IN THE WAY
Matthew 16:23
"You are a hindrance to me."

I

This is an arresting declaration. It ought to startle us into wide-eyed wakefulness. It ought to cause every one of us to say with deep searching of heart, "Lord, is it I?" This is startling for at least three very definite reasons.

1. First because of Him who said it. These are the words of Jesus. They are therefore the words of One who knows. It is not always possible for us to tell the moral and spiritual value of any single deed that we do. It is impossible for us to estimate with certainty the influence for good or evil of any single personality. But not so with Jesus. He speaks with authority in this realm as in every other. He knows whether we are helping or hindering. He knows whether we are proving a blessing or a curse. He knows whether we are helping to heal the world's open sore or only making it the more incurable. And seeing the effect of this man's life with clear eyes He said, "You are a hindrance to me."

Then this is not only the word of One who knows, but of One who cares. It is a judgment of One whose nature and whose name is Love. Of course we realize that love always sees the best. Those who really love us are not searching for our faults. They are not searching for our shortcomings. They are searching for what is best and most beautiful in us. And this clear-eyed Christ, loving Peter as no mother ever loved her child, had to say of him, "You are a hindrance to me."

2. Then this startles us because of what is implied in it. Jesus said, "You are a hindrance to me." There are some directions
in which it is a great honor to be a hindrance. A man of my acquaint-
ance moved out of a section of a certain city some years ago. Then
he was gone the lawless element in that section said openly, "Now we
can carry on our traffic. Now we can violate the law without hindrance
since this man is gone." To be so criticized is an honor. I should
like to stand as a barrier against every form of violation of law. I
should like to be a bulwark against every invading evil that would make
our city a less wholesome place for our boys and girls. The stock of
Mr. Roosevelt rose more than one hundred per cent in my estimation
recently because of the skillful and courageous way in which he handled
the case of Jimmy Walker. God bless every man who is taking a courageous
stand against those agencies that are seeking to make us what we are
today, the most lawless nation on the face of the earth.

But Jesus said, "You are a hindrance to me. You are thwart-
ing me in my purposes. You are obstructing me in my progress toward
the far and fine goals to which I have set myself. You are adding to
the weight of my already burdened shoulders. You are adding to the
agonie of my thorn crown. You are making more difficult my climb up
Salvary. You are defeating, in so far as in you lies, my purpose of ulti-
mate conquest."

What a tragic declaration! And yet there are those of whom
it is true at this hour. We thwart Jesus in our own personal lives.
He is eager to make us strong with His strength. He is offering us
His peace. He is yearning that the beauty of the Lord shall rest upon
us as the sunshine rests upon the hills. He is doing all that infinite
love can do to bring us to our highest possibilities, but we thwart Him.
I was reading recently of a family who, while crossing a swollen stream
fell into the water because an old decayed bridge gave way under them.
The son was an excellent swimmer. He gave himself to the task of
saving his mother, But she was frantic and threw her arms around her
son and so clutched him as to make his efforts at her salvation impossible.
The boy barely escaped with his own life. Then the funeral was held. He looked into her face and cried desperately, "O Mother, I did my dead level best to save you!" I may be only a fragment of the man I ought to be, but the reason is not the fault of Jesus. It is because I am hindering Him.

We hinder Jesus in our homes. One of the saddest signs of our times is the decay of home religion. How our Lord yearns to find a place in every home, but some of us hinder him. Some of us shut the door in his face. Thus we cheat ourselves. Thus we cheat our growing boys and girls. I wonder if I am talking to a father whose children would have a better chance if he were not there. I wonder if I am talking to a mother about whom the best thing that even Christ could say is "You are a hindrance to me." A father was killed the other day in a drunken brawl. Then the news was brought home his twelve-year old son flung his arms around his mother and said, "O Mother, aren't you glad!" He was a hindrance to the happiness and peace of his own home.

There are those whose contribution to the church is only to hinder. There are people in every church I know whose withdrawal would give the church a better chance. That influence they have tends only to the weakening of the church. They do not build up the brotherhood. What influence they have goes for dissension and strife and discord. They do not construct. They tear down. They do not help but hinder. There are some doing good whose very presence is power. Then they go they leave a lonesome place against the sky. It is everybody's privilege. But there are those, even in the church, whose membership does not make for power but for weakness, not for helping but for hurting.

It is a tragic way of using life. To make anybody's burden a bit heavier is pathetic enough, but to drag down when you might lift up is to make for strife when you might be building a brotherhood, to
hinder when you might help. That is the very climax of tragedy. The only goals worth striving for are the goals set by Jesus. The only purposes worth dying for are His purposes. He is out to banish every evil thing. He is out to bring justice between man and man, and between nation and nation. He is out to make the golden rule effective in every relationship of life. He is out to induce men to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks and to learn war no more. He is out to bring in the kingdom of God, to know that good day when the glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. It is the only enterprise worthy of an immortal soul. Let us resolve by the grace of God that we shall not thwart Him nor hinder Him, but that we will help Him.

3. Then this is startling in the third place because of the man to whom Jesus was speaking. This is what Jesus said to Simon Peter. Who was this man Simon? What kind of man was this of whom Jesus said, "You are a hindrance to me?" He was not an avowed enemy. Jesus had His enemies. There were those who hung on His words, not because they were spirit and life, but in order to entrap Him, to find some way to work His ruin. Jesus had enemies. He stirred tempests and waked serpents in some men's souls. He was hounded by the most diabolical set of human hounds that ever dogged an honest man to death. But Peter was not an enemy.

Nor was Simon Peter a lukewarm friend. Of course Jesus suffered and suffers still at the hands of indifferent and half-hearted friends. He suffers more from them than he does from open and avowed enemies. This is a declaration from His own lips. To those who were lukewarm, to those who patronized Himself and His Church rather than giving it a whole-hearted devotion, to those who put the primary in a secondary place He said, "I would that you were either cold or hot."
That is, "I wish you were either out and out for me or out and out against me. Any position is better than the hazy, half-hearted position that you are taking." There is nothing from which the cause of our Lord suffers more today than just this: Half-hearted saints trying to walk with a whole-hearted Christ. The kingdom of God is never advanced, the forces of evil are never really afraid except in the presence of those who put first things first. Vast numbers in the Church today are simply playing at religion. The cause of Christ is relegated to the background. They fling at the feet of Christ the mere scraps of their devotion. They have no set convictions that hold them steady. Their attendance upon church is far more variable than the weather, and their giving has upon it nothing that even hints of the crimson marks of Calvary. Christ suffered in the long ago at the hands of His enemies. He was nailed to the cross by them. He suffers from them today. But His sorest wounds then and His sorest wounds now are inflicted by the hands of His half-hearted friends.

But Simon Peter was not of this number. He was a friend of Jesus. He loved Him with hot devotion. He just made a great confession that filled the heart of his Lord with unspeakable gladness. Jesus had asked His disciples two questions. The first was theological and speculating: "Who do men say that I am?" And they answered that some said He was Elijah, the son of Jeremiah, and some one of the old prophets. Then He turned from the realm of speculation to that of personal experience as He asked this question: "Who do you say that I am? That do I mean to you? That have you found in me? That place have you given me in your own heart and life?" And Peter's answer was altogether satisfactory: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus greeted that answer with wild enthusiasm, declaring that Peter had been the object of divine revelation, that flesh and blood had not revealed that supreme fact to him, but the Infinite Father Himself.
Yet this man who confessed Jesus as Lord and who loved Him with passionate devotion, was for the present a hindrance to Him. How this should send us to search our hearts!

II

Now if Simon Peter, the confessor and friend of Jesus was a hindrance to Him, why was such the case?

It was surely not because of any set purpose on the part of Simon. When this disciple waked that morning he did not begin the day by resolving that he was going to make the path of Jesus that day just as difficult as possible. The evil that he did was not born of deliberate malice. He did not hinder his Master of set purposes. Those of us who are guilty of Peter's sin seldom do. I do not take it that there is a member of First Methodist Church who has deliberately resolved within himself that he is going to do all he can to defeat the purpose of Christ in the church. We have not set out to thwart Christ's dream that this should be a glorious church without spot or blemish or any such thing. And yet some of us are hindering just as Peter did.

Why, I repeat, did it come about that this well meaning disciple was a hindrance? How has it come about in our case? The answer lies on the surface. After Peter's confession Jesus dared to disclose His cross, and when Peter saw that skull-shaped hill in the distance he drew back. He laid hold of Jesus and tried to draw Him back. "Be it far from Thee, Lord," he said with amazed horror. "This shall never be unto Thee." And the enthusiastic joy of Jesus changed into deep sorrow as He turned to Peter and said, "Get thee behind me Satan, you are a hindrance to me. You do not have God's way of looking at things. You have man's. You are trying to save your life. In so doing you are going in the wrong direction, for he that seeketh to save
his life shall lose it, but he that loses his life shall keep it unto life eternal."

How did Peter hinder Christ? By putting self first. How do we hinder Him? By putting self first. That is a very common source of every hindrance. To thwart Jesus in your own life, to help to thwart Him in His blood-bought world, it is not necessary that you be vicious, that you be lawless, that you be antagonistic to all that is good. It is only necessary that you be self-centered rather than Christ-centered. Ours is a religion of the cross. It is a religion that calls not for self-denial but for the denial of self. As long as you make this cross a mere ornament that you wear about your necks instead of a crude instrument upon which you die to self you are going to be a hindrance to Jesus.

"Far be it from thee," cried Peter, by which he meant what is the use of having power if you do not use it yourself? That is the use of money if you do not spend it on yourself? Look out for number one. And that spirit is the supreme barrier in the conquest of Jesus Christ. So long as we ask, "There do I come in?" so long as we put self first we are going not to help but to hinder. Every self-centered man in the pulpit, every self-centered man in the pew, every self-centered church that lives in forgetfulness of the needs of the world and thinks only of itself, is but standing in the way of Christ's program. You are but blocking traffic on the highway of the Lord and making it the more difficult for Him to move on to the conquest of the nations.

"Why are we here this morning? Why have I entered the ministry? Is it to be ministered to or to minister? Did I enter this holy calling with the steeple of First Church in my eye? Are you here because you feel that in this church you can get the most with the least output?
Why did you join the church? In the city of Detroit a few months ago a young chap said to his friend, "I am going to become a Christian and join the church." And the friend said, "What church are you going to join?" The young convert said, "I am going to join the church of Dr. So-And-So." And his friend warned him, "If you join that church they are going to soak you." And the young disciple said, "Is that so? I am going to ask the pastor." He went and told the pastor that his friend said, "I am thinking of joining your church but he said you would soak me. Is that so?" And the pastor, who knew something of the cross, wisely answered, "It is true." And the young man responded to the challenge because he was really in earnest about the best. If I have ever won a single individual to the church by appealing to his love of ease, to his tendency to dodge the cross, may God forgive me. Any church that does not soak its membership, not only for what they have but for what they are, is not a Christian church. I remind you again, ours is the religion of the cross.

III

We all agree that Simon Peter, in spite of his bold confession, does not show to advantage in this scene. As beautiful as was his beginning, because he balked at the sight of the cross he became a hindrance. But by and by he faced up to the cross, and because he faced up to it he became a help. And this is the good news I have for you, that every hinderer may become a helper. These are desperate and difficult days, but they are days that I am persuaded are going to be rich in blessing for the church. A sifting process is going on. This depression is a bit like the persecutions of other days. It tends to separate the wheat from the chaff. Some are going to be alienated from Christ because they have never really given their hearts to Him.
Multitudes, please God, are going to be drawn closer to Him. How is it going to affect you? How is it going to affect our own church. If we put self first, if we fail Christ in this crisis it is going to mean our spiritual impoverishment, and from a help we are going to become a hindrance. If we stand in our places beside the cross and act as real Christians, God will bless us and make us a blessing.

I know you will remind me that these are difficult days. So they are. That may be the reason we are here. We have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. If there was ever a day when every man should stand in his place and be true, it is today. Remember that a winner never quits and a quitter never wins. A brilliant young chap committed suicide in one of our western cities the other day, leaving a poem behind him entitled, "Quitting Before the Thistle Blows."

We have it in our power to play the coward after this fashion if we will, but as for me and as for you, I pray God that we may have the courage to stand in our places of duty when the whistle blows. If we do then our Lord will run to meet us and say, "Well done. You were a help to me. Then the battle was hot against me, I could count on you."

Dear hearts, I would burn this message into your very souls. Nothing can rob us of our privilege of helpfulness except our fear of the cross. If we do not shrink, out of these difficulties will come unmeasured blessings. There is a story that tells of a certain Chinese king who ordered his minister to mold a bell that would ring with absolutely flawless tone. That minister went out and gathered together some of the choice gold and jewels of the empire and put them all together into a great caldron and melted them and molded a marvelous bell. But when it was swung in the tower and began to ring, its tone was harsh and discordant. He tried a second time and failed. Then his king said, "Unless the bell rings with flawless tone this third time, your life will be the forfeit."
At his wit's end the minister went home with sad face. When those who loved him saw his sadness they asked for the secret. And he told them that the bell was still discordant and he knew not how to make it ring with harmonious sweetness. His daughter, who loved him better than life, listened to his story and when all was sleeping she crept out of her home down to where the wise man lived and told him her story. And he instructed her that the bell would only ring with flawless sweetness when with the gold and the jewels there was mingled the life blood of a loving heart. So with the secret closely locked within her own soul she went home and the next day when the metal was seething and boiling and hissing in the great caldron, she threw herself into the caldron, and with the metal was mingled her own heart's blood. And then the bell was lifted to the tower and when it was rung, the multitudes gathered to hear with heaving bosoms and tear-wet faces, for such exquisite music was never heard before. So may it be with our lives, so may it be with our church, if we dare to die to self and put Jesus Christ and His cross at the very center of our lives.

Two Classes of Rewards. Some will come first because they are needed. They would stay away if such were not the case. Others will stay away because they are needed. If nothing were to be done but to set and report paid in face you would be there.

2. It rises in blessings.
3. Some money is to lose it. Adorn treasure.
4. Some wave is to lose it. Adorn treasure.
His Partial Eclipse

"Out of my way, Satan" Matthew 16:23 (J. B. Phillips)

"Out of my way, Satan"—what a horrible word! It cuts like a whip and burns like hot acid. It shocks us for at least three simple reasons. First, because of the one who said it. This is not the utterance of a blusterer. These sharp words came from the tenderest lips that ever spoke. They are the words of our Lord Himself.

Then they are shocking because of the one to whom they were spoken. "Out of my way, Satan". Jesus is here not talking to a foe but to a friend. He is speaking to one who loved him with deep devotion. Finally, the words shock us because of when they were spoken. They came just after Jesus had given Simon a breathtaking word of approval. How startling that having commended his friend to a superlative degree, he should proceed at once to dash him from the heights to the very floor of the bottomless pit.

Part I

Look at the background.

The scene is the city of Cæsarea Philippi. Here Jesus has come with his disciples for what we would today call a retreat. Frankly I have never liked the word retreat. It has a flavor of defeat about it. I fear it is often what we actually do even when we claim that we are going to the attack. It is possible for churches to retreat by merely taking the easy way. I have seen downtown churches retreat by leaving a location where they were greatly needed to find another in the suburbs where the need was far less. Such conduct reminds me of the drunk who sought his lost quarter under an arc light, not because he had lost it there, but because
he could see better.

Now Jesus, having led his friends into retirement for a closer fellowship and for fuller instructions, asked them two questions. The first was as to the impression he had made on the public. "Who do men say that I am?" His friends answered this question with eagerness. Speaking for the people, not for the authorities, they could give a most favorable answer. It was one that on the surface seemed highly flattering.

"Some say you are John the Baptist", they began. What a tribute that was! Jesus himself had declared that a greater man than John had not been born. "Others", they continued, "say that you are Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets." How living prophets are not always popular. They have a way of hurling too many thunderbolts. Even Elijah at one time was forced to seek a boarding place among pagans in the land of Jezebel. But dead prophets meet with all-but universal approval. These friends, therefore, in reporting to their Master that the people were according him a place among the great prophets of Israel felt that they were the bearers of glad tidings.

But by this high commendation Jesus seemed in no sense thrilled. He considered it of no moment at all. Therefore he brushed it aside to ask a question of supreme importance. It was of supreme importance to these disciples then and there. It is of supreme importance to us in the here and now. This is the question, "Who do you say that I am?" Apart from the testimony of others, apart from all hearsay evidence, speaking solely out of your own experience, what do I mean to you?" All that really counts in your religion depends upon your answer to that question.
In his reply Simon rose to sublime heights. "You are the Christ," "the Son of the Living God." That is Simon's way of saying "I have found in you all the values that belong to the Son of God. Indeed, I have found the very best that I can hope for in God himself." This I think is the faith of most of us. We can long for nothing better in God than that he be like Jesus Christ.

Now some may be disposed to argue as to how much content Simon put into this confession. But there is no argument as to the fact that he put sufficient into it to meet the approval of his Lord. Not only did Jesus approve, but he seems to have fairly leaped to his feet in joyful enthusiasm. "Blessed are you Simon...For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven." That is, "You have been the recipient of a divine revelation. You have been enlightened by a light that flashes from the very face of God." I do not see how Jesus could have given a fuller commendation. The fact that this great word of approval is not recorded by Mark is easily understood. The Gospel of Mark is in a real sense Simon's gospel. When it was written this once proud disciple had become too humble to parade such a high compliment.

Part II

Now leading Simon to this confession, Jesus seeks to lead him still further on his spiritual pilgrimage. "Since I am the Christ of God, what follows?"

Simon was as sure of the answer to this question as he was of his great confession. "Since you are the Christ, you are
going to lead us from victory to victory. You are going to enable us to throw off the yoke of the tyrant. You are going to make it possible for us to put our foot on the neck of our foe as they have long put their foot upon our necks. You are going to bring back the olden age of David. You are going to restore again the kingdom of Israel." Such was Simon's conviction. It was also that of every pious Jew who believed in the Messiah.

But the conviction of Jesus was exactly the opposite. "Since I am the Christ as you confess, I must suffer. I must suffer death, even the death of the cross." This word MUST is Jesus' very own. How long our Lord had known that he must go to the cross is a matter of question.

But there is no question as to the fact that he did know that the cross was a necessity. I am not forgetting that for a brief moment in Gethsemane he had a faint hope that there might be some other way. Therefore he prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But his second prayer indicates that he has discovered the impossibility of his request. Therefore it is a prayer of acceptance;--"If it is cup may not pass from me except I drink it, they will be done."

As Jesus looked upon the cross as a necessity when soon in prospect so he did when he looked upon it in retrospect. After he had passed through the black tunnel of crucifixion, he did not regard his suffering as a meaningless tragedy. He did not regard it as the result of the too shroud planning of the religious leaders of his own people. No more did he regard it as a result of the too great cowardice of Pilate. He still saw it as a necessity anchored
within the will of God. This he affirmed, to take a single example, by the question that he put to his two friends on the road to Emmaus, "Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer?"

Thus in the mind of our Lord the cross was not a misfortune but a divine necessity. So it came to be regarded by those who knew him best. It is a striking fact that the very men who loved him well enough to die for him never once lamented "The deep damnation of his taking off". They never hint that his was a heroic, but mad adventure born merely of somebody's blunder or of somebody's sin.

As these intimate friends did not bewail the cross, no more did they heap abuse upon those wicked hands had engineered the ugly tragedy. These saints became so sure of the necessity, and also of the infinite worth of this sacrifice on the part of their Lord that they could never regard it as a calamity. It was something that had so transformed and transfigured all life that they could sing centuries before the poet "In the cross of Christ I glory". To the mind of Jesus the cross was a necessity. Such has been the conviction of the choicest saints through the centuries. I am confident that it is our conviction even now.

But though Simon himself came later to be gripped by that great conviction, such was far from being the case when Jesus here declared that he must suffer. No sooner had the Master displayed his cross than the face of this friend that had become so radiant under the approval of his Lord, went into eclipse. "God forbid", he cried in amazed indignation. If Simon's confession had been explosive with conviction, his rebuke of his Master was, if possible, even more so. "You are mad", he seems to say. "What is the use of
being the Christ if you take your tremendous powers and throw them away? It is unthinkable that you should be guilty of such a wicked waste.

It is well to bear in mind that in making this rebuke Simon is not speaking selfishly. He is not merely shrinking from the cross for himself, as he did later. His sense of outrage is born of his love. He cannot endure the thought that one so great, so good, so dear as Jesus should thus die. Nor is Simon undertaking to turn his Lord aside from the mission he has come to accomplish. He is only urging him to find some easier way. "Certainly it is your duty to finish the work that God has given you to do. But to do this you must save yourself. You must make it your first aim to by-pass the cross." Seen in the light of history this protest on the part of Simon is altogether stupid. But tested by our usual way of thinking, it is so human, so shot through with what we are accustomed to call common sense, that we cannot throw a single stone at this disciple.

But such was not the conviction of Jesus. In a kind of holy horror He answered Simon's sensible suggestion with this thunderbolt, "Out of my way, Satan". Why did Jesus employ this hellish name, Satan? He did so because none other was quite so fitting. Simon's suggestion took our Lord back at once to that forty days battle in the wilderness. Simon's words were just as satanic as those used by the tempter during that lonely fight.

What was the suggestion of the tempter? He never hinted that Jesus might not be the unique Son of God. He accepted his deity. He only suggested to Jesus that he capitalize on his deity for himself. "Since you are the Son of God, command these stones to
be made bread. Meet all the physical needs both of yourself and of the world if you like. Win your way by seeing that everybody is well fed, well clothed and well housed, even though they may be well rotted at the same time. Win the kingdoms of this world surely, but do it by compromise. Indeed, how you win is of no moment so long as you shirk Calvary." Thus Simon and Satan spoke the same language.

Not only that, but their appeal is as old as man and as new as our last heartbeat. We are all religious. Man is a religious animal. But what do we demand of our religion? Too often the first and supreme demand is just this, that it be easy. We are all prone to choose a push-button religion. The prime sinner of the Old Testament according to the writer of the Book of Kings is Jeroboam. He has the wreck of a nation upon his conscience. How did he earn this condemnation?

Jeroboam was a politician. Having become king of the Ten Tribes he was eager to keep his high position. But he was afraid that if his Ten Tribes remained one religiously with the other two, they would soon become one politically. Therefore he set about making them of a divided faith. How did he do it? Not by a frontal attack, That would have met resistance. He said rather, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem." By this he is saying"Of course there is no harm in your going, but there is an easier way. You can still be religious at far less cost."

The other day a mother who is our friend and who had been active in our church said to Mrs. Chappell, "Our son came very nearly becoming a minister. But we talked him out of it." When my wife turned in amazement and asked, "Did you not want him to become a
"Certainly not", was the emphatic answer. When questioned for the reason this friend replied, "We did not want him to become a minister because ministers have such a hard time." Of course she was dead wrong on two counts. Ministers as a rule do not have such a hard time. But even if they did, this would be the poorest possible reason for rejecting that high calling.

