SHALL NOT GOD?

"Shall Not God?" Luke 18:7

"Shall not God?" Through the story of which this question is a part, Jesus is undertaking to teach us the importance and the reasonableness of a habit of prayer. He realized quite as well as we how easy it is for one to become discouraged in an effort to pray. He knew how prone we are to turn aside from this task that might be so regarding to give ourselves to lesser tasks that seem to bring greater results. Knowing the tragedy of such failure, he fairly taxed his vast abilities in an effort to teach us that we ought always to pray and not to faint.

I

Jesus taught us to pray by what he said about prayer.

His assertions regarding the privileges and possibilities of prayer often seem to our dim faith extravagant. He tells us, for instance, that prayer is not the privilege of the few but of the many. It is not simply for those who have climbed far up the hill toward God, but it is for ordinary pleaders like ourselves. He asserts that everyone that asketh, receiveth; that he that seeketh, findeth and that to him that seeketh, it shall be opened. The victories of prayer may be won by even the weakest.

Even so, failure may come to the strongest without it. One day Jesus came upon his disciples to find them hot and flustered. They had just made a terrible failure and were, therefore, filled with shame and confusion. A father had brought to them his afflicted lad. They had undertaken to cure him. But all their efforts had proved futile. They had only succeeded in winning the ridicule of the
scorns and in weakening the faith of this father who had come with such high confidence. But when Jesus came on the scene, defeat was changed into victory. Then, therefore, these disciples were alone with their Master, they asked him this same question. "Why could not we cast him out?"

What answer did our Lord give? He did not attribute their failure to their indifference. They were interested both in this father and in his son. Neither did he tell them that they had failed because of a lack of effort. They had done their serious and earnest best. No more did he tell them that their failure was due to the fact that they had undertaken a task that was too big for them, even when assisted by divine strength. He rather declared that they had failed in their efforts to help because they had failed to pray. If we refuse to pray, no amount of effort will atone for that failure when we go forth to battle.

But if what Jesus said about prayer was impressive, what he did about it was more impressive still. It was not after a sermon on prayer that the disciples came saying, "Lord, teach us to pray," but it was after they had seen the Master on his knees. As they watched him at prayer they said, "Here is something real. Here is something far bigger and finer than we have ever done. Here is something that is supremely worthwhile. We must learn the secret." Not only did they feel the reality and the worth of prayer when they saw the Master upon his knees, but they were heartened to believe that such prayer was in some measure possible for themselves. Therefore, they came with this wise prayer, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Our Lord is teaching us still. What place did he give to prayer in his own busy and triumphant life? The answer is - he gave prayer
that Jesus, who is our life, for it is by him that we are justified and have become heir of the glory of God.

And as Paul wrote: ‘If we are in Christ Jesus, we are new creations. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.’ (2 Corinthians 5:17) Similarly, the apostle Peter wrote: ‘For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. For ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory is like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls; but the word of the Lord endures forever.’’ (1 Peter 1:24-25) Thus, just as Jesus promised, he will come again to judge the living and the dead. He will come again in glory and power, to judge the living and the dead. (Revelation 1:7)
ministry. These men would have given their very lives to have entrap
d Jesus into uttering some ill and unguarded word. They set their trap with consummate cunning. Yet withbrushed these cunning 
traps aside like so many cobwebs. Had a stenographer taken down his 
every word, I daresay he would not have had to change his manuscript 
in the least. Having done the hard work of prayer, all else seemed 
to be easy.

It was even so to the end. Had I witnessed the struggle of 
Jesus in Gethsemane, as he poured forth his supplications with strong 
crying and tears, I should have been afraid for the future. I should 
have thought, "If he is so broken up now, how utterly will he go to 
pieces when he meets death eye to eye? Why does he not face the ordeal 
with the calm confidence of his three sleeping friends?" But when the 
final test came, it was the three friends that went to pieces. It 
was before the kingly majesty of the Man who had prayed, that the 
soldier staggered backward and fell to the ground. Thus Jesus teaches 
us to pray both by what he said and by what he did.

II

What are some of the regards of prayer?

1. The first and all inclusive regard of prayer, I mention, is 
that it lets God into our lives. To truly pray is to open the door to 
the eternal Christ who is always knocking and waiting for us to invite 
him to enter. The eternal God becomes real to the one who truly prays. 
This, I repeat, is the all inclusive good. There is absolutely 
nothing so much needed by all of us in these difficult days as a new 
sense of God. We can find this sense of God individually and as a 
group by prayers. When we enter a church where men pray, we are constant-
ly constrained to say, "Surely, God is in this place."
If you are struggling, remember to rest. It is okay to feel overwhelmed. You are not alone. It is okay to ask for help. You can find support through friends, family, or professionals. Take breaks when you need them. It is important to take care of yourself. You are strong, and you can overcome this. Please seek help if you feel like you cannot cope. It is okay to ask for help. You are not alone.
...
Lord in ceasing to pray for you." If you find that the services in
your church are wanting in warmth and power, try prayer. Pray for
your minister that he may be able to bring to you and others a sense
of God. Pray for your choir. Pray for the officers and teachers in
your church school. It is impossible to have - a futile church or a
futile service where the members of the congregation really pray.

Since we can help by praying, we ought to pray. Withholding
prayer is a sin. The priest and the Levite who passed by on the
other side have sat in the prisoner's dock along with the brigands for
long centuries. But if we can pass by on the other side by failing to
help by our gifts and by our efforts to bind another's wounds, we can
also pass by on the other side by our failure to pray. "Ye also
helping by prayer", writes Paul. Therefore, because we can help by
prayer, it is our duty to help. Withheld prayer is a sin.

Not only can we help by prayer, but there come times when it is
the only way we can help. We can give of our money to the cause of
missions, if we have it. But even if we are too poor to give even a
few pennies, we can help by prayer. There come desperate hours in
the life of those we love when we can help them in no other way. I
have had occasion to think in recent days of what a terrible thing
it would be to be unable to pray when there was nothing else that could
be done for the one you love most dearly. There are times when it is
the only means. "Therefore let your voice rise like a fountain day
and night both for yourself and for those who call you friend."

III

How then are we to pray? I am going to offer these suggestions.

1. If prayer is to accomplish its purpose, we must pray earnestly.
God cannot give his best to the listless and the half-hearted. It is
the earnest, energized prayer that is a mighty force. When John Knox prayed "Give me Scotland or I did," God gave him Scotland because he could trust his people in the hands of one who was thus desperately in earnest to bring them spiritual health.

If, therefore, we are to find the best in prayer, we must be in earnest about it. God cannot do much for us until we get to the end of ourselves. It is only when the heavy hands of a great need grip our shoulders and crush us to our knees that we really pray. Nothing worthwhile is accomplished by the prayers of the half-hearted. Therefore, if you would pray effectively, you must be in earnest.

