A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Some fell into good soil and grew and brought forth a hundredfold.

Luke 8:8

All three of the synoptic evangelists tell the story of the sower. In its beginning it is a depressing story. It seems a monotony of failure. Here is an earnest farmer going out to scatter good grain. But that grain falls, some on hard soil, some on rocky soil, and some on thorny soil, so that the harvest is simply nothing at all. Here is a picture black enough to satisfy the most pessimistic. I am quite sure that the Preacher of Ecclesiastes would have said "Amen" to this; he would have added, "that all is vanity and that the crooked can never be made straight. Therefore the only intelligent thing to do is to get drunk and forget about it."

But if there is soil that is barren and fruitless, there is also some good soil. That is a fact to hearten and to give courage. Just as we are preparing to turn back from our reading out of sheer discouragement, there comes this gleam like a flash of sunlight from heavens full of storm: - "Some fell into good soil."

All of the sowing then was not a failure. All the sowing was not on the same kind of soil. There is some soil that is barren; there is also some soil that is fruitful. There is light, and there is darkness. But the light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never overcome it. If we are astonished to find weeds among the wheat, we might also glory in the fact that there is wheat among the weeds. While the picture may be bad, it is not altogether bad. Here then Jesus is facing the fact that, while some of the sowing goes for nothing, there was other that was very rewarding. In fact it brought forth a hundredfold.
Here speaks the supremely hopeful man of all history. I make bold to say that of all the men that have ever lived, none have looked out on life with such daring courage and with such dauntless optimism as Jesus. In truth he is the supreme optimist. I confess that I use the word optimist with some hesitation. I do this because I know that it is a once winsome word, that has lost all its charm. Somehow in its journey from the Jerusalem of yesterday into the Jericho of today, it has fallen among thieves that have wounded it and robbed it and have departed leaving it half, if not wholly, dead.

Our first thought on hearing the word is of that superficial chap who twitters in the presence of tragedy either because he is a victim of wishful thinking or because of his ignorance or because he has not the courage to face facts. There are those who can cover up the ugliest facts of life by rose-petaled verbage and think, by so doing, that they have annihilated those facts. We even try to do that with such terrific tragedies as sin, sickness, and death. The superficial optimist has little charm. He is at once a pest and a bore.

Saying this, I do not mean by contrast to give my approval to the superficial pessimist. If the superficial optimist is a pest, the superficial pessimist is an even greater pest. He, too, may be a victim of wishful thinking just as the optimist. That man in the psalms, who annihilated God was of this kind. He lived in a godless world not because he had to, but because he wanted to. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." Our pessimism may also be born of our ignorance and of our refusal to face the facts. But Jesus was hopeful and full of courage, not because he looked on the bright side, not because he looked on the dark side, but because he looked on both sides. Because he faced all the facts, he had a courage that nothing could destroy.
II

What was the basis of the optimism of Jesus? Why, in spite of all that life could do to him, did he remain so sunny and so joyous and so hopeful? I think there were certain convictions that made this possible.

First, Jesus was supremely hopeful because he believed in the triumph of his own mission. It never occurred to him that he, the Word made flesh, was going to squander his life for nothing. This does not mean that our Lord cherished any illusions as to the final outcome of his earthly career. Just how soon he came to recognize the cross as an inevitable fact in his experience, we may not be able to say. But we can say with certainty that, long before it did become an experience, he faced it as something that was absolutely inevitable. He cherished no slightest hope of escaping the cross. He knew that he was doomed to die in the most shameful and painful way possible.

But, having faced this fact, he never feared that death would have the final word. He looked upon death as merely an exodus, a passing out of one room in God's house into a larger and a sunnier room. There is something almost laughable in the efforts of the enemies of Jesus to make his tomb secure. You remember how they went to Pilate and asked for a guard, and Pilate complied with their request, saying:—"You have a guard. Make the tomb as secure as you can." Now just how secure could a Roman guard make the tomb of the Son of God? Just about as secure as one lone policeman standing at six o'clock some lovely morning could make the night secure by preventing a sunrise. Jesus never believed that death would have the final word.
Nor did he believe that the cross would put an end to his usefulness. He believed on the contrary that it was a calamity that would be changed into capital. He believed that it was a defeat that would be transformed into victory. He believed that this worst that men could do to him would be transformed into the best. He believed that his shame would not repel but would appeal. Therefore he affirmed that, if lifted up, he would draw all men unto himself. Jesus was sure of the final triumph of his own mission and said, as he faced the cross, "Be of good cheer; for I have overcome."

Second, Jesus not only believed in himself, but he believed in man. If ever one lived who had a right to be cynical about man, that was Jesus. He knew what was in man. He had suffered at his hands as few have ever suffered. He not only saw the evil men did, but he saw the inner cancer of sin from which they suffered. He declared that he was here to seek and to save that which was lost. He never shut his eyes to man's sinfulness. He knew that there was nothing too bad to say about him, that there was no crime that he had not committed, and no trust that he had not betrayed.

But while he faced all the ugliness in man, he still believed in him. He was quite sure that if there was nothing too bad to say about him, there was also nothing too good to say; that if he was lost, he was capable of being found. In this faith he met the fluctuating son of Jonah and declared that he would become a rock of Christ-like character. When they threw that soiled rag of womanhood at his feet who had been taken in the very act of shame, he said to her, "Go and sin no more," in the faith that even she might climb toward the lily land of purity. On another day he horrified the respectable people of Jericho by declaring that a rich renegade, perhaps the best hated man in the city, was also a son of Abraham. By this he did not mean to affirm merely that Zacchaeus was a Jew. Such a statement would
have been superfluous and silly. He meant that he was of the spiritual lineage of Abraham, that he was akin to the father of the faithful, that he also had in him the capacity to become a friend of God. Jesus was optimistic because he believed in himself and he believed in man.

Third, Jesus believed in his church. With sublime confidence, he affirmed, "I will build my church and the gates of death shall not prevail against it." This assertion he made in the realization of the fact that he was going to have to build his church out of faulty human stuff such as we are. This he asserted with the further realization that he was going to have to build his church through frail human hands such as ours. This he asserted with the further conviction that he was going to have to build his church in the face of bitter opposition, that all the foul forces that home within the gates of death and hell were going to fight against it. He knew that the cross was only a few months away. He knew that beyond the cross there was bitter persecution, that the time would come when those who would kill the members of his church would feel they were doing service to God. He saw in his own land one tragedy walking hard upon the heels of another tragedy until men's hearts would fail them for fear. But he never lost heart himself and urged his followers, "When you see all these things come to pass, look up and lift your heads for your redemption draws nigh."

This means that not only was Jesus going to build his church in the face of opposition but that he was going to build it in spite of opposition. Beyond the persecution at the hands of the Jews came the more bitter persecution at the hands of Rome. That great empire at last unsheathed its mighty sword to destroy this weak church. So far did it succeed in its bloody task that one emperor erected a triumphal arch in token of the fact that the last Christian had been swept off
the face of the earth. Yet the passing centuries have trodden that triumphal arch so deeply into dust that history has forgotten where it stood. Even the great empire that erected it has passed into the cemetery of dead nations. But how fares it with the church? That weak church is at this moment still alive. At this moment it is the one world-wide institution on this planet. Jesus believed in his church.

Fourth, Jesus had a firm and unshakeable faith in God. This was the faith that undergirded his faith in his own mission as the Son of God. It undergirded his faith in man as a child of God. It undergirded his faith in the church as the church of God. Jesus was sure of God. Other men have seen his face at brief intervals. He looked constantly into that face. Other men have walked with Him with more or less assurance. He walked with Him all the way. "He that has sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone." "He trusted in God," they shrieked at him as he hung on the nails. For once his enemies were right. Jesus was the supreme believer. He was "the pioneer and the perfecter of faith." Therefore he was the most hopeful of all men.

III

Now it strikes me that this note of hope, this word of encouragement is one that is needed in our day.

This is the case because, whatever else we may say about our present generation, it is not characterized by a great hopefulness. We have lost much of our confidence, much of our assurance. A friend took me riding in his new car the other day. He sought to quiet all my anxieties by saying:—"You need not be the least uneasy. I have puncture-proof tires." But most of us do not possess such tires. Therefore today many are bumping along on four flat tires with their spares stolen. They have lost heart and have lost hope. That is sheer tragedy.
We need hope for the living of our own lives. When we lose hope, we cease to struggle. I read sometime ago of a man lost in a western blizzard whose body was found the next morning with his outstretched hand only four feet from his front doorstep. He could have made those few feet if he had not lost heart and hope. But having lost hope, he ceased to struggle. Many have given up out of sheer despair.

Then we need this in order to help others. Fear is contagious. Thank God, so is faith. I like that story in the thirteenth of Acts. Two distinguished ministers have slipped into a service in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. I have an idea that the service was not very impressive, that it was not vastly thrilling. Perhaps the congregation was small, just a little handful of homesick worshippers, a tiny island of faith in the midst of a vast sea of paganism. Therefore when they had put through their service, they sent an invitation to these two striking strangers.

Just why they appealed to them we are not told. But I have an idea that when they looked into their faces they came to hope that they might give them just the lift they needed. One of these strangers was named Son of Encouragement. The other affirmed of himself that he was also confident. Now since these worshipers were none too confident, they gave these visitors this invitation: "If you have anything encouraging to say to the people, speak." (Weymouth)

Now that is a two-edged invitation. It is an invitation to keep silent if they have no word of encouragement. I would give the same invitation to myself and also to you. I realize that those of you who have come to this service, already have all the discouragement you need. Life has barked your shins sufficiently. Therefore I do not need further to add to your burden of discouragement. If I do so, I do you more harm than good. Furthermore I will not be preaching a Christian sermon, I will be preaching one that is anti-Christian.
But not only were they invited to keep silent if they had no word of encouragement, they were invited to speak if it so happened that they did possess such a word. And that is an obligation resting upon us. Have you anything encouraging to say? If you are Christian, you have. If you are a Christian minister, you certainly have. This you can do without blinking any of the facts. This you can do without being in the least akin to a superficial optimist. This you must do if you face all the facts. You cannot face all the facts and fail to speak a word of encouragement.

The trouble of the man without faith is that he faces only the ugly facts. Had I gone out to the valley of dry bones with the prophet Ezekiel, I could have seen those bones just as clearly as he. But that might have been all I could have seen. But this man with the hand of the Lord upon him saw there were possibilities even in dry bones. He saw, that by the grace of God and by the power of God, this valley of death might be changed into a valley of life, that it might even become a parade ground for an army of the king.

When the assistant to the prophet Elisha rushed out early one morning to discover that the little city of Dothan where they were stopping was surrounded by a hostile army, the most heartening word he could utter was, "Alas." I am not blaming him. I might not have done any better. But no such wail came from the lips of the prophets. This was the case, not because he shut his eyes to his foes, but because he opened them to his friends. Therefore he said, "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." That is ever the case however small the minority if that minority is sure of God.

No other book faces the grim and ugly facts of life more frankly than the Bible. Yet no other book is so rich in hope. This is the case because its writers see the gigantic forces of evil, the ugly sons of Anak, in the light of God. How
often upon these pages do we meet these words, "But God."

The patriarchs sold Joseph into slavery. Having done this fiendish deed, they dusted him off their hands, assured that he would end in oblivion of a slave pen. "But God was with him." Therefore his road led through the slave pen to an immortality of usefulness. "There they crucified him." Nothing could go beyond that. "But God raised him from the dead."

As the Bible is the most heartening of books, the most hopeful voice we hear from its pages is that of Jesus. Facing all the facts, those that were grim and those that were beautiful, he never lost heart. He was sure that there was much barren soil, he was equally sure that there was good soil that would bring forth a hundredfold. We can share his courage if while our eyes are open to the worst, they are equally open to the best. That best has always at its center the eternal and Almighty God.
"No one puts a piece of undressed cloth to an old garment."

—Matthew 9:16 (Moffatt)

How at home Jesus was among the ordinary things of life! As we read His parables, we can understand why the common people—that is, the mass of people—heard him gladly. He was heard gladly by the ignorant and the underprivileged. He was heard gladly by the intellectual aristocrat and the scholar. This was the case for many reasons. First, He spoke about matters that were of universal importance. Second, He spoke about those matters in language that was simple. All great art is simple. All who heard Him understood what He was talking about. Jesus would never have qualified as a deep preacher. Sometime ago a friend said to me with considerable self-satisfaction, "My message is to the intellectually elite." All I could say to him was, "You have a small audience."

The message of Jesus was also to the intellectually elite. But it was equally to those who were not of the schools. He believed that preaching was to be understood. I heard of a minister sometime ago who when rebuked for being dead and obscure in his preaching replied that he could not compromise his literary style. He was out to save his style instead of to save folks. Jesus was after folks. It has always been my conviction that heavy and obscure preaching is inexcusable. I believe that anything that I see clearly myself I can make clear to my hearers. If I cannot, the chances are that my own thinking is muddled and criss-crossed. I do not follow Billy Sunday in many matters, but, when he told the ministers of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, that one trouble with them was that their hearers were likely to go hell while they were trying to figure out what they meant, I could say, "Amen."
Not only did Jesus speak about matters of fundamental importance in language that His hearers could understand, but He wove into His messages matters about which everybody knew. He touched with His genius such commonplace things as candles, and salt, bread, and water, the farmer sowing his seed, the lily blooming by the way. All these He made into preachers of righteousness. We cannot see these articles to this day without hearing His voice and being in some measure brought under the spell of His power.

He is following this method of dealing with the commonplace and ordinary in our text. He is speaking about something that He must have known from personal observation—that is, patching old clothes. Jesus, you remember, was the head of a large family. Joseph doubtless died when the baby was quite young. Jesus, as the oldest, took upon Himself the task of providing for the needs of His widowed mother and at least six brothers and sisters. Often He had seen Mary sit far into the night, mending some worn garment. When He had urged her to go to bed to get some much needed rest, she had replied, "I cannot go until I finish this bit of patching. If I do not finish tonight, Simon, or Jude, or Joseph will have nothing to put on in the morning.

Now when we hear Jesus speaking about patching old clothes, it is language that is familiar to many of us. Possibly this present generation does not know so much about it as we who belong to the preceding generation. If you grew up in a large family that was in moderate circumstances, if you happened, as I did, to be the youngest member of that large family, the chances are that you knew in a peculiar way something about patched clothing. As the youngest, every garment that came to you did not come fresh and new from the hand of the manufacturers.

You can enter understandingly into that poem that Shakespeare did not write, where a father of six boys is represented as speaking after this fashion:

"There are Pete, Jim, Jack, George, Joseph, and Ned—
A half dozen boys to be clothed up and fed;
I buy for them all plain vittles to eat,
But clothing—I only buy clothing for Pete."
When Pete got through with a suit of clothes, it was handed down to Jim, and from Jim to George. When at last little Ned got hold of it, it had as many colors as Joseph's coat. But those colors were not quite so gaudy as that that belonged to Joseph, nor did such a patched garment have a tendency to make a snob out of the wearer as did the one that Jacob gave to his brilliant son.

I

How did Jesus come to speak this brief and homely parable about patching old clothes? He spoke it in answer to a question that was asked, according to Matthew, by the disciples of John the Baptist. According to Mark, it was asked both by the disciples of John the Baptist and by the Pharisees. The question was this: "Why don't you and your disciples fast?" Fasting was a religious rite. It bore the sanction of the greatest of the saints, past and present. Yet here was a religious leader who did not fast. What did He mean by it? The question had to do with the heart and center of the purpose of Jesus. What was He here to do if not to be religious after the fashion of His fathers? Was He here to improve religion, or was He here with something entirely new? Was it His purpose to reform the old, or was it His purpose to transform? These looked on Jesus as a bit of a reformer. So many have done through the centuries. But Jesus had a different view. He summed up His mission in these words: "Behold, I make all things new."

II

Now if these questioners differed with Jesus as to the purpose of His mission, if they thought Him a reformer rather than one whose work was to transform, there was one particular in which they and the Master saw eye to eye. They believed that their world and that they themselves needed something. They realized that they had not "arrived". They knew that something was wrong with the generation of which they were a part and that something was wrong with themselves.

This is a matter on which we can all agree today. However far we may be from thinking the thoughts of Hitler and his Germans, of Mussolini and his Italians, of
Tojo and his Japanese, we are all of one mind in this—that something is wrong with our world. In fact, it was this desperate wrong that made these despots possible. Hitler could never have come to the place of power to which he has come but for the fact that he was able to voice the hopes and hates of a people who knew that their world was out of joint. We are all aware of the desperate plight of our world. We are also struggling in some fashion to make it a better world.

We recognize that something is wrong with the world. We recognize that something is also wrong with the individual. That is the very fountain source of the trouble. Sometime ago a minister who was trying to study while at the same time keeping watch of his small boy undertook to amuse that boy by giving him a map of the world to put together. He was sure that this rather difficult task would keep him employed for a long time. But in so thinking, he was mistaken. Soon the difficult map of the world was perfectly arranged. When he sought for the cause, he found that the reverse side of the map was a man’s face. The boy had no trouble putting the man together. And when the man got right, the world got right. I know we need to teach men to observe all things whatsoever our Lord has spoken. But the first and fundamental need is for man himself to be put right at his center.

This conviction has belonged to many of the worst of mankind. The prodigal who has gone into the far country and has wasted his substance with riotous living is conscious of the fact that he has missed the best. In spite of the great price he has paid, he has won nothing but homesickness and hunger of heart. By and by this longing for loved faces, by and by this hunger for home becomes such a gnawing agony that he can endure it no longer. “I will arise,” he declares, “and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned.” That is, “I am all wrong. Put me right.” He had begun by saying, “Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” He ended by saying, “Make me.” Many of the worst of men have felt this need of being re-made.

But if this conviction has gripped some of the worst, it has also gripped even more tenaciously the best. When we hear those confessions of sin and failure
that come red with shame and wet with tears, they do not as a rule come from the lips of the worst but of the best. "Now Job was a perfect man," is the opening sentence of that great drama. When he was accused by his friends of suffering because of his sin, Job denies it with vehemence and even hot anger. But by and by he has a vision of God and all is changed. "I have heard of thee," he sobs, "by the hearing of the ear, but now that mine eye seeth thee, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.

There is no doubt that young Isaiah was one of the choicest of souls of his day. He was a man deeply religious and intensely patriotic. As he was just coming into young manhood, a great sorrow came into his life in the loss of his king. With the death of this great man who had ruled his people for more than half a century, Isaiah felt that the loss was irreparable. In his sorrow he went to the temple. In his desperation, he wisely turned to the place of prayer. While there, this clean young man had a vision of God. Under the spell of this vision he pours out this confession: "Woe is me for I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."

Here is one of the choicest young men of the New Testament. Listen to his story: "And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments. Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. What lack I yet?" Here was a man, courageous and religious. Who said that anything was lacking? The young man himself. And Jesus answered, "One thing thou lackest." He was simply agreeing with the diagnosis of this choice young man who came seeking something that would satisfy his own deep needs. Thus, the worst and best of mankind say that something is wrong.
What is to be done about this wrong man in a wrong world? Broadly speaking, there are three distinct answers to this question.

1. There is the answer of the pessimist and the cynic. These tell us that nothing is to be done—that man is bad and will continue to be so. Those holding this view found a spokesman in the preacher in Ecclesiastes. This preacher is a keen and brilliant cynic. He has lived much and thought much and has come to the conclusion that life is a dull and drab affair without any real meaning. "The rivers flow to the sea," he says, "and are caught up again and brought back to the mountains and rained out again." Thus, "The waters are moving in circles. So are the winds. So is mankind. It is a bit like a squirrel chasing itself in a cage." Being a bit loyal to his own sex, he thinks there might be one good man in a thousand, but as for a good woman, there isn't any such thing. Not only are men bad, but they are going to continue that way. "The crooked," he says, "can never be made straight. Therefore, what has been is that which shall be and there is no new thing under the sun."

This, of course, is the language of pessimism and despair. But it is easily shared in times like this. I had an excellent and deeply religious minister to preach for me a few years ago. He declared that since the Bible prophesied there were to be wars and rumors of wars there was no use to make any effort to bring about world peace; that men have fought yesterday—they would go on fighting until the end of time, at least they would go on fighting until civilization committed suicide. That is the language of despair. That not only blots the sun out of our sky, but it clips the thews of our strength. When we lose hope and heart, we cease to struggle. "The world is bad," says this man, "but we can't do anything about it." That is the language of the cynic.

2. Then, there is the answer of the humanist. The world is bad and human nature is bad, but it can be improved. If man will use intellect and common—
sense, if he will lop off this evil and take on that virtue, he can yet save himself. This faith was quite vigorous and widespread before the outbreak of the first World War. Millions were believing in an inevitable progress. Man was on the up and up. The few vices that he had left would one by one be left behind. This amazing creature would soon lift himself by his boot-strings into an ideal manhood and into an ideal world.

Now, of course man has to have something to do with his own salvation. But the stern argument of events has convinced us that he cannot save himself. There are those who fancy that in becoming Christians all they need to do is to lop off a few vices. When I first went away to school, I discovered before very long that I was out of style. All the other boys were wearing coats that were so short that they came just below the top of their trousers. My coat was so long that it looked almost episcopal. So exercised over the matter did I become that I went to see the tailor about it. He recommended a new coat, but that was out of my reach. Therefore, after careful consideration we compromised by my having my coat detailed. Thus for the remainder of the year I was in style. That is the idea some folks have of being Christian—lopping off a few ugly things from life.

Then, there are others that think that being a Christian means taking on a few duties, facing up to a few obligations that they have heretofore ignored. Of course, being a Christian includes this, but that is not enough. Having had my coat detailed I was in style for the remainder of that year. But when I came back at the beginning of the second term, I found that coats had gone long again. Here I was wearing the same coat just below the top of my trousers. I was sorry that I had not stood still and waited for the procession to catch up. I went back to the tailor again to have my coat re-tailed, but he had thrown away the fragments and no cloth could be found to match. So I had to make the best of it until the end of the year.

There are always those who think religion is something tacked onto life. We
speak of man as body, mind, and spirit. Religion, therefore, is something to bring life to its completeness. Those holding this view make a sharp distinction between the sacred and the secular. They put religion in one compartment and the daily activities of life in another. Their religion is a thing of holy days and holy places, but it has nothing to do with every day affairs of life. These keep the Golden Rule on Sunday but smash it the other six days in the week. They pray for the coming of the Kingdom, but vote for the coming of the opposite. But religion is not a ruffle that we tack onto life. It is the whole of life or nothing. It is what sugar is to a cake. When my mother used to bake a cake, she did not put the sugar in one division of the cake all to itself. It permeated the whole cake. Thus, religion is to permeate all life. It is to enable us to handle the tools of our daily trade as religiously as we handle the communion cup on Sunday morning.

3. This brings us to the answer of Jesus. What had He to say about the making of a right man and of a right world? He faced the fact that man was lost. He saw his tragic plight with a clearer eye than those of any other that ever lived. But though facing the fact that man was wrong, He never doubted that He could be made right. Facing the fact that this was an evil world, He prayed and taught us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

How did He go about the realization of this dream? He believed that man could be re-born. One night a wise and religious scholar paid him a visit. This scholar, Nicodemus by name, was a man of genuine courage, though he has often been quoted as a coward. He belonged to a class who had repudiated Jesus. But he refused to condemn Him without a hearing. So one night he slipped out to a cottage where this Peasant was spending the night and had a frank talk with Him. "We know," he began, "that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

Then Jesus spoke home to the unasked question of Nicodemus. He saw that, though
this master in Israel was an earnest and good man, he was dissatisfied and hungry of heart. Therefore, He told him about the new birth. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." That was a revolutionary gospel. It brings us face to face with our highest privilege. No man need remain as he is. He can be re-born. That is a declaration of Scripture. That is a declaration of modern science. That is a declaration of experience.

Our generation has not heard perhaps so much of the new birth as did our fathers. There is a beautiful word in one of the Psalms that says, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." When the ministers and the church school teachers began to forsake the new birth, then the psychologist took it up. Of course, one may be born from beneath. All of us have seen that happen.

What happened to Doctor Jekyll? He was born from beneath and became Mr. Hyde. Years ago I had as a secretary a brilliant young girl who was deeply religious. I saw her again after an absence of three years. During those years she had been secretary to an insidious scoundrel. She too had been re-born.

Just as one may be born from beneath, so we may be born anew and born from above. In so saying, we can all make the words of Jesus our very own. We speak that which we do know and testify that which we have seen. Here is Paul the supreme menace of the Early Church. He is journeying from Jerusalem to Damascus to stamp out the hated sect that he believes is a foe to his nation and to his God. But as he journeys, there is a flash and a fall. Somehow the commission that he has to persecute slips from his hands and he receives another commission to preach to all who will hear the unsearchable riches of Christ. What happened to Paul? He was re-born. This is everybody's need. And there is no substitute for it. It is everybody's privilege. In our deepest heart, it is everybody's longing. I know sometimes we preach it as if it were an ugly experience through which we had to pass. We quote "Ye must be born anew," with the emphasis on the "must". But this "must" is not one of compulsion; it is one of privilege and of necessity.
Just as we cannot see the beauties of this world unless we are born physically, no more can we see the beauties of the spiritual world unless we are born from above. There is that in all of us which causes us to pray with Tennyson:

"O for the man to rise in me
That the man I am may cease to be!"

But while the new birth is a universal necessity, all of us do not come to it in the same fashion. Remember that Paul was a mature man when he was converted. Therefore, his experience was not an altogether normal experience. We should not expect such a crisis for instance in the life of a little child. In fact, it is possible so to train a child that he shall never know himself as other than a Christian. It is possible so to train a child that he will blossom into the knowledge of Jesus Christ as naturally as flowers bloom at the coming of the spring.

But whether in childhood or in maturity, the new birth is an absolute necessity and our highest privilege. It means, not a reformation, but a transformation. Springtime is not far away. Soon the world will be made new. How will that come about? It is not enough to knock a few icicles from the eaves of the houses. It is not enough to tear a few dead leaves that may still cling to boughs of some of our trees. It is not enough to tie some blossoms on the branches of the apple and peach trees. This kind of doctrine in tampering with the outside of life would be a poor substitute for what is actually going to happen. What this world needs is for springtime actually to come. When that happens

"Every clod feels a stir of might,
And instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And, groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers."

The miracle will become articulate in the call of the bob-white to its mate and in the song of the cat-bird among the appleblossoms. All life will be re-newed.

So also does it happen when spiritual springtime comes to the soul. Jesus is not here simply trying to help us patch up our tattered old garments. He is here saying, "Behold, I make all things new." He is here to enable us to shout with Paul out of our own glad experiences, "Old things are passed away. Behold they are
become new."

For given a new man we have a new attitude toward our fellows. We have new hopes, new longings, new loves, new passions. We have a new world.

"Skies above are softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green,
Something lives in every hue
Priceless eyes have never seen.

"Birds with greater songs o'erflow,
Flowers with richer glories shine,
Since I know as now I know
That I am His and He is mine."

May this new life become the experience of every one of us.
"But God said unto him, Thou Fool..." Luke 12:20

"Thou Fool", that is an ugly and insulting word. It fairly bruises our knuckles and spits in our faces. Our Lord has forbidden us under heavy penalty to use that word. He will not trust us with it. Yet He himself uses it. He dares to call this hard-working farmer a fool.

I have always thought it a good thing that Jesus labeled this picture. Had he not done so, we would have put on it an entirely different label. We may be sure that this shrewd man never thought of himself as a fool. He no doubt had superb confidence in his ability. We may be sure that his neighbors never called him a fool. They man have envied him, they may have said some ugly and harsh things about him, but they closed it by saying, "He is no fool." Nor do we of today call men of his type by that name. He is never so rated by his banker or by the Chamber of Commerce. We only use this name for the man of the text out of courtesy to Jesus. Why then did Jesus call him a fool? It was not because this farmer had no wisdom at all. But in spite of the wisdom he did have, the Master called him fool because no other name would really fit him. This was the case, in spite of the fact that in some respects he was quite sane and wise.

- I -

In what respect did he show himself wise?

1. He was wise in that he made a success of his business. This sane book that we call the Bible never sets a premium on failure.
It never praises a man for being slothful and shoddy in the conduct of his business. In the language of Paul it urges that we be not slothful in business. Let us bear in mind that there is no harm in making a success of any worthy enterprise. On the contrary, it is harmful not to make a success.

Yet I have seen quite a few people who acted as if to do their task well would be a positive sin. I have had men on the official board that acted as if God set a premium on failure. Let me repeat, there is no harm in making a success of any worthy enterprise. This farmer is to be commended for his success.

Sometimes there are those who have a tendency to speak slightingly of those who make money, as if to do so were a disgrace. There is no harm in making money. It is not money that is the root of all evil, but rather the love of it. Money can be a means of great good. Through money we can extend a helping hand across the world. The truth is that money is neither good nor bad. It is non-moral. Whether money is a curse or a blessing depends on the character of the person using it. One man can take a dollar and so use it that the very eagle on it will turn vulture to tear at someone's heart. Another can take that dollar and so use that the eagle will turn mockingbird to make music in someone's soul.

"Dug from the mountainside, washed in the glen, Servant am I, or the master of men. Earn me, I bless you; steal me, I curse you; Grip me and hold me; a fiend shall possess you. Lie for me, die for me, covet me, take me, Angel or devil, I am what you make me."

Money is power; it is canned energy. No man is to be blamed for acquiring this power in an honest fashion. He is only to be blamed for making the wrong use of it.

2. Not only did this man show himself wise in that he made money, but he made money in the most innocent and honest way possible. There
is a way of winning wealth that changes that wealth into spiritual want. There is a way of winning money that puts a curse on the winner. James urges certain farmers of his day to weep and howl because the unpaid wages of those who had worked their fields were crying to the God of Heaven. This farmer had taken his money from the real source of all wealth. He had taken it out of the ground.