Not only did Jesus call Simon by this terrible name, but he added this further damning word, "Out of my way, you are not a help but a hinderance. You are playing on the wrong team, fighting on the wrong side." That means that to become a foe of our Lord it is not necessary to become an aggressive and outrageous sinner. All that is necessary in the words of the prophet is to turn to our own way. Paul once wrote a letter that so bespattered by tears that I can well imagine that he was half ashamed to send it. "I tell you", he wrote, "even weeping, that you are enemies of the cross of Christ." Why? Not because they had become rakes and crooks. They simply had come to mind earthly things. In short they were self-centered instead of Christ-centered.

Now Jesus having declared that the cross was for him a necessity refused to draw back even at the rebuke of his devoted friend. Instead he added this further word: "The cross is a necessity for me, Simon, but if you are going to be my disciple, it is no less a necessity for you." "If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, he must give up all right to himself, take up his cross and follow me." (J. G. Phillips) Mark you, nobody has to follow. The cross is never forced upon any man. I am not forgetting that Simon of Cyrene was compelled to bear the cross. But that cross was at first only a burden that he bore in hot indignation. His real cross-bearing
began when having completely lost his heart to Jesus he took up of his own will.

Here then is the sure word of our Lord. It is endorsed by the experience of all the saints. Every man that would follow Jesus must take up his cross. To by-pass Calvary is to by-pass life. To shirk the cross is to run into the arms of death.

"Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone
And there's a cross for me."

Part III

Today as in the long ago, we are confronted with the high choice that Jesus offered to Simon. We do not have to follow our Lord. We do not even have to pretend to follow him. But if we do decide to follow we must do so on his terms, not ours. The terms that he has laid down are not arbitrary. He himself could not make them different. This is the case because it is true in the nature of things that he who seeks to save his life, shall lose it. The hand that is too tightly closed to give is too tightly closed to receive.

Therefore it comes to pass that though these conditions at first glance may seem forbidding they are in reality the very opposite. There is no surer road to disappointment and slavery than the acknowledging of no master but self. Life is a prize won only by those who seek to give. It forever eludes those whose supreme passion is to get. See how the truthfulness of this is illustrated through the insight of the greatest of all the poets.

The father of Portia realizing that he could not live to see his daughter married sought to guarantee for her a worthy husband. He therefore took three cases, put her likeness in one of these and so fixed it that the man who chose the case containing the
picture would be the successful author. The gaskets were of gold, silver, and lead. The first two make a common appeal. The gold said, "Who chases will shall sink in what many men desire," The silver spoke to the same motive, "Who chose we shall GET as much as he deserves." The leaden gasket bore thus forbidding word, "Who chases we much GIVE and bear all he hath." The fourth was addressed to the man whose central passion was gaining. The third to the man whose central passion was giving. No wonder the wise father put his daughter's picture in the leaden gasket. By thus gave her to a giver.

But the Prince of Morocco, you remember, was one who was caught up in the glitter of the gaskets. He sought the prize, but all his seeking had a self-reference. Therefore, when he opened the gasket of his choice he found only a death's head. At that, he made an exclamation that is thoroughly spiritual. It is the very epitome of the experience of all who choose the worst of the second beat and thus miss the highest. Here is his exclamation: "Oh, hell! The beauty of the world is not in its ugliness, but in its truth. To strive the way is to think everything that is of present and abiding worth. That can mean nothing less than hell. This is thus always and everywhere."
WINNING BY LOSING

For he that seeketh to save his life shall lose it: but he that loseth it shall keep it through life eternal.

Matthew 16:25

I.

How fitting you feel is such a word as this, as we are gathered in the hallowed atmosphere of this church, in the presence of these symbols of the broken body and shed blood of our Lord. But while this is a very same text for a high hour of idealism, we feel that it would not quite fit into the every day world where we live our lives. But, of course, so to think is to be altogether wrong. Set this text beside your banking buildings and your business houses, and it will be carrying on bravely when they have been dust for countless centuries. This is just as true and reliable as the multiplication table. It is as dependable as God.

"For he that seeketh to save his life shall lose it." You see Jesus is stating this as a reason or an explanation of something he has said before. Simon Peter has just made his great confession. The Master has concluded that his disciples are far enough forward now for Him to disclose the cross. Therefore, He tells them how He must go to Jerusalem, and how He must suffer, and must be put to death. Simon is outraged. He loves this Master of his
with passionate devotion. He cannot bear the idea of his throwing his life away in such a futile fashion. Therefore, he turns upon Him with positive indignation saying, "Be it far from thee Lord, it can never be unto thee."

But Jesus is not to be persuaded; he answers his misguided friend, with what seems like positive harshness--"Get thee behind me Satan. You are not talking the language of God, you are talking the language of men. You are saying, as misguided men have said through the centuries, 'Look out for self first.' But that is impossible for me. I must go to the cross. Not only so, but you must go too if you would be a follower of mine. 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

"Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone,
And there's a cross for me."

II.

In this last word, you notice that Jesus stated the conditions of discipleship.

1. Willingness. "If any man will come after me." "Discipleship," declares Jesus, "is optional. No man has to follow me. I am no despot. I do not compel. I have no conscript soldiers." That is forever true. No man has to be a christian. The fact that we are christians means that we are so from choice. Our Master never has and never will compel a single soul to follow Him.

Of course, He invites, He woos, He persuades. Ceasingly He stands at the door and knocks, but he never crashes the door. 'He never poaches upon the sacred precinct of personality.' He is eager to be both your guest and host this day. But eager as He is, the realization of His hopes, the realization of His longing depends upon you. "If any man will open the door I will come in." But
whether you are a follower of our Lord is entirely optional. To be a Christian one must be willing.

2. To be a Christian we must deny self. While our following Christ is purely optional, the conditions upon which we follow are not optional, they are fixed. Those conditions are not made by a despotic and an arbitrary God, they exist in the very nature of things. He himself could not change them. For instance, suppose it was up to you to decide whether or not you should be born into a world like this. May be such a decision would give you pause, but if you were to decide to be born, then of necessity you would have to meet the conditions of life on this planet. You could not decide to be born into a world like this, and at the same time decide to live without eating and without drinking. No more can you decide to follow Christ and ignore the conditions.

The first of these we said is willingness, and the second is denial of self. What is the denial of self? It is something far bigger and finer than self denial. Self denial treats the symptoms, while the denial of self goes to the heart of the disease. Here is a thorn tree in my yard. It is ugly and dangerous. I clip off a few of its thorns--that is self denial. Then I decide to dig it up root and all and throw it over the fence--that is the denial of self. Self denial is at times helpful, and at other times it is silly and hurtful.

In the old days men would imprison themselves in caves; they would whip themselves; they would torture their bodies in the belief that such self denial was pleasing to God. There is a certain type of religious character that believes their religion increases in fervor just in proportion to their wretchedness. Such a conception is not only not Christian, it is anti-Christian.

What Jesus is asking for is for the denial of self. That means self-surrender; self dedication. It means the yielding of ourselves to God. It means "that we present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God." It
means the giving of self. That is christianity. It is christianity in its begin
ning. We do not even start on the christian way without dedication. It is chr
ISTRITY in its course. We are to repeat that dedication every day. It is chr
ISTRITY in its consummation.

Now in just so far as we fail to give ourselves, we fail to become christians. N
othing will take the place of the dedication of life. What is the Master ask
ing as He knocks at the door of your heart this morning? He is not seeking your m
oney primarily; He is not seeking your work; He is not seeking your prayers and y
our tears; He is certainly not seeking your wretchedness; He is seeking you. H
e is saying, "Son give me thine heart." If He gets you, if He gets into the th
rone room of your life, if He wins you, and gets you to say from your heart, "N
ot my will, but Thine be done," then He is on the road to achieving His high pu
pose in your life.

3. To be a christian we must be willing. We must deny self. We must take up
the cross. The denial of self, the getting rid of the weary weight of our selfi
ness is to help us in the bearing of the cross. And what does it mean to take up
the cross? How many feel that the carrying of any sort of load is cross-beari
ng? We find ourselves fighting some handicap, and we say "It's a great cross,
but I am willing to bear it." But every burden we bear cannot be spoken of as
a cross. What then is it to bear the cross? To bear the cross is to carry
some load voluntarily. It is the doing of some task that we did not have to
do. It is loading ourselves with burdens that are not ours, and that nobody has a right to ask us to carry. When Jesus said "I must suffer," He did not mean that there was any outward compulsion. When He died, He did not have to die. No man wrenched life out of his grudging finger. "No man taketh it from me, I lay it down of myself."

Here is one of His most faithful servants. "Behold I go bound in spirit
unto Jerusalem. Not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city." When Paul's friends knew the dangers that threatened, they did their best to persuade him not to go. At last he turns upon these misguided friends with tender indignation. "What mean ye," he says, "by weeping and breaking my heart. I am ready not to go bound in Jerusalem only, but to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." But he did not have to do it; He took it on himself.

Here is David Livingston fighting his lonely fight in Africa. One devastating attack of fever after another is wrecking his body. He is suffering so from scurvy that we see him tying a string to one tooth after another, and the other end of the string to a tree until his teeth are knocked out. At last he dies in the service of this lonely and unfriendly land. He did not have to do it. He took its needs upon himself. There is Dr. Manget carrying on today in China. He is carrying on largely without instruments and without medicine. We have not been liberal enough to supply his needs. He does not have to do what he is doing. But he has taken the desperate plight of this plundering people upon himself. That is what cross-bearing means. It is doing for love's sake what we do not have to do.

We find the best possible illustration between mere burden-bearing and cross-bearing in the case of Simon of Cyrene. On the morning of the crucifixion, Simon was making his way into the city of Jerusalem. The procession that was hurrying Jesus to the cross attracted his attention. He was eager to see the prisoner. Being a husky fellow, he elbowed his way through the crowd, and arrived just as the Master was falling beneath his cross. Then an iron hand gripped his shoulder, and a voice of authority spoke to him, "Get under that cross and get going!" Simon went hot and cold, but in bitter shame and indignation he obeyed because he must. But the cross he was carrying was for him only a horrible burden.
But as he walked forward at the soldiers command, this strange prisoner whom he had released began to attract his attention. Perchance, he glanced at his face and realized that he had never seen a face just like that before. Then may be the prisoner spoke:—"I am sorry that I fell like that and so involved you." And the ice began to melt from Simon's heart. "That is all right," he said, "I am glad to carry it if it will help you." By and by they reached a skull-shaped hill and he was allowed to lay his burden down. He then watched the grim work of crucifixion. He heard that strange prayer "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." After that last bitter cry "It is finished," he went out for love's sake to live for his crucified Lord. That which once had been only a burden became a cross. The service that he had once rendered under compulsion he rendered now in joy. To bear the cross then is to do for love's sake what we do not have to do.

III.

Now what is the outcome of our willingly denying self and taking up the cross?

Such conduct is costly. There is no denying that. Those who live in this fashion live dangerously. In the eyes of the worldly, they literally throw their lives away. I am thinking now of a brilliant woman, with vast gifts, burying her life in an out of the way place among a crude and ignorant people. She could have shown in the eyes of society, but she chose to bury herself among these backward and under-privileged folks. Her wealthy friends said she was wasting her life, throwing herself away. But Jesus said that she and all such were winning life. She was winning in the only way possible, and that was by losing. "For he that seeketh to save his life shall lose it."

This is not a bit of idealistic preaching, it is sober fact. To save is
to lose everywhere. Here is a grain of wheat. How may it realize its possibilities? Not by saving itself, but by losing itself. "Except a coin of wheat fall in the ground and die it abideth alone." I have a good right arm, I desire to keep it good. Therefore, I seek to save it. I put it in a sling. But thereby I lose it. I have good eyes. I save them by bandaging them. They do not grow stronger, they do not remain the same, they go blind. I have a beautiful singing voice. I wish to keep it, and therefore I never sing. The result, I lose my capacity to sing. I have the power to think, but I must spare my brain. It does not become a better brain, it rather weakens and dies.

Just as this is true in every other realm, it is true in the realm of the spiritual. To refuse to get myself under the burdens and needs of others, to refuse to touch any part of the world's load, is not to live, but to die. There are folks that congratulate themselves because they manage to dodge every appeal for help. Their one question is "where do I come in?" Some of these are rich, some are poor, some are sick, and some are well, some are prominent, and some are hidden by obscurity, but none of them is in a true sense living. For all, regardless of their circumstances, life is a starving and mean thing, hardly worth the having.

But how about those who are eager to follow Jesus? Even to those it means the denial of self, and the bearing of the cross. How about these queer folks who seem to throw themselves away with mad abandon? They are the live folks, they are the only folks that live abundantly. A little before I left Memphis I had four old maids in my congregation. They had come from some of the most difficult mission fields in the world. They were eager to go back. In one sense they were homely, in a profounder sense, they were beautiful. Their faces had a radiance upon them as if lighted with the light of God. I felt as I looked at them--here are folks that are really living.

Dr. Gonzalius used to tell a story that is very much to the point. One
Saturday he was working on his sermon when his nephew, a youth of about twenty, looked in. "What's your text for tomorrow?" he asked. This was the text, "To this end was I born, and to this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth." The joyful young lad became serious and said, "Uncle, what was I born for?" And the uncle said, "I don't know, but if you will be willing to take the first step you will find out."

That young chap went out from the pastor's study and down the street. Then he saw a crowd gathered about the Iroquois theater that was on fire. You remember that disaster where some five or six hundred lost their lives. With fine forgetfulness, this young fellow dashed into the burning building and brought out a child, and then a woman, and then another. Till by and by he had saved a dozen or more. But as he was turning to go back to rescue another, a piece of burning timber hit him and he dropped on the sidewalk. They hurried him to the hospital and sent for his uncle. When he arrived, the youth was still conscious, though it lasted but a little longer. "I understand now," he said with radiant face. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world that I might save those fourteen."

The minister said that months later he was stopping at a hotel in Paris. By and by a gentleman from America came up to him and began to talk. First he talked with perfect sanity, then he began to get excited. Then he said, "Excuse me, I was in a burning building sometime ago. I had some friends with me. I saved myself; and breaking into maniacal laughter he shouted, "I saved myself." A little later his keeper came up and led him away. When he was quieted, this keeper explained to the minister. "He was in the Iroquois theater with some friends. Some of them were lost. He ran off and left them, but he has never been able to forgive himself. He saved his life only to lose it.

The one way then to find life here and hereafter is to deny self; it is
LIFE THROUGH THE CROSS

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Matthew 16:25

It is easy in the atmosphere of the sanctuary to hear this word without a shock. Of course it is true, we say. But while we feel it is true here in this atmosphere and during Holy Week, it is not quite so true out in the big world. But if this word is true here it is true everywhere. If it is not true here, it is not true anywhere. But true it is. We can no more ignore it than we can ignore the law of gravitation. Stand it up today beside your bank buildings, and it will be there fresh and green and young after your buildings of stone have been gone for countless ages. "For he that seeketh to save his life shall lose it, but he that loseth it for my sake shall find it."

I.

How did Jesus come to speak this word? He offered it as an explanation of something that went before. In a quiet retreat the Master had put to his disciples two questions. One of them was a speculative question. The other was intensely personal. Listen to the first—"Who do men say that I am? What impression have I made upon the great multitudes that have listened to me?" The answer given by these disciples would have been very flattering to anybody except Jesus. They declared that he had impressed his hearers as being one of the great prophets. All the great prophets were of course dead. Few of us ever
recognize a living prophet. To see a mole hill we must stand close to it. To get a proper view of a mountain we must stand away from it. The same is true if we recognize mountain-like men.

But while this answer seems flattering, it did not thrill Jesus in the least. He passed on to that question that is intensely personal, "Who do you say that I am?" In answer Simon Peter rose to great heights. He said a great many foolish things, but here he spoke magnificently. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. I have found in you, he affirms, the values that I find in God." At this answer Jesus was all enthusiasm. He declared that this discovery on the part of Simon had come about as a result of a divine revelation.

Having brought them thus far Jesus believed that he could now disclose the cross without too great an offense. Therefore he proceeded to tell them how he must go to Jerusalem and must be rejected and be put to death. But Simon who had spoken so wisely is at once amazed and indignant. He turns upon Jesus almost angrily saying, "Be it far from thee Lord. This shall never be unto thee." What is the use in having power, he means, if you do not use it? Why have such tremendous assets as yours if you refuse to capitalize upon them?

Then Jesus turned upon this devoted friend of his and spoke one of the sharpest words that he ever uttered. "Get thee behind me Satan. You are not talking the language of God, you are talking the language of men. Your words are as selfish as they are stupid and as stupid as they are selfish. If you were wise you would see that the cross is for me a necessity. You would also see that it is no less a necessity for you. To refuse to die is to refuse to live. Whosoever seeketh to save his life shall lose it, but to be willing to die is really to live."

II.

Then Jesus stated in simple terms the conditions for discipleship.
steps are pointed out, but rightly understood, they all mean one great step.

1. Willingness. "If any man is willing to come after me." If we are Christians it is because of our own choice. No compulsion has ever been laid upon any of us. God never poaches upon the sacred precincts of personality. He has no conscripts in his army. No man has to be a Christian. It is purely optional with everyone of us. The strongest measure that Almighty God takes with any human heart is to stand at the door and knock. He never crashes the door. Therefore if he gets into our lives it is because of our own choice. It is because we are willing.

2. If we will be Christian we must deny self. That, of course, is not optional. While we may decide for ourselves whether we shall follow Jesus or not, having chosen to follow him we cannot dictate the terms. If it were a matter of choice whether we should be born into a world like this we might hesitate. But, if having viewed all the facts we should decide to run the risk of living in a world like this, we would have to meet the conditions as such a choice involves. We could not say, "I am willing to be born in such a world, but I am not willing to hunger and thirst, to suffer and battle as other human beings have to do." In choosing to be born you would also choose to meet the conditions. In choosing to follow Christ, you therefore choose to deny self.

That is it to deny self? Some of us answer simply, "It is to practice self-denial." But that is not necessarily the case at all. Self-denial treats the symptoms while the denial of self goes to the heart of the disease. I remember an ugly thorn tree that grew in my father's yard. Its thorns were very sharp and dangerous. That it might be less dangerous we cut off a few of the thorns and burned them. That would have been self-denial. But the only safe way to treat such a tree was to dig it up roots and branches. That was the denial of self. Self-denial polishes the hands of the clock. The denial of self puts it right at its center. This means in short, that we are to put God's will
as supreme in our lives instead of our own wills.

3. The final step is the taking of the cross. Of course the denial of self is not an end, it is only a means to an end. We are to get rid of the burden of self in order that we may carry a more worthy burden. What is it to take up the cross? We sometimes think of the cross as any burden that we bear whether we bear it willingly or unwillingly. But such is not the case. Cross bearing is that burden, that responsibility, that load that we carry not of necessity, but of our own free choice.

That was what the cross meant to Jesus. Jesus did not have to die as he did. He tells us plainly that life was not wrenched from his hands by foes stronger than himself. "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." Jesus bore the cross of his own choice. The same must be true of ourselves. We can only regard ourselves as cross bearers as we get under the loads, burdens, and responsibilities that we do not have to get under.

Here for instance is a man whose burden became a cross. Simon of Cyrene is his name. On a certain Friday long ago this husky young man was making his way to Jerusalem. Near the city gates he ran into a great procession that was moving out toward Calvary. Then he had inquired what was going on he learned that three prisoners were to be executed that day. Probably he had never seen a crucifixion before. He was interested. He was eager to see the men who were condemned to death. Therefore being a husky fellow he elbowed his way through the crowd till he stood so close to the condemned man that he could have almost touched him with his hand.

There they go. Two of them were rugged fellows, lithe and sinewy and hard as nails. They walk briskly forward under the weight of their wooden cross as if they had strength to spare. But the third tottered as he walked as if his cross was too heavy for him. In fact, even as Simon looked he staggered and fell under its weight. Then just as he was preparing to turn away a bit sorry that this third
man could not take it, a strong man gripped his shoulder, and a voice of authority shouted at him, "Take it up and get going!"

Simon finds it hard to believe that he has heard aright. He goes hot with anger then cold with fear. He is utterly helpless. He cannot rebel against Rome. Therefore, with muttered curses he takes the heavy load upon his shoulders. He is angry with himself for his silly curiosity. He is filled with anger against Rome. He is even angry at the bleeding man at his side. "If he could not take it," he muttered to himself, "he ought never to have exposed himself to such danger."

I have an idea that Jesus knew something of what was going on in his bitter heart. Perhaps he looked at this angry man with a tender smile, then in a tone of apology he said, "I am sorry I am not quite up to myself today." But here we are at the foot of the hill. "I will take it now," but somehow as they walked together, Simon has forgotten his anger. A strange new tenderness warms his heart. The bearing of this shameful load is the very thing now that seems most worthwhile. "I will take it on to the end of the journey." And so he did. And when the grim work of crucifixion had been ended he went out to bear that cross till the day of his death. What was once a burden that he bore under compulsion that he would have gladly thrown down, became a cross that he carried for love's sake. When he thus began he became a Christian.

III.

Now the outcome of this will acceptance of the cross on our part is life, said Jesus, and rejection of it is death.

1. Take first the man who rejects the cross, who will have none of it, the man who says, "Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost," what does he find in life? He finds death. When and where? in some far-off time, in some far-off place out beyond the grave? By no means. He finds it in the here and
now. Over in the Orient there are two seas. They both looked out one morning to see a river coming. The first, the Sea of Galilee received the river and said, "It is too precious to keep." "The dry fields burn and the mills are to turn, and a million flowers morally yearn." So the sea passed the river on to the needy valley.

But this other sea looked out and saw that same river coming. She opened her arms to receive it and said as it clutched the heart, "It's mine. It's all mine. I will not let a single drop of it go for the moistening of a baby's lip or the watering of a flower." And that very day the laws of nature, which are the laws of God said, "Earth to earth and ashes to ashes, dust to dust." And they know it today as the Dead Sea. In refusing to give it refused to live.

2. But to those who accept the cross, receive life. This life is not simply experience of some far-off tomorrow, it is an experience of the here and now. We live today just in proportion as we give ourselves. Finding life through self-giving now we may be sure of finding it through all eternity. As twice two make four this noon, I can count on twice two making four a billion years from now. If through self-giving I find life today I can count on finding it forever more.

That those who do find life through losing it was the experience of Jesus. No man ever so fully gave as he. None ever so fully lived. But always everywhere in every age those who give themselves live abundantly. This is true regardless of outward circumstances. Some of these who have dedicated their lives lived in palaces, some in cottages, some are sick and some are well, some are rich and some are poor, but all of them without exception, live abundantly.

