He called them a generation of snakes. He wondered, in the white heat of his indignation, how they could escape damnation of hell. There were others whom he approved. He commended them with loving tenderness that brings a glow to our hearts to this day. If you have the right conception of God, you will think of him as a merciful father who is only asking your love and loyalty.

III

The final act of this drama is reckoning. "After a long time," said Jesus, "the employer of these men came for a reckoning with them." This is our Lord's way of saying what he affirms over and over again, that for every one of us there is a judgment. We can believe in judgment because it is a fact of the past. God's judgment has come upon men and nations again and again. We can believe in it because it is a fact of the present. We are now being judged in that we are now reaping as we sow. Since judgment is a fact of yesterday and today, it will certainly be a fact of tomorrow. One day, as certain as I am here, I am going to have to give an account to Almighty God for what I have done with the
gifts that he has entrusted to me.

What did he say to those who had worked with such skill and success? He said to the man who had won five talents not "you have been clever or shrewd or fortunate", but only this, "You have been faithful." And to what of the man whom he had given only two? To him he gave exactly the same commendation.

What does this mean? It means that our Lord is not asking us what we can give. He is not asking that we win a certain definite number over to him and his church. He is asking that we give him a certain amount of money. He is asking the one thing that we can give — he is asking for our loyalty, for our faithfulness. To be faithful is to be perfect. To be unfaithful is to fail.

What was the matter with the man of one talent? It was not that he threw his talent away. He did not waste it in riotous living. He just refused to use it. He did not even try. Had he only tried, if he had won nothing at all, if he had come, having done his best, with hands as empty as the pockets of a shroud, his Lord would have come to meet him saying, "Well done, well done, you have been faithful."

Now, whether we are faithful or not makes a difference. It makes a difference now. It will make this forever. What difference did it make to the man who refused to work? Who, because of his fear, stood in the midst of a needy world and did nothing. Two tragic results followed.

First, he lost his talent. "Take it from him," said his lord, "and give it to him who has the ten." That is the law of life that is as fixed as the multiplication table. To refuse to use is to lose. The losses do not come about in a day but the abilities to serve that were ours, that we will not use, gradually wither and atrophy and die.
A second result of his failure to use his talent was that he lost himself. He was thrown out into the night amidst the useless and worthless things that God could not use. He was not thrown there as a punishment but as a consequence. He cared neither for God nor for his fellows. There can be no peace in Heaven for a character of this type. No man can have a Heavenly environment if he has hell in his heart.

2. But what of the man who did their loyal best? First, by using their gifts, they increased them. That, too, is as inevitable as the law of gravity. Faithfulness to the present duty has many rewards, one of the greatest of which is this - that it opens the door to a yet richer opportunity. The more we face, the more we can face.

(2) Such loyalty opens the door to life eternal. Thus to surrender to God means life here. It will mean life forever. "Enter thou the joy of the Lord." Such an invitation is not arbitrary. There can be no hell for the man who gives his whole-hearted best to the service of God and his fellows. Do this and though you may never win/applause of the world, though you may travel home at the close of the day with no ribbon on your breast to tell of your heroism, your Lord will come to meet you all enthusiasm saying, "Well done, well done".

Face then these facts. We all have our gifts, some greater, some less. Our one responsibility is not to win the victory, as the world terms win. All God asks is that we give ourselves to him in loyalty. Refuse to do this and nothing can bring you victory here or hereafter. Do this and victory is sure here and sure in the endless ages.
"FAIR PLAY"

"To him that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Matthew 25:29

There is at least one advantage of a text like this. It is impossible to listen to it complacently. It sounds so utterly unjust. "To him that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not even that which he hath shall be taken away." "It is not fair," we feel like saying indignantly. There are some texts we can hear with our mental motors idling, but such a word as this throws them into gear. We are at once full of resentment. "It is not right," we say. "It might be right at times to take from the over-full hand of the rich to be given to the poor, even if it had to be done by force. But to take from the poor to give to the rich, that is all wrong.

But before we give full rein to our resentment. It might be well to see just what Jesus means. This is not the statement of an arbitrary rule. It is rather the declaration of a principle. It is the statement of a fact that is true in the very nature of things. It should no more arouse our resentment than the fact that twice two make four instead of nine. It should no more stir our indignation than the law of sowing and reaping, or that gravitation breaks our bones when we disregard it instead of arguing with us. Jesus dramatizes this truth for us in that story that we call the Parable of the Talents. In this story there are three scenes.

I

First, is the distribution of the talents. "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called unto him his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey." Now these words bring before us three considerations.

1. Every servant received something. No single man went from his master's
"Fair Play"

presence with nothing in his hand. And that is the case with ourselves. We have our
gifts, each of us. They are gifts that are peculiar to ourselves. There is not one of us
who is not capable of rendering some high and needed service. Spurgeon was right when he
said, "God is too busy to make nobodys." He gives to every man his work. Thus giving to
every man his work, He gives every man equipment for the doing of that work. Therefore,
eyery man has a right to think grandly of himself as of one in whose hands God has put a
trust fund to be used to his glory in the service of others.

2. While every man received some talent, all did not receive the same. As these men
came from the presence of their Lord, no two of them had quite the same equipment. There
are no two of us alike. We ought never try to be. When God makes a man, He breaks the
mold. We ought to accept ourselves, be willing to be ourselves. Most of us desire to re-
main ourselves though we should like to get hold of the other man's gifts. But our gifts
differ widely. When, therefore, the constitution declares that all men are created equal,
it is exceedingly wide of the mark. There is nothing more conspicuous than our inequalities.

We differ in scores of ways.

We differ in our physical makeup. Some are born with beautiful and healthful bodies,
while others are born misshapen and with inherited tendencies toward disease. Some are
born with the moral momentum of a pious ancestry in their veins. Their blood is pure be-
cause those who went before them lived clean lives. Others are born pre-dispossessed to
certain forms of dissipation. One of the most brilliant physicians I know today is a hope-
less drunkard. His father was what is known as a "gentleman drinker." He never got drunk,
but he bequeathed a will to his son that was not so strong as his. We are born with dif-
ferent intelligent quotients - some are brilliant, some are mediocre. Our educational op-
portunities differ widely. Some are born in homes of culture and sent to the best of in-
stitutions. Others have to look out through the smoke-begrimed, cobwebbed windows of pov-
erty and ignorance.

Then we differ in our opportunities for the using of our talents. On my father's
farm there were two kinds of land - one was upland where the most careful cultivation would
result in an abundant harvest. Thus, our fields of opportunity differ. Some serve where
conspicuous success seems a bit easy. Others serve where the hardest efforts bring but meager returns. Thus, counting the sum total of our opportunities for our talents, we differ widely.

3. Then the fact that our talents, whether large or small, come to us as gifts, should save us from either pride or humiliation. If the talents are small, we should not for that reason become possessed of a weakening inferiority complex. If our talents are great, we should not be puffed up. If you have beautiful eyes, you deserve no credit for that — they are a gift. If they are not greatly beautiful, it is no matter for shame. But we usually honor folks for possessing gifts for whose attaining they had no responsibility at all.

II

Now, having received their talents, what did they do with them? That is the question. Here is where the matter of merit comes in. You are not responsible for the talents with which you set out to do business. That is beyond your control. But you are held responsible for the use you make of those talents. It is a high trust for which every man is responsible to Almighty God.

These three men did not all employ their talents in the same fashion. Two of them went at once into the marts of trade and began to do business. They were men of daring and intelligence. They did their best. This was true even of him who was greatly gifted. Now, there is a sense in which it is easier for a gifted man to work than one of lesser gifts. He makes more progress, he wins more applause. It is easier, therefore, for him than for the plodder.

But the greatly gifted have temptations all their own. If they can accomplish results with less difficulty, they can often win the applause of their fellows and thereby the approval of their own conscience by doing far less work than their best. When the widow cast in her two mites, the gift seemed exceedingly small. When, therefore, the rich man came and threw in a handful of gold, his gift was so much more exciting than her's. Yet it did not mean half so much in terms of love or of sacrifice. Some of the greatest failures that I have known have not been the men who have done nothing at all. Rather they have been able men who have done only a poor fraction of what they might have done. I am thinking of one
such now. He is a minister. He has position and honor. He has done some good work, but his accomplishments are meager and mean in comparison with what they might have been, if he had only dared do his best. These two men of ability did their best.

Now, the center of interest is the man of one talent. What did he do? The answer is "Nothing!" I am quite sure that the course he took was not his original intention. When he first came from the presence of his master with his talent in his hand, I am confident that he expected to do something worthwhile. But he found a friend who was twice as gifted as himself and he was a little depressed. Then later he met another who was five times as gifted. With that he slunk home not to squander his talent, not to waste it in riotous living, but to bury it in the earth.

Why did he do this? It was not because he had no opportunity. It was not because his talent was worthless. His failure was not inevitable. According to his own statement, he buried his talent because he was afraid. What an oft told story that is. How many of us do only a trifling fraction of what we might do because we allow ourselves to be frightened. We are afraid to let ourselves go and really do our best.

Of what was he afraid? Well, he was afraid of his own littleness. He was afraid that with his one talent he could not make as big a show as his friend who had twice as many, or as his other friend who had five times as many. He was afraid to play any game unless he was sure to win. He did not dare to do any work unless he was certain he could do it conspicuously well. He was afraid he might wound his own pride. The truth of the matter is he was not thinking of the work to be done at all. He was thinking of himself.

Then he was afraid to work. The Master calls him a slothful servant. He was afraid of the adventure, the daring, the prosaic toil that was necessary in order for him to be faithful to his trust. But mark me, there is no more damaging fear among us at this hour than that. How many worthy enterprises in the church and out of it fail because good, respectable, decent, talented people refuse to be bothered. Every service could be an overflowing thrill, every good cause could be pushed to victory, if so many talented people who really believe in all for which we stand were not afraid to work.

Some years ago I went to see a woman, who, though a member of the church, was not at-
tending. It was a summer day and she came to meet me at the screen door. She did not know me, of course, but looking under her glasses instead of over them, she asked, "What is it?" I hardly knew whether to tell her I was it or not. But finally I told her I was the new pastor of her church. She invited me in and put on that tone that fairly oozesunction. It was one of the most pious tones I ever heard. She declared she wanted to work for the Lord all the time. But when I suggested a simple task that needed to be done, and that she had the ability to do, she went limp and said it would not be convenient. She was afraid of work like the man with one talent.

The final fear of this man was that his master would not play fair with him. We are often victims of that kind of fear. We think of God as a bit like an oriental despot, therefore, that He will exact of us more than we can possibly accomplish. We hear the call of discipleship; we hear Jesus say, "Follow Me." But, instead of following Him, we tell Him that it simply cannot be done. "Christianity is a beautiful dream, but only a dream. It is impossible of realization." Thus we tell our Lord frankly and to His face that He is exacting more of us than we can possibly give. Thus, as this poor fellow, unmanned by his own fears, we, too, tend to hide our talents.

III

The final scene is the reckoning. Now, there is to be a reckoning, let us not forget that. We have gotten away from the thought of a judgment day such as our fathers looked for. But because we are not expecting a term of court at which God is to be judge, we must not close our eyes to the day of reckoning. I believe there is a day of reckoning tomorrow because there was a day of reckoning yesterday. I believe it because today is a day of reckoning. Every day God reckons with us and where we are today depends upon what we did with our talents on yesterday. Where we shall be tomorrow and what we shall have of spiritual worth tomorrow depends upon the use we make of the opportunities of today. So we may look for a day of reckoning.

When that day came, two of these servants approached their master without fear. The first said, "Thy talents have gained five talents." And his lord said unto him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over
many things." The other came saying, "I have gained other two talents." And his lord gave him the same commendation. What did he approve? Not the fact that they were successful, not the fact that they had gained one hundred percent. His approval was not for anything that they had in their hands, but for what they had in their hearts. They had been faithful. But the man of one talent - he came with fear in his heart and a whine on his lips. "I was afraid to try," he said. "I had so little and you were such a hard man." He was afraid to be faithful and his lord could not approve him. Instead of approving him, there was meted out to him the most fearful punishment. The heart of that punishment is this, "Take the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents." It seems so unreasonable that there were those who dared remonstrate, but there is no other way. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

This is an experience that belongs to you and me every day in the year. This world is a great world for growing talents. The more we give, the more liberal we become. The more we adventure on our faith, the greater that faith becomes. The more we love, the roomier grows our heart. The more we remember, the more we can remember. However small our talents may be at the beginning there is this thrill that may be the day by day experience of all of us, that we may increase them.

But if this is a great world for growing talents, it is a terrible world for losing them. I have a good right arm, but if I desired to lose it I would not have to have it amputated. All that would be necessary is that I put it in a sling for six months and it would be as useless as a piece of wood. I have good eyes but if I desire to go blind, it would not be necessary for me to abuse them. All that would be necessary is that I bandage them for a few months and I will live in the night. I have good ears, but if I wish to become deaf, it would not be necessary that I drive a spike through my head. All I would need to do is to stuff my ears with cotton, thus refusing to hear, and I would cease to be able to hear.

Darwin tells us that in his absorption in science, he ceased to read poetry or listen to music. By and by he lost all taste for poetry and all taste for music. Every man is
born into the world with an innate hunger for God. We are all possessed by burning thirsts that only the Eternal can satisfy. But we can disregard these hungers and thirsts till they become less tormenting. We can disregard them till they dwindle almost to the vanishing point. This indeed is what our fathers understood by the unpardonable sin. It is to refuse to respond to the wooings of God till we lose our capacity to respond. It is to refuse to see the light till our eyes go out. Any gift that we do not use we finally lose.

Why then did this poor fellow fail? Not because of the smallness of his gifts, but because of his unfaithfulness. It is the faithful that enrich the earth whether their gifts are large or small. Think with me a moment of the folks who have helped you most. As a rule, they have not been brilliant people. They have been faithful people. And that is a treasure that is within reach of all our hands. The supreme victory is to be faithful. If you do that, then one day when you go home with no medals on your breast and perhaps with no hurrahs ringing in your ears, your Lord will come to meet you with the light of a great joy in His eyes, saying, "Well done — well done!" That is the highest prize for time and eternity, and it is within the reach of everyone of us.
DARING TO START ANEW

Mathew 26:45-46 - Sleep on now and take your rest. Rise up. Let us be going.

These on the surface are perplexing words. It sounds as if Jesus, in utter sarcasm, were saying to these friends of his who have so utterly failed, "You can give it up now. There's no use in trying any more. You have had one chance at the bat, and you have struck out." But right on the heels of this bitter and scathing rebuke, there comes an invitation to enter the land of beginning again. He said "sleep on now and take your rest", but immediately He added "rise up. Let us be going".

Here Jesus is opening the door of victory to these friends and to everyone of us. In almost every department of human endeavor, the difference between the failures and those who make a success, is not so much in their ability or in their opportunity as in their persistence. One had the courage after failure to start anew, and the other, having failed, rather wallowed in self pity and in self content. There is almost nothing that can defeat us in any human endeavor so readily as failing to start again. There is almost nothing to keep us from ultimate victory, if we do start again. And there is absolutely nothing, if this victory is in the realm of Christian experience.

It was my privilege to see Bobby Jones when, I think, he was at the height of his power. In my opinion he was about the best golfer that ever lived. I have watched him in a critical situation make an almost impossible shot. As I thought it over, how did he come to make that impossible shot? He made it because he had been willing to fail at ten thousand possible shots. He had dared to fail until he had almost reached perfection in his stubborn determination not
to quit but to start again.

When I went North to school I carried with me a pair of skates that I had used exceedingly little. Ice didn't come often enough for me to learn to skate. So I made up my mind that come winter I was going to learn to skate. And when winter came I went out to the skating park. They don't skate on ponds up there. They flood parks so that they are safe and so that the snow can be cleaned off them and they can be kept in repair. When I got out I was astonished at how many were skating and how skillfully they did it. I saw small boys darting around on the ice cutting figure eights, and I looked at them for a moment and I said to myself "I had no idea it was so easy". I was almost ashamed to do anything as easy as that. But, since I was there, I decided I might as well go through with it. I put on my skates, and while I did not cut any figure eights, I cut some stars. I did not have two feet. It seemed I had about thirty. And everyone of them would go off in a different direction. If I had given up after my hundredth fall, I'd of never learned to skate. I kept on until I did learn. I was willing to start anew.

PART I

This you recognize as a part of the story of the Cross. This grim instrument of torture is now so close to Jesus that He could almost reach out and touch its grim ugliness with His hand. The horror of it drives Him to prayer. We are not surprised at that. Almost everybody prays when life grows hard and when there is no visible hand stretched out and no visible one on whom to lean. But prayer was far more than this with Jesus. It was the habit of His life. He had prayed through the years. It was first with Him.
Before everything else He was a man of prayer. But if it is not surprising that Jesus took Himself to prayer in this grim hour, we are surprised at the content of His prayer. For what is He praying? Listen! "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." That we certainly did not expect. Jesus is here asking if it is not possible even at this late hour to avoid the Cross, to bypass that skull-shaped hill, Calvary. But had not Jesus accepted the Cross? He had. He had accepted it in the face of the bitter rebuke of Simon Peter. He had not only accepted it, but He had rejoiced over it, given thanks for it. And after supper "He took the Cup". What cup? The cup that signified life laid down. And when He had given thanks, this was not a mere perfunctory asking of the blessing. Jesus is here thanking God that by His own suffering He can alleviate the sufferings of those whom He loved. He had accepted the Cross with joy.

Not only so, but He had asserted the Cross as essential for every follower of His. "If any man will come after me," He said, "You don't have to come after Him; You don't even have to pretend to come. But "If any man will come after me, let him say no to himself". Let him renounce his self-will and take up his Cross and follow me. Jesus surrendered to the utmost and the same utter surrender is necessary for us. Must Jesus bear the Cross alone, and every man go free? No there is a Cross for everyone, and there's a Cross for me.

Jesus had accepted the Cross, both for Himself and for His followers. And yet He is seeking to escape the Cross.

Now while Jesus dreaded the Cross with a dread beyond words, there was one thing He dreaded even more, and that was the flouting
of the will of God. And He added that great word "Nevertheless, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done". In praying that prayer He prayed the sum total of all prayers. It is a prayer so important that if we fail to pray it, nothing else will do. If we actually do pray it, nothing deeply else is/necessary.

Now when this load got too heavy for Him to bear alone He went to the three friends whom He had invited to watch with Him. Peter and James and John. They had entered most intimately into His teaching and into His fellowship, and in His black hour He went to them, and found them asleep. What a shock and what a disappointment! It was a disappointment to the three friends. It was a disappointment to Jesus. He asked a question that was full of surprised horror. It was soaked in tears. "Could you not watch with me one hour, after all we've meant to each other in these passing months? Couldn't you watch one hour?" And they brushed the guilty sleep from their eyes, that were also full of shame, and undertook to do better. Jesus went away and prayed a second time.

This second prayer was different. "If this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, Thy will be done." What is that prayer? It is a prayer of acceptance. He is no longer doubting what the will of God is for His life. He is saying "since this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, Thy will be done". That was a prayer of acceptance. And with that prayer on His lips and in His heart, He went to His friends again, and again He found them asleep. This time He did not wake them and went away again and prayed the third time, using the same words, the words of submission, the words
of entering into the will of God at an unspeakable cost.

Then He came to them a final time and He came with this word: "Sleep on now and take your rest". Some translations make this a question rather than an admonition, but I think as a question it would have little meaning. But as it is stated here it has a very profound meaning. "Sleep on now and take your rest." What is He saying? He is saying I have brought you here for a definite purpose. You have failed. You have thrown away that chance. You have spoiled the possibility of fulfilling that purpose. You can go back to sleep now. You have missed your chance and you won't have missed it any more if you were to sleep through eternity.

Why did Jesus bring these three friends into the garden to begin with?

1. He brought them for their own good. He said, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation". He knew what was ahead for these three men, how sharply they were going to be tested. And so He invited them that in His fellowship, which was the fellowship of prayer, they might prepare themselves for the hard ordeal that was ahead. Jesus knew that to meet life prayerless is to meet it powerless. We have found it so.

You remember that father that brought his afflicted son to Jesus and how earnestly His disciples undertook to cure him? He was an epileptic, but they failed, and the father said with tears, "I brought unto these my son, and brought my son to your disciples to cast out the demon that is in him, but they couldn't". They had failed. Failed for lack of prayer. Failed for lack of faith.

You entered the door yesterday that you got yourself ready for the day before. You'll enter the door tomorrow for which you pre-
pare yourself today. They that are ready go into the feast. These men had thrown away their chance.

What therefore did Jesus say? "Sleep on now and take your rest. You won't have anymore missed your opportunity than if you sleep throughout all eternity." We have a way of saying easily, "I'll do better next time", but so many big things don't have a next time. This particular opportunity would never come to these people again.

I read some time ago of a father who was doing some plowing a few miles from home and he didn't go home to dinner, but took his dinner with him. And with him also, to the uneasiness of the mother, but because of the earnest felicitation of the little son, he took his boy, about four years of age, with a warning from the mother to keep an eye on him. Dinner time came and they ate together. Then the father leaned back against his plow to rest a moment. And before he was aware of it he was asleep. Just how long he slept he did not know, but when he waked up and looked about the small boy was gone. There was a high cliff close by. That came into his mind at once, and he hurried to the cliff and looked over with a trembling heart, and there far below was the battered body of his little boy.

He went down and picked him up in his arms and carried him to his mother, with whom he had shared with God in his creation. And all he could say to this mother was "I was asleep." He didn't say "I'll do better next time". He knew that a next time would never come. That little chap you have with you now, that's in your home. You have one chance to train him for God. You have one chance to make a good man and a good citizen of him. If you throw it away, it is an eternal waste. You don't have another time at it.
David, the great shepherd king, found this out. He had a boy to whom he was devoted. That boy finally rebelled against his father. His father was so busy being a king that he didn't have a chance to be a father. And so the boy rebelled and organized an army. And when his army went out to meet that of his son, instead of taking upon the responsibility himself, he put it upon his officers, and said, "See that the young man, Absolom, is saved".

But by and by a messenger came with the news that this handsome young man had been killed. No heartache could have been heavier. The tired father went upon the wall with this sad sob upon his lips: "Oh, Absolom, my son, I'm sorry now I didn't die for you". Anything would have been better than this, but he didn't have another chance. He never had that same opportunity again. These days that are ahead of us are days when everybody will have an opportunity to make a new start. Everybody has thought about it, whether you are in the Church or out of the Church. All of us have looked toward the heights. All of us have promised to climb. All of us have tried. All of us in some measure failed. What these services ought to do for us, if nothing else, they ought to summon us to a new start. But Jesus said, "Sleep on now and take your rest". You have thrown your chance away.

PART II

But is this all our Lord has to say to us who have failed? Because all of us have failed in some measure, there is nothing that I could say to you that would more deeply offend you, though some of you have known me for many years, "I have never committed a sin in my life. I have never stood at the forks of the road and taken a single wrong turn. Not only so, but I have never failed in my duty When opportunities knocked at my door, the opportunity serve, I
have always been at home. I have been flawless through the years'. I know Paul said we've all sinned, and Paul was sharp, but he was mistaken in my case. I've never fallen short". I could say nothing that would offend you more than that. We've all failed in some measure, and every single one of us need to accept this invitation to enter the land of beginning again.

Listen to His invitation. "Rise up. Let us be going." Notice that He does not say get up and go. That is what I would have expected. "You have played the coward. You have slept when you should have watched. You have forgotten when you should have remembered. Now you have thrown your chance away. Get up and go. I'm not going to destroy you, but I can't trust you any more. I can't walk with you any more. I can't lean upon you any more." No, He didn't say get up and go, He said, "Let us be going". I can see them look at him with eyes tender with tears and they said, "Lord, we just failed you. Lord we just struck out. We've just fumbled the ball. Lord, we have proved ourselves totally unfit and totally unworthy. Are you going with us?" He said, "Yes. I walk with failures." "It is never too late to start anew. He'll walk with you tonight. I don't care how much you have failed, if you will just dare to walk with Him. "Let us be going." And where did they go?

They went to some disastrous failures, but most of them went to final victory. Here were two of these friends, Judas and Simon Peter. They were close akin in shamefulness of their disastrous downfall. Judas lost his love for his Master, turned against Him and betrayed Him. Peter did almost as bad. When Jesus was standing alone and needed a friend, as no one has ever needed one more, Simon
instead of standing up, even cowed before a little servant girl, who said "You are one of them". He not only denied it, but swore that he had never known Jesus in all the years. What a terrible, tragic failure that was. And yet

And yet what was the destiny of these two men? One had sinned about as deeply as the other. The difference was this, that one made a new start and the other refused a new start. I've often thought of Judas. No man ever suffered, I think, more terribly than he. After his betrayal when he hurried back to throw down the silver at the feet of the priest who had duped him, and said, "I have sinned and I have betrayed innocent blood", to receive from them the most hellish possible answer, "What is that to us. See thou to that". And then, with all hope gone, he went out and hanged himself. Why was Judas lost? Not because of the terrible sin - betrayal. He was lost because having betrayed Jesus, he did not have the faith to go back to Him and say, "Lord I have betrayed you". There is nothing He won't forgive. It is never too late to start anew. I want to start anew. If Judas had only done that, he would have been one of the saints of sacred story.

Now Simon's story was different. In spite of the fact that he had lied, and that he had denied his Master, in the hour of that Master's deepest need, he came back. Jesus was ready for him to come back, as He was ready for Judas. That is a significant word. Simon Peter was the only one who records it. "Go tell my disciples and Peter", He said on the morning of the resurrection. He could hardly wait to get the door of His tomb open to send word to this disloyal disciples, this denier, to tell him that though He had failed he was still a disciple. He would still accept him for a friend. And Peter, having wept bitterly, over his utter downfall,
came back. And not only did he come back. He said, "Let us be going". Where? "Let us be going to Pentecost." Let us be going, let us be going on beyond Pentecost to that day when the very shadow of Peter will have healing in it. To that day when he shall glorify God on the Cross, being crucified head downward because He felt himself unworthy to die as did Jesus Christ. We need tonight, all of us, to make a new start. That is the difference between victory and defeat; between success and failure; between laughter and tears; between usefulness and uselessness.