"The ground of a certain rich man." When I read those words, I am back across the years on the farm where I spent my boyhood. I can see the old white house under the hill, with the sturdy apple trees in front, and the forest of beech, oak, and chestnut stretching away in the distance back of it. I can hear the neighing of the horses, the merry tinkling of the bells. I can feel the caress of the upturned sod on my bare feet. I can hear the mockingbird singing from his choir loft at the end of the furrow. I am going home as the day fades into golden, then into gray, then into the dark blue of the night sky with its myriad of stars that blossom at twilight's early hour like "lillies on the tomb of day." I am going home weary, but from a task honest and clean. This man got his money honestly. In that he was wise.

3. He was wise in that he sought to conserve what he made. Waste is not only foolish; it is wicked. The charge against the Prodigal Son was that he wasted his substance in riotous living. It is little to waste. The big things are never wastefull. This is a big world on which we live, but it has never wasted one drop of water or one grain of sand since God flung it from his fingers. That is a great sun that hangs in the sky, but when it goes out for its water supply, it taxes the seven seas and the Mississippi and the Nile and the Amazon. But it was not too big a sun to drink from the cup of the smallest flower, nor too dainty to wring out the rags of a tramp asleep in the fence corner.
Even the Christ, who holds the wealth of all worlds in his hands, has not a single crust of bread to throw away. This man was, therefore, wise in that he sought to conserve what he made.

- II -

Wherein, then, was he foolish? To find the answer to this question, we need something more than a glance at his face. We cannot always tell what a man is by looking at him. It is possible, as one of the greatest of the poets has pointed out, "To smile and smile, and be a villain." We cannot always tell what a man is by what he says. He may speak sentiments with his lips, to which his heart is a stranger. But there is one sure way of getting at what a man is, and that is by hearing him think. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." "And he thought within himself saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This Will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater: and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." There you see what brands him with imbecility. It comes out both in what he thought and in what he forgot.

What then did he think? He thought only of himself and his barns. The only pronoun he knew was the perpendicular "I". Beyond the first person he never ventured. "My goods, my fruits, my soul." To have remembered these things would not have been so bad, had they not crowded out all else. So busy was he thinking of himself that he forgot the things of abiding importance.

1. He forgot God. In the midst of his prosperity, he became a practical atheist. The chances are that he was far from being a confessed atheist. In all probability he recited his creed quite dutifully. But practically, God did not count. He lived and conducted his business as if the Bible were a myth and God were a lie.

2. His second bit of folly grew naturally out of the first. In
forgetting God, he decided that because he possessed a farm that he owned it. Of course such a conviction was foolishness. Nobody owns anything. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." All the values in this world have been fingered by other hands before we came. They will continue to be fingered by other hands still when we behind the veil have passed. Therefore, to claim ownership of anything is to deny both the Bible and common sense.

3. Not only did this man forget God, but he forgot man as well. He forgot his brother. What a stupid blunder that was! For thus forgetting man and God, he suffered some heavy losses. Some of these losses are so obvious that we cannot fail to see them.

In forgetting God and man, he forgot to be thankful. He was utterly devoid of gratitude. There was no one to whom he would say thank you. Of course, God had given him in trust his farm. God had sent the sunshine and the rain at just the right time. God had given him his body and his mind. God had given him his health. But he forgot all this. He was a self-made man. He was one of those chaps who say, "If God had not made the world, I would."

Not only was he without gratitude, but being without gratitude, he was without any sense of obligation as well. God had been most kind; his fellow workers had helped to make possible his success. But forgetting these facts, he never learned to say, "I owe." There is nothing that is a surer mark of moral imbecility than that. Every man who thinks, must realize he owes a debt to God and to man that he can never repay. The first thing we ask about person or thing is "What is it for?" We assume that it has a purpose beyond gratification of itself.

Of course, we do not ask this question of little babies. They have no sense of obligation. I remember that when my firstborn was a little fellow he had three months colic. It was such an interesting procedure
that he decided to give a return engagement and have it three months more. I was one of the floor walkers for the firm. One night I walked him back and forth until at last I felt his head drop on my shoulder. Thinking that he was asleep, I laid him gently down in his bed. He then looked up with a twisted smile and said, "Daddy, I still feel a sense of discomfort, but you have done your best, so go to bed, and I'll see it through with honor." No that is what a decent six month old baby should have said. But he had hardly touched the sheet when he let out a yell fit to wake the dead. The only reason I did not throw him out the window, was that I hoped he would come out of it someday when he grew up. Suppose he never does; suppose he is the keenest man in his profession; but suppose he never learns to say, "I owe, I ought, and I appreciate." I submit to you, that in the things that make a man, he is still a baby, a pitiful little dwarf, who never grew up. This man was a fool because reckoning without God and man, he had no sense either or gratitude or obligation.

4. Finally, he was a fool because when he set about to conserve his wealth, he chose about the most stupid possible method. He tried to provide for all his needs for time and eternity by building larger barns. He knew how to manage his farm, but knew nothing about what to do with a soul. Putting his wealth in a barn, he lost it all and went out at last with his hands and heart as empty as the pockets of a shroud.

If then, he could not conserve his wealth by putting it in a barn, how could he have conserved it? How can we? We can do so by changing it into wealth that will last forever. That is what Jesus meant when he urged that we make friends by the wise use of money. I can take money and use it to give a handicapped boy a chance. I can use it to build a church that will hold a cup of the water of life to thirsty lips when
I walk among men no longer. Those fuzzy-wuzzy angels that showed endless kindness to our soldiers in the South Sea Islands had been made possible by the investment of someone's consecrated money. Thus we can change our material wealth into wealth that will live as long as God lives.

Here then is our wisdom. Let us remember that God is our Father, and that He is the absolute owner of all. Let us remember that men are our brothers. Let us remember that out of gratitude to God and man, we owe our best to Him and to our brothers. Let us give ourselves the privilege of so using our money as to change it into friends that, when it fails, will receive us into everlasting habitations.
A FAMOUS FOOL

"But God said, Thou fool."
—Luke 12:20

Here is a famous and familiar portrait drawn by the hand of a master. It is fortunate for us that our Lord made this portrait; otherwise, we would never have given to the man here pictured his proper name. Whatever name may have been given to this man by his neighbors, they certainly did not call him a fool. They may not have liked him. They may have spoken of him with envy. They may have applied to him some rather harsh epithets, but, when they finished discussing him, it was usually on a note like this: "But whatever else you may say about him, he is no fool!" This man would certainly never have thought of applying such an ugly name to himself. It was the last name that he would have applied. He prided himself on his own ability, upon his superb wisdom. He would have said, "You must be a very keen man to get ahead of me."

Since we are Christians and honor the verdict of the Master, we call the man here pictured a fool without any great strain. Yet when we meet him in the flesh, we have no more tendency to speak of him in this ugly fashion than did the man and his contemporaries. When such a man moves to our city, we welcome him eagerly into our civic clubs and into our churches. The Chamber of Commerce takes knowledge of him. He is spoken of as a leading citizen. When he dies we try to think up something beautiful to say at his funeral, and his outgoing receives attention in the daily papers. We may not always
either like him or admire him, but we agree with the verdict of yesterday that he is no fool. But in spite of our verdict here stands the ugly word—"Thou fool!"

In calling this man a fool, Jesus of course was not speaking in envy. He was no inflamed labor agitator. He did not go about trying to set the poor against the rich. Nor did he by calling this man a fool mean to imply that he had no intelligence. He did not mean that he was one hundred percent imbecile. Even insane folks are not insane on every question; they are usually insane in just one respect. There is a certain sense in which this man was altogether sane and sensible.

I

Wherein does he show himself intelligent?

1. He shows his intelligence in that he made a fortune. He was highly successful in the accumulation of wealth. That in itself is a mark of intelligence. Now and then we say of a certain individual, "He can make money, but he hasn't any sense." That, of course, is as absurd as it is untrue. He has that kind of sense or he could not have made money. You might as well say that Whistler could paint lovely portraits, but he had no sense; Shakespeare could write splendid dramas, but he had no sense. Any man who can write great literature has sense of a certain kind. A man who can make money also has sense. It is a kind of sense that is entirely worthwhile. Every man has a right to make money. Every man ought to make it in a legitimate fashion.

This is the case because money is power. Money is pent up energy. It is canned sweat. It is a bit of a Niagara that I may hold in my hand and release if I will for the helping of men. Sometimes we speak of tainted money. There isn't any such thing! Money in itself is neither moral or immoral.
It is non-moral. Whether it does good or evil depends upon the character of the man who makes and uses it.

"Dug from the mountainside,
Washed in the glen,
Servant am I, or master of men.
Earn me, I bless you;
Steal me, I curse you;
Grip me and hold me,
A fiend shall possess you.
Lie for me, die for me,
Covet me, take me--
Angel or devil--
I am what you make me."

One man can take a dollar and so use it as that the very eagle upon it will turn vulture to tear at somebody's heart. Another man may so use it as that the eagle will turn mocking bird to make music in somebody's soul. But money is power, and it is altogether intelligent to accumulate some bit of this kind of power.

2. This man showed himself wise in that he not only accumulated wealth, but he did it in a most legitimate fashion. There are ways of getting money that are bad. I do not want any money that comes at the price of another's loss or of another's tears. But this man did not win his money by running a sweat shop. He did not win it by taking advantage of the weakness of his fellows. "An orphan's curse," says Coleridge, "can drag to hell a spirit from on high." But there was no orphan's curse upon this man's money. He did not make it by running a gambling-hell, or by engaging in the dope trade or the liquor traffic. How then did he win it?

In a fashion that is altogether right: "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully." He got his wealth from the real source of all wealth—out of the earth, the ground. When I hear that word, I am back again on the old farm. I am looking off at a sea of sassafras sprouts. I
am catching the fragrance of the upturned sod or the sweet aroma of new-mown hay. I am listening to the call of the bobwhite to its mate. I am hearing the cat-bird who is singing a solo in the choir loft in the thicket at the end of the furrow. I am listening to the music of the dinner bell. I am going home in the gloaming "As the day fades into golden, then into gray, then into the deep blue of the night sky with its myriad of stars that blossom at twilight's early hour like lilies on the tomb of day." But I am going home with a clear conscience, from a day's toil that is honest and clean. This man got his wealth in a clean and honest fashion. In that he was wise.

3. Finally, he was wise in that having money he sought to conserve it. One of the most detestable sins, I think, is that of stinginess. But close upon its heels is the sin of wastefulness. We in this land of abundance tend to be wasteful. To waste wealth in any form is wicked. When Jesus puts His finger on the tragedy of the Prodigal Son, it was this—"He wasted his substance with riotous living." He took priceless treasure and used it in such a fashion as to get an inadequate return, or no return at all, or a return that was worse than none. It is little to waste big things. Great souls have nothing to throw away.

For instance, this is a big world in which we live, but it has never thrown away one drop of water, or one drop of sand, or one leaf of a flower, or one ounce of energy "since the morning stars sang together." That is a great sun that hangs in the sky. When it went out for its water supply this morning, it taxed the seven seas, the Mississippi, the Nile, the Ganges, and the Amazon. But it was not too big a sun to drink from the cup of a violet, and it was not too squeamish to run its golden fingers through the mud-puddle or to wring out the wet rags of a tramp asleep in a fence-corner.
Even when Jesus the Eternal Christ fed the multitude, He said, "Gather up the scraps that nothing be lost." The Great Sower Himself has not a crumb of bread to throw away. This farmer was therefore wise in seeking to conserve his wealth. But in spite of these fine qualities, he was a fool.

II

Wherein was he foolish? To find the answer to this question, we need to hear him think. We cannot always tell what a man is by his looks. As Shakespeare points out, "he may look like the flower but be the serpent under it." He may smile and smile and be a villain. We cannot always tell what a man is by hearing him talk. He may speak high sentiments to which he himself in his inner life is a personal stranger. But if we can get in behind the scenes and hear him think, then we know him for what is he. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Let us then listen to this man think. "And he thought within himself, saying what shall I do? I have no room where to store my goods. And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

The tragedy of this thinking is: what it leaves out. He thought of himself, of his corn, and his barns, but there were other vastly important values that he forgot altogether. His folly is evident not so much in what he remembered as in what he forgot.

1. He forgot God. Listen again to his thinking and you will see that he was a practical atheist. That does not mean that he claimed to be an atheist. The chances are overwhelmingly great that he was thoroughly orthodox. He doubtless recited his creed with genuine fervor. He would have resented with hot anger any man who sought to discredit the reality of God. But in
spite of this he conducted his business, he went through with the daily affairs of living, just as he would have gone had his Bible been a myth and God a lie. Intellectual atheism is not half so deadening and damming as practical atheism that sends us to the task of living without any fear of God before our eyes.

2. Reckoning without God, he confused possession with ownership. That was perfectly natural under the circumstances. If there is no God, if this world is the product of blind forces that had no prevision of what they were creating, then of course we may lay claim to ownership. But if God did really make the world and create ourselves, then such claim to ownership is at once wicked and absurd. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." All the values that we possess today have been possessed and fingered by other hands before we came upon the scene. They will be fingered by other hands still when we behind the veil have passed. There are few types of folly more deadening than that of thinking that possession of certain values means that we own them.

3. Having no sense of God and confusing possession with ownership, he naturally became guilty of another great folly. He had no sense either of gratitude or of obligation. As he looked out upon his broad acres that were growing golden for harvest it seems that he could hardly have prevented such thoughts as these: "God has been good to me this year. He has given me health and strength. He has given me faithful men and women to work with me. They have been loyal. Then he has sent His sunshine and His rain in just the right proportions. I am deeply grateful to God. I am also deeply grateful to my fellow workers. Without them my success would have been impossible."

But no! He has nobody to thank but himself. He swaggers as if he had made his fertile fields. He boasts as if he had managed both the sunshine
and the rains. Of all the self-made men that meet us upon the pages of the Bible he is the outstanding example. He has prospered, he has grown rich, he is independent, his barns are so bursting with plenty that he has to build new ones, and he has done it all himself. Every man who seriously boasts of being a self-made man is a fool.

Then because he owns all, because he has nobody to thank for his success but himself he is also free from obligation. He thought within himself, saying "God has blessed me above the ordinary. He has blessed me with the capacity to get wealth. He has blessed me with faithful employees; therefore, I ought to make some return for His blessings. I ought to make some return by helping His other children that are as dear to His heart as I am and more needy than I. I will, therefore, change my material wealth into wealth that is measured in terms of personality. I will use it to try to build better and happier men and women." That would have been the natural thought of a man who had a sense of God. But this man had no sense of obligation. The man without any sense of obligation is in the eyes of God a fool.

4. This man was a fool because he sought to satisfy himself with treasures that had utterly failed him in yesterday and that were failing him today. It is quite evident when we hear him think that he had found life a bit like a trudge through a desert. Listen to him talk to his soul: "Eat, drink, have a good time!" That implies that his soul had not been at its ease. He had been living a starved life. This was the case because "man shall not live by bread alone." He knew how to care for donkeys and goats, and he did not know how to care for a soul. He knew how to treat his horses, but he knew no more of what to do with a soul than a hog would know how to handle an angel plum. Feeding on things, he was starving today, but he was fool enough to think that if he had a few more things he would be satisfied tomorrow.
5. Finally he was a fool in that he chose the worst possible fashion for the conserving of his wealth. In seeking to conserve it, he was wise, but when he looked about for a bank in which to deposit it where it would be secure he chose a barn. What a fool! How can we make our money secure? "Make to yourselves friends," said Jesus in another parable, "by the use of money." Only one thing abides: and that is human personality. Build your money into men and women, boys and girls, and it will last today and tomorrow and through eternity. What greater possible folly than to turn from the privilege of investing money in a human soul and depositing it in a barn!

III

What was the outcome of this folly? It continued and ended in tragedy. But we misunderstand the story if we think the tragedy of this story was that he died suddenly. So has many another overworked man! One day death walked past his cautious butler, stalked into his lovely bedroom, set his clay-covered spade down against his rosewood bedstead and pushed him out into the cemetery. But God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." But as neither his folly nor his tragedy consist in his sudden death, he would have been just as great a fool if he had lived on until today. The tragedy of his folly was this rather—that he lived in poverty and in poverty he died. At the end of the day he went out to meet God with his pockets as empty of all material and spiritual coin as the pockets of a shroud.

The tragedy of his life is all the darker when we realize the uselessness of it. He had such a big chance and made so little out of it. And last we with our big chances should pull our garments about us in self-righteousness and think ourselves superior to him, the Master drives home the story in these cutting words: "So is he that layeth up treasures for himself and is not rich toward God." That is, just the same kind of fool and just as great
A FAMOUS FOOL - page 9

fool is the man who lives selfishly and refuses by unselfish giving to come to possess the riches of God. Every one of us may be rich. That is God's purpose for us. It was to that end that Jesus came. "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor that we through His poverty might become rich." But if we enter this wealth we must reckon with God. We must realize that we only possess and never own. In this realization we must accept gratefully our obligations to use our substance as we have opportunity for others. Only thus can we be rich in time and rich in eternity.

There is a story of a certain rich man who with his chauffeur and high-powered car passed a minister one day who was walking a rather poverty stricken circuit. "There goes that man," he said. "I offered him a good job, but he would not give up his preaching and he is having to live like a beggar. The rich man could not understand such stupidity. But that night, the story said, he had a terrible dream. In his dream a great angel stood before him and he warned him in solemn tones. "Tomorrow morning at half-past three o'clock the richest man in Bartow county shall die." The rich man awoke, clammy with sweat. He told his wife of his terrible dream. He knew himself to be the richest man in Bartow county and to him it was a sentence of doom.

His wife tried to comfort him by telling him it was only a dream. So he went to sleep only to be awakened once more in deeper terror by the same vision. He dared not remain in bed longer. He rose and dressed and took his seat before the great grandfather clock just as it was striking the hour of two. He sat staring at the clock as if hypnotized. In spite of fear before he knew it he was asleep again. "Then once more that appalling dream; once more that terrifying voice: "Tomorrow morning at half past three o'clock the richest man in Bartow county shall die." As he opened his eyes the clock was striking three. Then he watched the hands steal to the quarter hour, then twenty minutes past, twenty-five minutes past, half-past. His knuckles were
white as he gripped the arms of his chair. But nothing happened. Little by little he relaxed. At last the sun rose, and his fears seemed a bit foolish. He went out on his wide lawns in the radiant light of the morning. His chaufeur passed with a spade in his hand. "Where are you going?" asked the rich man. "Hadn't you heard?" he answered. "I am going to dig a grave. That old preacher that we saw walking the circuit yesterday died this morning at half past three o'clock."
"Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected."


There was a quiet majesty about these words that are of the heart. Messengers have just come to Jesus informing Him that, unless He flees, Herod will kill Him. But Jesus is not in the least afraid. He knows that these messengers have not come out of friendship. These Pharisses are trying to drive Him to Jerusalem where they can kill Him themselves. But He answers with quiet dignity, "In spite of you and in spite of Herod I am going on about My God-given task. I shall work today and tomorrow and the third day I shall finish by dying at Jerusalem." This throws light upon Jesus' consciousness of His mission and His thought of His death. This coming crucifixion is not to bring His life to final failure. It is to bring it to final victory. It is through this death that He is to be able to say that great word that He utters upon the cross, "It is finished."

But our present interest in these words is not because of the light they throw upon the face of Jesus but upon that of Herod. They are words of stern rebuke. Jesus did not go about the world smiling indiscriminately upon the good and the bad. There were some He approved. There were others for whom He found no words of denunciation too bitter. But here He utters a rebuke that seems to me unique. Herod is the one man that Jesus singled out to call an ugly name. "Go tell that fox." He was not complimenting Herod. He was denouncing him in a fashion that should have filled Herod with deadly fear.

"Go tell that fox." That word is a window through which we can look into
the very soul of Herod. What kind of man is he? What kind of animal is the fox? Frankly, the word "fox" does not appall us. It does not make our blood run cold. It does not fill us with horror and with loathing. We think of the fox as quite a harmless creature that may amuse us in the chase or may furnish us with furs with which we may warm or decorate ourselves. But the fact that the fox is not a name to strike terror is born of the weakness of that animal rather than any worth inherent in his own character. The fox is a beast of prey. He lives off the bodies of others. He takes without giving.

Not only is he a beast of prey, but he is a little beast of prey. To the characteristic of cruelty he adds the further characteristic of pettiness. Had Jesus called Herod a lion, we should have thought of him as strong and cruel, courageous and bloodthirsty. But when He called him a fox, we think of him as weak and cruel. He substitutes cunning for courage, speed for strength. He is courageous only among the weak. He is a hero only in the hen-coop. The barking of the most cowardly dog will make him take to his heels. The fox, therefore, is a ruthless, cunning, and cowardly beast of prey. Therefore, when Jesus called Herod a fox, He was accusing Him of being little better than a cunning beast of prey.

That this estimate was correct is evidenced by a glance at Herod's story. Take one chapter for instance. On one occasion he went to visit his brother Philip who was then living at Rome. In all probability Philip and his wife received their guest with courtesy and kindness. But he outraged the laws of hospitality by making love to his brother Philip's wife. These two shameless sinners had an affair under his brother's own roof. I suppose Herodias alone understood him. He invited her to elope with him. This she promised to do on one condition—that Herod would send his own wife home. Thus he thievishly wrecked his own home as well as that of his brother Philip.

In thus stealing his brother's wife, he was the basest type of thief. I
know you will remind me that Herodias was willing to be stolen. That being the case, we feel that Herod was not so much to blame. But to take that position we must go on the assumption that opportunity to be dishonest gives one the right to be dishonest. But we do not feel that way when we deal with material values. If I should steal your watch and give as my reason, "I had an opportunity when you were not looking," no one would think that a justifiable reason. No more is it justifiable to steal any value simply because the opportunity is offered. Herod was a sneaking home-wrecker.

II

But the fact that Jesus called Herod a fox does not mean that there was nothing good in him. In the garden of his soul there were many noxious weeds but also in this garden there were a few flowers. They were quite sickly and much in need of the sun. But they were fighting for their lives and trying hard to grow. In the best of us there is always some little bad. In the worst of us there is always some little good. Even in the heart of foxy Herod there was that upon which our Lord could smile, that which gave Him hope.

In proof of this, when we see him a little later, he is at church. Only two people are present besides the minister. That was Herodias, his paramour. How Herod came to call the stern preacher on that occasion to be his pastor we do not know. The minister on that occasion was none other than John the Baptist. He had begun his ministry in the wilderness. His gospel was a rather stern gospel, but he spoke it with such sincerity and power that men heard him gladly. He fairly emptied the cities and filled the wilderness with eager throngs that came to hear his blazing and burning message.

Rumors of this daring prophet reached the palace of Herod. He invited him to preach at court. That was a sharp test for John. I can imagine some worldly-wise friend taking him aside and giving him a bit of useful advice.

"You have been preaching here in the wilderness with great success, but when you
get up to the court, that will be different. You have used great plainness of speech out here. You had better be a little more careful there. Especially keep off the Seventh Commandment. If you talk about that, you will be getting personal."

But when John stood in the presence of these two royal sinners, he forgot this good advice if he had ever remembered it. He did not denounce the sins of society in general. He came to grips with the cancer that was destroying the life of the man and the woman that were before him. He forgot their position. He forgot that he held his own life in his hand. He seemed to forget the other nine commandments. He thought only of one. That was the Seventh--"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Not only did he rebuke these two who were living in open and notorious sin, but he did it in a blunt and tactless fashion. Had I been the preacher, it seems to me I could have edged up to it a little more delicately. I think I might have said, "You two have been called upon to rule over a people that are fanatically religious. They believe in the sacredness of marriage. They do not all practice it, but they believe in it. Therefore, it is a bit indiscreet for you to flout your relationship in such open and aboveboard fashion. You would get on better, you would find your situation easier politically, if you would reform." But there was none of that. He based his sermon on bedrock principle of right and wrong. He did not recognize their marriage at all. He said flatly, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother Philip's wife. You are breaking the laws of God by the way you are living. If you keep on, those laws are going to break you."

It was a hard sermon. Herodias, I daresay, listened in utter amazement. Her eyes grew bright with anger. Her cheeks became even redder under her rouge. Then and there she told herself that John had signed his own death warrant by preaching like that. Then and there she resolved that she would take her revenge
on this insulting prophet. She became intensely angry at the physician but clung the more tenaciously to her disease. Herodias is one of the desperately evil characters that we meet on the pages of the New Testament. She was cunning, hard, and ruthless.

While Herodias was enraged by John's preaching, such was not the case with Herod. That is a bit surprising. Herod was rebuked as sharply as Herodias. Yet the story says that Herod heard him gladly. That shows there was something good about Herod. Just what was the source of his gladness we cannot say. I think there are times when it is refreshing to be told the truth even though the truth is jarring. I think too that Herod was thrilled to meet a man good enough, big enough, and brave enough to tell the truth when it might cost him his life.

Mark you, John is not abusing a whole congregation. He is standing in the presence of the one man and the one woman who have power of life and death over him and he is telling them a plain unpopular truth. That took courage. Herod was short on courage. But he had enough decency about him to admire the genuine article when he met it.

Not only did Herod hear John gladly, but we are told that "he did many things." There is something arresting and pathetic about that. Herod knew he was wrong and made some feeble effort to get right. He saw his house was toppling into ruins. He tried to prop it up. He realized the ugly weeds that grew in his garden. He said, "I will pull up a few of them." He did many things, but the tragedy of it was that he refused to do the real thing, the fundamental thing. He refused to repent. But the fact that he was stirred to do many things makes us hope.

Even the fact that he attended church where John was preaching is hopeful. Why did he invite this stern prophet to be his pastor? Possibly he wanted a new thrill. Though he was living in open sin, time went a bit heavily upon his hands. Then perchance he was curious. I am not going to criticize him for that. It is far better to come to church out of curiosity than not to come
at all. In a certain large department store, there is this word that faces
the salesmen, but is unseen by the customer: "It is not what the customer comes
in after that counts. It is what he goes out with." The church that excites
no curiosity is not as alive as it ought to be. The individual that has no
curiosity is likely to be intellectually dead.

Perhaps then Herod was curious. But I am going to give him credit for
seeking more than a thrill, more than the satisfaction of his curiosity. He
might have been seeking for help. He might have been looking wistfully toward
the heights, longing to climb. Why should we not give him credit for this? Hunger for God is universal. Thirst for the water of life belongs
to every man. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks so panteth my soul
after thee, O God." That is the cry of the saints. It is also the cry of
sinners. I am willing even to give foxy Herod the advantage of the doubt and
confess that there were times when he earnestly desired to be free of his sin.
If this was not the case before he heard John, it was surely the case after
he heard him. He tried to improve. He was willing to leave off some of his
sins. He began by refusing to have John executed then and there as Herodias
wanted him to do. But while he did many things, I repeat, he failed to do the
big thing. He failed to turn his soiled life over to God. I remember a lovely
spring on our farm. But the water of that spring once became so stenchful that
even the horses would not drink out of it. We found that an animal had crawled
into the spring and died at its source. The cure for that spring was not
planting lovely ferns about its borders. It had to be set right at its
That was what Herod needed. But often as ourselves, he was willing to do almost
anything except surrender his life.

III

This failure paved the way to perhaps the most tragic act of his life.

Herod's birthday had come. There was a big dinner being given in his honor.
The socially elite were present. They were entertaining themselves in a fashion that has not quite gone out of style even to this day. They were getting drunk. Herodias was keeping her cunning eyes upon Herod. When she saw that he was drunk enough to be more foolish than usual, when she saw that he was sufficiently intoxicated to have what little conscience was left put to sleep, she staged the big event of the evening. Her beautiful young daughter, then about sixteen years of age, came in to dance. Her dance appealed to the sensual. It was recently resurrected as the Salome dance. It used to haunt back streets when we were less bold under the oochi-coochi dance. The performance pleased Herod beyond measure. So much was the case that he promised her anything she would ask even to the half of his kingdom. This promise he made under oath.

Herodias was waiting for just that development. She and her charming daughter, got their heads together. I am quite sure they had talked the matter over before. Then Salome went through the pretense of consulting her mother. Then she came with her request. She made it as calmly and clearly as if she had been asking for some rare bouquet or for some jewel. "Give me here," she said, "the head of John the Baptist in a dish." The appetites of these two were perhaps a bit jaded. They wanted the thrill of seeing something in a dish that was to them more palatable than food. The request struck Herod like a blow. It half sobered him. Bad as he was, such a crime as this filled him with horror. "The king was sorry," the story reads. "Nevertheless for his oath's sake and for the sake of them that sat with him he commanded it to be given her." You see two reasons are assigned. First, for his oath's sake. He had made a vow. He had taken an oath to grant her request. He could not go back on his word.

What a man of honor! Of course, having taken upon himself a vow he must keep it. Is it always right to keep a vow? Is it ever right to break a solemn oath? Indeed it is. There are not a few vows that are far more honored in the breach than in the keeping. I knew a mother once whose daughter had gone wrong.
This mother took a solemn vow that her daughter should never cross the threshold of her house again. She vowed that she would never speak to her again. But through my earnest persuasion, she was led to break that horrible vow. When she broke it, the peace of heaven came into her face. I claimed my part in the transaction as one of the greatest triumphs in my ministry.

A second reason that Herod kept his vow was for the sake of them that sat with him. What a power for good or evil is the wrong companionship! It is possible for you to put yourself in a crowd that will make it easier for you to do right and harder for you to do wrong. It is also possible for you to put yourself in a crowd that will make it harder for you to do right and easier to do wrong. "The companion of fools," said the wise man, "shall be destroyed." Herod had surrounded himself with the wrong kind of friends. He was in a crowd that he knew would sanction murder. Therefore, unwillingly he consented to kill the best man that he knew. He murdered perhaps the only man that had ever helped him.