Sometime ago I went to see one in our city who outwardly seems to have lost about everything. She is stone blind. She is a helpless cripple. She will never take another step till she reaches that land where the gracious Physician waits with healing in his fingers. Saddest of all, she is in constant agony. Yet as
I talked to her I found her one of the gladest souls I have ever known. Her face looked as though she had a sunrise in behind it. In the course of the conversation she said this amazing word,—"I find myself wishing that I might bear the pain of others I have learned so well how to handle it." Here then is a word that is just as accurate as the multiplication table, just as reliable as the law of gravitation. "He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."
"In the last shall be first, and the first last."—Matthew 20:16

This is the main point of the gripping story that Jesus has just told. Of course, he does not mean that every man who is first is going to be last, nor that every man who is last is to be first; he only means that this sometimes happens. Or, as he puts it at the beginning of the story, "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first."

There is little doubt that every man present when Jesus told this unique story listened to it with keenest interest and absorption. Some were doubtless shocked by the seeming unfairness of it. Others, who were handicapped and who were coming close to the harvest without much to show for their day's labor, eagerly because it brought a glimmer of hope. Perhaps these felt that it was far too good to be true, but in spite of this fact, it made their gloomy day a bit brighter.

I

Look at the story. It tells of an eccentric landlord who hired laborers for his vineyard and paid them all in a very surprising fashion. It is striking also that this landlord hired every man who was willing to work, regardless of the lateness of the hour.

1. Look first at the laborers. They fell naturally into these groups:

(1) There were those sons of good fortune who succeeded in making contact with an employer in the early morning. These
men naturally had bargaining powers that their belated fellows
did not have. They could say to the owner of the vineyard,
"What will you pay for a day's work?" When he answered, "I
will pay each of you a dollar a day," that was satisfactory.
Having thus reached an agreement, these men went into the vineyard
for a full day's work.

(2) The second group was made up of those who were hired
at nine, twelve and three o'clock. These did not have the same
bargaining powers as their more fortunate fellows who found em-
ployment at the beginning of the day. Their employer offered
them no fixed wages. He only pledged himself to give them a
square deal. Therefore, they went into the vineyard trusting
this promise: "Whatever is right, I will pay you."

(3) The third group and the one which holds the center of
the stage is made up of those hired about five o'clock. When the
landlord went out at this late hour and found these still without
work, he questioned them, "Why stand ye here all the day idle or
workless?" In reply these depressed and discouraged men gave an
honest answer. "We are workless because nobody has hired us.
Our idleness is not our fault, but our misfortune." Then said
the landlord, "Go ye also into the vineyard." He gave them no
promise of reward, only a command. It speaks volumes, therefore,
for their eagerness that they took this, their first opportunity.
They hurried to earn even the pitiful pittance that they were
sure would be paid them for working only one-twelfth of a day.

2. Then, one hour later, came the pay off. Those who had
come last into the vineyard were paid first. That is what got
this employer into trouble. If he had only paid the full time
men first, they would have gone home without knowing of the good fortune of the late comers. But he paid the five o'clock men first. Not only so, but to their great joy, he paid them a full day's wages. What a burden that lifted! No child emptying his full stocking on Christmas morning could have found greater gladness than these found in the amazing generosity of their employer.

Naturally, such generosity awakened the expectations of the others. This was especially true of those who had worked for twelve full hours. They knew that if their employer were thus generous to them they would receive wages not for one day, but for twelve. Then, therefore, they received only that for which they had agreed, they were indignant. They appointed a spokesman who presented their case to the landlord. What was their complaint? Not that they had been cheated, but that others had been rewarded beyond their deserts. "Then hast made them equal unto us."

Their employer answered wisely, "I do thee no wrong." Surely he is perfectly right. You cannot possibly wrong me by doing a favor to my neighbor. It would seem that in his indignation this full time man had thrown down his dollar, saying "If you can't pay us more than that, I won't have anything." This is indicated by the fact that his employer said, "Take up that which is thine and go thy way. I will give unto this last as unto thee." "Thus," concludes Jesus, "the last shall be first, and the first last.

II

It is evident from this that our Lord's standard for measuring success is different from ours. It is well to remember that
For the days of the depression I heard the news of

"Tell me, have you heard the

newspaper to be excited by the coming that made you

misunderstood, is not understood, but we knew the

word to the truth." We read to measure the length of

the days so here and no fear of this I

will only tell...
who do not bring home the bacon. These men who had worked but one hour, received a full day’s wages not because they had really earned that much. They were rewarded not for what they had actually accomplished, but for what they would have accomplished had it been in their power. Their employer took the will for the deed. Browning must have had this in mind when he said, “It is not what man does, but what man would do that excites him.”

The fact that these five o’clock men had been jobless all day does not mean that they had been sitting in the shade having a good time. They had not been idle, but jobless. They had not only worked but had done so under the most depressing and discouraging circumstances. They had worked by going from one marketplace to another in search of a job. They had worked dagged by fear, the fear that they would be rated as failures, and by the still greater fear that at the close of the day they would be asked for bread that they could not give. In addition they had worked with a sense of uselessness growing like a rat at their self respect. There was a certain fairness, therefore, and vast kindness in their being paid more than they had earned.

This is constantly God’s way. I am quite sure that the supreme ambition of David’s was to build a temple to the honor of his God. I daresay that it was because of this temple that he expected to live in the grateful hearts of his people. But while he was able to accomplish much, this dream never came true. When he reached the end of the journey, there was no temple in Jerusalem to perpetuate his memory. Therefore, he probably passed on with a deep sense of failure. But God said
to him, "Whereas it was in thine heart to build me a house, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." That is, though David left no temple upon Mount Moriah, God gave him credit for such an achievement because of the temple that he had built in his heart.

This fact explains the enthusiasm of Jesus over the gift of the poor widow. "And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury, and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing." At that, Jesus sprung to his feet with cheeks aglow. He could not wait until the service was over to say to his friends, "This poor widow has cast in more than all they which have cast into the treasury." This was the case not because of what she had given with her hand, but what she had given with her heart.

This should give hope to the handicapped. It should ex- cite expectation in the hearts of those who feel that they are coming to the end of the journey with little to show for their struggles. I have known many of this kind. I am thinking now of a bright young chap in the Ozark Mountains who felt himself called to the ministry. He labored hard on his mountain farm to accumulate enough to enter college. At last the glad day came when he was on his way to the station to take the train. But his car was wrecked. His back was broken. He was confined to his bed not simply for days and weeks and months, but even years. At last, when he emerged from his torture chamber, his hopes of entering the ministry were dead. He had to take the only job that offered, that of ferryman on the Osage River. This he did not in bitterness, but with a fine high gallantry.
Here is a charming and high spirited girl who had dedicated her life to be mission field. She was soon to be married to a choice young man who shared her dream, and they were going out to these distant fields together. But tragedy struck. Her brother, who had been the stay of the family died. Then the mother. This left an invalid father and an imbecile brother. It, therefore, became necessary for this girl to give up her dream of working under far horizons. Life for her narrowed down to taking care of a whining, old invalid and a stupid brother. At last, these two passed into the sunset, but by that time spring had given place to summer, and summer to late autumn. The high spirited girl was then the old maid of the village. But through it all, she had been of a courageous, brave and cheerful spirit.

Now, I have an idea that the record of this young minister, who was never privileged to preach a single sermon, and this young woman, who had to give up her dream of wifehood and of labor in the mission field, is not going to be blank. I think our gracious Lord who understands is going to say, "Whereas it was in thine heart to do these great and romantic deeds for me, thou didn't well that it is in thine heart."

III

But what is the test of what is in our hearts?

The fact that God judges us not by what we do, but by what we would do is often very comforting. Some may even make an epitome of it. There are those who being handicapped, feel that they can make their contribution by cheap alibis. They satisfy themselves by telling what they would do if they could. They tell how much they would give if they were as rich as some Grecius.
They tell how faithfully they would work if they had the skill of some friend. Meanwhile, they are doing nothing with the opportunities that are really theirs.

The test of what is in our hearts is what we do with what is actually in our hands. These five o'clock laborers were rewarded because they had done their best with the opportunities that were actually theirs. When their employer said, "go also into the vineyard," they did not turn on him angrily and ask, "Why did you not employ us sooner?" No more did they say in self pity, "It is too late now. What is the good of one-twelfth of a day's wages anyway?" In spite of the fact that there seemed as little to be gained, they took what opportunity they had and made the best possible use of it.

I spoke just now of how God credited David with the building of the temple, though he did not build it at all except in his heart. How do we know that David really had it in his heart to build the temple? We know it because when he found that he could not build it, when he found that it would not be David's temple, instead of losing interest, he went just as far as he could toward building it. He did his best with what he had.

How do we know of the magnificent wealth that the poor widow had in her heart? Only in one way. By what she did with what was actually hers. Had she set out that morning to the temple leaving her two mites behind her, she would have had much to say for herself. She could have said, "There will be many rich people at the service today who will cast in handfuls of gold. I, too, would cast in a handful of gold if I had it,
but since I have only a fraction of a cent, I will not embarrass myself by giving anything." But she won immortality by giving what was actually hers.

Take the young minister who had to turn aside from the pulpit to fill the pressie job of fancyman. What indication is there that God is going to reward him for a success greater than he seems to have achieved? Here is the answer!- Shut off from the privileges of preaching from the pulpit, he preached at his task day by day. The friend who told me his story said that there were no less than seventy men living in the neighboring mountains who had been won to Christ by the personal appeal of this man who talked to them as he ferried them across the river.

Here, then, is this searching and comforting fact: God judges us by what is in our hearts. But the test of what is in our hearts is what we do with that which we have in our hands. This puts us all on an equal footing. The greatly gifted have no better chance than those of meager gifts. The handicapped have the same opportunity as the highly privileged. This fact makes this test at once very searching and very comforting.

It is very searching for those who are greatly gifted. It is easy for the man of great gifts to be contented with his big returns, even when he has done far less than his best. God is not going to ask us how much we have done but how faithfully we have worked.

This is full of hope for the handicapped. I meet so many who have failed to realize their dreams. On the campus of a
certain American college there is a monument to a former pupil which reads in part, as follows: "To the memory of Jim——Died in France saving the life of a comrade." Then this last in small type — "He played four years on the scrubs." What a story that tells! Of course, we honor the men who make the first team. Were I playing, I should like to become an All-American. But what of men like Jim who failing to make first or second team, can still play with "the scrubs" for long years and never grow either discouraged or sour? Beyond a doubt it was his willingness to play his best on a scrub team that helped him to play the best in later years on the field of battle. Surely such heroic souls shall have their reward. "So the last shall be first."
HOPE FOR THE HANDICAPPED

"So the last shall be first, and the first last." Matthew 20:16

This is the spear point of the gripping story that Jesus has just told. Of course, he does not mean that every man who is first is going to be last, nor that every man who is last is to be first. He only means that this sometimes happens. Or, as he puts it at the beginning of the story, "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first."

There is little doubt that every man present when Jesus told this unique story listened to it with keenest interest and attention. Some were doubtless shocked by the seeming unfairness of it. Others who were handicapped and who were coming close to the sunset without much to show for their day listened eagerly because it brought a gleam of hope. Perhaps these felt that it was far too good to be true, but in spite of this fact, it made their gloomy day a bit brighter.

I

Look at the story. It tells of an eccentric landlord who hired laborers for his vineyard and paid them off in a very surprising fashion. It is striking also that this landlord hired any man who was willing to work, regardless of the lateness of the hour.

1. Look first at the laborers. They fall naturally into three groups.

(1) There were those sons of good fortune who succeeded in making contact with an employer in the early morning. These men naturally had bargaining powers that their belated fellows did not have. They could say to the owner of the vineyard, "What will you pay for a day's work?"

When he answered, "I will pay each of you a dollar a day," that was satisfactory. Having thus reached an agreement, these men went into the vineyard for a full day's work.
(2) The second group was made up of those who were hired at nine, twelve and three o'clock. These did not have the same bargaining powers as their more fortunate fellows who found employment at the beginning of the day. Their employer offered them no fixed wages. He only pledged himself to give them a square deal. Therefore, they went into the vineyard trusting this promise: "Whatsoever is right, I will pay you."

(3) The third group and the one which holds the center of the stage is made up of those hired about five o'clock. When the landlord went out at this late hour and found these still without work, he questioned them, "Why stand ye here all the day idle or workless?" In reply these depressed and discouraged men gave an honest answer. "We are workless because nobody has hired us. Our idleness is not our fault, but our misfortune." Then said the landlord, "Go ye also into the vineyard." He gave them no promise of reward, only a command. It speaks volumes; therefore, for their eagerness that they took this, their first opportunity. They hurried to earn even the pitiful pittance that they were sure would be paid them for working only one-twelfth of a day.

2. Then, one hour later, came the pay off. Those who had come last into the vineyard were paid first. That is what got this employer into trouble. If he had only paid the full time men first, they would have gone home without knowing of the good fortune of the late comers. But he paid the five o'clock men first. Not only so, but to their great joy, he paid them a full day's wages. What a burden that lifted! No child emptying his full stocking on Christmas morning could have found greater gladness than these found in the amazing generosity of their employer.

Naturally, such generosity awakened the expectations of the others. This was especially true of those who had worked for twelve full hours. They knew that if their employer were thus generous to them they would
receive wages not for one day, but for twelve. When, therefore, they received only that for which they had agreed, they were indignant. They appointed a spokesman who presented their cause to the landlord. What was their complaint? Not that they had been cheated, but that others had been rewarded beyond their deserts. "Thou hast made them equal unto us."

Their employer answered wisely. "I do thee no wrong." Surely he is perfectly right there. You cannot possibly wrong me by doing a favor to my neighbor. It would seem that in his indignation this full time man had thrown down his dollar, saying "If you can't pay me more than that, I won't have anything." This is indicated by the fact that his employer said, "Take up that which is thine and go thy way. I will give unto this last as unto thee." Thus, concludes Jesus, "the last shall be first, and the first last.

II

It is evident from this that our Lord's standard for measuring success is different from ours. It is well to remember that Jesus is not here teaching a lesson in economics. I think there is no doubt of his keen interest in the right of men to work and to work for an adequate wage. There is no surer sign of a sick social order than that men willing to work cannot do so. That "pursuit of happiness" guaranteed under the Constitution is impossible for the man who is without work. Any man who would conduct his business as did this ancient landlord would go broke. This is the case because an employee must put into the firm at least as much as he takes out or that firm will inevitably go on the rocks.

For this reason, in the very nature of things, we must measure the worth of our fellows largely by the returns they make. If we desire to
know who is winning the game, we look at the score board. If we wish to know how good a ball player is, we examine his batting average. If we wish to learn of his success in finance, we turn to Dunn and Bradstreet. There must be some proportion between what a man earns and the wages he receives.

A few years ago I stepped into the office of a newspaper to be greeted by this word that glared at me from the wall in box car letters: "Fifty-seven rules for making a success. First - Deliver the goods! Second - It doesn't make any difference about the other fifty-six." There you have it.

During the days of the depression I heard the head of a large chemical company make this statement, "Tomorrow when I get to my office it will be crowded with men seeking employment. But most of them I cannot use because they are inefficient. This will be the case in spite of the fact that many of them are from our best American universities. This will be true in spite of the fact that some of them are from the best universities of Germany. But," he said, "there is little use for one to be educated on the Rhine unless he can bring home the bacon." "Deliver the goods" - "Bring home the bacon." That is the test.

But this story indicates that our Lord has rich rewards for those who do not, in the fullest sense, deliver the goods and who do not bring home the bacon. These men who had worked but one hour, received a full day's wages not because they had really earned that much. They were rewarded not for what they had actually accomplished, but for what they would have accomplished had it been in their power. Their employer took the will for the deed. Browning must have had this in mind when he said, "It is not what man does, but what man would do that exalts him."
Nor are we to conclude that those who had put in a full day had a harder lot than those who had worked for but one hour. In so thinking we are going on the false assumption that work is a curse. But it is a major blessing. Therefore, for these to be able to work a full day was not a penalty but a privilege. By working they were sure of having something to provide for their own needs as well as the needs of those whom they loved. They had also the bracing self respect that comes from being able to make a worthy contribution. Thus they were to be congratulated on their good fortune.

The fact that these five o'clock men had been jobless all day did not mean that they were having a good time. They had not been idle, but had done the jobless. Therefore, they had worked under the most depressing and discouraging conditions. They had worked by going from one marketplace to another in search of work. They had worked dogged by the fear that they would be rated as failures. They were dogged by the still greater fear that at the close of the day they would be asked for bread that they could not give. Thus they had to seek for work with a sense of uselessness gnawing like a rat at their self respect. There was a certain fairness, a kind of justice, in their being paid more than they earned.

This is constantly God's way. I am quite sure that the supreme ambition of David in heart was to build a temple to the honor of his God. I daresay that he expected to live in the grateful hearts of his people because of this. But while the king was able to accomplish much, this dream never came true. When he reached the end of the journey, there was no temple in Jerusalem to perpetuate his memory. Therefore, he probably passed, with a deep sense of failure. But God said to him, "Whereas it was in thine heart to build me a house, thou didst well that..."
it was in thine heart." That is, though David left no temple upon Mount Moriah, God gave him credit for such an achievement because of the temple that he had builded in his heart.

This fact also explains the enthusiasm of Jesus over the gift of the poor widow. "And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury, and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing." At that, Jesus sprang to his feet with cheeks aglow. He could not wait until the service was over to say to his friends, "This poor widow has cast in more than all they which have cast into the treasury." This was the case not because of what she had given with her hand, but what she had given with her heart.

This should give hope to the handicapped. It should excite expectation in the hearts of those who feel that they are coming to the end of the journey with little to show for their struggles. I have known many of this kind. I am thinking now of a bright young chap in the Ozark Mountains who felt himself called to the ministry. He labored hard on his mountain farm to accumulate enough to enter college. At last the glad day came when he was on his way to the station to take the train. But his car was wrecked. He was wrecked with it, with a broken back. He was confined to his bed, for days and weeks and months, and even years. At last, when he emerged from his torture chamber, his hopes of entering the ministry were dead. He had to take the only job that offered. Thus he became a ferryman on the Osage river. This he did not in bitterness, but with a fine, high gallantry.

Here is a charming and high spirited girl who had dedicated her life to the mission field. She was soon to be married to a choice young man
who shared her dream, and they were going out to those distant fields together. But tragedy struck. Her brother, who had been the stay of the family, died. Then the mother. This left an invalid father and an imbecile brother. It, therefore, became necessary for this girl to give up her dream of working under far horizons. Life for her narrowed down to taking care of a whining, old invalid and a stupid brother. At last, these two passed into the sunset, but by that time spring had given place to summer, and summer to late autumn. The high spirited girl was then the old maid of the village. But through it all, she had been brave and gentle of spirit.

Now, I have an idea that the record of this young minister, who was never privileged to preach a single sermon, and this young woman, who had to give up her dream of wifehood and of labor in the mission field, is not going to be quite blank. I think our gracious Lord who understands is going to say, "Whereas it was in thine heart to do these great and romantic deeds for me, thou didst well that it is in thine heart."

III

But what is the test of what is in our hearts?

The fact that God judges us not by what we do, but by what we would do is very comforting. Some may even make an opiate of it. There are those who have been handicapped, feeling that they make their contribution by cheap alibis. They satisfy themselves by telling all and sundry what they would do if they could. They tell how much they would give if they were as rich as some Croesus. They tell how faithfully they would work if they had the skill of some friend. Meantime they are doing nothing with the opportunities that are really theirs.

The test of what is in our hearts is what we do with what is actually
in our hands. These five o'clock laborers were rewarded because they had done the very best they could with the opportunities that were actually theirs. When their employer said, "Go also into the vineyard," they did not turn on him angrily and ask, "Why did you not employ me sooner?"

No more did they say in self-pity, "It is too late now. What is the good of one-twelfth of a day's wages anyway?" No, in spite of the fact that there seemed little to be gained, they took what they had and made the best possible use of it.

I spoke just now of how God credited David with the building of the temple, though he did not build it at all except in his heart. How do we know that David really had it in his heart to build the temple? We know it because when he found that he could not build it, when he found that it would not be David's temple but Solomon's, instead of losing interest, he went just as far as he could toward building it. He did his best with what he had.

Take, for instance, the enthusiasm of Jesus over this widow. How do we know of the magnificent wealth that she had in her heart? Only in one way. By what she did with what was actually hers. Had she set out that morning to the temple leaving her two mites behind her, she would have had much to say for herself. She could have said, "There will be many rich people at the service today who will cast in handfuls of gold. I, too, would cast in a handful of gold if I had it, but since I have only a fraction of a cent, I will not embarrass myself by giving anything. I will simply stay home in self-pity." But she won immortality by giving what was actually hers.

Take the young minister who had to turn aside from the pulpit to fill the prosaic job of ferryman. What indication is there that God is going
to reward him for a minister? I dare say far beyond many who were rated vastly successful. Shut off from the privileges of preaching from the pulpit, he preached at his task day by day. The friend who told me his story said that there were no less than seventy men living in the mountains who had been won to Christ by the personal appeal of this very man as he talked to them while he fulfilled his task.

Here, then, is this searching and comforting fact: God judges us by what is in our hearts. But the test of what is in our hearts is what we do with that which we have in our hands. This puts us all on an equal footing. The greatly gifted have no better chance than those of meager gifts. The handicapped have the same opportunity as the highly privileged. This fact makes this test at once very searching and very comforting.

It is very searching for those who are greatly gifted. It is easy for the man of great gifts to be contented with his big returns, even when he has done far less than his best. God is not going to ask us how much we have done but how faithfully we have worked.

This is full of hope for the handicapped. I meet so many who have failed to realize their dreams. Though they have tried and tried hard, they feel very much as if they have failed. Bear in mind that our Lord is not asking certain returns. Milton was right when he said that "They serve him best who passing bear his Thousands at his bidding speed and post over land and sea without rest, They also serve who only stand and wait."

On the campus of a certain American college there is a monument to a former pupil which reads in part as follows: "To the memory of Jim Hansen. Died in France saving the life of a comrade." Then this last in small type - "He played four years on the scrubs." What a story
that tells! Of course, we honor the men who make the first team. Were I playing, I should like to become an All-American. But what of a man like Jim who failing to make first or second team, can still play with "the scrubs" for years and never grow discouraged or sour? Beyond a doubt it was his willingness to do his best on a scrub football team that helped him to play the best in later years. "So the last shall be first and the first last."
HOPE FOR THE HANDICAPPED

"For the last shall be first and the first shall be last." Matthew 20:16

In this brief sentence Jesus sums up the meaning of the rather shocking story that he has just told. There is no doubt that those present gave keen attention to this story. They could not help it. It took even the listless by surprise. Some doubtless resented it, nudging their neighbors and whispering angrily, "It is not fair". Others were surely gladdened by it. These were chiefly the battered and handicapped folks, those to whom life seemed not to have offered a fair chance.