2. Pray expectantly. Remember that prayer is not a weird, strange experience. It is the very climax of sanity and common sense. Jesus reminds us that prayer is something with which we have to do in relations with each other every day that we live. For instance, parents hear and answer prayer. "If a son ask bread of me or you that is a father, will I give him a stone?" No good father would be so heartless as to give his boy a stone on which to break his teeth when the boy needed bread. If we, then, with our imperfections, will answer the prayers of our children, how much more will God, the perfect father, "give good gifts to them that ask him."

The reasonableness and sanity of prayer is seen in the relations of friend with friend. When a certain villager was surprised at midnight by an unexpected guest, he was embarrassed by the fact that he had no bread to set before him. So what? He went out to knock on the door of the house of a friend. This friend was in bed. It would seem that he had had trouble with the children and was afraid that this troublesome seeker after bread would disturb them, but in spite of
all difficulties, he got up and gave his friend as much as he needed.

As the climax, Jesus declared that not only do fathers and friends answer prayer, but even heartless scoundrels. In proof of this he told the story of a judge with no regard for either God or man. Yet a widow, the very embodiment of helplessness, so prayed as to win a favorable answer from this cruel and crooked man. This she did in spite of the fact that he saved nothing for her nor for the righteousness of her cause. He only hated being bothered. If such a judge will answer prayer, how confident we may be when we pray to a God who is at once a just judge, a loving friend, and a perfect father.

3. Finally, we must pray persistently. We are not to persist in order to make God hear us. We are to persist because we are sure that he will hear us. Last week I went to a wedding rehearsal. The bride was thirty minutes late. I confessed that I grew a bit restless, but the groom waited with equal confidence. I felt like saying, "Maybe she is not coming. Let us all give over and go home." But the groom was sure that she would come, therefore, he waited. But his waiting was not in order to make her come, it was rather because he was sure that she would come. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." Because this is true, we ought always to pray and not to faint.
My subject this evening is "Big Babies". And you will find the picture of this typical infant in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke: "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, Thy brother is 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; therefore came his father out and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve 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. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

Yes, this elder son is a real baby. There is no mistaking that. Not only is he a baby, but he is that colossal calamity known as a big baby. Size is an asset in many directions. There are a great many places where size counts for much. For instance, if I were going to cross the sea I would prefer a big vessel to a small one. Of course I would come very near dying on either one. I recall the man suffering from seasickness who was asked by his friend if he could do anything for him, and he replied hopelessly: "Send the remains home." But a few hours later when he was asked the same question he said: "You can do anything you want to with the remains." So on a big vessel I might at least want my remains sent home. Hence size would count for something in a situation like that.

Then there is the collection. If I am going to take up a collection I always prefer a big one. It is not my purpose to demand philosophic reasons why this is true, but I state it simply as a fact. There are those who have a tendency to forget it. They seem to think that just so they make a contribution it is enough, regardless of the smallness of it. But size counts for something when it comes to the collection.

With babies, on the other hand, the situation is just the reverse. Size here is not an asset. It is a liability. What worse calamity could come to a home than to be burdened with a hundred and fifty pound baby? Contemplate the tragedy if you can. If he would be as welcome as the flowers in May out at your house, your ideas are altogether different from mine. We have a nursery here at the Church, but I tell you frankly it is fitted out to accommodate small babies. Those weighing over a hundred and sixty need not apply. We cater to little babies strictly.

The truth of the matter is that we have never been able to work up any great enthusiasm over big babies. We prefer small ones. I am persuaded, in fact, that it would take no great mathematician to point out the many advantages that a little baby has over a big one. Take beauty, for instance. Beauty is not the most important item, but it is not to be despised. And it is expected of a baby that it be beautiful. At least you are expected to say it is, regardless of how it looks. But in all honesty, most little babies are pretty. You simply enjoy looking at them. They delight you like a blossoming rose or a bed of violets.

But big babies - it is different there. I do not know that I ever saw a really pretty big bearded baby in my life. They are simply too colossal to be attractive. Then as a rule they frown too much. They are too often ill tempered. One of the greatest beauty specialists of today
said that no face could ever be beautiful that was constantly being puckered by frowns. This he said, notwithstanding the fact that he made his living trying to iron those frowns out.

Then a little baby is so much more lovable. It is no chore at all to love a little baby. It is perfectly easy and perfectly natural. You love the little fellow because he is lovable. His soft and winsome helplessness appeals to you. You do not have to make yourself love him any more than you have to make yourself enjoy the springtime after a long and gloomy winter.

But did you ever try to love a big baby? Speaking of a hard job, now that is one to tax the energy of a moral giant. It can be done, as some of you wives well know. But it takes great grace. Loving a little baby - that's easy as resting when you are thoroughly wearied, but loving a big one - that's the gigantic task to make your very soul sweat. It was at one of these big babies that the Roman was speaking when he said: "I swear by the white knees of the graces that I couldn't love him if I wanted to."

Then most babies that I have known need spanking sometimes. That is true even of some small babies. But here is the glory of littleness. If a spanking is necessary it is so easy to administer. Why, it is the simplest matter in the world, as some of you quite well remember. When I catch myself saying: "Backward, flow backward, oh tide of years", I hesitate at times when I think of how easy it was for my father to put my head between his knees and turn loose the yellow jackets.

But you know a little baby doesn't know how to need a licking like a big one. There are big people all about us who are literally suffering for a good spanking. But the difficulty of administering it has grown with their growth so that today they are exempt, not because of any moral improvement, not because of any growing desert. They are exempt simply because they are too big. That is one of the greatest calamities connected with the bigness of babies.

The little baby is such an inspiring object. A little baby in the home ought to make an optimist out of every inmate. However far from the ideal the little fellow may be today, there is this fact to encourage you, he will grow. His little feet are walking upon an endless path. He will never cease to travel till the end of eternity. How high he may climb towards God if we only have the wisdom to start him in the right direction.

But if little babies tend to make us optimists, big babies are certainly conducive to pessimism. They have in large measure stopped becoming. They have already become. They have arrived. They are not growing. They discourage you with regard to themselves because you fear they will remain what they are. They discourage you with regard to those who are younger for fear they will grow up to be like them. You find yourself asking the question that the gozzling asked its fond feathered mother: "Mother, when I grow up will I be as big a goose as you?"