IV

But even then Herod was not entirely beyond hope. John had not been long dead before the wildest of rumors were flying about the country concerning another prophet far greater than John. This Prophet was not so stern and forbidding as John. John was a man of the wide open spaces. He loved the solitudes. His food was locust and wild honey. He did not care for society. He never went out to dinner. But this other Prophet was a man who never refused an invitation to dinner. He mixed gladly with the highest and the lowest. They were both great men, but very far apart in the type of message they delivered.

In spite of this, however, when Herod heard of the fame of this new prophet Jesus, while others were saying that He was Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the great prophets of the past, Herod said they were all wrong. "This is John the Baptist," he declared, "whom I beheaded." That shows that Jesus had become
an incarnate conscience for Herod. I imagine that this was the first time that Herod had ever faced the fact that he was solely responsible for the murder of John. He had doubtless said before that Herodias had killed John. But now he faces that ghastly deed as his very own. It still looks as if there is some hope for him.

But if Herod's sluggish conscience was half wakened, it was not for long. He was still interested in Jesus, but only as a wonder-worker, as a kind of sleight-of-hand performer. He wanted to see some miracle done by Him. Thus when on that fateful Friday Pilate sent Jesus to him, he was delighted. Here was an opportunity for which he had been eager for many days. This famous wizard was going to perform for his amusemen...
of chains nor the sobs of the deserted. The horror of the situation is this—that the candles begin to go out one by one. There is not a breath of air. Over to the right some unseen hand snuffs a candle and then another until one wavering light is left. That that is snuffed. Then the darkness! What had happened to Herod? One by one the candles of his soul went out and he was left in the night. That is a tragedy that is possible for every one of us.
Jesus is at a dinner party in the home of a well-to-do Pharisee. As he looks about upon his fellow guests and upon his host, he recognizes the fact that they all belong to the same social group. He sees also that they are in about the same economic bracket. Further, it is obvious to him that his host is not so much giving a dinner as exchanging one. Thus these people were accustomed to swapping dinners as many of us swap presents at Christmas time.

Realizing all this, Jesus thus addressed his host: "The next time you give a dinner do not invite your friends and kinsmen and rich neighbors, lest they invite you in return and you receive compensation for your dinner." I am sure there was a twinkle in Jesus' eye as he spoke this word. Any intelligent listener who was not personally rebuked must have chuckled over this host's fear of being rewarded for his dinner. Such recompense as Jesus here warns against was both desired and expected.

Naturally, this word created embarrassment. Then as these respectable feasters were looking down their noses in silence, one bright chap sought to relieve the situation by a pious platitude: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," he exclaims with unctious. It was easy for the Master to see through such insincere twaddle. "If you and your fellows really think it blessed to eat bread in the kingdom of God," he seems to reply, "why do you not eat it? But instead of doing this, you make excuses!"

As an illustration of their conduct he told of a certain man - Matthew says that he was a king - who made a great supper and invited many.
When everything was ready, the king sent his servants to announce to
the invited guests, "Dinner is now served." But it so happened that
these invited guests did not desire to attend the banquet; they had a
preference for doing something else. Therefore, instead of hurrying to
the feast, they sent in their excuses. The whole purpose of the story
is to picture the utter silliness of their conduct.

I

Their excuses were silly in themselves.

This is true of excuses in general. "They all with one consent
began to make excuse." Excuses always have to be made. Every excuse
is a manufactured article. We do not have to make reasons - they exist
in themselves - but we do have to make excuses. Since excuses are man-
ufactured, they are generally false. They are lies, ranging in color
from a delicate gray to sober black. They are false, both in purpose
and in content. Those making excuses claim to be offering a reason
for their conduct, but in reality they are seeking to hide their reason.

For instance, when you were invited recently to a party that you
did not wish to attend, you replied by saying that you had a dreadful
headache, or that you had a previous engagement. But your real reason
for not going was that you did not like the one who gave the party, or
thought that in case you should go you would be bored. When you refused
to attend church that gloomy Sunday, you told yourself that your reason
for neglecting the privilege of worship was the ugliness of the weather.
But that was only your excuse. Your real reason was that you did not
wish to go.

Not only is the purpose of an excuse to hide the reason, but it is
generally to conceal a reason that the excuse maker thinks is off color.
Now and then we find a good sportsman who will make excuse for his
victory or for his virtues. But generally speaking, we do not make excuse for our virtues, but for our vices. We do not make excuse for our successes, but for our failures. If you were at a wild party last night where everybody got drunk except you, the chances are that you will not seek to excuse your right conduct. But if you got drunk along with the crowd, you say "Yes, I got drunk, but everybody else did."

I am thinking now of a layman who was one of the most useful men that it has been my privilege to know. While at one time president of some twenty different organizations, he yet had sufficient leisure to attend every service of his church. Not only so, but when he came it was like turning on a new light. But I never heard him apologize for his conduct. He did not say, "In this hour of great need I am seeking to be a part of the remedy instead of a part of the disease. But you must pardon me for that, since I was brought up by Christian parents. These dedicated me to God in my young and tender years. Therefore, do not blame me for seeking to be and do right."

No, when we are conscious of the fact that we are doing right, we do not have to apologize. But when we get the consent of our minds to shirk our duty, when we decide to help the world rot down by refusing to be saving salt, then we feel we must give some explanation. That is when we sometimes lay the blame on our pious parents, affirming that we had too much religion as children. Or we blame the church, affirming that we stand aloof because the church is not what it ought to be. That is as sensible as it would be for me to declare, "I will never go to another hospital because a man died in the hospital last night." Or you blame it on the minister as I might blame my personal physician, say-
ing, "I will never call him again. I am taking this course because he himself has a cold." Our general run of excuses, therefore, are silly in that they are made up and are false both in content and in purpose.

The excuses made by these invited guests were no improvement on the average run-of-the-mill. In excusing themselves, they were affirming that their intentions were good, that they meant no harm by their refusal. The fact that they had other plans must not be taken to mean that they were trying to be-insulting. "Our hearts," they said, "are in the right place." That excuse is as old as man and as new as your last heart beat. The other day a drunken driver killed the son of my dear friend. Of course, this driver did not set out to kill. Neither he nor the man who sold him the liquor meant any harm. But they were both willing to endanger the lives of others to get to do as they pleased. It is well to remember that most of the harm that is done in this world is done by people who do not mean any.

Aaron is a classic of example. This brother of Moses was approached by his restless fellows: "Up, make us gods to go before us," they said, "for as for this Moses, we know not what has become of him." Of course, Aaron knew that their suggestion was wrong. He knew further that he should not comply with it. But he was too spineless to refuse. "Bring on your jewelry," he said. So they brought them their earrings and their finger rings and their golden bracelets. Out of these he fashioned a calf. Then the crowd threw a wild party that would have been a discredit to any tribe of pagans.

Suddenly Moses came upon the scene. He called his brother on the carpet. What did he have to say for himself? Virtually this: "I did
not mean any harm. I only cast the gold into the fire. I had no idea what was going to happen. When a calf came bounding out I was more surprised than anybody." Of course, he is not telling the truth. He is trying to duck the responsibility of a great evil by affirming that he did not mean any harm. We seldom mean the evil consequences of our wrong choices. We just mean the choices.

Not only did these people who refused the feast desire that their host should know that they meant no harm, but they also wanted him to know that their conduct was really quite innocent. This was the case because it was necessary. This man who had bought a piece of land had to go look it over. The man who had bought five yoke of oxen could not refrain from going at once to see if they would work. The one who had just married could not come in the very nature of things. As much, therefore, as they regretted missing the banquet, they could not help it.

Now, since it was impossible for these to attend the dinner, they were in no sense to be blamed. No man is ever to be blamed for not doing what in the nature of things he cannot do. Here is a man who is not doing his duty by his home, by his church, by his community. Instead he is going his own selfish way. He is not doing his duty because he cannot. But he is not to blame since he cannot do otherwise. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Furthermore, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." That means the man who neglects his duty is to die for something that he cannot help. That is to accuse God of infinite injustice.

When Jesus says to all of us, "Come unto me," that means we can come. When he invites, "Take My yoke," that means that we can accept the yoke that he gives and the yoke that he bears. To answer that we cannot is
merely to add injury to insult. Every such excuse is not only false, but puts the blame of our sin upon God. Thus the excuses that these men made were both false and silly, but we cannot improve upon them after all the centuries.

II

Then, the conduct of these men was silly because they were asking to be excused from a privilege.

I can readily understand how one could ask to be excused from a surgical operation, from a session with the dentist, from the boredom of doing nothing. But to seek to escape a fine privilege is foolish. Why should a poor man shrink from inheriting an estate? Why should a hungry man beg off from eating dinner? Why should a man whose lips are parched with thirst ask to be excused from kissing a spring on the lips? Why should a sick man, with pain walking with fire-shod feet along every nerve of his body, ask to be excused from being well and strong?

It is the affirmation of Jesus that discipleship is a privilege. It is the highest of all privileges. This assertion, I realize, is flatly contradictory to the belief of the man of the street. It contradicts the belief of many who belong to the church. We are all convinced that vital religion is good if we are to pass through some terrible ordeal of suffering. It is good for the man who is on his death bed. But for one who is in the thick of things it is more of a handicap than a help. It is a weight rather than wings. It is the man who is doing as he pleases that is really living. So many sing with fervor:

"Ship me somewhere East of Suez
Where the best is like the worst,
Where there ain't no Ten Commandments
And a man can raise a thirst."

Here is a song that our fathers used to sing:
"I saw a way worn traveler
In tattered garments clad,
And struggling up the mountain,
It seemed that he was sad."

In that woe-begone tramp many saw and see still a picture of the typical Christian. He is on his way to Heaven, but he is experiencing hell in the here and now. He is going to "get his pie in the sky, by by", if for no other reason, because he has so completely missed it in the life that now is. That picture, let me say, flatly contradicts all that Jesus said and all that Jesus was.

To our Lord discipleship is a feast, a royal wedding feast. It is like finding buried treasure. It is like coming to possess a priceless pearl. It is to experience life's supreme joy. "O, the gladness of the poor in spirit," he shouts. "O, the joy of the merciful and of the meek."

Another word that was constantly on his lips was "Be of good cheer."

Always he claimed that to know God was the most joyful of privileges.

What he asserts by his lips, he also proved by his life. Jesus lived constantly within the will of God. He wore constantly the yoke of perfect dedication. Speaking out of his own experience, he declared that such yoke was kindly. In his last prayer with his disciples, he prayed that the joy that was his might be theirs. I know that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. I am sure also that his was the greatest heart that ever beat in human bosom, that his was the sunniest face that ever looked upon this world.

This finding the dedicated life a feast was not only the experience of Jesus. It has been the experience of the saints throughout the centuries. To open the Book of Acts, for instance, is to come upon men and women with lighted faces and sparkling eyes who can hardly credit
their own good fortune. They are absurdly joyous. This is the case regardless of their circumstances. Some are being thrilled by the privilege of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. Some are being stoned, whipped, cast into prison, but all of them are rejoicing "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

This is true of the real saints of today. After a long ministry, I think I can affirm that I have never seen one single fully dedicated person who was not living joyously and abundantly. I have known some of these who were rich, more who were poor. Some were in vigorous health and some were tortured by disease. Some were in places of honor. More yet were in places obscure. But this common characteristic belonged to all of them, the joy of the Lord was their strength. The conduct, therefore, of those who excused themselves from life's supreme privilege, the privilege of knowing God through Christ, was silly.

III

The habit of excuse making is foolish in that it ends in tragedy.

1. This is the case because while the primary purpose of our excuse is to deceive another, it really succeeds only in deceiving ourselves. Our fellows can usually see through our excuses, but if we persist in making them, we come to believe them. There is not a duty that we neglect that we cannot persuade ourselves that we have a right to neglect if we persist in making excuses. There is not a wrong of which we are guilty that we cannot persuade ourselves is right, is best for us. Adultery, for instance, is an ugly sin. If made universal, society would rot down. Yet an otherwise decent man dared to excuse his conduct in this respect because his situation was peculiar.
2. Now, since excuses blind our eyes, since they convince us that we are right when we are wrong, they make a change for the better impossible. It is only when I realize my sickness that I apply to the physician. It is only when I face the fact that I am going in the wrong direction that I about face. It was when the Prodigal told himself the truth that he dared to say, "I will arise and go to my father." Had he taken the opposite course, as multitudes have done, he would have rotted in the swine pen.

3. The final tragedy of our excuses is that having denied our own guilt, we refuse to seek the pardon that our Lord is ever offering and is ever eager to give. "None of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper." Why? Because they refused to come. The door to the feast of the fulness of life stands open to every one of us. If instead of entering the door you send in your excuses, then you miss the feast. Here is God's invitation, "Come, for all things are nor ready." What is your answer? Will you accept or send in your excuse?
"And they all with one consent began to make excuse." Luke 14:18

Jesus is taking dinner in the home of a Pharisee. As he looks about on his fellow guests he sees that they belong to the same social and economic group to which their host belongs. He realizes that these decent and respectable people are accustomed not so much to giving dinners as to swapping dinners. They swap dinners just as we are accustomed to swap presents at Christmas time. Therefore, with a touch of delicious humor, and doubtless with a bit of a twinkle in his eye, he tells his host that he ought not to invite merely his friends and rich neighbors lest they invite him back again and he be paid for his feast.

This "lest" put in on the part of Jesus might have provoked a smile on the part of some who appreciated the keenness of it, but to others it was a source of embarrassment. The one guest who had about as much sense of humor as a death's head sought to relieve the situation. Therefore, he brought forth this twaddle, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." I dare say the Master would have laughed outright at the platitude had he not realized the pathetic insincerity of the man who uttered it. In reply, Jesus said this, "You, as a religious man, claim to be all eagerness to enter the kingdom, but, as a matter of fact, neither you nor your fellows really desire to enter the kingdom. At least you do not desire it enough to meet the conditions."

In proof of his position he told the story of a man who made a great feast and invited many guests. In Matthew's version of this Parable, the man who made the feast was a king and the occasion of the feast was the wedding of his son. Therefore, it was a wedding feast. To attend such a feast was, to the mind of the Oriental, the very climax of privilege and enjoyment. But in spite of this fact, when the dinner was ready and the servants went out
to announce "Dinner is now served," instead of hurrying to the feast, they all with one consent began to make excuse? In spite of the pious platitude they spoke about the feast, they really did not desire to participate in it. Jesus is here emphasizing the utter* foolishness* and absurdity of their conduct.

What was there so absurd about their conduct?

1. Their excuses. Instead of attending the feast as they were expected to do, they sent in their alibis, and as is the case with almost all alibis, they were ridiculous to the point of being utterly laughable. "They all, with one consent, began to make excuse." You see, there is a difference between an excuse and a reason. Reasons exist in the very nature of things. An excuse has to be made up. The purpose of an excuse is to hide the reason that we dare not give.

Since this is the case almost if not all our excuses are false. They are lies ranging from gray to deep black. Why did these guests refuse to attend the feast? For just one reason. They did not desire to attend it. They did not desire to attend it because they did not believe that they would enjoy it, they thought it would be tedious and trying experience that would bore them to extinction. But instead of stating their real reason, they tried to hide that reason. Not only is an excuse a sham reason that we offer to hide our real motives, but almost always we offer it because we ourselves are conscious of the fact that we have done wrong. Generally speaking, we do not offer excuses for our virtues but for our vices. You would hardly expect me to stand in the pulpit and say to you, "Don't think too harshly of me for being a Christian minister. Just remember I was brought up in an old fashioned home and was dedicated
to God in my young and tender years. Remember that I had a consecrated mother and a priest-like father who was never too hurried to read God's word to his children and to lead them into the presence of God through prayer. Remember that our home was in a special sense the minister's home, that his welcome was the warmest and that he was held in honor always. Therefore, do not think too harshly of me for having become a Christian minister.

No, we do not generally excuse ourselves for having taken the right course but for having taken the wrong. The very fact that we offer such excuse indicate that we think it is wrong, whether anybody else does or not. Some time ago a man swore savagely in my presence, but when he found that I was a minister he hastened to apologize. Then he hurried to excuse himself on the ground that he ran with a rough crowd and had to use such language to make them understand him. When you are constantly excusing your conduct before your friends, the chances are overwhelmingly great that you think your conduct is wrong.

Now, being unwilling to state the real reason for staying away from the feast, they manufactured their varied alibis. How utterly silly they were. Jesus meant them to be silly. All alibis are silly, ours as well as theirs. One man could not come because he had bought a piece of land and simply had to go look at it. "I must", is the word he uses. Of course, he was not telling the truth. No intelligent man would buy a piece of land without looking at it. Even assuming that he had done so, it was too late to look at it after it was bought. So his excuse was as stupid as it was false.

Another of the guests had a similar excuse. He had bought five yoke of oxen. Understand, he was not buying beef cattle. He was buying cattle broke to the yoke. They were trained to work. But he seemed to say that he bought them without finding out whether they would work or not. Now that the deal is closed, he must go test them out. But every intelligent man knows that this
man would never have bought the cattle without knowing. Had he been thus stupid it is too late now. So his excuse was equally silly. The third man simply said "I am married". Even these Pharisees, in spite of their poor sense of humor, must have laughed at that. This, then, is the characteristic of excuses. They have to be made up. They are false. They are meant to disguise the reason for our conduct. Almost always they are meant to disguise the reason for our wrong conduct.

2. The conduct of these men was absurd because they were asking to be excused from a feast. Had they been seeking an excuse from something hateful and de-reasonable, their conduct would have been true, but that from which they were seeking to be excused was something that would meet their deepest need and bring to them the highest possible joy. Their conduct, therefore, was more absurd by far than yours would be if you were to hear that a distant relative had died leaving you a fortune and you would seek to be excused from accepting it.

Now, I am aware that the privilege of discipleship is generally not looked upon as a privilege at all. That is in part the fault of us who are Christians. It is the conviction of the average man that while Christianity is a worthwhile if one is on his death bed, it is more an indication of helplessness if we are living our life in the thick of things. They think with the cynic that Heaven might be a good place for but hell for companions. Here, for instance, is a song that our fathers used to sing:

"I saw a way worn traveller, In tattered garments clad
And struggling up the mountain, It seemed that he was sad."

This ragged wretched struggling creature was their conception of a Christian.

But such a conception was as far from that of Jesus as the spaces between the stars. Jesus thought of the privileges of discipleship as a feast, as
a royal feast, as a royal marriage feast. It was something that brought the joy of life to a climax. Jesus believed this because it was his own experience. In spite of the way the artists have pictured him, our Lord was the most joyful of men. His was the greatest heart that ever beat in human bosom. His was the sunniest face that ever looked out upon this world.

This joy he offers to share with you and me. He promises that if we meet the conditions, our joy will be sure. The last night of his life he prayed for his disciples and for us this prayer, "That the joy that is mine may be theirs". Either Jesus was mistaken or many of us are dead wrong in our conception of what being a Christian means. I am convinced Jesus was right. I am convinced of this because when I have put him to the test, I have shared in his joy. I am convinced because of the experience of others. I have yet to find one single consecrated person who was not finding life a feast. To excuse yourself, therefore, from life's finest privilege is at once silly and absurd.

Now, we have been in the business of manufacturing excuses for nineteen centuries since then, yet I am sure that we have not improved on these men of the long ago. The excuses they made sum up about all that we think of to this hour. Here is what they are really saying. "I am not going to the feast. I am not going because I want to do something else. But I want it understood that I do not mean the slightest harm. I am not bent on insulting the king who invited me. All I am bent on is doing as I please." Now, these are our stock in trade to this hour. First, "I don't mean any harm." That is an excuse that has been used millions of times. Aaron is a classic of appeasement. One day, you remember, when Moses had been gone a long time, these fickle Israelites came to Aaron and said, "Up, make us gods to go before us, for it is for this Moses we know not what has
become of him". So Aaron commanded them to bring them their silver and their gold and he promised to make an idol, and there followed a great celebration and debauch.

When Moses came on the scene, he was full of hot anger. At once he called his brother on the carpet and questioned him about his shameful conduct. What reply did Aaron make? Did he confess his cowardly sin with penitent shame? Not a bit of it. He said, "I am not to blame. I meant no harm. The truth is I never intended to make an idol. I merely cast my gold into the fire and behold, there came forth this calf. Nobody was quite as surprised at the outcome as I." Of course, as a matter of fact, Aaron meant the deed but he did not mean all the consequences.

I am thinking of a father to whom I undertook to minister a few years ago. He was dying of a lingering disease. Some twenty years before, in a fit of anger, he quit the church. From that time he had never attended. Since that time he had given his children no religious training. Now he was seeing his mistake. Now they were breaking his heart. He had done them untold injury. He had cheated himself. But he did not mean any harm. He certainly did not mean the consequences but he did mean to do as he pleased, regardless of consequences.

While I was pastor in Memphis, I had as one of my assistants a sweet old saint past eighty years of age. That father had a devoted son on whose arm he leaned with special confidence. But one day that son was killed by a drunken driver. The accident sobered the driver. He was very sorry. He did not mean any harm. He was not out to hurt anybody. But he did mean to drink what he pleased and to drive when he pleased. Therefore, without meaning any harm, he had his brother's blood on his hand. It is well to remember that most of the harm that is done in the world is done by those who do not mean any.
When the prodigal left home, in Jesus' immortal story, he did not mean the slightest harm. He did not get up one morning and say, "This is the day I am going to begin to wreck myself. This is the day I am going to set out to cast a shadow over my home. This is the day I am going to begin to break my father's heart." He only said "This is the day I am going to do as I please. I do not mean the slightest harm. I only mean to have my own way regardless of consequences."

Wherever a church is weakened, wherever it is exercising only a meager fraction of its power, the fault lies mainly with those who do not only mean no harm, but who are well wishers. As the lights increasingly go on in our places of amusement, as they increasingly go out on Sunday evenings in our churches, whose hands are turning the switch? Who is putting out the lights? Generally speaking, not the anti-god folks, not the communists; the lights are being put out by those who do not mean any harm.

Wherever there is a home without religious training, wherever there are parents who believe that their children must be taught geography and grammar and arithmetic, but need no religious training; those who take this disastrous course do not mean any harm. But in spite of that fact they are robbing their children of their most priceless heritage, because a child needs the bread of life just as it needs physical bread. Wherever any individual soul is living in disregard of the call of God there is disaster, however we may intend our conduct to be.

2. These invited guests blamed their refusal to attend the feast on necessity. Their circumstances made attendance impossible. Since this was the case, the king had no right to be offended. He had no right to be offended because nobody is to blame for failure to do what in the nature of things he cannot do. We take the very same position when we face the
invitation of our Lord to enter the kingdom, to become his follower.

"The reason I am not a Christian is because my circumstances make it impossible." But there are no such circumstances. God never puts any man in a situation where he cannot comfort him. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he sent the greetings of the saints that were in Nero's household. Here were a group of people who were slaves. Not only were they slaves but they were slaves in the city of Rome, the most corrupt city in the world. Not only were they slaves in Rome, but they were slaves in the household of Nero, about the most cruel bit of human rottenness the world has ever known. And yet in spite of the harsh circumstances, they were saints.

I can imagine Daniel writing home from Babylon where he is a captive. "My dear Father," he writes. "Yesterday I was chosen for a position in the service of the king of Babylon. It is a great opportunity. When I was invited to dinner food was set before me that was contrary to my custom. I knew it was wrong to eat it but I ate it nonetheless because I had to. I should have lost my chance if I hadn't. I might even have lost my life." Had Daniel written like this, his name would have rotted centuries ago.

Yet we blame circumstances constantly for our moral failures. When I was in another city some years ago, I had a brilliant young friend — my next-door neighbor — who seemed headed for a promising career in politics. He opposed the corrupt machine of his city one year and won. He declared that he would have his head severed from his body rather than compromise. Realizing his popularity and ability, the machine offered him a high official next year and he sold out. When I protested, the only answer was "If I wouldn't have sold out I wouldn't have gotten the office." So a man must be elected. Just as we say a man must live.
When we do not blame our failures upon circumstances, we often blame them upon others. That started with Adam. He passed the buck to Eve and Eve to the devil. And so we have been doing from that day to this. In one of the most needy hours of the history of the world some of us are holding aloof from the church, others are giving it half-hearted support. But it is not your fault, it is the fault of your fellow members. Why should you give whole-hearted support to such an imperfect church? A man died in one of our hospitals yesterday. Therefore, I resolve never to go to the hospital again. Some even blame the minister. "How do you expect me to be a Christian when even the preacher fails at it?" Well, my own doctor has a cold, therefore I am never going to call a doctor again.

Everytime we recite our creed we remind ourselves of the tragic sin of Pilate. Yet Pilate did not regard himself as a great sinner at all. In the presence of the crowd he washed his hands in token of the fact that he had done nothing wrong. "I am innocent of the blood of this just person," he declared. "See to it." Then why did he condemn him? He condemned him because of the crowd. "I am not to blame, the crowd is to blame." So these men of the long ago, as ourselves, refused the invitation because circumstances of the other fellow make our acceptance impossible.

What is wrong with this habit of making excuses?

1. It puts out our own eyes. An excuse is intended to deceive the other fellow. When these invited guests went their excuses, they were seeking to convey the idea "I am very eager to attend your banquet but I simply cannot. I have other commitments that make my attendance impossible." But it is a very rare thing that our excuses deceive the one to whom they are made.

The first note I ever wrote to a girl asking for a date ended in refusal.
A delicate little missive came back saying "Please excuse me. I am too young to receive company." I, myself, was on the sunny side of fifty and quite inexperienced, but I was wise enough to know that she was not giving a reason but only an excuse. Her real reason was that in spite of the fame of the wooer, she failed to appreciate him.

But if our excuses do not deceive others, there is one that they do deceive. That is the man who makes them. Of course, it takes time but it is altogether possible for one to tell oneself pious lies until by and by he will come to believe them. You honestly believe that you would like to be a vital Christian if it were not impossible. You honestly believe that you failed to attend church because of the gloomy weather when the real reason was that you did not want to. Our excuses put out our own eyes.

2. Since our excuses blind us to the facts about ourselves, they soon convince us that we are not to blame for our failure to do right or for our determination to do wrong. Yet our Lord commends us under infinite penalty to obey him. If we cannot do this, then he is the one that is to blame and not ourselves. If when he stands at the door and knocks we cannot open the door at once, it is God's fault, not ours. Thus it comes to pass that our excuses are not only false but they lay the blame on circumstances, on others, but ultimately upon God. The fact that I am not a Christian is not my fault. It is, therefore, God's fault.

3. Since excuse-making tends to convince us that our own moral failures are not blameworthy, this makes repentance impossible. No man consults his physician unless he is convinced that he is sick. No prodigal ever turns his face home until he realizes that he has left home. Our gospel is a gospel for sinners and for sinners only. The only prayer that brings us newness of life is this, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

4. Since excuse-making blinds our eyes and makes repentance impossible, it shuts us away from the feast. What penalty did these men suffer who went one
to see his farm and the other to see his oxen. This all-inclusive penalty is they missed the feast. They missed it here and they missed it yonder. The door to the feast of the fullness of life is open to every man but if you will not enter it, you cannot enjoy it. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Answer: You won't escape at all.
IN THE NAME OF SENSES

"For which of you desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he is enough to complete it?"

Luke 14:28

This parable must have brought a disappointing shock to the friends of Jesus. Here he is facing a large and eager multitude. No doubt there are scores, even hundreds in this multitude who are looking wistfully toward the Master, half persuaded to cast in their lot with him and become disciples. But instead of urging them to this high choice he seems to do the very opposite. He douses their enthusiasm with this cold water, with this parable that we commonly call Counting the Cost. "Watch your step" he seems to say. "Be caution. Do not begin what you cannot finish."

Just what does Jesus mean?

However it may appear on the surface it is perfectly safe to say that this is not a call to cowardly caution. Jesus never taught caution by his life nor by his lips. He himself was not a cautious man. He was the very opposite. He lived daringly. He was so utterly lacking in caution that his own family thought him mad. He was so lacking in caution that he made enemies of the very men that seemingly might have helped him most. He was so lacking
in caution that he was done to death while he was yet in the springtime of his years. Certainly he lived his own life with an abandon that had no kinship with caution.

As he did not teach caution by his life, no more did he teach it by his words. Not once did he commend the prudent individual who was too cautious to take a risk. Instead it was against such that he uttered some of his sharpest rebukes. He told the story of a man who, entrusted with a sum of money to use for his master, buried that money in the earth. This he did not because he resented his master but because he was afraid. He was over-cautious. He was afraid of himself. He felt a sense of inferiority among those who were more greatly gifted than himself.

He was afraid of work. He was afraid of failure. Being too cautious he was able to account for every penny that had been entrusted to him, but in spite of this he lost all that he had and was thrown at once onto the cider pile or burnt-out worthless things. A victim of his too great caution.

"Why did the Priest and the Levite sit in the prison at dark along the side of those rough brigs that robbed and all but murdered their defenseless victim on the Jericho Road? When these two decent and religious men saw the dying man by the road-side their first thought was of themselves. "This is dangerous territory," they told themselves. "The brigands who set upon this poor man may not be a hundred yards away. Therefore I cannot run the risk of helping him." Thus their cowardly caution proved their undoing. They were too good at counting the cost.
Just as Jesus sharply rebuked the cautious, so he gave his most enthusiastic commendations to those who threw caution to the winds and acted with abandon. Once he saw a widow cast her whole living into the offering. It was not much of a living, only a fraction of a cent, yet it was all she had. Therefore, Jesus was filled with enthusiasm over it. In fact he could not wait for the service to end before he told his friends what a grand contribution she had made. It was not the amount of the gift that thrilled him, it was the absurd lack of caution behind the gift that made his heart sing.