I

Look at the story. It tells of an employer who hired laborers to work in his vineyard. The eagerness of this employer to secure each man that he could would indicate that their task was gathering grapes. These grapes had to be gathered before the rainy season set in, about the end of September, or the crop would be spoiled. Therefore, he gladly hired all who were willing to work, regardless of how little time they could give to that work. Those whom he employed were in three groups.

First, there were those sons of good fortune who were in the market place at the beginning of the day. These had bargaining powers. When the owner of the vineyard asked them what wages they would require for their work, they were privileged to set a price. "We will work," they replied, "for a dollar a day." That being satisfactory to their employer, they went at once to their clean and honest toil.

But the owner of the vineyard needed yet more laborers, so he went out at 9:00, at 12:00 and at 3:00 o'clock, and hired every man that was
willing to work. These were not in as good position to bargain as their fortunate fellows who went when the day was young. All their employer no doubt knew the hour they were promised to do their work, they promised them a square deal. This was trusting the owner of the vineyard to give them a square deal. This was the second group of laborers.

The third group was composed of discouragement and anxious group that this landlord found still idle at the late hour of 5 o'clock in the afternoon. "Why do stand all the day idle?" he questions. This word "idle" does not mean that they were loafing. It means that they were jobless; that in spite of hunting for work, they had no work. Thus they were able to give this truthful answer, "We are idle because nobody has hired us." At that this employer said, "Go ye also into the vineyard." So eager were these workless men to have a chance that they went, though the day was almost over.

Now, one hour later there came the pay off. This eccentric employer orders his business manager to pay these who had worked one hour a full day's wages, and to pay them first. It was just this paying them first that got him into trouble. Had he paid the twelve-hour men first, they would have gone home and perhaps not have known about their fortunate fellows. But this order to begin with the last and pay every one.

This generosity on the part of this employer must have amazed and gladdened these men who had not had a fair chance. They could not have fed their families on the meager fraction of a dollar that would have been theirs had their employer paid them exactly what they had earned. But now they could go home with out fear of present hunger, either for themselves or for those they loved. They could go home with out shame of water failure.

When the second group came who had gone into the vineyard with the promise of a square deal, they received it and more. Though some of them
had worked three-fourths, others one-half, others one-fourth of the day, they all received wages for a full day.

Naturally, such generosity excited the expectations of those who had long worked for twelve hours. "If he is as generous with us," they said to themselves, "as he has been with the men who worked for one hour, we can receive wages for twelve days." But they received no such reward. They did receive what they had asked at the beginning of the day and what they had expected all through the day, one dollar.

At this, they were disappointed. Not only so, but it would seem they were indignant. They appointed a spokesman to submit their complaint. So indignant was this spokesman that it would seem that he had thrown down his dollar in anger. As his employer said, "Take up that which is thine and go their way." Why was he angry? Not because his employer had failed to keep his agreement. He was angry because of his generosity to others who had put in shorter hours. His complaint was ill founded, therefore, because it did not grow out of harm done to himself but of good done to others. "Even so", said Jesus, "the last shall be first and the first last."

Of course, we are not to understand that every last man is going to be saved. It means what Jesus had said above, "Many that are last shall be first."

II

Now, we see from this that our Lord has a different standard of judging from what we have. We are not to see in this parable a lesson in economics. It certainly does mean that Jesus is interested in men's right to work and to receive adequate wages. But if the ordinary business man were to follow the example of this land owner, he would go broke. The employee must earn as much as he is paid or the business
cannot go on.

When, therefore, we measure success we have to look to the outward. When we desire to know who has won the game, we look at the scoreboard. When we test business success, we have to look at how a great business has been built up. Jesus called the rich farmer a fool, but you may be quite sure that he was not so regarded either by himself or by his fellows. Had I called him a fool they might have said, "Don't be silly, look at his full barns."

A few years ago I stepped into a newspaper office to be greeted with this word in box car letters - "Fifty-seven rules for making a success". At once I stopped to read. I desired to know the secret. This is what I read. "First - Deliver the goods. It doesn't matter about the other fifty-six." During the days of the depression I heard the head of a large chemical firm make an address. He declared, "When I get to my office in the morning, it will be jammed with men seeking for work. Most of them I shall have to refuse because they are inefficient, this in spite of the fact that some will be from the best universities of America and some from the best universities of Germany. But", he added, "there is little use to be educated on the Rhine if you don't bring home the bacon." Thus we have to measure by this test, "Deliver the goods. "Bring home the bacon." But according to this store, God looks not simply at what is in our hands, but what is in our hearts. This is brought out in the story of David. I am quite sure that the dearest ambition of David's life was the building of a temple to his God. I think it was to that high achievement that he worked for a place in the grateful hearts of his people. But that dream never came true. When he went to his rest, there was no temple on Mt. Moriah to be known as David's temple. Yet God said to him, "Whereas it was
in thine heart to build me a house; that it was in thine heart. God took the will for the deed. Therefore, he credited David with the temple because he had builded one in his heart.

That is what Browning meant when he declared, "It is not what man does but what man would do that exalts him." It is this fact that accounts for the enthusiasm of Jesus over the gift of the poor widow. When the offering was taken on that distant Sabbath, the Evangelist tells that many who were rich cast in much, but when this woman cast in a fraction of a cent, Jesus declares that she had cast in more than all the others together. She had done this, not with her hand but with her heart. Jesus took the will for the deed.

So it was with these laborers, these handicapped workers who were privileged to put in but one brief hour. Those who had worked a full day seemed to feel that they had a much harder time than those who had put in but one short hour. We are prone to agree with them, but in reality that was not the case at all. These fulltime workers had the privilege of a freedom from anxiety and of a bracing self respect that their unemployed fellows did not have.

The fact that these one-hour workers were not in the vineyard does not mean that they were loafing. They were doing the most depressing of all work, hunting for a job. Every man willing to work has a right to a job. There is no surer sign of a sick social order than that any man should suffer from enforced idleness. These men were working but they were working burdened with the deadly fear of being failures, with the fear of being asked for bread by their own children at the close of day that they cannot give. They were working with a sense of uselessness gnawing at their self respect like a rat. It was they and not
the full time workers that had had the really hard day.

This generous and eccentric employer, therefore, was paying them not for actual accomplishment, but for what they would have accomplished if they had had a chance. He really rewarded them for what was in their hearts rather than for what was in their hands. This is God's method. Therefore, we may be sure that many who have looked to our eyes as a little better than failures will be seen to have been vastly successful by and by. Also that many who have blazed like suns here will be little better than tallow dips when we see them as they are.

Years ago a young fellow was converted in an old time revival held in the Ozarks Mountains. Soon after he felt called to the ministry. He worked hard to get enough money together to enable him to enter college. But as he was driving to the station to get the train, his car was wrecked and he himself was wrecked with it. His back was broken. He was forced to turn aside from the college door to the door of the sickroom, where he suffered for weeks and months and even years. When at last he was able to sit up, his chance of entering the ministry had passed. Instead, he became a ferryman on the Osage river and finally went to his reward without ever preaching a sermon. Yet I am sure that his record will not be blank. Rather, his Lord will say, "Forasmuch as it was in thy heart to preach, thou didst well."

Think of that lovely and talented girl who had dedicated her life to the mission field. She was soon to be married to one who shared her dreams. They were to go out together to work under roomy horizons. But through the death of her mother and older brother, she was left with...
duties had been discharged, she had passed out of spring into summer, and out of summer into late autumn. When she passed she had no major laurels to her credit, yet I am sure she has not missed her reward.

III

What is the test of what is in our hearts?

A sermon like this ought to be comforting but there is a danger in it. Some may take the sweet unction to themselves that they are discharging all their obligations by being well wishers. These might content themselves by telling us in self pity how much they would give if they were as rich as some Croesus; how much they would achieve if they were as talented as some brilliant worker. But the real test of what is in our hearts is what we do with what is actually in our hands.

How do we know, for instance, that David really had it in his heart to build a temple to the honor of his God? The sincerity of his desire is indicated by the fact that when he found that he could not build it that it would not be known as David's temple, he did not lose interest. He went as far as possible in enabling others to build it. In like manner it was not the widow's boast of how much she would give if she had a million that won the approval of Jesus. It was rather the fact that she did the best possible with what she had.

This young candidate for the ministry of whom I spoke a moment ago - the richness of his reward will not grow out of the fact that he was miserably handicapped. We know that he had fine stuff in his heart because of what he did with the opportunities that were actually his. The man who told me this story declared that he knew of seventy men hidden about in various parts of the Ozark mountains who had been led to Christ by this man, who talked to them as he ferried them across the river.
Even so, these laborers who had worked but one hour were paid for a full day because they would have gladly worked a full day if they had only had an opportunity.

IV

"Many that are last shall be first and the first/last."

1. This is a searching word of warning to those of us who are highly privileged. God is not going to approve of us merely because of great accomplishments. This is the test - have we done the best with what we have? Many years ago the students of Northwestern University discovered a vessel going to pieces out in the lake. A young fellow who was an expert swimmer, Will Spencer by name, was able to rescue thirteen. He then fell in a faint and was carried to his room by his brother, Ed, who watched with him during the night. Past midnight, Ed felt a touch on his shoulder. It was his brother, Will, with this question upon his lips. "Did I do my best?" "Yes," came the answer, "you saved thirteen." "It is not a question of how many I saved, but did I do my best?" That is the question for all of us.

2. If this is a searching question for the privileged, it holds out hope to the handicapped. There are those who feel that life has in some measure let them down. They have not accomplished what they once hoped to accomplish. Their dreams have not come true. Now they are near the sunset with little to show for their seemingly futile efforts to serve. But God is not going to judge these by what is in their hands but by what is in their hearts. For all who have done their best, there will be this joyous greeting, "Well done, well done."
HOPE FOR THE HANDICAPPED

"So the last shall be first, and the first last." Matthew 20:16

This is the spear point of the gripping story that Jesus has just told. Of course, he does not mean that every first man is to be last, nor that every last man is to be first. He only means that this sometimes happens. Or, as he puts it at the beginning of the story, many first, last, or last place be first, and many that are first shall be last.

There is little doubt that every man present when Jesus told this unique story, heard him with keenest interest and attention. Some were doubtless shocked by the seeming unfairness of it. Others who were handicapped and who were coming closer to the sunset without much to show for their day, it brought a gleam of hope. They felt that it was far too good to be true, yet, it would make their gloomy day brighter.

I

Look at the story. It tells of an eccentric man who hired laborers for the vineyard and paid them off in a very surprising fashion. First, these laborers fell naturally into three groups.

(1) There were those sons of good fortune who succeeded in making contact with an employer in the early morning. These men, because they had a whole day, had bargaining powers that their fellows did not have. They could say to the owner of the vineyard, "What will you give us for a day's work?" When he answered, "I will pay you a dollar a day," that was satisfactory. Having thus reached an agreement, these men went into the vineyard for a full day's work.

(2) The second group of laborers was made up of those who were hired at 9, 12, and 3 o'clock. This whole story indicates the eagerness of this employer for workers. The particular work that they were to do in the vineyard was
doubtless that of gathering the grapes. These grapes had to be gathered before the fall rains set in or the crop would be spoiled. Being thus eager for laborers, he hired men to do far less than a day’s work. These latter did not have the same bargaining powers as their more fortunate fellows who were in the market place at the beginning of the day, but they went into the vineyard trusting in the promise of their employer to give them a square deal.

To each of these he said, “Whatsoever is right, I will pay you.”

(2) The third group is made up of those hired about five o’clock. The fact that this employer went into the market place in search of laborers at so late an hour showed that his need was urgent. “Why stand ye here all the day idle or workless?” he questioned these depressed and discouraged men. “We are workless because nobody has hired us,” they said; so the employer, “Go ye also into the vineyard.” But he gave them no promise at all, only a command to go. And what reply did these men give? They did say, “It is too late now.” It speaks volumes for their eagerness that though the day was almost over, they hurried to earn the pittance that would be paid them for working one hour.

Now, one hour later, there came the pay off. Those who had come last into the vineyard were paid first. That is what got this employer into trouble. If he had only paid the full time men in the beginning they would have gone home and would not have known the difference. But he paid the five o’clock men first. Not only so, but to their great joy, he paid them a full day’s wages. What a burden that lifted! What was that burden?

No child emptying the Christmas stocking on Christmas Day could have found greater gladness than these found in the amazing generosity of their employer.

Naturally, such generosity awakened the expectations of the others.
especially those who had worked for twelve full hours. They knew that if their employer were thus generous with them they would receive wages for one day, but for twelve. Therefore, when they received only that for which they had agreed to work, they were indignant. They appointed a spokesman who presented their cause to the landlord. What was their complaint? Not that they had been cheated, but that others had been rewarded beyond their deserts. "Thou hast made them equal unto us."

Their employer answered wisely. "I do thee no wrong." Surely he is perfectly right there. I cannot possibly wrong you by doing a favor to your neighbor. It would seem that in his indignation this full time man had thrown down his dollar, saying "If you can't pay me more than that I won't have anything." This is indicated by the fact, the employer said "Take up that which is thine and go thy way." I will give unto this last as unto thee." Thus, contends Jesus, "many that are first shall be last and many that are last shall be first."

II

It is evident from this that our Lord has a different measure for success from what we have. His rewards are not given on the same basis as the rewards we give. It is well to remember that Jesus is not here teaching a lesson in economics. I think there is no doubt that this story indicates his keen interest in the right of men to work and to work for an adequate wage, but this parable does not tell the employer how he must run his business. Any man who conducts his business as did this vineyard owner would go broke. This is the case because an employee must at least put into the firm as much as he takes out or that firm must inevitably go broke.

For this reason, in the very nature of things, we must measure the
worth of fellows largely by the returns they make. If we desire to know who is the winner of the game, we look at the score board. If we wish to know how good a ball player you are, we examine your batting average. If we want to know your success, we look at Dunn and Bradstreet. You must use this yard stick to measure what a man is worth.

It is true that Jesus called the rich farmer a fool. It is equally true that neither the farmer nor his neighbors so regarded him. Had you called him a fool in my presence, I should have answered, "How can a fool be so successful?" Look at his farm. His barns bursting with plenty. If that is foolish, let me share in his folly.

A few years ago I stepped into the office of a newspaper in a certain city to be greeted by this word, in giant box car letters - "Fifty-seven rules for making a success."

First - Deliver the goods! Nor does it make any difference about the other fifty-six."

There you have it. Knowing is it possible altogether to ignore that ten.

During the days of the depression I heard the head of a large chemical company make this statement, "Tomorrow when I get to my office it will be crowded with men seeking employment. But most of them I cannot use because they are inefficient. This will be the case in spite of the fact that many of them are from our best American universities. This will be true in spite of the fact that some of them are from the best universities of Germany."

"But," he said, "there is little use for one to be educated on the Rhine unless he can bring home the bacon. That is the test."

But this story indicates that our Lord has rich rewards for those who do not deliver the goods and who do not bring home the bacon. These men who had worked but one hour received a full day's wages not because they actually accomplished but for what they would have accomplished had it been in their power. Their employer took the will for the deed. Browning must have had this in mind when he said "It is not what man does but what man would do that exalted him."
Nor are we to conclude that those who had put in full time deserve
more than those who had worked for but one hour. In thinking that the full-
time men had a harder lot than the five o'clock group is to misunderstand
the story altogether. To put in a full day was not a penalty but a
privilege. These men who had a job were sure of having something to provide
for their own needs as well as the needs of those whom they loved. They
did have the bracing self respect that comes from being able to make a worthy
contribution. They worked undergirded by the sense that they were needed.
They were to be congratulated on their good fortune.

The fact that these five o'clock men have been jobless all day does not
mean that they have not worked. They have worked in the most depressing
conditions and discouraging fashion. They have worked by going from one market-place
to another, seeking jobs. They have worked dogged by fear that they would
be rated as failures by their fellows. They were dogged by the still greater
fear that they should be asked for bread by their children they could
cannot give. Thus they put in a full day seeking for work while feeling their
sense of uselessness gnawing at their self respect like a torturing rodent.

There was a certain fairness, therefore, in their being paid more than they
earned.

This is constantly God's way. I am quite sure that the supreme ambition
of David's heart was the building of the temple. I daresay that he
expected to live in the grateful hearts of his people. But while this great
king was able to accomplish much, this dream never came true. When he
reached the end of the journey there was no temple in Jerusalem to perpetuate
his memory. But God said to him, "Whereas it was in thine heart to build me
a house, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." That is, though
David left no temple upon Mount Moriah, God gave him credit for, so-desiring
because of the temple he had builded within his heart.
This fact also explains the enthusiasm of Jesus for the gift of the poor widow. "And Jesus sat over against the treasury, Mark tells people, and beheld how the many cast money into the treasury, and many that were rich cast in much." And there came a certain poor widow and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. "At that Jesus sprang to his feet with cheeks aglow. He could not wait until the service was over to say to his friends, "This poor widow has cast in more than all they which have cast into the treasury". This was the case not because of what she had cast in with her hand, but what she had cast in with her heart.

This should give hope to the handicapped. It should excite the expectation in the hearts of those who feel that they are coming to the end of the journey with little to show for their struggle. I have known many of this kind. I am thinking now of a bright young chap in the Ozark Mountains who felt himself called to the ministry. He labored hard on his mountain farm to accumulate enough to enter college. At last the glad day came when he was on his way to the station to take the train. But his car was wrecked. He was wrecked with it, with a broken back. He was confined to his bed for days and weeks and months and every year. At last, when he emerged from his torture chamber his hopes of entering the ministry were dead. He had to take the only joy that offered. Thus he became a ferry man on the Osage river. This he did not in bitterness but with a fine, high gallantry.

Then I think of a charming and high spirited girl who had dedicated her life to the mission field. She was soon to be married to a choice young man who shared her dream, and they were going out to those distant fields together. But tragedy struck. Her brother, who had been the stay of the family, died. Then the mother. This left an invalid father and an imbecile brother. It therefore became necessary for this girl to give up her dream of working under far horizons. Life narrowed down to taking care of a whining old invalid
and a stupid brother. At last these two passed into the sunset but by that time spring had given place to summer, and summer to late autumn. The high spirited girl was then the old maid of the village. But through it all, she had been brave and gentle of spirit.

Now, I have an idea that the record of this young minister who was never privileged to preach a single sermon and this young woman who had to give up her dream of wifehood and of labor in the mission field is going to be quite blank. I think gracious Lord who understands is going to say, "Whereas it was in thine heart to do these great and romantic deeds for me, thou didst well that it is in thine heart."

III

But what is the test of what is in our hearts?

The fact that God judges us not by what we do but by what we would do is very comforting. Some may even make an opiate of it. There are those who have been handicapped, feeling that they make their contribution by cheap alibis. They satisfy themselves by telling and singing what they would do if they could. They tell how much they would give if they were as rich as some Croesus. They tell how faithfully they would personally work if they had the skill of some friend. Meantime they are doing nothing with the opportunities that are really theirs.

The test of what is in our hearts is what we do with what is actually in our hands. These five o'clock laborers were rewarded because they had done the very best they could with the opportunities that were actually theirs. When their employer said, "Go also into the vineyard," they did not turn on him angrily and ask, "Why did you not employ me sooner?" No more did they say in self pity, "It is too late now. What is the good of one-twelfth of a day's wages anyway?" No, in spite of the fact that there seemed little to be gained, they took what they had and made the best possible use of it.
I spoke just now of how God credited David with the building of the temple, though he did not build it at all except in his heart. How do we know that David really had it in his heart to build the temple? We know it because when he found that he could not build it, when he found that it would not be David's temple but Solomon's, instead of losing interest, he went just as far as he could toward building it. He did his best with what he had.

Take, for instance, the enthusiasm of Jesus over this widow. How do we know of the magnificent wealth that she had in her heart? Only in one way. By what she did with what was actually hers. Had she set out that morning to the temple leaving her two mites behind her, she would have had much to say for herself. She could have said, "There will be many rich people at the service today who will cast in handfuls of gold. I, too, would cast in a handful of gold if I had it, but since I have only a fraction of a cent, I will not embarrass myself by giving anything. I will simply stay home in self pity." But she won immortality by giving what was actually hers.

Take the young minister who had to turn aside from the pulpit to fill the prosaic job of a ferryman. What indication is there that God is going to reward him for a minister? I daresay far beyond many who were rated vastly successful. Shut off from the privilege of preaching from the pulpit, he preached at his task day by day. The friend who told me this story said that there were no less than seventy men living about in the mountains who had been won to Christ by the personal appeal of this ferryman as he talked to them while he plied his task.

Here then is this searching and comforting fact: God judges us by what is in our hearts. But the test of what is in our hearts is what we do with that which we have in our hands.
This puts us all on an equal footing. The greatly gifted have no better chance than those of meager gifts. The handicapped have the same opportunity as the highly privileged. This fact makes this test at once very searching and very comforting.

1. It is very searching for those who are greatly gifted. It is easier for the man of great opportunity to be proud with his vast returns and content even with them when he has done far less than his best. Bear in mind God is not going to ask us how much we have done but how faithfully we have worked.

2. This is full of hope for the handicapped. I meet so many who have failed to realize their dreams. They entered upon their Christian service with higher hopes than they have realized. They have tried and tried hard, but they feel very much as if they had failed. Bear in mind that our Lord is not asking certain returns. Milton was right when he said that "we serve him best who passing bear his ....... Thousands at his bidding speed and post over land and sea without rest, they also serve who only stand and wait."

Many years ago the students of Northwestern University discovered that a certain vessel, the Lady Elgin, was going to pieces out in the lake. An expert swimmer, Will Spence, by name, plunged out into the storm tossed lake and rescued one ship wrecked man after another until eleven had been saved. Then, as he lay on the sands exhausted, he looked out and saw a man trying to rescue a woman. In spite of the entreaties of his friends, he plunged again into the dangerous water and succeeded in bringing both to land. He then fell in a faint and was carried to his room.

That night, as his brother Ed sat watching in the room of the exhausted man, he woke up to find that his brother Will was looking at him with
eager, searching eyes. "Ed," he said, "did I do my best?" "Yes," Will, his brother answered, with deep conviction, "you did your best, you saved thirteen." "I know," he said, "but did I do my dead level best. Did I do all any man could do?"

Well, that is the question for all of us. It searches the hearts of the gifted, it stands firm of hope among the hearts of the handicapped. God help us all to meet the test. If we do, one day he will come to meet us, all enthusiasm, saying "Well done, well done."
These church officials had come to Jesus with a legitimate question.

