THE SINFULIST

"Least there be any fornicator, or profane person, or man, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

Hebrews 12:16

Esau is not a criminal in the sense in which Cain was. Yet, his face looks out upon us from the Rogues' Gallery of the Bible. He is represented as the man who made a great tragic moral failure. Yet, as it so often the case with those who go greatly wrong, there is much of good in him. There is always something of good in the very worst. If you would go out into the slums of this city tonight and talk to the lowest of the low, there would not be one of them that would not have some bit of virtue growing like a white flower in the festering soil of their souls. There is a monument in one of the cemeteries in Memphis. It is a monument to a woman who once ran a house of ill fame. When yellow fever broke out, she turned that house into a hospital. She gave herself day and night to nursing those whom none other would touch. This she did till she paid the penalty with her life. She was an evil woman, but there was much of good in her.

I. Look for a moment at the virtues of Esau.

1. He was a fine animal. He was a splendid fellow physically. The tan of healthy summer suns is on his face. He is like the alpaca, and hard as a nail. He is a born athlete. He is always first in the chase, always first to be chosen for the playing of any game. Had he lived today, he would have been captain of the football team.
Not only was he blessed with a fine physique, but he was richly endowed with physical courage. I do not think he would have stood up in a moral fight. He was wanting in that sort of courage. But any physical duty, he would have faced unafraid. He would have ventured his life in any sort of physical conflict as recklessly as any gambler would have ventured a coin. Naturally, therefore, he had a great appeal for that iron age. He has great appeal even for us today.

2. Not only was he rugged and brawny and heavy-fisted; he was as kind as he was physically strong. That is splendid how the innate kindness of the man comes out in his treatment of his unattractive old father. The whole life of Isaac and Rebecca is an interesting study. It had a beautiful and romantic beginning, but as so often happens, they little by little let the romance die. They never divorced one another, but they became separated by wide chasms of indifference and neglect. Rebecca hen-pecked Isaac out of all self-respect. At the time of this story, he is a blind old dotard for whom nobody seems to care, nobody but one - that is Esau. He is ever thoughtful of him. He prepares him dainty dishes and when his birthright is stolen and he vows to kill his cheating brother, he delays his revenge because he is unwilling to grieve his father. He was a kind and dutiful son. That speaks volumes for him.

3. Then, he was unfailingly generous. Jacob is far more religious than he, but as has often happened, since, he is far less liberal, far more hard and selfish. Jacob, till the grace of God transformed him, was a grasping, greedy man, out after the main chance. That was never the case with Esau. When Jacob was seeking to soften his heart by many presents, he found
Esau's heart already soft. He said to his brother: "I have enough." That was splendid. He was ever generous.

Then, he showed his generosity by his willingness to forgive. Esau could flame in hot anger. There were times when he had every right to be angry, but his anger never hardened him to hate. When the brother who had so greatly wronged him came back after an absence of a score of years, Esau went to meet him, flung his arms around him and wept over him in sheer gladness, unmindful of the old wounds that he had inflicted upon him in earlier years.

That, too, is beautiful. It is at once good religion and good sense. There is nothing more stupid than nursing a grudge, because there is nothing more hurtful. If you give yourself the privilege of hating somebody, your hatred may harm the one you hate, or it may not, but there is one that it will certainly harm, and that is you. There is no surer way of being wretched. There is no surer way of kindling the flames of hell within your own heart than to allow yourself the tragic privilege of nursing a grudge.

II.

But, in spite of these fine virtues, Esau had certain tragic vices that all but wrecked his life. The Writer to the Hebrews points out two fatal defects in the character of Esau.

1. He was a fornicator. The better translation of the word is "Sensualist." Now, the word "sensualist" has come to be used in our day with a very restricted meaning. We understand by a sensualist, one who is given to sexual vice. But the word as here used means this, and far more. A sensualist, according to this author, is a man who lives within the realm of...
his senses. He is a man who cares only for the things that minister to his physical well-being. He cares for the things that he can see, the things that he can handle, the things that can minister to his physical habits. The things that are unseen make no appeal to him. He is a man without any spiritual interpretation of life. He is a sensualist.

Now when we thus understand Esau, we can realize that he had a multitude of blood brothers living in our day. There are vast numbers who, like Esau, are sensualists. They count as realities the things that they can see and clasp in their hands. They forget that there are other realities just as genuine and far more abiding, such as faith, honor, purity, love, unselfishness. The sensualist does not necessarily hate religion. He ignores it. He does not war against the Church, he passes it by because it has no place for his scheme of things. He does not tear the Bible into shreds. He lets it alone. In his pursuit of values that however real can never satisfy, he ignores the only values that are satisfying and abiding. For, the things that are seen are temporal, and the things that are not seen are eternal.

2. Esau was a profane man. Now, the word profane has come in our day to have a restricted meaning. When we say a man is profane, we mean that he is given to swearing, that he has fallen into the vicious habit of taking God's name in vain. But this writer does not mean to say simply that Esau was a swearing man. Doubtless he was. But swearing is only one result of profanity. It is only one of the little streams that flow out from this poisoned fountain. In what sense, then, was Esau profane? The word "profane" comes from two Latin words - pro (in front of), fane (the temple). In the temple there was a holy place, a place
closely guarded, where nothing vile could enter. But the ground in front of the temple was unguarded. It had no fence around it, and that is what the author means when he says that Esau was a profane man, with no fence around his life. His soul, instead of being a garden where the flowers of the spirit bloomed, was a common across which any cloven-footed devil could walk at his will.

And how many Esaus are with us still? The tragedy of vast multitudes today is not that they are vicious, but that they have no fences around their lives. There is nothing to keep in the good, and to keep out the bad. How was God able to bring Joseph to the great destiny that he realized? For one big reason, Joseph kept up his fences. When he came to one of the great temptations of his life, he said, "Can I do this great evil and sin against God?" He wouldn't allow his soul to become a common. The same is true of Daniel who purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself. There were some things that were simply not allowed to enter.

How about you? The years through which we have recently passed have been for most of us desperately trying years. Many of the faiths to which we have clung for support have slipped from our hands. I wonder if you have kept up your fences— if you have said to the spiritless foes that constantly seek to desecrate your life, and seek to change it from a holy place to a common, "You shall not pass." Have your fences fallen down? Have you flung away from your convictions? Have you lost your resisting power? Have you, like Esau, become a profane man—a man unfenced. There is no tragedy greater, I think, today,
nor more common than the tragedy of profanity. The tragedy of allowing life's safeguards to topple into ruins.

III.

Look how these two fatal defects told their disaster when Esau came to a crisis in his life. One day he came home hungry from the chase. In the excitement of the hunt, he had for a while forgotten his physical appetites. But now that the day is over, they assert themselves with all vigor. He smells the beans that Jacob is cooking, and feels that he must have them at once. "Feed me", he says, "with that red stuff. Let me gulp down those lentels." Then, wise Jacob sees his chance and drives a shapp bargain.

"All right" he says, with suppressed eagerness. "But before I give you my dinner, suppose you sell me your birthright." Of course Jacob would never have conceived that foolish bargain, but for the fact that he knew how little Esau valued his birthright. A man doesn't sell out in a single moment. Esau had been selling out for years. But here he brought the matter to a climax. "Take the thing", he says, "I am about to die, and what good will it do me when I am dead." You see, Esau had to have what he wanted when he wanted it. He couldn't wait.

Having made the bargain, he sat down and had his dish of beans. Then, he heaved a sigh, drew the sleeve of his goat-skin coat across his mouth and went on to his tent. "Esau ate and drank, and rose up and went his way," the author of Genesis says, with a touch of sarcasm. "As if that was all that life meant to Esau—just a little round of eating and drinking, and then silence forever." All there is
to show that he has lived is that a dish that was once full of beans is now empty. Thus, he concludes, Esau despised his birthright. That does not mean that Esau hated it as we use the word today, but that he under-valued it. He didn’t count it as a thing of supreme worth.

And you have your birthright, and I have mine. It is unspeakably rich. We have a right to know God, a right to victory over sin and self. We have a right to usefulness. We have a right to spiritual freedom. We have a right to all the spiritual treasure that made Jesus, and that makes those who knew him today, unspeakably rich in spite of all circumstances. But you may despise these treasures. You may under-value them. You may fail to utilize them, and let them slip through your fingers as did sensual and profane Esau.

IV.

Now there came a time when Esau realized his mistake. At first his foolish bargain seemed to make no great difference. The next day after this shameful transaction, the skies were as blue as they had ever been. His aim was as true, the chase as thrilling. But there came a time when even Esau, who strikes us as little more than a fine animal, realized that man cannot live by bread alone. Afterwards the story said, "Afterwards"! Take that word in your hand and examine it. There is always for every deed, every choice, good or bad - afterwards. Esau, the sensualist, forgot this, but there came a day when he had to remember.

"Afterwards". When he would have inherited the promise, the blessings, he found no place for repenters.
That does not mean that God refused to forgive him. Man can always repent if they will, and when they repent God will receive them, even if it is the last fleeting moment of life. What the author means is that Esau found no way of undoing the past. He found no way of getting back across the wide spaces of the years and becoming what he might have become, and doing what he might have done. His repentence saved his soul, but he could not save his life.

And would it not be well before you let down your fences and allow your own soul to become a common, would it not be wise to look ahead? Suppose you have your fling, there may come a time when a great love will come into your life, when you will give all the world to undo the past. God pity the man or the woman that so sacrifices on the wayside altar, that when they come to the supreme sacrificial moment of life, they have nothing to give. Repentence will always save, but it cannot restore youth. It cannot bring back to us our wasted years. It cannot give us the birthright that we ruthlessly threw away.

Some years ago, I was going to see a wife and mother who was dying of poison self administered. In a moment of desperation, she had taken bichloride of mercury. The dose was not sufficiently large to bring quick death. She lingered, and when I saw her more than a week after her rash act, she was slowing rotting above ground. She was
altogether rational, and very penitent. She told me a pitiful story, and then said, "Will God forgive me?"
And I could answer in the affirmative with absolute conviction. And I think she went out undergirded with the everlasting arms. But there was something that her repentance could not do for her, and that was remove the poison from her body and give her back to those who loved her.

Live the unfenced life if you will. Forget the values that are spiritual and abiding if you dare, but there will come afterwards, when your heart will break for your lost birthright. It may be you will repent. If you do, God will save your soul, but you will have wasted the best years of your life. Because this is true, the only wise thing to do is to repent before you sin. Claim your birthright now. You will save yourself from that tormenting afterwards that has broken millions of hearts. You will save yourself from the tragedy of wrongs that you can never right, and wounds that you can never heal. You can not only save yourself, but you can save others as well. Because this is true, no words can be quite so sane as these:
"Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation."
"Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

--Hebrews 12:16

Last Sunday, we studied the trickster, Jacob. Tonight we are to consider his brother Esau. Esau and Jacob were not only brothers; they were twins. But though so close together, there was a chasm between them as wide as the spaces between the stars. When Jacob comes upon the scene, he is about everything that we do not like. He has a winning way of being hated. Esau is the opposite. He is the kind of man that in any age would have many friends. Think how popular he would have been in a modern college! He would have grappled those who knew him to his with hoops of steel.

It is rather startling, therefore, the vast difference in the influence that these two men had upon their own day and upon subsequent generations. Jacob, who had so little that was commendable, became, by the grace of God, a prince and a servant of mankind. Esau, on the other hand, who had such vast treasure, so nearly squandered that treasure that he has his place in the Rogue's Gallery, not because he was a scoundrel, but because in spite of so much that was good he made a mess of the business of living. Jacob, then, impresses us as a man who had very little and made much out of it. Esau had much and made practically nothing out of it.

II

Glance at Esau's fine qualities.

1. He was a splendid animal. He had a magnificent body. That is a great asset. He was a born Athlete. The tan of healthy, summer suns was on his face.
He was a man of the out-of-doors. He was first in the chase. He was doubtless first in all the athletic sports of his day. Had he lived in our time, he might have been all-American full-ack or a Lou Gehrig on a baseball team.

Not only was he strong and skillful in the use of his fine body, but he was courageous. His courage was largely physical. I doubt that he would have stood up in a moral battle. He would have hardly thought it worthwhile. But physical courage was his in abundance. He pitted himself against the wild beasts of his day when he was little better armed than the beasts themselves. He was a man who would have stood up in any sort of physical fight. He would have so conducted himself that his enemy must have taken knowledge of him. A fine strong animal he was.

2. He was possessed of gentleness and kindness to an amazing degree. Remember he lived long ago in a crude iron age. He was strong and athletic. We would hardly have expected gentleness and kindness from one so brawny. Yet he is one of the kindest men, one of the gentlest, that we meet upon the pages of the Old Testament. He was kind at a place and under circumstances where kindness was not easy.