On another occasion when he was at a dinner party Mary came and spilled enough ointment in one single point to have been sufficient for a score, if not a hundred. Naturally Judas with his scales that were fit for weighing only pig iron and fertilizer was indignant. "Why this waste", he said, as his brother disciples nodded approval. But Jesus rose in indignant protest: "Let her alone", he demanded. "She hath done a beautiful thing to me". In fact, she had given with such abandon that he declared that her story would go hand in hand with his across all the future centuries.

If then Jesus is not urging caution what is he urging? He is urging that we face the facts. He is telling us to act in matters of religion with as much sanity and common sense as we use in the handling of our daily affairs. He said on another occasion that the children of this age, for their generation, wiser than the children of the light. That is, the man of the world goes about the obtaining of his ends with a sanity and common sense, that the saints do not always employ.
Why should we heed this word, 'spoken in the name of sense'?

1. We ought to face the facts because in no other way can we make an intelligent decision. This is the case because we can build nothing unconditionally. There are certain conditions that the builder has to meet, whether he is building a chicken coop or a skyscraper. This being the case it is only plain good sense to decide on what we are going to build in the light of what we are going to have to put into the building. Quarrel with the fact how we may, we can build nothing on our own terms.

For instance, the vast majority of the peoples of the earth have for years desired a warless world. But the trouble is that we have too often sought to build it on our own terms. We should like to have a strong nation where every man would have a chance, but certain conditions must be met in order to have such a nation. Who of us who belong to the church would not like to see the church the mighty force that it ought to be. We should like a salty church whose presence in the community would give life and power. We should like a church that would make sin and injustice afraid, a church that would indeed be "as bright as the sun, as fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners". Such a church is possible but we cannot have it on our own terms.

Some of you have recently married. You have entered into this beautiful relationship with high expectations. You desire that your home shall abide in peace—that there be a permanence about it that will give you and your children the best possible chance. You can build such
a home if you will. But you cannot build it on your own terms. If both of you are determined to have your own way, then sooner or later your marriage will be a wreck. Sooner or later you will realize that the deepest and sweetest secret of human blessedness has half whispered itself to you, and then forever passed you by.

Who of us with even the slightest appreciation of life finest values would not like to have a radiant religious experience? Who of us would not like to experience what Paul urged upon his fellow-saints? "Be aglow" he writes. Glowing lives have found the secret of abundant living. Glowing souls know the joy of helping others. We should all like to live glowing lives, if we could only live them on our own terms. But since we cannot, since there are conditions to be met, multitudes will fail to win the prize. It is well therefore to face the facts because we can build nothing on our own terms.

2. Not only are there conditions to be met for the putting through of any enterprise, but generally speaking the greater the enterprise the greater the cost. There is a relationship between the investment we make and the returns that we are to expect. In this world we do not get something for nothing. We reap in proportion to our sowing. No sane man would expect a million dollar return on a penny investment. No sane man would expect to build a skyscraper with the sources sufficient only for a ten house. Other things being equal you receive in proportion to your giving. That is neither the reason that cheap religion satisfies God nor man.
This is what the psalmist meant when he said: "They that go down to the ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep." The Jews were not a seafaring people. They feared the sea. They realize that one who should remain in the shelter of his quiet village would not have so daring as one who became a voyager. But while facing this fact he could not shut his eyes to the further fact that if one should throw caution to the winds and dare the dangers of the deep he would see wonders for which the safety-first man must forever be a stranger.

The discoveries we make in the deep, the discoveries we make in God, depend largely upon how fully we venture.

The author of the book of Job emphasizes this truth. He does it with a question, "Canst thou draw Leviathan with a hook". Scholars are not agreed upon what Leviathan is. Some say that it is a whale. Assuming that they are right, this is the situation. The author sees a certain chap going fishing. He asks him what particular kind of fish he is seeking. "Whales" is the easy answer. Now it was perfectly right for this ancient fisherman to set his heart upon the biggest fish in the sea. But what makes his high purpose too tragic for tears is that he is seeking such a big result with such puny equipment. While therefore we commend him for his high purpose, we condemn him for his stupidity. There must be some relationship between the returns we seek and the amount we invest.

3. Finally it is wise to face the facts because our failure to do so is likely to lead to discouragement and even to the abandoning of our enterprise. When a young man came enthusiastic to Jesus, saying: "Lord, I will follow Thee wheresoever Thou goest", The Lord did not
answer with an equal enthusiasm. Why not? Certainly it was not
because he was not eager for men to do just what this man was proposing
to do. His lack of enthusiasm was born of the fact that he saw that
this chap had not faced the facts. He was setting himself to the
task of climbing a mountain with a mole hill of an effort. Thus he
knew he would become discouraged. Becoming discouraged, he was likely
to quit and give over the enterprise altogether.

Now it is this quitting that is the only regrettable tragedy. If
one wishes to build a tower a foundation is necessary. But the
foundation has value only because of the tower that is constructed upon it. Nobody is in the market for a foundation.
Any building left unfinished is not a poem but a ruin.

The little town where we did our trading when I was a boy, was
some 25 miles from a railroad. One day a gentleman came into our
backwoods community declaring that he was going to build a road to
connect with the one 25 miles away. He hired a number of workers
and set himself to the task, to the admiration and enthusiasm of the
people of the village. But before his road bed was a mile long, his
money gave out, and there his monument stands to this day, a
monument not to his intelligence, but to his stupidity. The enterprise was good,
but he was not able to see it through to completion.

One of the most thrilling words in the New Testament is this:
"He gave them power to become." The tragedy of this tower builder, was
not that he built it slowly but that he ceased to build entirely. That
is the only calamity that spells utter loss. Demas had a wonderful
chance. He made a great beginning. He had once been a companion of Paul and of Paul's Christ. His tragedy was not failure to grow rapidly. It was rather that he quit. Paul had to write of him, this sentence: "Demas hath forsaken me". It is well therefore to face the facts about being a Christian. Failing to do so we might not realize that we can build nothing unconditionally. That other things being equal, our investment determines our returns. Failing to face facts we might even grow disguised and quite altogether. This word of Jesus is therefore a word spoken in the name of common sense.

**V. III**

What then is the choice before us?

It is this; whether we should build or refuse to build. No man has to build a Christ-like character. If we do not desire to build, no power on heaven or earth can compel us. But if we do desire to build, then no power can prevent it. "Behold I stand at the door and knock" saith the Lord. But that is all that Jesus will ever do. He will never crash the door. He will never drive anybody to the building of a Christ-like character. So to build, or not to build is the question that confronts everyone of us.

In making our choice we need to realize something of the cost of building. What does it cost to build a Christ-like character?

Answer: It costs everything. It costs the giving of self. Nothing less will do. Jesus with shocking bluntness puts it this way:; If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my
Of course, our Lord is not here using the word *hate* to mean what it generally means to us. No man can be a Christian and hate anybody. Not only so, but to be a Christian is to tone up and sweeten every human relationship. Every Christian father is a better father for being a Christian. Every Christian mother is a better mother. Being a Christian sweetens and stabilizes every human relationship. What Jesus means therefore, is not that we are to hate anybody. He does mean that we are not to let anybody come between us and him. He, himself must come first. He gives us his all, saying; "This is my body, myself, my everything." He must have a like self-giving on our part.

If this seems a big price to pay for discipleship—before we decide not to pay it we ought to realize the cost of refusing to build. If you as a youth are thinking of getting an education, and are about to decide that the price is too great, let me ask you to consider the price of passing up your opportunity. One day a young man of vast charm ran to meel at the feet of Jesus. He was in quest of eternal life; Jesus told him how he might possess this finest of all prizes. But when I met this young man an hour later the light had gone out of his eyes, and the spring out of his step. "Did you get what you wanted", I asked. "No", he answered. "Why not", was he not able to give you eternal life?" "Yes, he was able", came the reply, "but it cost too much".

Even so before this interview, this young man was very rich. After the interview he had all the millions that he had before. The interview hadn't cost him a cent. He clutched his treasure and turned his back on Jesus and went away. He really paid a terrible price—instead of
going away with a spring in his step and a glow in his heart, he went away grieved. Financially it didn't cost him a cent. In reality, it cost him everything that made life rich, and thrilling and glamorous. If, therefore, it costs \text{minimum} to build, it costs far more not to build. Because this is true, I urge you to make the response that another rich man made, whose money had failed to satisfy him. One day, Jesus said to Matthew: "Follow me". Then what? Matthew rose up and followed him. Thus he found the best in the life that now is. Finding the best here, we may be sure that he is still finding the best as he continues his progress amid the mountain heights of eternity.
"Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, when he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock, saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish". Luke 14: 28-30

The Master is facing a great and eager crowd. There are scores, perhaps hundreds, who are looking wistfully in his direction and wondering if they had better cast in their lot with him and become disciples. But, instead of encouraging them in their half-formed purpose, He douses them with this bucket of cold water, with this parable that enjoins counting the cost. "Watch your step," he seems to say. "Play it safe. Do not start what you cannot finish."

Just what does Jesus mean? What is he saying to these people of the long ago? What is he saying to us?

It is perfectly safe to say that he is not calling us to a cowardly caution. Jesus himself was not a cautious man. He was the very opposite. He lived daringly. So utterly was he lacking in caution that he alienated from him the very men that everybody believed could have helped him most in his great enterprise. So lacking was he in caution that he was done to death when he was yet in the springtime of his years. Surely he lived his own life with an abandon that had no kinship with caution.

As he did not teach caution by his life, no more did he teach it by his words. He never commended the prudent individual
who was too cautious to take a risk. He told the story of a man who had been entrusted by his employer with a large sum of money which he was to use in his master's interest. But this man was afraid that he might not be able to win as much as his more gifted fellows. He was afraid that if he dared to trade he might even lose his one talent. Therefore, he took the prudent way. He hid the money in the earth. But when the day of reckoning came, though he could account for every penny that he had received, his lord did not commend him. Instead, he had him thrown out on the cinder pile of burnt out and worthless things.

On another occasion Jesus told of a certain minister who was returning home from the filling of an appointment. As he passed along a dangerous strip of road, he came upon a desperately wounded man. But, strange to say, his first thought was not of this poor sufferer by the road side. His first thought was of himself. Therefore, he played it safe, passed on the other side, and reached his home without a scratch. But, Jesus did not commend him. He, rather, placed him in the prisoner's dock beside the brigands who had robbed the man and all but done him to death.

But, while Jesus never commended the cautious, he did commend those who were seemingly reckless. One day he rose in indignant defense of a woman who had broken for him a whole vase of precious ointment. Of course her conduct was a bit unreasonable. A small fraction of that ointment would have been sufficient. Yet she poured it all out in one wasteful act. Judas was angry, and his fellow disciples along with him. But Jesus said, "Let her alone. She has wrought a beautiful work on me".

On another day Jesus went to the temple. When the offering
IN THE NAME OF SENSE

was being received, he saw a woman recklessly cast in all her liv-
ing. It was not much of a living. It was less than a penny. But, her deed of devotion so filled Jesus with enthusiasm that he could not wait for the service to end before he called his friends to-
gether to tell them of the beautiful deed that he had witnessed.

Thus, while Jesus has no word of commendation for the cautious, he does commend those who live and give with abandon.

If Jesus is not urging caution, then what is he urging? He is telling us to think, to use our heads. He is speaking in

the name of sense. He is insisting that we bring to the affairs of religion the same thoughtfulness that we bring to the ordinary affairs of life. In another parable he made this assertion: "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light". That is, the man of the world generally goes about his objective with a clear-headed sanity that the Christian does not always employ.

In proof of this he told of a certain chap who discovered that he was going to lose his job. When he made this discovery he went into conference with himself and reached a definite decision. He said, "After I lose my job, I still must eat, I must have a roof over my head and clothing to wear". In otherwords, he had to have what so many are putting first today, security. "Now", he said, "I know how to win security. I can win it by misappropriating the wealth of my master. Of course by so doing I must become a rascal. But since comfort is so much more important than char-
acter, I am willing to pay the price". So he executed his plan and thus won his objective.

Jesus is of course not urging us to imitate the ras-
celity of this man, but only his shrewdness. It is as if he said, "Some of you are thinking of becoming my disciples. Some of you are half-persuaded to begin the building of a Christ-like character. Before you do you ought to face the facts. You ought to consider what you are undertaking to build, how much it will cost, and if you are willing to pay the price.

II

The wisdom of such a course is obvious.

1. This is the case because it is only as we do this that we can make an intelligent choice. No man contemplating the building of any sort of structure would go about it in a haphazard fashion. He would employ an architect to draw a plan. He would ascertain the cost, then decide whether or not he desired to construct the building on those terms. This he would do, not because he was cowardly or cautious. He would do it, rather, because he is a man of practical sense. Even so, Jesus urged us to face something of what is involved in becoming a Christian before we make our decision.

Such a course is wise because we can build nothing on our own terms. This is true both of the group and of the individual. Every congregation, I think, would like to have a vigorous, vital, church, if they could have it on their own terms. Perhaps all of us who belong to the Church would like for our church to be a salty, tangy, preventative force in the community. Such a church is about the most winsome something of which I can conceive. Not only so, but we could have that kind of church if we were only willing to pay the price. But we can not have it on our own terms. We can build nothing worth while unconditionally.
The same is true of the home. I am sure that almost all young people who marry desire that their marriage be permanent, and that the home that they establish shall abide in peace. But, if the home is to be permanent, the marriage tie must be permanent. It is upon marriage that the home rests. If marriage is a thing of rock, then the home will stand, if it is a thing of sand, then the home will crash into ruins. But while many are eager to make a success of marriage and thus build permanent homes, they cannot do so on their own terms.

As it is with the group so it is with the individual. Everyone of us, I take it, would like to have a strong, healthy body. Of course, for some this is impossible, but it is possible for far more than attain it. However greatly gifted in physical strength you may be, you cannot keep that strength unconditionally. There are certain demands that you must meet. You have to eat and drink, you have to sleep, you have to obey the laws of health. No man can have a strong, sound body on his own terms.

Some of you young people who are thinking of winning an education. That is a commendable ambition. But I warn you that you cannot have an education on your own terms. If you could rub a book on the side of your head at night and wake up in the morning with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, almost everyone of you would do so. But, you cannot win in that way. There is a price to be paid, and because some of you are not willing to pay the price, we will miss the prize.

The same is true in matters of religion. How many would like to have a rich and radiant religious experience? There are few of us who would not like to be able to say with Paul, "I
know whom I have believed". There are few of us, indeed, who would not like to be channels through which the amazing love and grace of God might flow out to others. That possibility is within reach of everyone of us. But many will miss it because we cannot have it on our own terms. It is plain good sense therefore, to face the fact that we can win nothing of value in this world without paying the price.

2. Not only is it impossible for us to build anything on our own terms, but there is a relationship between the end to be attained and what we put into it. If we expect big returns, we must be willing to make a big investment. The Bible teaches that truth over and over again. It says, "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly". We need not be either offended or amazed at that. Naturally the man who sows one bushel of wheat will not expect to reap as abundant harvest as the man who sows ten thousand bushels. Our investments determine our returns.

A certain psalmist taught the same truth in this way. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep". The Jews were not a seafaring people. They were afraid of the sea. But, this poet recognized the fact that the man who dared the dangers of the sea would make discoveries that were impossible for one who remained in the safety of his village, or whose greatest voyage was on a millpond. He is affirming that, other things being equal, the wealth of our discoveries is conditioned upon the fullness of our adventure.

The Book of Job states the same fact by asking a question. "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?" Scholars are not
agreed upon what a leviathan is. Some say that it is a whale. Assuming that they are right, this is the situation. The author saw a certain chap going fishing. This man had not only decided to fish, but he had decided upon the particular kind of fish that he was going to catch. He was going after the \textit{greatest} fish in the sea. That was the good. He had a definite purpose, and it was a worthy purpose.

But while we commend this man for his definite and worthy purpose, we have either to pity him (if we are tender-hearted) or laugh at him (if we are cruel) for seeking to attain such a great end by such puny means. No wonder this kindly author asks with amazement, "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook? Do you expect such big returns on so small an investment"? We ought, therefore, to count the cost, in order that we may make an intelligent choice.

3. We ought to count the cost, because if we fail to do so and find the undertaking harder than we expected we are likely to become disappointed and discouraged. To set out to climb an ant-hill and find that we are tackling a mountain might prove very disconcerting. It might even take the heart out of us. Jesus spoke chillingly to a young enthusiast who came to him saying, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest". He did this not because he did not desire that this man become a disciple. He did it rather because he was sure that the young man did not understand the price to be paid, and thus failing to understand would likely become quickly discouraged.

4. We need this warning not only because without it we are in danger of becoming discouraged, but we are likely to quit, to give up the enterprise altogether. Now, quitting is the supreme
end the supreme tragedy. Understand that what Jesus is warning against is not the slow building of the tower. So long as the builder keeps at his task though his progress be ever so slow, there is infinite hope. Remember that in the building of a Christ like character, we have a whole eternity in which to work. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be, but we know when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". This warning therefore, is not against slowness, it is against quitting. To quit spells the loss of everything.

When I was a boy a man came into our backwoods community with the announcement that he was going to build a railroad. Many took him seriously. He hired scores of workers and set them to throwing up a road bed. But when his road bed was less than a mile long his money gave out, and he had to quit. Therefore, nobody commended him for his wisdom. This was the case because his unfinished work was a complete loss. All he had done was not worth a penny.

The matter of a foundation, if one is going to build a tower is of fundamental importance. But, it is important solely because of the superstructure that is to be erected upon it. If no superstructure is erected, then the foundation becomes worthless. I do not know of anybody who is in the market for a foundation. To fail to finish is only to build a worthless ruin.

So it is in matters of religion. The one utter calamity is to quit. Judas entered the fellowship of Jesus and builded for a while. What wrecked him? It was not that he betrayed his Lord. That was a terrible sin. But the sin that spelled his final ruin
was this: He refused to come back to his Master and accept forgiveness. If he had only trusted his betrayed Lord more than he trusted a hangman's noose, instead of being one of the most tragic characters of our history, he would have been one of the saints of sacred story. It is wise, therefore, to face the facts, to count the cost. Otherwise we cannot make an intelligent choice. Otherwise we are likely to become discouraged. Otherwise we are likely to quit altogether. That alone spells the tragedy.

III

What, then, is the choice before us?

It is this: Whether we shall build or not build. No man has to build. If you desire to build then no power in earth or hell can prevent our building. But, if we are determined not to build, no power in heaven or earth can compel us to build. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock", saith the Lord. But that is all Jesus will do. He will never crash the door. He will never compel anybody to the building of a Christ-like character. He will not, because in the nature of things he cannot. So to build or not to build, that is the question. That choice is up to everyone of us.

In making this choice we need to realize something of the cost of building. What does it cost to build a Christ like character? Answer, it costs everything. It costs the giving of self. Nothing less will do. Jesus, with shocking bluntness, puts it this way. "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life, also, he cannot be my disciple".
IN THE NAME OF SENSE

Of course, Jesus is not here using hate in the usual sense. No man can be a Christian and hate anybody. Furthermore, it is true that to be a Christian, to tone up, sweeten, and stabilize every human relationship. Every father is a better father if he is a Christian. Every mother is a better mother if she is a Christian. I have seen not a few homes go up on the rocks. But, so far as I remember, I have never seen one single marriage fail where both husband and wife were vitally Christian. Being a Christian, I repeat, sweetens and stabilizes every human relationship. What Jesus means, therefore, is this; that he himself must come first. That we must be Lord of all.

Now, if this seems a big price, before we decide not to pay it, we ought to face the cost of refusing to. For, if to build is costly, to refuse to build is even more so. What has it cost our world, our nation to refuse to build according to the plan of Jesus Christ? We have already paid a price beyond our powers to estimate. Today our scientists are more emphatic than the ministers in affirming that our final price will be the ruin of civilization, that to refuse to be saved spiritually is to die physically.

Even so the refusal to follow Jesus is costly for the individual. Years ago when I was just out of my teens I found myself desperately ill in a town in the Southwest of Texas. My physician, realizing that I was a stranger in a strange land, took me into his confidence. He told me my trouble and indicated two possible courses. "I can operate or I can try to pilot you over the crisis without an operation." My answer was this, "I am eager to live. Give me your opinion as to which course offers the better promise of life." "To operate will be dangerous", he advised,
but to refuse will be more dangerous still! I, therefore, took my decision in the light, both of the cost of undergoing the operation and of the cost of refusal.

One day a winsome young man came to Jesus bent on obtaining eternal life. But when the Master told him what it would cost, he went away. I met him again in the village a little later and said, "I saw you just now hurrying to Jesus in quest of Life. Did you get it?" "No", he answered. "Why didn't you, wasn't he able to give it to you?" "Oh, yes". "He was able, wasn't he willing?" "Yes, indeed". "Then, why didn't you get it?" "It cost too much," came the reply. "I was not willing to pay the price". But there was a price that he did pay and that was the missing of the life for which he longed.

There was another young man who encountered this same Christ. But, instead of turning away and saying the price was too great, he said, "Lord, what will thou have me do?" and thus putting himself in the hands of Jesus Christ, he suffered the loss of all things. Yet, he lived so abundantly that to this very hour he breathes upon our wintry world like a breath of spring.

Here, then, is the choice that confronts everyone of us. Are we going to take Jesus seriously or not? If we follow him, it will cost us everything. That means that however rich we are we cannot hold back a penny. But there is this brighter side. It also means that however poor we are, we have enough. All that Jesus is asking is that wholeheartedly we commit ourselves to him. If we do that we can certainly build a tower of Christlikeness that will meet our needs today and forever. What is your answer?
THE SUPREME INDIVIDUALIST

"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."
Luke 15:7

As a boy in school I was often indebted to some dull who were courageous enough to ask questions that I desired and needed to ask but was prevented from asking by my too great humility of pride. But this fellow would cause the teacher to light up for me what would have otherwise remained in darkness. Even so we are indebted to the foes of Jesus for some of his choicest teachings. Here, for instance, are certain very respectable men, pillars in Church and state, who feel that the Master is showing far too much consideration to tax collectors and outcasts. Hence they declare in hot anger, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them."

Our Lord does not deny the charge. Instead he confesses the truthfulness of it and affirms the essential reasonableness and rightness of his conduct. "I am acting toward people," he seems to say, "as any sensible farmer would act toward his livestock, as any good shepherd would act toward his sheep." Then he told them this story. "What man of you having a hundred sheep, if you lose one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost until he find it. And when he hath found it he laid it on his shoulder rejoicing, and when he cometh home calleth together his friends and neighbors saying unto them, 'Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost.' I say unto you likewise, 'Joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.'"

I

Here speaks the supreme individualist. I am quite aware that this word "individualist" has fallen upon evil days. Bad company has been its ruin. What epithet is more damming to our modern ears than that of rugged individualist.
Yet the ugliness of this type of individualist is that it is so fractional. This so-called individualist is interested too often only in himself, or perhaps in his board of directors. But the individualism of Jesus was full bodied. Of course he was interested in crowds as a shepherd is interested in his whole flock. But his interest in crowds was expressed through his interest in the individual. It was the man that counted, not the group. He never lost the one among the many. He never lost the individual in the crowd.

This interest of Jesus in the individual is apparent in so much he said and did. I daresay that hundreds of travelers as they made that dangerous journey from Jerusalem to Jericho had fallen among thieves. But when Jesus tells us a story connected with that bloody road, he does not point out a hundred or a dozen or even two. He calls our attention to only one. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves." Then he tells us of three other men who passed that way. All three of those men were judged, or judged themselves, by their attitude to this one individual. Jesus' interest was constantly in the one.

On another occasion when he was on his way to the house of a church official a certain woman with a shame-faced disease made her way through the crowd and touched the tassel of his robe and found healing for her tortured body. Having been healed, she was eager to slip away with just half a blessing. But Jesus had a better purpose for her. So he turned in the midst of the passing crowd and asked, "Who touched me?" To Simon the question seemed the height of absurdity. But Jesus forgot the many in the presence of the need of the one. He refused to continue his journey until he had dealt with that single individual and had said to her, "Go in peace, thy faith hath made thee whole."

There was a certain home in the village of Bethany where Jesus always found a welcome. I can imagine that more than once he went additional weary miles to seek the comfort of that home. It was to him as rivers of water in a dry place
and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. But when the author tells us of his devotion to this home, he does not say that he loved the Bethany family. He rather says that he loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. He loved this family as you love your family, not as a group but as individuals.

Not only does Jesus fix his love upon the individual, but he does so strictly as an individual and not as one belonging to a certain class or to a certain group. When this shepherd found that he had lost one sheep he did not ask what kind of sheep it was. It may have been a blooded sheep that would have brought a high price. It may have been a scrub. It may have been a silly sheep that had a habit of getting lost. But the one fact that counted was this... That the sheep was lost, any kind of sheep. Even so Jesus was interested in people as individuals.

On his way into Jericho one day a beggar called out to him. The crowd tried to silence him, but the more they tried the louder this beggar became in his outcry. At last Jesus heard him and stopped the whole procession till he had the man brought to him. Then he fairly put the key of Heaven in his hands by asking, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" When the man stated the longing of his heart Jesus answered, "Thy faith has made thee whole." As our Lord continued his journey he entered Jericho. Arrived in that city, he saw a man who had climbed into a tree to see him. This man was rich, perhaps he was a millionaire. Jesus said to him, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down for today I must abide at thy house." These two men were as far apart as the poles. One of them was a beggar and the other was rich, but Jesus made not the slightest distinction between them. By what he said one could not tell who was the beggar and who the millionaire.

In the third chapter of John's gospel there is the story of a certain churchman who one night honored Jesus by paying him a visit. This visitor was a scholarly gentleman. He was a man of character and distinction. Almost any body would have been flattered by such a visitor. But if Jesus was flattered he gave
no indication of the fact. Instead he spoke not to the words of the man's lips but to the hunger of his heart. He told him that though he had been a loyal son of the church for so many years, he had missed the best because he had not been born anew. He preached him that profound and simple sermon on the new birth.

In the fourth chapter of this same gospel our Lord had seemingly by coincidence another visitor. This visitor was neither a scholar nor a religious teacher. She was a woman. Not only so, but she was a Samaritan woman. Not only was she a Samaritan woman, but an outcast at that. Yet Jesus treated her with the same gracious and courteous consideration that he had shown the scholarly churchman. He no more fawned upon the one than he condescended to the other. Jesus was interested in individuals as individuals.

Not only so, but he judged every institution of his day in the light of what that institution did to the individual. He was a loyal son of the church but he condemned a certain type of evangelism that was being practiced by his church. He did this because he declared that the evangelists made their converts twice as much a child of hell as they were themselves. Jesus looked upon the Sabbath with reverence. He declared that the Sabbath was made for man, that is, that it fits into human needs. It is made for man as air is made for the lungs and as light is made for the eye. Yet he saw that the religious leaders of his day were using the Sabbath in such a fashion as to make it a hindrance rather than a help; therefore he condemned such use in hot anger. He judged every movement because of its influence upon the individual.

It is in the light of what they do to the individual that we are to judge the institutions and practices of our day. Any social order that degrades the individual is to be repudiated or changed. We condemn war because it is destructive to the individual. Some of us condemn liquor because of what it does to the individual. Liquor today has become far more respectable than it was thirty years ago. Thirty years ago it was an outcast and a bum. Today it is a bit of a Cinderella. But no man can intelligently defend liquor because when it gets hold of an indivi-
dual it always gets hold of him to destroy him. We are to judge the state. We are to judge every habit and every institution in the light of what it does to the individual.

II

We can pass from the one to many -- Ruth, "Thy people... my people" -- seldom from many to one. Now the wisdom of Jesus in putting his emphasis on the individual is easily seen.

1. It is as we love the individual that we take the first step toward loving the group or the mass or the wide world. No man can love any individual intelligently without thereby taking an interest in the whole world. I said to a gentleman one day, "I am trying to help some orphans and I want a donation from you." He answered, "I have an orphan of my own to support." (He might have been speaking more truly than he realized.) But his refusal to take an interest in children other than his own was not only selfish, but foolish. This was the case because his boy was bound up in a bundle of life with other children. He had to play with other children, to go to school with them, to live with them. Therefore, if this father had really been intelligently interested in his own child, he would have been interested in other children, and in all that concerned them. He would have been interested in the kind of amusements that his town affords. Since his child must one day be one of the world's workers, he would be interested in working conditions. Since he wants his child to live out his allotted span of life, he would be interested in whether he lives in a peaceful world or a war-torn world. It is impossible intelligently to love any individual without thereby taking a step toward wearing a map of the world on your soul.

On the other hand, to love the mass or to claim to love the mass, and ignore the individual is to ignore both the mass and the individual. At the close of a certain service some time ago an enthusiastic gentleman came forward to express to me his eager longing to do religious work. "What is your business?" I asked. "I
am a traveling man," he replied. "Well," I said, "Do you meet any friends on the road who are not Christians?" "Oh yes," he said, "plenty of them." "How about talking to them and commending to them your Saviour?" I asked. "Oh," he answered, "I do not want to work on so small a scale as that. I want to prepare a lecture and deliver it to your congregation." At once I saw that he was not interested in individuals, that he was not really interested in the masses. He was only interested in an opportunity to shine.

In his Locksley Hall, Tennyson looked forward to a great era, "Where the individual withers and the world is more and more." But there will never come a situation like that. This is the case because where the individual withers, everything else withers as well. Where the individual withers, the home withers. Where the individual withers, the church withers. We are living in a day where the individual has withered in almost half the world. But this has not made that half of the world better or more free. It has changed it into a tyranny. To ignore the individual is to ignore the mass and to help to wreck it. Rightly to love the individual is to head toward a love for the whole world.

III

Now this love of our Lord for the individual is the very heart and center of our gospel. What will it do for us if we listen to it with open minds and open hearts?