It was my privilege to know one of the greatest preachers that our Church ever produced. He was some thirty years older than myself, yet he took a deep interest in me, and I felt that he was my friend. He told this story. He said that when he was a school boy a schoolmate came to the little mountain school house one day bringing a battered old fiddle with one string. And yet that boy, by persistent patience, had learned to play a tune or two on that old wreck of a fiddle, and it charmed George no end. He made up his mind that he had to have that fiddle. And so he offered his schoolmate a trade. He gave him everything he had - his top, his string, his slings, and things. He emptied his pockets to get that old one string fiddle. And he took it home with him that night and announced to the family he was going to learn to play it.

Now he did try for a few days, to the horror of those that had to hear him, but he gave it up and sold it to his brother Jim, who was just younger than he, for as little as he gave. And Jim set out to learn to play. He was more persistent than George and he sawed on it until they ran him out of the house on to the front porch, that
they called the piezza, and off the piezza into the yard, and out
of the yard into the woodslo. And a few weeks later, as they
sat about the supper table, Jim said I can play five tunes on that
old fiddle. After supper the father said, "Get the fiddle and play
those tunes". And he did. The father said never a word, but the
next day he went out to Knoxville and when he came home he had a
beautiful new violin. And George said many a time I've been charmed
by the music of Jim, the music that I said in my heart I might have
made, if I hadn't given it up so quick.

Then a very few years later I was converted and I felt the
call to preach. And they made an appointment for me in the little
log church in the mountains. And the high day came, and I stood up
in the pulpit and read my text and went utterly dumb. I read it a
second time, and a second time I was as dumb as the dead. Then I
read it a third time, and the third time not a single syllable
would come. And in utter shame and confusion I sat down behind the
pulpit and buried my ashamed face in my hands. An old Steward got
up and dismissed the congregation and they went home.

By and By I looked out from behind the pulpit and the Church was
empty. Then I slipped out and went home at a run, and I climbed
the ladder that led up to my little attic room. When I arrived
there I threw myself down on my trundle bed and burst into sobs and
said to myself "Never again! Never again! I've disgraced myself.
I'll never try to preach. And then a voice seemed to say to me "You
set out to learn to play the fiddle, but you gave it up. But Jim
learned to play. And now I've called you to be a preacher, and you
failed that the first time. Are you going to give that up?" And
I turned my face up to God and said "Lord I haven't but just a one-
string fiddle of ability, but if you will be patient with me and help me, I'll saw on that, starting from now and saw until I die". And God heard him, and that old one-stringed fiddle became a veritable orchestra and thousands were charmed by him. Not only by the spell of his passionate oratory, but they were charmed into the Kingdom of God. He refused to quit.

And so our Lord comes to us at the beginning of these services. What do you want from Him now? What do you want from Him during these days? The best thing we can ask is that we have the courage to make a new start. We haven't done yesterday what we might have done, what we wish we had done. So he's saying to us now "Sleep on and take your rest." That's gone. Let it be past. You can never change it.

The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on,

Nor all your piety nor wit can lure it back to cancel half a line

But if yesterday is gone, you still have now. You still have another chance. You still have this gracious invitation from your Lord. "Rise up. Let us be going."
"Rise, let us be going." (Matthew 26:46)

You will recognize this passage as a part of the story of the cross. Jesus has gone into the garden of Gethsemane with his disciples. He takes three of them, Peter, James, and John, to share in a peculiar way his passion. These three men belong to the inner circle. They had been greatly privileged. When the Master had gone into the home of the ruler of the synagogue, when he went into the death chamber, he took with him Peter, James, and John. Again when he went to the Mount of Transfiguration where the innate deity of his person shown out through the garment of his flesh again he took with him Peter and James and John. These men had been men of great privilege. Therefore they were also men of great responsibility. Jesus desired to have them with him when he fought this lonely battle in Gethsemane.

I

Why did Jesus take these three?

First, he took them for their own good. He took them that in his fellowship, the fellowship of prayer they might prepare themselves for the hard ordeal that was ahead. Jesus knew the terrific trial that was soon to test them. He knew that to meet life prayerless is in a profound sense to meet it powerless. He knew that when the test comes men enter the door for which they have prepared themselves.

"They that were ready," said Jesus in one of his parables, "went into
the feast." That is always the case. We enter the doors that we are prepared to enter. God himself cannot thrust us through any other. Soon after my arrival at Harvard University I heard that *Parsifal*, that famous Wagnerian opera was to be sung in English in one of the Boston theatres. I had never attended grand opera. I made up my mind to go. It was far grander than I thought. In fact, it was beyond my range. I failed in a profound sense to get into the feast. This was the case not because I had trouble with the usher, not because my ticket was not honored but because I was not ready. Jesus took these three men that they might prepare themselves for the terrific test that they were soon to face.

2. Then he took them not only for their own sakes but for the sake of their fellows. They were the leaders. He knew that what Peter and James and John did, others would like to do. If they were strong, if they were gallant of heart, if they faced their ordeal without fear, they would give courage and stability to their fellows. If they failed they would help others to fail. Thus Jesus brought them that they might find strength for themselves and have strength to share with those who needed it.

3. Finally, Jesus brought these three friends to share his passion because he needed them. Jesus was genuinely human. These friends could do something for him that nobody else could do. They could watch with him through his agony. The Master dreaded to be alone through this terrible hour. A little while before he had said to them, "It shall come to pass that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone." Nobody would have said that except one who was profoundly sensitive to loneliness and who dreaded it.

Loneliness as you know is of two kinds. First, there is physical loneliness that separates you from your fellows by dividing mountains or seas. Physical loneliness can be torture. Charles Reid in one of his books pictures a prisoner in solitary confinement. The silence and the darkness so oppress him that he feels himself going mad. He tears his
shirt into strings. He tears off the buttons and scatters them about the floor of the cell. Then he crawls about over the floor, picks up the strings and buttons, counting them in order to keep from going mad. At last the chaplain speaks to him through the doorway: "I am watching with you." And the prisoner goes to sleep like a child in his mother's arms.

(Poems.)

Jesus dreaded physical loneliness. But most of all he dreaded the loneliness of the spirit. That was the loneliness from which he was suffering here. He saw a vision that none other saw. He was fitting himself to a task that nobody in the world fully understood. Those who had come closest to him, those most fitted to share his dream were Peter and James and John. Therefore he asked them to be with him, to relieve in some measure the loneliness of this bitter hour. They, I repeat, could do something for him that nobody else could do. The same is true of you and me. The Master then invited these men to share his hour of prayer because of their own needs, because of the needs of others, because of his own needs.

II

What did these greatly honored men do with their opportunity?

They threw it away. Instead of watching they went to sleep. Instead of aiding themselves of their opportunity to gain strength both for their own needs and for the needs of others, they threw that opportunity away. After going a little apart to fall on his face and pray, Jesus returned to find them all asleep. "What," he seems to ask in pained amazement, "Could you not watch one hour?" With shame and confusion they try to brush the sleep from their eyes. But all in vain.

When Jesus comes a second time he finds them asleep again. This time he does not wake them. At last with the clamor of the mob in his ears he
he comes to them with this startling word: "Sleep on, now, and take your rest. Behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hand of sinners."

What does Jesus mean? "Sleep on, now, and take your rest." Scholars differ as to the proper translation of this sentence. If our vision is correct it would seem that Jesus was bringing these men face to face with their irrevocable, unchangeable past. "I have brought you here," he seems to say, "for a definite purpose. You have been given a great opportunity, that opportunity you have thrown away. You may sleep on now. You will not have any more completely lost your chance than you have lost it now if you sleep forever.

This is a solemnizing truth. Each day, each hour, brings its own opportunities. When that day or that hour is gone it gathers up all its opportunities and slips back through the gateway of the past and there is no bringing back though you may batter at that door with bruised fists and tamper at its lock with bleeding fingers, there is no recalling it.

"The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ, Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it."

Some years ago I hurried down to the station in Ft. Worth to catch a train to fill an engagement. Contrary to my custom I got there some twenty minutes ahead of time. Having bought my ticket I settles down to read an interesting book until the train should arrive. When I looked up it was five minutes past train time. But I was not in the least disturbed. I only walked over to the agent to ask this question: "How much late is the train this morning?" This was his answer: "It has been gone about five minutes." Now if he had been a mind to lecture he might have said to me: "Read on, now, and finish your book. Read on until you have finished all the books in all the libraries of the world. But you won't have any more missed your train than you have missed it already."

Sometime ago I was traveling by train over a road that at a certain
point gave opportunity for the enjoyment of some magnificent mountain scenery. "How long before we get to the mountains," I asked the conductor when he came by. "About an hour," he answered. I had been losing sleep and was drowsy. Therefore I decided to take a little nap before I got to the mountains. So I slept for a few moments as I thought. Again the conductor came by and I asked the same question. "How long before we meet the mountains?" "We passed them," he answered, "about two hours ago." Again if he had been a mind to lecture he might have said: "Sleep on, now, and take your rest. Sleep on until the mountains have become level with the plain but you will not any more have missed your chance than you have missed it already."

III

But is this all our Lord has to say to those who have failed? If it is we are all most miserable because all of us have failed somewhat. When Paul declares "we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God," the first part of the sentence may not startle us. Most of us are not greatly disturbed about our sins, they are so very decent and respectable. But that part about coming short—that touches a tender spot. We know we have not measured up. "We shall not fail nor be discouraged," I read of a certain One. But when I read that I know the author is not talking about me. I know he is not talking about my friends, even the best of them. The book of my life story is kept open, a blighted flower of opportunity.

What them does the Master have to say to us who have failed? He does say: "Sleep on, now, and take your rest. The past is past. There is no living it again. We are all like Esau who found no way of undoing his past. But he does add this bracing and hopeful word: "Rise up, let us be going."

That which makes the gospel of Jesus Christ such a marvelous gospel is that it gives hope to failures. It gives hope even to those who have
lost hope of themselves. A man said the other day, "Nobody ever lets me down but once." Well the God our Lord is not like that. After we let him down endless times he still believes in us, still is eager to walk with us. The Master who commands us to forgive until seventy times seven will surely not do less himself.

And mark you, he does not say simply, "Get up and go." But he said, "Let us be going." He is still willing to walk with us. He knows that however completely we may have failed yesterday, if we keep in his fellowship we can win tomorrow. These men who failed him here and who fled like frightened sheep rallied after a while and began to walk with their Master again and he led them to Pentecost. He led them to new and abundant life. He led them to the conquest of the world.

There is only one sure road to final failure. That is to quit trying. It matters not how soiled your yesterdays may have been. It matters not how many times you have played the coward. It matters not how many times you have fallen. If you only have the courage to begin again then the best is possible. The greatest wrong, the sorest wound, I am sure, that Judas inflicted on Jesus was not his kiss of treachery but rather his failure to trust him enough even after he had betrayed him to come back and try again. If Judas had only done that he would have become one of the saints of sacred story.

Here then is a word for everyone of us. It is the biggest and best thing that even God can say to you. That is this: "Rise up, let us be going." If you are ready to start again the very best is still within your reach. Years ago a gawky young mountaineer who was attending a backwoods school was thrilled by a fellow pupil who brought with him to school an old one-string fiddle. George decided that he would buy that fiddle and learn to play it. Not having any money he traded for it his sling and his marbles and all the treasures that a boy holds dear. Then with the fiddle tucked under his arm he hurried home, announcing his intention to
"I'd Start Again"

become a fiddler.

But things didn't go well. Soon he tired of his treasure and decided that music was not his gift. Therefore he sold his fiddle to his brother, Jim. Jim was more persistent. He sawed on that fiddle until they chased him out of the house on to the front porch. Then he sawed until they chased him off the porch into the yard. Then he sawed until they chased him out of the yard down into the woods lot. Then one night as the family sat round the fire, Jim announced that he could play five tunes on his one-string fiddle. The father asked him to play. And when he had proved his statement the father said never a word. But next day he went to the city of Knoxville and bought Jim a beautiful new violin on which he became proficient. George declared that he had been thrilled by his music many times.

A few years later George was converted and felt called to the ministry. One Sunday he was to preach in his old home church. The congregation gathered. George rose from behind the pulpit and announced his text and then he went dumb. He announced it a second time but he could say never a word. He announced it a third time. Then in utter shame he sat down behind the pulpit. A kindly old steward dismissed the congregation and the folks went home.

When George saw that the coast was clear he slipped out, hurried to his own home, went up to the attic, threw himself across the bed and burst into tears. As he thus sobbed he vowed that he would never undertake to preach again. Then a voice seemed to say to him: "You said you were going to learn to play the violin. Soon you gave it up but Jim took it and learned. Now you have made one failure at preaching. Are you going to give that up too? Then he told the Lord that he had only a one-string fiddle of ability but with his help he would saw on it until the end of his days. And that one-string violin became a veritable orchestra. For that discouraged and defeated young man was George R. Stuart who was certainly one of the most effective preachers of his day. Nothing can defeat us except giving it up.
"I'd Start Again"

The best is always possible for the man who has the faith and courage to start again.
WHITFORD'S

"Sleep on now, and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray me."

Matt. 26:45-46

"Sleep on now and take your rest....Rise up, let us be going." This translation has been questioned. As it stands here, it would seem that Jesus had at last lost patience with his blundering disciples. He has been persistently and consistently let-down by them and it would seem as if He were turning on them in bitter irony, giving them commands that are completely contradictory. "Sleep on now and take your rest....Rise up, let us be going." But He is not sarcastic. Each of these words comes with its own particular message. He is trying at once to bring these failing friends of His face to face with their irrevocable past and also with their possible and hopeful future.

You will recognize these words as a part of the story of the Cross. Jesus has gone out into Gethsemane in company with His disciples. Arrived in the precincts of the garden, He takes with Him Peter and James and John and goes into its deeper glooms. These three disciples belong to the inner circle. They have been greatly privileged. When death had come to the daughter of Jairus, Jesus took these three to witness the defeat of death. When He went to pray on the Mount of Transfiguration and His innate divinity shone out with such splendor as to transfigure His face, He took with Him Peter and James and John. Being men of great privilege, they were also men of great responsibility. When He came to the supreme trial of His life, He took with Him these three.

Why, when Jesus went to pray, did He take with Him these three most trusted friends?
1. He took them because He needed them. He was passing through a terrible struggle. Being human, He dreaded to be alone. He wanted somebody near Him who could share His grief, somebody who could give Him comfort. These men had it in their power to help. They could do something for their Master that nobody else could do. You and I can do something for Him that nobody else can do. In His hour of conflict, Jesus dreaded to be alone. Nobody but a very sensitive man would have said these words, "The hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone."

Loneliness is of two kinds. There is physical loneliness, the loneliness that comes when we are separated by dividing walls, by intervening mountains, by sundering seas. Physical loneliness can be very depressing and terrifying. You remember the chap in Selkirk's poem who was cast upon an uninhabited island. His loneliness fills him with horror.

"O solitude, where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face?
I had rather dwell in the midst of alarms
Than to reign in such a horrible place."

In *Put Yourself in His Place*, Charles Reid tells of a prisoner who was put into solitary confinement. He stood up under it for a while; then, he began to grow desperate. He felt that the very silence and the darkness were driving him mad. In order to keep his reason from tottering, he tore the buttons off his garment and tore his shirt into shreds, then busied himself counting the strings and picking up the buttons. Then the voice of the chaplain spoke from the outside, saying, "You are not alone. I am with you." And the frantic man went to sleep like a child in its mother's arms. Physical loneliness can be terrible.

"Were you ever out in the great alone
When the moon was awful clear,
And the ashey mountains shut you in
And the silence you most could hear,
With only the howl of a timber-wolf—
And you camped there in the cold,
A half-dead thing in a stark dead world—
Clean mad for the muck called gold,
While high overhead green, yellow, and red
The north lights swept in bare!
Then you have a hunch of what loneliness means--
Hunger, and night, and stars,
A hunger not of the belly kind
That is banished by bacon and beans,
But the ghastly hunger of lonely men
For home and all that it means.

But if physical loneliness can be terrible, spiritual loneliness can be far more awful. Jesus dreaded physical loneliness, but His supreme pain was His spiritual loneliness. He was seeing a vision that nobody else could see, dreaming dreams in which nobody else could fully share. He was facing a grim battle that even His friends could not fully understand. About the most tragic fact about Jesus was His loneliness. There was more in that declaration of the prophet than even the prophet himself was aware when he said, "I have trodden the winepress alone." But these men knew Him better than anybody else. He asked them, therefore, to watch with Him because He needed their help.

2. Not only did Jesus ask these disciples to watch with Him because He was lonely and needed companionship, but He asked them to watch for their own good. "Watch and pray," He said, "that ye shall not enter into temptation." He knew something of the terrible ordeal that was ahead, they did not know. Therefore, He brought them here that in His presence in His fellowship, which was the fellowship of prayer, they might get ready for the terrible crisis. He knew that to face life prayerless is to face it powerless. Therefore, because of their mutual need, Jesus said, "Tarry ye here and watch with me."

II

What did these three men do with their big chance? They made a terrible mess of it. Their conduct was no doubt a surprise to themselves. They thought of it in the after years with sinking hearts while their faces still burned with shame. Jesus went a little further and prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." Then it seems that His burden was too heavy to bear. He turned for consolation and help to His friends.

"With what result? Listen: "He cometh and findeth them asleep." How tragic!
There they were, snoring away in the presence of the most dramatic and tragic event of all human history. Then Jesus said a word that is too pathetic for tears. "What," He said, "could ye not watch with me one hour?" As if He had said, "After all these beautiful hours we have had together, after all we have come to mean to each other, after the radiance that I have brought into your life can't you watch with Me one hour?" When the three roused themselves in shame to say, "I am sure we did not mean to do it. We fully intended to stay away. Give us another chance."

When He went away and prayed a second time, using the same words, He turned to His friends for help and found them again asleep. Then there was a third prayer, and once more He came with the same tragic result. This time He does not watch with them. He does not tell them to pray against the coming crisis. He rather says, "Sleep on now and take your rest." What does He mean? He means to bring them face to face with the irrevocable past. "I brought you here," He said, "to watch with Me, to share My burden. I brought you here for the strengthening of your own souls, but you have wasted that precious hour that was yours. It will be no more wasted if you sleep forever. So sleep on now and take your rest."

"Well, I'll do better next time," we are fond of saying. And it is a wise word when rightly understood. But there are so many things that do not have any next time!  

Reposing of your boy. Giving this day.

"The moving finger writes
And having writ moves on;
Nor all your piety nor wit
Can lure it back
To cancel half a line;
Nor all your tears
Wash out a single word of it."

The moment that we have passed since coming into this church is as completely beyond our reach as the first moment that ever broke upon this world. Yesterday is past as completely out of your control as that distant day when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Each moment brings to us its own opportunity. Then it gathers its seconds into its hands and slips back through the doorway of the past and is gone forever. Though we may better
at that door with bruised fists and tear at the lock with bleeding fingers we can never get it back.

Some years ago while living in Fort Worth, I went down to take the Santa Fe to a neighboring town where I was to fill an engagement. Contrary to my custom, I got to the train nearly a half hour ahead of time. I believe in getting on after it gets started. Having bought my ticket, I seated myself where I could get a clear view of the train as it came in. Then I took an interesting book out of my grip and proceeded to read. By and by I looked up from my book and it was five minutes after train time. This fact did not disturb me in the least. I was sure that the train was a bit late. So I went over and said to the agent, "How much late is the train this morning?" He answered, "It has been gone about five minutes." If he had been disposed to lecture, he might have said, "Read on now, and finish your book. Read on until you have read all the musty and moldy manuscripts in the libraries of the world, but you won't have any more missed the train than you have already missed it. So read on."

On another occasion I was on a train that I knew at a certain time would bring me a view of lovely mountain scenery. There is that in the mountains and the hills that always speaks to my heart. I asked the pullman conductor how long before we would be to the mountains and he said, "About two hours." I had been losing a lot of sleep; so I decided to take a nap. By and by when I awakened, I spoke to the conductor again, "How long now before we get to the mountains?" "We passed them," he said, "about an hour ago." Again had he been disposed to lecture, he might have said, "Sleep on now. Take your rest. Sleep on until the rails wear down, sleep on until the roadbed is level, until the mountains slip down to the plain, until the "stars are old, and the sun is cold, and the leaves of the Judgment-Book unfold," but you won't any more have missed seeing the mountains than you have already missed it." Thus, Jesus brought to His failing friends, as He brings you and me, face to face with the fact of an irrevocable past.
III

But is that all He has to say to failures? If so, we are of all men most miserable because all of us have failed in somewhat. The year 1942 is forever beyond our reach. We did not make the best of it—any of us. We are constant and persistent blunderers. When I read in this Old Book, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged," I know the prophet is not talking about me. I know he is not talking about my friends, even the choicest and the best. The book of our lives is by you kept open by blighted flowers of opportunity and privilege.

What then does He mean? What then does He say? He not only says, "Sleep on now and take your rest"; He says, "Rise up. Let us be going." Yes, yesterday is gone. The chance of the last minute is gone, but there is still the present. There is still a chance to start anew. He does not simply say, "Get up and go." He says, "Let us be going." He walks with failures. He is not afraid to trust folks who have proved themselves untrustworthy. "No man ever lets me down but once," we say. Thank God! our Lord is not like that. He is always giving us another chance.

To believe in that second chance, to have the courage to start again—that determines our final victory more than anything else. Any fair view of the facts will indicate that the difference between the finally defeated and the finally victorious is not that one was strong and the other weak. It is not that one sometimes failed and the other never failed. The difference is in this—that one let failure be final while the other had courage to start again. One said, "I am down. There is no use to try to get up." The other said, "I have failed and failed miserably, but no failure need be final."

Each day is a new beginning,
Each moment is the world made new,
All you who are weary of sinning,
Here is a hope and a chance for you."

Two of Jesus' friends made tragic failures. Simon Peter did through cowardice almost as bad as Judas did through hate and treachery. This sturdy fisherman
declared with oaths that he did not even know the Man whom he called Lord and Master. But Judas allowed his failure to be final. Having struck out, he never went to bat again. Having fumbled, he never would try to carry the ball. He threw himself out of the world by the backdoor of suicide not because he was such a great sinner but because he did not think Jesus meant it when He said, "Rise up. Let us be going. I walk with sinners. I give my companionship to those who have failed me."

Simon Peter took the opposite course. "You were with Him in the garden," said the little servant girl. "By no means," said Simon. "I don't know what you are talking about." This he did three times. Then Jesus came from the hall and His eyes flung out Peter. That look broke his heart. He went out, the story says, and wept bitterly. I think I can see him as his big hands claw into the loam of the garden and he sobs, "I didn't intend to do it. I had rather died than to have gone back on You like that. Forgive me." And Jesus could hardly wait to get the door of the tomb open on the morning of the Resurrection to say, "Go tell my disciples and Peter." Yesterday is dead. The past is beyond your reach. All we can do is forget about it and start anew.

It is said that before the outbreak of the first World War there were three lieutenants in the British Army who belonged to the same regiment. As the war-clouds began to gather one of them became strangely restless and oppressed. More and more in spite of himself he was gripped by a torturing conviction that he was a coward. He was made utterly miserable by evil forebodings that when the test came he would not be able to see it through with honor. So irresistible was this conviction and so torturing that he went to his father who was a man high in political life and through his influence got himself a discharge from the army.

This discharge came on the very day that the first contingent of the British Army was ordered to France. As his comrades went away to battle, their friend went over to Ireland where lived a lovely Irish girl to whom he was engaged to be married. One morning, a few days later, as he and his fiancee were preparing to
to go riding together, the postman came and put into his hands a little box. He opened it in the presence of his bride-to-be and two white feathers dropped out upon the carpet. The girl laughed a ringing laugh, and then asked for an explanation. Coward that he was, he gave it. He told how he got discharged from the army and how his friends had sent him this little package in token of the fact that he had shown the white feather.

The high-spirited girl ceased to laugh. Instead two hectic spots of shame burned upon her lovely cheeks. She broke a bit of white plume from her hat and handed it to him and walked away without a word. Then the young man stood for a while with his life fallen in ruins about him. At last with a look of determination in his face, he picked up the three feathers, put them in the box, put the box back in his pocket and hurried to England where he joined the army under an assumed name.

Now it came to pass in the chances of war that he found himself in his old regiment once more. One night there was an excursion into No Man's Land led by one of his lieutenant friends. The officer did not return. The man who had quit asked to go in search of him. He was told that it would mean suicide. "Then I would like to commit suicide that way," he said. So permission was given with the result that he found the young officer, brought him back, laid him down on the floor of the trench as he was going west. And the young man smiled into the face of his rescuer and said, "Tom, I knew you would come back. I knew you were not a coward." And the young man took a little box out of his pocket and put one white feather into the hand of his friend as he slipped into the silence.

Other days went by and there was a wild charge and the one time coward found himself in a shell hole half on and half under a comrade who was pleading for water. He shook his canteen and found it almost empty. He drained the last drop into the lips of his companion. Then he looked at him again and recognized his other lieutenant friend. Then there was darkness. But when they were found
their bodies were stuck together in part by a feather that had once been white but was now crimson. Then he was an invalid at home. One day when he came from receiving the Victoria Cross down at the end of the line that watched the ceremony was a beautiful nurse from Ireland. As he passed her he slipped into her hand a little box stained from the mud and blood of the trenches. When a little later she opened it in the secret of her room there floated out one white feather. And the deserter had come back, and the coward had become a hero. That is a possibility for all of us. The best way to realize that possibility is to let the dead past bury its dead. Therefore, on this first Sunday of the New Year, I bring you these words of Jesus—"Sleep on now and take your rest. Yesterday is gone. Rise up. Let us be going." Christ will walk with us into tomorrow. That is our hope and our joy.
"Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said........And he went outside and wept bitterly." Matthew 26:75 (Moffatt)

Part I

This is a part of the story of Peter's denial of his Lord. This denial was so shocking, so utterly shameful, that some have found it hard to believe that it actually took place as here recorded. Indeed one of the most brilliant and saintly ministers of our day has denied it outright. In spite of the fact that all four of the gospel writers affirm that Simon did deny his Lord, he still dares to reverse their verdict and to bring in one of his own,—"Not Guilty".

This minister makes his denial on psychological grounds. He asserts that for Jesus to have given such warning as the record indicates would have been the worst possible psychology, since it would have all-but guaranteed Simon's defeat. This would be sound reasoning except that it fails to take into consideration the kind of man Simon was. This disciple was no super-sensitive soul devoid of self-confidence. Instead he was so sure of himself that while he found this warning annoying, it shattered his self-assurance no more than a sling shot would shatter the Rock of Gibraltar. Indeed after a moment's irritation, it would seem that he forgot the warning altogether.