Where did he show his kindness? Answer—at home. That is a place where kindness is not always easy. I am thinking now of a very charming and gracious young woman I knew years ago. In the social circle she seemed the embodiment of kindness. I have known few people who had such a knack of making friends. She could sell herself to all and sundry, seemingly without the least trouble—she seemed so genuinely kind. But at home with a lovely mother who was a great sufferer, her kindness was not conspicuous. Sometimes she treated that mother with a harshness that she would not have shown to the rankest stranger. When I buried her mother in later years, it was the memory of that unkindness that went far toward breaking the daughter's heart.
The married life of Isaac and Rebekah had started beautifully. But little by little they had grown apart. Isaac was an easy-going, placid man, while Rebekah was aggressive and manlying. Little by little she hen-pecked her flabby husband out of all self-respect. As the years went by, he came to count for less and less. He grew old before his time. He lost his eyesight. In fact, he seemed to have lost almost everything except his appetite. He degenerated into an unattractive, blind, flabby husband whose one enjoyment seemed to have been eating.

Who prepared the dainty dishes for this unattractive old dotard? It was not fory Jacob. It was not even Rebekah, the wife who had once loved him. The man who saw that he was fed with the kind of food that he liked was this breezy hunter Esau. Being a man of the out-of-doors, he must have hated cooking as he hated all house-work. It is, therefore, beautiful to see this brawny man taking time to become nurse-maid to his unattractive father. That was kindness at its best.

Then, he gave another proof of his kindness in this: When Jacob had cheated him, when he had robbed him of the prize blessing that he was desperately eager to possess, Esau's anger blazed fiercely. He made up his mind then and there that this scheming, cheating brother of his should pay for his trickery with his life. But he refused to kill him at once. This he did not because he was afraid of the law. This he did not because he was afraid of his own conscience. He held his hand and submitted with quiet rage to his fortune because he did not wish to hurt his old father. He knew it would break the poor old man's heart to have one brother kill the other; so for his sake he held his hand. Esau was kind not simply in the social circle, but kind at home and kind to the least attractive member of the family.

3. Then Esau was generous. He was not grasping and greedy and selfish like his brother Jacob. When this brother of his was returning to the land of
his fathers, he sent Esau a series of presents. Even in his gifts Jacob is still the same foxy man. He sends Esau one gift hard upon the heels of others. He is going to melt him down. But when the two brothers stand face to face, Esau tells him that his gifts are not necessary. "I have enough," he declares, with fine generosity. Such a declaration is neither a Jewish nor an Anglo-Saxon characteristic. It is seldom any of us have enough. But Esau was not grasping and greedy. He was generous.

Then, his generosity is even more conspicuous in his forgiveness of his brother. Jacob had deeply wronged him. There was a time when he blazed in hot and justifiable anger against him. But he never allowed his anger to harden into hate. That was all to the good. His hatred might have hurt Jacob. It certainly would have worked disaster to himself. When, therefore, this frightened brother of his came home, Esau was abundant in his forgiveness. Jesus must have read this story with approval for he uses practically the same language in his marvelous story of the Prodigal Son that is used here. "When Esau saw Jacob, he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." It took a generous heart to forgive in that fashion. When, therefore, we see a man with such magnificent gifts, it becomes all the more tragic that he allows these fine gifts largely to go to waste.

II

What was wrong with Esau? The writer to the Hebrews with fine insight puts his finger on two fatal defects in the character of this delightful and lovable man.

1. He was a fornicater. The better translation of the word is sensualist. Esau was a sensualist. The word "sensual" in our time has come to be very restricted in its meaning. It refers chiefly to one who is addicted to sexual vice. But here it is used in its broader and more correct meaning. Esau was a sensualist in that he lived in the realm of the senses. He was what we today would call secular. He had an eye for the seen and for the seen only.
Now that was a tragic defect. To have an appreciation only for what we can see, what our hands can handle and our ears can hear is to miss those finer values that really count. Of course, man must have bread. His physical body cries out for it. But he cannot live by bread alone. To this fact Esau was utterly blind. He did not hate religion—he was simply not interested in it. He did not scorn the church—he ignored it. He did not aggressively fight against God—he merely forgot His existence.

It is evident that Esau has had a great many blood brothers in this respect. There are those still who see only the seen. They are interested only in those values that they can rattle in their hands and deposit in a bank. The only pleasures they know are the pleasures of the flesh. These are always self cheating. Not only do they cheat themselves, but they cheat their fellows. They are robbed in life. They are robbed eternally when they come to the end of the journey. For the things that are seen are temporal. They won't last. The things that are not seen are eternal and these are life's only eternal values. Esau, the sensualist, was so busy praying at the seen that he missed the unseen altogether. This he did, I repeat, not because he was anticonvictionist to the unseen. He was unconscious of it. He hardly became aware of its existence.

2. A second tragic defect in the character of Esau was that he was a profane man. The word profane has also come to have a restricted meaning. When we say that a man is profane today, we generally mean that he uses foul language—that he is addicted to the habit of swearing. A man who swears is profane. But swearing is but one of the streams that flow out from a profane heart. The word profane comes from two Latin words—"pro", in front of, and "fane", the temple. The temple itself is a holy place. Certain values are kept within it. Certain evils are shut out of it. But a profane man is one that has no fence around his life. He lets his soul become common. Any cloven-footed devil can romp across that common at will.

Thus Esau was profane. He let his fences fall down and there were no
high spiritual values that he found it necessary to fence in and conserve. There were few glaring evils that he shut out. There are few tragedies worse than the tragedy of the unfenced life. He had much that was fine in him, but he had no holy place. There were no bracing convictions that said to the surrounding evils, "You shall not pass."

This is a temptation that belongs to every day. It is one that is going to be especially fierce in the days that are ahead of us. It is harder any time to keep up our fences. That fight becomes more intense in times of crisis such as these through which we are now passing. Let me urge upon you to hold fast those values that are real, to keep up your fences against those evils large and small that devastate and lay waste life. The man who keeps up his fences says of certain duties, "I must do this." He says as he faces evils, "I cannot do that."

Here, for instance, is a young man, brilliant and gifted—Joseph, by name. He has been sold into slavery, taken from the life of a nomad to be thrown in the midst of the perils of the city. He becomes a favorite man in a wealthy family. The wife of his master literally flings herself at him. But he keeps his head. He keeps his self-respect. He keeps himself where God can give him the best. This he does by keeping up his fences. In the face of his temptation he asks this question—"Can I do this great evil and sin against God?" There were certain things that were for him impossible.

Here is another. He is perhaps sixteen years of age. He is a war casualty. He has been taken by despotic power from the city of his fathers and flung down amidst the bewildering splendors of Babylon. In Babylon he has been singled out from the crowd because he was a youth of unusual promise. He has a chance for a place in the Palace of the King if he will only pray his cards right.

But when he is made to cline at his first meal, he sees before him dishes that he cannot eat with a clear conscience. But he refuses to be profane. He keeps up his fences. "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself."
You may be very attractive. You may have a thousand fine qualities, but if you are profane your possible garden becomes a common, romped over and uprooted by swine.

III

What effect did these qualities have upon Esau's conduct?

1. It caused him to treat the privileges that had come to him through the most ennobling religion of that time as of secondary value. This is evidenced in numberless little ways. It fairly shrieks at us in the kind of marriage he made. When Esau set out to choose a wife he had absolutely no thought of choosing a woman who would help him to stand firm in the faith. He had no thought of choosing a woman who would be a proper mother for his children. He threw himself away on pagan women. The values that were primary, he counted secondary.

2. Then, it comes out emphatically in the way he treated his birthright.

Let me remind you again of that scene. Esau is coming home from the chase. He is desperately hungry. He must have some food and have it right at once. He can't wait. Like a certain character in modern fiction, he cannot be bothered resisting the things that he wants. He wants what he wants when he wants it. "Let me gulp down that red stuff," he said. He must have satisfaction for his physical needs, and have it at once.

"All right, my brother," says Jacob. "But first sell me your birthright." Why did Jacob make such a proposal? Because he knew that Esau's birthright was for sale. He would never have dared make such a proposal if this fine and generous brother of his had not been treating the matter with contempt through the years. No man sells his birthright in a single moment. No man stands at his own front door and leaps into the pit at a single bound. Doctor Jekyll does not become Mr. Hyde in one single hour. Esau had been making petty sales of his birthright through the years. The sale that he made now was but the climax of many days of failure.
Even here he hesitates for a moment to make the fatal decision. Then he adds, "I'm about to die." That is equal to saying, "I must live"—a proposition with which we can in no sense agree. "I am about to die. Then what good will the birthright be to me?" So Jacob dished up the beans and we read this revealing word: "He sat down and ate and drank and rose up and went his way." That is almost a summary of his life. When Moses began to do business in the world his people were slaves. When he finished, his people were free. Esau, what did you do? "When I came on the store, this dish was full of beans. Now it is empty. That is all." He gulped down the beans, drew the sleeve of his fur coat across his greasy lips, and swaggered out into oblivion. What a cheap way to use life!

IV

Look at the final outcome. Having eaten his beans, Esau swaggered home to his tent, where he slept the sleep of healthful weariness. The next morning he did not miss the birthright. His aim was as true as ever. The skies were just as blue above his head. The chase was just as thrilling. His birthright, the privilege of being at his best and rendering his highest service—what did they amount to anyway? At first there were no regrets.

But not even a sensualist, not even a profane men can keep that attitude always. There came a time when Esau's heart grew hungry. There came a time when he had hungers that beans could not satisfy. There came a time when the thrill of the chase no longer met his need. "Afterward", says the writer. That is an arresting memory. Afterward—take it in your hand and look at it. Whatever choice you make, whatever turning you take remember this—there is always an afterward. You can make any turn you want. But having taken the turn, you can't choose the afterward. That you must face whether you choose it or not.

"Afterward"—when he would have inherited the blessing he found no place for repentance through he sought it diligently with tears. What does that mean?
Does it mean that God would not forgive him for his folly? By no means. There is no sin that God will not forgive if we repent. Though you might fling away every beautiful year of your life, if you were really to turn to Him in the last hour of twilight, He would accept you and forgive you. What the author is saying is this—that Esau found no way of undoing the past. When he repented, God saved his soul but he could not save his life. He could not restore to Esau his wasted years. He could not put into his hands again the opportunity he had thrown away in life's bright morning long ago.

That is an arresting fact. Repentance will always bring salvation, but it will not undo the past. Years ago I went to see a woman who was dying of bichloride of mercury poison. She had taken the poison some ten days before and was slowly rotting above ground. She told me of the tragedy of her life, how she had suffered and how she had wanted to fling away from it all. But she said, "I am sorry now. I have done wrong. Will God forgive me?" And with absolute confidence, I could answer in the affirmative. I am sure he did. I think she went away to meet Him at peace. But one thing even the forgiveness of God could not do. It could not take the bichloride of mercury out of her body that was gradually doing her to death.

Hear then this arresting word—It is not enough to repent. The only wise thing to do is to repent before you sin. It is beautiful to see the Prodigal come home. It is beautiful to watch his father run and fall on his neck and kiss him. It thrills us to watch him find a place at the feast of the fullness of life. But there might have been a scene better than that. He might never have gone into the far country. But since he went, I am sure that there was many a fine chap that he met on his way down and helped toward the swine-pen that he did not meet when he came home. There is a repentance that saves the soul and leaves the life in ruins. There is a far better repentance that saves both the soul and the life. That is the one to which God calls us in these words—"Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation."
THE PASSING AND THE ABIDING

"... That the things that cannot be shaken may remain."

Hebrews 12:27 (Hebrew)

I

Here is an ancient Christian minister facing an age-old problem. It is the problem of change. He has had to see the familiar world of which he was a part go to pieces before his very eyes. He was a Jew. He belonged to that little conquered nation of Palestine that could never accept its conquest as the last word. Though crushed under the iron heel of Rome, these Jews were always a bit of a powder-keg. They were always a volcano, threatening at any moment to burst into an eruption. They rebelled again and again only to be harshly crushed. They were so weak that their effort at freedom seemed entirely futile, but they could never accept their shameful situation as final.

At last there was a rebellion that was wide-spread. By this time the patience of Rome had become threadbare. Therefore Titus led his cohorts against the city among the Judean hills. He besieged and captured it. Its fall was one of the most horribly bloody in all history. Its fall too was final. Every Briton sings with passion today, "There will always be an England." This man belonged to a people that had sung with even greater fervor, "There will always be a Israel. There will always be a Jerusalem." But now the nation was dead, and the temple with its magnificent ritual was gone forever.

This man was not only a Jew, but he was a Jewish Christian. He belonged to that new and thrilling movement that had spread over the world like a prairie fire. Most of the leaders in this great enterprise had been men who had known
Jesus in the flesh. They had been present at Pentecost. They had preached with such power that it looked as if the world was going to be taken captive in a few short years. But now these leaders were almost all dead. Perhaps only one was left alive. Not only so, but they had died violent deaths. They had died at the hands of bloody Rome. But this cruel empire had not been satisfied with the slaughter of the leaders; they were out to destroy the young church utterly. This writer had therefore to witness not only the passing of his nation but the threatening destruction of his church. His was certainly an era of change.