So I speak to you tonight as a great believer in babies. This would be a hard and hopeless world without them. The world moves forward on the feet of little children. And the heart of the world is vastly softened by contact with children. The prophecy that "a little child shall lead them" has been fulfilled over and over again in countless thousands of lives. I am strong for babies, but they must be little babies. The big ones are not assets at all. They are burdensome liabilities.
Now look at this big baby that we call the elder son. He is the lad that didn't go away from home. His brother wasted his substance with riotous living, but he stayed out of the far country. No great crime is laid against him. He is not charged with sowing any wild oats. He is very decent and very respectable. Much could be said in his defense. But this we have against him, that he is a big baby.

Look at the marks of his infancy. First he is self-centered. All babies are so. If you were to get run over today and crushed by an auto, one of you daddies, that little six months old baby of yours wouldn't give a cent. He wouldn't care anything about it at all. And after he is a little older and his mother should be sick and he wanted an orange and there was only one to be had, he would eat it up from her if you would let him. And if one of his elder brothers was to go into the far country and into utter shame he would not be worried over it in the least. Nor would we blame him. We would say: "Of course not. He is only a baby."

But look at this big baby. He is like that in spite of his size. When we begin his story we are hopeful of him. "Now the elder son was in the field." He was out where the tasseling corn rustled in the wind and spilled out its fragrance. He was out where the soft sod caresses the bare feet of childhood. He is out where the bob-white calls to his mate; in the field, out where the wheat waves in billows; out where the catbird and the mocking bird pour out their volumes of song in the thicket at the end of the furrow.

"Now the elder son was in the field." That speaks of work. There is toil suggested by the picture. We see a man who is laboring. He is bending his shoulders to a burden. The sweat of honest work is upon his face. That is where the elder son was and that is where he ought to have been. But the trouble of it was that he was as self-centered in his toil as was the prodigal brother in his riotous living.

His father had a great heartache, but this son didn't share it. Often, no doubt, he found the old man in tears. But it never occurred to him to weep with him. He knew why he wept: his son was in the far country. His son was wasting his substance with riotous living. That prodigal son was breaking his father's heart. But he was no heartache to his brother. He didn't care. He no more cared than if he had been a wee bit of a baby.

I wonder if you have ever grown big enough spiritually to share in the burdens of your Father. Believe me, the heart of Jesus Christ is burdened for this world this very night. He is as greatly burdened for it and as greatly grieved over its sin as He was that distant night in Gethsemane. Believe me, He is just as dead in earnest about its salvation as He was when he hung on the cross. He grieves that men are lost. It breaks His heart. Are you big enough to care? "Is it nothing to you, oh ye that pass by?"

Since this elder son did not share in the grief of his father he did not share in his effort to find the wanderer and bring him home. He rather said, "Every fellow for himself, and the devil take the hindmost." He said: "It's no business of mine. Am I my brother's keeper?" He forgot that he was a brother to the down and out and that being a brother he was under tremendous obligation to help him. The word "I ought" was not in his vocabulary. He was this big a baby.

Has your sense of obligation ever driven you to work in the interest
of others? Has there ever come that big, good day in your life when you have said: "This world is not what it might be. I ought to help make it better. My friend is losing his grip. He is drifting. Instead of helping down I ought to help him to be better." Have you, I repeat, ever felt your obligation and responded to it? If not you are yet a baby. Babies have no sense of obligation. They feel no responsibility for the welfare of others. Their parents may be carrying loads that are literally crushing them to the grave, but the baby feels no responsibility to share.

But when they begin to grow, when they begin to arrive at the moral stature of manhood and womanhood it is different. If they have had any real spiritual growth they begin to say "I ought. I must." They begin to feel themselves under obligations. They throw away their toys. They drop their tops. They forget the playthings of life and like Achilles in the old Greek story, they lay hold on the weapons.

Since this elder son did not share in his father's sorrow for the lost, since he did not share in his father's eager effort to save the lost, he had no joy in the boy's home-coming, when the greatest of all battles was won. For that young fellow who had wasted his substance with riotous living to defy his evil habits, to defy the sins that had wrecked him, to rise even from the filth and stench of the hog pen and turn his steps resolutely toward his father's house - that was no mean achievement. Nothing could be bigger than that. For this young fellow who had gone wrong to be brave enough and big enough to come back and say to his outraged father: "I have sinned" - that was an event that set the bells of heaven to ringing and the angels' song took on new melody. But it brought no more joy to the heart of the elder son than if he had been a week old baby.

This man's babyishness is seen, in the second place, in that he demanded a great deal of petting and a great deal of attention. Now of course little babies must have attention, but when they are grown we feel that less attention is necessary. But some of us want just as much petting and just as much wooing and cooing as we had when we were three months old. That is the idea that some folks have of the Church. The Church for them is not a division of the army of the Lord Almighty. It is the baby ward in the hospital.

To such as have this idea there is ever this question: "What am I to get out of it?" They are ever thinking of what is coming to themselves. They are not seeking a place to serve, but a place to be served. They are not seeking an opportunity to give, but an opportunity to get. And to be accursed with this attitude is to always remain a moral infant. It is also to always remain a burden and a care. Oh make it your purpose if you are a member of the Church or if you are not a member of the Church to refuse to be a dead weight. Whatever may be your theology, know this, that it is your privilege and duty not to drag down but to lift up, not to hinder but to help.

Then this elder son showed his babyishness not only in demanding attention, but in his pouting when he did not get as much attention and as many gifts as he thought he ought to have. "He was angry and would not go in." So runs the story. And when we read it we exclaim: "How modern it is. He is pouting. He is in a temper."

Did you ever witness a scene like that? Among little fellows, of
course. I remember going to an old fashioned dinner on the ground when I was just a little lad. Something happened that my brother made up his mind he wasn't getting a square deal with father and mother. He took his ease in his own hands and didn't fare well. When I found him he was standing out against a tree with his face all out of shape and with the dinner being eaten up and he wasn't getting a bite. What was the matter? He was pouting.

I heard a child say some time ago when a question came up as to whether they should play one game or another: "Well then I won't play." And I listened and the whole trouble was just this: this little tyrant wanted his own way and if he couldn't get it he made up his mind he wouldn't have any way at all. It was hard for us to smile even over him, but we said, "He is so small."

Then I witnessed another scene once. The question was up in the Church as to whether we should do this way or that way. One individual said: "We will do this." And another said: "No, it will be wiser to do that." And the vote went against the man who wanted to do this. And what did he? He said, "Well, I'm a democrat. The majority ought to rule. Since I have been voted down I will go with the majority. I may be wrong anyway."

"I may be wrong." That is the language of manhood. You never hear a baby say that. Babies are always right. I don't believe I ever knew an exception to the rule. You remember when a messenger came to President Lincoln from Mr. Stanton. Lincoln had sent him about a certain matter. And when the messenger returned he said with flushed face: "Mr. Stanton said you lied." "Did he say that?" said Mr. Lincoln. "Yes, sir" was the reply. "Well, I'll go over and see Mr. Stanton. Maybe I did." It took a man to say that.