Now having taken the position that Simon did not deny his Lord the author must explain the apostle's glaring lies, lies that he sought to strengthen by his swearing. This he does by affirming that Simon was a spy for Jesus. Since this was the case, just as any trapped spy would deny loyalty to the group or nation for which he was working, even so Simon was justified in denying his loyalty to Jesus. But to
my mind this fails to make sense. In the first place had Jesus desired a spy he would never have chosen Simon whose face had a way of mirroring everything that he thought. In the second place Jesus had no need of a spy. The worst had already happened. He was even now in the hands of his enemies. Had Simon been a spy, of what value could his spying possibly have been among a handful of servants who would have no say whatever in the final decision as to the fate of Jesus.

I am sure, therefore, that we must accept Simon's denial as a fact. It is one event, I repeat, upon which all four of the Evangelists agree. Then it is suggested by other passages that do not affirm it directly. Luke declares that Jesus in speaking of the whole group of his disciples said, "Satan demanded to have you (all of you) that he might sift you like wheat". Then he singled out Simon and said, "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren". I think it is also safe to affirm that when Jesus asked Peter three times over if he loved him, he had in mind and expected Simon to have in mind, this three-fold denial. More impressive still perhaps is the deep humility and love of this apostle in his after days. Having been forgiven much, he loved much.

Nor need we look with too critical eyes upon Simon as if his were a unique sin. Such is surely not the case. There is not one of us who has not in some fashion denied our Lord. Of course we have not stood upon our feet to affirm with an oath that we have never met him. But there are many other ways in which we may deny him. We may deny him by what we are and by what we do. We may also deny him by what we fail to be and do, by the kindnesses that we refuse to show, by the
tears we fail to dry. Sometimes we deny him by our shameful silences, by witnessing injustices done to others with never a word of protest. We can deny thus him without ever mentioning his name. Here, therefore, is a prayer for everyone of us:

"In the hour of trial, Jesus plead for me;

Lest by base denial, I depart from thee."

We can also confess our Lord both by what we are and do, even though we may not speak his name. Several months ago I was preaching at an encampment in the deep south. A minister who was pastor of a small city church told me this story out of his own experience. On a recent Sunday morning there had come to his church a Negro man. One of his young officials who was ushering that day showed the Negro a seat. To make matters worse it was communion Sunday. In the course of the service this young official led the visitor to the front pew where they received communion together. To further complicate matters the following night was the meeting of the official board.

No sooner was the meeting opened on that tense occasion than a red-faced brother sprang to his feet and began a tirade. The tactful chairman asked that he delay his speech for a moment. Then he turned to the young usher and said, "Jim, why did you welcome that Negro as you did?"

At that the young fellow rose modestly and said, "Well, the fact that he came to church made me think that he might be a Christian. I knew that if he was a Christian, when he died he would go to heaven. When he got to heaven I did not know but that my Lord might make him an usher as you have made me. If he should make him an usher, I would want him to let me in. Therefore, I let him in."

At that all the air solemn stillness held. A little later the
meeting was adjourned with everybody seemingly in high good humor. Now whatever may be your view on this inflammable question, I do not believe there is a living man who will claim that a denial of Jesus was chalked up against this young official. We can, therefore, deny or confess our Lord without ever calling his name.

Part II

How did Simon come to this eclipse?

1. It was the result in part of his neglect of prayer. After Jesus had warned him of the danger ahead, he then led him with James and John into the inner precincts of the garden. He led them here for two reasons. First he needed them. They could do something for their Lord that none else could do. Then he invited them because they so desperately needed him. Jesus knew what was ahead. He knew that for them to meet this test prayerless would be to meet it without power. Therefore, he urged them to watch and pray.

But the opportunity that was theirs, they threw away. Instead of praying, they went to sleep. It was Simon to whom our Lord addressed himself saying, "Could you not watch with me one hour?" With shame he and his two faltering friends brushed the sleep from their eyes and made a second effort and then a third. But it all ended in failure. They simply could not stay awake.

Then suddenly their big test was upon them. Simon felt that he must do something. But the something that he did was at once futile and foolish. He unsheathed his sword and began to wield it with consummate awkwardness. "Good for Simon", we are ready to say. "Here again he is still his out-and-out self". There were two swords among
these disciples. But Simon was the only one who dared to draw. Yet our Lord did not approve. Instead he commanded him to put back his sword into its sheath.

Now with his sword gone Simon felt utterly helpless. Paul affirmed that he was a fighter but that the weapons with which he fought were not carnal, not material. He was armed by mighty spiritual resources. Such might have been the equipment of Simon. "They that wait upon the Lord" do renew their strength. But having failed thus to wait, and having no weapon but a sword that he was forbidden to use, there seemed nothing left for him but to take to his heels.

Therefore we see Simon an instant later making a wild sprint through the night. At last, out of breathe, and as he hoped, out of the danger zone, he pulled himself together and slowed down. Then he began to follow Jesus at a distance. At first glance it might appear that Simon is here acting out of character, that he has for once ceased to be his wholehearted self and become a partial follower. But in my opinion this is not the case. I think that he had ceased to be in any true sense a follower at all. This is evident, I think, when we realize the motive that prompted Simon.

Why did he follow? Matthew gives us the reason. In so doing he does not hint that Simon was following in the hope that he might yet avert disaster, or failing this, that he might die with his Lord.

Here is the reason, he followed "to see the end". That means that for Simon all was lost, that there was not one ray of hope left. He was following only to see the culmination of a one glad drama that he was now sure would end in complete and terrible tragedy.

Simon's final blunder was that he put himself among the foes of
of Jesus. Already chilled by the events of the night, to the depths of his soul, he now sought to warm himself by the enemies fire. Thus putting himself in a bad atmosphere his final collapse became all but a certainty. When therefore, a servant girl looked him over and said simply, "You also", Simon denied the charge. Indeed, he lied as spontaneously as he would have dodged a sudden blow. Having thus lied this once, he felt that there was no turning back. Hence, he continued as if eager to see what a damning mess he could make. His failure at Caesara Philippi was born of the fear of the cross for his Lord, but this more ugly failure was born of the fear of the cross for himself. Thus Simon went into total eclipse. Yet even of this coward our Lord made at last a rock of Christlike character.

Part III

How was this change wrought?

1. Simon was helped by the ministry of memory. "Then Peter remembered". "Then", that is the arresting word. Then, after he had so shamefully failed. Then, after he had broken the heart of his Lord. Then, after he had so let his friends down that he had become a hindrance rather than a help. Then, after he had seemingly done his ugly best to make the whole adventure seem a ridiculous farce. Then, after he had crushed himself under an avalanche of shame. Then, even then, he remembered and turned his face once more toward Jesus. What a lovely ministry of Memory!

Yet let us bear in mind that while such use of memory is good, it is only a second best. Had Simon used his memory as his Lord had purposed, it would have served as a preventive rather than as only a cure. It is beautiful to watch memory lay hold on the hand of the Prodigal and lead him from the famine of the swine pen to the peace
and plenty of his father's house. Only one story could have been more beautiful. That would have been for this wayward son to have so remembered that he would never have gone to waste his substance in the far country.

But if Simon failed to make the highest use of memory, he did grandly use the second best. As angels are said to have laid hold on clinging Lot to lead him out of Sodom, even so Simon allowed the hand of memory to lead him back to his Lord. Of course, there was nothing inevitable about this. It was up to him to decide whether memory should lead him toward the heights or toward the depths. "Son remember", was spoken to a man who by his own wrong choices had changed what might have been a ministering angel into a tormenting devil. But Simon made the better choice.

2. Simon was helped toward recovery by a look. "Are the Lord turned and looked at Peter". What do you suppose Simon read in the face of Jesus? He read no anger, no contempt, no bitter resentment. He read no self-pity, no despair. But he did read heartache, grief, and sorrow beyond words. He read also a deathly yearning. He read an incredible love that simply refused to let him go. But above all else, I think, he read in that look a faith that made Simon whisper to his shamed and hopeless heart--"He still counts on me, is sure that I can make good in spite of the fact that I have failed him so shamefully.

3. He went outside and wept bitterly. This, I take it, marks the final step in Simon's recovery. Of course, this bitter weeping on the part of Peter does not tell the whole story. No man is ever saved solely by his tears. I used to know a husband of high repute who began secretly to betray his wife. By and by his unfaithfulness became
an open scandal. But even then, again and again he would come back to his devoted wife, put his head in her lap and sob as if in brokenness of heart. I am quite sure his grief was genuine. But in spite of his bitter tears he refused to give the woman up. Therefore, he ended by wrecking his home and flinging himself into a suicide's grave.

To be sorry, therefore, even to tears, is not enough. Our prisons are full of sorry people. So also according to Jesus is hell. That old story of the governor who gave an interview to every inmate in a certain prison is to a point. After hearing scores of these declare their complete innocence, he at last found one man who with shame frankly confessed his guilt. At once this wise governor gave that bold criminal a pardon. His reason? He did not dare by keeping him in prison to run the risk of corrupting so many innocent souls. But best of all this confessed sinner was capable of another chance. So I am sure was sobbing Simon.

Therefore, while I repeat, merely to weep is not enough. Yet there are tears of which our Lord definitively does take knowledge. "I have seen your tears" is his word to a sobbing saint of the long ago. Indeed a certain psalmist had the heartening conviction that his own tears were so priceless that his Lord kept and treasured them as one would treasure a rare jewel. Simon's tears I dare say were of this kind. They were priceless because they came from a broken and repentant heart. Being sorry enough to turn his tear-wet face toward Jesus, his Lord was able to kiss those tears with jewels and to turn his night into day.

When on that first Easter Cleopas and his companion had seen and recognized their risen Lord, they forgot their weariness and the late-
ness of the night to hurry on winged feet back to Jerusalem. They must share their radiant certainty with their sorrowing friends. But having arrived they found that the once bleak winter was already being gladdened by a hint of spring. For before they could tell their own glad story some joyful soul shouted, "the Lord has risen indeed and has appeared unto Simon."

How heartening this must have been to those sorrowing saints of the distant yesterday. For since the risen Lord appeared to Simon they were sure that he would soon appear also unto themselves. And so he did. And so he has to countless thousands through the centuries. This is simply measuring the rivers of living water that have flowed from the heart of this man who had once so horribly failed. Even now he makes us sure both by his lips and by his life that if we confess our sins our Lord is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER

"And one of them ran forthwith and took a sponge and dipped it in vinegar and put it on the end of a reed and offered it him to drink, while the rest said, 'Stay, let us see whether Elijah will come to deliver him.'"

---Matthew 27:48-49 (Weymouth)

The scene is on that skull-shaped hill just outside Jerusalem. A dozen soldiers are gathered about three crosses. The real work of the day has been finished. These dozen men, four for each cross, have crucified the victim assigned to them. There is nothing left for them to do but to pass the time until the doomed men die. This is a bit boring. Death by crucifixion is such a slow-footed monster that they find it hard to pass the time. Four of them amuse themselves for a little while by throwing dice for the seamless robe of the Man on the middle cross. This done, all of them loll about in their blood-flecked garments, waiting for the end.

Suddenly they are startled by a wild cry. It comes from the lips of the Man on the middle cross. "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani." All the soldiers hear it and are startled by it. None of them understand it. Jesus was not speaking in Latin but in His mother tongue. But though they do not understand exactly what He said, they all recognize it as a cry of agony. It is the hand of need reaching out into encircling gloom for help. Though all the soldiers hear it, they do not all react in the same fashion. One of them feels that he must do something about it. The others do nothing. One of them acts; the others speculate, saying, "Stay, let us see if Elijah will come and deliver him."

There is that about this story that is unique. This is an event of human history that took place on a skull-shaped hill at a certain hour. There is a sense in which nobody ever suffered just as Jesus suffered, nobody ever died just as Jesus died. But
while there is that that is unique about the story, there is also that which is universal. While in a sense this story belongs to one day, in another sense it belongs to every day. What is there about it that is abiding?

1. There is this cry of agony. Always there is human need. Always, explain it how we may, humanity is in some fashion being crucified. Always there are human hands stretched out for help. Some of them are perchance far away, some of them are as close as your own home or as that of your next-door neighbor, but all of us live in a world of need. That is true of every day. It is intensely true of the day in which our lot is cast when we are called upon to witness a whole world on fire.

2. Not only is the cry of human need a universal experience but all of us have at sometime to hear that cry. Of course, the ears of some are more sensitive than those of others. There are some that can hear the cry of need and be largely indifferent. There are others for whom it is a poignant pain. But be our reactions what they may, all of us have a time to hear that cry. Whether we hear or not is not optional. The one thing that is optional is what we do about it. These soldiers made their own choice. They all heard. One sought to help. The others speculated. Even so we make our varied reactions to this hour.

II

Let us look then at these two groups. One of them ran forthwith while the others said, "Stay." This latter group is quite familiar. They did not try to hush the outcry of Jesus. They did not try to add to the bitterness of agony. They did not rebuke him. They simply heard his appeal and passed on their heedless way, simply making no contribution at all.

As to their reasons for this conduct, we are not told. Had we questioned them, I am quite sure they would have had some very reasonable answers. I am going to pass by the baser reasons that might have been very real to some that are more respectable. Of course, they might have refused any responsibility
because they did not care, because they were not in the least moved by this exceedingly bitter cry. They might have done nothing because it was too much trouble. They might have refused to share their sour wine with the Master because they said, "If I give it to Him where will I come in? I have to look out for Number One." But perhaps there were more decent reasons.

"Aren't you going to do anything?" I asked one of these soldiers. "No," he answers emphatically, "my name is not Elijah. Didn't you hear the name of the man for whom He was calling? I could not understand well, but I am quite sure He was calling on Elijah. Therefore, let Elijah help Him. It certainly is not mine. Of course the need is very real, but since my name was not called, it is none of my business."

But how wrong he was! How wrong we are when we take such a position. The priest and the Levite who passed the dying man on the roadside might have said, "We did not help him but we were not physicians." If I pass by your house and find it on fire, I may excuse myself by saying, "I did not give the alarm. I do not belong to the Fire Department." But it so happens that human need is my business. Any need that I know that I can help is my business. When I see it, God is calling my name just as really as if He spoke it with a voice of thunder or wrote it in letters of fire across the night sky. Then these soldiers that did nothing might have had an even saner reason. "We heard His cry, of course, knew it for a cry of agony, but we did nothing because we knew that any doings of ours would be futile. Rome had condemned Him. Rome had had Him crucified. He was now close upon the gates of death. What was there that we could do to help? Would you expect us to defy Rome and take Him from the cross and nurse Him back to life? We could not do everything; therefore, we did not do anything."

This benumbing sense of our own weakness, of the futility of our individual efforts is always a danger. It is especially dangerous in the presence of worldwide catastrophe. There are those who look upon our struggling world at this hour with a paralyzing sense of the utter futility of anything that they can do. Thus,
because they cannot do all that is needed, they refuse to do anything. That is a real danger for all of us.

Then there was perhaps a third reason for the failure of these soldiers. They heard the cry, were moved by it. They felt that something ought to be done, but they waited for somebody else to do it. Had you asked one of these who was sitting by in idleness, "Why not make an effort?" he would have answered, "I cannot believe that all these folks are so cruel as to do nothing. Of course, something ought to be done. But I am waiting for somebody else to do it. The class ought to be taught. The service ought to be kept up even if it is a night service. The gift ought to be made but I have a feeling that if I stumble long enough somebody else will actually do the deed and I shall be relieved. There are some who ask, "How much can I do?" and others who like these soldiers ask, "How little?"

But there is a brighter side to the picture. One of them ran forthwith. He set to work immediately. This he did in spite of the fact that his fellow soldiers not only did not help him but tried to hinder him. They said, "Stay, wait." That is what we always do when we do nothing ourselves. We do not have to call out to our fellows to stay. We can invite them to do nothing by merely taking a negative attitude. "Stay, let us see if Elijah will deliver Him."

But this heroic soldier shrugged their hands off his shoulder. He seized a sponge and dipped it into his portion of sour wine. Then he put this on the end of a reed and lifted it to the lips of Jesus. Two draughts were offered Jesus at the cross. One was a draught of drugged wine that He refused. He was determined to meet His Father with unclouded faculties. One was a draught of undrugged sour wine offered by this soldier that He accepted.

It was such a beautiful deed that I cannot refrain from expressing my appreciation. On behalf of the N-st er I say, "Thank you, Elijah. That was good." This soldier stares at me a moment puzzled. Then he understands and answers, "My name is not Elijah." "Well, I thought he was calling Elijah. How did you come to respond?" "I responded because I saw that Elijah was not going to do
anything. Somebody had to help. Therefore, I took it on myself."

What was this man's name? I am sorry that I cannot tell you. He is one of those anonymous helpers that got so busy serving that he failed to leave us his autograph. At the close of the first World War each nation found a battered nameless body that they buried midst pomp and ceremony. Then they erected a monument bearing the inscription, "To the Unknown Soldier." This man is entitled to such a monument. Who would have dreamed of finding such kindness among a group of executioners? There was a deal of tenderness in the heart and hands of this soldier in spite of the fact that they had been set to do a cruel task. He was brave beyond the line of duty. His deed has in it the spirit of the Cross. This is the case because he took upon himself voluntarily a burden that was not his own.

III

We all belong either with those who speculate or with those who act. Does it make any difference as to which class you belong? Indeed it does. It makes an eternity of difference.

1. Look at these who said, "Stay." What was there contribution? While they did nothing, while they waited, the Christ whom they might have helped died. Something like that constantly happens through our neglect. Jesus told the story of a man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and had a banquet every day. He was more kindly than the ordinary man of his class in that he allowed a ragged and loathsome beggar to lie like a blot upon the landscape at his very door. His kindness was further shown in that he gave this beggar the crumbs, the scraps that fell from his richly laden table.

But though he was less cruel than many of his fellows, his seeming kindness was not enough. Though he flung the beggar the scraps he never met him. They never made contact. This beggar, receiving only the crumbs, died. We cannot keep any individual, any institution, alive with the mere crumbs of our interest and help and indifference. But the beggar was not the only one who died. The rich man also died. The giving of crumbs deals death not only to the receiver but to
the giver as well. These soldiers by seeking to save their lives lost them even
as you and I. How do we lose them? In some far off tomorrow? Perhaps, but cer-
tainly in the here and now.

But this man who shared his bit of sour wine with Jesus, did he save the
Master? He did not. But at least he helped soften the terrible agony through which
he was passing. He made his lot easier though he did not save it he went as far
as he could in that direction. Therefore, I do not wonder that when this unknown
soldier reached life's other side he found himself credited with an achievement
far beyond his dreams. He thought he was doing very little; he found that he had
done very much.

We can believe this because God has a different measurement from that of our-
selves. What counts with us is actual accomplishment. I heard a businessman years
ago who employed a great many specialists in his factory make this statement: "When
I get to my office tomorrow, there will be many men waiting to see me for employ-
ment. Some of them will be from the best universities in America—some from the
best universities of Europe. But I can't use them." Then he added, "It is use-
less to be educated on the Rhine unless you bring home the bacon." There you have
it! If we work for men, we must bring home the bacon. Dreams, hopes, effort—these
count for little. It is accomplishment that counts.

Our Lord, however, has a different way of measuring. He judges us not by
actual results but rather by what we would accomplish if we could. Browning says,
"It is not what man does but what man would do that exalts him." That is true.
God looks not so much at the poor dross that is in our hands as at the fine gold
that is in our hearts. It is easy to guess the supreme ambition of David's life.
He was a great warrior, a great statesman, at his best a great poet. But that
by which he hoped to be remembered was the building of the Temple. But this dream
never came true. While he was never able to build the Temple on Mount Moriah
whose gilded dome was to catch the first glint of the sunrise and hold its last
lingering caress at eventide, he did plant a temple in his own heart so that God
said to him, "Whereas it was in thine heart to build a house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart to build it."

Since our Lord judges us not by what we actually accomplish but by what we would accomplish if we could, this unknown soldier ranks high. But what is the test of what is in our hearts? It is terribly easy to say how much we would do if we were as capable as another. It is exceedingly inexpensive to boast of how freely we would give if we had as much money as some Croesus of our acquaintance. Some of us feel quite pious while making such boasts though having made them we do nothing. Let us bear in mind that the test of what is in our hearts is what we do with the treasure that is actually in our hands.

There was a certain widow that Jesus made immortal. Of all the contributors that through the centuries have laid their gifts upon altars of human need she ranks the highest. How did she win her place? She did not win it by telling all and sundry how much she would do if she possessed a million. She won it by giving what was actually in her hand though that sum was only a fraction of a cent. As we face a bleeding world, we are benumbed in the realization of how little we can do. We can't save the whole world any more than this nameless soldier could save Jesus, but we can all do our sacrificial best. That is to live in the spirit of the Cross. That is also finally to build a redeemed world.
THE TASK OF THE CHURCH

"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20

Matthew declares that these words were spoken by our Lord. They are prefaced by this majestic statement,—"All power is given unto me in heaven and earth." It is easy for me to believe that these words were rightly spoken. They are so perfectly consistent with all that Jesus said and with all that he did. This is a command as wide as all the world and as old as all the ages. Any command more narrow than this would have been unworthy of him who gave it. These are just such words as we should expect from the lips of our Lord.

I.

To whom were they spoken?

1. To the Church. They were spoken to that little handful of individuals that Jesus had gathered about him during his brief ministry. They were spoken to them as a group. They were spoken to them as individuals. But these words are also meant for the Church of today. They are the marching orders of the Church in every age. They come with impressive urgency to the Church of our city and of our world. They come to us as individuals. These words are just
as impressive as if our Lord were saying to you and me with earnest urgency, "Ye."

2. But those who have acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus by becoming a part of his church are the only ones that have a stake in this command. This text has something to say also to all who have heard the Christian message. I know how prone some are to excuse themselves from the privileges and obligations of the Church by declaring that they are not even members. These go on the assumption that the repudiation of one duty gives them a right to repudiate another. True, they do not belong to the Church. But by refusing to do so they have failed in a high privilege and in a solemn duty. Every man ought to belong to the Church. Every man ought to be a part of that institution that is the hope of the world.

To conclude that our obligation to help cure the world's ills grows out of our joining the Church is altogether wrong. That obligation exists in the very nature of things. The major difference between the church member and the non-church member in this respect is that one has acknowledged his obligation and is seeking to live up to it, while the other is not. But the obligation to help in the best known way rests upon everyone of us. Paul looking upon a needy world declares,- "I am a debtor." It is a declaration that befits every one of us. We are all born with weighty obligations. We can no more sidestep those obligations than we can sidestep our own shadows. Our church membership does not make the obligation, it simply confesses it.

At this moment England is fighting with her back to the wall. Believe me, all my sympathies are with her. But suppose a young chap of military age should say to a friend who called on him for help. "This war is none of my business. I am not even a member of the army. I do not wear a uniform." I daresay that friend would answer,- "You should wear a uniform. The fact that you do not does not excuse you from your obligation to serve. That obligation grows out of your citizenship. It is involved in the fact that the nation of which you are a part is
threatened by disaster." So is the world of which you and I are a part. Therefore, to us individually, whether in the church or out of it, our risen Lord gives this compelling command.

II.

What is this command? In other words, what is the task of the Church? I am delighted to face this big question with you. We need to face this question at this time because there is so much false and shallow thinking about the business of the Church.

For instance, there are those who think of the Church as what our fathers used to call an "ark of safety." Its one purpose is to get folks of a rather harsh and difficult world into heaven. The church member, therefore, is an individual who shys his way through life a bit like a frightened rabbit. By and by he ducks into heaven as a rabbit ducks into his burrow. Now the Church is meant to help get folks into heaven. Rightly used, it will do just that. But that is not its supreme purpose. It has something far more positive to do. I remember a silly song they used to sing when I was a boy. It ran "Lonely I wander, sadly I roam, Seeking my far off home." This chap was not trying to help anybody, he was simply trying to save himself. That is not the Christian ideal.

No more is the Church a group of soft individuals who are merely trying to be good in a negative fashion. There are some folks who think they are good when they are merely goody, goody. There are those who have a tendency to confuse holiness with harmlessness. If to be harmless is to be a Christian, then we might make a St. Paul out of a wax figure, or a Frances Willard out of a rag doll. Mere harmless, negative goodness, is not only not Christianity it is its very opposite.
For instance, I have reminded you before that Jesus introduced a new kind of villain. The orthodox villain is a man who is aggressively bad. He is a Jessie James, a John Dillinger. He is some human wolf that goes out to prey upon mankind. But you search the message of Jesus in vain for a villain of this type. His villain is a man who stands in the midst of a bleeding world and offers no help. The man whom he feared the most was the man who shrugged all responsibility from his shoulders and said to his needy brother, "You are none of my business." This is a type of villainy that is at once deadly and dangerous. The man who is an aggressive scoundrel is more likely to recognize himself for what he is. The man who simply does no harm is apt to fancy himself a saint.

What then is the task of the Church. It is not negative, it is positive. It is not here to dodge difficulty, it is to face it and overcome it. It is not to get out of the world it is to transform the world. The Church is here as a crusader. It is salt. Salt is the very antithesis of negative. You can no more ignore salt than you can ignore fire. The Church is out to evangelize. It is out to win to Christ and to build up men in Christ.

It is not to do this for one small section merely, but for the whole world. It is to disciple the nations. Any program less than this is less than Christian. There are two types of mistaken folks that we find in the Church. There are those for instance who have such a wide view that they fail to see the near. "A fool's eyes," says a wise man, "are in the ends of the earth." I used to have neighbor who gave much time to lecturing mothers on how rightly to train their children. In fact, she was so busy in this worthy task that she neglected her own and allowed them to run the streets. Hogarth tells of a certain Britisher who became so deeply interested in paying the public debt of the Empire that he failed to pay his own. At last he got into prison for debt. But he kept devising
schemes on paying the debt of the nation. We are to be interested in the wide world, but we are to realize always that we are to begin at Jerusalem, that is at our own homes.

Then there is another group who are interested in the near, but have no concern about the far. These are also less than Christian. "The field," said Jesus, "is the world." If God is the father of all mankind, then he must be as interested in those that are far away from us as he is in ourselves. Any view that narrows the Christian message and the Christian obligation is lacking not only in being fully Christian, but it is lacking in intelligence as well. I have reminded you before that one cannot be intellectually interested in the smallest child without being interested in the members of that child's family, in his church, in his school, in his city, and in his world. We are to disciple the nations. Any dream less than that falls short of the command of our Lord.

III.

How are we to accomplish this? What are some of the agencies through which we are to seek to evangelize as to build a new world?