His experience is, of course, to some extent the experience of all of us. The one unchanging thing in our world is change. Even during the most peaceful eras everything is in a constant flux of change. Always the old order is passing, giving place to the new. This is the secret of the abiding clash between youth and age. Few of us are able to be at home in more than one generation. We speak the language and think the thoughts of the generation into which we are born. But when a new generation comes on the scene, if we think their thoughts and speak their language, it requires effort. It is like learning to speak in a foreign tongue.

What is the matter with the man of fifty who looks with despairing eyes upon those of twenty? Why is he so critical? It is not because the younger generation is necessarily worse than his own. The chances are that it is better. But that which arouses his indignation and causes him to unsheath the sword of his tongue is that they are different. We remind our children of what we used to be and what we used to do. We imply by that that we were all that we ought to have been and did all that we ought to have done. But of course that is in reality not the case. But the clash of youth with age grows out of the fact that youth is different. We are at home in one generation, they in another. Naturally they do not know how to be old, tragically we have forgotten how to be young.
But while change is something that is taking place constantly, there are eras when the process is greatly accelerated. The era in which this preacher lived was such. This is also the case with the era in which our lot is cast. We who have reached the age of fifty feel that enough changes have been packed into our brief lives to be sufficient for centuries. Ours has been in a special sense a day of upheaval. Think how the modern woman has upset our apple cart.

I heard a friend preach a sermon on "The Home" sometime ago. He is a fine man and an excellent preacher. I have the greatest respect for him. But his sermon was as futile as if he had stood in front of the Niagara Falls and had tried to drive it back into Lake Erie by saying "Boo!" He was rebuking women for leaving the home and going out to work in the big outer world. Thus he implied that they were robbing men of jobs while they left their own unaccomplished. "Back to the kitchen," was his battle cry. He really preached a good sermon except for the fact that its conclusions were taken without regard to the facts, and therefore hardly reached the height of dignified nonsense.

Now women have left the home by the millions. But they did not do so because they suddenly decided that men were getting the better of it and that they had better go out and take over. Their exodus from the home was brought about through economic changes. The work that women used to do in the home was carried outside of the home. The other day I saw a cow following close behind a farm wagon. She was watching that wagon with wide and solicitous eyes. I was puzzled to know the reason at first, then I discovered a little calf in the wagon. That cow was just following her calf. That calf was her job. When these women went out of their homes they were only following their jobs. Multitudes of women must work outside the home or not work at all. This is the case because multitudes of jobs that used to be done in the home are not there anymore.

For instance, the pioneer home was sufficient for itself. Those composing it bought almost nothing. They raised or hunted their own meat, they cultivated
their own cotton or raised their own sheep, spun the product and wove it into cloth and made it into garments. Even in my boyhood we had to turn to the merchant for comparatively little. We raised our own corn for meal, our own wheat for flour. We had our own honey and molasses. When we wanted milk we got personally acquainted with the cow. When we were sick we were sick at home. When we were born we were born at home. But all these tasks have now been carried elsewhere. Therefore many women will never go back to the kitchen till they go in an ox cart or in the prairie schooner.

But along with this economic change have come other changes that many of us have found very upsetting. Nation after nation has become a despotism. We have taken such long strides in that direction ourselves as to fill those possessed with the spirit of our founding father with amazed terror. At present the world is being shaken as by an earthquake. A young chap who was present years ago at the San Francisco earthquake told me of the terror of the people as they felt the once solid earth crawling beneath their feet. So some of us feel today. Certainly much to which we cling is likely to slip through our fingers. We are seeing great changes and are likely to see yet greater.

Now the arresting fact about this interesting preacher is that though he lived in the midst of a great upheaval, though his seemingly solid world was quaking beneath his feet, he seemed strangely, unafraid. In fact he does not even seem to regret it. He looks upon it all with quiet eyes. He sees much that was dear to him being shaken to pieces, but he steadies himself in the midst of it all by fixing his eyes on certain things upon which we need to look at this hour. He looked at the things that cannot be shaken. It was this that enabled him to see his ordeal through with honor.

II.

Since change is something with which we all have to deal, we ought to learn
how to adjust ourselves to it. How shall we do this?

To begin negatively, we are not to look upon change as an end in itself. There is no use of changing just for the sake of changing. Now and then I go to my room to find my bed pushed from its familiar corner to some other place. The dresser is not where it used to be. Everything has been pushed into a new position. I take it all patiently, but I have never seen any special point in it. There are those who would change everything every day if they could. They worship the god of whirl. They are firmly convinced that all change means progress even if those making them are going in circles. But change is not an end in itself, it is only a means to an end.

If change is not of necessity an angel of light, no more is it always a species of an ugly devil. Yet there are those who stand in deadly fear of almost any kind of change. They had as soon be shot by a rifle as by a new idea. Of course it is easier for us who are middle-aged to sympathize with those who fear change than with those who worship it. Change can be very upsetting. It can bring on a species of earthquake that shakes us rudely out of our comfortable ruts. Sometimes change compels us to think, to alter our views, and this we seldom like to do.

Then change can be upsetting in another direction. Here, for instance, is a lovely home. There are the father and mother and a group of children. These are bound together by the tender ties of love and understanding. But as winsome as is this home it cannot remain as it is. By and by the children will grow to womanhood and manhood. They will go from the old home nest to build homes of their own. The time will come when the father and mother will be back again living together just as they did when he led her a bride across the threshold of his home a half century ago. Then one day that companionship will be broken and the husband or the wife will walk alone. No wonder they are a bit afraid of change.
A few days ago I was talking to a friend. By and by an old gentleman came to visit this friend. I should say he was past seventy. When we were introduced and began talking I soon found that he was from my native state. Not only so, but he was from the most beautiful part of the state. He lived in that section which might be described as "the dimple of the universe." He told how that after years of waiting he had recently gone back to visit his old home. But he declared, "I was disappointed to tears. Everything was so changed." Certainly. We sing wistfully about going back to Dixie, but we find that the Dixie for which we longed exists only in the land of memory. Dixie has a way of changing. Even if it did not, those that visit Dixie change. Nothing looks the same through the eyes of old age as it looked through the eyes of childhood.

But in spite of the fact that change often shocks and wounds us, it is in reality our friend. If to change is at times heartbreaking, not to change would be positive tragedy. Here for instance is a lovely baby. That baby might break the heart of the mother who loves him by growing up to be a criminal. But there is another way in which he can bring heartache, that is by refusing to grow at all. Years ago we had a next door neighbor who was called upon to face this tragedy. The sweet angel of suffering came to that home and a new life was put into the mother's arms. But the days wore into weeks, the weeks into months, the months into years, and the little fellow refused to grow. We are meant to change. We are to change ourselves, we are to help change our world. That is what life is for.

In dealing with change however we are to realize there are different kinds of change. There are the changes that are inevitable. Of this type, for instance, are the changes that must take place in our physical bodies. A beautiful baby cannot remain a baby, he must grow into youthhood and manhood. We parents must be willing for him to do that. Then he must pass on to middle life, then on to old age. There is no use in shrinking or shying around the latter, it is inevi-
table if we live long enough. Let us remember that December is as much part of God's year as is January or June. We can allow this inevitable change to break our hearts or we can accept it as a part of God's plan for our lives.

Then there are other changes that are inevitable so far as we are concerned. These are the changes that we cannot prevent. It may be the loss of your wealth. It may be the loss of your health. It may be the upheaval of your snug world. Think of the millions in Europe that through no fault of their own have passed from freedom to bondage. Even such changes as these we can use if we meet them within the will of God. That was a terrible change when Israel was carried into exile. But it was during this period of exile that she learned her most valuable lessons. Every change, however feared and dreaded may work for our good if we meet it in the fear of God.

Then along with these inevitable changes are those that we choose for ourselves. We can choose to be different. We can choose to think in different fashion. That we must do if we grow. In dealing with this type of change, Paul gives a very sane guidepost. "Prove all things: hold fast to that which is good." Do not lay hold of some "ism" just because it is new. Accept it only because it is true. There are some people, one suggests, that are like ships that have no anchors. They have abundant sails, they move constantly and swiftly, but they do nothing but move. There are others that have anchors but no sails. They are stand-patters. They remain in one harbor and leave the vast sea unexplored. We ought to have both sails and anchors. This is what Paul meant when he said, "Prove all things: hold fast to that which is good."

III.

What is this good which we are to hold fast? It is the abiding. It is made up of those values that last. It belongs to that group of things that this preacher says cannot be shaken. What are some of the things?
1. The law of sowing and reaping. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." That was true in the dim eternities, it is true today, it will be true throughout the everlasting tomorrow. Each generation has its own customs, its own code of morals. Some things that our fathers tolerated we frown upon. Some that they frowned upon we welcome with open arms. We are constantly changing our views of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. Take, for instance, our change of attitude toward liquor. In 1928 the liquor question was a supreme issue in the presidential campaign. It was voted down by an overwhelming majority. Liquor at that time was a disgraced outcast. It had no social standing at all. But today all that is different. It is welcomed into the so-called best society. No scene in the movies is complete without a drink. This miserable bum has become a second Cinderella. From being despised it has become as popular as Santa Claus.

But while our attitude toward liquor has changed, there is one something that remains the same, that is liquor itself. It still bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. It still lowers our physical vitality, blunts our intellect and kills our inhibitions. In spite of the fact that the first lady of the land must give advice to her younger sisters on how to carry their liquor, there is no way to carry it with safety. It blasts modesty and tends to change the timid and innocent girl into the bold and brazen hussy. The virtue of Diana herself is not to be trusted if she is drunk. Our attitude toward liquor has changed, but liquor itself remains the same deadly thing it has ever been.

But if tares and weeds grow when we plant them, it is equally true that flowers grow also if we give them a chance. If our wrong sowing surely comes to harvest, it is no less true that our right sowing will do the same. We may count on it, therefore, that whatever devastating changes may sweep over our world, our nation, ourselves, our sowing to the Spirit will never be in vain. In spite of men and devils it will surely come to harvest.
2. Christ-like character abides. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." God-like character can never be destroyed. Years ago a group of politicians found a certain statesman, Daniel, in their way. They decided to destroy him. "The sure way to do this," they argued, "is to bring him to a situation where he must choose between obedience to the State and obedience to God. They brought this to pass by having a law passed that no man should pray to any but the king for the next thirty days. But when Daniel knew that the writing was signed he went into his chamber and opened his window toward Jerusalem and prayed as afore time. Babylon has been dead centuries. Its one time grandeur is a heap of ruins. There is only one thing left standing in Babylon, that is the character of Daniel. "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

3. God abides. Soon I am to go on my vacation. I expect to go fishing in the Buffalo River. As I stand with that silvery water gurgling about my knees I shall glance out the tail of my eye to see the hills and the cliffs running away as if there were a terrible earthquake. But it will not frighten me. I shall know that it is only my head swimming, that the mountains and hills are still standing firm. And when today I seem to see the very throne of God taking to its heels, I know that is is only my head swimming. God still abides. I know also that this God can steady me. "I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved."

Here then is a way we may treat change. We can make every change a new milepost toward God and toward our best possible selves.

"There, there, little girl don't cry,
They have broken your doll I know;
And your tea set blue and your playhouse too
Are things of the long ago."
But childish griefs will soon pass by,
There, there, little girl don't cry.

There, there little girl don't cry,
They have broken your slate I know;
And the glad wild ways of your schoolhood days
Are things of the long ago.
But life and love will soon come by,
There, there, little girl don't cry.

There, there, little girl don't cry
They have broken your heart I know;
And the rainbow gleams of your youthful dreams
Of things of the long ago,
But heaven holds all for which you sigh,
There, there, little girl don't cry."
"...that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." Hebrews 12:27

- I -

Here is a man who was addressing himself to the problem of change. This letter was written about the time of the fall of Jerusalem. Its author is a Jew who had had to witness the final collapse of his nation. That wonderful city with its sacred temple had been captured before, but never could the Jewish people believe that their downfall was final. They had always been a powder keg, but now after a final rebellion, the city has been destroyed in about the most cruel and bloody siege that our tortured world has ever known. This writer had had to witness this change.

Not only was the author a Jew, but he was a Jewish Christian. He was a part of that promising movement that had swept over the world like a burst of springtime, but now Rome has risen in opposition. Every great leader who had known Jesus in the flesh has doubtless been executed with one exception. As his nation had been destroyed, so the forces of evil now threatened to destroy the church of which he is a part. The whole world, therefore, was being shaken. Yet he somehow managed to steady himself because he believed that there were somethings that could not be shaken.

How then can we steady ourselves in a time of change, for his problem is our problem? The one unchanging thing in this world of ours is change. However stagnant a situation seems to be, it is always in a flux of change. When Tennyson wrote, "The old world changeth giving place to new", he is saying what was true in every age of history of the world.
But while change is something that is going on constantly, there are eras during which the process is speeded up. Such was the era in which this writer lived. Such has certainly been the case in which our lot was cast. If you have reached the age of fifty, you have seen enough changes packed away in that brief period to suffice four or five centuries. There have been changes in national and international relations. Weak nations have grown strong and strong nations have all but ceased to exist.