"By what authority," they asked, "are you doing all these things?"

He had cleansed the temple, seeking to make it now more into a place of prayer, rather than into a place of buying and selling. He had been doing quite a lot - cleansing the temple, healing the sick, preaching amazing sermons, upsetting things generally. With wisdom, therefore, they asked by what authority.

In reply Jesus said, "I will answer your question provided you will answer one for me. The baptism of John - was it from heaven or of men?"

By baptism, Jesus means the whole ministry of John. This was the question:

Was John a prophet or was he an imposter? At that, the story said, they argued among themselves. Their argument was not how best to get at the truth, but just what lie to tell. A keen young lawyer told me he often said to his witnesses, concluded.

"Don't tell that lie; tell this one." Thus arguing, they said: "If we say that John was a real prophet, he will ask why did we not believe him. If we say that he was an imposter, then we will arouse the indignation of the multitude, for they count John as a prophet." Therefore, they decided to be neutral. Not knowing what church to join, they did not join any. They answered, "We do not know." Jesus in reply said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing." Why did he take that position? Not through anger or retaliation. He knew there was no use protesting to any group, who had put its receiving set out of commission. They simply did not desire to know the truth. Jesus and his followers spoke to everybody who was willing to hear. At first he answered Pilate eagerly and earnestly, even opened the door of the kingdom to him and became a creature of thieves and drunks, when he invited him to enter. But when Pilate smashed his receiving set by refusing to hear, Jesus spoke to him no more.

In all Jerusalem there was not a man more eager to meet Jesus than was Herod. He wanted to see him do some slight-of-hand trick, but not once did
Jesus speak to Herod. Why? He knew it would do no good. For a long time Herod had listened to John and had been deeply stirred. But in spite of that he never visited him. Declining his eye, he desisted to send John to Pilate. The fact, Herod added by seizing up the prophet's head to his mistress as he might judge a feather have served roast pig. Thus he had blinded his eyes and stopped his ears.

There are some to whom Jesus will not speak, or if he does, it will do no good because they will not hear.

II. Since then religious leaders have taken a position of neutrality, Jesus saw that he could not enter their hearts by the direct road. Therefore, he took the indirect. He told them two stories. (These stories forced them to see themselves.) They decided that he would not obey.

Look at the first. A certain father had two sons. He said to the first son, "Go work today in my vineyard." The son replied in churlish fashion, "I will not." He was not even decently polite. He represented the publicans and harlots of the day—a crowd that had broken with the church, knowing not the least they were under a curse, for them a people for whom the church of that day had no care and felt no responsibility.

To the second son he gave the same command. This son gave exactly the answer that any father would be glad to hear. With genuine courtesy he said, "I go, sir." But he thought that a promise to obey was the same as obeying.

He thought to unite with the church and take its vows. That was enough. Having declared his light action, he seemed then to see that he could sit down and do nothing. Therefore, having promised to go, he refused to go. Whereas the churlish boy, having thought the situation over, decided that he would obey.

Then Jesus pressed home the question; "Which of these sons did the will of his father?" They answered—readily, "The one who obeyed." "That," replied Jesus, "is exactly what the harlots and sinners did when they heard the preach-
ing of John. That is what you refused to do. Not only did you refuse to believe both the message and the facts; both the preaching and the works. Therefore, according to your own verdict, you are guilty of disobedience. You haven't done the will of your Father.

III


"Not only," said Jesus, "have you refused to obey, but you have been guilty of past rebellion." Then he told that second story of the householder who planted his vineyard and rented it out to tenants and went into a far country. That was something that happened often in those days. It is something not many of its absences today. But when the householder

gently went to his tenants for his share of the fruit, they refused to give it. Not only so, but they persecuted one, stoned another, and wounded another. But this lord of the vineyard was a patient man, so he sent other servants, with tragic results. At last, he sent his son saying, "They will respect my son." But they were even more eager to kill him than the servants, sure that if they got him out of the way, the inheritance would be theirs. In the language of the former times, they were saying, "Oh, let these religious leaders to whom he Jewish churches was theirs. They knew that the church of God's revenue, they exhausted its authority. It was no longer the church of God's. It was the church of the chief priest and the Pharisees. They were lording it over God's people, a far higher that could not be satisfied by anything.

How is it that such a tragic situation has developed? After having always been those who were eager to punish God and take over for themselves. Call it prejudice if you will, but I have a strong conviction that while the Church of Rome has developed many beautiful saints, it really belongs not so much to God or to the people as it does to the hierarchy. It is the head of the one man of like passions. He can show of the church who is infallible in his pronouncements on doctrine, wicked and more.
as it may sound, I feel at times that this strongest of all organizations
has sought to take over the inheritance.

In making such a statement I realize that I also, like some Protestants,
can in a glass chamber be wrong.

I have known more than one church dignitary who impressed me as conscientiously
believing that his was the final authority in the church. Such a man is
generally always a bit of a pest because nobody is, so self-righteous as the man who is
conscientiously wrong. I have met one or two pastors who impressed me as to
suffer from the feeling that the church was to minister to them rather than they to the
church. At rare intervals I have even known a certain ambitious layman who appeared to
feel the right to dominate his local church, and to move both pastor and
people about like a skilled chess-player. It is quite human to want to take
the church back to the sixteenth century, but it is even more
sinister.

Now, having told the story, Jesus again presses home a question; What
will the owner of the vineyard do to the servants? The chief priests and
Pharisees had a prompt answer, "He will put the wretches to a miserable
death, and take the vineyard from them and give it to those who will render
true service."

Well, that was what happened a little later. But though they had pronounced themselves guilty, they refused to change. They refused to
repent. Instead of taking sides against their sin, they took sides against
their Savior. Instead of hating the disease, they hated and crucified the
Physician.

The story had a tragic ending, but it need not have been so. It
might have ended in a triumph. Here is a story that has much in common
with this that did end triumphantly. David in hot blood has become guilty
instead of facing his guilty guilt, he TIntentiously chose to plead not
of adultery. In cold blood he has committed murder. Not only so, but he
has tried to shift the responsibility for his ghastly deed, saying piously,
I foresaw him attack them abandoned, when some of the Hebrews
for the sword devoured one as well as another. In all the Bible there is
murder, cause of the human heart, not a more hideous crime than that of this Shepherd King.

There is a very loud in their loudness, hypocrisy
"Afterwards he repented and went."  
— Matthew 21:29

My subject this evening is Repentance. I wonder how long since you have heard a sermon on Repentance? "A long time", some of you answer, and that is not the whole story. You wouldn't have heard this one if you had known what I was going to talk about. It is a dusty-sounding subject. You half feel like putting a handkerchief to your mouth and stifling a sneeze when you hear it. What could be more foolish than for a minister to try to interest a modern audience in a subject so antiquated as Repentance? It is like competing with the modern fast speed car for an ox cart.

But recognizing how out of date my subject sounds, I dare to discuss it because of its vast importance. That repentance is tremendously important, no reader of the Bible can deny. In fact this old Book seems to be little more than an old Book of repentance. From beginning to end, itfaculty haunts you with a note to repentance. You cannot read it without having it constantly dinned into your ears. You are challenged by it upon almost every page of the Old Testament. When you come to the New Testament it becomes more clamorous and insistent. The first preacher you meet upon its pages is John the Baptist. He empties the cities and fills the wilderness by his marvelous appeal. What is his theme? "Repent, ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." John haunted his hearers with that call, till he was cast into prison, and at last put to death.
But no sooner was the voice of John hushed than Jesus Himself began to preach. And His call, while differing in many respects from that of John, had this in common, that it was a call of repentance. And Jesus came unto Galilee saying, repent ye and believe the gospel." His theme was not vastly popular. Sermons on obedience are never exceedingly popular. But Jesus continued his preaching along this line till, as in the case of John, it cost Him His life. - He went to the Cross, died and arose from the dead. And when He met with His disciples on the Resurrection side of the grave, He gave them a commission, and that commission was this: "To go and preach repentance and remission of sins."

Now, the remaining part of the New Testament is little more than a record of their carrying out this command. Upon the day of Pentecost, Peter preached with such power that three thousand were converted. What was his theme? This same threadbare theme of Repentance. "Repent all you in the name of Jesus, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The same note runs through the preaching of Paul: "Wherein O! King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the Heavenly vision; But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent." And when he stood on Mars Hill he declared: "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." So important is repentance that the news of such an event on the part even of the least and lowest sends a thrill of joy throughout Heaven. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

II

Why is repentance so vastly important? Why is this the theme of the preaching of so many of the Prophets of the Old and New Testament, of so many Prophets throughout the centuries.
Repentance is important:

1. Because there is absolutely no spiritual life without it. There is no Jesus Christ without it. There is nothing but spiritual death without it. It was Jesus Himself who said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." If your religion lacks reality, if it is awakened and then wanes, if it brings to you no clear vision of your Risen Lord, if it is a shallow something, the chances are it is because your repentance has been shallow. Wherever repentance is genuine and deep, there is a rich religious experience. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." There is an abundant pardon, and an abundant life for him that truly repents. But without it, there is no pardon and no life.

2. Repentance is important because it makes it possible for us to receive the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was having His last conversation with His disciples, He said to them an astonishing something. I dare say that they did not half believe it. They were heart-broken over the fact that they were soon to separate from Him whom they loved with such passionate devotion. But He comforted them with these words: "It is expedient that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." That is, Jesus said that there is a blessing in store for these disciples and for ourselves greater than that of His personal presence in the flesh, and that is His presence in the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. But how are we to realize this presence? Surely that is the finest experience that can come to a human soul. If I were passing through a great difficulty today, how much it would mean for me to have Jesus with me in the flesh, and for Him to walk by my side and steady me as I walk through my dark valley. But I can have Him with me in a more real sense than that, not only with me, but within me. How is that to be realized? The Answer is by repentance. "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit", is the promise unto you. Here is a blessing that is especially for yourself, a precious gift from God that bears your name. You can have it under one condition, and that is that you claim it through true repentance.

3. Then, repentance is of vast importance because it is a means of life, not only to the individual, but to the group. It is a sure road to a spiritual awakening. It is an open door to a genuine revival. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be forgiven, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Whenever the Church repents, whenever any single congregation repents, there is always an outpouring of the Spirit; There is always the coming of a Spiritual springtime. There is always a mighty refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

4. Then, repentance is of vast importance finally, because it is the roadway to spiritual progress. It is not only the doorway into the Kingdom, it is that, but it is the road along which we must travel if we are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If you quit repenting the moment you become a Christian, then you quit growing.
That is what some of us did. That is our tragedy. How many there are in the Church who are no larger than they were the day they were born? They have failed to grow. But if you are a repenting Christian, God is discovering to you day by day increasing areas that you have not discovered, and increasing resources in Himself that are available to you. To continue to repent is to continue to grow. To cease to repent is to become a victim of arrested development.

III

Now, what is repentance? What is this something that is so beautiful that it adds a new note of gladness to the songs of Heaven? At the risk of being a bit old-fashioned, I am going to tell you a few things that it is not. First, repentance is not simply knowing that you are a sinner. Of course that may be a part of it, but that is not enough. We all know that we have done wrong. When the Bible tells us, there is no difference, but all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," we know that it is speaking the plain truth about one individual at least, and that is about ourselves. But we can know ourselves as sinners, face the grim and ugly fact, and refuse to repent. Second, repentance is more than being sorry for sin. Of course if you repent, it is likely that you are sorry. But you can be desperately sorry without repenting. Our jails and penitentiaries are full of people today that are doubtless sorry that they have sinned. According to Jesus, hell was a place that was full of sorry folks, of folks that wept and wailed, and gnashed their teeth. But so far as we know, they are not repentant.
Years ago when I was a school teacher, I had two girls in my school, both of whom broke the rules. One came and confessed her fault, though I had no idea of her guilt. She was repentant. The other, whose guilt I knew, skipped up and down the hall, seemingly without the slightest thought on her mind. But when I called her into the office and told her what I knew, it was then that she burst into tears. I had to send her home. But her father brought her back, and said that she had repented. And God requires no more than that, and that was all I had a right to require. I could only answer that all her grief came about as a result of her being caught, and not because of her sin. She was sorry, but she was not repentant.

Then, repentance is more than simply being frightened. I have known people to call mightily upon God when they were sick. I have known them seemingly to repent in sackcloth and ashes when they were in the midst of danger. But all their tears and prayers and promises were forgotten when the danger was past. Years ago I preached on a little Circuit in Oklahoma. One of my appointments was in a cyclone delta streak. I think I could have had a hundred conversions in an ordinary storm if I had had a good church under the ground. But the same winds that blew away the clouds tended to blow away their repentance.

Then, repentance is often something more than joining the Church. Mark you, if you have really repented, the chances are seemingly great that you will join some church. If you are too good to join any church, I am uneasy about you. But you may join the Church and do a thousand and one good things without really repenting.

What, then, is repentance? We find the best possible answer in our text. Here was a young man, commanded of his father
to go work in a vineyard. But he did not wish to do it. Possibly he did not love work. Possibly he was a bit lazy. More likely still, there was something else that he wanted to do. He had other plans. Therefore, he said to his father frankly: "I will not do it." He had the power to say that to his earthly father. We have the power to say it to our Heavenly Father. God will not compel anybody to obey Him.

Now, having flatly refused to do his father's will, he went about his own pleasure. But somehow he couldn't see it through. It may be that the pained face of his father haunted him. It may be that he could not forget his thoughtfulness of him, his abiding interest, his tender love. It may be he thought, too, of the worthfulness of the task to which his father was trying to send him. But whatever lay back of his decision, this at least happened, that he changed his mind, and set his hand to the task that he had formerly refused.

Now, that is repentance in its simplicity. It is quitting the wrong, and doing the right. It's ceasing to follow your own way in order to follow God's way. Sometimes it even goes deeper than this. It is not only turning from the wrong to the right, from the power of the wicked unto God," as Paul puts it. But it means the righting of the wrong so far as it is in our power. When Zacchaeus repented, he not only left off his dishonest practices, but he paid back all he had stolen fourfold.

When, therefore, we repent, we change our mind. We change our mind so radically that we change our conduct. The truth of this is illustrated and enforced over and over again throughout the whole Bible. Here, for instance, in the Old Testament, are two men who sinned and sinned greatly. Their names are Saul and
David. But Saul did not sin nearly so deeply as David. There is hardly a blacker record to be found on all the pages of the Bible than that of David. But in spite of this, Saul's life ended in utter tragedy, while David came to be one of the most winsome saints of sacred history. Why, this difference? Saul confessed his sins more often than anybody in the Bible, but he never did quite give them up. He never truly repented. But, when the Prophet rebuked David for his sin, his voice choked with sobs, and his heart broke, and in repentance he cried for mercy. David was saved, not because he was a better man than Saul, he was saved because he repented.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find two of the friends of Jesus, named Peter and Judas. They both sinned and sinned greatly. Simon Peter did, though cowardice, something close akin to what Judas did through greed and hate. They were both sorry for what they had done. But the sorrow of Judas led him to the hangman's noose, while the sorrow of Peter led him to repentance. Therefore, Jesus had to say of Judas that he had robbed him, but he could hardly wait to get the door of his tomb open on Easter morning until he said, "Go, tell my disciples and Peter." And this denier of His Lord found his way back into His healing friendship and fellowship.

The fifteenth of Luke is a chapter of lost things. There is a coin that got lost in the house. It got lost through somebody's carelessness. There is a sheep that got lost out in the wilderness. It got lost through its own carelessness. There is a son that got lost in the Far Country. He got lost through his own wilfulness. He desired to be independent toward his father.
Now, when the coin was lost, somebody searched for it, till it was found. When the sheep was lost, the shepherd went after him and never gave up till he was back in the fold once more. But nobody went after the boy. Why was that? Why did not the father go into the Far Country and bring the wandering chap home by force? For one reason, he would have been as much a prodigal at home as he was in the Far Country.

What was necessary before this boy could ever really be at home again in his father's house? You know. It was necessary for him to change his mind. That, at last, he came to do. One day we read, "he came to himself." He faced the facts about himself. He had gone away for a long time, but he was having a wretched time. He had gone away hungry for pleasure, but he was starving. He had gone away, thinking that his father was trying to cheat him. Now, he realized that he was trying to enrich him. Having changed his mind, he did not simply say, "I will arise and get out of the hog pen." He did not say, "I will arise and run off, that would have been negative. He said, rather, "I will arise and go to my father." It was that that brought him victory.

Now, what is God asking of you and me? He is not asking for our tears primarily. He is not asking us to sob. He is not asking us to shout or to sing. He is not asking us for our money. He is asking us for ourselves. He is asking that we so change our minds about sin, and about righteousness and about Himself, that we will turn away from sin and give ourselves heartily to Him. "I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies as a living sacrifice wholly acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service, and be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and
We ought to change our minds because some of us are consciously wrong. We ought to change our minds because we might be consciously right. We ought to change our minds and cease to be indifferent and antagonistic to God, and come to love Him, because of His goodness. "The goodness of God," says Paul, "leads thee to repentance."

Years ago, as a young chap, I failed to do something that my mother had commanded me to do. She did not have the sternness of my father. I obeyed him for two motives. One of which, I must say was fear. But with Mother, it was a bit different. When I failed in my obedience to her, she did not punish me, except to show her keen disappointment. But that was the most painful punishment I could have had. In the agony of it, I did like Simon Peter, when he had wounded his Lord, I went out and wept bitterly. God has been good to you. All that infinite love could do, He has done. This loving Lord is saying to you tonight: "Son, go, work today in my vineyard." Yesterday, you said, "I will not." Now, at this moment, you may say, "I go, Sir." And it will be written of you, the biggest sentence that could be written: "He repented, and went." May God grant that it may be so!
"WHICH SHEEP IS BLACK?"

"Which of the two did the will of his father?" Matthew 21: 31

Here is a simple little story that contains one of the most simple and compelling gospel messages to be found in the New Testament. "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and he went not. Whose of the two did the will of his father?"

The question that Jesus asks is, of course, fundamental. "Which of the two did the will of his father?" That is a big question. To the mind of Jesus, it is the only thing that really matters. The doing of the will of God was the one passion of His soul. It was that for which He lived. It was even that by which He lived. "I have meat to eat," He said to His disciples, "that ye know not of." They were astonished and they wondered who had brought Him something to eat. But He explained His meaning by saying, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." That was more precious to Him than His life. In Gethsemane when He faced the cross, He shrank from it even as you and I. But He shrank from refusing the will of God even more. Therefore He prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." The teachings of Jesus and all life and experience show that men really live or die just in proportion to their obedience to the will of God.

I.

Look first at the command laid upon these sons. This command has certain arresting characteristics.

1. It is a call to work. "My Father worketh even now," said Jesus, "in work." Our Lord was a tireless worker. He believed that work was God-like. He expects that of you and me. When He saw the multitude, the bedraggled, the harassed, and the
"Which Sheep is Black?"

defeated, His heart went out to them. "Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest," He said, "that he will send forth laborers into his vineyard." We have enough triflers, God knows, enough shirkers, enough folks that refuse to be bothered. We have entirely too few who are willing to work. When our Lord calls to us as this father to his sons saying, "Go work today in my vineyard."

2. It is a call to immediate action. It is so easy to postpone our big decisions. It is so easy to make all sacrifices, to carry all our burdens, to heal all our wounds in some hazy tomorrow that never comes. There are few people, indeed, who set out to live entirely useless lives. There are too few who in the beginning or in the morning of life who firmly resolve never to put their shoulder under the heavy load, never to reach for a hand to help any human soul. They drift into uselessness unconsciously. They drift because they refuse to accept a present call and a present command, "Son, go work today in my vineyard."

3. This is an individual command. It is addressed to us, not as a group, not as a church, not as a world. It is addressed to us one by one. To each of these sons, their father spoke individually. He made a separate and definite appeal to every one of them. It is even so that our heavenly Father is speaking to us. He is looking very wistfully at us tonight, appealing through the needs of a broken world, saying, "Son, go work today in my vineyard."

4. This is the appeal of a father to a son, not a master to a slave. It is therefore, the appeal of love. A father is seeking not simply the best for his vineyard, he is seeking the best for his son as well. He knows that the vineyard needs the son. He knows also that the son is equally in need of a bracing task that will put meaning and worth into life. Therefore, he lays this earnest and compelling command upon each son that he loves, "Go work today in my vineyard."

5. But while this is a command, there is no compulsion in it, except the compulsion of love. We do not have to obey. We can face the appeal of our Father, we
can face the needs of the vineyard, we can face the high rewards of obedience and either obey or disobey. We can say, "Yes" to our Lord, or we can say, "No." It was so with these two sons, it is so with ourselves.

II.

What response did they make? Here we come to that narrow view that Jesus so often taught and enforced. It was His conviction that only two responses to such a command were possible. The response of obedience and the response of disobedience. What did these sons say? I do not use the order given by Matthew.

1. One of them said, "I go, Sir." But he went not. Now what was wrong with his conduct? Let us keep our eyes on what is fundamental and not what is incidental. His failure was not in his open and avowed promise to do his father's will. "I go, Sir," he said and there was certainly nothing wrong in that word. That is exactly what he should have said. That is what we ought to say to the commands of our Lord. Every man ought to make a public and open avowal of his decision to follow Christ. Such an open avowal is helpful to himself personally. It is also helpful to others. It is further a means of honoring God.

Nor are we to conclude that this man's avowed purpose of obeying his father created his obligation to obey. It may have increased it, but it did not create it. The obligation was there fixed and unavoidable, whatever his answer. You and I may refuse openly to obey God or we may make a public promise to obey, but our obligation to obedience remains regardless of whether we make an avowal or refuse to make it. Those, therefore, that remain without the church make no pretense to being Christians, do not thereby shirk the obligation of being Christians.

What then was wrong with this man? Not his promise to obey, but his refusal to obey. Just why he failed to make his promise good we are not told. That is only in-
cidental. The man who refuses to eat, starves to death however sound his reasons. The man who refuses to obey God misses life, however sound his reasons. This son may have become interested in other matters. He may have been merely lazy. He may have heard the surly reply of his brother and said to himself, "If he is not going to work, neither will I." But whatever the influence that turned him away from the path of obedience, his failure to obey was his tragedy. No amount of pardon from his father on his part could atone for this. He became through his disobedience the black sheep of the family.

2. The reply of the second son was surly in the extreme. "Son, go work today in my vineyard," was the father's appeal. "I will not do it," came the answer. But in spite of that unpardonable answer, he ended by going out into the vineyard to work. We, therefore, approve this man in spite of his bad start. But why do we approve of him?