1. We are to evangelize individually. How did Christianity spread so rapidly over the Roman Empire? It was not by preaching from the pulpit. There were no pulpits from which to preach. The rapid spread of Christianity was due mainly to the fact that one individual Christian went out to win his fellow. That was the favorite method of Jesus. He preached to great crowds, but he won his greatest victories with the individual. That has been the case with the greatest of the evangelists through the years. "The next great revival," said Moody, "will come when a man is willing to take a walk with his friend for Christ's sake.

2. We are to make disciples in our own homes. We are to evangelize our own
children. We are to teach them to observe what Jesus has commanded. This, we are to do specifically and directly. This we are to do most of all by what we are. We are to realize that Christianity is taught, but far more often it is caught. The Kingdom of God would have come long ago if Christians' fathers and mothers had only succeeded in Christianizing their own homes.

3. We are to evangelize through all the activities of the Church. Preaching is a form of teaching. The work of those who conduct the Church-school is teaching. The Church is preeminently a teaching institution. Through all its activities it is to have one supreme end in view—the winning of men and women, boys and girls to Christ and the building of them up in Christ.

4. Then there is a final agency that some of us are in danger of forgetting, and that is the Christian colleges and universities. From the beginning the Christian Church has emphasized education. Dr. Glover in "The History of Jesus" declares that "Where Christianity triumphed over paganism was because the Christians out thought the pagans." In pioneer days wherever the Church went, schools sprang up. Take out of American life today the Church-founded institutions and our educational system would be a wreck. Our high schools and colleges had a common mother, the Church. The Church, therefore, has a tremendously important stake in education.

This is the case because we realize that education in itself is not enough. Education serves simply to sharpen our intellect, to increase our capacities. If the new powers that education has put into our hands are not Christianized they become deadly dangerous instead of helps. At this moment civilization is threatening to commit suicide. What is the matter with Hitler's Germany for instance? It is not lack of education, it is lack of the right kind of education. The supreme threat of our world today is that our spiritual development has not kept pace with our intellectual development. Our education has run past our
goodwill. Unless education is Christianized it becomes a threat.

That is as true for America as it is for Germany. Whence has come what is best in our American life today. How have we attained whatever goodness is ours? It has come through an education shot through with Christian principles. Any type of education that ignores these fundamental principles will prove a curse rather than a blessing. The supreme good of a Christian college is not that it teaches religion, as important as that is, its supreme contribution is that it shows all truth to be God's truth, that it undergirds all learning with faith in God.

Sometime ago I called attention to the ill behaviour of a certain youth group that met in Washington. They booed the president, they booed the first lady of the land, they booed Congress. Recently Congress invited Committeeman Dies to be its guest speaker. I hold no grief for Mr. Dies. I take it that he is a good man. I take it, further, that he is doing what he has been ordered by Congress to do. But whether he is right or wrong, being the guest of this great body, he had a right to every courtesy. Yet the police had to be called out to restrain certain youths from creating a disturbance. What was the matter with these youths? They were not necessarily more vicious than others. They had been wrongly taught.

This gives me opportunity to call attention to the fact that we have in our own city an institution of higher education, Oklahoma City University. It belongs to our United Methodism. It is greatly needed here. It owes a debt of some $300,000. Soon you are going to have an opportunity to help to pay that debt. While we are engaged in this campaign. While we are engaged in this campaign the Methodists outside the city are engaged in a successful campaign to raise money for endowment and other purposes. Here is an opportunity to make an investment in religious education. We believe in a separation between
the Church and the State. The State cannot teach religion, we must do it or it will not be done. Here is a rich opportunity that we cannot ignore except at our peril.

IV.

Why should we take this command seriously?

1. It is only by so doing that we can claim the enriching fellowship of Jesus Christ. God's purpose for this world has not changed. He is still bent on bringing the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of righteousness. We often grow weak and discouraged, but not so our infinite Lord. It is written of him, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." It is our privilege to have this courageous and abiding God as our constant companion and friend. But we can enjoy this rich privilege only by making his purpose our purpose. We must set our feet upon the road along which he marches.

To seek his companionship on any other condition is sheer futility. We cannot peevishly tug at God's skirts and turn him aside from his great enterprise. To say that we can have his companionship on no other basis is to say what is true in the very nature of things. If I desire to have a sunrise flood my face tomorrow I must turn toward the East. No amount of praying will accomplish it if my back is to the sun. If I desire the companionship of my Lord I must go his way. If I dare to do that, we will surely meet and I will be able to say "My Lord and my God."

2. It is by taking this command seriously that the Church continues to live. It is only as the Church is aggressive that it can share in the life and power of our Lord. Whenever the Church seeks to save its life it always loses it. I am quite sure that there were those who would have liked to have remained complacently in Jerusalem and let the rest of the world alone. But had the Church taken that course it would have died in its cradle. The best method of
of defense for the Church as for the individual is offense. The Church that undertakes merely to hold its own dies. It is through self-giving that it lives.

3. Our obligation to this command is the supreme hope of the world. Let us not blink this fact. I have said it before and I say it again, and I cannot say it with sufficient emphasis--this world is not going to be saved by the diplomats. It is not going to be saved by its politicians. It is not going to be saved by secular education. The one solution of the program is entrusted to the Church. It is the God that the Church preaches who is our one hope. The very disaster that is abroad today is declaring through its blood and waste and tears, "There is none other name given under heaven whereby we may be saved."

Some years ago it was my privilege to attend a meeting of religious leaders in Stockholm, Sweden. Among those present was a missionary from China. He was getting the magnificent salary of twelve hundred dollars a year. But he was a man of ability. He was credited with being better informed in things Chinese than any other man in China.

Naturally leaders of big business put in their bid for him. I am told that a representative from the Standard Oil Company paid him a visit and offered him ten thousand dollars a year, then he went to fifteen, then to twenty-five. "Set your own price," was the reply of this representative of big business. "I was told to employ you at your own price." "The first salary you offered," came the reply, "was large enough. The trouble is with your job. It is not big enough. I am engaged in too big a task to give it up for one as small as yours." He was right. His task is ours. Surely none could be more worthy of our best.
THE TASK OF THE CHURCH

"Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20

Whatever my sermon may be you must agree that I have a great and bracing and roomy text. This text is rich and wide and deep in itself. It comes from the lips of him whom we call our Lord and Master. I can easily believe that he gave this command. It is so thoroughly consistent with what he said and did during his earthly ministry. Now he is going away and is giving his final word. These are his marching orders,—"Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." It is just the word that we should have expected him to utter. Any command less comprehensive and roomy would have been unworthy of him.

I.

To whom is our Lord speaking?

1. He is speaking to his Church. He is telling this little group that he has gathered about him what they are to do when he has passed from the sight of their eyes. Not only is he speaking to the Church, but he is speaking to each individual in the Church. Whose business is it to take this command seriously and to carry it out conscientiously? It is yours and mine. It is a high privilege and responsibility that is laid upon the weakest and the strongest, the most gifted and backward, the young and the old, the rich and the poor. It is
the solemn duty of everyone of us to be obedient to this command.

2. But while this is a special call to the Church, those without the Church are not exempt. Now and then we hear those who excuse themselves from facing up to their privileges and responsibilities by saying, "I do not even belong to the Church." But it is every man's duty to belong to the Church. Every man ought to be a part of this great organization. It is not church membership that constitutes our obligation, the obligation exists in the nature of things. The only difference between the church member and the non-church member in this respect is that one has acknowledged his obligation and the other has not.

Suppose, for instance, that this nation was at war. Here is a young man of military age who has refused to volunteer. He does not wear a uniform. He is asked to share the hardship of his country. He is asked to take part in its defense, but he refuses. He gives as his reason, "I do not wear the uniform. I am not even in the army." The only answer to give would be, "you ought to be in the army." But whether you are in the army or not, your duty to your country grows out of the fact that you are a citizen." It is every man's business who knows this command of our Lord to take it seriously. It is every man's duty to obey. So this is a word to you and to me regardless of whether we are in the Church or out of it.

II.

What are we called upon to do? What is the business of the Church? I am glad to face this question with you. There is so much misunderstanding, so much shallow thinking about this matter. One would suppose that practically everybody would know what the Church is about. Ours is a Christian nation. We should, therefore, naturally expect the man on the street as well as the man in the Church to be able to give a clear and concise and intelligent answer as to the
But this is by no means the case. There are thousands that pass our doors day by day who have little more idea what we are undertaking to do than if they had been born in pagan lands. There are those, for instance, who think of the Church as an organization of women and children, and a few men who are practicing sanctified selfishness. They think of the Church under that old figure of an "ark of safety." It is a way to get out of the world with the fewest scars possible and into heaven. We have heard a few silly songs that encourage this view. I remember one we used to sing when I was a boy. It ran like this:

"Lonely I wander, sadly I roam,
Seeking my far off home."

This suggests a chap dodging here and there like a frightened rabbit, making a dive into heaven at last like a rabbit escaping into his burrow.

Now there may be churches that are self-centered, but such organizations are not churches in the real sense. The Church is not a group of folks merely seeking to be good but with no thought for being good for anything. It is not a group of folks hiding from life. The true picture is not well represented by those three monkeys who resolve merely to hear and see and speak no evil. If that were all there is to Christianity, then you might make St. Paul out of a wax figure, and the Virgin Mary out of a rag doll. There is nothing further from holiness than mere harmlessness.

The truth of the matter is that the merely harmless man is in the mind of Jesus the supreme sinner. I have reminded you of the fact that Jesus brought to us a new type of villain. The convention of villain is one who is aggressive in wrong doing. He goes on a debauch. He shoots up the town. He succeeds at last, perchance, in getting himself hanged. But Jesus never drew that sort of villain. His supreme sinner was a man who simply held himself aloof. He was a
man who could pass his brother on the roadside without making any effort to help. The Church is not an organization for those who have resolved to be harmless.

No more is the Church a group of folks that have resolved to dig in a certain siege. Sometimes individual churches get self-satisfied. They feel that they have arrived. They become as strong, as spiritual, as victorious, as they care to be. I read this report of a certain church sometime ago. It told how many members had been received, how many had been lost. There had been no gain in membership at all, and the report closed with this heroic appeal,—"Pray for us brethren that we may hold our own." No church holds its own. The Church that refuses to go forward goes backward. Churches as well as men are born on an incline. When they cease to climb they begin at once to descend.

What then is the Church? It is an aggressive organization. It is an institution that goes forth conquering and to conquer. It is to make a difference in the life of the home, in the life of the community, in the life of the world. It is to be salt. Salt is not negative. Salt is that something that we cannot ignore. If salt is present when it is not wanted it can create a terrible row. If it is missing when it is wanted everybody feels the difference. It is not only something that we cannot ignore, but it is something that is indispensable. So it is with the Church.

This is the case because of what the Church is to do. What is the Church here for? We are here to make disciples. That means that we are here to evangelize. We are here to win men to loyalty to Christ. Let us not shy around evangelism. The Christian church was born of an evangelistic passion. Our own Methodist Church was born of the same holy passion. To evangelize is to tell the good news about God. The early church went out a little, significant handful, hardly a respectable prayer-meeting crowd. But they reproduced themselves a thousand fold through their evangelistic efforts.

Not only is the Church to evangelize, but the Church is to teach. Of course,
The Task of the Church

Teaching is one method of evangelism. But by teaching here I mean that we are not only to win men to Christ, but we are to build them up in Christ. I have heard men say with great emphasis, the one need is to get people converted. If a man is really converted you can trust him to take a right stand on every question that comes up.

But as a matter of fact, this is not the case at all. People not only need Christianizing, but they need to be taught how to apply their Christian living to the daily task of living. There have been many thousands of truly converted people who feel no conscientious compulsion with regard to slavery. There was a time when a man could be a good churchman and engage in the liquor traffic. There are those today who feel that they can be thoroughly Christian without accepting their share of the responsibility for the wrongs and ills of their needy fellows. It is the business of the Church not only to evangelize but to teach. These two must go hand in hand.

III.

What are the agencies through which the Church is to evangelize by teaching? What are the agencies we are to win people to Christ and to build people up in Christ?

1. The Church works through the individual. This is a work of abiding and supreme importance. "The next great revival," said Moody, "will be when a man is willing to take a walk with his friend for Christ's sake." Jesus won his disciples and laid the foundation of the early Church by dealing with the individual. He spoke to great crowds, but his supreme victories were met in dealing with men one by one. So it has been with the most effective and useful churchmen through the centuries.

2. The Church is to work through its teaching. A part of the purpose of the pulpit is to teach. The supreme task of the Church-school is to teach.
As we have indicated we win our recruits through teaching, and we bring them to spiritual maturity in the same fashion. One of the greatest weaknesses of our own church is the lack of proper facilities for the teaching of our members. Other churches of our size have almost three times as many in adult classes as we have. This is the case, not because they are more zealous than we, but because they have better facilities. We are to evangelize and to teach through all the services of our church.

3. The third agency through which we are to carry out the great commission is through our schools and colleges and universities. The Church has always been interested in education. It has pioneered in this field. It may be said truly that the Church is the mother of our educational organizations and of our educational system. Dr. Glover in accounting for the triumph of the early Church said that one reason for its victory was that it out-thought the pagan world. In the early days when a few Christians got together in the community, they not only built a house of worship, but a school. These academies and high schools pioneered the way for the high schools of our city and that dot our country sides today. Almost all of our greatest colleges and universities were church founded.

We have in our own city an institution that fills a unique place. One value of a church school is that it teaches religion. But what is more important than that, it proclaims the fact that all knowledge is religious, that all truth is God's truth. Soon you are going to have the opportunity to make a contribution to Oklahoma City University. We are to do this in the faith that this institution is needed, that there are scores and hundreds of young men and women whose one big chance to receive college training is through this institution. I hope you will give this important matter your careful and prayerful consideration.

IV.
What is to be the outcome of our loyalty to our Lord's command?

1. It is only in obedience that we can come to our best as Christians. It is only through obedience that we can experience the bracing and transforming companionship of our Lord. "Go," he said, "and lo, I am with you all the day, even unto the end of the age." And we can have this companionship in no other way. And this, mark you! is no arbitrary condition. Jesus is not saying, if you do not help me I will not help you. He is rather saying, I am out on a quest. I am going on a great mission. The only way you can have my companionship is to share my quest and to engage in my mission. Surely we do not think that we can tease God into changing his purpose into our purpose, and going in our direction when that direction is wrong.

Bear in mind that our Lord longs for our companionship. He longs to walk with us. But he can do so only on one condition. That condition is fixed. It exists in the very nature of this. How can I have a sunrise in my face? There is only one possible way and that is for me to face the sun. If I turn my back upon the morning God himself can't give me the splendors of a sunrise. How can I have the service of electricity? I can only do so by obeying the laws of electricity. How can I have the companionship of God? Only by obedience. But set out today anytime, anywhere to walk the road that he is walking; Set yourself to working at the task which he is working, and your roads will cross each other. And sooner or later you will come to say with assurance,—"My Lord and my God."

2. Not only is this the way of highest self realization for the individual, but for the Church. No sadder tragedy can come to any church than for that church to cease to be aggressive. We are never engaged in a task quite so futile as seeking to save the Church. The church that has to be saved is not worth it. The Church only saves itself by giving itself. The Church only defends itself by
an attack. The only strategy that wins is the strategy that hits the first lick. Had the early Church tried to fortify itself in Jerusalem it would have died centuries ago. It was madly throwing itself into intricate wrongs and glaring impossibilities, and it came to strong and victorious light.

3. Not only is loyalty to this command the way of highest self-realization for the individual and the Church, but it is the one hope of the world. I may have said it before, but it needs to be said again. The one hope of this world is in the Church and the values for which the Church stands. If this world is to be saved it will not be saved by its financiers. It will not be saved by its armies and navies. It will not be saved by its politicians and statesmen. It will only be saved by the mind of God himself. And he is mediated to the world through the gospel of the Church. Here then is our task. It has to do with the evangelizing of our own children, of our own homes, of our community, but it does not stop there. It has to do with the whole world. Ours is a world religion. Any lesser conception would be unworthy of God. Any lesser conception would be inadequate to human need. Some people get so interested in the distant that they forget the near. Some get so interested in the near that they fail to see the distant. The Christian is interested in the man with whom he rubs elbows. He is also interested in the uttermost parts of the earth. His religion has a horizon about it as roomy as the whole world. Surely here is a job big enough for the greatest and broadest among us. It is the only job that is really worthy of all our powers.

Some years ago I attended a religious meeting in Stockholm, Sweden. There was present at this meeting a missionary from China. He was said to be about the best informed man on things Chinese in that nation. Naturally great public organizations were eager for his services. The Standard Oil Company, through its representative, offered him a salary of ten thousand dollars a year. But he refused. Then the offer was increased to fifteen thousand, then to twenty-
five. Then the representative of this company said, "Set your own price. My orders are to get you whatever the price." "The salary you offered at first was plenty," came the answer. "My salary is only twelve hundred dollars a year. There is nothing wrong with your salary. It was big enough. The trouble is with your job. It is not big enough. I am out in the big business of bringing in the Kingdom of God throughout the world. That is too big to give up." Even so, "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age."
THE CHRISTMAS QUESTION

What do you think of the Christ?
Matthew 22:42

This morning we are celebrating a birthday. The celebration of birthdays is a common experience with us. Sometimes we celebrate the birthday of some notable personality who has made an outstanding contribution in point of character and service. Such celebrations are altogether wise. They serve to keep alive our sense of appreciation and also our sense of obligation; to keep alive in our individual and national lives the virtues that made our honored dead what they were.

Not only do we celebrate the birthdays of those who have died, but even more frequently we celebrate the birthdays of the living, those of our friends and those of our intimate family circle. On such days we prepare a feast; we give presents; we declare to the one whose birthday we are celebrating that we are glad it is coming. We rejoice that he has passed our way. We thus tell him that his presence has helped to add to the richness and the gladness of life.

But as we who are Christians come to celebrate the birthday of Jesus, we are combining the two kinds of celebrations mentioned above. We are remembering a child who was cradled in a manger more than nineteen centuries ago. We are remembering one whose personality was so tremendous that he cut history asunder, dividing it squarely into two parts. All the events that have taken place in this world since man began to keep a record fall into two groups, and two groups only. The one group is made up of those things that took place before Jesus came. The other group is made up of those events that took place since he came. In celebrating Christmas, therefore, we are celebrating the birthday of one who lived and died in the long ago.

But at Christmas we not only celebrate the birth of one who lived and died, but of one who is alive forevermore. When life grows hard and we find
ourselves in a bleak winter of tragedy, we do not think of George Washington at Valley Forge and appeal to him for help as greatly as we honor him, but in such hours we do appeal to Mary's baby. We appeal to him who fought his lonely fight at Gethsemane and fell under the weight of his cross as he struggled toward Calvary. This Christ of the long ago is our eternal contemporary.

"But warms sweet toward evening
Yet a peaceful help is he
The father has solid debt
And lo it is Galilee
Then He will all his dress
Is but our beds of pain
We touch Him in life still oppressed.
And we will hold again.

It is altogether fitting therefore that at this Christmas season I bring to you this question - What do you think of the Christ?

I

This is a question of supreme importance.

It is important in the first place because what we think determines what we are and what increasingly we become. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Beliefs are created. The oft repeated declaration that it does not matter what one believes so long as a life is all right is as false as it is stupid. You might as well say that it does not matter whether a grain of wheat has a germ of life in it so long as it germinates. But without life it will not germinate. What man really believes shapes both his character and his conduct.

Somewhere I read this story years ago. A committee of Japanese called to interview that great scientist, Herbert Spencer. They desired to discuss with him the advisability of adopting a state religion for Japan. This brilliant man of science agreed that such a course might be wise. Then came the next question. If a national religion is to be adopted, then what religion?
In discussing this question the Japanese themselves suggested a religion that would direct divinity to the emperor. To this Herbert Spencer agreed. He thought such a religion might promote patriotism and national unity. Being an unbeliever and looking upon all religion as equally true and, therefore, equally false, he thought that perhaps the cult of emperor worship might be the best possible for these Japanese. Therefore, they went from this interview to establish such a religion.

Now had a friend gone to Herbert Spencer when this interview was over and have told him that he had made a tragic and damnable blunder, he would in all possibility have met such an accusation with amazed incredulity. Had this friend informed the great scientist that he had been sowing dragon's teeth, had he told him that he had just planted a horrible time bomb that would one day blast whole nations into ruins, he would not have believed it. But it so happened, nonetheless. What the Japanese did was a natural outcome of what they believed.

Being taught that the emperor was the Son of Heaven, billions believed it. Since they had a leader who was divine, it was natural to expect that a greater destiny was in store for them than for people of other nations. They came naturally, therefore, to believe that they were destined to conquer and to rule the world. When they smacked at Pearl Harbor, that blow was the outcome of their faith. When their soldiers fought with fanatical heroism, when they blew themselves to bits rather than surrender, it was because they believed that having God for their emperor they would find places of special honor in heaven because of their personal loyalty. What they believed, therefore, was not a matter of secondary but of supreme importance. What they believed, therefore, was a matter of great importance because their beliefs made them what they were.

This question is important in the second place because on its answer depends the destiny of the nations and of the individual. So important it is
that if we give a wrong answer to it, though if it were possible we might give a right answer to every other question, the result would still be as tragic as that woven out of the warp and woof of despair and death. It is so important that if we give the right answer to it, though if it were possible we might give the wrong answer to every other question, life would still be a triumphant and victorious something. This is the stupendous claim by no less a person than Jesus himself. He claims that whether nations or men stand or fall, survive or perish, depends upon their attitude toward him. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock;... and every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

Why did the one house stand and the other fall? Because one was founded upon a rock and the other upon sand. Why did the wise man build upon rock? Because he believed that such a foundation would give permanence to his structure. Why did the foolish man build upon sand? He did not do so because he wanted his house to become a wreck. He had put time and money into the building of it. He was eager for it to stand. He build it upon the sand because he believed in sand. So Jesus affirms that whether men stand or fall depends on their faith in Him.

If you answer that Jesus is here talking about his teachings and not about himself, I reply that Jesus drew no distinction between himself and his teaching. Jesus was and is his teaching. He did not say "I teach the truth." He rather said "I am the truth." Recently a distinguished minister affirmed that to be a Christian was to share the faith of Jesus, which he summed up as faith in a fatherly God and the brotherhood of man. He declared that our personal attitude toward Jesus himself was not a vital matter. But such an
assertion is flatly contradictory to the teaching of the New Testament. Here both
ship
Jesus himself and his followers affirm that it is our relation to him that is
fundamental. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is
the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter
all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." Jesus is incarnate righteousness.
What we think of Him, therefore, is a matter of life and death.

II

What do you think of Christ? Possibly it would us to glance for a moment at what
those who knew him best, who came closest to him, thought of Him.

One day Jesus went out with some friends and came into the land
of Caesarea Philippi. At this time Caesarea was only a few
months away. Here he
put to them a personal question. "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" He did not
ask this question when he first invited these men to be his disciples. They began to
follow him with no clearly defined views as to who he was. They found him far the most
winsome and personality they had ever met. They hear with a feeling of
shock and amazement then, those that question in all wonder what manner of man is he.
But to their questioning they themselves could at first give no definite answer.

But here they have reached this conclusion. I take it that Simon Peter was
speaking for the group when he answered "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living
God." It is interesting to notice the reaction of Jesus to this declaration of faith.
When a few years later, a group of excited men set out to offer sacrifices to Paul and
Barnabas because they thought they were gods, these two good men here horrified.
So horrified they were that they faced stoning and possible death rather than accept such
honor.

But instead of Jesus being horrified at Simon confession, it filled him with great
enthusiasm. "Blessed art thou Simon son of Jonah," he declares. "For flesh and blood
has not revealed this unto thee but my father who is in Heaven." Since no man can
call Jesus Lord except the Holy Spirit, the Master knew that Simon had been illuminated
by the very lightning that flashed from the face of God. These early saints then saw in him values that they saw only in God. He was the word made fresh. He was Emanuel. "God come to dwell with men."

2. Then, as the result of their own experiences, they came to call him Savior. They gave him this best and dearest of names because salvation is what they had experienced in and through Him. In his presence they realized their moral ugliness. In his presence they had also realized their amazing possibilities. Through Him they had received forgiveness. Through Him the tragic quarrel between the soul and God had been healed and they had been brought into fellowship with the Divine.

Not only had Jesus saved them but set them free from the guilt of sin by giving them a task of infinite worth. "As the father has sent me into the world, even so send I you." If it is true that a man's work is his life preserver, these men had the best possible. They were divinely appointed to the task of helping to save the world.

Then this Christ who was sending them was also going with them. They came to know their risen Lord as a constant companion, as "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." He was both with and within them as a source of unfailing power and courage. In the consciousness of his presence they went out to face every experience except that of defeat. There were those in that distant day who said "we have no king but Caesar." Today their memories and their deeds are dust. This group went out affirming "we have no king but Christ" and they changed the world.

III

But this question is personal. What do you think of Christ? What others think may be vitally important, what others think may be very helpful, but that will not suffice for you and me. I have a friend who sent a manuscript to the publisher some time ago. This friend is unusually brilliant and well read. Assuming that it was useless to read much without making use of the same, he fairly filled each page with returned quotations. The result was that the publisher returned the manuscript with this word

"Too many quotations. We want to know what you think."
When Paul reached Rome, his Jewish brethren gathered about him declaring that they were aware that the sect to which he belonged was everywhere spoken against. They contended that they desired to know what he thought. In spite of the fact that we have heard nothing about it but adverse criticism, still it has remade you and brought you through. Therefore we should like to know what you think. Out of your own experience, what do you think of Jesus Christ? What is he doing to you personally?

This is the question that I bring you at this Christmas season. If one lonely and desperate were to put to you this abiding question, "What do you think of the Christ" what answer could you give? What could you say, not simply as a matter of what you have learned from others but what you have learned from Him? It is not enough to know him as an historic person. We must know him as a living presence. What have you found in Him? Suppose Jesus had never come. Suppose the news should come to you that after all these ages God was at last going to come in the flesh. What would you expect? I confess I would hardly know what to expect. From the reading of the prophets, I should shrink at the coming of the Most High and Holy One who inhabits eternity. My heart might look upward and expectant after reading the twenty-third Psalm. I might look for one who would be a good shepherd, but I confess that I found more than I could ever dream of in Mary's child. Looking to Him, I sing with the wistful cry of "all that I want, more than all, in thee I find." What then does Christmas mean to you and me? It ought to mean the time of receiving. It ought to mean the time of receiving not simply the congratulations and the gifts from our friends and loved ones but of life everlasting in Christ our Lord. He is still offering himself, he is still making good this amazing promise "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." Blessed indeed it is to receive this love. It will help to make Christmas what it ought to be.