Take the change that is taking place, for instance, in the status of woman. That is one of the most amazing revolutions of any age. It has not been more than a century ago since only one vocation, or maybe two were open to women. She could be a wife and mother, or she could teach. Outside of those she must not go. But all this has changed. Even as far back as 1920 woman had entered every vocation that man follows except thirty-five.

Naturally there were those of both sexes who have resented this. A few years ago a friend of mine who is a neighbor minister preached a sermon on the home. It was a good sermon except for one fact. It was utterly futile. His last appeal was, "Back to the kitchen." He might as well have shouted, "Back to the prairie schooner!" Woman as a whole will never return to the kitchen. If she would there would hardly be standing room.

Dr. George R. Stewart viewed this situation with a kind of impudent horror. He had a lecture entitled, "When the American Woman Becomes Man, Then What?" In other words he would question, "When all of the fouls of the barnyard take to crowing, who is going to cackle?" Yet as good as the old days look, they will never come back. This is the case for the simple reason because they were in rebellion. They left the home because the work they once did has been carried outside
the home.

There was a time when the home was largely sufficient unto itself. Such was the case of the pioneer home. They raised or killed or hunted for their own meat. They raised the cotton or wool, and spun it into thread, wove it into garments, and made the garments at home. They were dependent upon their merchant for very little.

The home in which I grew up was largely independent of a merchant. We kept bees for our honey, we raised our own wheat and corn for flour and meal. When we wanted meal, we got personally acquainted with the cow. When we wanted soap, we made it. There was hard soap and soft soap. I came in one night, went for something to eat in the dark, and stopped my hand into a dish of soft soap thinking it might be preserves. My mouth has been clean ever since. When we were sick, we were sick at home. We were born at home. We died at home. But all these tasks have been carried outside. Thus the world is constantly changing and the world along with it.

II

Now since change is a fact with which everybody has to do, with what attitude shall we face it?

1. Some look on change as an end in itself. To them change is an angel of life. They would like to change everything. They believe so long as they are moving, they are getting somewhere even though they are going in circles. I have seen preachers who worship the God of world. Everytime they go to a knew charge, they feel that it is necessary to change everything that our predecessors have done the day after they arrive. Naturally such restless souls soon have to repent under the juniper tree that they are no better than our fathers. Change is good, but we are not to look upon it as an end in itself.

2. Then there are those who go to the opposite extreme. Instead
of looking upon change as an angel of life, they look upon it as a
species of the devil. Any change meets with stern opposition. The
one all sufficient reason for following any program is this, "We have
always done it this way." They had as soon he shot with a rifle as
with a new idea. Now it is easy to see why some folks dread change.
Changes can be very upsetting. They can shake us out of our comfortable
ruts. Often they even compel us to think. And there is nothing,
generally speaking, that we resist and resent more than having to think.
Sometimes changes can weighen our lives. Sometimes they can break our
hearts.

But whether we like them or dislike them, change is a fact of
human experience.

3. Now since this is the case, the proper attitude toward change
is the frank facing of fact. We need to remember also that changes
are of two kinds.

First, there are changes that are inevitable. Here is a lovely
home made up of husband, wife and children. But beautiful as that
home circle is, it will not always stay the same. The children will
grow from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood and womanhood.
They will go to form homes of their own. By and by husband and wife
will be left alone just as they were when he led her as a bride across
the threshold of life. Then one, then both of them will pass.

The other day I ran into a gentleman who had visited our native
state after many years. He had lived in a beautiful section of the country.
For a long time he had dreamed of going back. But his visit was a sad
disappointment. He told me with the pathos of tears that everything
had so changed that his visit brought him more sorrow than joy. Such
experiences are not unique. We used to sing with fervor about going
back to Dixie. But we find that when we get back, the Dixie we knew
has changed. Even if it had remained exactly as it was when seen at childhood and youth, it would not look the same when seen through the eyes of old age. My old home is located in a semi-circle of lovely hills. I did not realize until recently with what gross exaggeration I have described the heights of those hills. They are really not half so high as they used to be. This is not the case because they have changed, but because I have.

Just as there are changes that take place in your person and in your own home that are beyond your control; even so there are changes that take place in your world. Before the outbreak of the First World War, we were a complacent lot. We believed that we had a rich era of complacent peace, that we were headed into Utopia. Then the crash came and twenty-four nations slipped into blood and tears, and you and I could not prevent it. There are personal and international changes that we cannot control.

Second:- But along with these changes that are beyond our control, there are some changes that we control ourselves. We cannot remain as we are how hard we try. We are born on an incline and we must either go up or down. Though it is not optional whether we become different or not, it is optional the direction in which we travel. We can deliberately choose to be better. We can strike the upward trail, but we pay for this by an ability to take the lower trail. The choice of the kind of man or woman you increasingly become is up to you. One of the glories of your life is that you cannot remain as you are. You must become better or you will become worse. You cannot avoid change, but you can choose to make changes that will enrich you rather than impoverish you.

Change, therefore, is our friend rather than our foe. We are not to change just for the fact of changing. But we are to change just for the fact of improvement. There are two kinds of people. One
group is a bit like a ship with a wide sail, but with no anchor. They are constantly shifting. We never know where to place them. With every new ism, however, they are embraced with enthusiasm.

Then there is another group that have very heavy anchors, but no sail at all. Their ideal world is one that never changes. They have no admiration for a daring Abraham who ventured at the call of God into a new world. They rather admire Rip Van Winkle who can lie complacently asleep while a new age is taking shape about him. Change then is a fact. Meet those changes that are inevitable within the will of God. Choose those changes that are helpful by the grace of God, and every change will become your friend.

- III -

Now the reason the author of this letter views his tottering and changing world with such a quiet heart and steady eye is because he believes that there are certain things that do not change and do not pass. Of course, all that is visible is changing and will one day pass utterly away. There is nothing material that you cannot count on losing. What then is there that abides?

1. The law of sowing and reaping abides. "But in deceiving, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." That was true a million years ago, that is true today. Ours is an ordered universe. We live in a law abiding world. Our ideas and attitudes toward the moral law may change, but not the moral law itself. For instance, we are living in a day in which relation between the sexes is more lax perhaps than ever before in American life. People are more frank in facing these evils and indulging in them than in the days of our fathers. But in the fact that public opinion does not discourage the sinner today as it did a few years ago has not changed an evil into good. That sin is still a wrecker of happiness and a blaster of homes.
Our attitude toward liquor has changed, but what has not changed is the alcoholic content of liquor and the effect of that alcohol upon the human body. However much we legalize it and make it respectable, it will still make a man drunk. It will still enslave him. It will still kill him body, mind, and soul. Always, everywhere wherever a man sows, he reaps. This he does however good naturedly he may sow his wild dates. This he does, even if he has persuaded himself that the oates he is sowing are not wild at all. In plain English, life is made to be lived according to the will of God. Every man who refuses it reaps a harvest of desolation and death. That is not theory, that is fact.

2. There is another field that while it changes, yet it abides. It remains unshaken in the shaken world. That is the church. "I will build my church", says Jesus, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." There have been times when that declaration sounded ridiculous. There was a time when a Roman emperor erected a triumphant arch in token of the fact that the church had been destroyed. Imperfect? Yes, but in the power of Almighty God. If you make an investment in it, the Christ of the Church will not let you down. It has had many a debt, but because the everlasting God is in it, it has always come to a resurrection.

3. A third value that abides is a Christlike character. Listen to John, "The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he who doeth the will of God abideth forever." "Now abideth" sings Paul, "faith, hope, and love." Christlike character changes from good to better, but it is eternal. It is something that cannot be shaken.

In that beautiful Old Testament story, Daniel has heard that it is forbidden under penalty of death to pray to anybody but the king for the next thirty days. What is his reaction? Listen. When he heard that the
writing was signed, he went up into an upper room and opened his window toward Jerusalem and prayed as he had done aforetime. He had a habit of prayer, and he dared to maintain it in the presence of what seemed certain death. Babylon has been a ruin for thirty-five years. Nothing remains of it today but the character of Daniel. We still listen to him pray and still light our torches in his glowing fire.

4. Finally God abides. He stabilizes all else. He is like Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and everyday. I stood one day with the silvery waters of the Buffalo River singing about my knees. Out of the corner of my eye it looked as if the cliffs and hills were running by. But I realized that my head was swimming. When I lifted my eyes from the rushing water and looked to the rugged cliffs, I saw that they were as firm as they had ever been.

Maybe your world is threatening to break up about you. Certainly as we look about at the confusion of our own land and other nations, there is much that is upsetting. What do we need to steady ourselves. We need to lift our eyes to the eternal hills of God. "I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." If we walk with God every change that we meet, whether it brings joy or sorrow will be a new stage on our journey. Here is a child's song that still expresses the finest of our possibilities as we meet change within the will of God.

"There little girl, don't cry,
They have broken your doll, I know,
And your teaset blue and your playhouse too
Are things of the long ago.
But childish griefs will soon pass by,
There, there, little girl, don't cry.

"There little girl, don't cry,
They have broken your slate, I know
And the glad, wild ways of your schoolhood days
Are things of the long ago.
But life and love will soon come by
There, there little girl, don't cry."
"There little girl, don't cry
They have broken your heart, I know
And the rainbow gleams of your youthful dreams
Are things of the long ago.
But heaven holds all for which you sigh.
There, there little girl, don't cry."

Let the wick of faith change here.

Here is a man under disappointment's death.
He has sorrow, the weight of it, the drudgery of it.
Let just human tears dry up, and be long to come.
Let man bear the burden.

For where he loved true and funny, he knew he had the love of him.

Henceforward, his life was but a backsliding, tenor, fairer, than this world. The days of his life, had in them, those

...and in those.
"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before." (Hebrews 12:1) (Revised Standard Version)

Here is a first century Christian preaching to his fellow countrymen, a company of Jews who have turned aside from the faith of their fathers to become a part of the Christian Church. These Christians are having a hard time. They are being bitterly persecuted. Some of them no doubt are wondering if they have not made a mistake. They are looking wistfully over their shoulder back to the old life half persuaded that they had better fling away from their new faith and go back to where life is easier and safer. Now it was to steady these frightened and hard pressed people that this author wrote his letter.

How does he seek to give them courage and staying power? You will notice that he makes absolutely no appeal to their softness, their cowardice, or their love of ease. He rather does the opposite. With engaging candor he faces the fact with them that to be a Christian is costly. He tells them frankly that if they propose to follow Jesus Christ they must be willing to pay the price and the price will not be small.

Now that is the case with everything that is worth while. The idea of getting something for nothing is always appealing but it is also always a fact. Perhaps the worst evil of gambling is that it touches its votaries
to reverse a fundamental law of life and get real values without an adequate
return. That simply doesn't happen. I know the poet sings it is only God
may be had for the asking and heaven alone that is given away. But the only
type of asking that brings God into your life is the asking that calls for
the complete giving of self.

When I was a boy there was one paper that seldom failed to make its
appearance at our home every month. That was "The Home Comfort." Nobody
ever subscribed for it though the subscription I think was only twenty-five
cents per year. It always came as a sample copy. It was able to pay ex-
penses by the vast variety of things it had to give away. When you opened
it the first word that greeted you in box-car letters was this: Free. Send
us five two-cent postage stamps to pay mailing expenses and we will send you
anything from an automobile to a new pair of lungs. It lived off the suckers
who were trying to get something for nothing.

Of course at our best we are too sensible to think we can get something
for nothing and too honest to want to. Carlyle was right when he said:

It is not to taste sweet things
But to do true and noble things
And to vindicate ourselves under God's heaven
As God made men and women is that after which
Every son of Adam dimly longs."

Therefore this ancient writer with engaging honesty faces his frightened
fellow-Christians with the declaration: "If ye mean to be a Christian you
must pay the price and the price is great.

In speaking after this fashion he is in harmony with the whole New
Testament. When we turn for instance to the last book of the Bible every
page of it clashes with conflict. When John gets a glimpse of those who
have gained the blessing of the world to come he asks: "Who are these
arrayed in white robes and whence came they?" "These are they," comes
the answer, "that have come up out of great tribulation." "Tribulation"
comes from the Latin word tribulum which was a thrashing machine. A bundle
of wheat was thus beaten until the wheat was separated from the chaff. So
"I'd Play to Win"

these triumphant creatures are those who have passed through a thrashing maching, a conflict that has separated what is chaffy and worthless from what is good. "They overcame," says the author, "because they counted not their lives as dear unto themselves."

As we sit at the feet of Paul he talks the same language. His is constantly the language of the athletic field, the arena, the field of battle. Now he is in the ring as a pugelist, saying: "So fight I not as one that beateth the air. Again he is on the race track saying: "I so run not as undertainly." Then he is on the field of battle saying: "Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand in the evil day and having fought to the finish remained victor on the field."

These men learned the costliness of the Christian life through their own experiences and through the experiences of others. They learned it also from the Master himself. Not once did Jesus appeal to a would-be disciple to follow him because to do so was the easiest way to get through life. He said the very opposite: "Strive to enter in," he urged, "because narrow is the way. This narrowness is not due to any arbitrary stubbornness on the part of God. The way is narrow in the nature of things.