1. It will lay our pride in the dust. Listen to this strange word. "I say unto you, there shall be joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." One has suggested that Jesus spoke that sentence with a twinkle in his eye. If he did, behind that twinkle there was surely also a tear. For the man who needs no repentance is one who has never sinned. The man who has never sinned is one who in reality does not exist. He is only self-deceived.

The Pharisee who went up into the temple to pray was a man of this type. He was sure that he had no need of repentance. He only needed to tell how good
he himself was and how bad were all his fellows. The elder son of whom Jesus speaks a little later in this immortal chapter was another man who had no need of repentance. Listen to his declaration, "All these years do I serve thee; neither transgress I at any time thy commandments." He had been everything that he ought to have been. But this conviction of his own perfect goodness did not help him. It rather shut the door to the feast in his face. This was the case because our gospel is a gospel for sinners only. If you are not a sinner, then you have no need of a Saviour. If you have no need you will neither sin nor find him who came to save those who are lost.

2. This personal love of Jesus for the individual gives us a bracing self-respect that every man needs. He needs such self-respect especially in our day when so much is being done to dwarf and belittle the individual. This spells tragedy because no man is in a better position to waste his life than the man who does not think his life matters. If you do not think we count for anything, then the chances are that you will not. There is nobody, I repeat, more tempted to throw himself away than the man who has no sense of personal worth. Grasshopper saints by having a contempt for themselves find others quite ready to share their contempt and thus to help guarantee their failure.

I read somewhere of a gentleman who was making a voyage in northern waters. One day he put into a little cove off the coast of Newfoundland. There he found a fisherman who was living close to the edge of starvation. This fisherman showed his visitor a barrel of soapy looking substance that he had taken from the stomach of a whale. He was eager to know whether or not this bit of soapy ugliness had any value. The visitor had to answer that he did not know. But he promised to take a sample of it back to the city and have it examined. Having done this, he discovered that it was ambergris, a substance of great value. Naturally he made his way back to the fisherman's hut as quickly as possible. But he was too late. The fisherman had had some need of his barrel and so he had poured out his ambergris and had thereby thrown away some $200,000 in value. Nobody, I repeat, is in greater
danger of wasting himself than the one who does not think he matters.

I am quite sure that the man of one talent felt elated as he came from the presence of his lord. He had been entrusted with a talent. That was a lot of money, a sum that would have taken a laborer some twenty years to have earned. But his self-respect soon gave way to self-contempt because he met a friend who had twice as much. A little later he met another friend who had five times as much. Therefore, in his disparaging of himself he went and hid his Lord's money in the earth. Thus he threw his chance away, because he had no bracing self-respect.

Now just as there is something weakening in self-contempt, there is something bracing in a high and holy self-respect. That was what gave the Puritan his power. Thomas Macaulay tells us that every one of them felt that he was a being to whom a mysterious and terrible importance belonged. That it was for him that empires had risen and flourished and decayed. That it was for him that the sun had been darkened and that all nature had shuddered at the agony of her expiring God. Because of this high and holy self-esteem, even though "he groveled in the dust before his Maker, he set his foot upon the neck of his king." Thus he brought England in a few short years from a third rate power to be the mightiest power in the world. As there is something debilitating in self-contempt, even so there is something bracing in that holy self-esteem that is born of a realization of the personal love of Jesus Christ.

Finally, it is this personal love of the Good Shepherd for each lost sheep that gives him his supreme drawing power. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." There is nothing so magnetic as love. We delight to go where we are wanted. We are loath to go anywhere else. That is what makes home to most of us the dearest spot in the world. We know that if we go there, we shall be welcome. If we fail to go, we shall be missed. "He is constantly saying to every one of us: "You mean something to me that nobody else means. You can do something
for me that nobody else can do. I can do something for you that nobody else can do. I can never be contented without you. As long as you are away I am going to miss you. When you come home there is going to be more joy in my heart over your coming than over ninety and nine decent and respectable folks who feel that they do not need to come."

Here then is a gospel that fits into our need. It is a gospel that lifts us by giving us a new and bracing self-respect. The author of Revelation affirms this when he shouts, "To him that loved us and loosed us from our sins and made us to be Kings and priests unto God." He breaks our fetters and changes our defeat into victory. He makes us sure that we count, sure that life is priceless and that it is good to be a saint. This seeking Savior is seeking you today. Even now in love he is on your track. Not only so, but he will never rest and he will never give us rest until he finds us. God grant that he may find us even now!
FACING THE FACTS

Luke 15:17 "I Perish With Hunger"

Here is a young man in earnest conversation. He is not talking to a friend, he is talking to himself. We all talk to ourselves at times. Such conversations are important. They might be important because it is good to know what an intelligent person thinks. But they are important most of all because if you tell me what you habitually say to yourself I will tell you what you are and what increasingly you are becoming. It is important to tell the truth at all times. "Why not," said Paul, "because we are members one of another." Lying hurts the other fellow but the most deadly form of lying is to lie to oneself. To do that is to put a roadblock on the path of moral and spiritual progress.

This young man is not only talking to himself but he is telling himself the truth. You remember the woman with the shamefaced disease. She had suffered for twelve long years. She had gone to physician after physician who had relieved her of nothing but her money. Now we hear her in conversation with herself. Had she told herself that she had recovered or had she told herself that there was no chance of recovery even at the hands of Jesus she would have hastened her steps to the grave but what she said to herself was this: "In spite of all my failures if I touch but the hem of His garment I shall be healed," and thus talking and encouraging herself she found healing. This young man told himself the truth about himself. Now what were the wholesome and bracing facts and what were the depressing facts that as a fact-finding committee he brought out about himself.
First, he faced the fact that he was disappointed in his winnings. He had spent a great deal, he had given up the privileges of home, he had given up fellowship with his father, he had spent all that he had and what had come of it? The best he had to say for himself was this: "I perish with hunger, I have not found what I set out to find regardless of the purity or baseness of my motives when I left home I did not leave in order to disappoint my father. I did not leave in order to find the companionship of swine, I did not leave in order to be tortured by hunger, but regardless of my motives this is what has happened. I had not found life's finest satisfaction. I perish with hunger."

Now it strikes me that this confession of this prodigal is a characteristic confession of our generation. We are not greatly concerned about our wrongdoing. Our confessions of sin do not burst from us with the tears and wrecked with shame but we are conscious of emptiness. We are conscious of heart-hunger; we are conscious of burning thirst. We are conscious, millions of us, of the fact that we have not found satisfaction for the deepest longings of our souls. Here is a minister congratulating one of the greatest actresses of the day and when he had finished she answered, "Don't talk to me about that, what I want is peace and rest. Rest and peace. Well, that is what everybody wants and that is what very few are finding.

When Jesus in conversation with the woman at the well said to her, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst, for the water that I shall give him shall be within him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." He spoke on what everybody needs, for if we drink of the wells of this world we thirst again. What I need is an inward well, a well that makes me independent of outward circumstances that when all other human resources are cut off I can still find inward satisfaction, a well
That springs up unto eternal life. But most of us have missed that well. That is true of many outside the Church as well as many within the Church.

I have always had a profound sympathy for that fine old churchman, Nicodemus. He had given his life to the service of the church. He was a clean, scholarly gentleman but as he looked into his half-empty hands and his half-empty heart he said to himself, "I wonder if this is God's best for me and that wonder was brought to a climax when he heard that a young rabbi was spending the night in the city of Jerusalem. He made up his mind to go to see this rabbi. This he did in spite of the fact that his own friends had turned their backs upon him and had denounced him. He went with fear and trembling. He did not desire to go. He went because the hunger of his heart compelled him to go and when he came face to face with Jesus, our Lord spoke home to the needs of his soul rather than to the words of his lips and told him how he could find life's fullest satisfaction.

"I perish with hunger." That is the conscious or unconscious declaration of millions today. We affirm it by a mad pursuit of amusement. Winston Churchill said recently that England was standing upon a trap door that she might at any time be plunged into an economic abyss. What was the matter? One big matter was this - she was spending her meager income on pleasures, amusements and gambling. In this country we are doing the same. Adding to it such quantities of liquor as we have never drunk before. It is our way of seeking satisfaction that we have not found. And Isaiah, if he were here now, would stand in front of this stampeding crowd and throw up his hands as in the long ago and say, "Wherefor do you spend money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfieth now." This young man honestly faced this fact: "I have made an adventure seeking satisfaction and it has been a keen disappointment, I have not found it. I have found only hunger of heart."
PART TWO

The second fact that this young man faced was this. "I am hungry and the fault is my very own." Now he might have closed the door of possibility in his face by refusing to look that fact in the eye. He might have blamed his predicament on his friends. His friends had let him down. They had been glad to associate with him as long as his pockets were well lined, but when he had spent all that he had and nothing was left he had no companions but the hogs of the swine pens. He might have put the blame on his brother who was as cold as an icicle and hard as a nail. He might have put the blame on his father. He might have said, "My father ought never to have given me the money, he ought not to have let me free."

Such a conviction has been pronounced more than once. Old Omar Khayyam laid the faults of sin upon God -

"Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And who with Paradise devise the Snake;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness give -- and take."

That is, my sin is not my fault, it is the fault of God, but so long as we take this attitude we never move one-millionth of an inch towards a better life. This young man did dare, in spite of all his failure, to face the grim and depressing fact - I am hungry, I missed the way and the fact that I missed it is my own fault, I really had nobody to blame but myself.

PART THREE

A third fact that he faced, and without this fact his facing of the other facts would have done no good. They would only have plunged him into the pits of desolation and despair. He said, "I have missed the way and I have missed it through my own faults. But I do not have to keep on missing it. In spite of the fact that I have left my father's house, in spite of the fact that I
have left my father's house of my own choice I can return to my father's house also of my own choice though I have done wrong I can do right. Though I am sick I may be well. Though I am in the far country I may return to the peace and plenty of my father's house. I do not have to remain as I am.

This is the very heart of the gospel. John tells us that Jesus gives us power to become. That is the most amazing power, it seems to me, in the universe. There is no measuring how greatly wrong we could go, there is no measuring how greatly right we can go. From the very place on which I stand two roads stretch away: one dips downward and ever downward until it loses itself in the quagmires of desolation and death, the other climbs upward and ever upward to where the light lingers even when the sun is set. I can take either road I choose. And so this young man, disappointed in himself, knowing that it was his own fault, said, "Though I am wrong, I may be right." That is what every sinner can say to himself however far he may have gone, however long he may have lingered in the far country.

PART FOUR

A fourth fact that this man faced about himself was this - If I am to get back into the fellowship of my father the choice is up to me. If I do not desire to go back no one in Heaven or earth can compel me. If I do desire and will to go back nobody in earth or hell can prevent me. If I am ever to become what I ought to become, if I am ever to find satisfaction for the gnawing hungers and the burning thirsts of my soul, if I am ever to be able to be a channel of these satisfactions for others I must do something about it, nobody can do that but me; it is a choice that must be my very own.

Now only must I be willing to act but I must be willing to do whatever is necessary in order to get back to my father's house. I came away by the road of self will. In going back I must travel the one road that leads back into his fellowship. If you had decided to find good health you must obey the laws of health. The road that you take to health is not optional, it is arbitrary.
If you have decided to win an education you must take a certain road. It is not optional, it is arbitrary. You cannot decide to know by simply rubbing a book on the top of your head once a month. If you have made up your mind to become a musician, narrow is the way. You must take the road that leads there. So if you have decided to go back to the peace and plenty of your father's house you must travel the one road that leads back and that is the road of self-surrender. The road of self-giving, of self-dedication. The young man went away because he was determined to do as he pleased. He only can get back by ceasing to say, "Give me," and by saying, "Take me." There is no road back except the road of personal surrender.

Not only must he be willing to do something about it, not only must he be willing to do anything about it, but he must be willing to act in the here and now. He must bring his decision to the present moment or it will come to naked nothing. We must act in the here and now because now is the only time we have. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow has not come - indeed it never will. The only time that our Lord offers us salvation is now. If we refuse to act in the now, if we refuse now to set our feet upon the road that leads back into His presence then we refuse forever.

Felix was deeply stirred by the preaching of Paul. We read that he shuddered. What he said to himself was this: "The preacher is telling the truth, I am deeply concerned about what he says. I am so deeply concerned that one day I am going to take him seriously, when a convenient season comes I am going to make my decision." But what he really said was this, "At any cost, whatever it may be, I am not going to make the decision now." And refusing to choose the way of Christ in the here and now he refused forevermore. There is but one way to find your way back to God and that is to act in the here and now.

PART FIVE

When this young man thus faced the facts about himself, when he told himself the honest truth that he was wrong and that he could be right and that
he is ever to be right he himself must act. That nobody can prevent his getting right and that nobody can compel him to be right and when he put his decision into action what happened?

Here is his thrilling story, the most tenderly beautiful and the most beautifully tender ever told. His father saw him, he had compassion on him, that is, he shared his heartache; he felt the gnawing of his hunger, he blushed in his shame. He ran, fell on his neck and kissed him. He said, "Make haste and bring forth the best robe and put it on him. Bring hither the fattest calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry." The whole story has in it an atmosphere of hot haste of enthusiastic eagerness, but all the haste is on the part of the father, none on the part of the son. It is Jesus' way of telling us that God is infinitely eager, that he is in an all but intimate hurry to give us heaven's best the very moment we will make such a gift possible.

I bring you, therefore, this question. If you have not found satisfaction for the deepest hungers of your heart, who is to blame and who is responsible for the delay? It is not God, it is you. Often I have heard of the story of Wrestling Jacob referred to as an ideal picture of confession. It is certainly a beautiful and thrilling story. It is almost unbelievable how this man who had been a deceiver so long, how this man who by having lived by his wits, really could believe that a crooked line was a shortest distance between two points. How even this man was reborn and how he was given a new name and there was something unspeakably thrilling in seeing him as he limps away in the light of the morning sun with the beams of the Son of Righteousness shining in his heart. He has been given a new name to match his new nature.

But we need to remember that the blessing which came to Jacob in the light of the early morning might have come to him in the twilight of evening. In fact, it might have come to him years before. Who had held it up - not God, but Jacob. There wrestled with him a man says the story. Why was there any wrestling at all? It was because Jacob resisted God. Where there is no
there can be no wrestling. I remember a schoolmate of mine who, when wrestling was very popular, would not participate in the pastime at all. We tried to force him but there was no way of forcing him because when we laid violent hands on him he would crumple up in a heap like a sack of sand. Nobody could compel him to wrestle because he surrendered without it. The only reason there was any wrestling on the part of God with Jacob was because that Jacob resisted God. The very moment he ceased to wrestle and yeilded, then God gave him a new nature and a new name. Even so He will do for us and he will do it now because now is the acceptable time and today is the day of salvation.
WHAT MAKES YOU ANGRY?

"And he was angry, and would not go in."
Luke 15:28

Here is a scene that should have been one of unmixed beauty. A lost son has been found. A brother once dead to the best has come back to life. The darkness of a once shadowed home has been changed into radiant morning. A new day has dawned. Everybody is glad, even to the hired servants. Then suddenly a shadow falls upon this scene of beauty. The elder son arrives, finds out what is going on, grows hot with anger, and gets his father told. Thus the scene was marred as completely as the elder son had it in his power to mar it. This he did, not because he was an altogether bad man. He had only lost his temper.

I

But in spite of its bad reputation, all anger is not evil. There is such an emotion as righteous indignation. This is not to deny that much anger is evil. For this reason the writers both of the Old and of the New Testament look askance at it. They cannot give anger a clean bill of health. "Refrain from anger and forsake wrath", one of them counsels. "Be angry and sin not" is the urgent command of St. Paul. He puts anger and sin together because they are so often related as cause and effect. How many harsh and unkind words we have spoken, not because they were true, not because we were seeking to help, but because we were angry! How many unbrotherly deeds we have done, not because we really hated the one whom we wronged! We did them in a fit of temper. Probably the most torturing memories that some of us have are the memories of cruelties inflicted in anger.

But if the writers of the Bible in general look askance at anger, it is Jesus himself who has the most startling words of warn-
ing to say against it. Listen to him. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shall not kill....But I say unto you whosoever is angry with his brother....shall be in danger of the judgment." Thus Jesus passed beyond the striking of the deadly blow to the passion that prompted the blow. He thus warned not against the club that was used to destroy, but against the rage that prompted the wielding of the club. He declared that there is an anger that is incipient murder. If anger does not lead us actually to kill our brother, it will often lead us to kill his reputation which might be even more precious to him than his life. This word of God, then, is full of urgent warning against anger.

But over against these warnings stands this arresting fact. Jesus at times blazed with anger. There were times when our sinless Saviour was gripped by hot indignation. More than once, if we can believe the writers of the New Testament, the very soul of Jesus leaped to its feet, fiery-eyed and defiant. His anger was the anger of "the terrible meek". No wonder John wrote years later of the wrath of the Lamb in tones that awe the heart. This anger of Jesus was a righteous anger. This was the case, not merely because it was his, but because it was right in the nature of things. It was born of a right motive and led to right conduct. Such anger is not a vice, but a virtue.

Anger, therefore, is in one respect like money. We used to hear quite a bit about tainted money. As a matter of fact, there isn't any such thing. Money is neither moral nor immoral. It is non-moral. Whether money is a good or an evil depends upon the character of the one who possesses and uses it.
"Dug from the mountain side, washed in the glen,  
Servant am I, or the master of men.  
Earn me, I bless you.  
Steal me, I curse you.  
Grip me and hold me, a fiend shall possess you.  
Lie for me, die for me, covet me, take me,  
Angel or devil, I am what you make me."

One man can take a dollar and so use it as to make the eagle upon it turn vulture to tear at somebody's heart. Another can take that dollar and so use it that the eagle will turn mocking bird to make music in somebody's soul. Even so Jesus took anger and so used it as to make of it an angel. That is possible for us. But, generally speaking, we make of our anger a species of ugly devil. Or to be more accurate, we permit our anger to make us devilish. There is, then, a righteous anger and an anger that is desperately wicked.

Whether our anger is good or bad depends, I think, upon two things. First, it depends upon what makes us angry. Tell me the things that stir your anger and I can tell you with considerably accuracy the kind of person you are. Second, whether our anger is good or evil depends upon what it drives us to do. Anger is a driving power. It sends us with greater speed either upon the road that leads to human helpfulness or the road that leads to the things that will hurt.

II

What, then, are the things that anger us?

1. Let us look first at what angered Jesus. More than once we see his cheeks glow and his eyes flash fire. What was the cause? Never once did Jesus get angry because of any slight or wrong done to himself. The slights and wrongs heaped upon him must have been hard to bear. At times it would seem that he was invited to dinner just
to be insulted. Often he was slandered. He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. Once, at least, he had his face slapped. But these outrages left him unmoved.

I think this refusal on the part of Jesus to strike back impressed Peter above everything that he did. Simon was a hot headed and tempery man. I dare say he did not always approve of the conduct of Jesus in his attitude towards those who wronged him. I have an idea that many a time his heavy fists clenched, that more than once he was angered, not only at the foes of his Master, but at the Master himself, for not showing more resentment. Yet after he himself had experienced Pentecost, after he had been trained for years in the school of his Master, he wrote down what had impressed him most. It was this, "When he was reviled, he reviled not again".

If Jesus never showed resentment because of wrongs done to himself, what then did anger him? Look at this picture. One day he went into a synagogue where there was a man with a withered hand. Luke tells us that it was his right hand that was withered. Thus this man faced life with a handicap. His was a handicap that was visible to the religious leaders who had charge of the service on that distant day. It was only natural, therefore, to expect that these leaders should be concerned with this man's infirmity.

But when Jesus came upon the scene, they did not grow expectant and eager, hoping that the Master might do something for this handicapped man. On the contrary, they grew tense and watchful. It was the Sabbath. They were the custodians of the law. If Jesus should dare to desecrate the Sabbath by healing this man it would be an affront to them. The Master saw all this as he read their selfish hearts.
So what? Mark tells us "He looked round about upon them with anger". He was angry because these men were more concerned about keeping up appearances than giving a needy brother a chance. They cared more for institutions than for persons.

On another day, little children were finding the Master so winsome that they were fighting their way out of their mother's arms and climbing into his arms. Some of the grown-ups were outraged. They could not allow boys and girls to take such liberties with the Master. Therefore, they hurried to get in between Jesus and the children. But the conduct of these grown-ups did not please him; it angered him. It filled him with indignation. "Suffer the little children to come unto me", he urged, "and forbid them not, for their's is the kingdom of Heaven."

Through these scenes we get an insight into what angered Jesus. He became angry when weakness was outraged by strength. He was angry when personality was cheapened; when he saw right trodden under foot by might. This, he did because he cared. His anger was born of love. Here, then is the first essential of righteous anger. It is born of unselfish love. Anger for any other reason is not righteous.

2. Look at the anger of this elder son. Read again his story. "Now the elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother hath come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry and would not go in." Why was he angry?

He was angry because his prodigal brother was being made wel-
come. For him to be allowed to return was bad enough, but for a feast to be prepared in his honor was an outrage. If there were any honors to be passed around, he who had remained at home and worked while his brother wasted was the one to receive them. This elder son had not shared his father's grief because of his brother's going away. Therefore, being indifferent as to his going, he was also indifferent as to his return, except for the fact that a feast had been made in his honor. That changed his indifference into indignation. It filled him with envy. Why was this the case? It was the case because the elder brother was thoroughly selfish. His anger was a child of selfishness.

Here, then, we can see at least one difference between anger that is right and anger that is wrong. The one is born of selfishness, the other of love. Jesus became angry because he cared for others. The elder son got angry because he cared for himself. If you and I had never given way to temper except for reasons of love, many an ugly thing written into our records would not be there.

I do not think I am reading into the story what is not there when I say that another reason for his anger was the too great joy that this home-coming brought to all concerned. Being a Pharisee, he was an earnestly religious man. But his religion, while deeply solemn, was devoid of sunshine. It had no laughter in it. Here is one of his fellows at prayer: "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortionate, unjust, adulterers. I feast twice in a week." It would be impossible to think of that man with eyes lighted by laughter. He never saw anything funny in all his life, not even when he shaved.

Now, I am not arguing for flippancy in matters of religion. Be-
ing a Christian is a deeply serious business, but the fact that it is serious does not mean that it must be devoid of all light and laughter. To take laughter out of religion is to dehumanize it. There are those who are perfectly willing to laugh at the theater, at the club, in the office, in the home, everywhere, in fact, except the church. Here they stop all laughter like a suspected person in a hostile country.

Some years ago I was preaching to a large and dignified congregation. In the course of my sermon, I happened to say something amusing. As well as I remember, it was one of those spontaneous outbursts that I cannot always avoid without watching with painstaking care. So far as I could tell only one man saw the point. He laughed out loud while his fellow listeners remained as solemn as if I had just been saying "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust". At once I saw I was off on the wrong foot and hastened to apologize.

"I beg your pardon", I said, "I see that you folks don't like jokes in the pulpit." Their solemnity indicated that I had spoken even better than I knew. "I appreciate your position," I continued, "I can appreciate it genuinely because I do not like jokes in the pew. But since we have a house full of them this morning, we might as well be tolerant." This man was angry because the joy and laughter of others served not to gladden him, but to stir his resentment.

III

Whether our anger is right or wrong depends also upon what it impells us to do. Anger is a driving power. Which way does your anger drive you?

1. Take the anger of Jesus. When our Lord blazed with anger against the Scribes and Pharisees for seeking to rob the crippled man
of his chance, what did his anger lead him to do? It led him to rebuke those misguided leaders, but it did not lead him to seek to hurt them. He loved them just as truly as he loved the man whose champion he had become. Under the impulse of this anger born of love, he went out the more eager to serve, the more willing to die, not only for his friends, but also for his foes. What, then, is righteous anger? We hear it spoken of quite a bit. I fear we claim it more often than we possess it. Righteous anger is anger that is born of love and that seeks only the good of those against whom we are angry.

2. Look again at the anger of the elder son. When he became angry, his first impulse was to hurt somebody. Is that not the case of almost all our anger? Whenever anybody irritates us, even though it be husband or wife or child, our first reaction so often is to cause somebody pain.

How did this elder son set about the ugly business of causing pain and grief? He did not resort to violence. He was too civilized, too religious for such crude conduct as that. Therefore, he did not rush into the banquet hall and overturn tables and take his prodigal brother by the collar and fling him out of the house. But if he was too refined to use his fists, he was not too refined to use his tongue. He unsheathed that two-edged sword and wielded it with skill and precision.

He began by slandering his father. He accused him of setting a premium upon prodigality, of being unjust and of not giving him his due. Then he passed on to slander his brother. "As soon," he declared, "as this son of yours has come, who has devoured your living with harlots, you have killed for him the fatted calf." How did he
who had remained at home know this ugly chapter in the life of the one who had been in the far country? Had he been an eye-witness? No. Had he received the report of an eye-witness? No. He had only heard rumors to that effect. Therefore, he dared to affirm what he did not know, easing his conscience with that ancient lie, "There cannot be so much smoke without some fire."

Finally, this elder son refused to have any fellowship with his brother. This he did by refusing to attend the feast. He thus grieved his father deeply. He thus made the position of his brother more difficult. Because things did not go just to his liking, he said, "I will have nothing to do with it at all." It is always easy to get a certain type of character to take up a cross of his own making and quit. In thus refusing to play a brother's part, he did not spoil the feast, but he kept it from being the unmixed joy that it might have been. Unrighteous anger tends always to lead to words and deeds that bring anguish and pain.

IV

What was the outcome of this anger? I am now thinking of what it did to others. Of course, it saddened his father and perhaps embarrassed his brother. But what did his selfish anger do for the elder son himself?

1. It shut him out from the feast. The door to the feast was open to him. His father was eager for him to be present. The joy, both of the prodigal and his guests, might have been shared by him. But he angrily refused and thus slammed the door with his own hand. Therefore, while he cheated others, he cheated himself most of all. He thus was wretched when he might have been joyous.

2. Refusing the fellowship of his brother, he had also to forego
the fellowship of his father. Whether or not we fellowship with our brother is optional. If we like we can break off diplomatic relations, hate him, slander him, avoid him. That choice is our own. But having made it, we cannot then have the fellowship of God. To refuse fellowship with our brother is, in the very nature of things, to refuse the fellowship of God.

3. Finally, he lost everything. This disappointed father speaks very tenderly to his angry son. "My boy," he says, using a word that is a term of endearment, "my boy, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine." But instead of receiving his father's all, he received naked nothing. Even so we often cheat ourselves. "All that I have is thine," God is saying to us. Maybe we had better look into God's roomy hand and see if there is not something there that we need. But let us remember that we can only receive that all as we are willing to play the part of both a son and a brother.
THE DRUDGE

"Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."
—Luke 15:31

I

This is a part of the story of the boy who did not go away from home. He is not vastly lovable; yet he has much to say for himself. His story opens in a most encouraging fashion. It has in it the very radiance of the morning. Hear it: "Now the elder son was in the field." What does that mean?

1. The Elder Son was in a clean and a wholesome environment. He was in that wholesome environment of his own choice. He was in the field. He was out where the wheat waved in billows. He was out where the winds came fresh and sweet with the odor of new-mown hay or with the aroma of the upturned sod. His younger brother was away in the far country in the midst of the stench of a pig-sty. He, too, was there of his own choice. It is, therefore, all to this elder son's credit that he had chosen his clean environment.

Having chosen the field instead of the hog-pen, the implication is that he had kept morally clean. That also is to his credit. There used to be a certain type of evangelist that sought to magnify the grace of God by telling of the dissipated rake he was before he was converted. There were those who listened to such stories who became convinced that these men were the richer instead of the poorer for having sowed such a rich crop of wild oats. But that, of course, was a tragic blunder. No man is ever the richer in time or in eternity for having gone morally wrong. If sin adds anything to us, Jesus would have been cheated because he knew no sin. This man had avoided the sowing of wild oats and was the better for it.
Not only does the fact that he was in the field indicate that he was in a clean and wholesome environment; it also indicates that he was a worker. He was putting his shoulder under the load. He was not afraid to harden his palms by honest toil. He was one of the world's workers. That, too, is to his credit. There is great truth in Bernard Shaw's declaration, "A gentleman is a man that puts into life more than he takes out." Therefore, a gentleman is a worker. I can conceive of a man's being a hard worker and yet not a Christian. But no man can be truly Christian and a deliberate idler. Jesus took pride in the fact that He Himself was a worker. This man had a right to an honest pride in his work. Thus he was in sharp contrast to his younger brother. While he himself was in the field as a worker, his brother was in the far country as a waster. For this reason he has far more to say for himself than his younger brother.

II

But while this is the case, it is rather startling that Jesus has no word of commendation for this elder son. He who had the keenest eye for whatever was good has no word of praise for this man. Why is this the case? What is wrong with him? He was not dishonest. He was not dissipated. He was not a waster. He considered himself, and was considered by others, a pillar in church and state. Yet Jesus looks on him as not an asset but a liability, not a friend but a foe. While he was not guilty of the sins of the flesh, he was guilty of the more damning and dangerous sins of disposition. Where did he go wrong?

1. He was self-centered. He belonged to a family, even as you and I. But he felt no responsibility for that family. He was strictly for Number One! When, therefore, his brother gathered all together and went into a far country, he did not grieve. His father grieved. The conduct of this younger son broke his father's heart. But the elder son said, "It is no business of mine." He shared neither the grief of his father nor the shame of his brother. He was self-centered.
It is safe to say that the measure of our Christlikeness is very largely the measure of our capacity to rejoice with those that do rejoice and to weep with those that weep. In the insensitive, generally speaking, is the surface that we expose to the world. How easy it is to take another's sorrow, another's failure, another's sin and moral bankruptcy for granted! How easy it is to grow so accustomed to the every day tragedies of life that they do not touch us any more! Jesus was the Saviour that He was because He was "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for and by our iniquities."