But if it is blessed to receive, it is far more blessed to give. So Jesus learned out of his own experience and so may we learn. If it good freely to receive, it is richer still freely to give. "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall
flow rivers of living water." To receive Him as Savior and to go forth withazamaz out and be, through his power, a savior to others, that is surely the poetry of life.

Where is a story whose dire cruelty I have seldom seen surpassed. It happened years ago when I was a very small boy. I was attending my first Christmas tree. That tree was doubtless quite a small and drab affair, but it was a thing of beauty and wonder to me. Santa Claus was present in person. The presents were being distributed to eager boys and girls as we stood about the tree. But there was one boy whose name was not called. He was the village half-wit. I can see him yet as he turned his stupid face wistfully toward the miraculous tree. Then Santa Claus took down the largest box from the tree and called his name. Those lack luster eyes took on a bit of a sparkle and as he gripped his box, he let out a hugh sigh of satisfaction. He then untied it with fingers that trembled with eagerness. But when he lifted the lid he found the box empty. Some darkened soul, mistaking a tragedy for a joke, had hung an empty box on the tree for the village half-wit.

We are hanging presents upon the world's great Christmas tree, each of us, and the presents we hang are the lives we live. Some lives are empty and empty of beauty and empty of Christ. But we can say with John "And from his fullness have we all received." Then we shall give to our fellows what will enrich now and enrich forever.
MAJORING ON MINORS

"Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."

—Matthew 23:24

This is a part of one of the most scathing deliverances that ever fell from the lips of our Lord. Sometimes misguided souls speak of the Master as the "Sweet Galilean". They seem to think that He went through the world casting smiles of approval on all and sundry and uttering commendations upon every one whom He met. But how far is that from the truth! There were some whom Jesus commended with a commendation that makes the heart sing. There were others whom He denounced. There were some indeed for whom He could hardly find words bitter enough. He called them swine. He called them snakes. He wondered, in the white heat of His moral indignation, how they could escape the damnation of hell. It is of such a stern passage that this text is a part.

I

What accusation is Jesus bringing against these earnest and religious people? "You strain out a gnat," He says, according to Matthew, "and swallow down a camel." That is, "If you get a gnat in your wine, you strain and strain with the utmost care. Under no consideration would you drink a gnat. But if you get a camel in your wine, you gulp him down hairs, hide, humps, hoofs, and all." Of course there is nothing wrong in refusing to drink a gnat. Nobody would deliberately choose gnats for a beverage. But what is ridiculous is to get all exercised over something as small as a gnat and then without hesitation gulp down something that is a million times as large. That is what these Pharisees
were doing, and in so doing Jesus declared that they were majoring on minors. They were magnifying trifles while they minimized what was of vast worth.

Now these ancient Pharisees were not the only ones who were ever tempted to major on minors. That is one of the major temptations of our day and of every day. We are always prone to get our values confused. There is always danger of fixing our gaze so intently upon a molehill that we miss the mountain. We become so absorbed in a tallow-dip that we forget the sunrise. We become so absorbed in those values that are superficial and passing that we neglect those other values that are fundamental and abiding. All of us are prone to strain at the gnat and swallow the camel.

1. This is often true in our home life. For many years now I have been in a sense a court of domestic relations. I have heard about every kind of story of domestic tragedy that can be told. After listening through the years I have reached the conclusion that, generally speaking, it is not the big things that wreck marriage—it is the little things. Big things often bring husband and wife closer together. I have seen tragedy overtake the husband until wealth gave place to want, but the wife, instead of being frightened by the prospects of poverty, found a richer love for her husband and a deeper interest in living. I have seen sickness lay waste the wife until if she were to drop her hand the wedding-ring would almost slip from her finger, but this served to draw the two together by tighter bonds of affection. But the little foes—they are the foes that so often destroy the marital vow.

Years ago I married a solid, sensible girl to an educated idiot. He had a Ph. D. degree, but did not have the good sense to carry it. A heavy degree makes some folks top heavy. It was so to this man. He almost wrecked his home in an effort to prevent his wife's reading light literature. He wanted to Ph. D.-ize her in every relationship of her life. Many a marriage is able to weather the tempests of the high sea only to be drowned in a bath-tub. They swallow camels with more or less ease but get shocked to death on gnats.
Not only do husband and wife often major on minors in dealing with each other, but in dealing with their children as well. It is highly important for us to look well to the physical needs of our children. The physical and the spiritual are closely bound up in a bundle of life. But some get so absorbed in the secondary that they lose the primary. I heard a man say boastfully that he was going to see to it that his children did not have as hard time as he had. He was going to enable them to live on Easy Street. He boasted further that he was hardly acquainted with them. He rose in the morning and hurried to business before they were awake. He came home so late at night that they had already gone to bed. This man got to heaven far ahead of time. Meantime he failed to do his best for his children. It is well to look to the comfort of your child. It is tragic to neglect his character.

2. We tend to major on minors in the pursuit of our daily vocations. A business man said hotly sometime ago, "I am not in business for my health." Usually when a man makes that sort of statement, he is confessing his own moral failure. He is saying, "I am in business strictly for the money. I am not concerned with the needs of others. I am not looking after the interests of my customer. I am strictly out for Number One." Such a position is, of course, bad morals, but it is bad business as well. Certainly some men are not in business for their health. They wreck their health in order to get it.

But generally speaking, when a man says this, he is more or less slandering himself. He is slandering his fellows. Naturally the profit motive has its part in business. I believe it will have for a long time. But to make it the supreme and only motive is to major on minors. To be convinced of this, it is only necessary to ask what would be the effect should other men take the same position. For instance, suppose a physician should say, "I am not practicing medicine for my health. I am out strictly for the money. What happens to my patient is no primary concern of mine." Suppose I should stand in my place
and say, "I am a minister, but I want you to know that I am preaching strictly for what I get out of it. I have not the slightest bit of concern for your good either today or tomorrow. I am not in the ministry for my health. I am looking out for Number One." You would be horrified at such a word as that from me. Yet I have exactly the same right to say that about my vocation as you have to say that about yours. To make getting the primary aim is to major on minors.

3. We run this risk in our religious work. Personally I am a great believer in getting results in the work of the church, but many a time we have put the outward success above inward attainment. We have put achievement above character. We are prone to judge every service of the church by its outward achievement. I went into a newspaper office sometime ago. On the wall in box-car letters were these words: 57 RULES FOR MAKING A SUCCESS. Being interested in success, I stopped to read. They ran as follows: 1. Deliver the goods. 2. It doesn't matter about the other fifty-six.

Do you remember that rather strange word that Jesus said to His disciples when they had returned from a very successful evangelistic tour? They had been out on a mission of healing the sick, of casting out demons, of winning men to their Lord. They were joyful and enthusiastic over the results. "Even devils," they said, "were subject to us through Thy Name. We delivered the goods!" But Jesus failed to share their enthusiasm. "Rejoice not," He said, "that devils are subject unto you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." A rather strange word on the surface!

What does He mean? He means that the biggest attainment is rightness with God. To have one's name written in heaven, in the language of the Bible, is to be enrolled among the saints. It is to be right with God. He means also that it is possible to attain splendid results and yet not have our names written in heaven. It is possible to call the stations along the track and yet never visit those stations ourselves. It is possible for unchristian men—even anti-Christian men—to do Christlike service. So Jesus said! So you have seen! It
used to puzzle me how a man whose character I had every right to believe was crooked could have results that were good. But if the devil himself were to say to a sinner, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," the man would be saved in spite of the devil. Getting a good job done in religious work is not proof positive of a good character. Results are important, but the biggest result is personal goodness. To neglect this is to major on minors.

II

Why are we so prone to do this?

1. The first reason, I am sure, seem a bit strange. We often major on minors because of our lack of sense of humor. We may have a good sense of humor and still major on minors. But if we have none, we are more likely to do so. Take the despots of history. How few of them could laugh! How would you like to deliver a humorous address to an audience made up of Hitlers? Before we got into the war I read this story: In the German Reich there was a man known as the Will Rogers of Germany. Soon after Hitler came to power, he was forbidden to make jokes about politics. Therefore, he said one night, "I cannot joke about politics since Herr What's-his-name has come to power." For this he was sent to a concentration camp for six months. When he was out, he came back to the theatre and described a concentration camp. He said, "It is surrounded by a concrete wall. It is further surrounded by barbed wire that is charged with electricity where one may be electrocuted. It is surrounded by a moat full of water where one may be drowned. It is surrounded by a field that is mined where one may be blown up. But in spite of all this I can get back into that concentration camp in five minutes." For this he was sent up for twelve months.

When he was out again, he went back to the theater not as an actor, but the crowd saw him and asked him for a joke. He said he saw none and was sent up for eighteen months. Released once more, he went to work in a beer-garden.
One night Goebbels came and discovered him. "Make us laugh," he shouted. "The Third Reich loves jokes." "That is a joke," said the humorist. For that he was sent up again and, so far as the record goes, he is there to this day. To have no sense of humor increases your chances of majoring on minors.

2. Then often we major on minors because we have a small way of looking at things. We magnify trifles until we become trifling. Generally speaking, worry is bad. It becomes its wicked worst when our very worries are over petty things that matter little. We get so absorbed in our own small annoyances that it obscures the millions who are suffering and dying around the world. Perhaps you have heard of the chap who, when he got to heaven, looked out on that new world with a frown and said, "I am in heaven, it is true. But I came up on the dampest cloud that I ever saw."

3. Then we major on minors because we get our values confused. Some of us cannot distinguish the passing and the superficial from the fundamental and abiding. Years ago two rival steamboats left New Orleans for the city of Memphis. Soon after their departure they began to race. One of them was carrying a cargo of hams. When the engineer realized that his boat was in danger of losing the race, he threw two or three hams into the fire. He saw that the steam was increased. Therefore, he threw another and another. By and by he reached Memphis and won the race, but he had burned up his cargo on the way. What a tragedy to get our values so confused that in an effort to win the race of life we burn up its purpose on the way.

III

How shall we avoid this tragedy?

1. Naturally the first step is keeping alive our sense of humor. This may not be fundamental but it is very near it. Blessed is the man who can laugh. Blessed especially is the man who can laugh at his own petty foibles and failures. James G. Blaine ran for the Presidency. He lost. His defeat broke his heart.
All life went into eclipse. He died prematurely because he felt that he had nothing left for which to live. Taft got defeated for the same high office. His defeat came about from causes that tended to make him very bitter. His friend, Theodore Roosevelt upon whose backing he had a right to count, not only refused to back him but ran against him. But those of you who heard Taft speak will recall the delicious humor that would shake his great big body as he would tell you that he had the honor of being defeated by the largest majority of any man who had ever run for the Presidency up to his day. He refused to major on minors. Blessed, therefore, is the man who can laugh. It is little short of a positive duty to look round in this wonderful world and find something to laugh at. In case you can't find it, you certainly ought to look in the glass and see what the other fellow laughs at.

2. Keep clear your sense of values. Distinguish between what is temporal and what is abiding. Distinguish between what meets life's needs and what leaves the heart hungry and dissatisfied. Jesus watched the mad scramble of men for things of secondary value until He turned to them with pained amazement and said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world—not simply some worthless gewgaw of the marketplace—but if he gain the whole world and lose his life?" What profit indeed! Blessed is the man who keeps clear his sense of values.

3. If you are to avoid majoring on minors, give God the center of your life. Ours is a day that has minimized a man's personal salvation. It has been fashionable to boast that we are so busy looking after the needs of others that we have no time for the needs of our own souls. That sounds very big and brawny. It sounds very unselfish, but over against it I offer these suggestions.

(1). Such a seemingly broad-minded and unselfish position has no sanction in the Scriptures. This old-fashioned Book seems to believe that it is a man's first duty to see that he himself is saved. It recognizes the fact that in spite
of all our activities we might have to make this pathetic confession: "They made me keeper of the vineyards but mine own vineyard have I not kept." It emphasizes the fact that it is possible to be very holy about holy things and at the same time lose all sense of your holy Lord. "Rejoice not," said Jesus, "merely in your work, but rejoice in your rightness with God. That rightness comes of His mercy and His mercy is better than your merit.

(2) Not only is mere busyness not an end in itself, but those who accomplish most through their efforts are those who are themselves right with God. When we look over the history of the church, when we look back upon our own yesterdays, those who have helped most have been those who have been most. The first step towards doing more is being more. Those early disciples after Pentecost accomplished the impossible in a difficult world because they had become Christlike in their personal lives.

(3) It is only this rightness with God that brings solid satisfaction. It is only such rightness that can meet our deepest need here and tomorrow. When rugged, battling John Knox was near the end of the journey, the watchers at his bed-side heard him grown in an agony of conflict. By and by the struggle passed, and the light of a great joy broke over his face. Then he explained his struggle. He said, "The devil came to me and tried to tell me that after an earnest and courageous life like mine I deserved salvation. But I defeated him by bringing all my good deeds and all my bad deeds and laying them down at the foot of the Cross and accepting salvation as a gift." He put Christ at the center. Nothing else will do. To count on any salvation except what comes from Him alone is to major on minors.
"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom."

--Matthew 25:1

Here is a story that has gripped the hearts and imaginations of the centuries. It is a romantic story that comes close to life. I think of all the stories that Jesus told, none is more fascinating. Perhaps also none has been more consistently misunderstood and misinterpreted. Generally speaking, the crisis referred to in this story has been that of the Second Coming of Jesus. Naturally, this crisis may be included, but it is certainly not the only one to which the story refers. Otherwise it would have meant little or nothing to all the centuries that have passed since the days of Jesus.

This is not to say that the Early Church did not believe in the immediate, visible, and bodily return of Jesus. They did believe in what we call the "Second Coming" emphatically. Paul referred to it as "that blessed hope." He with his fellow saints lived in daily expectation of seeing the heavens blaze with glory at the visible coming of the Lord. They, as many today, did not believe that the Kingdom could come by orderly processes. It must be ushered in by crisis and by crisis only. But just as no honest reading of the New Testament can deny their expectation of the immediate bodily return of Jesus, neither can it be denied that Jesus failed to come in this fashion.

What then are we concluding? That all these saints were mistaken? Are we to conclude that Jesus inspired a faith that He could not satisfy? By no means. The great seers of the Old Testament were sure that God was going to become manifest after some fashion in the flesh. But while they were sure of the fact, they had no clear conception of the method. A few deep-hearted prophets saw Him as the Suffering Servant. But the popular view was that He was coming as a King.
Therefore, when He came as a little child by way of the manger, they failed to recognize Him and did not receive Him. But the supreme essential fact was that Jesus did come as the prophets expected. Even so, He came to the Early Church, but He came not visibly in the power of the flesh, but invisibly in the power of the Holy Spirit.

To what crisis then does this story refer? It refers to every crisis that comes in our lives. Jesus is here emphasizing the fact that life is made up of tests. Each day brings to us its own opportunity, its own choices. Day by day we are being tested. We can see how close akin this parable is to the study of the morning. To live in a world like ours is to be tested. However sheltered our lives may be, we are constantly standing at the forks of the road. We are constantly coming face to face with experiences that test us and try our souls.

Sometimes we are tested by experiences that are unwelcome. We are called upon to face losses that break our hearts. We lose our wealth or we lose our health, and there is the setting of a great hope in our lives like the setting of the sun. One day the brothers of Joseph looked across the plains about Dothan and discovered that they were soon to have a visitor. They recognized Joseph by his many-colored coat. They recognized him perchance by his swagger. They did not like him. They said one to another, "That dreamer is coming." And when the dreamer came, they thrust him into an old dry well. From this they lifted him into the light of the sun not to set him free, but to sell him into slavery. It was a terrible test.

The iron entered into Joseph's soul that day. But the road upon which these evil brothers set Joseph's feet, did not lead him to a slave-pen, as they expected, but to a palace on the Nile, and to a usefulness that enriches us to this day.

At other times we are tested by experiences that are altogether welcome. That was the case in this story. Here are ten girls who have been selected as a bridal party. They are to await the coming of the bridegroom and as torch-bearers escort him to the home of his bride where the marriage ceremony is to be said and a feast is to be spread. It is not a gruesome experience; it is an experience to
which they look forward joyfully and eagerly. To them it is a glad privilege, a romantic opportunity. But whether welcome or unwelcome, life is constantly bringing us face to face with experiences that test us and try our souls.

II

What do these tests do for us?

1. They reveal to ourselves and others what we are. A sudden test neither makes us or breaks us. It merely takes a snapshot of our real selves. It shines the light upon our faces. This light does not make our faces either clean or unclean, but it reveals them for what they are. Near my home in Tennessee there stood a magnificent tree. One day a storm grew up and that tree crashed in ruins. When it fell, we discovered that it was a mere hollow shell. The storm did not rot it down from within. It only revealed a weakness that was already there. Near that tree was another, but it was not wrecked by the storm; it was only made the stronger.

So it was with these ten girls. Jesus tells us that five of them were sensible while five were foolish. Foolishness here is not used in the sense of lacking in intelligence. The rich farmer was called a fool not because he was stupid, but because he had no sense of spiritual values. To the outward eye all these girls were alike. By looking at them you could not say, "This one is sensible, while that one is foolish."

First, they were alike in their outward equipment. They were all dressed for the wedding. The sensible so far as we knew were dressed no better than the foolish. They all had costumes befitting the occasion. As they were alike in their dress, so were they alike in their equipment. They were invited as torch-bearers. Therefore, every girl had a torch. This was true of the foolish just as it was true of the sensible.

Not only were they alike in their outward equipment, but they were alike in their knowledge and in their ignorance. They all knew that the bridegroom was
coming sometime. They knew what was necessary in order for them to measure up to the occasion. They must be light bringers. They knew for this that oil was necessary. They also knew whether they had oil or not. They were alike in their ignorance of when the bridegroom was coming. They were sure that he was coming sometime, but whether he would come in the next moment or in the next hour was not theirs to know. While the bridegroom tarried, they all became drowsy and slept. Sleep is a symbol of their ignorance. The sensible slept as soundly as the foolish.

Finally, they were alike in their expectations. If you had said to one of the sensible girls, "You have been invited to be a torch-bearer to the forthcoming wedding. Do you really expect to go through with it? Do you expect to meet the bridegroom and go with him into the feast? Or are you counting on being shut out in the dark?"—this sensible girl would have answered, "Certainly, I intend to get into the feast. That is why I am here." But the foolish girl was just as sure that she was going to participate in this glad ceremony as was the sensible. There was really only one difference between them. The sensible girl had a present readiness for the emergency while the foolish girl did not.

Look at the picture. While the bridegroom tarried they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Behold the bridegroom. Go you out to meet him." Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. But the foolish said unto the sensible, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out." All these ten girls had lamps, but the foolish failed to supply themselves with oil. Therefore, their lamps began to splutter and go out. The sudden coming of the bridegroom did not put out their lamps. His sudden coming did not rob them of their oil. It only revealed the fact that they were not ready. Had he delayed his coming for years, the result would have been the same. The crisis did not make nor break them. It simply showed what they were. III

What they were conditioned their future. We enter the door for which we have made ourselves ready. That door opens to us of its own accord, but God Himself cannot thrust us through any
other. Whatever oil means, it was that something without which they could not enter the feast. Therefore, when these foolish girls saw that their lamps were sluttering and going out, they made a pathetic appeal to their sensible sisters.

"Give us of your oil," they said in desperation, "for our lamps are going out." The answer of these sensible girls sounds rather sauë and heartless. They refused to share with their foolish sisters. "Not so," they said, "lest there be not enough for us and you. But go rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves." No less an authority than Emerson said that the sensible ought to have shared with the foolish. But with all due respect to this great man, I must differ. It was not the duty of the wise to share with the stupid for the simple reason that they could not. There are some values that we can pass from one to the other without difficulty. Money, for instance—"'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands."

But there are other values that are not transferrable. Here, for instance, are two brothers. They were both gifted with sound bodies. But one violates the laws of health while the other is obedient. By and by a scourge comes. Maybe it is no more than the epidemic of a common cold. But one is stricken while the other is not. But the healthful one cannot share his health germs with his dissipated brother. I watched a young fellow face the ordeal of death a few years ago. He was horribly afraid. That is not generally the case. As a rule death administers its own anesthetic. But this young man faced the future with stark horror. Yet at his side was a consecrated mother. She was a woman of faith. She would have given her life for her laddie, but she could not put her faith into the hands of her needy son. Money may be passed from hand to hand, but character is not transferrable.

Instead of undertaking the impossible task of sharing their oil, they told their foolish sisters all they could tell them. "Go rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves." Then what? While they went to buy, the bridesroom came and they that were ready went in with him into the feast, and the door was shut.
The sensible entered because they were ready to enter. The door was shut in the face of the others because they were not ready. They are those who fancy that these foolish girls hurried away, supplied themselves with oil, and came to knock at the door to find it shut in their faces in some arbitrary fashion because they had obtained the oil too late. But that is to misread the story. They did not obtain the oil at all. Otherwise the door would have opened to them. They waited until the house was on fire to take out insurance. They waited until the ship was sinking to learn to swim. These tests, then, that come to us reveal us for what we are. They also decide our tomorrow. This is the case because we are always entering the future by the door of the past.

Long centuries ago Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, laid siege to Jerusalem and captured it. He then took the choicest of its citizens, old and young, and carried them with him into exile. It was a tragedy very much akin to those that have been enacted in our own day. When these captives had reached distant Babylon, they encamped on the banks of the river Euphrates. Then one day an officer came among them, picking out the most intelligent of the youth to be trained for government service. Among those selected was a youth of some twelve to sixteen named Daniel.

To be thus chosen was to have a door of opportunity open wide. But when Daniel reached the palace, he found himself face to face with a crisis. When dinner was served, there were placed before him dishes that he could not eat in good conscience. But instead of postponing the issue, instead of pleading a headache, he faced up to the test frankly. He said, "I cannot eat this." "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." I can imagine he had a friend right at his side who looked at him with a kind of horror. This friend wrote home after dinner and said, "My dear Father, I have decided to eat the king's meat and drink the king's wine. Everybody is doing it—that is, everybody except Daniel."
Now the years slip by and we come to another scene. A bunch of petty politicians are eager to get rid of Daniel. He is the most influential man in Babylon. They offer varied suggestions. Then, one said, "I know how we can ruin him. Maneuver him into a position where he must choose between loyalty to God and loyalty to his king. Then you will have him because he will stand to his God." What a compliment! So they had a law passed that nobody could pray for the next thirty days to anyone except to the king.

Then what? Listen: "When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went up into his upper chamber and opened his window toward Jerusalem and prayed as he had done aforetime." He was entering his future through the door of his past. By the fidelities of yesterday he was enabled to triumph in today and tomorrow. This friend of Daniel that we have imagined—where is he? Forgotten long ago. Babylon itself has been a heap of ruins for long centuries. Only one thing is left standing—that is the character of Daniel and the window out of which he prayed. Consequently, we enter the future through the past.

IV

This is true not only in the realm of religion, but in every department of life. No experience, however seemingly helpful, can be of any good to you unless you are ready to make good out of it. When I was a boy, I used to trap for quail. One morning I went to my trap to find no quail but a cardinal. This cardinal was a fierce, wild, fighting creature. I wanted to make him a pet, but I soon saw that it was impossible. He was made for freedom. So I opened the door of his cage and let him out into the world for which he was fitted. It was the greatest service I could do him. But if you were to do that for your canary, it would not be a service. So long as he has been coddled and cared for that to set him free would mean nothing more than a dinner for a cat. We enter the door for which we are ready in the life that now is. Our land is enriched by splendid libraries. What a treasure is offered in the realm of books! "Reading," says Bacon, "makes
a full man." That fullness is for us. We have the privilege of losing ourselves in other men's minds. We have access to those books that Milton describes as "the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, enshrined and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." It is said of Sir Walter Scott that he gave to the world a thousand years of intense living. We are heirs to that intense living, but only the ready go in. In the face of the unready the door to the library is closed.

Once while visiting in Europe I stood in one of the great art galleries of the world. It was interesting to see the vast difference between those who visited that gallery. Some hurried past those great canvases where the artists had spilled out their dreams with scarcely a glance. They did not have time for such trifling matters. They had to hurry back to the hotel and play bridge. But others would stand at rapt attention. Some entered into the feast while in the face of others the door was shut.

While I was a student at Harvard, the papers carried the news that that great Wagnerian opera, Parcifal, was going to be sung in English at one of the Boston theaters. I had never heard a grand opera. I had no idea how grand it was. Therefore, I decided to attend. Having come out of the hill country, I secured my ticket in the highlands of the opera house. I looked forward with eagerness to the great feast of music that I was sure was to be mine. But when the time came, it was vastly disappointing. "Isn't that wonderful?" a musical friend said to me after some wild, blood-curdling wail. "Indeed it was," I answered. "I didn't know anybody could do it." What was wrong? The fault was not that of Wagner. It was not that of the artists. The fault was not that of the ushers nor of the management. I was simply not ready.

The same is true of the great feast of marriage. I am thinking of two couples. One of these was made up of a young chap who was wilful and self-indulgent, who had sacrificed on many a way-side altar. The girl was as selfish and wilful as he was. Each one was bent on going his own way. They married with it in the back of their minds that if they did not like it they could ditch the whole matter. Of course,
ditch it they did. Having squandered themselves in petty flirtations when they came to the supreme sacramental moment of life, they had nothing to give. The other two exercised a wise reserve. Their marriage has been an ever enriching romance. The difference is not accidental. They both entered the door for which they were ready.

2. As we enter the door for which we are now ready in the life that now is, so do we in the life that is to come. Here is the consideration that makes a differing destiny an absolute essential. We have traveled far from the old-fashioned burning hell of our fathers. In fact, hell has become an altogether useless affair except as a rather mild and lady-like swear word. But forget it how we may, argue around it how we will, some kind of hell is an absolute necessity. It is impossible not to believe in some sort of hell because so many are experiencing hell today. "Do you believe in hell?" I asked a visitor sometime ago. "Indeed I do," he answered fiercely. "That is where I live."

It is a fact that there are those living in hell all about us in spite of the love of God. If God cannot save them from hell here, I do not know how we can expect Him to do so by and by. In sober fact there is no way of restoring any man into heaven when he has hell in his own soul. The door of heaven stands wide open for every man, but only the ready can enter it. To be unready in heaven would be to be in hottest hell. That is what Jesus meant by His answer to the mother of James and John. "Grant," she asked, "that my two sons may sit the one on the right hand and the other on the left in thy kingdom." That," replied Jesus, "is not mine to give." It is for those who make themselves ready for it. If Fritz Kreisler were playing in our city tomorrow night, he might love me as a brother, but he could not guarantee that I would enjoy his concert beyond anyone else. My enjoyment would depend on the music that I have in my own soul.