For instance if I desire to hit a target in a shooting gallery, narrow is the way. If I desire to write good prose, the way is narrow. I cannot write it haphazard. If I desire to write good poetry, the way is more narrow still. I set out once as a boy to learn to play the violin. I soon gave it up because I found that the way was narrow. You go to a piano teacher to learn to be a concert pianist. He sets you to doing little finger drills. In indignation you tell him, "I don't want to do that. I want to play Mozart and Handel and Bach. And I want to play them just as I please." But this you can't do because narrow is the way. Let us face the fact then that the good life is costly. If any man will come after me "let him deny himself and take up his cross." Thus this ancient preacher sought to hearten his wavering fellows by telling them not that their undertaking was easy but that it was difficult. It was a race to be run.
Now since the good life is a battle to be fought and a race to be run how can we hope to run it successfully?

1. We must run stripped of all possible hindrances. We are to lay aside the sin that clings so closely to us. Sin is transgression of the law. To sin against the body is therefore to weaken the body. If we are to be at our best spiritually we must avoid all known wrong. We must especially avoid that most tricky of sins, the sin of uselessness. Nothing would help you so much in the running of this race as keeping peace with your own conscience. Wrong is never strong permanently. Abiding strength brings only to the right.

My good blade carves the castes of men,
My quick lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten
Because my heart is pure.

2. Not only are we to run stripped of our positive sins but we are to lay aside every weight. Now a weight is something that may be altogether innocent in itself but it becomes a sin only because we use it in such a fashion as to allow it to hinder us in the running of our race. If you were a member of a track team it would not be a sin for you to run in cowboy boots. But should you insist in doing so you would sin against your team because you would thereby lower your efficiency. It is no harm for a member of the football team to smoke cigarettes but he becomes a sinner against his team if by so doing he lowers his efficiency. This is the sanest test of what pleasures and pasttimes we may enjoy as Christians. We may enjoy anything not that helps us to run the race. We cannot enjoy anything that hinders.

Years ago as a schoolboy I had to cross the Buffalo River every morning on my way to school. One morning I saw a crow feeding in the shallow water of the river. When I approached him he flew for only a short distance. The next time he made a shorter distance still. At last I was able to catch him with my hands. He was not wanted. Nobody had clipped his wings nor had he
lost his fear of human creatures like me. But he was carrying a weight. He had stepped his toe into the shell of a muscle and that muscle had closed upon his toe. I doubt if it caused the crow the slightest pain but it so slowed him down as to make him an easy prey for his enemy.

In my home state a few years ago a man succeeded in killing a great American eagle with a squirrel gun. He wondered how he could approach so near the great bird. He was a magnificent creature measuring seven feet from tip to tip but when he was dead and he got a still nearer view he discovered that a small steel trap was hanging to one of his legs. The trap didn't kill him but it made it impossible for him to fly with the swiftness and to pounce upon his prey as he once did. Thus he had become lean and weakened and an easy victim to his enemy. In the running of this race we are to lay aside positive sin. We are also to lay aside our weights.

3. Finally we are not only to strip off what hinders but we are to take on what helps. If the athlete must avoid those dissipations that weaken his body he must also eat the wholesome food that is to build his body up. Even so as Christians we must not only avoid all hindrances so far as possible but we must avail ourselves of all helps.

III

What are some of the helps that this wise author suggests?

1. The forward look. This race of which he is speaking is a race set before us. That sounds trite I know, but in reality it is not. There are those who lose the race because they will not face forward. In the Rose Bowl a few years ago a brilliant football player made a seventy yard dash. It was a spectacular feat. There was only one criticism. He was running in the wrong direction. He was running toward his own goal instead of toward that of his enemy.

If the backward look on a football field spells disaster it is equally
disastrous in the human race. But what am I to do with my old sin? You are to turn your back on it. Here is one who ran the race magnificently. He is giving us the advantage of his victorious race, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forth unto those things that are before I press toward the mark for the prize." The only old age that is really deadly is the old age that gives birth to the backward look. If you expect to win you must face forward.

2. As you run it will hearten you to realize that you do not run alone. You are a part of a great company. There are others who are engaged in this great race with you. Then there are those who have won, declares the author. These look on with eager interest, giving their testimony to the worth of the race and to the sureness of victory. That is what the author means by these words. Seeing that we also are compassed about with so great a crowd of witnesses, let us run.

3. Finally, we are to run with patience. Patience has two possible meanings. The power to endure and the power to persist. We are to be patient with ourselves. We are to be patient with others. We are to be patient with God. He does not always do things as we think he ought. We are to bear in mind that if we fail to persist, nothing can give us victory. We are to bear in mind also that if we refuse to faint, if we dare to keep on, nothing in hell can defeat us. "In due season we shall reap if we faint not."

IV

How then can we find strength to persist? "We are to run," answers the author, "looking unto Jesus"

1. We are to look to Jesus as our example. We are to run the race somewhat as he ran it. How did he run the race?

(1) He had the forward look; he kept his eye on the goal. "Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." That was his
goal. The joy of living his life within the will of God, the joy of being able to say: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." His was also the joy of service to others, the joy of a world redeemed. We are to keep our eyes on the goal of Christlikeness as he kept his eye on his goal.

(2) Not only did Jesus run with his eye on the goal, but he ran in the midst of opposition. There were many difficulties and dangers. His life was a struggle to the end of the journey. When he said, "I will build my Church and the gates of death will not prevail against it," he was declaring that he would carry on in the face of stubborn opposition. We may expect as much. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Lord.

(3) Not only did Jesus run with his eye on the goal and in the face of opposition, but he ran in spite of opposition. If we turn back at the first difficulty, then we are defeated already. We must carry on in the fact of conflict. Jesus carried on even at the cost of a cross.

2. Not only are we to run looking to Jesus as our example, we are to look to him as our Saviour, our Helper, and our Friend. If Jesus is an example and no more, then he is more a source of bafflement and bewilderment than of help. An example can be merely aggravating. A few years ago one of the most brilliant creatures in America said to a company of brother ministers, "If you will come back tomorrow I will tell you how to preach. I will make such a difference in you that your own congregations will not know you."

As one of the ministers present, I thought he was setting himself a pretty big task. The next day he undertook the performance of this task. As a display of real brilliance it was a great success, but as a practical help to ministers, most of whom were circuit riders, I thought it was a flop. It was just about as helpful as it would be for Fritz Kreisler to stand before a company of mountaineer fiddlers with his magic violin and say, "This is the way you ought to play." It is little use for an eagle to tell me how to fly when I don't even have any wings. We are to look to Jesus
then not simply as an example but as our source of power both for being and doing. A year or two ago Gilbert Dodd ran the fastest mile that had ever been run up to that time. When he told over the radio the thirteen thousand spectators who were present and the multitudes who were listening in something of the secret of his victory he said, "I asked God to help me every step of the way." Now I know how easy it is to look at a statement like this with critical and cynical eyes. What did this athlete mean? He did not mean that he asked God to make him more fleet-footed than all others, but by praying he did receive an inner poise and serenity that enabled him to run at his best. Soon after Stanley found Livingstone in darkest Africa he came also to find Livingstone's Lord. In the after days he declared that he stood the long torturing marches through the jungles of Africa as his fellows could not because he prayed. Let us then run looking to Jesus as our example, but above all else looking to him as our Savior and Friend.
DRIFTING

We must therefore pay all the more attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away. (Moffatt) Hebrews 2:1

Here is a first century preacher writing to a group of Jewish Christians. These Christians are not finding their new way of life easy. Just where they are living we do not know. Possibly in Rome, but wherever they are they are the few among the many. As a minority they are being scorned, ostracized, even plundered and peeled. The author reminds them that they have taken cheerfully the spoiling of their goods. He, therefore, sends them this letter to steady them and to keep them loyal to their faith. In our text he gives a word of warning.

1.

Against what is he warning?

Strange to say he is not warning them against the danger of making a clean break with their new faith. He is not afraid that they may den betray their Lord as did Judas. He is not afraid they will deny Him as did Peter. He is not warning them against being seduced from their Lord for the love of the world as was Demas. He is not even warning them against letting the priceless treasure that is theirs slip from their hands.

It is this losing of something of priceless worth that is suggested by the authorized version. "Therefore we ought to give the most earnest heed to things we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip". Even though incorrect, that is a very suggestive translation. We do permit some treasures to slip through our fingers.
I had a friend years ago who owned almost a hundred lots in a desirable section of a growing city. Those lots would easily have made him a millionaire. But when I met him again several years later I could easily see he was not a millionaire. Being curious I asked "What became of those lots you once owned?". He put his hands together with his fingers outstretched, looked at me with a boyish grin and answered, "They slipped right out of my hands". We do let slip material treasures, some even let their marriage slip through their fingers. Some even let go their children. There is no treasure that we cannot lose by sheer carelessness.

But this author is not warning us against letting some prize value slip, he is rather warning us against slipping ourselves. That was a needed ward in the long ago, it is just as much needed today. This is true for the following reasons:

1. Drifting is so easy. The fact that it is easy gives it a tremendous appeal. This is not to deny that the heroic also has an appeal. If that were not the case there would be no use in my preaching to you. Carlyle was right in saying "It is not to taste sweet things but to do true and noble things and to vindicate ourselves under God's heaven as god-made men and women, that after which every son of Adam dimly longs." But if the heroic makes the easy appeals even more strongly.

There are some of you students who will make zero tomorrow in spite of the fact that every one of you would like to make a hundred if you could do so on your own terms. There is not a church so utterly sluggish that it would not like to be a center of life and power.
If it could attain that goal without effort. There is not a professing Christian who would not like to have a warm, rich, radiant experience with Christ, if that could be attained without condition. But many of us will miss it because we love the easy way. Of all the sinners of the Old Testament, none is denounced in sharper terms than Jeroboam. He is credited with the ruin of a nation. The charge against him is that he made Israel to sin. How did he reach this unworthy goal? He did not do so by urging them to aggressive violence. He only advised them to take the easy way. 'The faith of your fathers did very well for them' he seems to say, 'but it was a bit costly. You can win with less denial of self. It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem, thus they took the easy way and ended in disaster.

The greatest of the prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, bring this charge against the people of their day. 'Ye have bought no no sweet cane with money'. At first sight the charge seems trivial. These prophets seem to be majoring on minors. But when we realize that this sweet cane was the one costly part of the holy anointing oil we understand that they are thundering against a cheap religion, as one that satisfies neither God nor man.

Jesus spoke of two roads. These roads lead to opposite goals; one head toward life, while the other heads toward death. One is narrow, the other broad. The narrow road was not crowded at all, while the broad road was congested with traffic. Why were so many choosing the broad road? Not because they were lured by desirable destination, they were traveling it simply
because it was easy. It is just this love of the easy way that makes drifting so dangerous. To drift we need not put ourselves to the slightest discomfort. All we need to do is to let go and drop into the arms of a popular god of today called relaxation.

2. Then drifting is dangerous because to drift is always to go downstream. We may drift into sickness, we never drift into health. We may drift into ignorance but never into intellectual achievement. We may drift into weakness, we never drift into strength. We may drift into spiritual death, but never into spiritual life. To drift is always to go wrong, it is never to go right.

3. Drifting is dangerous in the third place because it is so often unconscious. We can drift oftentimes and be blissfully unaware of it. I am quite sure that Lot did not set out with Sodam as his destination. In all probability he found himself in the midst of that rotten and rotting city with a gasp of amazement. He did not so much journey to Sodam as drift into it.

"You leaving home?" I questioned a young man whose pockets were lined with the rich treasure that had come to him through his father. "Yes," he answered proudly, "I am off on my own, I am going to live my own life, make my own choices, do as I please."

"What do you please to do?" I questioned. "What destination have you chosen?" "I have decided," he might have answered, "to see how it feels to break my fathers heart, to waste my substance in riotous living, to know the pinch of hunger. I have also longed to see life from the vantage point of a pig sty, therefore I am headed for the far country where the hogs will be better fed than I." He did not set out for the hog pen, he drifted into it.
Some time ago I had the opportunity of talking with a man of many fine qualities who had become a bonds...
the bank of the Niagara river saw the body of a dead sheep drifting by, but he was not the only one that saw it. A great eagle saw it and swooped down upon it. The body of the sheep dipped under the water for an instant. The wool wrapped about the talons of the great bird and began to freeze as the day was very cold. But the great bird unaware of its danger, drifted toward the rapids.

Had this farmer known the language of this great bird and quoted a warning, the eagle possibly would have smiled wanly and said "No danger, you have forgotten my great wings". So he sat complacently until just the sheep was on the point of making the plunge, then he spread his burnished brown wings, but then it was too late. The frozen wool held him, but even that was not necessary. Had he continued to drift he would have gone to his death just the same. This wise author therefore is uttering a wise word of warning. He knows that all that is necessary for these hard pressed christians to do in order to make shipwreck is nothing. They have only to lose control and thus to drift.

III.

How can we avoid this deadly danger?