But I know another individual who, voted down, still said he was right. In fact he seemed to say: "I am always right and everybody else is always wrong. If you won't do my way then I won't do any way." And he gathered up his top, together with his string and put them in his pocket and he folded his tent like the Arabs and he silently stole away. His place at the feast was empty. And we wrote on the card at his empty place this word: "He was angry and would not go in."

How came this man to be such a baby? It was not because his father wanted him to be one. Every good father and mother are proud of a baby. But they do not want them to stay babies always. However great a joy they are when they come, the greater the joy the bitterer the sorrow if they do not grow. The father wanted the boy to grow. Our Father wants us to grow. "Grow in grace," he says, "and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

This elder son did not remain a baby because he had no possibilities in him. How he might have grown. Why, his moral bigness might have been a surprise to his own heart. I do not believe that the average one of us has any conception of the possible bigness that is locked within our lives. Young man with your commonplace and mean ideals and your shoddy purposes, there are possibilities of moral bigness within you of which you have never dreamed. You have capacities for growth that are next to infinite. Such capacities also had this elder son.

Why then did he not grow? Simply because he didn't claim his privileges. That is all. He had opportunities amazing beyond our dreams, but
he simply let them go by. These opportunities are mentioned here in a sentence. They include the very finest and highest privileges that can come to any soul for time and for eternity. "Son, thou art with me and all that I have is thine."

First it was this young man's privilege to have claimed and to have enjoyed the perpetual presence of his father. "Thou are ever with me." What a blessing there is in the right kind of association. There are some people that elevate us almost in spite of ourselves. There are those who make it easy for us to believe the best, easy for us to hope and love and pray. No greater blessing can come to us on the human side than the right kind of a friend.

But the friendship of Jesus - that is the highest of all privileges. And that is offered to every one of us. "Thou are ever with me." How much it might mean to us in the day of our temptation. A great merchant who once knew and loved Frederick W. Robertson kept that sacred preacher's picture hanging upon the wall of his office. And he said: "When I am tempted to do a questionable or a dishonest thing in business, I go back and look at that fine clean face, and it is impossible for me to do it."

There are secret sins in your life. You have fought and have not conquered. You have resolved and resolved and yet they hold you still. There are fine ideals to whose realization you have set yourself, but you are miserably far from attaining. You are ready to surrender. Maybe you have surrendered. Maybe you are on the point of deciding to take a lower road. What is it you need more than all else for the fighting of this everyday battle of life? You need a friend, the supreme friend, that friend that sticketh closer than a brother, even Jesus Christ.

Then who can do for us in our sorrows what He can do? There are dark days ahead of all of us. There are days of separation, days of disappointment, days when there shall be the blighting of our hopes and the blasting of our dreams. On whose arm are we going to lean in the hour of our weakness? Who is going to walk with us through our fiery furnace? There is only one who is sufficient for the task and that is Jesus Christ. He is sufficient and He is willing. And so He says tonight: "Son, thou art ever with me." (Florence Nightingale)

Not only does He offer us His fellowship, but He offers us all the treasures that are locked in His own loving heart. "Son, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine." There is absolutely nothing that God possesses that He is not willing to give us. The very tragedy of His heart tonight is that He longs to do so much for us and we will allow Him to do so little. "All that I have." He is able to give pardon. He is able to cleanse you from the stains of yesterday. He is able to give us strength for today. He is able to bring victory for tomorrow. Nothing that this weak heart of mine needs in life, nothing that it needs in death, nothing that it needs beyond death but He can supply. "Son, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine."

This young man lived with the water of life aripple in his ears, but he never kissed the gushing stream upon the lips. He lived within hand-clasp of the bread of life, but he never enjoyed its life-giving power. He lived a poor, self-centered, useless, wretched, pouting baby. And this he did not from necessity. This he did not according to the will of his father. This he did to the heart-break of his father and to the ruin of his own life, because he wouldn't claim his own. And believe me, men and women, though in the energy of the flesh you may reach considerable heights
of manhood and womanhood, there is no complete escape from moral infancy except in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. May the Lord help us to claim our own and to begin this night. This promise is to you: "Thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine."
This is a story of the son that did not go away from home. He did not want to claim kin with his prodigal brother, but he was close kin to him after all. They were brothers not simply because they were sons of the same father. They were brothers in that at heart they were both self-seekers. They were both concerned in pleasing themselves and gaining their own ends rather than in pleasing their father and realizing his purposes. Of the two, the boy that stayed at home is the more hopeless because he is the less conscious of his need and of his spiritual poverty. In fact, he has no sense of need at all. He believes himself an object of genuine congratulation.

Look at the story. "Now the elder son was in the field", quite a contrast, you see at once, from the abode of his profligate brother. Where was the younger son? He was in the far country. He was in the land of famine. He was in the hog pen of the swill trough and hunger glared at him with hollow eyes, and homesickness tortured him with heartache. He was in a bad environment. The stench of swine was about him. He was elbowed by filth. His music was the squeal and the grunt of the husk-eating hogs.

But the elder son was in the field, out where the yellow wheat waved in billows; out where the corn rustled and spilled out its fragrance; out where potatoes grew, and also pansies and posies and forget-me-nots. He was in the field, out where the blue sky bent above him and the sun rained down its gold; out where the breeze was full of fragrance and soft as the breath of an infant and pure as the atmosphere of the mountain fanned by an angel's wing. He was out where the bob-white called, and the linnet and the catbird sang in the thicket at the end of the furrow. He was in the field. And when he thought of his brother in the far country he congratulated himself. Mocking bird.

But his congratulation did not grow out of the fact that he thought his present lot better than that of his prodigal brother. He really thought that the son in the hog pen was getting the better of the deal so far as the present was concerned, but he thought that honesty and decency were the better policy, that they would pay better in the long run; so he was willing to let the cash go and take the credit.

He was in the field. That speaks of work. There is sweat in the word. There is the stern strain of toil. This man was a laborer. He was increasing the world's wealth. He was making something, and the profligate brother, he was wasting. The elder son knew that well. He had thought of it a thousand times. It is the word that was glib upon his tongue when he spoke to his father: "He has wasted thy substance with harlots." He is squandering his treasure. He is flinging his soul wealth away, but I, I am doing nothing of the kind. I am remaining perfectly honest, perfectly decent, perfectly moral. Therefore, I am making something. I am laying up treasure for myself", and again he was ready to congratulate himself, though the motive of his conduct was the same as that of his prodigal brother.