All those who have come to share His nature have come to share also in His capacity to suffer in another's woes. "Who is weak," cries Paul, "and I am not weak. Who is offended and I do not burn with indignation?" "Why do you want to return to China?" a friend asked of a certain missionary who had had to give up his beloved work in that needy field. "Because I cannot sleep at night for thinking about them," came the answer. "Their desperate needs haunt my dreams." Blessed is the man who learns by the grace of God how to care. He suffers in the woes of others, and when we grow callous He questions still as in the long ago, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

Years ago J. Wilbur Chapman said he asked Sam Hadley, superintendent of the Water Street Mission in New York, to show him over some of the slums where he did his work. "By and by," said Mr. Chapman, "when I had seen all that I could bear, we separated, Mr. Hadley returning to his home and I to my hotel. But I had not gone half a block before I heard anguished sobs. I turned to see Sam Hadley wringing his hands as he stood alone on the street. Thinking that he had been taken suddenly ill, I hurried back to ask what was the matter. 'A, the sin and the suffering of these people!' he said, turning his anguished face back toward the slums that we had just visited. 'The suffering and the sin—it will break my heart. It has broken my heart.' And because it broke his heart, he fished literally thousands out of those sewers that today walk the street with him in
white. Being self-centered, this elder brother did not share in the sorrow of his father nor in the shame of his father's younger son.

2. Refusing to share his father's suffering for the loss of his son, he likewise refused to make any effort to win him back. His father's eyes were constantly turned toward the far country. He was always watching, always hoping, always praying. Then one day he saw the son while he was yet a great way off. But the elder son did not see him. He did not want to see him. He said, "Every fellow for himself and the devil take the hindmost." When men went wrong, when the church seemed to change from a house of life to a house of death, he did nothing about it. Being without care for others, he made no special effort to help others.

3. Refusing to be interested in his brother, when at last his brother came home, he did not give him welcome. Not only so, he merely made matters more difficult both for his father and for his wayward brother. I have an idea the most difficult obstacle that this prodigal had to overcome in making up his mind to return home was to encounter this hard and self-satisfied brother. But one day this brother came home to hear the sound of music and dancing. When he asked a servant what was going on, the servant answered gleefully, "Thy brother has come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf because he hath received him safe and sound." But instead of such good news making him glad, it only made him angry.

This is a very human story. If we think that Jesus is here picturing a personality who is extreme, we are vastly mistaken. This man is more like ourselves than almost any other character that Jesus delineated. One day when I was pastor in Washington, an excellent, upright, icicled sister said to me, "Before you became pastor of this church, we old members could come down here and get a seat any time and anywhere we desired. But now since you have filled the house up with strangers, we have to get here by ten-thirty in the morning to get a seat at all. Then a lot of times we who have borne the burden in the heat of the day
have to stand up. We might have written of her, "She was angry and would not go in."

Why was this elder son angry? Was it because this brother had wronged him? Had he cheated him of anything? Not a bit of it. His anger was born of envy. What is envy? It is not to be confused with jealousy. Jealousy is a child of love. It is the natural reaction of love when it is cheated of its rights. It is an emotion that is even ascribed to God: "I, the Lord thy God am a jealous God." I know that it may become the "green-eyed monster that makes the meat it feeds upon." But when its meat is made for it, when love is cheated of its dues—if I break my marriage vows and give my love to another, my wife has a right to be jealous.

Jealousy is a child of love. Envy, on the other hand, is a child of selfishness. Envy is that devilish something that causes us to have a secret joy in another's downfall. It is that which causes a secret pang when another succeeds. It does not stir us to come from behind the procession to run to our brother's side. It rather prompts us to reach a cruel hand and seize our brother by the neck and push him back behind ourselves. One of the most beautiful girls I ever knew came to the place where she could not endure to hear another girl complimented. She became green with envy.

Now the sin of envy is as cruel as it is common and as common as it is cruel. Were you ever envious? It is one sin that is seldom confessed. Alexander White said that during the more than fifty years of his ministry every sin had been confessed to him but the sin of envy. That is an indication of the subtlety of it and also of its ugliness. It is as deadly as it is dangerous. According to the old Genesis story, it was back of the first murder ever committed. The first man that ever died did so at the cruel hands of envy.

When Joseph was sold into slavery, it was envy that sold him. When young David had to flee for his life, it was envy that was in pursuit. Look at the picture. Saul is coming back from a battle. A chorus choir of young ladies
come out to greet the returning soldiers with songs. "Saul has slain his thousands," they sang. "It is a beautiful song," said the king with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes. "Beautiful and altogether fitting!" Then came the second stanza. "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David hath slain his tens of thousands." At once the glow went from his cheek and the sparkle from his eye. From a glad and happy warrior he became little by little a tortured madman who spent the remaining years of his life trying to murder the faithful servant whom he envied. This elder son then was not guilty of the sins of the flesh; he was guilty of those more difficult and damming sins of the disposition.

III

Here then was a man who looked out strictly for Number One. He never let it worry him that another failed. He rather rejoiced in his failures and grieved in his successes. He worked, but he worked for himself. He put himself in the clean environment of the field not because he enjoyed the field, better than he would have enjoyed the hog-pen. He only thought that it was the better policy. What did his self-seeking do for Him? In this story he tells us his experience. I am sure he did not use the language that he would have used at the prayer-meeting. Here his tone might have oozed unction. But he is angry now and so he bluntly tells the truth about himself. What has his self-seeking brought him? Listen: "All these years do I serve thee"—better translated "All these years do I slave for thee"—"Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." How disappointing!

Here is a young man who has spent his life in his father's house. This young man who has been away squandering his substance might naturally have expected that his older brother would have had a wonderful story to tell of his father's goodness and love and mercy when he returned home. But such is not the case. He said, "I have been slaving here all these years and I have never got a thing out of it—not even so much as a kid. I have never known a really joyous moment."
The experience of this young man, I fear, is not unique. There are many in all our churches who are genuinely disappointed in their religious experiences. Sometime ago one said to me, "I get more out of the lodge than I do out of the church." The word was not spoken in bitterness but rather in disappointment. A certain woman said, "I used to think that if I should ever become a Christian I should be the right kind of Christian. But I have found I am a bit like the rest." Not bitter, just disappointed! She was just wondering if what she had was the best that God had to offer. She was just wondering if the wealthy promises of God did not mean anything better than her paltry achievements.

"All these years do I slave for thee." There had been no joy in his work, no thrill, no song. He was not living as a son, but as a slave. Doctor Hubbard has rightly called him a drudge. He was the most pitiful of all drudges—a religious drudge. Drudgery you know is not the task, but it is the spirit in which we do the task. One wife can make drudgery out of being mistress of a palace; another can make poetry out of keeping a cabin. One can make drudgery out of the singing of an anthem; another can make poetry out of the mopping of a floor.

Here, for instance, are two nurses. They have equal training, equal skill. They seem equally devoted to the task. But one of them sees nothing in the task except the pay-check at the end of the week. The other does her work under roomier horizons. She ministers because she cares. Her check is only to pay her expenses while she has the privilege of serving. As she works she sings,

"O how could I serve in the wards
If the hope of the world were a lie?
How could I endure the sights
And the loathsome smell of Disease
But He said, "Ye do it for Me,
When ye do it for these."

Here are two men pegging shoes. So far as the eye can see, their work is equally prosaic. But one sees nothing but the paltry prize when his work is done. But the other is a man named Carey. There is no drudgery about his work. He is mending worn shoes, but he is mending them in the light of the Sun of Righteousness
that has risen upon him with healing in his beams. The song of his hammer is
the song that the angels sang about the starlit heights of Bethlehem. He has a
map of the world upon his soul. He is living for God and binding shoes to pay
expenses. He is not a slave, but a son—not a drudge, but a poet.

When, therefore, this hard-working son told his story, he confessed that he
had missed all that makes life worth living. In spite of the fact that he had a
devoted father, he had lived like a slave. In spite of the fact that he had re-
mained at home, he had been homeless. In spite of the fact that he had lived
within hand-clasp of the Bread of Life, he had never tasted it. In spite of the
fact that the fountain of the Water of Life gurgled within his very hearing, he
never bent down once to kiss the spring upon the lips. Poor self-satisfied soul!
Had we understanding enough, we could weep over him as we could weep over our-
selves. Truly, he was right who marveled not at what men suffered but at what
they missed. He had worked hard and won nothing.

IV

But his slavery and poverty were self-chosen. He need not have been dis-
appointed. Though he had been disappointed yesterday, he need not continue to
be so. Over against what actually had been, his father showed him what might
have been. Here are the facts: "All these years do I serve thee, neither
transgressed I at any time thy commandments and thou never gavest me a kid that
I might make merry with my friends." It sounds like a harsh impeachment of his
father. It sounds as if the father had been niggardly with him. And strange to
say, the father does not deny a word of it. He confesses that his son had worked
like a slave. He confesses that he had received nothing for all his pains. But
then he adds, "It need not have been so."

What then might have been his? Here is the answer. "Son,"—the word is a
term of endearment. "My child, thou art ever with me and all that I have is
thine." Here then are two priceless treasures that this young man had missed.
that might have been his for the taking.

1. He might have enjoyed the constant companionship of his father. He had worked, but he had worked alone. How easy it is for us while really concerned with holy things to lose touch with our holy Lord! He promises to be with us to the end of the age. There is no single experience to which any one of us need go alone. "Son, thou art ever with me."

We can have Him as our companion when the days are bright. His presence will give a new blue to the sky and a new radiance to the sunshine.

"Skies above are softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green,
Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen.
Birds with gladdest songs o'erflow,
Flowers with richer glories shine,
Since I know, as now I know
I am His, and He is mine."

We can have him in our days of heartache, when "sorrow sits sobbing like a troubled ghost in every chamber of the heart." We can have him when the fierce winds of temptation beat hard upon us. Years ago I knew a young man who was leading a double life to be converted. When he got home from church, he called his companion in sin and told her he was through. "You just think you are," she answered. "You think you can reclaim your decency and leave me to bear the sin. You can't. I'll camp on your track until I get you." She made good her threat. He fell and in his shame he hid himself from his faithful pastor. But that earnest man sought him and found him and literally fought with him for his future. He came back to God and became an effective minister. One day he said to the pastor to whom he owed so much, "I feel that I will never fall again if you are with me." Then his friend said, "There is something infinitely better than that. You may have our Infinite Friend." "Son, thou art ever with me."

2. Not only may we have God as our constant companion, but having him we can possess all. "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

In giving us Himself our Lord is giving us everything. "This is my body," He
saying, literally putting Himself, as Browning declares, on His own hand and holding Himself out to us. Is there anything in God that you need. It is yours for the taking. "All that I have is thine." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The tragedy of this young man's life was that when he might have been a son he remained a slave. When he might have been unspeakably rich, he chose to remain a poverty-stricken wretch.

This perhaps brings us to the greatest grief of our Lord. I sometimes think that His chief heartache is not the failure of the wicked, but the paltry poverty of the saints. He is eager to do so much for us, and we permit Him to do so little. It is said when Helen Keller, that deaf, dumb, and blind genius, lay in her cradle as a little child, her mother used to come and bend above her and drop her hot tears on the baby's face as she sobbed, "O Helen, how your mother loves you, and how she longs to tell you about her love, but she cannot. Your eyes are closed, and your ears are stopped. So our Lord is bending above you and me tonight. He is saying, "O child of mine, how I love you! How I long to give you my best!" He is saying to you as He said to this other faltering, failing soul, "My child, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Will you accept what is yours for the taking?
"For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

--Luke 16:8

That sounds very much like the language of a New Yorker. Did we not know the author, we would say, "Here is somebody who is a foe of the Church. Here is a man who is trying to belittle the saints." But the one who said this is not a foe but a friend. This is the language of him who loved the Church and gave himself up for it. But in spite of his love for the Church, he could not shut his eyes to the plain truth about him. Therefore, he said this sentence, so searching and so true: "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

You see at once that our Lord is drawing a contrast between two different classes, between the children of the world, or the children of this age, and the children of light. Look at the first--the children of this age. What does He mean by that? He means what we would mean today by a "man of the world". The man of the world is one who believes supremely in the worth of things. He pins his faith to those values that are material. But back of this confidence in things is a wrong desire. When Paul tells us that Demas loved this present age, he means that Demas had been brought under the spirit that dominates the man of this age—that is, the spirit of self-pleasing. Whenever a man makes self-pleasing the law of his life, it always leads to his seeking the satisfaction for his needs in some worldly fashion. He may seek low values or those that are higher and more respectable. But his passion is for the wares that this world has to offer.
Now it so happens that the man of the world in this particular story was a rascal. By this Jesus does not mean to imply that every worldling is a rascal. A man may put things first and be scrupulously honest. He may put things first and be flagrantly dishonest. He may love the world supremely and remain as decent as decency and as respectable as respectability. Or he may put the world first and end in the gutter or the penitentiary. But the significant fact about the man is not either his honesty or dishonesty but what holds first place in his life.

In contrast to this man of the world Jesus puts the Christian, whom He calls "a child of light." That is a beautiful and suggestive name. Paul uses it more than once. He wrote to his converts, both at Thessalonica and at Ephesus, reminding them that they were the children of light. The prophet speaks of the coming of Jesus as the coming of the dawn. He called Himself the "light of the world". The followers of Christ then are those who have been enlightened. They are those whose hearts and faces have been illuminated by the very light of God and who become bringers of light to others.

II

Now since the man of the world is one that puts things first, and since the child of light is one who puts God and eternal values first, it seems shockingly strange at first that Jesus should say that the children of this age are for their generation wiser than the children of light. Just what did the Master mean? We will make sad work of His meaning if we leave out that qualifying phrase "for their generation." Mark you, He is not saying that the child of this age is wiser in every particular. On the contrary the Master specifically states that the child of light is far wiser in his choice of values. He is far wiser in the prizes that he seeks. In proof of this Jesus gives a three-fold contrast.

(1). The man of the world is less wise than the child of light because he chooses a value that is little in contrast to a value that is exceedingly great.

Jesus Himself states that the worldling is working for that which is very little.
He believed that this was the case even though the world was out to seek no less a prize than the whole world itself. If a man wins a million, he has comparatively won very little. When a certain highly successful young business-man decided that he was going to be worth a million so that he could tell the other fellow to go to hell, he was not seeking a great goal. *A few years ago* we had an epidemic of tree-sitting and folks standing on flag poles. It never commended itself to me as a profession because I had a sneaking conviction that if I were to become the best tree-sitter that ever lived I still would not have won much. Jesus affirms and especially bears His testimony to the truth of it—that however great the prizes we win in this world if they are purely material we have not won much. He affirms on the other hand that the child of light wins a great prize. This He does even if he wins little of what the world has to offer. The only really rich people that I have known have been those who have been rich in faith, rich in their possession of God.

(2). Then the child of light is wiser in his choices because he seeks for a value that is real in contrast to one that is unreal or spurious. Jesus asked the question, "If you have been unfaithful in the use of unrighteous mammon who shall commit to your trust the true riches?" By "unrighteous mammon" He means simply possessions. He does not mean that these possessions are evil in themselves, but that we often commit evil in getting them. He is contrasting here wealth that is spurious with wealth that is real. I know that flies right into the face of our ordinary thinking. We speak of certain values as realistic. It is wealth upon which we can plant our feet. But Jesus regarded as realistic those values that really meet our needs today and that will meet them forevermore.

I am aware that such words make easy preaching. But they are mere words, I fear, to the majority of us. They are the declarations of one we like to call the "sweet Galilean Dreamer". "Of course!" we say, "Jesus said that, but He was so impractical! His way of looking at things might do for the prayer meeting or the death-bed, but not for the dirty, dusty world in which I live." Yet test what
He said by your own life. You have won a few possessions. Have they met the deep needs of your soul? Will they continue to do so? "And now abideth," wrote Paul centuries ago. Then he names a few values that abide. "Now abideth fame, ambition, money." No, no! "Now abideth faith, hope, love." Faith is good today, it will be good tomorrow, it will be good through eternity. Hope is essential today. Life is not livable without it. It will be essential through eternity. Love is good today. Earth becomes hell without it. It will make whatever heaven there is by and by.

The child of the light then is wiser in his choices because he lays hold of values that are real while the other fights and dies for sham values.

(3). Then the child of light is wiser because he chooses that which may be his very own in contrast to that which must always be another's. "If you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" What is it that belongs to another? Answer—everything that is on the outside of us. I shall have occasion to say it again before this sermon is over, but no man owns any material value. You may possess a farm but you do not own it. Other feet than yours will tread upon it when you behind the veil have passed. Feet that are dust today walked over it before you ever planted your foot on it.

The only values that are really ours are the values that are inward.

"'Tis only God may be had for the asking, 'Tis heaven alone that is given away."

The spiritual wealth of faith, hope, and love may be your very own but no material value can ever be truly yours. Surely then in his choices the child of light is far wiser than the child of the world.

In what respect then is the worldling wiser than the Christian? He is wiser "for his generation," said Jesus. By this, he puts an intelligent shrewdness into the practice of his creed that the Christian often fails to do. Having recited his confession of faith—"I believe in things. I believe in getting mine while the getting is good. I believe in those values that we can hold in our hands, cram into our pockets, and deposit in banks,"—he went out and lived accordingly. But we often stand up and say, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty," and then go out and live
A SHREW RASCAL - page 5

as if our creed were a lie. We do not show the same practical commonsense in implementing our faith that the man of the world does.

III

Look then at the shrewdness of this rascal of whom Jesus told. He was the manager of a great estate. Perhaps he had held this position a long time. Doubtless he had been a bit of a rascal all his life. Partly perhaps through rascality, partly through soft living he was squandering his master's wealth. This master at last found out what he was doing, called his manager on the carpet, and told him that as soon as he wound up his affairs he was out. "Give an account of thy stewardship for thou mayest be no longer steward." Then it was that this man showed his shrewdness.

1. He was shrewd in facing the facts about himself. Being a rascal, I have no doubt that he was accustomed to lying. But at least he did not lie to himself. He did not tell himself that his master really did not mean it, that he was not going to lose his job after all. He faced the facts frankly and honestly. Lying is always dangerous, but no form of lying is quite so dangerous as when we lie to ourselves. When he faced the facts about himself, this was his situation: "I am soon going to lose my place, but I have not lost it yet. I still have control of all my master's goods. I do not own a penny's value of them, but they are in my possession. They are as completely under my control as if they were really mine. But though I control them today, I shall certainly not control them tomorrow. Tomorrow all the wealth that I possess will have slipped out of my hands forever." Then came this question: "When this comes, what am I to do? I can't quit living just because I have lost my job. I have tomorrow on my hands whether I wish it or not. Tomorrow I must live. In order to live I must have food to eat, clothing to wear, and a roof over my head. Someway then I, who have possessions today that I will not have, must provide for tomorrow."

2. He was shrewd in the method that he chose for providing for his tomorrow.
How did he set about it? He did not try to convert his master's wealth into gold and then abscond. He knew he would have been caught before he could do that. He hit upon this keen plan: "I am going to take this wealth that is in my hands and change it into friends. That will be expensive to my master. It won't cost me anything. I will take wealth that belongs to another and make it into friendships."

It does not take vast intelligence to see the shrewdness of that plan. I do not wonder that his own master (not our Master) had to give him a grudging admiration. Mark you, we do not have to admire everything about a character to admire something. Hitler will certainly go down in history as one of the most despicable men that ever lived. But no man can deny his power as a rabble-rouser or his genius as a military leader. I am thinking of a minister--you do not know him--whom I would not believe on oath. But the daring of the man, his magnetism and his scintillating ability command my grudging admiration. This man was a crook certainly, but he was a shrewd man.

3. Finally, he showed his shrewdness in the prompt and direct method he used in carrying out his plan. He called his master's debtors to him one by one. To the first he said, "How much do you owe my lord?" "A hundred barrels of oil." (This man farmed an olive orchard.) "Sit down quickly," said the manager, "and write fifty. I always did like you," I daresay he said aside. "We have been as close as brothers. I want to help you." "I'll never forget it," said the tenant. "See that you don't," replied the rascal. Thus he went down the line, using his master's own wealth to make friends for himself.

"But," you say, "was not that risky?" Sure it was. But this man loved things so well that he would allow nothing to stand in his way of his winning the prize upon which he set his heart. Did he not expose himself to the law? Did he not forfeit the confidence of every tenant that his master had? Did he not have to give up his own honor? Certainly. But in so doing he was simply living up to his creed. "I believe in getting money. I would prefer to get it honestly, but honestly or dishonestly I am going to have money." What a shrewd rascal he was!
But how about the child of the light?

1. Do we with equally clear-eyed candor face the facts about ourselves. We are here this morning with certain treasures in our hands. Of course included in those treasures are our time, our talents, but Jesus is here thinking especially of money. This is a parable on the use of wealth. We have a certain measure of goods, large or small. The quantity has nothing to do with our responsibility as stewards. To be unfaithful in little is to be unfaithful in much. Every single one of us has certain values that are material, but these values are, in ourselves, we do not own them. We only possess them. That is at once the plain teaching of the Bible and commonsense. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein." One of the first solid convictions that came to the spirit-baptized saints of Pentecost was this: "Neither said any man that aught of the things that he possessed was his own."

A second fact we need to face if we are going to tell ourselves the truth is this—these treasures that we possess but do not own are soon going to slip from our fingers. That is true not of one but of all. Some may lose through bad investments. Some may lose through careless handling. Some may lose through the rascality of a trickster. But even if you hold to your possessions in spite of all these foes, one day the highwayman death will meet you and take every penny you have. There are no pockets, you remember, in a shroud. Every man of us will go out to meet God with hands as empty as were our baby hands when we came into this world.

Now our problem is the problem of this rascal. We have a future with which to reckon. He had a very short future. Being a man of the world, he did not reckon with his own immortality. He was only interested in that brief tomorrow that ends in the grave. We must be interested in that. We have to live with ourselves in the here and now. But in addition to that, we have an eternal tomorrow. "Why are you stealing your master's goods as you are?" I might have asked this rascal.
"Because I have got to live. A man must live." Even so. You and I must live.

We must, therefore, make some provision for our eternal tomorrow.

But was not that a part of the foolishness of the farmer who pulled down barns and built greater? Was not he too trying to make provision for his future? Certainly. His foolishness was not born of the fact that he made some provision for the tomorrow in which he might live. That is altogether wise. He was a fool because he made no provision for the eternal tomorrow in which he must live.

How then can we help to provide for a rich eternity. Listen to these startling words of Jesus: "Make to yourselves friends with the use of money (I am using a free translation) that when it fails (not ye, as it is in the authorized version)—that is, when money fails thee these the friends you have made through the right use of money may receive you into everlasting habitation." What is a safe investment? There is only one. That is investment in human personality. Nothing else is safe because nothing else lasts. Put your money into human character or into character-building institutions. That is the only investment that is really secure.

Money is cold, hard stuff. How wonderful it is that it can be changed into the warm handclasp and the glowing face of a friend! Seven men had to make a forced landing a few months ago on a little dot of an island in the Pacific. That island was occupied by the Japanese. But it so happened that a missionary had visited that little island and some of the natives had become Christian. These natives found those boys, sheltered and cared and taught them at the risk of their own lives. While none of the seven had been a Christian before, every one of them came back to America Christian. Somebody had taken a bit of money and so used it as to make friends for those boys on that distant island. Such use of money makes friends here and hereafter.

Bad Robinson told me this story: He said, "I was accosted by a desperate young chap who asked me for a nickél to buy a bowl of soup. I told him, 'No, there is a saloon over there that would get you and get you and the soup too. I
am going to dinner. You come with me." He took the young man out and fed him. Then he told him of the Saviour who had saved him. Three years later when Bud was preaching way out in North Dakota this man, then himself a preacher, was present. "Well," he added, "he took me in his arms and ran round with me in his joy as if I had been a child. Then he set me down and I looked at him, strong and clean, so magnificent that if he had stomped his foot you would have felt it a thousand miles." Then he added this word, "He only cost eighty cents." You and I believe in the supreme value of the things of the spirit. We are met here as those who believe in the supremacy of the spiritual. We believe in God! We believe that money is all important, but we believe we must use it, not as its owners, but as the good stewards of Jesus Christ. If we so use it, we shall build a friendlier world for tomorrow. We shall help to build for ourselves a friendlier eternity. There will be those waiting on life's other side who would not have been there except for our giving. Let us put our creed into effect with the same straightforward earnestness as did this rascal. Let us go about the business of religion even on rainy Sundays as seriously as we go about our daily task on rainy Mondays. Thus we will make to ourselves friends with the use of our wealth that when it fails—as fail it will very soon—those friends may receive us into everlasting habitations.
A SHREWDED RASCAL

The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

Luke 16:8

I.

Jesus is here presenting a contrast. The contrast is between two classes of people. One he calls the children of this world, or the children of this age. It so happens that the particular man of the world about whom Jesus is speaking is a rascal. But that is incidental. A man may be honest, and yet be a man of the world. He means a man that is dominated by the spirit of this age. "Demas forsook me," Paul said, "for he loved this present age."

The second group of the children are the children of light. These are made up of the men and women that have been illuminated by the light of God. They are the deservers of our Lord. They, are those to whom Jesus was speaking when he said "Ye are the light of the world." Now it is significant that Jesus meant these two classes, and these only. Here in so doing, he is consistent with himself and with all the writers of the New Testament. This strange book is constantly dividing us into two classes. Those who are ready, and those who are not ready. Those who are building on sand, not rock. Those who have oil and those who have none. Here it
is those who are of the world and those who are children of the light.

In speaking of these two classes he does not mean to say that every worldly is equally worldly. Nor, that every child of light is equally illuminated. We divide folks into the living and into the dead. This does not mean that all the living are equally alive. Sometime ago I sat by the bed of a man who was slipping away under the ravages of tuberculosis. From that sick room, I went to where some husky, well trained boys were practicing for football. What was the difference between the sick man and the athletes? It was not that one was alive and the other dead, all were alive. But one group was abundantly alive while the other was hanging on to life by a mere gossam of life. Therefore while we are not equally worldly or equally enlightened, at the last long last we give our first allegiance either to the worldly or to the things of the spirit. We either seek things first, or we seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Now having contrasted these two classes, Jesus says a shocking and startling thing. We might have expected such from the lips of one antagonistic toward the church. We might have expected such a statement from one who was critical of the church, because he did not have the gallantry and grit to live up to its demands. But such was not the case with Jesus. He loved the church with passionate devotion. But in spite of this, he declares "The children of this generation are in their generation wiser than the children of light." How astonishing.

II.

Now if this is true, wherein is it true? Remember it is not the case because Jesus said so.
1. Let it be said at once that the children of this age are not wiser than the children of the light, because they have a finer appreciation of values, or because they are wiser in their choices. Jesus never claimed the utter worthlessness of material wealth, but he did maintain that its value was secondary. He claimed that the choice of the child of light was wiser than the choice of the child of the world for a number of reasons. It was wiser (1) Because things are worth but little in comparison to the infinite wealth that is offered us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(2) The wealth that the world has to offer is rated as spurious, while the wealth that Christ offers is genuine. By this he means that the wealth of the world does not last, everybody knows that. However full your hand is today, it will be empty tomorrow. It might be emptied by the depression, or by some misfortune. But if you escape all these, the highwayman death will get it. You can't take it with you. Everything that you have of a material nature, you may depend upon losing.

Not only will this spurious wealth not stay with you, but it will not satisfy even while it lasts. Go out to find the wretched and wretched on the one hand, and those who are enjoying peace and rest on the other. They will not be divided into those who have and those who do not have. You will have to go deeper than that. There was a certain actress who had everything. She had success. She had wealth. She draped her couch in a nation's praise. But when a minister interviewed her, she turned to him fretfully and said, "What I want is peace and rest, rest and peace." From that palace he went to a cottage where a seamstress was slipping away. She had fairly sewed her life into garments for her younger brother and sister. When the preacher spoke in pity to her, she smiled at him and said, "What I have is peace and rest, rest and peace."
Last week there died in our city a man who had actually a billion dollars in worthless bonds. When he died, he had to be buried by charity. We smile at his stupidity in investing his money in worthless bonds, but now that he has gone, he is just as rich in his pauper's grave as he would have been if every bond would have been worth a hundred cents on the dollar.

Finally, Jesus contrasted the choice of the man of the world with the child of the light, in that the one choice can really never have his, and the other makes a choice of what may be his very own. "If you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who shall give you that which is your own." What is your own? Nothing that you hold in your hand. Only that which you have within. "Now abideth faith, hope and love." These are the things that last. These are treasures that might be our very own, the inner possessions of the heart, and not merely treasures gripped by the hand. The man who possesses them is alone wise. All who fail to possess them are foolish.

Here in time, I repeat, is the man of the world wiser than the child of light. Not in his possessions, not in the creed that he professes. He is wiser in the same common sense in which he lives up to his creed. Here is a man of the world who declares: I believe in things. I believe that in all our getting, it is our first wisdom to get money. Having thus professed his faith, he goes out to live that way. He allows nothing in the way of religion to turn him aside from his quest after gold.

But how about ourselves. We recite our creed. We declare that Jesus was right when he said "Seek first the Kingdom of God." But, having recited our creed, we go out to live as if it were a sham and a fraud. Professing to believe in the values of the spirit, we turn our backs upon those values and spend our nights dreaming and scheming on how we are to get hold on things. Truly the man of the world is wiser than the child of light.
III.

To be convinced of this, it is only necessary to watch this man of the world in action. He has been called in for a painful interview with his employer. "Give an account of your stewardship," says his employer. "I am serving notice on you, you are going to lose your job." The interview was over and the man who had been fired was alone with himself. What did he do? He met his crisis in such a fashion as to prove himself a genuinely shrewd man. He did three very keen things.