It is not enough to clinch our fist and square our jaws and solemnly vow to hold our own. That ancient merchant vessel on which Paul sailed in the long ago delayed disaster for a brief period by casting four anchors. That may serve for a ship, but it will not serve for a human soul. There is no standing still with us. We either go up or down.

How then can we keep from drifting? In only one way, by breasting
the current. If we refuse to go up, we are sure to go down. I reminded you just now that the prodigal did not set out for the hog pen, that he drifted into it, but there came a great day when he drifted no more. How did this come about? He did not firmly plant his feed in the pig sty and declare that he would never drift another inch. Life and salvation began for him when he said "I will arise and go to my father". He had to become aggressive. He had to overcome the evil of drifting by the good of going toward his father's arms and his father's welcome.

Christianity is essentially aggressive. When we as professing Christians cease to be aggressive we cease to be Christians. It is the team that carries the ball that makes the touchdown. It is a discouraging and depressing fact that in our contest with the Communist world, we of the free world seldom win. I wonder if our failure is not born in part by this fact. We are trying to hold our own to keep the freedom that is ours, while the Communist are fighting to enslave the whole world. They are on the offense while we are so often on the defense.

Be that as it may, there is but one way we can win as Christians. We are to give earnest heed to the things that we have heard. This gospel of ours is a priceless possession. It comes to us as a gift, but we can only receive it as a gift by the wholehearted giving of ourselves. To seek merely to resist to drift, to stand firm against the swelling currents that come upon us spells disaster. To give ourselves to the following the victorious Lord is to become conquerors and more than conquerors through him that loves us and gives himself for us and to us.
Hebrews 2:1
"We must, therefore, pay the more earnest attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away". (Moffatt)

This author is writing to a company of Christians. These Christians are finding their new life beset by difficulties. The writer reminds them a little later that they have taken cheerfully the despoiling of their goods, that is, they are being persecuted, plundered and peeled. Under these trying circumstances he feels that they deeply need a word of warning.

Part I.

What is this word of warning.

He is not warning them as we should have expected against a complete break with their faith. No more is he urging that they cling with strong hands to their rich spiritual possessions. That is what is suggested by the translation of this text in the Authorized Version. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip". That is such a word as a football coach might address to his team as they went on the field when the day was rainy and the ball slippery, "Be careful that you do not let the ball slip through your fingers and thus make a fumble that might cost you the ball, or even the game".

It is such a word that we might address to one who was in possession of a material treasure. Years ago I had a friend who possessed almost 100 lots in a desirable section in a growing city. Those lots should have made him a millionaire, but when I met him number of years later I could easily see that he was not a millionaire. He was entirely too cheerful. "What became of those fine lots of yours?", I asked. With a boyish grin he put his hands
together with his fingers outspread and said, "I let them slip right through my fingers." This he had not done purposely, he was simply not a good business man. We even let more priceless possessions get away from us. Our husbands, our wives, our children, our friends.

But this author is warning us not against letting some treasure slip but against slipping ourselves. "Lest we drift away." That is a warning that was addressed especially to Christians. Of course, it is needed not only by those of us who are trying to follow Christ, it is needed even more by those who are not.

Part II.

Why is this a needed word?

It is needed in the first place because we all have a tendency to drift. This is the case because there are currents all about us. All nature seems opposed to our standing still. There are currents in the air, in the earth and in the sea. There are currents of influence that beat upon us and that must be resisted and counteracted or we shall be swept from our moorings. There is no hiding from these strong currents. Certain saints of the Middle Ages sought to avoid them by fleeing to the monasteries, but they found there was no escape.

Then we need this warning because drifting is so dangerous. Of all the foes there are few that cause more havoc, more disaster than drifting.

Part III.

Why is drifting so dangerous?

1. first, it is dangerous because if we drift we always drift downhill.
A man by the name of Hogan recently became the golf champion of the world. How did he attain? He did not drift into that attainment, he fought his way into it. We would not drift into health but into sickness. We would not drift into any intellectual achievement; such requires effort. We would not drift into saintliness. Paul did not become the good soldier of Jesus Christ that he was by letting go his cars and drifting with the tide. Nobody ever drifts into heaven. If he drifts he always drifts into hell. To drift is to go downhill.

2. Drifting is dangerous because it is so easy. We all love the easy way. This is not to deny that there is not within all of us that to which the heroic appeals. I think in our effort to win our youth to Christ we make far too little appeal to the hero that is in every man's soul. "It is not to taste sweet things but to do true and noble things and to vindicate ourselves under God's heaven as God made man and woman is that for which every son of Adam dimly longs."

But while there is that which the heroic appeals there is also that to which the easy appeals. Jeroboam has to his credit the sin of seducing Israel from her faith. Having become king of the ten tribes by the will of God, he was afraid to trust God to help him to keep his position. He was convinced that if the Jewish people continued to be one religiously they would end by becoming one politically. To prevent this taking place he turned them from the faith of their fathers. How did he go about it? By an appeal to their love of ease. He did not tell them that they had been wrong in going to Jerusalem to worship. He offered them an easier way saying, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem."

Thus
took the easy way which was the way of disaster.

Isaiah in one of his rebukes of one of the religious leaders of his day speaks this strange word, "Ye have bought no sweet cane with money". It would seem that the prophet here is majoring on minors. "No sweet cane with money?" So what? After a charge like this "so what" seems the natural answer. But ex-sweet cane was the one pensive ingredient that went in the holy anointing oil. It had to be imported. Therefore when they became barain-counter they simply left out that which was costly. Thus their religion became cheap. Being cheap it had no satisfaction in it for either God or men.

We need this warning against drifting because drifting is so easy.

3. We need this warning because drifting is so often unconscious. We slip our moorings and are swept away toward the rapids before we are aware of it. When Lot part ed company with Abraham he did not set out with Sodom as his goal. He had been on the streets of that city. He had been sickened and disgusted by its wickedness. He did not set out with grim determination to reach it, but rather drifted into it.

How is it that the night service is dead in so many churches. We did not either think or plan or pray our way to this new position. We drifted to it. What is back of the changed attitude of so many Americans toward liquor. How has that foul creature that was once an outcast become a society favorite. It is not because we have discovered certain merits of liquor that our foolish fathers overlooked. Here again we have been caught in the drift.

We speak to some who no longer make it a habit of prayer. No longer do you turn daily to the word of God. Your fixed habit of church
attendance has slipped from you. Sometimes you go, sometimes you don't. How has it come about? Some of you can listen with laughter to stories that only a few years ago would have made your cheeks burn with an honest shame. How has it come about? We have been caught in the drift. Unconsciously we have slipped.

4. Then we need this warning because drifting is so fatal. When the Titanic went out on its voyage it was proclaimed a vessel that was 1,000 per cent safe. Its builders believed that nothing could wreck it. Yet one stab of an iceberg sent it to its grave. But had it been 1,000 times stronger than it was a iceberg would not have been necessary. It could have been wrecked just as surely had it been cast adrift. However strong a vessel may be if it drifts it never ends in some safe harbor with its arms full of commerce, it ends in Davy Jones' locker.

What is true of a ship is equally true of a man. What must I do to be saved? I must battle, I must bestir myself - very definitely there is something I must do or there can be no salvation. What must I do to be lost? Nothing. Naked nothing. All that is necessary is that I drop my oars and drift with the tide.

We need this warning then because to drift is always to drift downhill. We need it because drifting is so easy. It is so often unconscious. It is always deadly.
PART IV

How can we conquer this universal tendency to drift.

It is well to realize at once that mere resistance is not enough.

When that ancient vessel on which Paul was sailing threatened to go utterly to pieces Luke tells us that the sailors cast out four anchors while they waited for the day. These anchors were of some value but that value was purely temporary. Anchors alone can never bring permanent salvation to a drifting vessel. This is the case regardless of how firm those anchors may be. They make steady the vessel and compel it to be "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean", but if anchors are the only remedy the vessel is surely doomed.

If that is the case with a ship it is even more so with men. It is not resisting the strong currents that beat upon us, neither merely squaring our jaws and clenching our fists and vowing that we will not drift one step further. In that old story from mythology we are told that the ships that sailed along the shores of Greece and Italy were often lured upon the rocks by the song of the Sirens. Caught under the spell of the music the sailors let their vessels drift and the end of their drifting was death.

But when Ulysses had to sail by those dangerous shores he found a remedy. His remedy was not casting out anchors. His remedy was not stuffing the ears of the sailors with wool so that they could hear nothing. His was a positive remedy. He had Orpheus on board. One who was fabled to sing so beautifully that the very stones and trees followed him. When, therefore, the Sirens began to sing Ulysses ordered Orpheus to strike his harp and the drift was conquered by the vessel continuing on its journey to
its desired haven.

This author knew that the hard-pressed Christians to whom he was writing would not avoid the danger that threatened them by merely standing still. They had bravely to brest the current. He knew that Christianity is exceedingly aggressive. Whenever it ceases to be aggressive it ceases to be Christian. The only real foe of darkness is light. The only real foe of death is life. The only way to conquer evil is by good. To make short work of our faith, therefore, it is not necessary to betray your Lord as did Judas. It is not necessary to deny Him as did Simon. It is not necessary to desert Him as did Demas. All that is necessary is to cease aggressively to follow Him.

>"This, I say, work in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh". This deadly enemy called drifting can only be conquered by those who aggressively battle their way upstream.

This word is needed quite as much by those of us who have never made an aggressive decision to follow Jesus Christ. All of us have felt his appeal. All of us have been caught in some measure under the spell of his charm. We have longed to be other than we are. How can we hope to come to our best? "What must I do to be saved". Whatever the answer we all know from experience that we must do something. That must I do to be lost -- nothing. I can accomplish that deadly end by an easy and cowardly folding of my hands.

When the prodigal left home he was bent on finding a world of high adventure where he could do as he pleased. He was not seeking to wreck himself, to hurt his father, or to hurt anyone else. He was merely shrugging his
father's hand off his shoulder that he might live his own life. The end for him was a pigsty, but he did not reach that disappointing goal of set purpose. He did not so much choose his way. He did not deliberately choose to drift into the hog pen. He drifted into it.

Yet even he made a wise choice one day that brought him to his father's arms and to the enjoyment of the feast of the fullness of life. What was this choice? This wise resolve? He did not merely say to himself, "I have drifted away from my father and from my father's house, but I am never going to drift another." He might have said that and ended in disappointment and desolation. The resolve that saved him was this - "I will arise and go to my father".

Years ago I had a school mate, brilliant and gifted with wonderful personal charm. He might have lived with joyful usefulness, but he began to drift. He took the easy way. By and by he became deeply involved. He became a bond slave of drinking lust. At last he called a halt. "I have quit", he said bravely. Then he added, "This does not mean I have become a Christian. It only means that I grew tired of suffering". That was better than nothing, but he is still missing the best. He will continue to miss it til he vows with the prodigal, "I will arise and go to my father". The drift will surely prove our destruction unless in the power and might of God we aggressively resist the current and thus overcome evil with good.
"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard lest at any time we drift away from them."

Hebrews 2:1

In the Authorized Version, this text is as follows:

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip." The idea conveyed is of one entrusted with a sacred trust which he must guard lest that trust should slip through his fingers and be lost. We might express the sense of this rendering in the language of the football field: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard lest at any time we fumble the ball and lose the game." (Just as it seemed that the Alabama team had done at the Rose Bowl the other day).

There are those all about us who are in danger of fumbling the game of life through sheer carelessness and indifference.

But though as expressive as this is, it is not what the author says.

The revised version gives the correct rendering: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we drift away from them." The author is writing to a group of Jewish Christians. These have separated themselves from their fellows; have broken with the old religion to become followers of Jesus Christ. They are not finding the Christian life easy. They are a despised minority in the midst of a strong and bullying majority. The trend of the life of the world about them is against them. The author is evidently afraid that it is going to bring about disaster. Not that he is afraid that they would suddenly break with all that they have loved and believed - he rather feels that under the pressure of
strong currents that beat upon them, they will let go their moorings and begin to drift. Therefore he writes, urging them to take heed of the things that they have heard, lest at any time they drift away from them.

I

Now this warning that was given so many centuries ago is genuinely needed by ourselves:

1. It is needed because there are currents that sweep about us that we find it hard to resist. There are currents in life just as there are currents in the air, and the earth, and the sea. As you look at the ocean, you feel that the water is all of a kind, but there are great rivers that flow through the ocean far mightier than the Mississippi or the Amazon. One of those rivers we call the Gulf stream. It flows out of the Gulf of Mexico toward the Northeast. The breath of it breathes upon England, otherwise that wealthy and fertile isle would be as barren as the bleak coast of Labrador.

Those of you who have been to Alaska in summer will doubtless recall the luxurious vegetation that springs from that fertile soil. I have never seen more luxuriant, outside the tropics. You will recall, also, that the average Alaskan resents any hint that his is a cold country. Of course it is cold in the interior, but not along the coast. The thermometer rarely ever gets as low as zero in any coast town. This is the case because another river called the Japanese current brings warmth to it from sunny seas.