Here then is an arresting, solemnizing fact. We are meeting tests day by day, ever one of us. What we do with the tests of today will depend largely upon what we did with the tests of yesterday. To fail in life's commonplace days, to
be guilty of petty disloyalties with each passing hour is someday to become guilty of some damming disloyalty that might wreck us in time and in eternity. But on the other hand to be faithful to the small tests, to the obscure duties of life's commonplace days is to gather strength that will enable us to stand when life's big hour is upon us. They that are ready go in to the feast here and yonder. In the faces of others the door is shut. Not even God can open it.
They that were ready went in. They always do enter and they alone. To them the door opens automatically. There was once a young enthusiast that desired to liberate his people. He made a spasmodic effort and miserably failed. Forty years later when the rose of youth had gone from his cheeks God said to him, "Now I will send thee." Why not before? He was not ready. He needed to see his hope fall about him like the shattered petals of a rose. He was not ready till then.

A gifted young student once entered the school of the most gifted teacher that ever taught. After attending school for three years he was self-expelled. And he died with a rope about his neck. After he was gone Peter never said of him that he went to hell. He said that he went to his own place. He felt a thousand hands, hot hands, burning hands pulling at him tugging at him, till he cried, "Loose me, Loose me and I will spring into hell. I know I must go. I know I am going to my own place." And to hell he sprang. Likewise Paul was being lifted by invisible hands up to that home where there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness.

Doors open to the ready and to no others. It is so in the world of art. I was in a great gallery. I watched the people hurry through. I did a little hurrying myself. There were the works of the great masters. But those who rushed by did not see them. Turner was there showing how he had stolen the sheen from the rivers and the fleeces from the clouds and had flung them upon the canvas. They never saw. They were not ready.

I went to hear Parsifal. I sat in the highland part of the theater. Some face were glad with the wonder of the music. But mine was not. I could get glimpses now and then of the wonders that the master must have had in mind. But I got terribly tired. I had paid my way. The usher honored my ticket. But I never really got in. I was not ready. To me the door was shut. I did not have a fight with the man at the door. I had no difficulty with the usher. They were as courteous as could be. They showed me my seat and I sat on it. But I never really got in. And there was none to blame but myself.

When Bull played at Knoxville the fiddlers that came to hear him did not get in for ever so long. At last he played Arkansas Traveller. For that they were ready. They might have been in before. But they were not ready. You get everywhere, in this world and in that which is to come to the place, the joy for which you are ready.

She stood within sight of its heaving billows and exclaimed:—"Isn't it cute? Of course she never saw the sea. Wordsworth went out into the field and found heaven. For to him the meanest flower that blows could give thoughts that lie too deep for tears. He saw back of the flower, back of the green stem that supported it the mighty God that made it to bloom.
CRAWFORD, TEXAS,

You are going to enter the door for which you are ready. There is the library, but you will never get into it unless you are ready. No amount of millions can gain your admission.

My first advice then is that we get ready for the best. It is only thus that we will get the best in this life and the life to come. Darwin got to the place where he could not enjoy music. The great master mathematician had nothing to say of the singing of Jenny Lind save "What does she prove?"

If you are going to be ready for the best you must begin your preparation early. You cannot reach the best with the mere butt end of a life. The Last Supper is treasure now, but it is only a fragment. How much better to have treasured it before it became almost a ruin. Do not wait till the best part of life is gone before you begin to get ready to live.

You will need a physical preparation. There is an intimate connection between the body and the mind. There must be a sound body if the soul is to do its best work through that body. Keep it clean. You are the temple of the Holy Ghost. Buckingham Palace and Cecil Hotel.

There must be a mental preparation. The man who goes out into the world without that to-day is courting his own failure.

But these are not enough. The fatal breakdown of mere efficiency has been most strikingly seen in the present war. Germany is the most efficient nation in the world. But look at the result. During the steamboat day of the Mississippi there was a boat so eager to beat a revival that it burned up a large part of its cargo. It is so with the modern man. He will come at last into port empty, having burned up on the way, in his mad eagerness to get on, that which gave reason for his voyage.

It is said that the war in Europe is a signal for us to get ready. To get ready for what peace or war? Those who say that we are to get ready by building more battle ships mean that it is time for us to prepare for war. And the nation that is prepared for war will enter into war. It is inevitable. It is a signal for us to get ready. To get ready by bringing into our modern educational system something that has been all too largely ignored. We are to get ready by a larger moral training. We are to learn that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. We are to be able to see through the mists of national pride and honor the real death's head that lies behind them.

Efficiency is not enough. When the suicides became so prevalent in the Penn. University they sent for Billy Sunday. And they grew less. Why? Because this man was able to bring the missing chord into play. Man cannot get along without the training of his religious nature.

Half of our people go to church schools, the other half to the State. The half that belongs to the State furnishes six percent to the ministry. The other half eighty-seven to Foreign Missions against eighty-four. Six to Home against eighty-four.
And at the close of the day you are going to enter into the place for which you are ready. You, as Judas, are going to your own place. You will go where you fit in. If you are ready for the association of the redeemed, among them you will find yourself. If for the damned, there you will open your eyes. And if in this life you find yourself upon the Devil's cinder heap, just remember that it is the place for which you have prepared yourself. And if at last you wake in hell among the outcast and the damned you will have to say as you face your own soul. This is the crowd for which I prepared myself. This is the company for which I was ready. They that were ready went into the feast. They that were ready went also to hell. The place for which we are ready draws us like a mighty magnet. And God himself cannot lift a man into heaven who has schooled himself for hell. O, Heart, you are going in at the door for which are ready. Which door?
"They that were ready went into the marriage feast, and the door was shut." Matthew 25:10

"And the door was shut." That word has a fatal finality about it.

Life is full of shut doors. They are slamming in our faces day by day and hour by hour. There are some we ought to shut. To fail to do so is to be weak and undecided. To fail to do so is to be wretched. There is no surer road to an ineffective and unhappy life than the inability to shut a door once we have passed through it.

There are certain supreme decisions that ought to be made once and for all. One secret of the strength of Ghandi was that having made up his mind, neither man nor circumstances could unmake it for him. "Селът!" says Jesus, in one memorable passage. In other words, having passed through the door, forget it.

There are other doors that shut of their own accord. We do not have to close them; they close themselves. That is true, for instance, of the door that leads into the past. This is the last Sunday of the Old Year. Yesterday has gone. It is as completely beyond our reach as the first day that ever dawned upon this world. Each hour brings its own opportunities and privileges. When it is passed, it gathers up those opportunities and privileges and slips through the gate way into the past. Others come but we never get those back. There is no way of getting through that closed door into the past. However we may pound on that door with bruised fists or tamper at its lock with blood stained hands fingers.

"The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on. Nor all your tears washed out a single word of it."
That is what the Bible means by saying that Esau, having sold his birthright, found no place for repentance. We are not to understand by this that God did not forgive Esau. We are to understand that Esau found no way of undoing the past. There was no way that he could get back into yesterday and claim the opportunities that were his in youth's bright morning long ago. He could still start afresh. The cup that he had marred in the making could still be made over, but there was no way of undoing the past. For Esau the door was shut.

Here is an exceedingly bitter cry: "O Absalom, my son, my son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee." Why is there so much agony in that cry? This father is realizing the finality of his loss. "I will do better next time", we are fond of saying, but there are too many things that have no next time. One of them is the rearing of a son. David had shirked his responsibility and Absalom had gone wrong. And these wild sobs that come to us from across the centuries are the sobs of a man in whose face the door is shut.

Now, in the story before us there is a shut door. It is a striking fact that this door was not shut, as would appear on the surface, from the inside, it is true of so many of the doors that are shut in our faces. The doors that lead into life's supreme opportunities are shut, if at all, by our own hands. In the Book of Revelation we hear Jesus saying to a certain church, "I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it". That is true not only of the church but of the individual. Before you and me there stands an open door to the highest and the best. Neither man nor circumstances can shut it in our faces. We can shut it with our own hands. So was the door shut in the story of which my text is a part.
Look at the picture. It is a scene of romance. It is a wedding scene. It takes place at night as all Oriental weddings take place. Here the bride and bridesmaids wait for the bridegroom instead of the groom waiting for the bride as it is in the West. The climax of the wedding is when the bridegroom, with his attendants, goes to the house of the bride, where she waits with her bridesmaids, to escort her in procession to his own home. So these ten bridesmaids were waiting. They went there as torch bearers to take part in the ceremony.

Now Jesus tells us that these lovely maidens were not all alike. He divides them into two groups. That is a familiar practice. He was constantly dividing folks into two groups, either those who travel life by the broad way and those who travel by the narrow; those who built on rock and those who built on sand; those who were spiritually alive and those who were spiritually dead. Here he divided them into those who were wise and those who were foolish. It is good that he tells us that they were not all alike, because to us there seems nothing to choose between them.

1. They were alike in their appearance and in their equipment. If you had looked at those ten girls you could not have distinguished the wise from the foolish. They were all dressed in wedding attire. They all had lamps. That were little metal affairs put on the end of a pole. From the spout there was a wick protruding that was lighted. Each girl was dressed in wedding attire and equipped with a lamp.

2. They were alike in their purposes and intentions. The girls who were wise definitely intended to participate in the wedding and to enter into the marriage feast. They had made up their minds to that. But the foolish were just as sure that they were going to join the
marriage procession and enter into the feast as were the wise. They were all alike in their intentions. Not one of them had the slightest fear of being shut out in the night.

3. They were alike in their ignorance as to the exact time of the bridegroom's coming. "While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept." Sleep is a symbol of ignorance. Everybody goes to bed early in the East. Since the bridegroom did not come until midnight, these girls went to sleep. All of them slept just as soundly as did the foolish. When the bridegroom came they were startled out of their sleep, all of them, wise and foolish alike.

II

But while in outward aspect, in ignorance and knowledge, they were alike, there was a difference between them that was fundamental. While all of them were dressed for the wedding, while all of them intended to participate in the wedding, while all of them were ignorant as to the exact time of the bridegroom's coming, they differed in this - One group had a present readiness for his coming and the other did not. This was so important as to decide their destiny - witness how this was made manifest. It was manifested by a crisis. We sometimes seem to fancy that a crisis makes us strong or makes us weak, but that is not the case. A crisis simply flashes the light into our faces revealing what we are. Tests are coming every day. These tests neither make nor break us. We make or break ourselves according to what these tests find in us. Here, for instance, are two young men who are faced with similar situations. One of them, the nephew of a famous minister of Chicago, stepped into his uncle's office one Saturday morning and asked his uncle "what is your text
for tomorrow?" "To this end was I born and for this cause came I into
the world" the minister answered. It made the young man
thoughtful for a moment. "What was I made for?" he asked. "I don't know",
came the answer, but if you take the first step, God will show you."

That young man went out from this interview down the streets. He saw a
crowd gather. When he rushed to the scene, he noticed that a
theater, the Iráquois Theater, was on fire. Instead of being a mere
spectator, he rushed in to help save the victims. He brought out one after
another until he had saved thirteen. Then a piece of timber fell upon him,
giving him an injury from which he died a few hours later. But when his
uncle reached the hospital where he had been carried, he was still conscious.
Knowing that he was passing, he smiled into the face of his uncle and said,
"To this end was I born, that I might save thirteen."

Here is another scene. A young couple is sitting in another theater,
side by side. They are engaged to be married. Suddenly there was a puff
of smoke near the stage and some hysterical person shouted "Fire!" This
young man, without a glance at the girl, sprang to his feet, ran wildly down the aisle, and out into the street. He had gone some two blocks
before he dared look back. Then he saw that nobody was running but himself.

He stopped, hesitated, turned back. Arriving at the theater, he found that the
fire was a false alarm. He slipped in and sat down by his bride-to-be, but
she never spoke to him; hasn't spoken to him since. That cry of fire did
not make him a coward, it just revealed the cowardice that was already there.
She wisely refused to marry a man whose first passion was to look out for
number one.

Even so, when the cry of "Behold, the bridegroom" was heard, all these
sleeping girls came awake. At once they began to trim their lamps that had
been burning all the while. But while one group of girls pouring in
fresh oil, the lamps of the other's began to sputter and go out. Therefore, in desperation, they turned to their friends with this pathetic appeal, "Give me some of your oil for our lamps will go out". "No", came the seemingly smug and selfish answer, "but go rather to them that have and buy for yourselves."

This scene is pictured marvelously in Wellesley College. I remember looking at it as a student years ago. The foolish girl, with tragedy written in every line of her face, is making her appeal to the wise. But the wise is putting her hand over her treasure of oil and you can see refusal written in her face. It is a fascinating picture. When Emerson looked at it, he said, "The wise ought to have divided with the foolish."

But as rash as it may seem, I must differ with Mr. Emerson. She ought not to have divided. This is the case because nobody is under obligations to do what is in the nature of things they cannot do. There are some values that you can share with me. If I am hungry, you can put a piece of bread in my hands. If I am broke, you can give me a coin. If I am certain material you can give me ______. Certain material values are transferable, but life's supreme values are not transferable. What I meant and meant not share with.

I was talking to my oldest brother, Dr. E. B. Chappell, a little while before he passed into the great blessedness. He was one of the most scholarly and lovable saints that it has been my privilege to know. He then was past eighty years of age. I congratulate myself that we were close together and that he loved me dearly. Why, then, since he was ready to pass into a richer life, did he not give to me his scholarship and Christlikeness? Because he could not. There are some things you can give me but you cannot slip into my trembling hands your Christlike character. Character is not thus transferable.
Years ago an earnest mother asked me to speak to a lad who was a weight upon her heart. Of all to whom I have spoken across a long ministry, he, I think, was the most resentful. He said bitterly, "I know my mother asked you to talk to me, and neither she nor you can force me to be different from what I am." A few months later I was called in the dark to talk to that young man. He was slipping into eternity and he was afraid. Not many folks are afraid. Death usually administers its own anesthetic. But this boy was afraid.

He turned to me in utter desperation and said, "Tell me how to pray." I did my best. In the meantime his mother sat by and watched his agony. How gladly she would have given him her faith, her Christlike character, her all, but she couldn't. The finest treasures of life cannot be slipped from hand to hand. This oil that the foolish girls did not have was a treasure without which she could not take part in the wedding. It signifies Christlike character. To possess that, every one of us must go to God for ourself. So this wise girl said all she could say, "Go and buy for yourself." Thus when the bridegroom came some of these girls were not ready.

III

What was the result? In spite of their good intentions, they put off their preparation. Having made a wrong choice, that wrong choice led to a wrong character. That wrong character in turn led to a wrong destiny. The door of the feast was shut in their faces.

Here is the way the Master puts it: "While they went to buy". That is, while they were in search of that character that is necessary for entrance, the bridegroom came and the door was shut. We sometimes imagine that these girls who came later to knock on the door had at last obtained the required oil, but were a little late in attaining it. To take that view is to miss
the meaning of the story. They failed ever to find oil, therefore the door was shut in their faces.

Who shut the door? It was not shut by circumstances; it was not shut by God who had turned into an angry judge. It was shut by the only ones that could shut it. It was shut by themselves. They failed to get in, not because they were late, not because they were vicious, not because God had ceased to be merciful. They were shut out because they were not ready.

There is nothing unique about this. I am thinking of two young couples who stood at the marriage altar. To the outward eye the success of one couple was just as sure as that of the other. But one of these couples had grown up without discipline. They had learned in childhood that if they stamped their feet hard enough and shrieked long enough, they could get their way. They were both intensely selfish. They knew nothing of forbearance. Therefore, when they knocked at the door of a happy marriage relationship, the door was shut.

Here is another couple. They have had a lovely training. They had learned the fine art of forbearance. To them the door opened almost of its own accord. It takes two to make a marriage if you are ready to enter into the feast, but if you are not, even God can't thrust you into it.

When you go to the concert you enter into the feast of music, not in proportion to the desire of the artist, but in proportion to your own readiness. When you go to the library you find the richness of books in proportion to your readiness.

We need not be surprised that the same law holds with the doors to which we come day by day. We need not be surprised that the same laws hold at the final door. You may count on it that a loving God is going to let everybody into heaven who has any fit for that place. If you and I fail to enter, it will be for lack of readiness. To the unready, heaven itself would be a hotter hell than any on the outside.
IV

What, then, are we to do about this life of ours with its shut doors?

The answer is very simple. All God asks of us is a present readiness. In other words, all God asks of us is a right use of the opportunities that confront us now. A wise Psalmist says this wise word: "This is the day that the Lord has made ours. Rejoice and be glad in it." That sums up the whole duty and privilege of living.

1. We ought to use today because today is all we have. If we fail to be ready for life's emergency today, we have thrown away the sum total of our treasure.

2. We ought to use today because today is all we can manage.

3. We ought to use today because today is all we need. If we take the right turn today, we can leave yesterday to God. If we turn right today, tomorrow will take care of itself. All God asks of you and me, then, is a right attitude with him today. If we claim our own today, every door to what is superlative worthfulness will open to us in the immediate tomorrow and in the eternal tomorrow.
"They that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut." This is a tragic picture woven of the black warp and woof of failure and night. Some have thought the picture not only horrible, but unjust and cruel. Horrible it is, but cruel and unjust it is not. It simply states in a startling, gripping way one of the most important truths in God's universe.

Let us look at it. It is midnight. Silence is brooding like a peaceful spirit over the still and pulseless world. But as I pass down the street and turn a certain corner I am startled by stifled sobs that soon rise into the hopeless shriekings of despair. With blood a bit chilled I hurry on to see what is the matter. I find myself before a palatial building in whose windows the light streams into the darkness and wherein is the sound of music and joyous laughter. But standing before this building, pounding at its door with bruised fists and tampering at its lock with bleeding thumb and finger, is a girl, a group of girls.

As I come close to them I observe that they are in festive attire. In their hands, or thrown upon the pavement, are lamps that no longer burn. They are hard by a scene of merriment and happiness, but they themselves are the very pictures of wretchedness and utter hopelessness. I can not pass them by without a question: "What is this?" I say, and they tell me it is a wedding feast. "Are you going in?" They shudder and answer "No." "Do you want in?" "Yes." "Why not get in?" "The door is shut," and then they sob anew and say, "We missed it at last. We have failed—miserably, utterly, eternally."

Why did they fail to enter? That is the question that in my surprise, and almost indignation, I can not but ask. "You were invited to the wedding feast, were you not?" And they answer, "Yes." "Then you did not miss it for lack of an invitation. You were coming as torch bearers, I believe?" And again they answer, "Yes." "Well, why didn't you get in? I suppose it was because you had no torch. You were so unfortunate as not to possess a lamp", and then I see the smoking lamp lying upon the street and know that it is not true. They had lamps, everyone of them; that is, they had a capacity for receiving oil. They had a capacity for receiving what would have made light. They were not in reality torch bearers, light bringers, but they had the capacity for such.

And light bringing is your job and mine. Jesus says, "Ye are the light of the world." Not that we are so by nature, but He is able to make us so. It is a capacity that belongs to every man of us and every woman of us, and if we fail we will not fail, as these girls did not fail, for lack of ability. "Why did you fail?" I ask again. "Was it because you did not know the conditions upon which you were to be admitted? Was it because you did not know that you had to have oil?" "No", they answer, "We knew that. We knew the conditions; we also knew that we had not met the conditions." And the same is true of you and me. We know the conditions of salvation. We know the conditions to be met for us to be light bringers. Our ignorance of what is right, our ignorance of what we ought to do and the way we ought to live - that is not our calamity. That is not why we are failing. Nor are we failing because we do not know whether or not we have met the conditions. We know the direction of our lives. We know the side upon which we stand. If we are for God we know it. If we are against Him we know it. They did not fail for lack of knowledge.
Nor did they fail because of a wrong intention. They fully expected to enter the wedding feast. They no more intended to miss it than the wise girls intended to miss it. They no more intended to throw away their chance than you do. And I am perfectly sure that you have not deliberately determined to make the worst out of your life. You have not definitely decided that, come what may, you are going to forever stand out against the church and against the God of your father and of your mother. Your intentions are all right, just as were the intentions of these girls who failed. Nor did they fail because of the injustice or cruelty of the door keeper. He was not to blame, he was only doing what he had to do, what he must do in the very nature of things. They failed for one reason and one only. They failed for lack of preparation. They were not ready. Therefore, they could not enter. "For they that were ready went in", and they only.

And how many millions have failed and are failing in the same way - failing for lack of preparation, drowsily and stupidly hoping for results without causes, for harvests without sowings, to slip through doors without readiness.

The thing of big importance for you tonight is preparedness. That is important because it determines the doors that you will enter both in this life and in the world to come. It seems a bit strange that it would be necessary to say this; it seems strange that anybody would ever dream that the case was otherwise, and yet we find people everywhere that seem to believe that life is a bit of a game of chance, that the work that men do and the positions they fill are determined by pull or by good fortune or by anything else except honest preparation.

Now, I know that here and there a man gets into a place for which he is not fitted through the influence of friends or through some other agency, but the rule is that we get the job in this life for which we are fitted; that the place we fill depends upon our capacity to deliver the goods. That is simply another way of saying that this is a rational and ordered world, that certain causes produce certain effects, that what a man sows that he reaps. (A world of chance.)

In athletics, if I make the team it is not because I am the son of some prominent man. It is because I have prepared myself to play the game. If I am a lawyer I enter the door and fill the place for which I am ready. When Webster was a young lawyer he handled a certain case for a fee of $20. To prepare himself to win that case he made a trip to New York City. He spent far more money than he received, besides weeks of work. Years after he was asked on short notice to take a very important case where the fee was large, and it was to be done on short notice. He looked at it and discovered it was similar to the case that he had worked up years ago. He won it and it helped him both to fame and fortune, but it was no accident. He won it because he was ready.

The reason that young man stepped ahead of you in business down at the store or the office was because he stepped ahead of you in readiness. He was looking after his employer's interests while you were studying the clock. He was conserving his energies while you were dissipating. He was ready and you were not ready. He was prepared and you were not prepared. That was the difference.

All doors open to the ready and they open to none others. God Himself has not the grip to turn the knob of a door and thrust you through it when you are not ready to enter. Two men stand together amidst the won-
Two men go together to see the wonders of the great art galleries of Rome. One stands enraptured and is lifted into another world. The other paces restlessly about the says, "Let's go and see the King's stables." They enter the door, each of them, for which they are ready. One passes through the door of the palace of art; another through the door of a barn.

The same is true in the realm of music. You enjoy the song that you are prepared to enjoy. (Parsifal and Ole Bull.)

And that same law works irresistibly in the realm of the spiritual. You enter the door in the after life for which you prepared yourself in this life. It is a marvel to me how any man can be so illogical as to fail to believe in some sort of a heaven and hell. They both must exist in the very nature of things. They must exist from the simple fact that men here make opposite choices. One chooses right and the other wrong. Thus opposite choices lead to opposite characters. Thus opposite characters must then inevitably lead to opposite destinies. That is true in the here and now. Men say sometimes that they do not believe in hell because God loves people too well to allow them to suffer so, and yet there are people by the thousand that are suffering pangs of hell here and now. They are suffering so because of their wrong choices, because of their sin. God does not and cannot prevent that suffering here and now. What reason is there to believe that He will prevent it by and by?

This is the fact on its face: Man do make different choices here. Men do prepare themselves for different destinies. That Dr. Jeckyl becomes Mr. Hyde is not an accident. It is a law. The tragic scene at the end of the chapter when Hyde kills Jeckyl is not the logical outcome of the beginning. That the mole living in the dark loses its power to see is not the curse of an angry God; it is simply the working out of law. The mole enters the door of eternal night because that is the thing for which he has prepared himself. So every man in the big eternity goes to his own place. If in the here and now you have developed a heavenly character, to Heaven you will go. If you have not, you will be somewhere without the gate, and that somewhere is hell. Believe me, there is no way of getting any man into Heaven when he has hell in his own heart. That is a something beyond the very might of God Himself.

So the big question is just this: For what are you preparing yourself? You are going to reap what you sow. The door for which you are
ready will swing open to you; all others will remain closed. If you ex-
pect to fill a useful place as one of the world's workers you have got to
get ready for it. You must prepare yourself the strongest body that is
possible; you must prepare yourself the strongest mind that is possible;
you must prepare yourself also the strongest character that is possible.
And if you think that the door you are going to enter is a door of chance
or pull or trickery or skillful manipulation, forget it and go to work.
It is a question of readiness, fitness, preparedness.

What sort of an eternity are you preparing for yourself? That
is answered by saying what kind of a man you are making out of yourself
in the here and now. For what sort of an eternity was Demas preparing
himself as he forsook Paul and Paul's God to live for the world? For
what sort of an eternity was the ruler preparing himself who turned his
back on Jesus Christ when He had invited him to follow Him? For what
sort of an eternity are you preparing as you daily ignore the vows of
your church membership, as you daily live as if the fact of Christ were
only a myth? You are going at last to your own place. It was true of
Judas; it was true of Paul; it will be true of you.

So remember that the door that you enter here and yonder does
not depend upon your good intentions or your good fortune simply, nor
upon your prayers or your tears, but upon your preparation. Do you want
a worth while destiny here? Then begin now the present preparation. Do
you want a worth while destiny tomorrow? Prepare for it.

And remember last of all that the preparation that saves is not
a preparation that you intend to make, nor a preparation that you hope to
make, nor a preparation that you admire and dream you are going to achieve
after a while; it must be a present preparation. Here are two boys. They
both admire swimming, but one actually learns to swim and the other does
not. Tomorrow they both sink as they are thrown into the lake. One goes
to the shore and the other goes to the bottom. Their different destinies
grew not out of the fact that one cared for or admired swimming and the
other did not. It grew out of the fact that one was ready and the other
was not ready.

And so Life's testing moments come to you and me, temptations
that try us and that we overcome in proportion to the faithfulness with
which we have fought and won our former battles; opportunities to advance
that we can claim in proportion as we have improved our former opportuni-
ties. And at last that final crisis shall come that we call death, and
we shall move into the light or into the night according to our present
preparation. And so I can not do better than to close my message with
this appeal of the old prophet, "Prepare to meet thy God." And in that
preparation you prepare yourself for the best and the highest both in
this life and in that which is to come. (Macbeth and Daniel.)
"Why I am a Failure." No. 3.