Now, what is wrong with this young stay-at-home? Why is it that Christ has no word of commendation to say concerning him? Was it wrong for him to be in the field? No, that is where he ought to have been. That is where his prodigal brother ought to have been. The calamity of his life is
just this: Not that he works, but that he works as a slave and not as a son. He is a drudge, the most pitiful of all drudges, a religious drudge.

What is drudgery? A man's task? No. Drudgery is not the task; it is the spirit in which we perform the task. One man can make a drudgery out of the singing of an anthem, while another can make poetry out of the scrubbing of the floor. To do your work in the spirit of loveless slavery is drudgery, however sublime that work may be.

Here are two nurses at the hospital. For one the task is purely professional. She watches, she gives medicine; she cools the fevered face; she is capable, efficient, earnest, but all she sees is the pay check at the end of the week. She is a drudge. Here is another. She, too, watches, tends, gives out her strength. Possibly she is no more efficient than her sister, and yet as she moves in and out among these sons and daughters of pain, this song is in her heart;

"Oh, how could I serve in the wards
   If the hope of the world were alive;
How could I endure the sights and the smells
   Of loathsome disease, but that He said,
'Ye do it for Me when ye do it for these!"

And for her the task is no longer drudgery, but it is flooded with the white light of eternity, and she moves in company with those immortal spirits who are ministers of His and who post o'er land and ocean without rest.

A collection is being taken, and here the collection is a kind of Judgment Day. And here is a man, giving and he is giving liberally. He believes that giving will bring him popularity, praise applause; it will make him as popular as it made a certain Barnabas, so he will give. He will claim to give all, though that will be a lie. And as he lays his gift upon the altar he blunders over a piece of fresh up-turned sod and falls flat into his own grave. His name is Ananias. He is a giver, but a selfish giver. He gives for motives no higher than those of a gambler in gambling or the pickpocket in the plying of his dishonorable trade.

And here is another giver. Her gift is so small, so trifling, so like a mere grain of sand, that under certain conditions it would be contemptible beyond words. What was the sum of her donation? A fourth of a cent. And we are ready to glare at and say, "You ought to be ashamed. You stand under the shadow of the Cross and yet you can only give a fourth of a penny." But when we learn that that trifling sum is all her living and that she is giving it not because she believes she will be congratulated by the crowd for so doing, but because the tides of a great love are bearing her on; when we learn this we are ready to sit at her feet. She has done a little thing, but she has done it in a way so magnificently grand that her gift becomes the finest poetry and she becomes the teacher to those who would rightly give throughout all the centuries.
Who is that man pegging day after day upon old shoes? He is a cobbler, you are ready to say, a drudging shoemaker, and his name is Caleb. No, a shoemaker he is, but not a drudge. He is pegging shoes under the light of the Star of Bethlehem and the song of his hammer is the song that the angels sang above the Judean hills, and the vision that he sees reaches infinitely beyond the meager sum he is to receive for his toil. The mending of the worn leather shoe is to be a means to a glorious end. By it the feet of the old and sore, wounded and bleeding are to be shod with preparation for the Gospel of Peace. And here again, what might have been drudgery is transformed into poetry by a noble motive that lies behind it.

Here are two men being educated in the stern University of Pain. They are both brave men. Neither whines; neither is a weakling, but one of them clinches his hands, compresses his lips, squares his jaw and says:

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole;
I thank whatever gods there be
For my unconquerable soul."

What a drudge he is!

But look at this other man. His flesh is thorn-pierced. He bleeds from a hidden wound. He spends sleepless nights and restless days over what is to us an unknown agony. Only this we know: he is a great sufferer. And this burden of pain crushes him to his knees, and three times, he tells us, he besought the Lord that it might depart from him. But the wound was not healed and the thorns still pierced, yet Christ said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee." And what was the result? Listen: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmity; the power of Christ may rest upon me." For him the night is no longer black as the pit from pole to pole; he rejoices in it because it has suddenly grown bright by the very face of God. And the thorns, kissed by the lips of his Lord have blossomed into flowers sweeter in perfume than the honeysuckle and fairer than the Easter lily. And again drudgery has become poetry.

Yes, this elder brother is a drudge. And there is nothing fine about religious drudgery. It is a galvanized corpse. It may move, but it is not a movement born of inner life, but through influences exerted from without. It may accomplish something, but it is a mere artificial flower. It has no life. It has never drunk from the mystic chalice of dew that God holds to the rose's lips at nightfall. It has never been christened by the Almighty by the gentle baptism of rain. It has never mined the gold of real beauty in the soft loam of the garden. It has never held up its cheek for the sun's magic brush to touch it with life and color. Yes, the elder son was a worker. That is fine, but his work was done in the spirit of selfish slavery that made him a drudge. That was tragic.

Why do we say that he was a drudge? First, because there was no love in his service. He was not brotherly, and since he had no love for his brother, he had no love for his father, for "If we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?" The measure of our love to God is what we are willing to do for men. Our devotion to the unseen is read in our faithful and loyal devotion to those whom we do see. Love to God kindles the fire in our hearts that makes itself known in the warmth of our affection for the ordinary sons and daughters of God.
about us. To say you love God and love folks is to lie to your own soul.

Having no love for his brother, there was no pain in his going away. There was no tireless look-out kept for him. While he was yet a great way off the father saw him; but his brother did not even see him when he came home. He had no concern for the salvation of the down and out! In fact, he looked upon such service as a useless waste of time and money. His degradation and shame and his father's sorrow were no concern of his. His father might bathe his midnight pillow in tears, but not he. He took his waywardness and shame and ruin very easily indeed, and so taking it, I have no doubt that he was one of the greatest obstacles that the prodigal had to overcome in returning to his father's house. When homesickness dogged at him and his father's love wooed him, the hard, precise, unbrotherly face of the stay-at-home repelled him. Heary waited him, y of sex, to miss the laws and do the chores.

Yes, he worked, labored in the vineyard of his father, but never dreamed of sharing in his father's purposes. He toiled, but never thought of becoming a partaker of the sufferings of his father. He dug and drudged and played the slave, but failed to cultivate the rare sweet flower of compassion and tenderness and sympathy for him who had failed and for him who had fallen.

Even when he came home it brought no joy to the drudge. The truth of the matter is, he rather resented it. And he was not softened when his father reminded him of the fact that in spite of his sin, he was his brother. "Not if I know our relations", he says. He calls him "this, thy son who has wasted his substance with harlots" for he did about the meanest thing that a man ever did: he reached his hand back into his past to bring up the old enemy that had besmirched him and almost destroyed him. He pressed his finger into the old wound half healed and tore it open and made it smart again. He is envious, and nothing is worse than envy. It was born with a club in its hand and that club was bloody with murder in an instant, for the first murder ever committed envy committed it. And when Christ was crucified it was envy that nailed Him to the cross. Jealousy is not like envy. Jealousy may be right at times; it may, and often does, make the meat it feeds upon, but it is a child of love. But envy is a child of hate. He was envious. Therefore the music of joy and mirth and laughter that floated out from his father's house evoked no joy within his breast, but only made him angry.