Now, just as there are streams in the sea and in the earth, so there are strong currents in life. It is impossible for us to hide ourselves altogether from these strong currents. In the middle ages, men tried to escape by going into monasteries,
and by hiding in the dens and caves of the earth. But even then they could not escape the pressure of those strong currents that tended to set them adrift. No man takes the voyage of life on a sheltered lake. There is never a time anywhere along the voyage when we can give up effort and lift up our anchors without the danger of drifting.

One current that plays upon us still is time. We change, if for no other reason but the process of living. The passing of the years makes us different. Paul said, "When I was a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child, but now that I have become a man I have put away childish things." So it is, in some measure, with all of us. We do not think the same thoughts. We do not dream the same dreams. We do not cherish exactly the same faith. We are not anchored to exactly the same convictions that we were in our younger years. The tides of time sweep us on.

Then, there are the strong currents that press upon us because of our environment. Few of us, I think, appreciate rightly the power of an atmosphere. If I threw a piece of glowing hot steel out upon the ground, it will continue to glow for a little while, but by and by it will take on the temperature of its environment. And that is what we tend to do. That is what, except by earnest struggle and the supply of the grace of God, we surely will do. If we consider the matter, we will see that many of the positions that we take upon moral questions today have not come about because we have re-thought the whole matter. We have rather drifted into those positions.

Take the matter of swearing, for instance. There was a time when that was an ugly habit. To hear it upon the lips of others was an offense. But you became accustomed to it.
The world so tended to popularize it. By and by you began to spice your own conversation with it. One of my stewards was telling me of calling upon a certain member of this church, and he swore proficiently in ordinary good manners conversation, as if he had been to hell as his school, and had had the devil for his school master. How did this come about? He did not reach a certain period when he decided that swearing was a helpful and necessary achievement. He had drifted into the habit.

The same is true of the attitude of a large part of the members of the church toward the Sabbath. The overwhelming tendency today is to change Sunday from a Holy day into a holiday. This has come about, not from thoughtful conviction. It is the result, not of a new reading, or a new understanding of the Gospels. It is rather that we have been caught in the drift. The sin of the world is in that drifting, and instead of stemming the tide we have gone with it.

The same is true of a score of other evils. Our attitude toward divorce! The easy way in which we divorce one, and marry another, is not the result of deep conviction at which we have arrived thoughtfully. After a careful examination of the facts, we have not concluded that those who flit from mate to mate, as a bird from one branch of a tree to another, do find a larger happiness and render a larger service than those who adhere to the old ideals of marriage. Our position on this question is the result of our drifting. The set of the tide is in that direction, and we have simply gone with it.

2. Then, we need this warning, because drifting is so easy, and we love the easy way. Of course I am aware that there is that in all of us to which the heroic appeals, but there is also that to which the easy and the soft appeal. A certain
popular writer makes the leading character of his story proclaims: "I cannot be bothered resisting the things that I want." This is characteristic of many of our day. And because you cannot be bothered resisting - drift. That is the easy and natural thing to do. To go upstream, means a battle, but to drift costs nothing at all. It can be done by a corpse or any dead and dry piece of timber.

3. We need this warning, finally, because drifting is so dangerous. It may seem a bit strange that this inspired writer should take the time in the midst of his letter to warn against so seemingly innocent a thing as drifting. But drifting is not innocent; it is not harmless. It is one of the most deadly, dangerous perils to which you and I are exposed. We may be doing many things tonight that threaten our usefulness, and our peace of mind, and our final victory, but I dare say that we are doing nothing that is more deadly dangerous than simply drifting.

II

Why is drifting so dangerous?

1. It is dangerous because the one who drifts always drifts downhill. I have seen a good many streams, but I have never seen one yet that was flowing uphill. The man, therefore, that gives way to drifting never drifts toward a greater strength, but always toward a greater weakness. He never drifts toward a larger faith, but toward a lesser faith. He never drifts toward the light, but always toward the night. He never drifts toward heaven; he drifts toward hell. He never drifts toward God; he drifts away from Him. If you ever come into possession of strong Christ-like character, I can assure you you will not drift into it. The man who drifts always drifts downward.
2. Drifting is dangerous because it is so often unconscious. We can drift without knowing it. We get busy about this, and about that, forget the set of our moorings, and by and by when we do look up we are astonished beyond words how far we have drifted. You remember that Old Testament story of a man who was set to guard a certain prisoner. If he allowed his prisoner to escape his own life would be the forfeit. He let him escape, and his only excuse was this: "While thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." He drifted into his doom unconsciously.

Dr. Jekyll, in Stevenson's immortal story, didn't become Hyde in a single day. He drifted to that terrible doom - drifted unconsciously. Day by day it was easier for him to become Hyde, and harder for him to become Jekyll. But he failed to face the fact, failed to be warned by it, till it was too late. We slip our anchors, and drift away into loose and Godless living without ever taking time to think what we are doing, and to realize that we are drifting.

In a certain congested block in New York City, a religious census showed that there was 1,300 men and women who had broke with the church, who used to belong to it. Some of them were official members; some were Sunday-school superintendents; some were teachers. How have they come to turn their backs upon what they have once loved? It was not by a sudden wrench. They moved into a new environment. They were caught in the drift. Gradually, they died to the things to which they had once been alive.
You can see now why this writer warned these early saints against drifting, rather than repudiating their faith. I am not uneasy that many of you will openly break with the faith of your fathers. You have no idea of a sudden flinging away from the Church. Such an idea would appall you, but it is easy to drift away from it. That is what vast multitudes are doing. There are fewer Church members in San Francisco than there are in Shanghai, China - only about 4,000. Yet, I dare say there are not less than 100,000 that were reared in the Church. How did they get out of it? They drifted.

How about you, young man? A few years ago, you came to this city from a Christian home. You came with the kiss of a consecrated mother scarce dried upon your lips. For a while you were found constantly in the place of worship on Sunday. For a while you never went to bed without a look into God's Word, and without an upward glance of prayer. But how about it now? Perhaps you have turned away from it all, not because you have had new and larger life, but because you have been caught in the drift.

How about you, my young woman? When you left home, you were a bit old-fashioned, a bit straight-laced, perhaps. But you have flung away from all that. You can now smoke and drink cocktails with the best of them. You can feel at home in company that once would have horrified you, and laugh at what would once have made you blush with shame. How has it come about? Not through a larger vision, not through an open break with all that you have believed before. You have been caught in the drift. Drifting is so dangerous. Drifting is terribly dangerous, because so often it is unconsciously.

3. Finally, drifting is dangerous because it ends in disaster. Disaster may be delayed, but it is absolutely certain.
Here is a beautiful garden. What must I do with my lovely garden in order for it to become a wilderness? The answer - "Nothing at all. Just cease to cultivate it. Leave it alone, and the wilderness will claim it."

The greatest living pianist said some time ago, that if he left off practicing for one day, he could tell the difference in his playing, if he left off for two days, his friends could tell it. What must he do in order to lose his skill? "Nothing!" If he lets himself drift, all his skill will sooner or later pass from him.

Here is a ship on the high seas. What is necessary in order to wreck that vessel? Dynamite is not needed. Fire is not needed. A hidden reef is not needed. An iceberg is not needed. All that is necessary in order for that ship to become a wreck is for it to fling away its compass, and let the fire die in its fire box. The vessel that is set adrift is certain to become a wreck regardless of how strong it is. But it is no more certain than the man who allows himself to drift.

Not only does drifting end in disaster for the one who drifts, but it oftentimes brings disaster to others. The most disastrous foe of the sea is not a hidden reef or sandbanks where the ships might be pounded to pieces by the waves - the greatest menace that the sea can know is a derelict, a vessel that is bound for no port, that seeks no haven, that goes toward Liverpool today, and England tomorrow.

Do you remember James Spearforth in David Copperfield? What a charming young chap he is! He has one of those winsome magnetic personalities that seemed to cast a spell over all he met. But he had no guiding star in his life. He was anchored to no great and steady convictions. And when we see him last he is lying upon a beach with his head pillowed upon his arm as if in sleep. The sea has just spit out his body upon the shore as if nauseated with such a piece of human driftwood.
But this corpse does not tell half of the tragic story of this charming drifter. He did not go down alone. He ran into other traffic upon the high seas of life. Little Emily was wrecked by him. And poor old Pegotty was wounded to his death. The man who drifts always drifts downhill. If he continues to drift, the end is disaster. Walk along the shore, and look at the bits of plank that you find there. They are driftwood. That is, they are bits of good vessels, noble ships, that have gone to pieces. And all about us we find human driftwood, the fragments of noble men and women, who have gone to pieces.

III

But the Good News that I bring you is that you need not drift. If you have already begun, you can quit. What is the remedy? Listen to the words of the text: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we drift." We are to resist our tendency to drift, then, by giving heed, by giving earnest heed, by giving more earnest heed, to the things that we have seen and heard. This is an honest, straight-speaking book. It tells us frankly and plainly, that to be a Christian means a fight; that to win Christ-like character is a stern and strenuous business. Take the easy, and you will drift. But if you are willing to give earnest heed, you can stem the tide.

How are we to give earnest heed to the things that we have seen and heard? We are to do so by the earnest study of God's Word, because the things that we have seen and heard is our Gospel. We are to do so by putting these things into practice, by making them dominant in our lives every day. We ought to do this, the writer tells us, for three reasons: First, because of Him who uttered them. They are the words of Jesus Himself. Our revelation comes to us, not simply through Apostles and Prophets, but through God's own Son.
"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land; which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." Hebrews 11:29

This is a gripping and fascinating story. There is the charm of abiding youthfulness in every word of it. It tells of two groups of people, who at one time in the world's history, traveled the same road, passed the same fields, and forests, and came by so doing to the same difficult crossing. Both these groups were eager to conquer this crossing. Both were so eager that they gave to the task their best effort.

But here the likeness ends. While both these companies dared everything to conquer this crossing, only one group succeeded. The efforts of the other ended in failure. One found this difficult barrier not a terminus but a thoroughfare. They found it a roadway to freedom and to a richer life. But the other group found this thoroughfare a terminus. They found it a roadway to death. The next morning those composing one of these groups were shouting for joy on the further shore, while the bodies of the other group were being spit out upon that same shore by a pink and seething sea.

Why this difference? It was not, let me repeat, because one was eager to cross while the other did not care. It was not that one made an effort while the other made no effort at all. No more was this difference due to the fact that one of these companies was a favorite of Heaven while the other was not. All of them were God's children and God never plays favorites. It was not that these Israelites were perfect while the Egyptians were imperfect. The Israelites, instead of being perfect, were a horde of whining, cantankerous slaves. It was not because they were better equipped than the Egyptians. It was the other way round. These Egyptians were far more cultured, far better organized, and therefore,
humanly speaking, far more likely to make the crossing. Yet they failed while their inferiors succeeded.

Why, I repeat, this difference? The author of this Epistle declares that the deciding factor was not outward and visible, but inward. The real difference was that the one group, in spite of many a defect, had faith, while the other did not have faith. The Egyptians approached this or deal with no higher motive than to prevent the escape of a horde of slaves. They were out after their property. The Israelites, on the other hand, were out to bring a new nation to its birth. They had tasted, as this author says, however vaguely, the powers of the age to come. Their leader was enduring, see him who is invincible." This high faith these shared to some very small degree.

Now, this story may be old beyond your interest, yet when we face the facts it is as new as your last heart's beat. It is as new as the difficult crossing that some of you face at this moment. For while there is that about the story that is unique, there is also that about it that is universal. It has a word to say, therefore, that concerns you and me and every human soul. What, then, does it tell us this morning?

I

It tells us first of all that to every nation, to every individual, there come crises that are matters of loss or gain, defeat or victory, death or life. We can no more escape these difficult crossings than we can unloose ourselves from our own shadows. Some of you can say "amen" to this as you think of the experiences of yesterday. Others can say "amen" as they face the conflict of today. But if it is not true of you yesterday or today, it will certainly be true of you tomorrow.

1. Sooner or later these difficult crossings come in the guise of some temptation. Temptation, as you know, is a universal experience. We can limit
our temptations somewhat by a wholesome environment. We can find help through a pious ancestry. We can find vast help through loyalty to the highest in life's everyday conflicts. But no environment, however clean; no ancestry, however pious; no moral achievement, however high; can exempt us altogether. Even our sinless Lord faced temptation as we have to face it.

Not only so, but he faced it with the same dire consequences possible for him as for us. It is a huge blunder to assume that our Lord cannot have faith, that it was impossible for him to make his life without the will of God. If this is the case, then his was a sham battle where no real wound was possible for him, while mine is a matter of life and death. Believe me, Jesus knew when he prayed with strong cries and tears in the garden, that failure was possible for him as it is for you and me.

Now, there are those who question the love and goodness of God because he permits us to be tempted. Even so great a scientist as Huxley expressed the wish that he might have been born without any capacity to do wrong. In the realization of the tragic suffering that results from our own choices, we can understand this. Yet to possess such a desire is to long to be less than human. It is to long that real goodness should be impossible, because goodness is impossible where there is no power of choice. I confess at times that it would be far safer to be born an oyster, but it would also be far less thrilling, for if an oyster cannot sob, neither can it sing. If it cannot go vastly wrong, neither can it ever climb to those heights where it can possess Christlikeness.