We do not do so because of his surly answer. There was nothing big or smart in his loud and emphatic, "No." This I say because there are so many that are of a definite opinion. How many there are who live in open disobedience to God, but who seek to atone for it by saying, "I do not pretend to be a Christian." As if an avowed and open disobedience could take the place of obedience. "I drink now and then," a brother said the other day, "but I do not slip in the back door or try to conceal it. What I do, I do in the open."

Well, I cannot grow enthusiastic over that. If a man is doing wrong, I think he should have the decency to be ashamed of it. I never saw any virtue in parading one's physical infirmities before the public eye. I am still further from seeing any merit in those swaggering boys who take delight in showing us the moral and spiritual cancers that are eating away their inner lives. Remember that frank and open sin against God is a mighty poor substitute for a frank and open obedience to God.

If we do not approve of this son because of his surly answer, no more do we refuse him because he refused an immediate obedience. There are those who seem to feel
that the prodigal is saved in a fuller way than the one who never goes away from home. But that is not true. How long this son delayed his obedience we do not know, but this we may be sure, that he was the poorer for every moment he lived in rebellion against his father. We do not, therefore, approve him because he did not at once do as he was commanded.

Why then do we approve him? Just for this, that in spite of his surly answer, it was all wrong, that in spite of his delay, which was also wrong, he did at last repent and go to work in the vineyard. Just what influenced him to do this, we are not told. It may have been the vision of need. He saw how sorely workers were needed. It may have been the pain that he read in his father's face when he refused him. It may have been the fear of wasting his life by giving it to men and secondary matters. But the reasons are not the fundamental part of the story. The one reason that the conduct of this young man meets the approval of God and men is this, that in spite of a bad start, he ended by repenting and doing the will of his father.

III.

Now this brings us to one of the simplest and most scriptural definitions or illustrations of repentance to be found in the Bible. This ought to hold our attention because repentance is so important. Repentance is a fundamental necessity. When Jesus preached His first sermon, it had to do with repentance. "Repent ye," He said, "and believe the gospel." When he had been crucified and risen from the dead, His command to His followers was, "Go and preach repentance." The remainder of the New Testament is little more than a record of the carrying out of that command. When Peter preached on Pentecost, and three thousand were converted, he called them to repent. Paul declared that He showed throughout all Judea and unto the Gentiles that men should repent. When he stood on Mars' hill, he said, "God commanded all men everywhere to repent."

Repentance is fundamental because there is no salvation without it. "Except
ye repent," said Jesus, "ye shall all perish." Repentance is fundamental because it is the way to the fullness of life. "Repent and be baptized everyone of you," said Peter, "for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Repentance is the door of life, it is the way of growth. We have to repent to enter the kingdom. We have to continue repenting to remain in the kingdom. It is something so beautiful that when the least and most insignificant repent it sends a thrill through all heaven. "There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repented." What then is repentance? This son repented, what did he do? What is involved in repentance?

1. He faced the fact that he was living in disobedience to his father. That was a step toward repentance, but by no means a final step. Before we repent of our sins, we must recognize the fact that we are sinners. But, of course, that is not enough. We all know that ourselves. There is no difference where all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. To that, every intelligent man who has not become morally blinded gives a ready assent, but all who thus assent do not repent.

2. There came a time when this son not only knew himself to be disobedient to his father, but he was sorry for his disobedience. That is a part of repentance, yet that is only a part. There are plenty of folks who know they are sinners and who are sorry they are sinners, yet they fail to repent. I have in mind a man who became the victim of a degrading habit. How sorry he was, sorry to tears. Yet even though he recognized his weakness and grieved over it, he did not repent.

3. There came a time when this man who had said, "I will not go" changed and said, "I will go." But his avowal was not in itself repentance. There are many who avow their determination to be Christians by uniting with the church, but who do not really repent. Now uniting with the church is good so far as it goes. I believe in it with all my heart. I believe if you are really in earnest about being a Christian, you
can find your place in some church. If you are staying out of the church because you are too good to associate with those within it, I am uneasy about you. I was preaching at a certain place some time ago where there was an Amen brother. He was saying Amen almost as fast as I was preaching. I became suspicious of him. By and by, I said, "I believe in the church." "Amen," he shouted. "If I lived next door to a man who was too good to belong to the church, I would lock my smoke house door every night." He started to say Amen, but it slid off like a feather-edged shingle. If a man really repents, he is likely to avow the fact, but that in itself is not repentance.

4. When did this man repent? When he not only said, "I will," instead of "I will not," but when he ceased to turn his back on the vineyard and went out into it and went to work. In a service I was holding about two years ago, two men came to the altar. One was obviously a roughneck and the other, I found out later was from one of our best colleges. "Will you accept Christ, if I tell you now," I said to the college man. "Indeed I will," he answered without the slightest show of emotion, "that is what I am here for." I then explained to him what it meant to repent. He immediately put his arm around the roughneck at his side to explain to him the way of life.

Repentance then is changing from disobedience to obedience. Moffatt properly translates, "He repented and went..." by saying, "He changed his mind and went..." Repentance means change of mind and that leads to change of conduct. He changed his mind about his father. He changed his mind about the work to be done. He changed his mind about the use he was going to make of his own life. Finding himself on the wrong road, he deliberately turned around and took the right road. That is very simple. That is very heroic. It requires the highest courage, but it has life and usefulness in its hands.

IV.

Now, you and I are taking the course of one of these sons tonight. Leaving
off what is incidental, we are either repenting and obeying God, or we are refusing to. The need of our own lives summons us to repentance. The need of our fellows is an urgent call to repentance. The need of our church is a call to repentance. Above all else, as Paul said, "The goodness of God calls us to repentance."

Years ago, I knew a young chap who failed his mother in a crisis. It was not a desperate wrong that he had done. In fact, it was not wrong at all. He had just failed to render a service to show a thoughtfulness that he ought to have shown. His mother was tender and cautious. There was not a word of rebuke. She was merely disappointed. "If she had been in my place," said the young fellow to himself, "she would have done that for me at almost any sacrifice." And as he thought it over, he did what Peter did when he had grieved his Lord. He went out and wept bitterly. The fear of disappointing the One who loves you best ought to lead us to say, "I go, Sir," and not only to say it but to mean it with all our hearts.
"Whither of the twain did the will of his father?"

--Matthew 21:31

This is the climax of one of the most brief, incisive, and urgent parables that Jesus ever uttered. He spoke it to certain religious leaders of His day who were trifling with the truth. Jesus had just asked them a question. "The baptism of John," He asked, "was it from heaven or of men?" Instead of giving an honest answer to this honest question, these religious leaders rationalized. They said among themselves, "If we say it was from heaven, He will ask why we did not believe it. If we answer from men, then the crowd will stone us because they counted John a prophet." Therefore, they answered, "We cannot tell."

Then it was that Jesus spoke this parable, climaxing with the question, "Whither of the twain did the will of his father?" He also declared that the Publicans and harlots, those people that they themselves regarded as beyond hope, would enter into the Kingdom of Heaven before themselves. Thus, he made a personal application of the parable. Thus he aroused a hatred that could be satisfied with nothing less than His going to His cross. The parable was timely. It is also timeless. It was needed by those who first heard it. It has been needed by those who have heard it in every generation. It is needed today. "Which of the two," Jesus is asking still, "did the will of his father?"

I

Why this question? Because it is the only question that really matters. Of course, there are many questions that we regard as important. But the supreme question, declares Jesus, the all-inclusive question is just this—how do we stand with relation to the will of God? If men or nations seek to live in defiance of
the will of God, then they find not victory but defeat, not life but death. If, on the contrary, they find a home secure within the will of God, then all other prizes come as a matter of course. There is, therefore, but one supreme question for the individual, for the group, for the nation—How does that individual or group or nation stand with regard to the will of God.

The whole Bible seems to have been written to teach and to impress upon us this truth. It haunts us upon every page of the Old Testament. In the lovely poetry of Genesis, the Garden of Eden becomes a wilderness, not from necessity, but because those that dwelt in the Garden refused to live within the will of God. As man after man comes upon the stage of action, he judges himself, finds his place of tragedy or triumph just in proportion as he does or refuses to do the will of God. When these men of insight who wrote the Bible discussed the careers of kings, their supreme interest is just this—how did they stand with regard to the will of God. Did they do that which was right or that which was wrong in the sight of the Lord. All else is secondary to this. Here is a typical example: "The rest of all the acts of Amaziah, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" Poor Amaziah thought he was going to be remembered by subsequent generations because of the palaces and cities that he built, but he was really remembered by the character that he refused to build.

When we come to the life of David, the emphasis is still the same. David was a great warrior, a great statesman. If tradition is true, he was a great poet. He let a flock of skylarks out of his heart that will sing as long as men have a sky above their heads. He made his age the Golden Age of his people. When in after years these thought of the best possible that could come to them as a nation, they thought of a return of an age like that of David. What made his reign so prosperous? It was not his genius but his conformity to the will of God. Listen to this summing up of it all: "David when he had served his own generation by the will of
God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers." The Old Testament then teaches that the individual meets triumph or tragedy, life or death in proportion to his conformity to the will of God. And as it is with the individual, so it is with the nation. Great nations stalk their way to their ruin before our very eyes, not because of any natural weakness, but because they refuse the will of God.

When we turn to the New Testament, we are haunted by the same impressive truth. Naturally, the central Light of the New Testament is Jesus. What is the secret of His greatness? We find it in the central purpose of His life. Why is He here? What is it that decides every step of His journey? It is the will of God. "I came not to do my own will but the will of Him that sent me." This will of God was not only His constant guide; it was the very breath of life to Him. It was not only that for which He lived, but that by which He lived. "My meat," He declares, "is to do the will of God and to finish His work." Then when He reached the end of the journey and was shrinking from the cross with such terrible sensitiveness, He prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."

It was just this loyalty to the will of God that accounts for the unique perfection of His life. When He stood at the end of the journey, He could say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." By this He does not mean simply that He has reached the end of the journey; He means that His life is complete, that it is full-orbed, that it is perfect. He has left nothing undone that He ought to have done. No tear has been left undried that He might have dried. No burden has been left unlifted that He might have lifted. It means that He has done no positive wrong; He has never inflicted a needless wound, never caused a needless tear. His is a perfect life--perfect because it was lived completely within the will of God.

The testimony of the Bible is the testimony of history and experience. Life will work according to the will of God and it will not work in any other way.
God has a plan for our physical lives. We live richly physically in proportion as we meet the demands of the laws of health. We live spiritually as we comply with the laws of spiritual health. To refuse to eat is to starve. To refuse the Bread of Life is to starve spiritually. What is the matter with our present world that threatens to crash and sink like a torpedoed ship? It is trying to live in defiance of the will of God. Life for the individual and life for the nation will not work that way. When Jesus, therefore, asks which of the two do the will of God, He is asking the supreme question, the all-inclusive question.

II

What is this will of God?

1. We do well to have respect to the will of God because God is our Father. His will, then, is not the will of a tyrant; it is the will of One who loves us with an everlasting love. It is the will of One who understands us as no one else does or can. It is the will of One who has not come to steal or to kill or to destroy, but that we might have life and have it in abundance." Since God is our Father, His will seeks our highest good. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

2. This will of God has to do with the whole world. God has a plan and a purpose for the nations of the earth, but He also has a plan and purpose for each individual. "Every man's life-work," said Lowell, "is born with him." He gives to every man his work. God never loses the individual in the crowd. My father had a large family, but he did not love us merely as a group, but as individuals. So does God love! "He calleth his own sheep by name." He has a plan for the last and least of us endless as eternity.

3. This plan is a call to help. "Son," He said, "go work today in my vine-
yard." The kind of work we can do is vastly varied. Some are called to work on great world stage. Some spend their lives in the thick of things. Others are called to work in hidden places. Some are knights of the battle-field; others are knights of the sick-room. But they serve Him best who most fully enter into His will. It may be that you have not found the particular niche into which you fit. But this we know—that He has called upon us to be a part of the remedy and not of the disease, to help and not to hinder.

"Son, go work." Religion seems to be the one enterprise of which we expect to make a success without any effort. To our daily task we expect to give something of our best. We have a technique for daily living, but many of us undertake to live our religious lives at haphazard. But here must be effort as elsewhere. When Jesus saw an multitude scattered abroad as sheep without a shepherd, He was moved with compassion and said, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." We need more than side-line saints, more than spectators, more than critics. We need workers. If the same sacrificial effort had gone into the work of Kingdom-building that we are putting into the war, we would change the world into a bit of a heaven far more quickly than we are changing it into a hell.

4. The time we are to work is today. We are to work today because that is when we are needed. We are to work because that is the only time we have. "We have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this." So often we allow our attention to be diverted from the one time that we have and the one place that we live. "A fool's eyes," said the wise man, "are at the ends of the earth." Yesterday was a great day. If he had only lived there, he would have done something. But yesterday is gone. Tomorrow will be full of opportunities. When tomorrow comes instead of being a fool he will be wise. Instead of being a sinner, he will be a saint. But tomorrow has not come. Meantime, he does nothing with today. God's call is today, and for today only. To waste today is to waste eternity.
In giving this command, God recognizes our individual freedom. "Son, go work today in my vineyard." It is a commandment, but we do not have to obey. This is the appalling peril that God faced in creating us free men and women. We can say yes to Him, and enrich ourselves, help to enrich our world, and gladden the heart of God. But we have power to say no to Him. We have power to defy His will and wreck ourselves and help to wreck our world, and to add to the weight of His cross. "Son, go work today in my vineyard." "Must I?" we answer peevishly. "No, but you may." That is life's highest privilege.

III

What answer did these sons give? They did not give the same answer, but they gave only two answers. Had there been a million sons instead of two, the number of answers would have been the same. We do not like such dogmatic statements. But when God lays His commandments upon us, we have to do one or two things—we have to say yes or no. Of course, we recognize the fact that there are different degrees in obedience. All men are either living or dead. Among those who are alive, there is not the same degree of life; so some give a fuller obedience than others. Some enter more fully into the will of God than others. But when God's command comes, we either say yes or no.

1. Look at this young man who said yes with his lips and no with his life. His father came unto him and said, "Son, go work today in my vineyard." He answers graciously and thrillingly, "I go, sir." You see he added the "sir" with punctilious and military politeness. But having made this beautiful assent, he failed to put it into practice. "He went not." Now nobody admires this young man. Nobody wants to be like him. Nobody points to him as a model of good conduct and good character.

But what is wrong? Wherein was he at fault? We are not going to criticize him for being courteous—that was all to the good. We are not going to criticize him for promising to go. That, too, is what he ought to have done. His supreme
failure was in that he did not go. Of course, it was bad for him to break his promise. But bear in mind that his promise was not the basis of his obligation. He was under obligations to go whether he had promised or not. Were I to steal ten dollars out of your purse, you would not excuse me for my misconduct were I to tell you frankly, "I never promised not to steal." If a pretended lover were to bring shame upon your daughter, you would want a better reason than for him to say, "I never promised to marry her."

What then, I repeat, was the sin of this young man? It was simply in that he refused to obey his father. Just why he refused we are not told. The common conviction is that he was a hypocrite. He pretended to his father that he was loyal and obedient just to take the old man in and win an approval to which he had no right. He might have been a hypocrite, but I doubt it. I think it is far more probable that when he made the promise he really intended to go. But having left the presence of his father, he found that the crowd was not headed toward the vineyard but in the opposite direction; so he went with the crowd. Or it may be he sought to live in the realm of his emotions. He was stirred when he made the promise, but now he had cooled off and no longer felt like doing his father's will.

This happens times without number. There is not one of us that in reading some helpful book, in hearing some thrilling hymn, in listening to a Gospel appeal has not been stirred. But the emotion passed without action. There was an old chap in Tennessee that, when his pastor preached a stirring sermon on missions, pledged fifty dollars. But when he was asked to pay, he refused, saying, "I was too religious that day to look out for my own interest."

But while the reason for this son's refusal to do his father's will might be interesting, it is not fundamental. Tradition tells us that the asp that stung Cleopatra to death was brought in a basket of flowers. Perhaps so. But whether it came in flowers or came in thorns is not significant. The significant fact is that it brought death. This young man might have had some very wise, seemingly same reasons for his disobedience. He might have had reasons that were shallow
and silly. But the nature of the reasons do not signify. The tragedy of his life was this—that given an opportunity to serve, that called upon to do his father's will, he refused.

2. This second son took the opposite course. When his father came to him, he gave him the same command that he gave his brother: "Son, go work today in my vineyard." And the son answered, "I will not." But afterward, he repented and went. Now we admire the conduct of this young man just as much as we abhor the conduct of his brother. We would like to be like him. He took a course that meets our approval.

Why is this the case? It is not because that he was crude and boorish and impolite—that he was. When his father said to him, "Go, work today in my vineyard," he was not even courteous. He said, "I will not." Notice, he left off the "sir". When he got out with his fellows, he said swaggeringly, "I got the old man told. I spoke my mind. There is one thing," he added, "I am at least not a hypocrite. That simpering brother of mine pretended that he was going and then didn't go. I am frank and open and above-board in my rebellion. At least I am not a hypocrite."

But I am not sure of that at all. My guess is that he was more hypocritical than his pious-sounding brother. There are two kinds of hypocrites you know. There is the hypocrite who pretends that he is better than he is. That is a type of hypocrite that flourishes in a day when the church is popular and when religion is a passport to good society. But there is another type of hypocrite who pretends that he is worse than he is. He flourishes when religion is in disrepute. He openly flouts convictions that in his heart he honors. He laughs at ideals that really bring his soul to its knees. I think really we have less to fear from the man who pretends to be better than he is because he is ashamed of the base and mean than we have to fear of the man who pretends to be worse than he is because he is ashamed of the best that is in him.

Generally speaking, the man whose one pride is that he is not a hypocrite is
often the worst type of hypocrite. But even if he is honest and sincere, a candid confession of vice is a poor substitute for virtue. The man who swaggeringly tells you that when he takes a drink he does so openly is often a poor substitute for sobriety. Why any man thinks it to his credit to parade his moral deformities in the eyes of the world is more than I can see. The child that loves to show his sore toe to the company may be excused because he is a child, but the grown-up that constantly calls our attention to his moral warts and carbuncles is without excuse. He is merely disgusting. How profoundly stupid to try to make a candid and professed disobedience a substitute for obedience! What, then, I repeat, is commendable about this young man? Just this—he had the grace to repent of the rash and ugly answer that he had given to his father. "Afterward," says the lovely story, "he repented"—that is, he changed his mind—"and went." Just why he did this we are not told. Maybe the pain that looked out from his father's eyes haunted him until it broke his heart. Maybe the gracious memories of his father's tenderness made his further rebellion impossible. That ought to be the case with you and me. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." Along with this He may have come face to face with a need that he could meet. He may have been thrilled with the possibility of helping.

But the significant fact, be the causes what they may, is that he changed his mind and went. "He repented," says the story. Repentance is necessary to salvation. It is something so beautiful, says Jesus, that when the least of us performs it, all heaven knows about it. But what is it to repent? It was not enough for this young man to recognize the fact that he was disobeying his father. It was not enough for him to be sorry. He repented when he faced about. He was walking on a road that led directly away from the vineyard. He turned deliberately around and went in the opposite direction. That is repentance.

Tonight I bring to your heart and mine this question—what are you going to do about the will of God? He is calling you to work in His vineyard. What is your answer? Yes, or no? This is your supreme question. If you give the wrong
answer, though, if it were possible, you might win all the prizes that the world offers, life for you must be a little and mean affair and must end at last in a tragedy as deep and dark as that woven out of the warp and woof of desolation and death. If you give the right answer, though, if it were possible, you might miss all other prizes, you would find life abundant here and forevermore. The only question, therefore, of eternal importance is, "Will you answer yes or no to the call of God." 

"In his wic is our peace!"
A THRILLING INVITATION--THE WEDDING FEAST

"Come to the Marriage-Banquet." -- Matthew 22:4. (Neffatt)

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I.

My business with you is very simple. I am not here primarily to entertain you, though what I shall have to say ought to be vastly interesting. I am the bearer of an invitation. This invitation is not mine. No more is it that of any other man. It comes from the King of Kings. It comes from Him in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. He addresses us, not as a group, but as individuals. How heartening that is! This invitation bears the name of every one of us. It is for that man of business and of social prominence whose address everybody knows. It also bears the name of that defeated man, that shamed woman, of poor souls who are trying to hide from a misspent yesterday in some back street of our city. Their own loved ones may not even know where they are. But God knows, and even now He is wooing them and us with this invitation.

I rejoice in my task because in bringing you this invitation, I am offering you satisfaction for your deepest needs. For the invitation is to a feast, a marriage-feast, a royal marriage-feast. It therefore meets a universal need. All of us must eat. Our tissues and our bones and our blood cry out for bread. This physical hunger is no more genuine nor more universal than spiritual hunger. Just as our bodies demand material bread, so our souls cry out for the bread of life and the water of life. Some of you may have flung away from the faith of your childhood. You may have broken with organized religion. You may have lost patience with preachers and their sometimes trite and trying sermons. But here is one something you have not lost,
and that is your hunger after God. Whatever may be your attitude
to the church or to the minister, of this I am sure, that every one
of you has a hungry heart.

Some years ago, when I was pastor in a Western village,
a friend pointed out a hard-faced man, much given to drink, who was
superintending the construction of a building. "You see that man," he
said, calling his name, "I would advise that you never undertake
to talk religion with him. He will certainly insult you." I took
his advice. But one day I stepped into the leading grocery store
to be greeted by low hogs that were not meant for me. They were to
warm a certain gentlemen who was talking recklessly, that the minister
had come. But he paid them no mind. In a loud voice he went on with
his speech. I was compelled to listen. I found that he was paying
his respects to the different churches of the town, and he used the
church of which I was pastor as his climax. Naturally the situation
was a bit embarrassing.

His speech over, he stalked toward the door. He was a
great husky giant of a man. With considerable fear and trembling,
therefore, I stepped in front of him and held out my hand and said,
"Cheapp all is my name. I am pastor of the church about which you have
just been speaking." He looked a bit startled, and said, "O, are you?"
"Yes," I replied. And still holding his hand, I stepped closer to
him and said too softly for the others to hear, "I was down at your
home yesterday. It didn't strike me as a happy home." And I saw
his lips quiver and his eyes fill with tears. I then ran my arm
through his and we went out and sat down together for a quiet talk.
"Mr. F," I said, "if one had told you ten years ago that you would
ever become what you are today, you wouldn't have believed him.
would you?" "I would have killed him," was the answer. "But you
have not gone down without a fight, have you?" And the big tears
gushed from his eyes as he replied, "That is what nobody seems to
know. I have tried, God knows I have. I have cursed myself for a
fool a thousand times, but drink's got me, and I can't quit." And
I found him an eager hearer as I preached to him, Jesus. Yes, we
can always be sure of this, every man has a hungry heart.