Now look what all this loveless and unbrotherly toil have brought this older brother who had stayed at home and worked while his brother had gone into the far country and wasted his substance with riotous living. You would have thought that staying at home his life would have been enriched, that he would have had a wonderful story to tell of his father's goodness and of his father's love. You would have turned your face toward him when he rose to tell his experience, expecting to receive a thrill of inspiration, but how disappointing he is! Listen to him: "All these years have I served thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment and thou never gavest me a kid with which to make merry with my friends."

What a funeral dirge is here! What does he say? I have been in the church five, ten, fifteen, twenty years, but I have never got anything out of it. I have heard people speak of the joy that was unspeakable, a full of glory, but such joy is a stranger to me. I have heard of wonderful gardens wherein grew the rare flowers of love and joy and peace, but when I lean over my garden gate I see only the weeds of envy and drudgery and self-righteousness. I have heard of those who received of the promise of the
Father power from on high, but my life has all been lived in the energy of the flesh. I have heard of those who in the secret place have talked to God in prayer in the upper room. I have heard of those who went into the conflict joyfully declaring that the love of God constrained them, but such high motive is a mystery to me.

What a disappointment his life has been! What a disappointment to himself, - he had intended to be a better man than he was. What a disappointment he had been to his brother! The younger and weaker expected more help and sympathy from the older and stronger than he received. What a disappointment he had been to God!

Now, over against this experience set the experience that might have been his, yes, and might still be his, if he is willing to claim it. "Son, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine." So this man, whose life had been spent in dreary drudgery, had left his real wealth unclaimed.

First, he might have had the constant presence of his father, - "thou art ever with me." He might have had it in those transfiguration moments of his life when Heaven comes close and the whole world seems bathed in the radiance of the eternal morning. He might have had it in the valley moments of his life when sorrow sobbed like a troubled ghost in every chamber of his soul. He might have had it in the midst of life's drab every-dayness.

And that is your privilege and mine: to claim for our own the blessed promise, "Lo, I am with you all the way." How much this would mean to us as we try to press the battle for righteousness in our Father's name! It is said that the personal presence of Caesar made the most commonplace soldier a hero. I do not know whether this is so or not, but I do know that the realized presence of Jesus Christ my Lord will make every man and every woman gloriously heroic.

How much the presence of Jesus Christ might mean to us in the day of our temptation, in the hours of our stern conflict with sin! (Tom S.)

How much the presence of Jesus would mean to us in the days of our loneliness and bereavement and sorrow! And these days come to us all, - the days in which lips that once spoke to us and kissed us speak to us in kisses no more. And we touch a hand that is cold, and one who yesterday looked out from the windows of those closed eyes looks out no more. How much in that day we need the realized presence of Him who said, "I will not leave thee comfortless." (John G. Peyton. Hancock.)

And then he says, "All that I have is thine." Will you hear that word again: "All I have." Do you know who the I is? It is the eternal God. For a man to put himself at our disposal would mean much, but for God to put Himself at our disposal means everything. "All that I have" - the sum total of that wealth no angel of God is wise enough to estimate. The breath of His lips has kindled all the suns and all the stars. All beauty is His. All glory is His. All holiness is His. All power is His.

"My Father is rich in houses and lands; He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands", etc.

And all this He puts at your disposal and mine, for "He that spared not His own Son, but freely offered Him up, how shall they not with Him also free-
The Religious Drudge

So what do you think? Shall we come out of the field? Shall we cease to toil? By no means, but let us claim our own. Let us possess our possessions. Then shall we go into the great world field, not with the tardy step of a drudge, but with a joyous song of a son. The ball and chain of drudgery will fall away from us and love will uphold us and lighten our feet with wings.

CGC:BR

You would have thought he would have carried you to some hidden spring to which his father had brought him when he was first parched. But he would have led you to some lovely garden, where trees and unending stories to tell of his father's power to repose in time of sorrow etc.
EVERYBODY'S PRAYER

"God be merciful to me a sinner."
--Luke 18:13

This parable when it was uttered must have boomed like a cannonade and shaken like an earthquake. It has a cutting edge to it. It stung many of those who heard it like a whiplash. In fact, it stirred tempests of hot anger within them, an anger that hardened into hate. This hatred was so bitter that it could not be satisfied in the coming days with anything less than the crucifixion of Jesus.

But if this parable has a sting, it also has a caress. It if rebukes, it encourages. If it fell like hot acid upon the religious leaders of that day, it fell like healing lotion upon the diseased and the outcast. If it rebuked one group, it comforted and encouraged another.

This is a parable of contrasts. The contrasts are three in number. Let us look at them.

I

It is a contrast in the two men who went to pray.

1. Let us look at the Pharisee first. We look at him first because at least according to his own thinking he is first. It is a Sabbath morning and he is on his way to church. The day is beautiful and sunny. I meet him at the steps of the church and give him a hearty "Good morning!" Feeling good myself, I dare even to speak to him. "Good morning. You are going to church this morning?" "Yes," he barks back. I always go to church. I have not missed a Sunday in forty years." He passes me like a breath from the refrigerator, climbs the steps as if the whole building belonged to him, picks out the most prominent pew and settles himself down as if to say, "Now the service is ready to begin."
EVERYBODY'S PRAYER - page 2

This Pharisee is not popular. Frankly, we do not like him. We not only fail
to like him, but we resent him. He antagonizes us. He fills us with inward re-
sentment. If somebody were to reach out his foot and trip him up we would not feel
greatly offended. But we must not get our eyes so fixed upon his vices that we
forget his virtues. In taking account of what is wrong with him, we must not forget
that there is much that is right.

(1). He was an active and earnest member of the church. That is always a
credit. Through the years the church with all its faults has been the salt of the
earth. It has been that without which civilization rots down. We cannot judge
the Church solely by its positive attainment, by its positive accomplishments. It
must be judged also by what it prevents. We are faulty enough with it, but we would
be far more faulty without it. The church is the one institution that is unselfishly
seeking to heal the world's open sore. It has made a supreme contribution to human
welfare. Because it is a part of the remedy and not a part of the disease, it
is everybody's privilege and everybody's obligation to belong to it.

