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## GODS FULLNESS

That ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:19

The topic assigned me is "Jesus Contemplates The Mysteries Of Life." On Wednesday of Holy Week, we know nothing of either the deeds or thoughts of Jesus. With good reason, your committee has decided that He must have been contemplating some of lifes central mysteries. Fortunately, I was not only assigned a topic, but a text. This text also contemplates one of lifes most sublime mysteries. The mystery of the fullness of God. It is what Paul calls in another place the Glory of Christ which is in you.

"For this cause," says Paul, "I bow my knees. My prayer is that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." Paul is praying for his converts that are made up of slaves, social nobodys, and what-nots. Yet, he believed that each of them had an amazing capacity for God. He believed that each of them might be filled unto all the fullness of God. There is a kindred expression in the fourth gospel. Here the author is accounting for the amazing difference that Jesus has made in his own life and in the life of his fellow Christians. What has made them so vastly different from what they were before? The answer is this:- "Of His fullness have we all received." That is, through Christ we have received of the very fullness of God.

What is it then to receive of the fullness of Christ?

Back on the old farm where I spent my boyhood, there is a great flat rock on whose broad face -- hands that have doubtless been dust for centuries carved a basin. In spite of the fact that this rock is lifeless and dead, this basin laughs and ripples and sings with one of the loveliest springs that a thirsty man ever kissed upon the lips. Go to it during the bleak days of winter, or the noon-tide hush of mid-summer, and it is always a frolic and a glitter with life. What is the secret? There is nothing in the basin itself to explain it, but when we ask this basin why it was always filled to overflowing, it points to the majestic hill that hides above it and says, "Of its fullness have I received."

Years ago when I was a student at Harvard University, I stopped one afternoon to look down from a bridge into the waters of the Charles River. I was thinking of another bridge where Longfellow had stood when he wrote "The Bridge At Midnight". But the scene before me was so dull and drab I could not but wonder where the poet had obtained his inspiration. I could see the mud and refuse at the bottom of the stream. Down below were the fishing vessels sprawled upon their sides. I turned in disgust. But, hours later, for instance, to use Dr. Halls expression, I came again to find the whole scene changed. Mud and wreckage at the bottom of the stream were no longer visible. The ships were floating buoyantly upon their keels ready to sail the seas with the compass<sup>ness</sup> of the world in their arms. What had brought the change? It was the same river, yet, how different. As ~~answer~~ I asked the question:-This once drab stream pointed to the far flung sea, and said, "Of its fullness have I received."

Here is a piece of blank paper. There are no blotches upon it, but

there is nothing of beauty. It is just a blankness and nothing else. It is as voiceless as the tomb. But when I look again, that piece of paper has not only found a voice, but it has burst into song. I listen to it with gratitude and reverent awe. What is the once colorless thing saying? This is its song:-

No fable old, nor mythic roar,  
Nor dream of bards and sears,  
Nor dead fact stranded on the shore  
Of the oblivious years.

But warm, sweet, tender even yet  
A present help is he,  
And Faith has stood its Olivet,  
And Love its Galilee.

The <sup>h</sup>earth<sup>g</sup>ing of his seamless dress,  
Is by our beds of pain,  
We touch him in life's throng and press  
And we are whole again.

Some years ago it was my privilege to hear Fritz Kreissler. He came upon the stage with a voiceless little contraption of wood and metal tucked under his arm. By and by he drew his bow across that voiceless instrument, and lo an angel choir began to sing within its compass. As he played you could hear the low-breathing of springtime winds. You could catch the perfume of the flowers. You could hear the song of the birds, the murmuring of the summer brook, and a happy laughter of a child. Then it sobbed like a desolate child that longed for the touch of a father's hand, and the

sound of a voice that is still. How did this fullness come? It pointed to Fritz Kreissler and said, "Of his fullness have I received."

So it may be for ourselves. We are so closely akin to God that we may receive of his fullness. Since it is our privilege so to receive, it is also our responsibility. Really, there is no excuse for the empty life. We ought to receive of his fullness because life is not worth living if we fail to do so. But we need this fullness. Not simply to help us live, but to help us also to give. The tragedy of the empty life is that it has nothing to share with its fellows.