Matthew, 25th chapt., 24 - 30 vs.

I am going to speak to you this evening about the man of one talent. I select this man because he is such a complete and pathetic failure. He turned his usefulness into uselessness. He transformed his wealth into waste. From profitable he became unprofitable. He blighted his own life; looted his own money safe; squandered his own treasure; with his own hand threw himself away.

But his life had a bright morning. One would never have expected his sun to have set in such a burst of storm clouds. The voyage had a bright beginning. Neither he nor his friends dreamed of the fatal possibilities of his going upon the rocks. He set out with every possibility of success. His failure is at once a surprise and a disappointment. Our first acquaintance with him is one to make us hope great things for him. He is coming from his master's presence. There is something in his hand. "What is that you are gripping so hard, old man?" I ask. "Ah", he says. "It is a talent." "All yours?" "All mine," he answers, "to use as I will only I must use it for my lord." "My", I answer, "but he must certainly trust you. He must believe both in your integrity and in your ability to put that treasure into your hand. I would like to have such a master myself." "It is great," he answers, and we separate.

The next time we meet the scene is utterly changed. Again he has just come from his master's presence, but I see a misty scene of weird waste and horror. I am rambling in the dumping ground of the universe. Where I stroll are the ash heaps and the cinder piles of wasted and burnt-out things. There are the empty cans and broken glass and shattered crockery of the humanity that has squandered itself. I see the gnashing of teeth and a solemn despair; and from this rubbish heap - of it and a part of it - I find the man once trusted and honored by his lord.

It is impossible to pass him by without a question. The change is great almost beyond belief. I can not but wonder how it came about. How did he lose the confidence of his master? How did the treasure that he once possessed slip from his finger? How did the worthful become worthless? And I pause upon the ash heap to question with him. "How did you come to be here?" And as was the case with the man without a purpose and as was the case of the man without energy, he could not say that he did not have a chance. Had he so said I would have been compelled to have called his attention to that distant day when he came forth from the master's presence with the talent in his hand.

Yes, this man, failure though he is, had been entrusted with a talent. He had had ability. True, there were others that had greater ability. There were possibly some others who had far less, but however small his talent in comparison with that of others, it was sufficient to have made him a success, for, as shown by his master's dealing with the other men, his success was not to be measured by the sum total of his gain, but by his faithfulness. And the man of two talents made as great a success as the man of five in spite of his smaller ability, and he received the same commendation from his lord.

You tonight who are making a failure, you are not failing because God has given you no ability. You may have set out one day to be a Christian and today you may be failing at the high and holy enterprise. Let me tell you that your failure is not because the church or society or the world and the flesh and the devil has made success impossible. It is not because you have no ability to succeed.
Nor did this man fail because he lacked opportunity for the investment of his talent. He could not say that there was no opportunity for him in the marts of the world's trade. He could not say that there was no demand for his commodity in the world's exchanges. He could not say that he had no opportunity to invest himself, for his two friends had gone into the same circumstances that unmanned him and wrecked him and not only kept their wealth but vastly increased it. They took situations that cowed him and made capital out of it. No, it was not a lack of opportunity that brought his failure. It was not a mean and untoward set of circumstances. It is not our circumstances that either make us or unmake us. It is for ourselves to determine whether these circumstances shall contribute to our upbuilding or to our undoing.

Two boys go to the same school. One is equipped for life by it. The other is rendered more useless and more flabby. The bee and the spider go to the same flower. One gathers poison. The other gathers honey. Peter and Herod, both touched possibly by the same angel; one is made free; the other is made worm-eaten. These men work together in the same world. One grows rich and the other grows poor. One succeeds and the other fails, not because one has opportunity and the other did not, they have the same opportunity. The difference is in that one takes advantage of his opportunity and the other does not.

Why did the one-talent man fail? Not because he had no ability, I say, not because circumstances were against him. He failed for one reason. It is a reason that is upon his own lips. It is a part of the contemptible apology that he turns over to his master instead of the wealth that he might have gained. Why did he fail? Listen: the sentence might serve as an epitaph on the tombstone of his dead possibilities, of his murdered hopes and ambitions - "I was afraid." That is the secret of his failure. He failed because he had no courage. He failed because he had no grit, no stamina, no nerve. He failed because he was a coward.

And mark you, my friend, this is a hard world on cowards. It is the one sin that men will not forgive. We will give some respect to a cruel man, to a vicious man, to a dishonest man, but the one man that we will never forgive and never respect is the coward. We will scorn him, abuse him, use him, set him aside, override him, help to wreck him, but we will not respect him. Cowardice is the one unpardonable sin, as courage is the one universal virtue.

"I was afraid." Of how many a failure is that the secret! "I was afraid." Of how many a tragic downfall does that tell the story! I had a chance at business success. I let it slip by me. Another had proven the opportunity that I threw away. I was afraid. I had an opportunity for promotion. I was better equipped than the one who got it, but he passed me in the race because I was afraid. I loved a girl. My prospects were better than those of my rival. He married her. I was afraid. I heard God's call to a life of usefulness. I heard that call through His Book. I heard it through the prayers of my mother. I heard it through the consecrated life of my father. I heard that call through the voice of my own conscience. I heard it through the whisperings of my own conviction. I heard it through the appeal of the preacher, but I never yielded to it. I was afraid. I stood face to face with Christ. I stood face to face with Heaven's open door. I stood face to face with the possibilities of the highest service, but I turned my back on Christ and I turned my back on my usefulness and I stepped into the very gates of hell because I was afraid. Cowardice - that is the common sin. And it is the sin that must be fought and conquered if we would be men.
And so this one-talent man was slain by his fear. He was robbed by his cowardice. He was cheated and defeated by his timidity. Let us ask him: "Man, what were you afraid of?" "First", he said, "I was afraid of my own littleness. You saw me coming from the master's presence. I had my one talent in my hand and felt myself rich and honored, but I learned a little while later that a friend of mine had two talents, and that another friend even had five. And at once my insignificance dawned upon me. At once I seemed to lose my self-respect. I decided then and there that I did not amount to anything. I was afraid to respect myself. I was afraid to believe that I with so small an equipment was really worth while."

Now, I am not asking that you go to your own head. I am not trying to persuade you to become an egotistical donkey, but I am asking that you dare to think worthily of yourself. For the man who will not respect himself need not expect to be respected. The man who does not respect himself has already lost life's big battle.

What is the secret of the tremendous breakdown of the ten spies? You say they saw the giants, the sons of Anak. So did Caleb and Joshua see the same giants, but it unmanned the one and made the others all the more manly. The tragedy of the ten was just this: The bigness of the giants led them to have a contempt for themselves. "They were in their own eyes as grasshoppers." And the man who seems like a grasshopper to himself will always seem like a grasshopper to the other fellow. Caleb and Joshua, on the other hand, saw not only the giants, but they saw God as well. And the fact that He was backing them and sending them gave them a contempt not for themselves, but for any physical power that would oppose itself to their Lord.

Do not, I beg you, hide behind your own littleness your own insignificance. God sent you into the world as really as He sent the most gifted man into the world. He no more had a plan in the life of St. Paul than He has a plan in your life. He is no more interested in Shakespeare than He is in you. You mean as vitally to Him as any child of His heart however gifted that child might be. And the man who because he can not do as much or more than anyone else does nothing is not a zero but a self-conscious coward. The man who thinks too meanly of himself to respect himself is not gifted with the grace of humility, but he is rather allowing himself to be cursed by a stupid, snaky, caricature of humility. He is not Christlike. He is more like Uriah Heep.

"Why did you fail?""Well, in the second place, I had so little to start with that I saw no hope of ever making anything out of it. I did not see how I could ever be of any use. I did not see how I could ever render any service, so I gave it up because I was afraid." Now, I am sure this man said many a time, "If I only had two talents or five talents, I could do wonderful things" or he said, "I can not do anything with just one talent here, but if I only lived in another place or in another age I could do something even with one talent." So he always wanted to work where he was not with something that he did not have. And that is eternally impossible, for what you and I do we must do where we are and we must do it with what we have. If I ever count for anything it will not be because I wish for and long to invest the other man's talents. It will be because I have invested and worked with my own.

There was once a man who owned a lovely little cottage with a fruitful garden back of it, but it seemed a rather prosaic and hopeless thing. He had heard of a certain stone named a diamond that had in it the worth of a hundred gardens like his. And when he heard it that garden seemed too commonplace, so he sold it and went wandering about the world in search
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of diamonds. He never found one but died a pauper. But the man who bought his little garden dared to believe that it was worth while to work it, even though it was much smaller than some of the gardens about him. And one day as he dug in it he unearthed something that sparkled in the light of the sun. He had it examined. It was a diamond. And that was now the Golconda Diamond Mine was discovered - one of the richest mines in the world. It was discovered by a man who dared to believe in the possibilities of his own garden. And I beg you to have the courage to believe in the possibilities for success, for sainthood, for the highest spirituality that God has locked within your heart.

The third reason why this man failed was because he was afraid of his master, not afraid of him in any right and manly way, but in a mean and distrustful way. He was afraid of his master's fairness. He did not believe in his justness. He did not believe that his master would give him a square deal. He said that he knew him, that he knew him for a hard man, that the master took up what he did not put down and reaped where he did not sow. A hard, exacting, dishonest man he was.

And do you know there are many who look on Jesus Christ in that way? Do you know there are those who have the same fear of Him? They say, "I would like to be a Christian, but it is impossible;" in other words, "Christ requires of me what I cannot give. He expects of me what I can not do. I know that other folks can be Christians, but I am peculiar and vital Christianity is impossible for me. I am sorry, but it is."

How unjust and unfounded is such a fear as this. And here was this one-talent man saying that he was afraid of the harshness and grasping greed of his master, afraid of it because he reaped where he did not sow. And all that he was asking of him was to invest for him what the master himself had put into his hands. And what is Jesus Christ expecting of you and me? What is He asking of us? Just this: not that which we can not do, but that which we can. He is asking us to use for Himself not what we have not, but what we have. He wants us to give not what is another's, but what is our own. What did He seek at the hands of the lad with his lunch in his pocket? Not a storehouse of food, but just the five loaves and two fishes that he had. What does He require of the widow? Not millions, but the two mites that she possesses. What does He require of you? Not the ability of a St. Paul. He requires of you simply what you have. He asks you to do not what the other man can do, but to do what you can do. And that is all He asks, and that for you is success and ultimate victory.

The fourth thing of which this man was afraid was this: He was afraid to fail. Now, I do not believe that any man can have too great a fear of making a final and ultimate failure, but I believe we often fear certain types of temporary failure entirely too much. Some folks are so afraid of making mistakes that they will not make anything. They are so afraid of falling down that they will never stand up. They are so afraid of doing wrong that they do nothing. The man who is afraid to fail will never skate. The man who is afraid to fail will never learn to swim. The man who is afraid to fail will never play baseball. The man who is afraid to fail will never learn to box. The man who is afraid to fail will never be a Christian. And, yet, now often as we approach man on this subject we receive these two answers: "I am afraid I couldn't hold out" or this other: "I tried once and failed." And, yet, if you will remember in skating for the first time and were to fall down you would not take off your skates and go home and quit trying. If you were in a burning building and were to start out running for your life and fall down you would not lie there and purr up. And yet after one half-hearted effort, or even many times without a half-hearted effort we allow the rich possibilities of
Why I am a Failure. No. 3.

Christlike living to pass us by forever because we are too afraid to rail. Out of heart, dare to stumble. Dare to blunder. Dare to rail down. Remember it is better to make a thousand mistakes, to do a thousand stupid things, to blunder a thousand times than to refuse the battle.

What is the supreme failure after all? It is just this: To be too cowardly to try. Is there anything more contemptible than to near one say as an excuse for having failed, "I didn't try"? Not to try, I say, is the most contemptible of all things. Did you ever read the adventure of Phaethon? He was told that he was the son of a god. He sought to prove it by doing the godly task of driving the chariot of the Sun-God for one day. The task was too much for him and he was thrown to his death. But the story says that the nymphs took up his body and buried it and wrote over it this epitaph: "Here lies Phaethon, driver of his father's chariot, who, however he failed, yet failed in a great attempt." So do not be afraid to fail in an attempt to achieve the highest. Do not fear to be battered a bit in the big battle of life. It is not hard knocks that hurt us. It is not falling down and getting up again. It is not matriculating in the University of Hard Knocks whose colors are black and blue. It is being afraid to try, afraid to fail. That is the damning fear.

"Did you tackle the trouble that came your way
With a resolute soul and cheerful?
Or hide your face from the light of day,
With a quaking soul and fearful?" etc. etc.

And what was the result of this man's failure? The first big result was already hinted at. It kept him from doing anything. He had talent, but he did not use it. He had wealth, but he never did invest it. The man of whom I spoke last Sunday did nothing because he was too lazy. This man did nothing because he was too cowardly. His fear froze him. When I was a student at Harvard I used to meet an immense dog every morning. He made a ferocious spring at me one time and I was petrified with fear. And so fear oftentimes freezes people into eternal idleness and uselessness. (Petrified.)

The second result of this fear was that all the returns that he had to make for the investment that his Lord had made in him were whines and apologies and excuses. You know, the man that is so good at apologizing is not good for anything else in the world. This man's Lord had honored him, trusted him, made a big investment in him, and all the return he got from it was a whine, a miserable excuse, a doleful apology. And God has made an investment in you. He has bought you with His own precious blood and that is all the return some of you will ever make. Herod murdered one of the best men that this world ever knew. Why did he do it? The story says that "he did it for the sake of those that sat with him." That is, all the return that he had to make for the life worse than wasted was the miserable excuse that the crowd made him do wrong.

Pilate had a chance to set Christ at liberty and he had Him crucified. A big opportunity was his. What return did he make? Return of the miserable apology that we see recorded in the waen basin—he would have nothing to do with it at all. Is that all the return that you are making? To blame the crowd; to blame your circumstances or blame the church or blame God for the fact that you have failed? His fear robbed him of every return but his excuses.

In the third place, his fear not only kept him from using the wealth that he had. It not only kept him from making it into greater wealth,
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but it utterly robed him and left him absolutely penniless. It is ever true that which we will not use we lose.

If I fail to use this hand the world will miss the service it might have rendered, but it will miss more than that - it will lose the hand as well. If the great musician will not play the world will miss his music, but the musician will also lose his skill. The man who will refuse to take his opportunity to know God and serve Him will by and by lose his capacity.

In order for me to lose my eyes it is not necessary that I have them put out. All that is necessary is that I bandage them for a while and they will go out. If I want to become deaf it is not necessary for me to drive a nail through my head. I can stuff cotton in my ears till I become as deaf as a post. If I want to lose my power of speech it is not necessary that my tongue be burned out. I can simply refuse to use my tongue. If I want to kill my God-given capacity to know and believe the Truth as it is in Jesus. All that is necessary is for me to refuse to believe that truth - to let Him alone. To refuse to use my religious capacity is to lose it.

The final result of this man's fear was that he was dumped upon the cinder pile of the burnt-out and the useless. He was thrown into hell. And what is hell but this: the dumping ground of the universe; the miserable heap of refuse where men and women throw themselves by deliberately and persistently refusing to fill the place in God's Kingdom that He intended them to fill.

What thing shall I do with this killing something that we call fear? You say that you cannot help being afraid. That is true, but you can help yielding to your fear. If you would be men you must learn to do things that you are dreadfully afraid to do. I remember as a young speaker my knees used to tremble till I could see folks pointing at them. I felt like quitting, but I kept on.

Who is the brave man after all? Not the man who can march to battle without a tremor and with a normal beating of the pulse. The brave man is the one who with trembling knees and blanched face and compressed lips marches as though he were not afraid, daring to meet not only the enemy, but also his fear.

The storm is raging on our eastern coast and the wind is from the land out to sea. The old captain orders the life boats launched for a ship is wrecking. His men say, "You can never get back." And his face is white with fear, but he says, "It is not necessary to get back. It is necessary to go." That is courage.

There is a young fellow in the social circle and who is asked to do what is against his conscience. His face burns with embarrassment. He longs to yield, but he says, "No." That is courage. The young fellow listens to the appeal of a preacher. He is timid. He is retiring. The crowd strikes terror into him. He feels that if he were to go forward he would fail. He feels that a thousand eyes would be looking at him and through him. He fears he would make only a poor out being a Christian anyway, but in spite of it all he responds. He makes the attempt and he moves out. That is courage.

God is counting on you. He has made an investment in you. There are those who love you who have also made an investment in you, who believe in you, who are counting upon you to do the manly thing, the heroic thing, the courageous thing. You can not afford to let your cowardice con-
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quer you and make you disappoint them. There were two brothers at the battle front. One did not come back after the charge. The other asked permission to go bring him in. He was told that it was nothing short of suicide, but allowed to go. He went and at the price of angry wounds brought him in, and when he laid him upon the bottom of the trench he lived only a few moments, said only five words and those words were these: "I knew you would come." And some thought the effort was wasted, but the brother said, "I would not have disappointed his faith in me. I would not have proven the coward for a million worlds." Heart, success is possible for us every one of us, but to succeed you must conquer fear. If you do not, this is the epitaph that you will write for your murdered possibilities with your own hand: "I was afraid."

CGC:BR
"I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth."
—Matthew 25:25

A brilliant Australian essayist tells this story: "One day I went for a walk in the country. The world was a-thrill with the life and beauty of springtime. There was that abundance of life that characterizes spring as it is close upon the even more abundant life of summer. As I rounded the bend in the road, I came on a lovely garden. This garden was given over to strawberries. The vines were then green and luxurious. There were still a few lovely white blossoms, but peaking out from among the green leaves and among the blossoms were the colorful strawberries. They were so abundant and beautiful that my mouth watered as I looked at them. There was only one blot upon the landscape. In the very center of this winsome garden stood a disreputable scarecrow. It had on a top-hat that was tilted at an ungainly angle that denoted disgusting drunkenness. Its ghastly arms were outstretched as if to seize in a deadening grip any luckless intruder who might poach upon the domain that had been set to his guard. But what thrilled me most of all was that upon each arm of this dreadful effigy sat a plump, well-fed blackbird. These birds had just returned from dinner. They were even then using their finger bowls. They were waiting in comfort until they were hungry enough to eat some more.

But all of the birds that I saw during my walk were not having such a delightful time. Here was a bird perched upon a fence some distance away, looking wistfully at the garden that he dared not enter. Another was seated upon a telephone wire. Another was industriously digging for worms. Some sat on the branches of trees in songless silence as if complaining that life had not treated them right.
They seemed to be saying, "Why could not I feast as those two birds that are in the strawberry patch. But such, of course, is impossible. If I were to dare to get so much as a single berry that terrible monster who guards his treasures night and day would certainly destroy me." Therefore, while two birds feasted, the others continued disconsolately to fast.

When I read this scarecrow story, it recalled to my mind an even better one that was told by none other than Jesus Himself. We call this story the Parable of the Talents. I will give it to you in rough outline. A certain man who was journeying into a far country called unto him his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. To one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, and straightway took his journey. The man who received five talents went and traded with them and doubled his investment. The man who received two talents doubled his investment. But the man who had received one went and hid his talent in the earth. When their lord returned, he commended the man of five talents, and the man of two for their faithfulness. But he had no commendation for the man with one talent because he came with this whine upon his lips, "I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth." This man with one talent failed to use his money, not because he could not, but because he let scarecrows frighten him out of his chance.

What are some of the scarecrows that frightened this man? A scarecrow, you must remember is not a real danger; it is an imaginary danger. A scarecrow never harmed anybody in all the world, but how many it has frightened! Let me say further that there are some dangers that are real. There are some fears that are legitimate. The man who declares that he is not afraid of anything is not complimenting himself. If he is telling the truth, he is only advertising his stupidity. There are some dangers which everybody ought to fear.

For example, everybody ought to be afraid to take a needless physical risk.
Naturally, there are tremendous risks to be faced in the line of duty. These we are to take. But I am speaking of those risks to which we expose ourselves when there is no prize to be gained. It is a risk such as that to which a candle-fly exposes itself when it buzzes about the chimney of a lamp. This life of mine is a trust. So is your life! It is given us to be used. We, therefore, have no right to trifle with it. We have no right to treat it as if it were a cheap and worthless something.

Just as we have no right to take a needless physical risk, so we have no right to take a needless moral risk. When a young man or woman begins to toy with pleasures that have enslaved millions, when they begin to trifle with something as deadly as liquor, for instance, they are not acting with wisdom but with folly. They may escape without a scar, but they are taking a needless risk. The man who is not afraid of sin will sooner or later be made afraid by sin. Wrong-doing turns lose a Nemesis upon our track. If there is an ugly secret in your life, your steps are dogged by fear. In the language of Coleridge, you are

"Like one that on a lonesome road
Both walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Both close behind him tread."

But the fears of this one-talent man were imaginary. They were scarecrows. What are they?

1. He was afraid of himself. No doubt he was quite elated with the gift his master had put into his hands at first. One talent was quite a sum of money—at least twelve hundred dollars. He thought of the many fine investments he could make. But as he was preparing to venture, he met a friend who had two talents. That dampened his enthusiasm. Then, he met another who had five. That put out his fire. After that he was afraid to be himself.

That is a persistent danger today. There are always those that tell themselves how much they could give if only they had as much money as their friend Croesus.
But they do nothing with what they have. How gladly they would sing if they had as fine a voice as some Caruso! But with the voice they have, they do nothing. They would gladly teach, if they could be the best in the church school, but having no guarantee of that they will do nothing at all. They would raise an abundant crop if they had the other man's garden, but their own is so small that they are doing nothing at all. To be afraid of oneself is to be afraid of a scarecrow.

This is the case because we are responsible not for our gifts. That is indicated by the very name. The fact that they are gifts indicates that they came to us from another. Nobody deserves any special praise for inheriting an estate. No more do you deserve particular applause for having inherited a graceful and beautiful body and a sound mind. You are nor responsible for the good opportunities that have come your way. You are just responsible for the use you make of them. One of the first steps toward useful living is the courage to accept ourselves. We are to remember that God is just as vitally interested in a violet as He is in a giant redwood tree—that He sets no more store on the man of genius than He does on the man of mediocre ability.

2. This man was afraid to fail. I do not mean he was afraid to make a final failure—I mean he was afraid that he might make a mistake. He was so afraid of making a mistake that he did not make anything. There are some people so afraid that they will fumble the ball that they never carry it. They are so afraid that they will strike out that they will never go to bat. They are so afraid of losing the game that they won't even participate in it. Yet failure is not a foe. It only looks like one. It is a scarecrow. Every man fails in proportion to the greatness of the task that he undertakes. The man who makes any investment runs the risk of losing it. But the man who refuses to invest is sure to lose.

The only salvation for any of us is to desire success enough to be willing to fail again and again in order to win it. That is the way a child learns to walk. Every baby falls down again and again. That is the way I learned to skate. When
I went to Harvard and the winter came round, I made up my mind that I was going to skate. I got me a pair of skates, tucked them under my arm, and went out to the pond. Arrived there, I saw little chaps, six to eight years old, darting about on the ice in astounding fashion. Even those in their early teens could cut figure eights. It looked so easy that I was almost ashamed to try it. But I put on my skates and, while I did not cut any figure eights to begin with, I did cut a few stars.

Sometime ago I was talking to a young chap about being a Christian. His answer was, "I am afraid I could not hold out. I am afraid I would make a mess of it." Being thus afraid, he did not even try. How silly that is! I may enter a game of baseball and blunder at it, but I will certainly play better by trying than the chap that sits in the bleachers and never tries at all. I may give myself honestly to the task of being a Christian and not be a shining saint, but I will certainly come closer to it by an honest effort than by being too big a coward even to try. This man was afraid to fail and failure is only a scarecrow.

3. Then a third scarecrow that frightened this man was work. As he looked at his one talent, he said, "If I make anything out of this small investment, I must be very diligent. My ax is not as sharp as that of my neighbor. If I cut much wood, I am going to have to hit harder and longer. This man was afraid of work. His master called him slothful. He was afraid of difficulties in the way. He was afraid to give himself any trouble. He did not ask for the right road but for the easy road. He did not say, "Which turn leads to character?" but "Which one leads to comfort?"

That is a persistent danger that frightens multitudes in every generation. We love comfort. We do not like to be bothered. To grow a soul requires dedication and discipline. It requires that we keep up our defenses. The slothful man of whom we read in Proverbs raised no crop because he was not willing to pay the price. His garden had no fences around it not because he tore the fence down—
he let it fall down because of his love of ease. Work is a blessing. Conflict makes for strength. But this man was frightened by work.

4. Finally, this man was afraid that his master would not give him a square-deal. He said to him, "You are a hard man. You reap where you do not sow. You require more of me than I can give." That is the way some feel toward God. We do not always dare to put it into words, but there are those who, if they would express themselves frankly, would say, "God does not give me a square deal." He is asking far more of me than I can give." But of course, this is only a scarecrow. God does play fair. He does not put upon us heavier burdens than we are able to carry. He did not require of the man of five talents that he make other five. He did not require of the men of two that he double his investment. All He asked of these servants was that they do their best. That was all that He asked of the man of one talent. He did not say to those who had won, "You have been successful." Success is not a requirement. Sometimes it seems beyond our reach. There is only one requirement and that is faithfulness. That is within the reach of the last and the lowest and the least.

II

What did these scarecrows do for this man?

1. They paralyzed him. That is one terrible thing about fear. It often kills effort. You have heard a friend tell you how he was scared stiff. On my way to my first class at college one year I used to meet a tremendous dog almost every morning. I was always afraid of the big brute, but I greeted him with an enthusiastic warmth that even the dog could tell was hypocritical. One morning that wise dog seemed to have got up on the wrong side. At least when I spoke to him in my engaging fashion, he wheeled on his hind feet with a roar and came at me. I did just what all the dog psychologists say do—stood perfectly still and looked at him. But it was not my familiarity with psychology that caused this. I was simply paralyzed. This man became so frightened that he did nothing.
2. Not only did he let his fear paralyze him, but by so doing he let it rob him of his usefulness. He made no contribution to life. That involved another loss—the loss of joy. "The shock of uselessness," says Huxley, "is the greatest that can come to a living organism." Not only did he miss the joy of service, but he was made wretched partly by a sense of uselessness, partly by his nagging fears. Thus, he allowed his scarecrows to cheat him out of both his usefulness and his laughter.