This I say boldly and without apology. Whoever you are, whatever may be your
circumstances, it is your solemn obligation to God and man to belong to some church.
Mark you, I did not say to belong to the Methodist Church, but you ought to belong
to some church. If you cannot find any group with whom you can agree and have
fellowship, then there is something tragically wrong. If you are so far ahead of
your fellows that you cannot afford to associate with them, then you are more wrong
still. I used to know a chap who got so good that he withdrew from the church
because the Lord had said, "Come out from among them and be ye separate." But I
must confess that I found his saintliness very unimpressive. Of course, we confess
at once that a man may be an active participant in the church and not be a good man.
Church membership is not a substitute for Christlike character, yet it is a help
toward that end. While a man may belong to the church and not be saintly, it is
far more difficult to be saintly and not identify yourself with some church. I
know the answer—"The best people I have known did not belong to the church at all."
Well, your experience and mine differ. By far the best people I have known were actively identified with some church. Such was the case with this Pharisee and in so belonging he was right.

(2). Not only was he actively identified with the church, but he was a man of solid moral character. He declared that he was not an extortioner, that he had been guilty of no injustice. I know Jesus spoke of certain Pharisees who robbed widows' houses and tried to conceal their rascality with long prayers, but that was not the case with all Pharisees. Jesus neither hints nor implies that such was the case with this man. He was a church member who was honest and upright in his dealings. Hard he might be, but he was not dishonest. He looked after his own interests, but his gains were the gains of a man who had won without dishonor and without shame.

Not only was he honest in his business dealings, but he was upright and clean in his domestic relationships. He had not been a "rounder". He had been faithful to his marriage vows. He had not dragged his orange blossoms through the mud. He had been a clean and decent husband and father. That also is to his credit. It is possible, I know, for a man to be just and straight in his business dealings. It is possible for him to be clean in his marital relationships and yet not be a Christian. But no man can be a Christian and deal dishonestly with his fellows. And no man can be a Christian and be unfaithful to his marriage vows and to the children of his home.

(3). Not only was this man an active churchman, honest and clean in his life, but he was conscientious and liberal in the use of money. He was a tither. He did more than the law required. He even tithed mint and anise and cumin. That was obedience plus. It is popular to say that tithing is no longer required. This is the case because we are living under grace and not under law. It was required of the Jew, but it is not required of us. Of course, this is a legitimate argument if we desire to give more than a tithe, but it is rather cheap if we desire to give less. To make the grace of God to minister to our stinginess instead of to our
liberality is rather cheap. If God required of the Jew living in the twilight that he give a tenth, I hardly see how we can give less with opportunities so much greater than theirs.

In tithing this Pharisee was performing a wise and religious service. Jesus Himself set his sanction upon it. In paying a tithe, He declared that this they ought to have done. Where these Pharisees went wrong was not in tithing, but in trying to make tithing a substitute for right living. No amount of giving is, of course, a substitute for that. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and give my body to be burned and have not love, it is nothing." One may, therefore, tithe and not be a Christian, but no one can be a Christian and be greedy and grasping in the use of money. This Pharisee, therefore, was a pillar in the church and a good citizen. He had much to say for himself in spite of all his faults.

2. But what can we say for the Publican? He was lacking in all the virtues that the Pharisee possessed. He had given up his church, had turned upon it, had become its foe and a foe of his country. He was a Quizling. He had allowed himself to be made a cat's paw by a foreign power. He was engaged in the dastardly business of pulling Rome's chestnuts out of the fire for her. This Pharisee was at the head of the procession. This Publican was at the rear of the procession. He was the most despised and the most hated man in the community and, generally speaking, deservedly so. Being unchurched, he was anti-churched.

Not only did he fail to belong to the church and to participate in its work; he did not exemplify its virtues. The Pharisee prided himself that he was not an extortioner and not unjust. If this Publican was typical of his class, he was both. The taxes were farmed. He got out of the people by fair means or foul all that he could. Therefore, as a tax-collector he was an extortioner—he was unjust. Much of his gains bore the stain of injustice and positive cruelty. While the Pharisee was honest, he was dishonest.

Finally, this Publican was not only not a church member and not an honest
man; he was not a tither. He did not contribute to the church at all. The truth of the matter is that the church would not have his money. He was looked upon with such contempt, his gains were so often ill-gotten gains, that the authorities would not receive them. They felt that his money was in the truest sense tainted money.

Naturally, when I saw this man going to church, I was astonished. "Good morning, Mr. Publican," I greeted him as I had greeted the Pharisee. "You going to church to day?" His face turned very red. He hung his head as if in shame. "Yes, I am going to church today. I know I have no right to go. I know I have no claim either upon the church or the God of the church. I know decent and respectable people will shun me. It was terribly hard for me to come, realizing their scorn and contempt, but I came just because I had to. Something has happened to me that has broken my heart. Something has happened that has so crushed me with a sense of need that I could not stay away. I just had to come because I have to have God." So there they go—these two, the one at the top of the ladder, the other at the very bottom. Between them there is a great gulf fixed.

II

The second contrast is the contrast between their prayers.

1. Listen to the prayer of the Pharisee. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." What a prayer! What an insight it gives us into the character of this Pharisee! A prayer, you know, can be a terribly revealing thing. This prayer is a window through which we look into the very heart of the man. What we see there is not good. As we look at him and listen to him, we realize that his prayer has three tragic defects.

(1). As he prays, he prays with a good eye on himself. "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men." He is beautifully different and magnificently unique.
He has arrived, while the other fellow is hardly on his way. He calls over the ugly things that he does not do. He enumerates the beautiful things that he does do. It never occurs to this Pharisee to thank God for what He has done for him. He rather congratulates God on the fine service he has rendered Him. He does not say in beautiful humility, "How good God has been to me!" He rather says, "How good I have been to God! I am a self-made man." He does not see how God could have ever run the world without him.

(2). Having a good eye on himself, he has a bad eye on his brother. Those two seem to go hand in hand. The clearer eye I have for my own virtues, the clearer is my eye for your vices. The better I get in my own estimation, the worse you become. The bigger this Pharisee grew in his own estimation, the more ant-like were his fellows. "I thank thee that I am not as other men." How were other men? They were a bad lot. They were all extortioners, unjust, adulterers.

Since this man was so good at loving himself, also the poorest hand in the world at loving the other fellow, naturally other men were not greatly drawn to him. The better I love myself, the less others are likely to love me. That is true with all of us. When we fall in love with ourselves, our fellows are quite apt to leave us a clear field. It is possible to hold a penny so close to the eye that it can shut out the whole Rocky Mountain system. It is possible so to fix your eye upon yourself that all other people become worthless and trivial—mere extortioners, unjust, and adulterers. Having a good eye on himself, he had a bad eye on his brother.

(3). Not only did he have a good eye on himself and a bad eye on his brother, but he had no eye on the Lord at all. In fact, this was the source of his tragedy. Of course, he called the name of God. He called his speech of congratulation a prayer. But when he thanked God, he thanked Him not for what God had done for him but what he had done for God. But while he called God's name, he was utterly devoid of any sense of His Presence.