To this day I remember vividly the first Christmas tree I ever attended. To me it seemed as large as a giant of the forest. A group of boys and girls were clustered about it. Our names were being called, and Santa Claus was helping distribute them. Present among us was a village half-wit. He looked at the scene with eager eyes that came as near to a sparkle as possible from sheer wistfulness.

At last Santa Claus took down the largest package on the tree. He called the name of this idiot. His dull face took on a new glow. He reached forward hands that trembled with the thrill of great expectation. With nervous fingers he untied the string, lifted the lid, but the box was empty. Somebody had mistaken a tragedy for a joke. They had given him an empty box. We are hanging presents upon the worlds christmas tree, each of us. The presents we hang on the tree are the lives we live. Some of us are giving to the world empty lives. It is our privilege to give to this world lives that are filled unto the fullness of God.

What of the content of this fullness?

1. We have received of the fullness of His life. When Jesus was among us, he cast a spell upon us. One secret of that spell was that he was so tremendously alive. One day a young aristocrat braved the staves of the crowd to fall at his feet to ask him how he might get hold on life. On another day, when thousands had turned their backs upon him and only the twelve were left. They were held by the gripping magnet of life. "To whom shall we go?" said Simon. "Thou hast the sayings of life." We are to receive of the fullness of His life.

2. We are privileged to receive of the fullness of His joy. I am not forgetting that Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. I am not forgetting that he bore a cross. I am not forgetting that he threw himself into the raw wounds of every man's sore. But in spite of this, and because of it too, he was a happy man. I am sure that His was the gladdest heart that ever beat in a human bosom. I am sure that His was the sunniest face that ever looked out on this world. We are to receive of the fullness of His joy.

3. Possibly this supreme secret of Jesus' was that he was a man who cared. All sorts of people were drawn to him because they felt the compelling power of his interest. Here was a man who cared, not simply for their souls, but who cared for them as living personalities. Little children, harlots, broken men, saintly gray beards were drawn under His spell because he cared. It is our privilege to share in the fullness of His love.

III.

How is this to be done?

All commentators on this text say that the first step is to empty ourselves. There is just enough truth in this for it to be profoundly discouraging. This is the case because to empty oneself is no easy job. There is sweat and struggling in that process beyond all words. I went fishing some time ago in a leaky boat. I undertook to empty it, but it was a futile task. The water ran in almost as fast as I could empty it out. So when I go to emptying self as fast as I get him out one door, he chases in the next. Emptying your own heart is about as difficult as driving darkness out of a room with a club.

How then may we hope to win? We need to remember that the fullness of Christ is a gift. We do not have to drag Him into our hearts, when we open the door he comes in. "Son", he says, "Thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." The one condition of receiving all, is to give all. He is infinitely more willing to give than we are to receive.

It is said that when Helen Keller, that deaf, dumb, and blind genius, was a little baby, her mother used to bend over her cradle and drop tears upon the babies tender face. As she would thus weep, she would talk to the unhearing child. "O Helen," she was accustomed to say, "how your mother loves you, how she longs to tell you about it. How she longs to get in your heart, but there is no way; eyes closed, ears stopped. So our Lord is thus looking longingly at us this moment and saying, "O child, how I love you. How I long to give you my fullness. But I can only give as you give. I can only come in as you open the door. Of His fullness have we not seized nor grabbed, but received. It may take a strong man to take by force, but the weakest of us can receive.

"A CHANCE FOR THE DEVIL"

Eph. 4:27.

"Give the devil no chance." These words come to us sounding somewhat strange and far away. For some, belief in the devil has been relegated to the back ground. We have run past him some how as we have run past our ox carts, our flannels and our long hair. He simply does not fit, according to the storm and stress of things. He is no longer to be feared. He is only a mild cuss word to be used in the presence of ladies.