1. He faced the facts about himself. These facts ran somewhat as follows: (1) I have in my possession the wealth of my employer. Not a penny of it belongs to me, but I possess it and can use it as if it were mine. (2) This wealth that I have today will not be mine tomorrow. I am losing my job and the boss will take every bit of it away from me. (3) But while I will have no job tomorrow I must go on living. (4) Since I must go on living, my problem is to provide for my future. As a child of the light your situation and your problem is somewhat the same.

1. You have possessions, but you own nothing.
2. These possessions are yours but for a day.
3. But you too must go on living. When you have been dispossessed, life for you extends beyond the grave.
4. Your problem is to provide for your future. The tomorrow that you will spend in the world that now is, the tomorrow that is yours in eternity. The rich fool was a fool, not because he made preparation for the day in which he might live. He was a fool because he made no preparation for the eternity in which he must live. Do we face the facts about ourselves as candidly as the man of the world faces them regarding himself.

2. This rascal was shrewd in that he possessed a keen method of pro-
viding for his future. He did not undertake to horde his lord's money, he
invested it in friendship. He tucked it away in human personality.

Certainly every man is wise enough to see that that is the best invest-
ment we can make as children of the light. While I was in Tulsa some time
ago, a member of Boston Avenue Church said to me, "It has been a great joy
to me that I put $70,000 in this great church. I lost everything I had, but
I didn't lose that. We can never lose what we put into human personality.

That is the one safe investment in this world.

3. This man was shrewd in that having made up his mind as to how to
invest his money, he went immediately about it and allowed nothing to turn
him aside. If you take the work that you are now taking, you will have to
barter your honor. Quite so, but I can afford to get on without honor, you
can't eat honor. I have got to have something to eat.

But if you take your lord's money and invest it into folks, it might
come into no end of trouble. You might have to even go to jail. "I know
it is risky," he answered, "but the thing I fear most is having no provision
made for my future. I am willing to dare all dangers, the loss of freedom,
and honor in order to attain my desired goal.

What a contrast between him and the ordinary child of the light. We
are so easily turned aside. We allow nothing in the way of wealth to keep
us from our position. But anything can keep us from our church. When times
get hard and we have to economize, the first institution to feel our economy
is the church. We confess a brilliant creed then go out as if it were nothing.
The man of the world goes about living up to his creed with an earnestness. We
are so listless, and many times we are worth simply nothing at all.

Do you really believe your beliefs? Do you believe that it is down-
right good sense to seek first the Kingdom of God? Do you believe that you
brought nothing into the world, and that you can take nothing out? I know
a man without one hundredth part of your opportunity, and he has educated one hundred boys for the ministry. He has a beautiful creed, but he lives up to it. If you and I were to do that there would be a new reality in our religion. If the church were to do that for a single generation, the kingdom of God would come and the glory of God would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.
"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores."

—Luke 16:19,20

This amazing parable is really a drama in three acts.

**ACT I**

This Act is a tableau. It pictures a typical day in the lives of two men. First, it is a typical day in the life of a rich man. "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day."

The picture is vivid. There is a palatial residence. We enter by a magnificent portal. The halls are lined with marble, white and black, like the mingling of night and morning. The floors are spread with the choicest products of the Oriental loom. The walls are hung with the finest tapestries. There are lovely courts where lazy fountains spray from silver faucets. The scene is one of luxury and bewitching beauty.

Today the rich man is giving a banquet. He is entertaining the socially elite, a choice few of the select Four Hundred perchance. His guests are elegant and cultured, but he himself outshines them all. He entertains as "to the manner born". He is the best dressed man in the city. He sets the style. He is the Beau Brummell of his day. He is clothed in purple and fine linen. The scene so far is one of unmixed beauty.

There is just one blot upon the picture. Out in front of the imposing portal of this palace there lies what at first sight seems to be only a bundle of rags. But as we watch this heap of soiled rags, we see it move. As we look closer, we
see there is the wrecked body of a man inside these rags. "There was a beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores." This beggar is also entertaining, but his guests are the unfriended street-dogs who sit about on their haunches and seem to be his only attendants. "Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores."

These two men are close together physically, but in spite of this, they are separated by distances wider than the spaces between the stars. One is strong; the other is weak. One is capable of giving help; the other is helpless. One is healthful; the other is sick. The one is rich; the other is poor. Neither of these two men speak a word. The beggar does not abuse the rich man. The rich man does not abuse the beggar. Doré pictures this rich man as having Lazarus scourged from his door, but that is reading into the story what is not there. The rich man did him no aggressive harm at all. But the two never got together. Lazarus could not go to the rich man. The rich man would not go to Lazarus. But he did him no harm. He allowed him to be a blot on the picture while he ate the scraps that fell from his table. Thus Jesus takes a snap-shot of these two men in a typical day of their lives.

**ACT II**

In Act II the scene changes. We stand in the solemn presence of death. "It came to pass that the beggar died." "Too bad!" the rich man might have said with a gloomy shake of the head, if he heard about it at all. Perhaps he even went so far as to say, "Well, it is a good thing I did not help him any more than I did. It would only have prolonged his misery. Besides, why should he be helped? He was not making any contribution to life. He was a mere parasite. It is good riddance." The beggar died. Life moved on just the same. Few knew of his passing. So far as we know, none cared. He died in the street. Perchance he had lived there for some days.

Did they hold an autopsy? Possibly. Were we to come upon such a death today,
that would be our procedure. What would have been the verdict? No marks of violence were found on his body. "He came to his death," we would have said, "from natural causes." He had nothing but crumbs, mere scraps, and scraps are not enough to keep anything alive. The church that tries to live off the scraps of the devotion of its membership will die. A business that tried to exist on the scraps of its owners' attention would not last a week. Men and women cannot be kept alive by what others throw away. Nobody can live off scraps. The beggar died. What killed him was neglect.

Sometime ago I was exchanging experiences with a brother minister. We were telling each other how many times we had been taken in. I made bold to say that I had heard almost every lie that human ingenuity could devise. I have thought sometimes that a man of genius could not make a more remunerative contribution than the invention of a few new lies. Generally speaking, we all tell the same ones. All we can change is a few of the circumstances. Then he told this story: "I had had an unusually hard day. I had become bankrupt in personality and patience when a seedy looking chap made an appeal for help. I answered rather roughly, 'I have gone as far as I can go. You will have to go to somebody else.' They found his body two days later just a few rods from my home. An autopsy showed that he had died of insufficient nourishment." So died this beggar of the long ago.

As to the funeral of this beggar, nothing is said. Doubtless he had none. Today we would put him in the potter's field. In that day he would doubtless have been shovelled up and carried away with the city garbage. They had neither time nor heart for the burying of such worthless creatures.

"Rattle his bones over the stones; He's only a beggar that nobody owns."

Then we come to a word that is indeed startling. The beggar died. "Of course," you say. "What of it?" But listen to this. "The rich man also died." Now that is arresting. One day ill-mannered death came to the palace as he had come to the
cobble-stones of the street. One day he stalked right in through this imposing portal, set his clay-covered spade beside the rosewood bedstead on which the rich man lay and pushed him out into the cemetery. The rich man also died—in spite of his riches, in spite of his purple and fine linen, in spite of the best attention, in spite of the fact that people said of him, "He had so much for which to live."

Dying as he did, an autopsy was not necessary. The best of physicians were about him at his passing. They gave the name of the disease from which he died. But there was perhaps even more here than met the eye. As the beggar had died of too little, he perhaps died of too much. A banquet every day is living too fast. What is more likely still is that death was hastened by sheer boredom. Having nothing to do but to pamper himself, he grew tired. If the beggar died because he had nothing on which to live, the rich man perhaps died because he had nothing for which to live.

But be the cause of his death what it may, he had a funeral. I think there is a touch of humor in this. "The rich man also died and had a funeral." Naturally! He was a leading citizen. There was perchance an editorial in the Jerusalem Gazette. There was an eloquent eulogy, plenty of hired mourners, an abundance of flowers. If it had been like our day, there was a casket that put a heavy strain upon the pallbearers. There was a quiet asking in an undertone, "How much did he leave?" with some cynic answering, "He left everything." Thus, these two men who lived so close together and were so far apart met a common fate at the end of the journey. They both passed into the land of the unseen.

ACT III

This Act takes place within the veil. Jesus is not here undertaking to tell us all about the after-life. The Bible is beautifully reticent about what lies beyond the grave. This is the case, I think, for many reasons. I have an idea we are not capable of understanding fully what lies beyond death. It might be as
difficult to explain it to us as it would be to explain the present world to a babe unborn. It might be as difficult as it would be to explain color to one who had never seen, or a Beethoven symphony to one who was stone deaf. But if Jesus does not undertake to give us all the details of the after life, he always assumed the after life, spoke of it with an at-homeness with which He spoke of the life that now is.

Listen: "It came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried: And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Here Jesus makes certain great assumptions that amount to affirmations.

1. He assumes the continuity of life. "Lazarus died, period!" we are accustomed to say. But it was not a period—it is not even a comma. The same was true of the rich man. Their bodies passed, but they were not their bodies. Their brains came to an end, but they were not their brains. This body is not myself; this brain
is not myself. I have thrown away eight bodies and eight brains, but I am the same personality. You will still be you, and I will still be I, when we have crossed the little ditch that men call the grave.

2. A second affirmation that Jesus makes is that different choices eventuate in different destinies. "Remember," Abraham is represented as saying, "that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things." Why did the rich man go wrong? Why did he end in hell? It was not because he was rich. It was not because he made a pile of money. Money means only a greater opportunity to do good. It was not because he lived in a fine house and wore good clothes. He went wrong because he chose to live for things. He chose to live for himself. It is possible to deny the after life altogether. It is possible to shut our eyes to any possibility of any kind of hell. Maybe it all ends in the grave. But this is true—the man who seeks to corner the good things of life for himself finds and makes hell in the here and now. The red hell of war that now blazes over the earth is due to the same sort of selfishness that Dives made his choice.

Why did Lazarus achieve an opposite destiny? Why did he find a place in Abraham's bosom, which is the Hebrew way of saying the Paradise of God. It was not because he had a hard time in this world. He is represented as having evil things. He did suffer. He even chose to suffer rather than to do wrong. But what saved Lazarus was not his misfortune, not his hardship, not his poverty. But in spite of all these things, he chose God. He chose to try to share the unselfishness of God. He is the only character in any parable to whom Jesus ever gave a name. Lazarus—that means "God is my help." Dives lived for himself and found hell. Lazarus lived for God and others and found heaven. That is the case here whatever may be the case by and by.

3. A third affirmation of Jesus is that, not only did Dives go wrong because he made a wrong choice, but because he made that wrong choice without excuse. When Dives makes his appeal for some one to warn his brothers, our first impulse is to believe that he has had a change of heart. He is at last becoming interested in
others. But that is not the case at all. Why did he ask for some one to go to his brothers from the dead? It was his way of saying, "I did not have a fair chance. My light was too dim. If I had known the road I ought to have taken, the choice I ought to have made, I would have made it."

But our Lord makes it plain that this is not the case at all. It is not lack of knowledge of the difference between right and wrong that is back of most of our wrong choices. It is not so much that we do not know enough; it is rather the fact that we are unwilling to live up to what we do know. It may be that Dives never read his Bible, though I have an idea that he was a good Pharisee. It may be that he did not go to the church or synagogue; the chances are that he went every day. But even then he knew that it was better to be kind than unkind. He knew that it was better to be unselfish than selfish. He knew it was better to help a man in need of help than to leave him alone.

At first blush we feel inclined to agree with Dives. If one went unto them, he said they would repent. But would they? I have never known anybody yet to become a New Testament Christian by seeing a ghost. I have known people here and there who claimed to receive messages from the dead, but I never knew one so far as I could see to be made Christ-like by such messages. The truth of the matter is that all of us have that light we need. We know that it is better to do right than to do wrong. We know that the most dangerous form of wrong-doing is refusing to give the help that we ought to give. We know that, though we may be consciously choosing to disobey God at this moment, we can turn to Him and accept Him as our God if we will. If the appeal of His word, if the appeal of His spirit, if the appeal of our own consciences, if the appeal of human need will not lead us to do this, there is no use in expecting such transformation at the hands of a ghost.

4. Finally, Jesus seems to assume that the destiny fixed by our choices is final. Of course, we cannot be positive about this but that seems indicated.

"Besides all this, "between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed." Who fixed
it? Not God, not evil men, not ignorance, not lack of opportunity! That gulf was fixed by Dives himself. He knew Lazarus was there, but he never met him. Lazarus was his responsibility. He was also his opportunity. He might in love have so disposed his wealth as to have enriched himself for time and for eternity. Now he was separated from him by a chasm of his own digging.

Who are these five brothers of Dives that he seems so eager to warn? You and I are a part of them. He has a word to say to us. That word is this: We are all the sons of God. Our lives interlock. For you to live in disregard of your brother, for you to neglect him will cause him suffering. It might even cause his death. But such neglect, whatever it does to your brother, will destroy you. It will make a bit of hell for you, if not in the by and by, certainly in the here and now. There may not be any beggars for physical bread living next door to you, but there are always those who are starving for the Bread of Life, for the bread of sympathy, for the bread of plain human helpfulness and human kindness. It is up to you whether you will give it or not. A wrong choice leads to a wrong destiny here and always. A right choice leads to a right destiny here and always. Which choice is yours?
EXPERIENCING EASTER

Let me read you a story. It is found in St. Luke's Gospel, 16th Chapter, Verses 19 to 31:

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:
And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, ........"

This is one of the most striking and dramatic stories ever told, even by Jesus himself. If it seems harsh, remember that it is the harshness of the tenderest lips that ever spoke. If it seems foolish and incredible, bear in mind that it contains the very wisdom of the eternal Christ. If it is stern, it is also tender. If it has tones that awe the heart, it also speaks home to our dearest dreams and to our hopes. It is a marvelous drama in three scenes:

As the curtain rises, we see the two characters of the drama as they play their parts during the typical day of their lives. It is not necessary to have a whole bay full of water to know what water is like. One drop is enough. It is not necessary to know every day of man's life to know what type of man he is. It is only necessary to see him in one typical day. Here Jesus takes a snapshot of these two men in a pose that is characteristic.

1. Look first at the rich man. The scene suggested by him is pleasant to the eye. He lives in a palatial home. This palace is entered by a beautiful portal. Within the halls are lined with marble, white and black like the blending of morning and night. His walls are hung with the finest tapestry. The
choicest oriental rugs adorn the floors. There are lovely courts where sleepy fountains spray from silvery faucets into lovely basins.

Today this rich man, called Dives, because that is the Latin word for rich, is giving a banquet. The fact that he fared sumptuously every day means that he gave a banquet every day. His guests were the socially prominent. They were people of wealth, culture, and position. All in all the scene is pleasant to the eye. In fact there is only one ugly blot upon the landscape. We westerners cannot but be shocked that such a blot was permitted at all.

2. Hard by the ornate door of this palace is what looks at first like a bundle of dirty rags. By and by these rags move. They become articulate. We hear a groan from them. Then we are horrified by the fact that there is a man inside them. He is a sick beggar whose name is Lazarus. His body is covered with ulcers. About him sitting on their haunches are the wild street dogs. While Dives entertains these select four hundred, this beggar entertains these dogs. Now these two men are very far apart, though physically so close together. I want you to notice the gulf that separates them. We shall meet it again later. Dives is well and strong. Lazarus is sick. Dives is capable of giving help. Lazarus is helpless. Dives is at the top of the ladder. Lazarus is at the bottom. Dives has to the physical eye everything. Lazarus has nothing. Dives has the capacity to bridge the chasm between himself and his needy brother. But the chasm is not bridged because he is not willing to bridge it. Lazarus fails to bridge the chasm because he cannot.

There you have the picture. There are two men, one in
desperate need, the other with everything to give. What does the rich man do about it? He does not have the beggar stoned away. That a more cruel man would have done. But Dives does nothing at all. He merely neglects him. He has grown so accustomed to his presence that he perhaps does not even see him. Nothing is said against the rich man. There is no word of accommodation for the poor man. We only see them so close together and so far apart. That is the end of Scene I.

- II -

The second scene is one that we frankly do not like. It is a death scene. Oldtime preachers used to be criticized for telling death-bed stories. Personally I have never gone into them myself, but there is no use in shying around the fact. That corrupt old tyrant Louis XIV forbade death to be mentioned in his presence. But one day death walked in unannounced. He set his slate colored stag down by the bedside and pushed the king out to rot with his paupers. There is no use to shut our eyes to the fact. Listen them to this story.

"It came to pass that the beggar died. "What relief!" We say. "He is well out of his misery." Nothing shocking about such a death, for his going only removed an ugly blot from the landscape. Nobody was astonished that the beggar died.

How did he come to die? He was sick we are told. But the real reason was neglect. He had to live off crumbs and scraps. There were no napkins in those days. Guests dipped their hands into a common dish. They used bread for napkins, then threw the napkins aside. There was no reason that this beggar should starve on these scraps. But he did starve for human friendship and helpfulness. You cannot even keep your soul alive if you toss it a scrap of worship once a year on Easter Sunday morning.
The rich man also died. That is shocking. "What a pity." said his fellow feasters. "He had so much for which to live." No, "for" is the wrong word. "On" is the proper word. He had plenty to live on, but little to live for. What he lived for was to enjoy himself. He was a playboy. He never grew up. He never learned to use those words: "I owe, I ought, I must."

What killed him? We are not told, but as we read between the lines, I think he died because of sheer boredom. He had no high purpose. No campaign for human betterment interested him. Being a playboy, he did not have interest enough in others to keep him alive.

Not only did the rich man die, but he had a funeral. There is a touch of scorn in that, it would seem. The funeral of the beggar is not mentioned. He did not have any. They shoveled him up with the refuse of the city and carted him away to the valley Hinnom to be burned. But the rich man had a funeral. The papers told how much he left, which was all that he had. Likely they sang a lovely hymn like the one used for an old renegade millionaire in Oklahoma, "There's a Gold Mine in the Sky."

- III -

The third scene is one that only Jesus could paint with authority. When the curtain rises, you get a glimpse of the afterlife. Now it is well to bear in mind that the purpose of this parable is not to teach us about the life to come. What it says, therefore, about life beyond death is all the more impressive. Jesus here makes certain affirmations that are very proper to Easter.

1. He affirms that death is not a period. Beyond the
experiences of death the rich man was still alive, and so was Lazarus. When a soldier saw his comrade blown to bits by a bomb, he said, "It will take more than that to stop him." And so it will. Life goes on. God has breathed his own breath into us, and we are all immortal. This is a fact whatever may be our attitude to immortality. We may be indifferent to it. We may refuse to think about it. We may welcome the fact with vast eagerness. But whatever the attitude, we are children of eternity. Somewhere forever we are going to live. If I am to spend one day at a place, I will not take my preparation for that day so seriously as if I were going to spend ten years there. It is a tremendously serious matter to have an eternity on your hands.

Some years ago I stood one Saturday morning talking to a banker who was a member of my church and quite a fine man. "I will not be with you tomorrow", he said. "They are opening up some new lots over at "X" and I am going to drive over tomorrow so as to be there early Monday morning so as to be on the ground floor."

"You don't see anything wrong with that?" he asked.

"Do you?", I replied.

"Do you?" he answered.

Then I said, "Do you?" At last like the honest man he was, he said, "Yes, I suppose it is not exactly what a Christian must do, but you preachers do not understand. A man must live."

"Yes", I replied. "You are entirely right, a man must live. Now if you mean you must live a certain number of years here, I don't know about that and neither do you. If you mean that you must live until you get back inside your bank, I do not know and you do not know."

But somewhere a man must live. Nothing can stop you. Beyond
death when this world is only a memory, we are going to go on living:

"I have got to live with myself, and so I ought to be fit for myself to know."

Beyond death both these men were alive.

2. Not only were they both alive, but Dives was still Dives and Lazarus was still Lazarus. They were the same men they had been before. Of course they had lost their bodies, but they had lost them before. Losing bodies is a familiar experience with all of us. We wear our body out and throw it away every seven years. I have already had nine bodies, but I am the same individual that I was when I set out. We are not only going on living beyond death, but you will always be you and I will always be I.

I desire to emphasize this fact because we have a tendency to believe that death is going to work an amazing revolution in us. I am sure that such is not the case. So to think is neither reasonable nor scriptural. Few of us think of death as Jesus thought of it. With Him it was no more than passing from one town to another, or one room to another. It was an exodus. We are not greatly changed by passing through a door. If death could make a bad man into a good man, then it also might make a good man into a bad man. As I lie down to sleep at night, so will I awake in the morning. Sleep rests me, but it does not change me. Forever you are going to be yourself.

3. While both of these men were still living, while they were the same individuals conscious of themselves and conscious of each other they were not experiencing the same destiny. One was in a place of wretchedness and the other in a place of comfort and joy. Between the two, says the story, there was a great gulf fixed. That does not necessarily mean that they were far apart
physically. They were perhaps no farther apart now then they were in their lives. But they were far apart in that one was joyous and the other was wretched. God did not make the chasm. The men made it themselves.

Suppose you and I were to go tonight to hear Fritz Chrysler play. And suppose by nature and by training you were an enthusiastic musician, and suppose on the other hand I had neither taste nor training. To you the music would be a bit of heaven. To me it would be a bit of hell. Dives had made himself incapable of enjoying the values that heaven represents. Lazarus had a capacity to enjoy those values.

- IV -

This brings us to the real point of the story. Why think of them? First, take Dives himself. Why did he find himself in a place of conscious wretchedness. It was not because he had been rich. The man upon whose bosom Lazarus was leaning, Abraham, had been far richer than Dives. Money can be a very bad master. It can enslave. But money itself is not an evil. It may be a source of endless good.

No more did Dives blunder into hell because he had been aggressively unkind to this beggar. I repeat, he did not scourge him; he did not drive him away. He just let him alone. He did not do him any wrong. He just did nothing at all. But the surest way to lose anything of value or to destroy any institution is just to neglect it. It is natural, therefore, that Jesus would not regard the open and aggressive sins as those of greatest danger. The greatest sin to his mind was the sin of standing amidst a world of human need and doing nothing to meet that need.

The sin of Dives then was the sin of self-centeredness. Jesus
strongly hints here that the self-centered man is headed for hell. That sounds shocking. Do not think for a moment that I am so old-fashion as to believe in fire and brimstone. You cannot burn a human soul. Yet it is easy to believe that the one who goes through life too self-centered to share the other man's burden, is headed for some sort of hell.

Why can we believe this? Because that is certainly what happens in the life that now is. What lies back of the two world wars that have turned the nations into hell. Self-centeredness and determination of too many men to do as they please. What is it that makes the homes that have the possibility of heaven in them a living hell? Self-centeredness. What makes many a man cry with Milton's devil: "Which way is hell when I myself am in hell." What effect might doing as you please have on after-life. It makes hell of the life that now is.

Not only had Dives flung himself into a hell of wretchedness because he willfully ignored the will of God and the needs of men, but he did this with his eyes wide open. When we hear him ask for a missionary to go to his five brothers, our first impression is at last he is coming to care for somebody other than himself. But that is not the meaning of his appeal at all. When he made this request he was affirming that he had not had a fair test. "If I had only known," he said, "I would have done better." But he did know. The trouble with him as with us was not that he did not know enough, but that he refused to live up to what he actually did know.

2. Why did Lazarus find a home in the paradise of God? Was Dives not condemned because he was rich? Neither was this man rewarded because he was poor and sick. Life had dealt harshly
with him, but he might have been just as selfish as was Dives. Poverty and misfortune do not necessarily make one a saint.

Why, I repeat, was he saved. He found himself amidst the bliss of heaven because in spite of the harsh blows that life had dealt him, he had trusted in God. Lazarus is the only character in the parables of Jesus who is given a name. His name signifies, "God is my help." Jesus is meaning to tell us that the man found his way to the paradise of God because through faith in God and surrender to Him he was fitted for that high fellowship.

Here, then, are the facts that you and I face. We are going to live. We have eternity in our hearts and on our hands. Always we are going to be ourselves. We are going to remember and know on life's other side. We are not going all to meet the same destiny because we do not all enjoy and appreciate the same values. God has no way of getting any man into heaven who has no appreciation of the values that he offers here and now. These two men made opposite choices. Those choices issued in opposite characters and opposite destinies. Now we have our chance at choice. You can make the choice of Dives to live your own life, independent of the will of God, or you can make the choice of Lazarus, dedicating you life to God. If you do this, you have eternal life here and now.

With many Easter is a date in the almanac and nothing else. With you it will be an experience. You will know Christ personally. Therefore, you will not simply live for ever. We will all do that. Eternal life does not mean mere eternal existence, but eternal right existence. "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." If you take Him as your Lord and Savior today, He will give you a quality of life.
THAT RICH MAN

There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.

Luke 16:19

The parable of which this text is a part is one of the most daring and startling that ever fell from the lips of Jesus. It is impossible to hear it intelligently without being awed by it. It has in it a sternness of tone that is all the more amazing when we realize the character of the speaker. This lurid picture was not drawn by some disappointed and embittered misanthrope. These are not the words of a cynical fanatic, who delights in all that smacks of tragedy. These shocking words fell from the tenderest lips that ever spoke. They were born of the warmest and gentlest heart that ever beat in a human bosom. They are all the more compelling and arresting for this reason. The story is really a gripping drama in three scenes.

I.

The first scene is a typical day in the lives of two men. The one of these is a man of wealth and position, the other is a man of poverty. One enjoys physical vigor. He is a part of the select four hundred of his city. He gives a banquet every day. The other is at the opposite end of the procession. He is a man whose life has been pounded by cruel fists. Fate seems to have gone through
his pockets and stripped him of everything of real worth. The one scene that is here painted gives an insight into the kind of men that they are. One does not need a hogshead of water to know the nature of the sea, a single drop is enough. So a single day, or a single hour out of the lives of these two men is enough to show us the kind of men they are.

Look then at this picture. "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a beggar that was laid at his gate full of sores . . . . Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." This is a picture of extreme beauty and extreme ugliness all—but rubbing elbows with each other. Look at the beautiful side of the picture. There is a palacial home. it is entered by a magnificent portal. Within are lovely halls, lined with marble white and black like the mingling of night and of morning. There are open courts where flowers bloom; where sparkling water sprays from silvery faucets to fall with liquid laughter into a transparent pool. Standing at the door of this palace is a patrician. His clothing is of the most stylish cut. He is receiving in princely fashion those who have their names in the social register.

It is a beautiful scene, but there is one blot on the landscape. Near this door, we see, what at first seems but a bundle of rags. Suddenly, those rags move, and we discover that there is life within them. Ah, there is a man! He is a pitiful and repelent object. He is sick with a ghastly disease. His body is covered with ulcers. About him the lean street-dogs sit upon their haunches, seemingly less friendless and desolate than he. This rich man and this poor man are at the opposite extremes of the human procession.

This then is the picture. As offensive as the presence of this beggar must have been, the rich man did not have him driven away. He did not have his servants to scourge him out of sight. He did not have him stoned, he simply let him alone. He went on with his banquet just as if the beggar did
not exist. The beggar on his side made no contact with the rich man. He did not because he could not. He was there for the crumbs that were to be thrown away after the banquet. No doubt he had received crumbs at this place before. He was there for this purpose now. And the significant fact of the story is that these two never got together. The beggar could not go to the rich man, the rich man would not go to the beggar. This is the first scene. It is a typical chapter out of the lives of these two men. They are near together, and yet infinite distances apart.

II.

The second scene is one that is more shocking. It is a scene that, frankly, few of us like. This is the case because it is a death scene. I have heard ministers criticized for telling death-bed stories. Sometimes it may be done in a cheap and sensational fashion, but such is not the case here. This is a mere facing of facts. Death is an experience that must come to all of us. It is said of Louis XIV. that he would not allow death to be mentioned in his presence. But in spite of that, one day death sent in his own card. He walked in past the guard and Louis had to meet him face to face. So must all of us. There is, therefore, no use in blinking plain facts.

Listen then to the second scene. "It came to pass, that the beggar died." "Poor fellow," we try to say sympathetically. "It is good that he did, he is better off. If I were as wretched and destitute and unfriended as he, I should want to die too." There is nothing shocking, of course, about the beggar's dying. It was to be expected that he should die. In fact, he lasted longer than most thought.

What was it killed him? "He died," you remind me, "of a disease that rotted his body with ulcers." But that is not what killed him. He died of neglect. That is what the Master means to tell us. All that he got from the
"That Rich Man"

the rich man was crumbs. Crumbs are what is left after the feast. They will not keep anybody alive long. Both the individual and the church will die if they are fed only on crumbs. Many of us give the church only the crumbs of our time, the crumbs of our interests, the crumbs of our money. Therefore, for us the church becomes a dead thing and we die with it. Nothing of worth can live off of crumbs.

But, if the death of the beggar is a commonplace, here is a further fact that is startling "The rich man also died." "Ah!" you say, "What a pity--and he had so much for which to live. He was so comfortable and well fixed. He was so popular, such a social favorite. He gave such splendid banquets. And just as he reached the climax of his financial and social success, death wrench-ed it all out of his hands." That is so often the case.

"And when he thinks, good easy man,

Full sure his honors are ripening,

Then comes a frost, a killing frost."

So it was here, "It came to pass that the beggar died . . . And the rich man also died."

But while the same event happened to both, there was a difference in the attention given to the bit of clay that was left after the spirit had gone. "The rich man died and was buried." That is, he had a funeral. Nothing is said of the funeral of the beggar. He doubtless had none. His body was probably gathered by the city scavenger, and carried away to the valley to be burned with the other refuse. Doubtless he did not even have the poor honor of a pauper's grave.

"Rattled his bones over the stones,

He is only a beggar that nobody knows."

But the rich man died and had a funeral. The floral offerings were beautiful. The funeral sermon was brilliant. The hired mourners wept and wailed loud
and long. The "Jerusalem Gazette" perchance remarked that his was one of the longest funeral processions that ever passed through the streets of the city. There the curtain falls.