Of course as I bring you this invitation, I am well aware
that this is not the first time that you have received it. Some of
you have heard it so often that it leaves you rather listless and cold.
Nor, is preaching the only method that God is employing in his effort
to win you. He wooes us in a thousand ways. He invites us though our
joys and through our sorrows, though our laughter and through our
tears. He calls us through the consciousness that we have made a
bit of a mess of life. He calls us through our restlessness and our
weariness. He calls us through the tender memory of a mother whose
"eyes were the homes of a silent prayer." He calls us through the
enchanting vision of the better man or the better woman that at times
we are sure he made it possible for us to become. He is a veritable
Hound of Heaven, forever pursuing us with a love that will not let us
go. Through countless voices he is ever calling, "All things are
ready; come to the marriage-banquet."

II.

Why does Jesus say that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a
royal marriage-banquet? He uses this figure, because to the oriental
mind to attend such a banquet was the very climax of privilege. It
represented the very acme of enjoyment. Thus does Jesus seek to con-
vince us that to enter the Kingdom is not to cheat ourselves. It is
not to impoverish life. It is rather to lay hold of the richest
possibilities that can come to a human soul. To become a child of
the Kingdom is not to eke out the anaemic existence of the hungry and
half-starved, it is rather to enjoy the feast of the fullness of life.
How did Jesus come to this conviction? It was not a mere theory of His. No more did He learn it from the religious leaders of His day. Nor is this, I fear, the impression that one would get from ourselves. Take the word "saint" for instance. What does it suggest to you? What kind of a picture does it paint? When you hear it, do you see one possessed of a sparkling eye and a radiant face? Do you see one who is capable of ringing laughter, who is good to have around, because his very presence is an antidote against gloom? Or, does the word suggest one who is painfully tame and uninteresting - one who is pathetically hoping to get something out of the next world for the ridiculous reason that he is getting so little out of this one? Do we as Christians move among our fellows, facing up to life like men and women who have bread to eat that the world knows not of? Do we impress them that we are feasting or fasting? Too often, there is little in our drab lives to convince any one that we are finding life like a banquet.

How then, I repeat, did Jesus come by this conviction? He knew that to live within the will of God was like attending a royal banquet because He had learned it through His own experience. He had lived every day completely within the circle of the will of God. Always and everywhere He sought first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. In so doing, He met opposition. He was misunderstood in His own home. He was thrown out of His native village. Sometimes His face was wet with tears. He had to agonize in Gethsemane. He had to stagger under the weight of a cross. He had to climb Calvary. But in spite of all this, nay by virtue of all this, He found life infinitely rich and full. Though a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, no other ever lived so abundantly as He, nor was any other face ever so radiant with abiding joy. Through His own experience He knew that the Kingdom of God was like a royal marriage-banquet.
And the verdict of Jesus has been the verdict of all those through the years who have without reservation accepted the King’s invitation. To open our New Testaments is to have this conviction literally thrust upon us. Upon its pages we meet men and women of varied types and temperaments. We meet them under all sorts of circumstances. Some of them have homes and some are homeless. Some are honored and some are shamed. Some are “destitute, afflicted, tormented,” but all are literally amazed at the incredible treasure that has come into their possession. They are all finding life a feast, and so finding it, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

And their joy was contagious. Weary and laughterless souls, caught under its spell, were reborn. Thus the wilderness and the solitary place became glad, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as a rose. And this is the way of victory for ourselves. We have constantly among us those who are finding life dull and drab and gray. Some are flinging out of it altogether from sheer boredom; others are turning to high-powered amusements; others to paths of dissipation. Surely the need of the hour is for men and women who can show a better way, who can call to their fellows with Paul, “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit!” If you want life to have a tang, if you want it to thrill, do not take the way of the flesh. That will leave you with an ill head and an aching heart. Enter the Kingdom, and you, too, will find life like a royal marriage-banquet.

III.

But here a strange fact meets us. As appealing as this invitation was, all did not accept it. It divided those to whom it was sent into two main groups. Those who accepted and enjoyed the feast and those who did not.

1. Let us look, first, at those who refused the invitation. It is evident at once that all did not refuse in the same fashion. Jesus divides these rejectors into three groups: (1) One was antagonistic,
The King's invitation aroused their bitter resentment. It made them intensely angry. They showed their resentment by persecuting the messengers. Some of them were actually done to death. Real messengers from the King have always stirred up more or less opposition. This opposition has expressed itself in varied ways. The stones the persecutors throw are sometimes quite crude and sometimes more refined, but the opposition abides. Let one come among us today who really proclaims and practices the Sermon on the Mount, and he will stir up resentment. Such a man shames our selfishness; he rebukes our littleness. He calls for sacrifices that we are not willing to make. He calls for the attitude of a brother toward every man, regardless of race or creed or color. He demands of us individual and social justice. Naturally, he is not universally popular.

But this opposition, instead of being a discredit to the messenger is really one of his credentials. "Woe unto you," said Jesus, "when all men speak well of you." Of course we are not to conclude from this that we are to make ourselves deliberately disagreeable. There are those who seem to think that the thorns upon a rose bush are more important than the roses, that a porcupine is more appealing than a Maltese cat. But such is not the case. If it is woe when all men speak well of us, it is doubtless a far greater all woe when men speak evil of us. But possibly the greatest woe is to be so morally flabby and useless that nobody speaks of us at all. To meet with opposition is in no sense tragic, but not to be worth opposing is the height of tragedy. Nor is the man who fights back so hopeless as the one who is indifferent. Saul of Tarsus breathing out threatenings and slaughter is not an altogether pleasant spectacle, but he is far more hopeful than a complacent Gamaliel who has no more heroic advice than, "Refrain from these men and let them alone."

(2) The second group of rejectors were preoccupied. When the invitation was given them, they were not angry in the least. They heard it with all due deference and respect. Possibly they shook
hands with the messenger and expressed their appreciation of his services. They may have even talked enthusiastically about the coming banquet and declared with conviction their intention of accepting the invitation at some future day. But having done so, they made it quite plain that they could not accept it then and there. They could not, for the very simple reason that they had other matters pending that were far more important. To be invited to a royal marriage-banquet was indeed an honor and worth considering, but of course, it was a small matter in comparison to looking after their own big affairs. Therefore, "they made light of it and went their way, one to his farm and another to his merchandise." They were so absorbed in the secondary that they had no time for the primary.

Some years ago, a gentleman came to my study to invite me to a dinner that was to be given in his own home. I readily accepted his gracious invitation, but in reality it never took hold of my mind. He left almost immediately and I never thought of it again. The following Sunday, however, a friend came to me after the service with this question, "Why did you not come to dinner the other day?" The only answer I could make was, "I forgot it. My mind was so taken up with something else when Mr. H. invited me that all else was crowded out." Why did I refuse this invitation? It was not because I came nothing about eating. I have a fairly good appetite, besides at that time, eggs were eighty cents a dozen. Nor was it because of any desire on my part to be rude. Neither was it because of any dislike I had for the man who invited me, he was my friend. I was just so taken up with other matters that the invitation did not register. Therefore, though my intentions were the best, I missed the feast.

(3) The third group is represented by the man who refuses to dress for the occasion, the man without a wedding garment. The trouble with this man was not that he was either antagonistic or pre-occupied. He was presumptuous. He had convinced himself that he could
enjoy the feast without meeting the conditions that were necessary to its enjoyment. He believed that he could have an effect without a cause. He was sure that he could know without learning, that he could see without eyes, that he could hear without ears. He dared to ignore the fact that always and everywhere character determines destiny. So, when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man not having on a wedding garment. He saw him because he could not do otherwise. He stood out in such glaring contrast to those about him that to overlook him was impossible.

But when the King saw him, He did not glare at him in anger. He spoke to him with a voice tender as tears, "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment?" How sorry the King is, how disappointed! And what is the man's answer? He makes no answer at all. For once this pathetic piece of presumption is speechless. No doubt if you had met him an hour ago out on the street, and asked him this same question, he could have talked you to Mars and back. He could have told you what shabby outfits some of his fellow guests were wearing, how far superior his own was, though he did not pretend to be wearing a wedding garment at all. But here in the presence of the King, he is utterly dumb. Why did he not plead ignorance? Why did he not say, "Lord, I didn't know that a wedding garment was necessary." He did not, because he could not. He knew the conditions to be met in order to enter the feast. Why did he not plead poverty? Why did he not tell the King that he genuinely longed for a wedding garment, but was not able to secure one? Had he been able to say this truly, he could have cried, "Unjust! Unjust!", as he was flung out of the banquet hall, until he shook it into a heap of ruins. But, a wedding garment might have been his for the taking. Therefore, he was speechless because he was without excuse.
Having refused to prepare himself for the feast, naturally he could not enjoy it. This was the case, not because he was thrown out by servants of the King, it was in reality his own hands that threw him out. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." He can no more see it than one who has never experienced physical birth can see the kingdom of this world. Without the wedding garment, we can no more enter into the feast than a deaf man can enter into the feast of music. We can no more enter in than a blind man can thrill with the splendors of a sunrise. "They that are ready go into the feast, and they only." God, himself, cannot change the conditions. Therefore, when this man refused to meet the conditions, he shut the door in his own face.

This dinner engagement that I mentioned awhile ago was not the only one that I have ever forgotten. Sad to say there was another. But this time, I was reminded of it in time to in some measure save my face. But before I was reminded, this was my misfortune, that I had already dined heartily at home. But in spite of this, I hurried to the home of my host. Soon, with other guests, I was seated at his well-filled table. The welcome was warm, and the dinner was of the best, but what a bore it was to me. Try to eat two dinners not more than twenty minutes apart and you will understand my position. Really, I was excluded from the feast as completely as if I had been thrown out bodily. The wedding garment that I lacked was an appetite, and lacking that, I could not enjoy the feast.

2. But if there were those who rejected the invitation, there were also those who accepted it. Let us thank God for these. Let us hurry to put ourselves among them. Some of those who came to the banquet were choice and worthy souls. They came wearing the white flower of a blameless life. But there were others who had little
to offer. They had wasted their substance with riotous living. But even when the most hopeless prodigal came, the King said, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him." And he was given a place at the banquet. The story says, "they gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good and the wedding was furnished with guests." It looked at first as if nobody was coming. It looked as if the banquet hall was going to be empty. But soon it began to fill rapidly and the process is still going on. Guests will continue to come till He who has invested so much in the feast shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. But, remember this, Jesus can never be satisfied without you. Therefore, once more, I urge upon you, "All things are ready, come to the marriage-banquet."
DECENT DEVILS

Devil No. III Presumption

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment."

Matthew 22:11

I.

Illustration

In this parable Jesus makes three assertions with regard to the kingdom of God.

1. He affirms that to enter the Kingdom is a privilege. It is the very climax of privilege. He speaks of it in terms that to the oriental mind was most appealing. It is a feast. It is the choicest of all feasts, a marriage feast. It is the acme of all marriage feasts, a royal marriage feast. A king is making a marriage for his son. To be privileged to attend the banquet that celebrates this occasion is a privilege, a height of privilege which none could be greater. Jesus reached this conviction not by close study, it grew out of his own experience. He embodied in himself the kingdom of heaven. He found in his own experience that to enter the Kingdom was to find a place at the feast of the fullness of life.

2. A second assertion, that Jesus makes in this parable is that this feast that is the height of privilege is open to everybody. It does not belong simply to the privileged few, but to the many. The servants were commanded to go out into the highways and constrain all sorts and conditions of people to come in. They were to invite both good and bad. No man however unworthy, however black
and tragic his past, was to be excluded. This invitation was extended to everyone. "All things are now ready come to the feast."

3. The third assertion that Jesus makes is that while the king invited everybody, all did not accept his invitation. In fact this invitation divided those who heard it into two groups. There were those who accepted. There were perhaps vast differences between one of these and another. But there were some that when the invitation was presented, then and there made up their minds to attend. And they saw it through and found a place at the marriage feast. Then there was a second group who refused to attend. This Bible has a shocking way of dividing folks into just two groups like that. Such divisions some time shock us. It seems narrow and dogmatic, but when we face the facts there could be only these two groups,—those who said yes, and those who said no.

Now just as there were differences among those who accepted there were also differences among those who rejected. That is, these rejectors did not all refuse for the same reason. For instance there were those who were angered by the invitation and were driven into aggressive rebellion. Just why this was the case we are not told. But it need not surprise us. There are those who are angered by the invitation still. At least there are those who reject it and make of their anger an escape mechanism. When Naaman was told to dip in the Jordan in order to be cured of leprosy the story says that he went away in a rage. He was too proud to obey, or to excuse himself in his own mind. Instead he grew angry at the Prophet.

A second group of rejectors were made up of those who were preoccupied.

"They were all with one consent," said Dr. Luke, "and began to make excuse."

There is a vast difference between excuse and reason. A reason exists in the nature of things. It never has to be made. It is ready at hand. But an excuse has to be made. A reason exists in itself, but an excuse is a substitute for a reason. It is the lie we tell when we do not wish to give the real reason.

Practically all excuses are lies.
For instance when you flunk out on duty, when you do the cheap thing instead of the right thing, when you through deliberate laziness consent to be a part of the disease instead of a part of the remedy you seldom give the real reason for such conduct. You make up an excuse. When the Ten Spies voted against possessing their possessions they had a real reason. "It would cost too much." It demanded more gallantry and grit than they had. But instead of giving the reason they gave an excuse. "The land was no good, it was sour grapes." Thus those who were invited lied as they said, "We cannot come because other interests make it impossible."

"I have bought a farm," said one. "I have bought some oxen," said another. But the last was the climax, "I have married me a wife." Thus they treated the invitation with contempt because they were preoccupied.

The final group is represented by the man without the wedding garment. This character is unique in the parables of Jesus. We find no other like him. "I understand you have been invited to the royal marriage feast," I said to him. "Indeed I have," he answered proudly. "Are you going to attend?" "Certainly I am," came the reply. "Do you think I am crazy?" A few days later I met him in the banquet hall. "So you are here?" "I would not have missed it for the world." "But you do not seem to be dressed like the rest of us. Where is your wedding garment?" "I don't care," he answered. "The king says with a swagger, "you make me tired. I never cared about such matters. I know the King expects such things, but he will overlook such a small breach of conduct on my behalf. He certainly wouldn't get angry over resent little respectable sins like mine." So he put himself among the guests without the wedding garment.

What is meant by this wedding garment? It stands for something without which the feast is impossible. It represents Christ-like character. This man made up his mind that there was no connection between salvation and character. In other words he thought he could pick out his goal and then reach it by any road that he desired. He decided that he could enter the feast without meeting the conditions
of the feast. The decent devil that wrecked him was presumption. He thought he could have an effect while he ignored the cause.

II.

Now presumption is a very decent devil but it is as deadly as it is decent. Its pathway is strewn with wrecks. But there are few of us indeed that are not guilty.

1. We presume with regard to ourselves. We act on the easy assumption that we are different from our fellows, that we can get by where they cannot. We assume that we can reap without sowing or that we can sow tares and as a result reap an abundant harvest of wheat. We know that tampering with liquor has wrecked millions, but it can't do anything to us. We know that unclean living has made hell for all that have become its slaves, but we are exceptions. Stupid folks may reap as they sow, but shrewd souls like ourselves can reverse the laws of nature and gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles.

It seems that nobody would presume after that fashion. Yet the name of those so presuming is legion. Here is a woman, Jezebel by name. She is the Lady Macbeth of the Old Testament. Her life has been one long and bloody sowing to the flesh. Now vengeance in the person of Jehu is on her track. When he rides into the city, instead of hiding she exposes herself at an upstairs window. "Had Zimri peace who slew his master?" she shouts at Jehu. What does she mean? She is reminding this avenger that Zimri had sinned and had paid the price. "So will you," she declares. But she herself is an exception. She could get by herself. "But be sure your sin will find you out," she shouts. "Kiss," answers Jehu. Then by way of illustration, "Throw her down." And there was a shriek and a dull thud on the cobblestones. Jezebel presumed on her own ability to get by even the laws of sowing and reaping.

2. We presume on each other. Here is a new married couple. They love each
other. They have every promise and possibility of a successful married life. But they presume on each other. They conclude that a marriage license is a guarantee of success. They presume that they can neglect each other, even knife each other, and have a growing love. Not only so, but one of them presumes that he can have a love life apart from that of his home and get away with it. His wife is devoted, she will forgive him of anything. Millions of homes have been wrecked by presumption.

We often presume upon our children. They come to us clean and unspoiled, but we forget that children are not so much born as made. We get too careless to set them a right example, too busy to give them the right training. We assume that because they are ours they can grow into right men and women without a proper opportunity. By and by we realize that we have marred them and robbed them not by our deliberate wickedness, but by our presumption.

Often we presume upon our friends. We presume that we can have friends without being one. We presume that we can win others by our dislike. Recently a teacher asked her pupils to write down the names of the folks they disliked. Some of them after studying five minutes could only think of one. Others got as high as fourteen. This teacher discovered further that those who could find fourteen they did not like were the least popular members of the class. Love teaches love to love and hate teaches hate to hate. Then we presume that both friends and loved ones are always by and always accessible. We fail to express the appreciation that we feel till by and by we spill our words of praise into ears that do not hear. Thus we have robbed both ourselves and them by our presumption.

But most of all do we presume upon God. This was one of the temptations of Jesus. "Inasmuch as ye are the son of God," command these stones be made bread." What was there wrong in this suggestion? Why should not Jesus turn the stones into bread? It was a temptation to doubt God. The tempter was virtually saying, "Though you are here in the wilderness according to the will of God, if you do
not take matters into your own hands, if you do not look after number one, then you are going to die. You cannot depend upon God to keep you even if you put everything into his keeping." But Jesus answered, "Man shall not live by bread alone. As long as I trust my Father I am safe where he leads."

Then the tempter went to the opposite extreme. The story tells how Jesus was set on the pinnacle of the temple. "Cast thyself down," said the tempter, "and it is written that he shall give his angel's charge concerning thee, to keep thee." "That is, you are right in trusting God to keep you so long as you are in his will. But you may even go further than that, you can trust him to keep you when you go your own way. He will keep you if you obey him, he will keep you no less if you disobey him. He will save you if you repent of your sin. In fact he is so good natured that he will save you even if you refuse to repent."

But Jesus answered, "Thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test."

Jesus resisted this temptation, but many of us do not. It is perfectly amazing how many people have an unspoken conviction that God can save everybody if he were not so narrow minded. While they realize that they cannot know without learning, that they cannot live without eating, that they cannot see without opening their eyes, they somehow believe that God can save them without any cooperation on their part. They are sure that he can not only save them from their sins, but can save them in the midst of their sins. They defend God with pious indignation saying, "God loves us too well to send us to hell."

Now there is just enough truth in this for it to be a deadly dangerous lie. God does love us too well to send us to hell. He never sent any man to perdition. But we have a foolish way of sending ourselves there in the life that now is, to say nothing of that which is to come. God loves everybody in the here and now, but there are thousands in this very city who are suffering the pangs of hell, not because God is angry with them, but because they refuse to meet the conditions of real happiness. If we choose physical health we must obey the laws of health.
If we choose spiritual health we must meet the conditions. If we decide to enter the feast we must meet the conditions of admission. This man presumed that he could enter while ignoring the conditions.

III.

What were the results? The answer has in it that which sounds very cruel, but such is not the case. When the king came in to see the guests his eyes fell at once upon this man who had not a wedding garment. He approached him and asked him a question. "Friend, how camest thou in here not having on a wedding garment?" and for once this presumptuous man was speechless. He could not plead ignorant. He knew the conditions. He knew that a wedding garment was a necessity. He could not plead inability. He knew that this garment might be had for the taking. Therefore this man who a few moments ago could have talked you to the moon and back, could have told you with cock-sureness, though he had no wedding garment, that that of his own was quite as good as that offered by the king, had now nothing to say for himself. Then the inevitable happened. He was cast out of the feast.

Why was this the case? Because the king was angry? Not a bit of it. The king did not cast him out, the man cast himself out. He could not enjoy the feast because he had no taste for it. In another city my wife and I were invited to dinner. The invitation as we thought was conditional. We heard no more of it till the feast was prepared then the hostess called us and we hurried to respond. But the trouble was we had already dined heartily at home. In spite of this however we hurried over and took our place at their well filled table. I am told it was an excellent dinner. But it was not so for me. I had no appetite.

"They that are ready go into the feast." That is true in the here and now. It is true everywhere. There is a feast of literature, a feast of music, a feast of friendship available for all of us, but we will enjoy the feast only in proportion to our readiness. I was reading sometime ago of a street boy who stood
outside a palatial home looking through the window to where a party was being given. The kindly hostess saw him and invited him in. But in the brightness of the lights he became conscious of his own rags, of his own uncleanness, and he begged to be let out in the dark again. Even though he was hungry he was happy down in the alley where the cold north wind hissed about the corner than in this palatial home because he was not ready for it.

Jesus stated certain fundamental facts. He said to a master in Israel, - "You must be born anew." That was not an arbitrary condition. It was not a rule that an indifferent God made to plague his children. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." He can no more see the Kingdom of God than a man can see the kingdom of this visible world without a physical birth.

This then is a necessity.

How shall we treat this necessity? If we are wise we will not treat it as a matter of no importance. We will not assume that God will somehow make us an exception. He will not because he cannot. We will not presume that there is some other way. We will meet the conditions of a personal surrender. We will accept this wedding garment that means new life here and new life forever more. To fail to do so is to wreck ourselves upon that innocent looking reef of presumption.
"Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless." Matthew 22:12.

In this parable Jesus makes four emphatic and arresting assertions with regard to the Kingdom of God.

1. First, He assures us that to enter the Kingdom is a joy. It is the very climax of privilege. It is like attending a feast. It is like attending the most gladsome of feasts - a wedding feast. Not only is it like attending a wedding feast but it is like attending a royal wedding feast. This to the oriental mind was the very climax of privilege. Those who were listening to Jesus could think of nothing finer than that. To enter the Kingdom then, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, is the very climax of privilege.

So Jesus taught here, so He taught throughout his ministry. When He spoke of the privilege of entering the Kingdom as life's supremest joy, He was speaking out of his own experience. But how has it come to pass that so many look upon the opportunity to follow Christ not as something to be embraced with joy, but as something to be postponed as long as possible and to be entered upon, if ever, with certain reluctance?

We who profess to be Christians have misrepresented our Lord in few respects so utterly as in the joylessness of our lives. Every vital Christian has a song in his heart. This is the teaching of Jesus. This also is the teaching of experience. To live a drab and joyless life is to deny Christ.

2. The second great affirmation of Jesus is that this Kingdom of supreme privilege is open to everybody. It was a shock to the religious leaders of His day that the Master did not confine His invitation to the fit. They said with horror which is our hope, 'He received sinners. In fact, He told the self-righteous religious leaders of His time that the publicans and harlots, those at the very bottom of the ladder, at the
rear of the procession, would enter into the Kingdom before them. Ours is a gospel for sinners. Therefore it is for everybody. Here is an invitation that includes us all.