We have undergone a marvelous reaction from fear in recent years. This reaction is, for the most part, altogether right and wholesome. There was a day when we feared so many things. We were afraid of ghosts, we were afraid of goblins, we were tremendously afraid of being bewitched. In one of the gloomiest dungeons of all Scotland, a very beautiful girl was thrust one time. She was put into that gruesome place because a jilted lover accused her of casting upon him the evil eye. But the search light of modern knowledge has been turned upon such fears and we have found them groundless.

Now in this welcomed reaction from fear, there is danger that we may go too far. We refuse to take seriously what is really serious. Many are doing this very thing. There are numberless people today who feel bound by no laws, held by no restrictions. For them there is no positive "Thou Shalt" nor is there any authoritative "Thou Shalt not". They are law unto themselves. They believe there is nothing in heaven, earth or hell to fear.

PART I.

But Paul was of a contrary opinion. Hence, when he wrote to his converts over in Ephesus, he gave them this warning. "Give the devil no chance." Why did he write such seeming nonsense. He was really not a stupid man. He was one of the great intellects of all the centuries, then he was a man who spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. Why then did he warn these people against giving the devil a chance.

1. He warned them because he believed there was a devil and in so believing his position was by no means unique. The Apostle Peter shared that belief, so did John, so did Dr. Luke, so did Mathew and Mark. So did Jesus. So strong was the conviction of the Master that there was such a being, that he taught us to pray this prayer "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one".

2. Paul gave this warning in the second place, because he regarded the devil as an enemy. So he is regarded throughout the word of God. He is called by three names. He is the advesary, the one who takes the opposite side to all that is good, and is the slanderer. He does not believe in goodness and frankly says so. He is Beelzebub, that is he is the god of the filthy. He is the god of the morally rotten.

The case is put very plainly in the 9th chapter of St. Mark. A father has brought his son to Jesus. The son is a demoniac. The father tells the son's experience. Oft times, he declares, the foe that besieges him has cast him into the fire and into the water to destroy him. That is the work of this agency of evil, it is not to help but to hurt. It is not to serve, but to destroy. It is not to upbuild, but to wreck, to blight and to damn.

Now it is possible that what I am saying may weigh little with some of you, because you do not believe there is any devil. But the fact that you do not so believe should not alter the situation seriously for you. What is the devil, any-way? It is the scriptural way of explaining the presence of evil in a God made world. These writers of the old and new Testament realized that sin was a great grim fact. They explained that fact by saying, that there was a personal agency of evil at work in the world in the hearts of men.

Now it is possible that you do not accept that explanation, but even if you do not, you have not altered in the slightest the fact that they were undertaking to explain. Even if there is no devil, sin remains the same ugly, awful damning fact. You have simply thrown away the explanation.

For instance, it is only in comparative recent times that science have discovered the theory of germ disease. They tell us that certain diseases are brought about by living organisms that prey upon the diseased body. Suppose, for instance that I am suffering from tuberculosis. The doctor tells me that he has examined my sputum under the magnifying glass and finds it is filled with tuberculosis germs. I tell him that I can no more see them than I can see the devil and therefore I do not believe what he says. But though I do not believe him even though I prove that what he says is not true, that still does not cure my disease.

The same is the situation in the moral realm. Sin is here, however we may explain its presence. You can say there is nothing in the devil to fear, but no intelligent man can say that about sin. Sin is a man getter. It is a nation wrecker. Its tragic foot prints

are seen upon every page of <sup>human</sup> history. It wrought ruin in the first home that was ever built, and its record has been one of great ruin ever since.

Suppose you had visited the first pair in their garden home. Then suppose you came days later and find the garden withered and find this once happy couple living in a briar patch. You ask them why the change. You ask why the care lines have grown deep in their faces. You ask why the grey in the hair before their time. Ask why their first born, that they thought was the promised Christ has become a vagabond. Ask why the meaning of that first grave. What answer will they give to all these questions. They can be answered, every one with one word, and that word is sin.

If, therefore, it seems to you unreasonable and old fashioned and a bit silly to say, "Give the devil no chance" then I will put it in this fashion. Do not trifle with that something that wrecks everything that it ever touches. Fools make a mock of sin. Play with fire, if you will. Sport with deadly poison, take serpents into your bosom, pitch your tent on the crater of a volcano, but do not be so rash, do not be so blind, do not be so utterly mad as to toy with sin. Give sin no chance, it is dangerous, it is deadly, it is damning.