3. Finally, his fear robbed him of his gifts. "Take the talent from him," said his master, "and give it to him that has ten, for unto him that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. How unfair it seems to take from the empty hand of the impoverished and put it into the full hand of him who is already enriched, but it is not unfair. It is a law of life. The more I know the more I can learn. The more I venture on my faith, the stronger it becomes. The more I use the gifts God has put into my hands, the richer those gifts become. In order to lose them, of course, I have only to do nothing at all. I can refuse to see until my eyes go out. I can refuse to hear until my ears become stopped. I can refuse to serve until I lose my capacity to serve. This man let his fears cheat him of everything that makes life worthwhile.

III

Naturally, we can make the same tragic blunder that he made. He had his chance and threw it away. Now is your turn and mine. It is our privilege to go right where he went wrong. It is our privilege to profit by his disaster. How should we do it?

1. If we are going to triumph over our scarecrows, we must be able to recognize a scarecrow when we see it. That is, we must be able to distinguish between a real danger and one that is imaginary. Remember a scarecrow can't hurt—it can only frighten. I have reminded you that there are some dangers that are very real. We ought to be afraid to trifle with conscience. We ought to be afraid to flirt with
the unclean. We ought to be deadly afraid to do nothing. But the mark of a real scarecrow is that while it looks fearful, it is really perfectly harmless.

2. Not only ought we to be able to distinguish a scarecrow when we see it, but we ought to use it. If I were a bird, I would be on the constant lookout for scarecrows. This would be the case because I would know that wherever there is a scarecrow, there is something worth having. Men do not set scarecrows in deserts. They do not take the pains to erect these frightful effigies in drouth-parched gardens. A scarecrow is an uncouth dinner bell. It is a roughly engraved invitation to a banquet. Its outspread, out-flung arms that looked so frightening are really pointing to a feast. Therefore, a wise bird will light upon church steeples and tall trees and look in every direction for a scarecrow. He will know that the presence of the scarecrow indicates the presence of something worth guarding.

In the same fashion the wise youth will use his scarecrows. The thing that is difficult is the thing that is really worth doing. The thing that costs something is the only thing that is really worth possessing. Conflict, denial of self, hard work, courageous struggle, the giving of self—these are not real foes. They are truest friends in disguise. They are meant to show you the way to the feast of the fullness of life. The forbidding thing, the taxing undertaking, the venture that seems to cost your all—these are guide-posts to worthwhile living.

3. Not only is it necessary to distinguish scarecrows and to use them, but we must also defy them. It took a lot of courage for these two wise blackbirds that the essayist saw to light and feast right in the presence of this ugly monster. But having triumphed once, the rest was easier. At last they found courage even to light on the arms of the effigy of which they were once deadly afraid. So must we defy our fears. There is nothing that can defeat us except being too cowardly to face the conflict. Even if the venture costs us the laying down of life, we shall discover that death itself is only a scarecrow. His grim hand is pointing not to the grave, but to a richer, fuller life.
The heartening fact about this story is that it tells us that nobody need face the pain and shame of final failure. How did these two gifted men win their reward? Not by their gifts but by their fidelity. How can you and I win ours? It is not a matter of the richness of our gifts, it is not a matter of our circumstances, it is not a matter of our environment. It is a matter of our fidelity. Some are far more gifted than others. These do not necessarily live more richly. As I think of those that in the fullest sense have won my admiration, as I think of the ones who have touched my life most helpfully, they were not the brilliant and the gifted, but the ordinary men and women who in defiance of their fears laid their all upon the altar of God. That doorway to supreme usefulness is open to every one of us. May we have the courage to enter.

Even death is a scarecrow when in faith you light upon the arms from which it has been plucking arrows.
SCARECROWS

A brilliant Australian essayist tells of a walk that he took along a winding country road. It was a beautiful sunny day when spring was treading hard on the heels of summer. The world was a-thrill and a-throb with life. As he came upon the turn in the road he came upon a scene so beautiful that it fairly took his breath. It was a lovely garden of strawberries. The vines were luxurious. From under the deep green leaves the ripe and ripening fruit glanced out at him like eyes full of friendly laughter.

There was only one blot upon the sun. Standing right in the middle of this lovely and luxurious garden was a disreputable scarecrow. The monster wore ragged and dirty trousers. His Prince Albert coat was out at the elbow and torn at the tails. He wore a top hat that was tilted at an ungainly angle that denoted disgrace from drunkenness. But with all this he stood firmly in his place and stretched out two forbidding arms that threatened dire disaster to any creature that would dare poach upon the domain that he was set to guard.

But what thrilled the essayist most and almost caused him to break into applause was this: sitting on the arms of that forbidding effigy, the one on the right arm and the other on the left, were two brave blackbirds. They were using their glossy feathers for napkins, having just come from a banquet. There they rested serenely waiting until they should be able to go to dinner again. Not all the birds had joined them in their venture. Some were sitting on distant fences, some on telephone wires looking wistfully and half angrily at the garden that they dared not enter.
"Scarecrows"

Others had given it up altogether and were stubbornly digging for worms. "Why don't you enter?" the first might have asked. Had he done so, this would have been the answer: "Don't you see that hideous monster? I am afraid of that scarecrow." Thus they were frightened away from the banquet by something that could not have hurt them in the least.

When I read that I thought of another scarecrow story. It was told by no less of an artist than Jesus himself. It runs like this: "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I
sowed not, and gather where I have not strayed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." (Matt. 25:14-29)

I

Listen to the man with one talent. "I was afraid and went and hid thy money in the earth." What was he afraid of? Answer: scarecrows. The fears that frightened him away from the feast of life were perfectly harmless. What were they?

1. First, he was afraid of himself. He was afraid of his own littleness. He failed to learn to accept himself. There was a brief period during which he faced life with a wholesome self-respect. I met him as he came out from an interview with his employer. "The boss trusts me," he said. "He is going to leave in a few days for a long journey, but he called me in just now and gave me a whole talent to trade with while he is away. He has a lot of confidence in me." "Indeed, he has," I replied, and congratulated him. As he continued his way down the street he met another friend and told him the story of his employer's confidence. "That is fine," came the reply. "But I did not get off as easy as you. My employer loaded me with heavier responsibilities. He gave me two talents." And from this friend he turned with less enthusiasm. Then he met another employee who told that he had been loaded with a heavier responsibility of five talents. At this the once glad man went sour, looked at his one talent and said, "What can I do with that?" and hurried home and buried it.

What was wrong? He measured values in terms of mere bigness. Had he been creating the world he would have made every flower a sun flower. There
would have been nothing so small as a violet. All animals would have been
elephants or mastodons. All trees would have been giant redwoods. All
birds would have been eagles or ostriches. But God is just as much
interested in the small as in the large. Great gifts do not reflect honor
upon the receiver but upon the giver. I know that the less we are responsible
for what is put in our hands the more likely are we to be conceited over
it. But God is just as interested in the man with one talent as he is in
the man with five or ten or a hundred.

But because this man was not as able as any other man he did nothing
with what he had. He was afraid of his own littleness, of his own lack of
importance. Conceit is sometimes ugly and often dangerous. I would not
urge conceit as a virtue. I have no special admiration for the
rooster who thought the sun rose every morning just to hear him crow.
Yet even this rooster stands a better chance than his brother rooster who
has a contempt for himself. Few men are in better position to waste their
lives than those who have decided that they are of no importance at all.
This man was afraid to accept himself. He despised his own gifts. Therefore,
he did nothing with them. However little one may like your garden,
remember that it is your one chance to raise a crop. No man ever failed
morally and spiritually because he was of small importance.

2. A second scarecrow that helped to defeat this man was that he was
afraid to fail. I do not mean final failure. He was not so much afraid of
that. He was rather afraid to make a mistake. He wanted to do everything
as well as or better than anybody else the first time he tried it. What
an unfortunate desire that was. I have seen young folks who would not take
part in any game simply because they could not be experts at the very be-
inning. Bear this in mind: the man who does anything will acquire that
skill by daring failure a thousand times over. I have watched Bobby Jones
and Byron Nelson make perfect golf shots. I knew that those perfect shots
had been made possible by ten thousand imperfect ones.
There are some folks who are so afraid that they will strike out that they never go to the bat. They are so afraid that they will fumble that they will not carry the ball. They are so afraid they will fall down that they hardly stand up. When I went north to school I made up my mind that during the long winter I was going to learn to skate. So when the cold had turned the lakes into shimmering glass I armed myself with a pair of skates and went out to have some fun.

When I reached the pond I was amazed at how easy skating was. Everybody seemed to be an expert. There were youngsters not more than ten years of age that could cut figure 8's on the ice. As I looked on I said to myself, "I did not know that skating was so easy." but since I am here I might as well cut a few 8's myself." Now to be honest I did not cut a few 8's, but I cut a few stars. I fell down so many times that I almost changed my color, but I kept on until I finally learned.

Now isn't it strange that we are willing to practice and practice in some matters like that, yet we expect to obtain perfection in Christian living at the first feeble effort. Sometime ago I asked a chap, "Are you a Christian?" And he answered: "I tried it once." I felt inclined to answer in indignation, "You mean to say that you made one effort in the biggest enterprise in the whole universe and gave it up after a single effort?"

There are some things that are so worth doing that we can afford to fail at them a thousand times over. One of them is the business of dedicating our lives to God and using them as he calls us to use them. This man was so afraid to fail that he did not try.

3. A third scarecrow that worked toward his undoing is laziness. Not only was he afraid of his own littleness and afraid to fail, he was afraid of work.---the plain, practical, garden variety of work. His master called him/slothful servant. He had nothing to show for his master's investment in him because he was not willing to pay the price. The man with two talents, the man with five, did something because inspite of their fears they worked
and worked mightily and let me say there is no attaining of anything that is worth while without hard work.

This puts its finger upon one of the greatest weaknesses of our modern Christianity. So many in the church are possessed of a cheap religion. How much does it cost you to be a Christian really. If it costs you nothing, that is exactly what it is worth. A cheap religion is one that satisfies neither God nor man.

Yet while you are disappointed in your own religious life there are times when you would like to be different. There are times when you touch elbows with someone who is vitally Christian and you say in your heart, "I would like to have an experience like that. I would like to have his poise, his serenity, his courage, his joy, his enthusiasm. How much would you like to have it? If you would like it well enough to pay the price, then you can have it. These rich promises of the New Testament may be taken at their face value. They are for anybody who is willing to make the surrender that is necessary to win them. "Have what you want and pay for it!"

Why are not our churches more vital and powerful? We have the promise of a glorious church without spot or blemish or any such thing. It is to be as fair as the sun and terrible as an army with banners. Why is not this church thronged to the doors each Sunday evening by eager worshippers who have drawn the careless with them by the might of their enthusiasm? Just one reason: we are not willing to pay the price. All God needs to accomplish that great result is the willingness on your part and mine to cooperate. This man was frightened by the scarecrows of work, of self-giving.

4. Finally he was afraid of his master. He was afraid of his master just as some of us are afraid of God. We do not fear him in a fine filial way. We fear him in a mistrustful way. We fear that he will not quite play the game fairly with us, he will require as much of us with our one talent as of our brother with his five. We look at the whole business
of Christian living and shake our heads and say, "It is all very beautiful but it is impossible for me in my circumstances." But God has commanded you and if you cannot carry out his commands he is not a loving Father but an infinite tyrant.

What really is God asking of you and me? He is not asking for cleverness. He is not asking for success as the world counts success. He is not asking that we give a certain amount of money, that we send a certain number of souls to Christ. He is asking for just one something that the least and the greatest can give. He is asking for their faithfulness. When he welcomed the man of five talents he did not say, "You have been clever or successful," but, "You have been faithful." You may cripple home at the close of the day feeling that you have nothing to show for what God has invested in you, but if you have done your best you will come to meet an enthusiasm saying, "Well done, well done."

II

What did this man's fears do for him?
1. Fixing his eyes upon his scarecrows.

He did nothing. You have heard of a man being scared stiff. This was what happened to him. His fears paralyzed him. He was so afraid of making a mistake, so afraid of this and that that he did nothing at all.

2. Refusing to do anything, he missed the privilege of being helpful. God had said to him as he says to us, "I will bless thee and thou shalt be a blessing." Being a blessing is the very poetry of living. It gives splendor of life. Perhaps the supreme tragedy that can come to any human soul is to have come and gone and never to have known the majesty and mirth of carrying a heavy load.

3. Finally, being too frightened to use his talents, he lost them. "Take the talent from him," said his master, "and give it to him who has
"Scarecrows"

them. It sounds hard and harsh and yet that is the way life works. To use what you have is to increase it. To refuse to use it is to lose it.

All I have to do to lose my right arm would be simply to put it in a sling and refuse to use it. By and by it becomes useless to me as a piece of wood. The finally loses himself. This was the case not because God did not love him. It was the case because God can build no possible heaven for a man who dodges life's responsibilities. He himself had to endure the Cross. Those of us who never get acquainted with any kind of cross simply cannot be at home in the presence of others who have led crucified lives.

III

What then are we to do with our scarecrows?

1. First we are to recognize them for what they are. Most of the things that frighten you in this world are not really dangerous, they are imaginary dangers. They are scarecrows that can do you no harm at all. Take, for instance, our fear of the difficult. Our dread of a hard time. Our love of the easy way. Suppose you have a bitter battle and conflict. It will not do you harm, it will do you good.

Take another deadly fear: criticism. How afraid we are of being criticized. How afraid we are of laughter. There are men who can charge a machine gun more courageously than they can face with scornful laughter of one who does not see their visions or dream their dreams. Yet criticism often helps as much as it hurts. It is about the only free advertising we get and laughter is utterly powerless to kill. When you think of becoming a Christian the fears that frighten you off are fears that could not possible hurt.

2. Not only ought we to be able to recognize our fears as mere scarecrows, but we ought to use them. If I were a bird I would spend much of my
time hunting for scaredrows. I would fly up on church steeples and telephone poles and look north, south, east, and west. Why? Because nobody puts a scarecrow in an untilled garden. Nobody takes the trouble to put a scarecrow in a desert. Any intelligent bird ought to know that wherever he sees a scarecrow there is something there that is worth having. A scarecrow is just a unique dinner bill, is a grotesque invitation to a banquet.

If we look at our own lives, we will discover that often the things that we most fear to do are the very things that we ought to do. Some years ago I got involved in a hot liquor battle. The wet newspapers became very pious about it. They developed an appetite for the old-time gospel that was perfectly amazing. They declared that it was the preacher's one business to preach the gospel. Whenever I see a soaking wet paper taking a position on one side of a moral question, I can almost take the opposite side with my eyes shut. Scarecrows are not only to be distinguished, they they are to be used.

3. Finally, having distinguished your scarecrows, defy them. I can imagine the first time that these blackbirds ever dared pluck a berry from that garden almost made their blood run cold. But as they defied their fears their cowardice diminished and their courage increased until by and by they were perfectly at home even on the arms of the monster they had so much dreaded.

What is courage at its noblest and best? It is not a total absence of fear. For one to say, "I am not afraid of anything," is usually not true. It would be a misunderstanding if it were. Courage at its best is to do what you know you ought to do in spite of your fears.

Now that I am going to invite you to come forward as one who has already committed your life to God or as I invite you to come forward in acknowledgement of your surrender to him, you will be afraid to do it. This aisle will look as if it is a mile long. If you will yield to your fears
you will find it increasingly difficult to make the confession that you
know you ought to make. If you defy your fears you will do something
so magnificent that all heaven will rejoice over it. What is the answer?

I. What He Feared - Some fears are right. Men

1. He was afraid of himself.
   a. He was different from others. Had more than
      one talent.
   b. Frightened him that he was not as able as
      he thought (on my way to Washington).

2. He was afraid to make a mistake. To make
   a faulty beginning.

3. He was afraid of work. Thought it wrong.
   a. He was afraid of work.

4. He was afraid of success. Hadn't an idea of God.
   a. Some two hundred people to whom
      I spoke.

II. What He Foretold - Begin with two, four.

1. Tormented time. - Begin with two, four, six.
   a. Combine and fail.

2. Paralyzed time.

3. Heaven called him of usefulness.

4. Roasted time.

III. What Are We To Do - Distinguish the

1. True from false.

2. True Lessons.

3. True Leaders.

4. True Lessons through Scarecrows.

5. True men change in spite of fear, but

3. False Lessons.

Scarecrows
"SCARECROWS"
Matthew 25 - 25

"And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine."

One of the most fascinating essayist of our day tells this charming story. He went for a walk in the country. It was a lovely spring day, late enough to be getting near the beginning of summer. By and by he passed a lovely garden. This garden was a spot of rare beauty. It was planted in strawberries and the fruit was just ripe. The delicious pink berries that looked out shyly from under the green leaves was a sight to make one's mouth water.

But in the midst of this lovely beauty there stood a horrible scarecrow. It was dressed in a fashion that tended to inspire terror. It wore a cocked hat that was tilted at an angle that denoted long and disgraceful drunkenness. Its ugly arms were outstretched as if in eagerness to lay savage hold upon any enemy that should dare to intrude upon the domain that it was set to guard. But what filled this essayist with admiration was this. On each arm of this frightful effigy there sat a bird. These birds had just had a banquet. They were going to enjoy another as soon as they were able. No wonder it was difficult for him to keep from breaking into wild applause.

Now I dare say that this man saw quite a number of hungry birds during the course of that walk that did not get a single strawberry. One was perched on a treetop, another on a telegraph wire, another was digging worms, another sat on the fence at a safe distance and looked wistfully at the strawberry patch. Why don't you go to dinner, he might have asked. I am afraid of that terrible monster. So this bird missed the feast while the others enjoyed it.
Scarecrows.

When I read that story it made me think of another one that is even a better scarecrow story than that. It was told by the Master Himself. You will find it in the 26th chapter of St. Matthew. Three men were entrusted each with a sum of money. Two of them went and traded and doubled their capital. When their lord returned they met him without fear and heard the approving "Well done" from his lips. The other met him with a whine saying, "I was afraid" and was thrown out into the night.

PART I.

Now the fact about this man of one talent was this, he was defeated by scarecrows. It was not real dangers that proved his undoing. It was imaginary dangers. He was cowed by fears that had no power to harm. What were some of these scarecrows?

1. He was afraid of himself. He was afraid of his own littleness. He was quite proud of his one talent till he found others that were more highly gifted than himself. Then he began in a measure to despise himself. If he could not count in as big way as a man with five talents he would not count at all.

How many there are who fail from the same reason. Because they cannot give largely they give nothing. Because they cannot teach the largest class in the Sunday School they stay at home. Because they cannot sing solos they sing not at all. They believe that the big thing is cleverness, not character; fine faculties, not fidelity.

But God is as much interested in the seeming small as in the great. He gives to every man his work. Success is not a matter of gifts, it is a matter of fidelity. To fill the place in the world that God wants you to fill, that is success. All else is failure. Therefore,
Soareorows.

God is just as much interested in what you do with your opportunities, however humble and commonplace you may seem, as He is in the career of any genius.

What a tragedy it would be if we were all alike, if we all had the same aptitudes and possessed the same gifts! What a tragedy this would be in the world of nature! Suppose there was not a bit of vegetation in the world except the giant redwood trees. No carpet of grass, no modest violet, no blushing rose, every plant a giant. Suppose every bird were an eagle or an ostrich. Suppose every animal were an elephant. There is not the slightest merit in being gifted. The very word gifted indicates that. Therefore, we all stand on an equal footing with an equal chance. Therefore, a woman with only one-quarter of a cent was the largest contributor one day, because she refused to despise herself and dared to do the best she could with what she had.

2. This man was afraid to fail. I do not mean by this that we should not fear final failure. But there are some things that are so eminently worth doing that we can afford to fail many times in an effort to accomplish them. As a small boy I wanted to be a speaker. I have never seen anybody more timid, but I wanted to be a speaker so much that I was willing to fail at it over and over again in order to gain my purpose.

When I undertook to learn to skate I wanted to skate enough to be willing to blunder, to fall down, to fail more than once. How many failures did the Wright brothers make before they invented the airship? How many failures did Edison make before he perfected the phonograph? If you really desire to accomplish anything that is worth
accomplishing you have got to desire that something deeply enough to
dare failure. I tried once.

Let me bring this challenge to you who are not Christians, whether you are in the Church or out of it. Why do you treat the matter so lightly. Some of you have never made a beginning. Why not? Here is one oft repeated reason. "I am afraid I could not hold out." But certainly no one was any more unchristian for having made a serious and earnest effort to be one. To be Christ-like is the supreme human achievement. Certainly you could afford to make many new starts if necessary, to suffer many failures in order to attain. This poor fellow said, I would invest but I am afraid I could not make a go.

3. He was afraid of work. He was lazy. His lord called him slothful. He was unwilling to put himself to any serious trouble. He was like the man whose field was grown over with thorns. Success was possible for him, victory was within his reach but he was unwilling to put himself to any serious trouble in order to attain.

Now I must tell you frankly that to be a real Christian is costly. I know it is not very expensive to be a Church member. It costs some of us nothing at all, and it is worth to us just what it costs. But if you count as a power for righteousness, if you have the mind of Christ then you are going to have to pay the price. If you haggle about the price and try to strike a bargain then you are defeated. You will never arrive. The crown is only worn at the price of the Cross.

4. This man was afraid of God. Not afraid of Him in a fine wholesome and filial way, but in a mean chringing distrustful and cowardly way. He did not think that God would treat fair with him. He thought
Scarecrows.

Him too harsh, too stern, too exacting. He demanded of him what it was impossible for him to give.

There are multitudes that share this feeling. They may have never spoken out thus boldly. They may never have thought with sufficient fairness to put the matter into words, but as they face the demands of Christ, as they realize something of what it means to be a Christian, they admire the Christ-like character, but they say, "It is too high for me, in my circumstances it is impossible." Then you are not to blame for not being a Christian. God is to blame, yet he holds you responsible. Therefore, He is a hard man.

But how tragic to think thus of God. God is not hard. He is like Jesus. Jesus challenged those he met to the impossible, but He always supplied the strength that changed the impossible into the possible. God is like the father in the story of the prodigal. If you ever look His way He is ready to run and meet you. He is ready to forgive and forget. He is ready to give heaven's best to anybody that will take it.

PART II.

What did these foolish fear do for this man?

1. They paralyzed him. He was so afraid of not being able to do the big thing, he was so afraid of making a mistake, he was so afraid of putting himself to a little trouble that he did nothing at all. And there is no greater failure than this. The sharpest condemnation that ever fell from the lips of Jesus were not for wrong deeds done, they were for good deeds left undone. This man stood in the midst of a needy world and did nothing, absolutely nothing to help. He was an
2. Doing nothing he made no contribution to life. Some time ago I put my hand on the shoulder of a young man and looked him eye to eye and said, "Is there any one in all the world that can look at you as I am looking now and say, 'I am better and closer to God for having known you.'" And he answered thoughtfully and sorrowfully, "there is not one." And I am glad to say that there was still enough bigness in him to cause his eyes to swim with tears and his voice to tremble as he said it. To do nothing is to be useless. To be useless is to be more than useless; it is to be a curse.

3. This man's fears robbed him of his ability. He was possessed of a God-given talent. It was a talent different from any possessed of any other human soul, but he refused to use it. The outcome of that refusal was that he lost it. It is ever so. To refuse to see is to lose your capacity to see. To refuse to love is to have your heart withered. To refuse to believe is to blast your faith faculty. To refuse to know God is to lose your capacity to know Him. And that is the sin that has never forgiveness either in this life or that which is to come.

4. Finally he allowed his fears to rob him of himself and to rob him of God. He begins in the light. With his hand full of treasures the highest victories of usefulness are possible to him, but he refuses to take his chance and listens to the voice of fear. He ends in the dark empty handed without God and without hope forever. Not that he ever committed any great crime, not that he was an avowed enemy of God or man, he simply allowed his foolish fears to keep him from doing anything, and, therefore, those
Scarecrows.

fears defeated him utterly.

We have our fears, all of us. Scarecrows are common experiences with us. What are we to do about them?

1. Let us recognize them for what they are. A scarecrow is an imaginary danger. It can do you no harm. It only looks as if it could. There are dangers, of course, that are very real. It is a dangerous thing to trifle with your conscience. It is dangerous to play with sin. It is deadly dangerous to neglect God. But the things that frighten us most are not dangers at all, they are just scarecrows.

For instance, We are very afraid of being criticized, but that does not hurt. Often it helps. We are afraid of being laughed at. We are afraid of ridicule. We are afraid of standing alone. We are afraid of self-denial. We are afraid of a hard time. But none of these things is really dangerous. If rightly treated every one of them is helpful.

2. We should use our scarecrows. If I were a bird I would make it a business to conquer scarecrows. I would fly upon church steeples and look north, south, east and west for scarecrows and whenever I found one I would rejoice, because a scarecrow is an indication that there is something growing in the neighborhood that is worth guarding. No man ever puts a scarecrow in an untilled garden. No man ever puts one in a desert. The scarecrow is a kind of silent bell. It is a grotesque invitation to a banquet. Therefore, if I were a bird I would hunt for scarecrows.

Why not do so as man? Is it not a fact that the things most worth doing are the things as a rule we are most afraid to do. The devil is no fool. When he sets up a scarecrow there is something behind it. For instance, just now the newspapers are making the greatest effort to
Scarecrows.

save the preachers that I have ever known them to make. They are afraid bot they and the Church are going to be utterly ruined by their mixing in politics.

But what is the real meaning of all this? Is it that these brethren love the Church better than the preachers do? Is it that they are better men than the preachers? My opinion is that these brethren have what they think is a strawberry patch to protect. It may be rather a patch of corn or rye, but in their zeal they are paying the preachers an unconscious complement. They are trying to keep them from speaking their convictions on the moral issues involved lest the candidate that they are supporting should not be elected. when I find a "wet" editor warning the preacher not to do a certain thing, that is a pretty good indication that that is something the preacher ought to do.

3. Not only should we recognize and use our scarecrows but we should defy them. It would be useless for a bird to discover a scarecrow and discover the garden it was set to guard, if it did not proceed further and defy the horrid looking thing by alighting in the garden and enjoying himself. It is so of ourselves. If you are anyakin to me, there are things I must do again and again that I am afraid to, but if I defy my fears I win. If I allow them to defy me I lose.

When the Roman arena was built a great crowd was assembled to do honor to the architect that had planed it. The first act was to be the feeding of a number of Christians to the lions. It so happened that this architect had been converted to Christianity himself only a few days before. When he saw what was happening, in spite of the scarecrow of ridicule, in spite of death itself, he cried, "I am a Christian,"
Scarecrows.

and a few minutes later his body was torn into fragments. But he was realizing that the grim specter of death was nothing more than the scarecrow pointing to the garden of the Kingdom.