How can we be so sure of this? Answer—by the fact that he had no sense of
need, no sense of sin. Wherever there is a sense of God, there is always a sense of sin. When Isaiah went as a youth to the Temple, there is no doubt that he was one of the choicest young men of his day, but in the Temple he saw the Lord, high and lifted up. What was his reaction? "Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips." The greater robber who died by the side of Jesus brazened out his crimes until he saw himself against the white background of that Man on the middle cross. Then it was that his blood-stained lips dropped these words to his companion: "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; but this man hath done nothing amiss."

Failing to see God, the Pharisee failed to see himself. Failing to see himself, he also failed to recognize his own sinfulness. Failing to see God and himself, he failed also to see his brother. He does not dream that his struggling fellows are more than extortioners, unjust, adulterers. They are men of hopes and dreams and prayers. "Even that publican" as the Pharisee called him was more than a Publican—he was also a penitent. Therefore, this man with no sense of God and with no hope for his fellows and no sense of his own need did not really pray. He only informed God what a great success he was in spite of the fact that everybody else was making a miserable mess.

2. By way of contrast listen to the prayer of the Publican. Burdened with a sense of shame, he made himself as little conspicuous as possible. With a feeling of unworthiness he stood afar off. Standing there, he does not look about him as the Pharisee does to contrast himself with his fellows. He feels the contrast without looking. He calls himself not simply a sinner, but "the sinner". He is as conspicuous for his blackness as the Pharisee is for his whiteness. He might have said, "I am a sinner, it is true, but I am a saint in comparison with that self-satisfied human icicle who is cataloguing his virtues before God. But while the Pharisee looked at the Publican, the Publican did not look at the Pharisee. He saw only himself and God.

Thus, seeing himself in the light of God, he has no good word to say for himself.
He does not make any excuses. He does not have a single alibi. I like that.
As long as I excuse my sin, I tell myself and God that I am not responsible. It is only the man that is without excuse that is really guilty. It is the man that faces the fact of guilt that is capable of receiving a new chance. Sometime ago a young wife came to tell me a tragic story of unfaithfulness. "Any mitigating circumstances?" I asked. "None," she answered. That was an evidence of the fact that she was capable of a new start.

Having confessed his sin without any excuse, he proceeded to ask God for that which He is always infinitely eager to give. He asked for that which we must have or perish—that is mercy. Mercy is favor to the undeserving. "God be merciful unto me a sinner." How different the impression that sobbing Publican made upon the Pharisee from what he made on Jesus. The Pharisee looked at him as utterly hopeless and beneath contempt. Jesus looked at him as facing toward a new life. He recognized that he was doing so beautiful a thing that all heaven was pulsating with hallelujahs because of the joy of it. "There is joy in heaven in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth."

III

The third contrast is the contrast in the results. Two men very far apart went to pray. One was decent and the other indecent, one honest and the other dishonest, one a patriot and the other a traitor, one at the front of the procession and the other at the rear. Both of them prayed, but one congratulated God on having such a paragon of perfection for His servant. The other besought His mercy because of his sin. What was the outcome?

1. For the Pharisee. When the prayer was over, when the benediction had been pronounced and the Pharisee was going home, how much better was he for the service? None whatever. Feeling no need, he made no request. Requesting nothing, he got nothing. He went his way just as hard and harsh and cold as he had been before. "Good sermon today," I said to make conversation. "If length is any

no need man sought of his help.
virtue, it was good. He can whistle more times before he gets into the station than any preacher I ever heard. And the anthem was a travesty!"

Seeing I am off on the wrong foot, I veer away from the services of the church. "A beautiful day," I said. "Yes, but it is going to be raining tomorrow. My rheumatism is hurting me now." I make one more effort. "That is a beautiful car our friend is driving." "Yes, but if he would pay his debts he would be walking." Thus he goes snarling and snapping down the street. The dog sees him coming and tucks his tail and runs under the house. The laughter goes off the faces of his children. His wife steadies herself and waits for the expected storm. Everybody was glad when he went to church because they wanted to be rid of him. Everybody was sorry when he got home because they had him on their hands again.

Not only did he come back as cold and critical as he went, but even more so, because this Gospel is the savor of life unto life or death unto death. It either makes us better or it makes us worse. What then was wrong with this Pharisee. Let us not fix our gaze so firmly upon the non-essential that we forget the essential. He was right in going to church, right in being honest, right in tithing, but he was wrong in that he made these ends in themselves instead of means to an end. We call these things the means of grace. That is right. But we get so absorbed in the means that we forget the end. He fixed his attention so upon the secondary that he forgot the primary. He missed God and, missing God, he missed everything.

2. What was the result for the Publican? He had a heavy score against him. He had not only done wrong, but he was wrong. But because he was willing to face the fact of his sin, because he was willing to confess his sin and forsake it, he went down to his house justified. That is a word that we do not use much today. It means that he went down pardoned. That is more than merely being forgiven. Though he had come to church estranged from God, he went home in His fellowship.

When I dared to speak to him, his response was vastly different. "Good sermon today!" "Yes, it broke and healed my heart." "How did you like the singing?"
"It lifted me to the gates of heaven." "Beautiful day, isn't it?" "So beautiful that only God can give such a day." And when he reached home, his coming was like the coming of the springtime. Why the difference? It was not because God loved the one and did not love the other. It was not because God despises decency and respectability and sets a premium on profligacy. God was equally eager to forgive them both. But one of them shut the door in God's face while the other flung it open. Do you remember the story of the passing of old Doctor McClure in "Beside the Bonny Briar Bush"? For forty toilsome years he had borne the burdens and hardships of a country physician. No night had ever been too dark nor too cold for him to respond to a call of need. He had battled his way through snow-drifts that seemed impossible, crossed swollen streams with reckless daring. He had given his all without stint. And now he is dying. And he asks his old friend and brother in the church to read for him from God's Holy Book.

This friend, seeing he was near upon the crossing, naturally turned to that prose poem that has put its arms around so many stopped shoulders; that has been a light unto so many tired feet to guide them through the valley of the shadow—the Fourteenth Chapter of St. John. When he began to read, "Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions," the grim old physician stopped him. "No," he said, "that is not for the likes of me. That is too good for me. Hold the book in your hand and it will open to the place that I have been reading every day now for months. And the book opened at this immortal story, and the Doctor listened as his friend read. When he had finished, the old Doctor prayed again, "God be merciful unto me a sinner." "Ah, that is a word for a man like me who has reached the end of the journey and has no good word to say for himself." Yes, it is a prayer for you and me. It is everybody's prayer. This is the case because we have all sinned. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from our unrighteousness.