3. Then Paul gives us this warning because <sup>if</sup> the devil gets a chance we must give it to him. That is the truth we need to bear in mind. Or put it in another way, if sin gets a chance in your life and mine, we must give sin that chance. In other words, you are what you are, by virtue of the fact that you choose to be that way. What we are, we are from choice, therefore every man is personally responsible for what he is. The only door knob to the door of the heart

is on the inside. Neither right nor wrong can get into your life except at your own invitation.

If you then are Christian, why are you sinning. It is not from compulsion. It is because of your own free will and a matter of choice. You have opened your heart for the incoming of Christ. When ever we invite Him, He enters and he does not enter on any other terms. If on the other hand, you are in sin, it is because you want to be. No man has to lie. No man has to be dishonest. No man has to be unclean. No man has to be a drunkard. No man has to be a rascal. No man has to be a libertine. No man has to be selfish, indifferent. What you are morally, you are by your own choice.

We need to face these facts. If we do not, we can blame no body except ourselves, and so long as we do that, just so long will we continue to be the failures that we are. If you are wasting your life, whather you are in the church or out of it, do not blame your enemies. Do not blame your friends, do not blame the preacher, do not blame the devil, he can only attempt. Blame yourself. Put the responsibility where it belongs. If you do this, there is hope for you. If you do this, you will fall on your knees and say with another great sinner, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned". You will realize that if sin has had a chance in your life, it has been for one reason, that is because you have given it that chance.

## PART II.

But in spite of this warning, we continue to trifle with sin. We persist in giving the devil a chance. ~~Firstly~~

1. We give him a chance in our own personal lives.

Many of our hopes are in ashes, many of our dreams are wrecked.

Some of our best possibilities have been utterly destroyed, because we have trifled with sin. God planned great things for us. He opened wide doors before our very feet, but we wrecked his plans and slammed the door in our faces, and to our heartache, we realize that we have given the devil a chance in our own personal lives.

2. Not only is this true, but we have given him a chance in our homes. Our careless and Christless life has not only impoverished ourselves, but has meant the impoverishment of others. If there are physical enemies upon our streets, threatening the lives of our children, we would stand guard and fight for them to death, but we let the supreme enemy trail his slime into our homes, oft times without a protest. Is your home a Christian home? You have some lovely furniture, but the most important article, the one that you should have kept in best repair has fallen to pieces. You have no altar. Yes there is a card table, I know. There is some nice wax floors where you may remove the rugs for a quiet dance, but there is no place for family prayer. You and all your family belong to the church, but if a visitor from Mar would spend a night in your home, and then spend another night in a home whose inmates made no pretense to Christianity, would he be able to tell the difference. Blessed is the father and mother, that purpose in their hearts that they will give the devil no chance in their home, nor with their children.

3. Then we give the devil a chance in the church of Christ itself. Some of us do this by our stenginess, some by a fault finding spirit, some by idleness and laziness, some by letting it alone. There are many criticisms of the church today. Numerous of our magazine and news paper writers tell us what is the matter,

but if they know what they are responsible for conditions being as they are, it is their business to change them. I was in a community some years ago where church members complained that there was no hope for their church, the devil has the whole thing, they said, but one old saint spoke up and contradicted them. It is not true he replied, I occupy a pew every time it is open.

He had the remedy. What ever may be wrong with this church or any other church, that wrong may be righted if those who belong to it will be in their places with Christ in their hearts at each service. The First Methodist church is not doing what it ought to if it is not measuring up. It is not God's fault, He stands ready to fulfil his promise to make a glorious church without spot or blemish. It is not the fault of the devil, it is your fault and mine until we have done all that is in our power to make it better.