III.

The third scene lifts the curtain upon that life that lies beyond death. Jesus is not here arguing about the life to come. This parable is in no sense meant to be a discussion of immortality. Jesus assumes immortality just as He assumes God. He assumed God, realized Him, walked in his fellowship. He never sought to prove eternal life. He assumed it, lived in the daily experience of it. He knew that the things that we can prove are not really worth proving.

In this story Jesus assumes that both the rich man and the beggar were consciously alive beyond the experience that we call death. It is evident that Jesus never thought of the departure of the spirit as a final and awful something as we do. He didn't speak of the cessation of physical life as death at all. When his friend, who lived at Bethany had slipped away, he declared that he was asleep. It was only when his disciples said "if he sleeps he will do well," that Jesus said plainly,-"Lazarus is dead." To Him physical death was a sleep, an exodus. It meant a passing from one room in God's house into some other room. But as circumstance changed life went on.

Therefore, we find these two consciously alive beyond the grave. Jesus was sure of the survival of the personality. Since they were consciously alive, we are not surprised to find that they are the same kind of men on the further side of death that they were on this side. It is a common and grievous blunder to assume that death can work any great moral change in a human character. As we lie down at night, so we are likely to awaken in the morning. And as we lie down in our final sleep, so we shall awaken in the beyond. The casket, the
shroud, the undertaker, the cemetery, none of these, nor all of these, have any power to make us different from what we are.

Since this is the case, we should not be surprised to find that these two who had been separated from each other on this side, were separated still on the further side. They failed to get together here because the beggar could not, and the rich man would not. That chasm abides in the beyond. When the rich man makes his pathetic appeal for help, he is reminded of the fact that between the two there is a great gulf fixed. Who fixed it? Not God, not death, not the beggar. Dives fixed it.

This rich man, having consciously separated himself from his brother, found himself lonely and unfriended in the land unseen. The beggar on the other hand, found himself in the bosom of Abraham, which to the mind of the Jews meant the paradise of God. One was consciously and joyously alive. The other was consciously and bitterly wretched. In this present world, they had made different choices, those choices had issued in different destinies. This is inevitable. God is powerless to get a man into any kind of heaven when he clings to hell in his own heart. To be selfish and neglectful of the needs of others is to be building for ourselves in the here and now, as well as in the yonder, some kind of hell. "The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abrahams bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried, and in Hades he lifted up his eyes."

IV.

Why was the rich man lost while the beggar was saved. Why did the one find himself in a place of joy and the other in a place of sorrow? Let us face the fact at once that the beggar was not saved because he was a beggar. He might have because of his sickness and rags and neglect become unspeakably bitter. He might have become possessed of bitter hatred to his more fortunate brother. But he refused to do that. His name, Lazarus, signifies "God is my
help." Under those rags beat a heart that trusted God and loved Him, and therefore, loved his brother in spite of the fact that that brother neglected him. That fact caused the door of heaven to open to him of its own accord.

Why did the rich man lift up his eyes in Hades? It was not because he was rich. It was not because he wore good clothes. It was not because he was the favorite of society. None of these things is wrong in itself. He missed the way, not because he was aggressively cruel to this beggar that laid at his gate. He never lifted his hand against him. All he did was to let him alone. He did not think evil of him, he just forgot him. He did not scourge him, he neglected him. Then one day immersed in business and social engagements, he tangled his silken sandaled foot into the rags of that old beggar and fell flat into the pit without ever really seeing him. His sin was the sin of living in a needy world and doing nothing to meet that need.

His sin was further aggravated by the fact that he made his self-centered choice with his eyes wide open. He is represented as making an appeal for his brothers who have not yet entered into the experience of death. "I pray thee, Father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment."

It would seem that at last this rich man has become conscious of the needs of others. But that is not the meaning of his wail at all. What he is saying is this:—"I never had a chance. I didn't know that the results of a self-centered life would be hell. Had I known it, I should have never made such a choice."

But listen to the answer. "They had Moses and the prophets let them hear them." "You also had Moses and the prophets, therefore, you had all the light that you needed. Your failure was not born of the fact that you did not know better, it was born of the fact that you were too self-centered to do better." But he presses his claim, "If one went into them from the dead, they would repent." But listen to the answer! "If they hear not Moses and the prophets,
they would not be persuaded even though one went unto them from the dead." How true that is! What we need is not more knowledge, it is the consecration to live up to the knowledge that is actually ours.

This is a startling story. It is a parable, but it embodies a truth that is just as abiding as God. That truth is this--The need at your door is your opportunity. It is a safety vault in which you may store up wealth for eternity. It may serve to build your heaven. But if through your indifference, and selfishness, you refuse to meet that need, the opportunity that would have builded your heaven will build your hell. The sin of all sins in the mind of Jesus is to live in a world of desperate need and fail unselfishly to do anything to meet that need. That means hell here. It means hell also in the world unseen.
I

In speaking of memory, we are speaking of a mystical and amazing power.

1. Memory is independent of many barriers that limit other powers. It is independent of space. I cannot will myself across a continent or across a sea but I can transport myself by means of memory. This power is swifter than the fastest train. It is more fleet than any air ship or rocket. It even outruns swift-footed light. By means of memory I can visit again any place on the earth that I have been, however distant.

Just as memory is independent of space, so it is of time. The old Spanish explorer who sought for the fountain of youth was following a mad quest. There is no way of breaking through the doorway of the past. There is no way of slipping back physically into our bygone yesterdays. "Backward, turn backward, Oh time in your flight", expresses a longing that is utterly futile. But while I can never in a physical sense break through the door of the past into the land of boyhood, I can go back by means of memory. At this moment I am remembering an incident connected with the celebration of my third birthday years ago.

Not only is memory independent of space and of time, but of death also. The Whole New Testament teaches this, both directly and indirectly. When that great outlaw was dying, he turned to Jesus, who is dying more rapidly than himself, and prayed this prayer, "Remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom". He believed that this dying man could not be permanently stopped by death, and that continuing to live, he would remember. And Jesus declared that he was right by answering, "Today shalt thou
be with me in Paradise". This promise was capable of being verified only on the grounds that Jesus could remember the outlaw and that this outlaw could remember Jesus.

Our Lord further affirms the victory of memory over death in the Parable of which my text is a part. Many of the possessions of Dives have been left behind him. He had left his purple and fine linen. He had left his friends. He had left an elaborate banquet. He had left his palatial home. But he had not left his memory. Beyond the experience of death he still remembered. So will you. So will I. If we may believe the New Testament, memory will survive death.

If we find it difficult to accept this on the authority of the New Testament, we may find ourselves assisted by one of the gods of our present day, and that is science. We use up one brain after another and toss it away in the here and now, but memory persists. If you are seventy years of age, you have been in possession of at least ten different brains. Yet at this moment you find it easier to remember what was recorded on the first brain you ever had than you do to remember what was recorded six months ago. Here, then, is an amazing power that is superior to space, time, and death.

2. A second fact to which I call your attention is that this amazing power of memory is possessed by every one of us. Now and then some friend tells me of his treacherous memory. He declares, "I cannot remember a thing. What I hear seems to go in one ear and out the other." Yet such a man would be far nearer the truth if he were to declare, "I cannot forget anything." Every word that I speak, every thought that I think, every decision that I make is written upon the tablet of my memory, and I have no power to erase them.
That this is the case is indicated by the fact that often one who has been rescued when he was sinking for the last time, has declared that in that instant before death closed over him his whole life seemed to pass before him in a panorama. Some theologians believe that the books that are to be opened on the day of judgment are none other than the books of memory. "Don't write that," said a youth to his friend who was preparing to write an obscene word on a plate glass window. "Why not?" came the answer. "Because you can't rub it out." So I say to my own heart and yours, "Don't write that ugly thought, that warped dream, because you can't rub it out." Everybody remembers.

3. But while scientifically we never forget anything, practically we forget almost everything. We forget each other's faces and we forget each other's names. We forget our unpaid bills. We forget our unfulfilled vows. We forget our friends. We sometimes forget our loved ones. We even forget God. Thus while scientifically we forget nothing, practically we forget everything.

Sometimes we forget unconsciously. We simply allow one matter to crowd out another. I forget a wedding once after I had rehearsed for it. I did not desire to forget. The day of the wedding was a crowded day and I got so busy with something else that I forgot this engagement of such vast importance to a young man and young woman. It was thus you forgot your first love. You did not say, "Go to, I am going to forget this girl", you simply got interested in another and she slipped out of your mind.

It is thus multitudes forget God. You remember the man with the muck rake, in Binyan's immortal allegory. He is very busy working in the barn yard. He has a muck rake in his hands with which he is working
dirt, and sticks and straw. He is giving all his attention to this mean task. Yet all the while, just above his bowed head, is an angel on outstretched wings. That angel has a crown in his hands that he is eager to put on the muck raker's brow if he can only get his attention. But this he cannot do because the poor chap is simply too busy. Thus, I repeat, multitudes forget God because they get absorbed in something else.

Then there are those who forget deliberately and as a matter of choice. I came to my office some time ago in response to an earnest appeal for financial help. When I arrived the man asking help was talking with a brother minister in the outer office. When I had sent him into the inner office I asked my minister friend, "Do you know him?" "I have met him," was the reply. "What do you know about him?" "I know this much, he borrowed some money from me one time and failed to pay me back."

With that information, I went in to hear his story. It was a good one and he told it well. When he had finished, I said, "By the way, you know this minister?" "I have met him," came the cautious answer. "Did you ever borrow any money from him?" Surprise showed in his eyes as he said, "I believe I did." "Did you pay him back?" was the next question. At that he popped his finger in utter and wide eyed amazement and said, "I forgot that." So he had, deliberately and with set purpose.

It is even thus that some forget God. So it was with the Perfect Fool. The Fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." You notice that his difficulties were not intellectual but moral. The thought of God worried him. "If there really is a God and I am his child, then I have responsibilities that a son of the muck does not have." This fool did not wish to be weighed with this responsibility. Therefore, he simply banished God from his thinking. This is not unique. A young fellow wrote to the minister some time ago telling him of the new joy and
freedom that he had found since he had made up his mind that there was no God. Thus we allow the thought of God to be crowded out or we crowd him out deliberately.

4. The final fact to which I call your attention is that this amazing power of memory is intended by our Heavenly Father to be our friend. Rightly used, it may begin in the here and now to make our heaven and continue that process throughout eternity. But if we refuse to make this power our friend, it will become our foe. If we refuse to let it help make our heaven, it will begin here and now to make our hell. Whether it is our angel or our devil depends upon our use of it.

II

How do we use memory?

1. For some it is a great preventive. This is one of the finest uses of memory. It may build for us a strong wall at the top of the cliff instead of a house for our broken bodies and broken hearts at the foot of the cliff. This is what the preacher is saying in these fine words: "Remember thy creator in the days of thy youth." This is the finest possible wisdom for at least three reasons.

(1) It is easier to remember God in our youth than at any other period of life. There is a natural affinity between Jesus Christ and a little children. The characteristics that go to make Christian faith, humility, loyalty are inherent in the life of the normal child. God put them there. We ought to help our children to remember their Creator in the days of their youth because it is easier to remember him then than it will ever be again.

(2) To remember in youth is to give God the whole of life instead of just a part of it. Those who remember God in their youth save them-
selves from the tragedy of wasted years. Those who remember in youth naturally make the best and most useful Christians.

(3) Then we ought to teach our children to remember in youth because if they fail to do so, the chances are that they will never remember. A fine old gentleman said to me years ago, "When I was young the thought of God seemed to haunt me. I found it difficult to put him out of my mind. But now, as I am getting old, I seek to realize him but it seems impossible." If you forget God in youth, you are in great danger of forgetting him forever. But to remember in youth is to keep life sweet and fine from the morning to the even tide.

2. Then memory may minister to us by restoring us, by bringing us back into the way that we have forsaken. Why did the Prodigal turn his back on the swine pen and begin his difficult trek back to his father's house? That, under God, is a work of memory. As he struggled under the burden of his hunger and shame, old home voices called to him, old home memories tormented him. Above all else he saw through the medium of memory the kindliest face into which he had ever looked, that of his father. So he said, "I will arise and go."

What a tragic failure was that of Peter. Jesus had sought to warn him of his danger but Simon was sure of himself. He virtually said "James and John may deny you, even my brother Andrew might do so, but not I. I am far too gracious, far too loving and loyal for that. Yet when the test came, he forgot all about this warning and proved an utter coward. Suddenly there was the crowing of the cock. Then what?

Then Peter remembered. Then. After he had missed his chance. Then. After he had been disloyal to one whom he had deeply loved. Then. After he had broken the greatest heart that ever beat in human bosom. Then he remembered and went out and wept bitterly. He thought of the Master's
patience with him, of all that he had meant through those bright yester-
days, and thus remembering, he came back. He came back with such whole
hearted fullness that his Lord could hardly wait to get the door of his
tomb open on Easter morning before saying, "Go, tell my disciples and
Peter."

Why back there? It was here, I take it, that the full meaning of his
Master first broke upon him. It was here that the Heavens had opened
above his head. It was here that he had heard distinctly God's voice.
It was here that the dove of God's peace and power had descended upon
him.

Some of us have Betharabas like that, experiences to which we return
in memory when the going is hard and the light is dim. Thank God, I can
speak here out of my own experience. God has not left me alone through
the busy years, but again and again I go back to the distant yesterdays
when, in a peculiar sense, the heavens opened above my unworthy head and
when the dove of God's peace came into my heart. Thus remembering, I am
helped and restored.

But if we refuse to use memory as a safeguard and as a restorer,
it becomes our judge. When Dives had thrown away his chance, when he had
forgotten the needy man that lay at his very gate, he found himself on
life's other side the victim of a torturing memory. That torturing mem-
ory was to him a veritable hell. Who believes in hell today? The
modern man asks indignantly. Well, I do, for one. This is the case
not because I desire to believe in it but because I must.
But don't you know that a God whose nature and whose name is love will not send one of his children to hell? Indeed, I do. But that child can make his own hell in spite of the love of God. Certainly that is true in the here and now. Imam thinking of one of the ablest young men that ever came into our backwoods community. We were not accustomed to the most brilliant and gifted people there, but all of us knew that he was a man capable of filling almost any position. Yet here he was teaching school in our little village. We wondered why he was there. One day, as I sat by listening as a boy, I overheard him give the reason to my father. "Mr. Chappell," he said, "you wonder why I am here. I am here because I am trying to forget. There is something in my life I must forget." But he couldn't. The last time I saw this brilliant man he was being taken away to an asylum for the insane.

God loves every one of us in the here and now with everlasting love, but in spite of that love there are thousands that are suffering the tortures of a tormenting memory. If God cannot save them here without their repentance, how can we expect Him to save them anywhere? The wicked shall be turned into hell with all the nations that forget God. That is not a threat. That is a fact of present experience. The nations have been turned into hell as a consequence of their forgetting God. What is true of the nation is true also of the individual.

III

What then shall we do with this amazing power of memory?

1. Bear in mind that if we use it as God intended it to be used, we shall make it as a preventive. I believe in rescue homes for the down and out, but far and ahead of the best rescue home is the home in which the child is born.
2. If youth has passed, as it has for many of us, then let memory be your restorer. As the angel laid hold on the hand of Lot to lead him out of Sodom, so let the angel hand of memory lead you back to the Christ that you once knew but perhaps now know no more. Repentance will always save your soul but it will not always save your life nor the lives of others.

In one of Hugo's stories he gives a marvelous picture of a cannon that broke from its mooring on an ancient battle ship. That cannon broke loose because of the carelessness and the forgetfulness of the head gunner. Being on wheels, it was threatening to pound the vessel to pieces. One man after another tried to bring it under control, but they were unequal to the grim monster. Five were killed and ground to bits. Then the head gunner, the man who was responsible for the disaster, with high courage and skill, got a crow bar between its wheels and turned it on its side.

"What shall be done for this hero?" said the captain to the commanding officer. "Decorate him for his courage", said the officer, "and then have him shot for his forgetfulness."

Wise use of memory, I repeat, is that which prevents. Years ago a mother took her small boy to the art gallery especially to see Hunt's picture "Light of the World". She explained the picture to the lad, how Jesus had knocked at the shut door because there was no knob on the outside. The only knob the door had was inside. Therefore Jesus could not get in except at the opening of the owner. "Now, son," she said, "when Jesus knocks at your heart, you open the door." "But," answered the lad, with fine understanding, "but, mother, I have never shut the door in his face." That is the way to bring life to its best. Thus memory becomes our angel, bringing for us a heaven here and a heaven yonder.

*Have you forgotten anything?* Question.

I saw as I lift my chin...
THE MAGNIFICENT MINORITY

"And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back and with a loud voice glorified God. And fell down on his face at his feet giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan."

Luke 17: 15-16

This Samaritan is a man who is well worth knowing. I am sorry to tell you that I cannot give you his name. For some reason he failed to leave us his autograph. He was one of those anonymous helpers who was so busy doing his job that he failed to leave his calling card. Yet we are the richer for his having passed our way. Somehow his face shines upon us from the far spaces of the years as winsome as a star. He first comes upon the scene as part of a kind of reception committee that gave Jesus a welcome into their village. But this committee was not appointed by any mayor. It was a self-appointed committee. The one bond of union that held these ten men together was that all had a common tragedy. They were not one in race,—nine were Jews while one was a Samaritan. But they were one in their suffering, one in their desperation and despair. In some respects, therefore, there were very much alike, while in others they were as far apart as the spaces between the stars.

I.

Wherein were they alike?

1. They were alike in that they were all lepers. They were all suffering from a ghastly disease. They were all being eaten up piece meal. They were all victims of a grim grave digger that was burying them a fraction of an inch at a time. They were bloody brothers in despair.

2. They were alike in their eagerness to live. Though they were suffering from one of the most horrible and hopeless of diseases they were unwilling to die. That I think is to their credit. I have never been able to sympathize with folks
who were seeking for a good place to be buried. There is something unhealthful about that sort of attitude. I am profoundly convinced that the best way to get ready for the life to come is to live this life and live it bravely and faithfully as we can. By the grace of God I hope to reach that other home not made with hands but I am in no hurry to get there and I have no desire to take the reception committee by surprise.

3. They were alike in their belief in Jesus.

First they believed that He could do something for them. Strange rumors had been blowing about the country with regard to this Man. These rumors had reached these lepers. They had heard that He was able to do deeds beyond the human. They had been told that He had opened blind eyes. They had been told that He cleansed lepers like themselves. They had heard that He even started the heart of life to beat in frozen ribs of death. They had heard too that His willingness was as great as His power.

Thus believing that Jesus might be both able and willing to help them they were all men of prayer. When Jesus came upon the scene they lifted their cracking and strident voices in an appeal for help. "Jesus Master" they prayed have mercy on us." It was an earnest and eager prayer. They were praying unashamed. They prayed because they believed in prayer and because they believed in Jesus, which was a second mark of their faith.

The third mark of their faith is indicated by their readiness to obey.

When Jesus heard their prayer He gave what must have been a very perplexing answer. "Go shew yourselves unto the priests," He said. That must have been a shock. A leper was only to show himself to the priest after he was cured but here they were commanded to do that while they were still lepers. They knew that if they reached the priests in the condition in which they were then, they would simply be driven away. Yet in confidence that Jesus was not sending them on a fool's errand they obeyed. That took faith.
4. Finally, not only were they alike in that they were all lepers, in their eagerness to live, in their belief in Jesus but they were alike in the thrilling results of their faith. When they set out to show themselves to the priests in spite of the fact they were still lepers something happened. While they were going on this errand in obedience to the command of the Master they were all cleansed. Obedience is ever a pathway to knowledge. A man who is willing to obey comes to know. Thus these men were the recipients of common blessings. In this they were alike.

II

But while they had so much in common yet they were vastly different. This difference comes out in their response to the great mercy that Jesus had shown them.

1. Look first at the response of the nine. I can see these ten men plodding through the desperate way. Suddenly one looks at the other and says "Why, you are well! You are cured!" Then he looks at his own hands in realization that the same thing had happened even to himself and he shouts "So am I!" Then these ten stood still for a moment looking at each other with wild joy that could not be put into words. Looking at each other I dare say through eyes with glittering tears of sheer gladness. "Cured" they shout "I am cured!"

Then what?

One of them suddenly came back to earth. He became practical. He reminds me somewhat of a young ant who flies for a moment and then says "business is business, I must catch this fly and go to crawling". So the first of these to break rank said "I am a farmer but I have not been able to work my farm for long months. It must be going to wreck. I must hurry back to it and that as soon as possible". So he sets off. Then the second said "I must hurry to my shop, goodness knows what has happened to it during my absence". The third said "I must go home, it has been a long time since I saw the faces of those I love."
By and by they were all gone except one lone man.

We can see this man as he stands the magnificent minority. When he saw his companions disappear around the bend of the road he whispers to himself "I too have a little shop. I too have a home but I could not enjoy the kiss of the lips of the woman I love or the hug of my baby's arms if I did not go back to the man who has done so much for me to tell him of my appreciation. So he hurries back not to give grudging gratitude but to throw himself at the feet of Jesus in a veritable abundance of thanksgiving. This he did in spite of the fact that he had to go alone.

It is rather striking too that those who were blessed without being grateful were so many more than those who expressed their thanks. Ninety per cent failed to utter a word of appreciation. Only ten percent said "thank you". I would not be so pessimistic as to say that that proportion holds today. Yet I fear the grateful are far in the minority. That old story of how God called two angels and sent them to gather up all the prayers of the saints for a single day has much truth in it. You recall the one who gathered up the prayers of petitions came back with his basket overflowing. But the other one who was to gather the prayers of thanksgiving came home with his basket almost empty. These men then were all alike in that they had been greatly blessed. They were different in their gratitude.

III

Why this difference?

Let me say that it is obvious that the difference was not born of their different circumstances. It so happens that their circumstances were the same. The truth is that gratitude is not a child of circumstances. Whether you are grateful or not does not depend upon whether you are rich or poor, sick or well, a success as the world terms success or a failure.
If this were not the case we might go out this morning to divide the thankful and the thankless. All we would have to do would be to gather the successful, the healthy, the strong, the well-to-do, the dwellers on easy street, and put them into one group. Then we could take the infirm, the aged, the sick, those finding it hard to keep the wolf from the door, those who have failed to make a name for themselves and put them in another group. Then we could draw a line between them and say these saints of good fortune are thankful and these saints are thankless.

But you know that it would not work that way in the least. Some of the most ungrateful are highly unsuccessful and do not know pain. Some of the most thankful have never got on very well and life for them has been one long battle with sickness.

Why then I repeat was this one man grateful while nine were not?

1. The first reason is this, the Samaritan took his blessing as a matter of God while the others took theirs as a matter of course. "This blessed experience would never have come to me," said the one "if I had not met Jesus". But the nine gradually persuaded themselves that they would have got cured somehow if they had never met Jesus at all. Of course it is hard to believe this in that particular instance yet things like that happen millions of times.

In fact one of the most deadly foes of gratitude is taking our blessings for granted. We live in an ordered world where however bleak the winter we know that spring is sure to follow. Therefore we often forget to thank God for spring. However black the night we are sure that morning will dawn. Therefore there are comparatively few that thanked God for the sunrise this morning.

But suppose the sun had failed to rise. Suppose the hour had come at which the heavens were expected to blaze with glory and there had been no sun to kindle that glory. Suppose noon had come and had brought with it only blackness of midnight. Suppose the hour of sunset should arrive and there would be no sunset because there had been no sunrise. Then what. Tomorrow morning one hundred million sleepless eyes would be turned toward the east. And when blackness changed to gray
and gray to crimson a shout would go up from one hundred million throats. Why?
Not so much because the sun had risen but because it had failed to rise one day.
Thus we constantly take our blessings for granted. Who is most thankful for good
health but those who have passed through lean gray days where every hour was a
fistycuff fight with agony. Who appreciates this land of plenty? Not those who
have never known want but those who have known hunger. Our mercies are so constant
we simply say "of course." Thus we take our friends for granted. We take the
church for granted. We take our loved ones for granted. We take life for granted.
We take our reason and intelligence for granted, — we even take God for granted.

Years ago my little nephew was talking to me about the uncertainty of life.
He was sharing with me some of the teaching of his mother. He said "Uncle we don't
know how long we are going to live do we?" "No". "We don't know whether we will
live another year or not do we?" "No". "When we go to bed at night we don't know
whether we will live till morning, do we?" "No" came the answer again. Then he
declared cheerfully "But I am so used to getting up without being dead I don't
think about it." Thus early in life gratitude was being killed by the very con-
stancy of God's mercies. If you take your blessings as a matter of course you will
be thankless. If you take them as a matter of God you will be thankful.

2. This Samaritan was thankful because he was humble. He knew that he
had not cured himself. He knew that this blessing had come to him as a gift.
The nine on the other hand were perhaps made thankless by their conceit. Their
tendency toward gratitude was destroyed by them telling themselves "you cannot keep
a good man down. I knew all the time I would be cured of leprosy sometime. I am
a self-made man."

How silly such a position would have been. But it is no more silly than that of
any other man who has only himself to thank for his blessings. "What hast thou"
Paul asked "that thou hast not received". The answer to that question is "Nothing.
Every thing on earth that is in my hands of any worth has come to me as a gift.
I did not build the home in which I first opened my baby eyes. I did not go through
the valley of the shadow of death to give myself birth. I did not build the
church at whose altars I was dedicated to God. I did not build the schools to which I was privileged to go. I did not read the books that I have been privileged to read. I did not create the church in which I have been privileged to preach. All treasures of mine have come to me as a gift. They bear the finger marks of God.

It was the failure to realize this that was the mark of imbecility on the part of the rich farmer. When he looked upon his waving grain fields. When he was forced to build new barns to care for his abundant harvest he thought he had done it all himself. He had no gratitude to either God or man thus he was as blind, dull and stupid in that respect as the pig who eats acorns under the tree and never looks up at the wide spreading branches from which they come. This Samaritan was humble therefore he thanked God. The nine were proud, therefore they thanked nobody but themselves. One of the most deadly foes of gratitude is just plain old garden variety of conceit.

3. This Samaritan when he saw that he was cured gloried in the blessing that was his. He was grateful because he had passed out of death into life. But these nine lost their gratitude because they had doubtless made it a habit all their lives to fix their attention more upon what they had to find than what they had found. Even with the blessing of healing in their hands they could not forget how much they had lost through their sickness. They became bitter perchance as they saw some neighbor had forged ahead while they themselves had fallen behind the procession because of their sickness. This brings us face to face with another deadly foe of gratitude. The habit of looking at what you have missed, at the good of others instead of what is actually yours. Esop that wise student of human nature tells of a certain dog who went out to forage one day. His efforts to fill his larder were very successful. On his way home with a lovely roast that should have satisfied the greediest of dogs it so happened he had to cross a clear still stream. He crossed this stream on a foot log. In the process he looked down in the clear mirror of that stream and saw another dog about his own size but the piece of meat that the other dog had in his mouth was so much larger and thicker than his own
that he at once dropped his to make a wild dash after that of this other dog.
Thus he snarled and snapped and went home at last saying "Why did this happen to me?"
If you are to know the joy of gratitude you must look at what you have instead of
what you have missed.

4. Finally this man hurried back to tell Jesus how much he appreciated what
He had done for him because doubtless it had been a habit of his life. These others
failed to go back because through the years they had formed a habit of never uttering
to God or man a word of praise or thanksgiving.

Of course they had a good reason for their failure. It is one of the most
familiar in the world. We have all given it. I might have met them up the road and
said "Wonderful, you are cured! Did you tell the Lord how much you appreciate it?"
"No" they said "we had to hurry home but it is all right. He knows that we appreciate
it." That is what we often say with regard to each other "he knows,— she knows."

How? The only way you can be sure of my appreciation is by what I say and do
about it. Even when we know we like to hear it put into words. This is true even of
God. There are few duties and privileges urged upon us through the Bible more than
this "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

IV

These ten then were alike in the blessings received. They differed in their
response. What were the results?

The nine cheated themselves. They cheated their fellows. They cheated their
Lord. While the Samaritan enriched himself. Enriched others. Brought joy to the
heart of God.

Here we see why we are so often urged to thanksgiving. To be grateful is to
be joyous. If you have nothing to thank God for this morning there is no sun in
your heart. But if you are thankful you are joyous regardless of circumstances.

Then gratitude is a mark of maturity. It is a badge of spiritual growth.
We do not expect gratitude of a little baby however carefully and motherly we may
minister to it. But to refuse to be grateful when we grow up is one of the
supreme failures of manhood and womanhood, one that will cause them to remain always childish, bitter and morally and spiritually a dwarf.

Then finally gratitude has a second place. It pleases him that gives and him that takes. To refuse to express gratitude is loss. To express it is to grow more and more. It is one of those rare treasure that the more you share it the richer you become and in this enriching yourself you enrich your fellows as well. When I remember how much richer I would be and how much richer would be those who live with me if I were more grateful I wonder at my own ingratitude.

One of them turned back, and the heart of Jesus was glad yet His was laughter was through tears as he asked this question "were not ten cleansed where are the nine ? "

One Saturday afternoon a hard working pastor sat talking to himself, when a knock came at the study door. The weary man pulled himself together for one more drain on his energies. But when he called "come in" the door opened and a sunny faced little girl looked in saying "may I come in" and she darted in, climbed up in his lap, put her arms around his neck and kissed his lips and said "Daddy I did not come to ask you for a thing. I just came to climb up in your lap and tell you what a good, kind, sweet daddy you are" and then she slipped down and went away, and the father's eyes filled with glad tears. Gratitude pleases the giver and pleases the receiver. It gladdens the heart of God. May we be among those who turn back having received our blessing to tell of our appreciation.