3. Jesus asserts in the third place that his invitation divided men then as it divides them now into two groups. There were those who accepted the invitation and there were those who rejected it. There was no middle group. Such arbitrary divisions often shock the modern man. We like to say that there is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us, etc., but Jesus went on His dogmatic way dividing people into just two groups: those who were alive spiritually and those who were dead, those who travel life the broad road and those who travel by the narrow ones, those who build upon foundations of rock and those who build on foundations of sand. Thus came those who accepted His invitation to enter the Kingdom and those who rejected that invitation. There were two groups and only two.

4. The fourth and final fact to which He calls our attention is that while some accepted and some rejected, all who refused the invitation did not refuse in the same fashion. In fact, He divides the rejecters into three groups.

First, there were those who found the invitation annoying and rejected it with indignation. That may seem strange, but it is something that has happened through the years and is happening still. For instance, when Naaman came to be cured of his leprosy the prophet told him to dip in Jordan seven times. That seems a simple and easy remedy. But instead of responding with obedience, the story says that Naaman went away in a rage. This he did because he expected the prophet to do something else. He had already made up his mind as to how he was to be cured, even if it was a matter of merely dipping in water, his own home rivers were much better than the Jordan. The real cause of his indignation, as often ours is, was that the gospel is for sinners only. Thus he humbles our pride in the dust and often arouses our resentment because it humbles our pride. There was a second group who refused to accept the king's invitation because they were preoccupied. They were so interested in their own affairs, in the temporal,
in the near, that they were simply not interested in this feast offered by the king.

Therefore when the invitation came they all with one consent, Luke tells us, began to make excuses. An excuse is always a manufactured article. A reason exists in the nature of things, but an excuse has to be made up. For this reason always all excuses are lies. An excuse is what we make when we dare not tell the real reason.

For instance when the fox saw the luscious grapes the very sight of them made his mouth water. But when he realized that he would have to climb in order to possess those grapes and when he realized further that so to climb was a risk that he had not the gallantry to take, he made an excuse to himself. The reason for his not climbing was that he was afraid. The excuse that he gave was that the grapes were sour. The reason that these men did not attend the banquet was that they were simply not interested. The excuses they gave were altogether different.

Look at them. They give evidence of Jesus' fine sense of humor. He purposely makes their excuses just as ridiculous as possible. They are so absurd as to be laughable. One man could not attend the banquet because he had bought a piece of land and had to go see it. Another had bought five yoke of oxen and had to see whether they would work or not. Of course, Jesus knew that any intelligent man would look the land over before he bought it or try the oxen out before he closed the trade. The first man gave an excuse that reaches the very climax of absurdity. He said, "I married a wife, therefore I cannot come."

The third man is unique. There is no other like him in all the stories of Jesus. This man readily accepted the invitation. He took his place among the guests in the banquet hall, yet he was different from all his fellows in that he alone came without dressing himself in a wedding garment. Now this wedding garment symbolizes Christ-like character. This man therefore refused the feast not because he was preoccupied, but not because he was preoccupied, he refused it by refusing the conditions upon which it could be enjoyed.

I have met this man more than once. "Are you going to the feast?" I asked. "Certainly I am. You think I would miss it." "So here you are," I say to him later as
we meet in the banquet hall of the king. "Yes, here I am. I told you I would come."

"But", I asked in amazement, "why are you not dressed for the occasion? The king expects it of us all. He provides a robe for any who will wear them." "Quite so", he answers glibly, "but you know me. I never cared for such things. But don't you worry, I'll get by all right. The king will let any man into the feast who meets the conditions of admission, but he will let me in whether I meet those conditions or not."

Here then is a man who is bent on reaching a certain goal, but he is not going to reach it by the road that leads here. He reserves the right to select his own road. But always to refuse the road is to refuse the goal.

II

What is the matter with this man? His is the sin of presumption. He proposes to have any effects he desires, regardless of the cost. He believes that he can reap wheat from his farm whether he sows wheat or not. His tribe is by no means small.

So many of us feel that we are exceptions to the rule. That we can somehow get by whether we meet the conditions of getting by or not. Others need to pray the prayer of the psalmist, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sin!"

1. First we often presume upon ourselves. Years ago when I was pastor in Memphis I knew a minister who was quite vigorous both physically and mentally. This man by some queer quirk made up his mind that he could live without eating. He set himself to the task of being clothed in the godhead bodily. But his presumption that he could revise the laws of nature did not clothe him in the godhead. It came very near to clothing him in his shroud. The only reason it did not-he fell in a coma one night and they carried him to the hospital where he was saved by forced feeding.

How many young chaps have I known in school who felt that they could know without learning, that they could see without opening their eyes, that they could hear without attention. How many have I seen who felt that they could trifle with moral dangers and get by while other silly souls would get into trouble.

One night I watched a candle-fly buzz about the chimney of an old kerosene lamp.
I tried to frighten him away. "Look out you silly idiot, you will burn yourself to death." We only smiled and said, "I'll get by all right." But a minute later he had scorched his wings and fallen into the furnace. Even so, Samson, a judge in Israel, dared to take his holiday among his foes because he was so sure of himself. Even so a young candidate for the ministry, a student at Harvard, went down to test his moral strength in the slums of New York and never came out.

2. Just as we presume on ourselves so we presume upon others. Here for instance are a bride and groom. They have married with every possibility of success, but they begin to presume that the mere fact that they have been married will guarantee that they will live happily ever after. They fail to see that the high adventure of marriage must be a growing adventure or it will likely end in disaster. I try to impress upon whose whom I marry that they will love each other far better twenty-five years from now or far less.

Too often the couple is hardly back from the honeymoon until they begin to presume upon each other. They forget the tender courtesies that caused them to fall in love. They begin to engage in petty quarrels that increase in storminess. They excuse themselves by saying how pleasant it is to kiss and make up again. This they do until quarreling becomes a habit and marriage a sort of thing that is lived out in the atmosphere of everlasting war-whoop.

Following hard on the heels of this come other presumptions that are even worse. Sometimes the husband presumes upon his wife's love and loyalty so greatly that he sacrifices on wayside altars. "She will forgive anything. I will never get caught in the first place and if I am caught, we can make it up." Thus many a marriage is wrecked on the rock of presumption. We disregard the rules and yet tell ourselves "I'll get by all right."

Then we not only as husband and wife presume upon each other, we presume upon our children. We face the fact honestly that if they are properly fed, we must feed them. If they are properly housed and clothed, then we are the ones who must do that. But often we leave their religious training to mere chance. A woman said to me not
two months ago, "I am not a member of any church. I am waiting to see what church
my children wish to join. I am going to follow them." She would never think of getting
by all right without clothing and feeding her children, but of course she can leave
the shaping of their characters to mere chance. This is deadly.

Now just as parents presume upon their children, children often presume upon
their parents. It takes a rather fine youngster to put himself in the place of the
old folks. Yet such fine imagination is needed. But often we see in our parents
little more than troublesome meal tickets, who are telling us "Don't do this and
don't do that". We take their sacrifices for granted. Often we forget to express
the slightest appreciation until they have passed to where our words of either praise
or blame matter not at all. We presume upon our loved ones and we presume upon our
friends, forgetting so often that in order to have a friend we must be one.

3. Finally, we presume upon God. So often we take His love and His gracious
invitation for granted. We take the privilege of worship, the privilege of prayer
for granted. If we realized that next Sunday was the last opportunity that we should
ever have to attend church, every church would be thronged. If tonight were the last
time that you would ever have the privilege of prayer, how earnestly you would pray.
If this were the only chance to find God, how eagerly you would respond to His
invitation. But because He is always present, God is always saying, "Behold, I stand at the door
and knock". He is always saying, "Why hurry? Why give the matter of your personal salvation any
attention at all? Is not God our Father? Is not His love infinite? Did you ever
hear a man say, "I believe God loves me far too well ever to send me to hell."

Therefore, he went on rejecting His invitation.

Now there is just enough truth in this to make it a dangerous lie. God does
love us too well to send us to hell. He never sent any man to perdition. But many
men have sent themselves there in the here and now in spite of the love of God. This
old Book declares, speaking out of experience, "The wicked shall be turned into hell
and all the nations forgetting God. Look at the hell into which the God-forgetting
The sin then of this man without the wedding garment, for the man who determined
to set his own conditions of salvation, was the sin of presumption. "I am not going
to accept the invitation by donning a wedding robe, but I'll get by all right." Did he?
Will you and I? Will any man? No, if we refuse the road, we refuse the destination
to which the road leads.

What happened to this man who was so dead sure he would get by all right? The
story is told in dramatic fashion. When the king came in to see the guests, he saw
men not having on the wedding garment; and he said, "Friend, how camest thou in
hither not having a wedding garment?" and for once this man who was so sure of himself
told nothing to say, so long as his coat did not speak for him. He couldn't plead ignorance. He couldn't plead inability. He couldn't even say, "I'll get by all right." He was cast out of the banquet hall, not by an angry
king, but by himself. The enjoyment of any kind of heaven depends upon a
heavenly character. Not even God can get a man into heaven when he has hell in his
heart.

However rich in literature the library may be, it will have no richness for me if I cannot see. However beautiful the scenery that nature spreads about may be, it will be lost on me if I have no eyes. However charming the music may be, it will have no charm for me if I have no preparation for the hearing. For instance,

At Christmas time years ago, I am told, a youngster from the slums stood outside
of a palatial home in one of our cities looking wistfully at a Christmas tree that was
being given for a company of children on the inside. The mother saw the forlorn little
waif and had him brought in. At first he felt that he had entered heaven, but as he
looked at the well dressed children about him, he realized his own rags. As he looked
at their cleanliness, he notices for the first time his own soiled hands. At last he
went pitifully to his hostess and asked to be let out into the dark. He felt that he
would be happier down in the alley where the cold north wind shrieked around the corner
than in this palace of beauty because he didn't fit in. They who are ready go into the
feast and in the face of all others the door is shut. It is shut automatically. Not
even God can open it. The readiness that is required, and the only readiness, is that
of a surrendered heart. To expect to be saved on any other condition is sheer
presumption.
Nothing to Say - Matt 22:13

Intro - Imagine three groups current events. 
- Noblemen 2. In different places; 
  - People hear of them.

I. What is presumption.
1. Do take for granted.
2. Act without authority.
3. Do hurry because of pressure.
4. Count chances upon falsifying.
5. Secure and short cut.
6. Save without paying.
7. Keep without permission.
8. Bow before the page, which

II. It is a common error.
1. We presume to obtain.
2. We decree (2) UNK. (3) nomens.
3. We claim.

III. It be proved, then.
1. He was the children.
2. Cost well.
3. Test done on time.
Reflected Paper 2 - Acts 2: 21

She was a man of faith.
3. He was forgiving. Luke 7: 47.
4. He was humble. Phil. 2: 3.
5. He longed for the Spirit.

II. What was wrong

III. What was right in God's sight
2. To do what is right. In Acts 1: 15.

IV. Repentance
1. Repentance.
Fighting for God: [Paragraph]

It is true that [Paragraph]

1. It is the history of [Paragraph]
2. It has been experienced [Paragraph]
3. It is a matter of experience [Paragraph]

We need it today.

1. We need it now.
2. It is an [Paragraph]
3. It is both [Paragraph]
4. It is a [Paragraph]
5. It is a [Paragraph]

Some Concerns...

1. These concerns are real
2. These concerns are great
3. These concerns are pressing
4. These concerns are important
5. These concerns are real

The Way Out

1. [Paragraph]
2. [Paragraph]
3. [Paragraph]
4. [Paragraph]
"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how cameth thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless." Matthew 22:11-12

There is something unique in this story. This man without a wedding garment appears through the years in many stories that Jesus told. He is a man who counted on getting into the feast without meeting the conditions of entrance. Had you met him before this startling and arresting scene where he is hurled into the darkness, he could have doubtless talked you to the moon and back, but in the presence of his king his lips were as silent as the lips of the dead. He dared not make an excuse and there was no reason to give.

The first affirmation of Jesus in this story is one that he was constantly making. It is one that we pretend to believe, but in reality do not believe. He declared that discipleship was a privilege, that to dedicate one's self to God was not only a privilege but the highest of all privileges. He pictures it as a marriage feast. Not only so, but it was a royal marriage feast. To the Oriental mind such a feast was the very climax of privilege.

Was Jesus right or was he wrong? If he was right, then some of us are vastly wrong. In proof of this, you have only to look into your own heart and see what you think of the privilege of following Jesus Christ. To the average man on the street it seems about the least desirable of all ways of life. Of course, he hopes to summon up the courage to become a Christian some day but in order not to cheat himself too much, he desires putting it off just as long as he can.

If this conviction were confined to those outside the church, it would not be so tragic. But there are multitudes in the church who are striving in half-hearted fashion to be Christians. They are seeking in some feeble
way to enter Heaven. This they are doing not because they have any special
desire for Heaven, but because they wish to escape hell. They put through
their religious duties Sunday after Sunday with grim faces rather than with
joyous eagerness. That is, they put them through if the weather is perfect.
But if it happens to rain, they thank God for his refreshing showers and stay
cozily at home. They do not impress their children or their fellows that be-
ing a Christian is a privilege. It is rather a grim must that they put through
with wry faces.

Now, to Jesus such an attitude was simply unthinkable. He thought that
to turn one's life over to God, to be able to say "He that hath sent me is with
me", is the finest of all privileges. He believed that such perfect dedication
made possible a joyous and abundant life that could be found in no other way.
How, I wonder, did Jesus come by such conviction?

He came by it through his own experience. Jesus, from his very childhood,
lived a life of perfect dedication. He never knew himself as other than God's
child. Thus to be God's wholly cost him a great deal. His life seems to
many little other than one long toil up Calvary. For this reason they think
it should be a rather starved life. He was entitled to have a hard time here
because he was expecting to have an easy time hereafter. He was going to enter
into that trite saying, "I will get my pie in the sky by and by".

But Jesus did not postpone life. He did not postpone joy. As he lived
day by day, he lived in unbelievable gladness. There is not the slightest
doubt in my mind that he was the most joyous person that ever lived. His
face was the sunniest that ever looked out on this world. He was so sunny
that the hard religionists of his day - the Pharisees - thought he was not
religious at all. John was religious. He was so grim. But Jesus was not
religious, he was so sunny.
But in so thinking they completely misunderstood him. It was Jesus who told of the gladness of the merciful and of the meek. He spoke of the joy of seeing God, the joy of even being persecuted for righteousness sake. Another word was on his lips over and over — that was, be of good cheer. The cheer that he offered to others he possessed so abundantly himself that the last prayer that he had with his disciples included this petition, "That the joy that is mine may be theirs." Jesus knew from his own experience that his life of dedication to God was a feast, the finest of all feasts.

We may be sure of this in the second place because it has been through the centuries the experience of the saints. I have yet to find one single person who is whole hearted in his devotion to God who is not living abundantly. I have found such people in all sorts of circumstances. Some were well and strong. Others had pain walking with fire shod feet along every nerve of their tortured bodies. Some had wealth. Others were poor. Some were well known. Others were practically unknown. But I have yet to find one single dedicated soul that was not living abundantly and joyously.

Some years ago I heard a Quaker missionary tell of his experiences in the long grass country of Africa. He told of winning an African chief and of seeing the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ break over his face. Then he gave this testimony. He said, "I have been for fourteen years in Africa. I have had forty-two cases of African fever. I have been for four years without a companion. For fourteen months I lived on ants and rhinoceros meat and curdâd milk. But knowing what it would mean in suffering, I would gladly go through it all over again to see that one black face light up by the lamp fire." Incredible? Perhaps. And yet as he told his story there was a light in his face that was equally incredible.

Recently we have had a visit from one of the greatest men on the earth today, Albert Switzer. He declared during his brief visit that he could not
wait to get back to his work in Africa. His work has to do with Negro savages in a climate where life is almost impossible. Switzer is a many-sided man. His ability falls little short of genius. He is a great philosopher, a great theologian. He is a great musician, one of the best. He is both an organist and an organ maker. He is the greatest living authority on Bach. He is a physician and surgeon. As he was taking the boat a newspaper man asked him about his sacrifices. He said, "I have never made any. I have had the joy of doing good."

Ridiculous? Maybe so. But take Hotchkiss, the Quaker missionary, or Albert Switzer, and set them alongside of the man of the world who is out to get his while the getting is good. Set them alongside of the average church member who is trying to be Christian on the easiest possible terms and see who is living most abundantly. Discipleship is a feast in Heaven possibly. But the only grounds we have for believing that it will be a feast on life's other side is because we are finding it so here.

II

Now, Jesus affirmed that to this feast everybody is invited. Since everybody is invited, everybody must make some response. Of course, in the last analysis, there are only two responses possible. If I should invite you to my home at the close of this service, you would have to do either one or two things. You would have to come or refuse to come. When we face this invitation from our Lord we have to do one of two things. We must say "Yes" or "no".

1. There is one group who accepted the invitation. They did not do so because they had to. They did not do so because they were better than their fellows. It is as easy for God to save one sinner as another. Some of them
came from the highways and the hedges. They were people that nobody else wanted. But having been invited and believing that the invitation was worth accepting, they accepted.

2. There was another enthusiastic group that refused to accept. There were these two groups and these only. Now, those who refused did not all refuse in the same fashion.

For instance, one group was made up of those who were simply not interested. They had something more important to do. They went, one to a farm and another to his merchandise, and another said he was married. Therefore, instead of going, they sent their excuses. They confined themselves to excuses, that were too polite to tell their reason. Their reason was that they did not believe that the feast was worth accepting, and therefore they simply did not desire to attend. There was, then, this group of polite refusers.

A second group was made up of those who were not even courteous. Instead of accepting the invitation, they refused it angrily. They were antagonistic to the king and to that for which he stood. We have these with us today. They number into the millions. There is a whole nation that is out to destroy religion. There are those among us who glare at the church with hostile eyes. They refuse its claim without even a show of politeness.

There is a third group represented by this man without a wedding garment. He was all for the feast. He made no excuses. Had you asked him if he was going to attend, he would have said, "Certainly, do you think I am stupid?" Therefore, when the guests assembled, he was among them. But while he fully intended to be present at the feast, he was determined to attend the feast without meeting the conditions necessary to participate in it. Every man had to have a wedding garment. This wedding garment was his for the taking, but he did not accept one. He knew his way around. He was an exception to
the rule. Others had to have a wedding garment to get in but not so wise a chap as he. He could enter on his own terms. Now, it is on this man that our Lord would rivet our attention.

III

What was wrong with him? His was the sin of presumption. He was one of those wise people who did not have to keep the rules of ordinary men. He did not have to sow in order to reap, or having sowed, he did not have to reap according to his sowing. "Are those wild oats you are sowing?" I asked. "Certainly," he replied, "but never mind, I will get by. You rubes may reap according to your sowing, but it is because you sow so childishly. I know how to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles."

Now, at first blush I would think that nobody would be so silly as to bite the empty hook like that. Yet everyone of us has been just that silly some times. A certain Psalmist prayed to be delivered from presumptuous sins. You and I ought to pray that prayer every day. The sin of presumption is one of the most common and one of the most deadly that I know.

It is one of the temptations of Jesus. When our Lord had refused to mistrust God by turning a stone into bread, the temptor went to the other extreme and said, "Jesus you were right in trusting God to keep you while you were obedient to him, but I will keep you whether you are obedient to him or not. You can do even a stupid or wicked thing and God will back you because you are you. Therefore, cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple for God will not let you hurt yourself. But Jesus refused to do this silly and wicked thing. Had he done it, he would have broken his bones just as you and I.

Yet there are few practices more common that that of seeking an effect while ignoring the cause. In order to know my lesson, I must study. So say
some foolish students but not you. You can know yours by merely rubbing a book on the side of your ear at night. In order to enjoy good health I must obey the laws of health. That is so for the childish but not you. You are an exception to the rule. I knew a minister once who in believed in all good conscience that he could live without eating. But all that kept him from starting to death was that when he had fallen in a coma his friends hurried him to the hospital and gave him forced feeding. He said, "I will get by all right without eating."

At Peepskill the other night they had a riot. I deplore a mob under any circumstances. But what was the cause? A brilliant and highly gifted Negro who belongs to a party that seeks to overthrow the government by values sought to give a concert. He wanted the protection of the loyal while he himself was disloyal. He wanted to sow the seed of wreckage and reap a harvest of protection.

One of the commonest experiences of my ministry is having to listen to and stories of domestic tragedy; what lies back of most of them. One party to the contract, sometimes the wife, more often the husband, seeks to get into the marriage feast without meeting the conditions, desiring all the while that their partner remain perfectly loyal while they are completely disloyal. What would be wrong for the other is rather smart for themselves.

Everywhere we meet the clever boys who can reap without sowing, can make a living without working. The world is their oyster. They can open it without any serious effort and take what they want. Or what is equally foolish, they can sow without reaping, or they can sow weeds and reap wheat. Men have been presumptuous on that law since the very beginning of human history, but no one has succeeded yet. But of course we are more clever than all who lived before us.

Again and again I meet the man who wants friends but he is bent on having
his without being friendly. He tells of coming to church and that nobody shakes hands with him, which means that he shook hands with nobody. In the realm of friendship you reap as you sow. I used to talk to an echo across the river from where I was plowing, but for the life of me I couldn't curse it and get it to answer me in terms of a blessing. And life is an echo. You get largely what you give.

As we presume on our fellows, so we presume on God. A gentleman said this word to me: "God will have to save the average and I am as good as the average. Therefore, he will have to save me whether I ever repent or not." Now, you may put this down as fundamental. God is going to let everybody into Heaven who would find it enjoyable, but if you do not like that sort of companionship here, what makes you think you are going to like it after while?

There are multitudes who think God could enable them to live far more joyfully and richly day by day if he wasn't so narrow minded and grudging with his gifts. But the plain truth is God is going his dead level best with me and with you right now. He is giving us every blessing that we are capable of receiving. We do not care for his treasures enough to commit ourselves to him, he can no more give them to us than he can made a deaf man enjoy music or a blind man enjoy the sunrise.

All this adds up to this one fact. There is no salvation apart from character. Character determines destiny. As an old Greek philosopher said, "character is fate." The character of the nation determines whether it will live or whether it will rot down. The character of the individual tells whether he will enjoy life's priceless values here. It tells whether he will enjoy them by and by. "They that are ready go into the feast, today and tomorrow and forever. In the face of all others the door is shut. There is world no Christlike joy in this or any other without Christlike character. To tell yourself that you are getting by without this is to tell yourself a dangerous and mostly lie."