4. We are giving the devil a chance in our city and in our world. We do this whenever we allow our spiritual vitality to become limited. We do this whenever we permit the church to become weak and worldly, for the hope of the world is in the church of Jesus Christ. There is no other institution that pretends in the least to be <sup>in the</sup> soul saving business. Our lodges and our clubs may help in certain directions but ~~it~~ <sup>only</sup> as the church of Jesus Christ is seeking to save. Those who know Him are the salt of the earth. Without that saving salt, civilization rots. If the environment is bad in which our children have to grow up, if the atmosphere is made vile by boot-legger liquor, if we put lawless men into places of authority, it is because we are willing to give the devil a chance to work his way in our political and civic lives.

PART III.

How we could avoid this disaster.

1. The first step we must take is the realization that sin is a matter to be taken seriously. We must not under-rate our foe. Braddock and his army were wiped out of existence, you remember, simply because the general insisted on under-rating the cunning and the deadliness of the enemy with which they had to deal. If you would not be over-thrown and defeated, you must take your enemy seriously.

2. We must give ourselves in wholehearted surrender to Him who was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil. "He is able to make us conquerors, and more than conquerors. If we will only yield our lives to Him he will take us and make us triumphant and we can conquer in no other way. A half hearted surrender will not do. A half way loyalty is not enough. A renunciation of certain glaring sins is not enough. It is only as we give all that we receive all. We cannot fight sin out of an empty life. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, it goeth through dry places, seeking rest and findeth none. Hence, sayeth he, I will return to my house whence I came out and he cometh and findeth it empty. Then goeth he and gathereth with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entereth and dwelleth there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first." We cannot live in the power of a negative goodness. It is only as we are positive with the spirit that we can hope to succeed. "Thence I say, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

3. Not only must we give ourselves to Christ in a definite surrender, not only express a belief that he homes in our heart, but

we must give ourselves to an open and an aggressive service. How many people give the devil a chance through sheer cowardice and laziness. How many complain that they are finding so little in religion, when they are too lazy to do anything but howl. They remind me of the old farmers hound who sat down at the end of the furrow and let out a wail. A friend who was passing said, what ~~is~~ has hurt your dog. Nothing said the farmer, he has just set down on a cacklebur, and is too lazy to get up.

4. If you do not wish to give the devil a chance, put yourself in the best crowd that you can find. Do not deliberately form your friendships with those who neither know nothing or care nothing about your Christ. To try to be a Christian and yet persistently run with an absolutely unchristian crowd is certainly to throw the door wide open to the enemy. A companion of fools, says the wise man, shall be destroyed. How many thousands could testify to the truth of that.

If then you expect to be a Christian, align yourself with Christian people. Join some church. You will not be any account unless you do. Having joined it, mean something to the church, and let it mean something to you. Give it first place. Do not go thru the mockery of taking these solemn vows unless you are in earnest. About the most heart-breaking thing I know today is the vast number of church members who having pledged themselves to God and to ~~support~~ attend his church and to support it, have utterly forgotten their vows and thereby have lied not only unto men, but unto the Holy Spirit.

5/ If you would avoid giving the devil a chance, you will go into the conflict armed. That is what Paul urges in this letter. "Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." He urges that we take the weapon of the spirit, which is the word of God. That is the weapon that Jesus used against the devil when he fought in the wilderness, and he came out conqueror. Then he urges prayer. "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the spirit".

This is another mighty weapon that Jesus employed constantly. It has been employed by all his victorious saints. That must be employed by ourselves. We better go big game hunting with pop guns than to go out to meet the foes of sin unarmed and unstrengthened with the power of prayer and with the word of God.

6. Finally if you mean to play a shut out game with the devil, you have got to act now. We give the devil a chance in many ways, but in no way do we help him quite so much as delaying action. He is perfectly satisfied to have our hearts stirred. He is satisfied to have us form good resolutions. He does not object to having us look wistfully to the heights, he is willing to all this, if we will only say, go thy way for this time.

"Give the devil no chance". Of course you expect to be a Christian some time. You do not expect to live in sin and die in sin. You do not expect to go thru a needy world and do nothing to help a soul, but your trouble is that all these glorious and wonderful things you are going to do tomorrow. That is where the devil gets his chance. "God says today, the devil says tomorrow, the fool says by and by". There are many doors that you can open, ~~the new tomorrow~~.