Now, these temptations may work our undoing, they may impoverish us. They also may bring us untold wealth. When Joseph was sold into Egypt he faced the fact that the worst possible had happened to him. His brothers had become his would-be murderers. There was all the material here for
making of a complete wreck of his life, but instead he so reacted to this tragic experience that the road that was meant to lead to slavery led to freedom. The worst thing that could possibly have happened to him became the best that could possibly have happened. He enriched his generation and all future generations as it would have been impossible except through this terrible experience.

2. Then these testing crossings come to us through some kind of loss. Sometimes they come through the loss of our material wealth. We have never dreamed of being rich, but we have desired to make some provision for our own. We have desired to accumulate something against that time when we can no longer work. Yet often, through our own mismanagement, sometimes through the rascality of others, our wealth is swept away and we find ourselves coming to the eventide of life with the wolf of want howling at the door.

Again this testing crossing comes through the loss of our physical health. We go our robust and painless way for years. We see others suffering but it touches us but vaguely. Then one day, like a bolt from the blue, pain begins to walk with fire-shod feet along every nerve of our bodies. Life grows grim and gray as we see nothing ahead except one long fisticuff with agony. Some who are called thus to suffer become embittered; others become sweeter and more radiant.

To all of us, if we live long enough, comes sooner or later the ordeal of old age. That is a grim crossing that we face in vastly different fashions. I am thinking of one now, shrewd and capable in spite of the experience of more than eighty years. Yet these years have not brought added sweetness, but the opposite. They have only made for harsher judgments and a sharper tongue and increasing bitter suspicions. At the same time there is another who has faced the same ordeal. Yet she moves about life
like a rich and rare perfume. Years ago I went to see an old friend who had had a wonderfully rich and successful ministry. Yet to my utter amazement, he turned to me at the close of the conversation with the desperation of a cornered animal and said, "It is awful, it is awful for one who has lived his life in the thick of things as I have to get old and yet where I can't do it any more." Well, I felt that he had let me down. Yet that crossing must be faced by us if we live long enough.

Then there is the bitter crossing that comes to us through the loss of loved ones. Heaven has come closer to some of you since the one that you loved the best slipped away. The Unseen has become the more real. God has drawn all the nearer. With others passing through similar sorrows, they become sour and embittered. I am thinking of a mother in another city who lost her child. She did not move the closer to Heaven through that experience. In her rebellion, in her anger, she moved the closer to hell. Then there are those whose dreams do not come true. I am thinking in of two women that in our careless cruelty we call "old maids". Love had come to both of them in youth's bright morning. They both suffered humiliating disappointment. One went out to a life of/supreme beauty and sweetness that she compelled many to thank God for her coming. The other came down to utter shame. The same crossing and yet by what different results.

II

Now, since difficult crossings of one kind or another are the lot of every one of us, what is the deciding factor that will determine our victories or our defeat? That deciding factor is not our inherited strength or weakness. Naturally, the weakling who has no resources but his own is likely to fail. We have seen that happen again and again. It has happened to some of us.
We go our varied ways quite sunnily until something trips us up. Then instead of getting up and renewing the battle, we like prostrate and beat ourselves. Thus we allow our difficult crossing to work our undoing.

But there is a defeat of the strong just as there is a defeat of the weak. I have known men to weather heavy gales in their own strength, but their victories ministered to their pride and self-sufficiency. Their struggles did not give them greater gladness and a brotherly sympathy, it rather made them harsh and hard and unsympathetic. There is a defeat of the strong at these difficult crossings just as there is a defeat of the weak.

What, then, is the deciding factor? According to this author, whether we sink or swim, whether we win or lose, whether we live or die, is a matter of our faith in God. We may travel approximately the same road, come to the same difficult crossings; one of us will crack up and the other will go to a richer and fuller life. The issue will not be a matter of our cleverness or our strength. It will be a matter of our vital faith in God.

III

Why is this the case? Does this answer make sense? I think it does.

1. Faith is a source of strength. That is the case if it reaches no higher than ourselves. The man who believes in himself will possess a strength that the man without such confidence does not possess. A distinguished British neurologist made this test. He took three soldiers and tested their gripping strength. The three of them made an average of 101. He then put them under neurosis. First he told them they were very weak, weak as babies. Then when he tested their strength they averaged 29. Then he reversed himself and said, "You are very strong". He then made a third test and their average was 141. In other words,
They were almost five times as strong when they thought they were strong
as they were when they thought they were weak. "We can because we think
we can" has some sense in it.

2. Then faith is a source of power if it leads to full committal to
a cause. That accounts for the fact that Communism is a real threat today.
Of course, multitudes in Communistic nations are not real Communists. But
for some who have fixed their faith upon it, Communism has become more than
a political creed, it has become a crusading religion.

In his younger years Hitler was an entirely negligible man. He
was a failure in every respect. But there came a time when he fixed his
faith upon a cause. He believed in the German people. He believed in the
might of force. Out of weakness he became strong. Of course, when his cause
cracked up, when his bubble burst, he, himself, cracked up. But he was
possessed of a strength through faith in his cause to which he would have
otherwise been a stranger.

3. But faith in God makes its possessor invincible. So says this author. So says Jesus. He says that if we possess faith that was real
we could fairly toss the mountains of the world about as a giant might
toss a ball. In fact, the Bible seems to have been written to make sure
that nothing, absolutely nothing, can defeat a man who has faith in God.

This is not to say that if you believe, everything you touch will
turn to gold. I heard a man preach on tithing some time ago. He was
preaching to a congregation that was made up of people who were poor beyond
the ordinary, yet he virtually said to those poor people that if they
would tithe, they would get rich. I confess his sermon filled me with
indignation. Tithing is in a sense conducive to prosperity, but not
every man who tithes gets rich. Some go broke.

The authorized version the author of the First Psalm saying
something that he did not say and that is not true. In the Standard version it reads like this: "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper". That is, if a man is genuinely good, all his enterprises will turn out well. But that is flagrantly not so. Experience tears that easy faith into shreds and tatters. What the author really says is this: "In whatsoever he doeth he shall prosper."

His health may fail, his bank may go broke, the drought may blight his crops, but whatever happens on the outside of him, he shall know inward prosperity.

Was not that the case with Joseph, whom we mentioned just now? "The Lord was with Joseph," says the writer, "and he prospered." He was rich not simply in things, but in himself. Let me remind you again of my friend whose cotton crop was an utter failure. He told me how he stood on the parched ground and watched the cotton blossoms fall and knew that he was not going to make a thing. Yet instead of wringing his hands in fear for the future, he said quietly, "Lord, I thought you were going to take care of me through this cotton. Evidently you have some other plans." His cotton crop was a failure but the man himself was a great success.

That faith in God shall do just this is as plain as common sense. The man who believes in God sees not only his difficult crossing, but he sees God as well. When the twelve spies went to visit the Promised Land, all of them saw the same fertile fields; all of them saw the same grim difficulties. But the ten got their attention so fixed upon the difficulties that they lost sight of God altogether. Hence they turned coward. The two, on the other hand, while seeing the same difficulties, saw them in the light of God. They made them heroic. "I have set the Lord always before me Because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved."

The man who thus believes in God has a strength to which the unbeliever is a stranger, because such faith delivers from fear. It saves us from worry. Worry, as you know, is one of our deadliest foes. It makes war upon
physical health. There is not a disease known that it does not aggravate.
It shatters our nerves. It robs us of our sleep. It irritates us. It
makes us hard to work for. It makes us hard to live with. But he who has
faith can face life without fear.

Then faith in God makes for victory because the man who believes in God thus taps infinite reservoirs. "They that wait upon the
Lord shall renew their strength." As a dewey spring sings all the year
with liquid life, so the man who makes contact with God through living
faith becomes a channel of divine power. "He that believeth on me," as the
scribe hath said, "out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water."
He is able to receive and to pass on to others the very resources of the
infinite God.

This is not merely theory. This is experience. After a ministry that
I know has been very faulty, I can say that more than once I have found my-
self faced by difficult crossings and have experienced a strength and a
confidence that was a surprise to my own heart, sometimes through my own
trust in God, more often, perhaps, through the prayers of others.
When Paul, facing with two hundred and seventy-five others what seemed like
certain death, what was it that changed utter despair into hope, defeat into
victory? It was the man who could stand in the face of disaster and recite
his creed: "I believe, God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

Here, then, is a recipe for high living. Here is something that worked
centuries ago. Here is something that works today. Here is something that
will work tomorrow. You are facing a hard situation. That is true of some
of you in the here and now. You are going to face a harder tomorrow. But
you need have no fear. There is a way of victory for every one of us. That
victory, if we meet the conditions, is as sure as the fact of God. Here is
the secret: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even of faith."
Here is a story out of the long gone past. Two groups of people were traveling the same road. In the process, they came to the same crossing. They were both exceedingly eager to make that crossing. They both put forth their best efforts to make it. But in spite of this fact, one of them failed while the other succeeded. One found this crossing a roadway to life and freedom. The other found it a roadway to death. The next morning one group was shouting the praises of God on the further shore, while the bodies of the other group were being spit out upon that same shore by a seemingly sick sea.

Why this difference? It was certainly not born of any outward superiority on the part of those who won. The case was really the other way round. The Egyptians were far superior in culture, equipment and organization to these Israelites. Nor was this due to the fact that these Egyptians were imperfect while the Israelites were perfect. These were a mere horde of slaves, fretful, peevish, cantankerous to an extreme degree.

Why, then, I repeat, did one succeed while the other failed? The difference was due to an inward factor. The crossing was the same for both but the attitude in the face of that crossing was different. The Egyptians came to this test with no higher motive than the pursuit of their fleeing slaves. They were seeking to recover their property. The Israelites came to this adventure in a spirit of faith. This was especially true of their leader. but even the rank and file were tasting, however vaguely, the "powers of the age to come".

Now, this story may be old beyond your interest. You may even question whether this event ever happened just in this way. But whatever view
you take this fact remains - there is that in the story that while as old
as man is as new as the problem that confronts you at this moment. There
is that in this story, therefore, that concerns every man in every age.
Why is this the case?

I

It is the case first of all because life sooner or later brings every-
one of us to difficult crossings. There is not one who wholly escapes.

1. Sometimes that crossing comes in the guise of loss of your material
wealth. Financial disaster overtakes you. You face want where once there
was wealth. The wolf howls at your door. Because your treasure, large or
small, has slipped through your fingers. I spoke to a friend some years
ago who had owned scores of lots in the heart of a growing city. "What did
you do with them?" I asked. He put his hands together and said, "They just
slipped through my hands like that." And he, as many another, was called
upon to face poverty where there was once plenty.

2. Sometimes this comes in the loss of physical health. You go your
way for years with hardly an ache or a pain. Then like a bolt from the
blue some tormenting sickness swoops upon you. You consult your physician
and he passes a death sentence upon you as relentlessly as was ever passed
upon a culprit at the bar. In fame of old age.

3. Sometimes this experience comes in the guise of great temptation.
You come to the parting of the ways. You have to make a choice and that
choice is so important as to be a matter of life and death. Such a choice
was faced by Daniel as he had to decide between the prospects of getting on,
and of being loyal to his conscience. It was faced by his brothers as
they had to decide whether to stand by their convictions at the price of
the fiery furnace or to go with the crowd. It came to Jesus himself. He
had to decide whether he would live outside the will of God or within that will, even though it cost the cross.

Here, then, is a grim fact from which there is no escape. However sheltered our lives may be, however earnestly we may seek to dodge the difficult, soon or late we all come to some difficult crossing, some test that will decide whether we shall be the weaker or the stronger, the richer of the poorer; whether we shall live abundantly or die to the highest and best.

II

This story indicates the supreme essential when we come to our crossing.

What is the deciding factor when life's tests come upon us? What will determine our victories or defeats, our triumphs or our tragedies? It will not depend upon our skill or upon our cleverness or upon our vast ability. It will not depend upon circumstances. It will not depend upon lucky breaks. It will depend upon what the crisis may find inside of us.

"The essential factor, if we are going to win as we face life's crises," says this author, "is faith." If you have all other assets and fail to have faith, then the end for you will be disaster. But if you have a vital faith, though you may be sadly deficient in other qualities, the most dangerous crossing will prove for you a pathway to a fuller freedom and to a larger life. In every age the man of faith wins while the man without faith goes down in defeat.

Here, for instance, are two men who have suffered heavy financial reverses. One of these was several times a millionaire. In spite of his losses, he still was worth more than a million. But the disaster that struck him gave him a sense of failure. He was covered with shame and confusion because of his lack of complete success. In his humiliation he took his own
life. But in that same city there was another man whose loss was complete. But he kept faith and keeping faith, he kept his self respect and won back sufficient of his fortune to live.

Here are two people who were members of my church. They suffered from the same incurable disease. One of them, when his doctor had sentenced him to death, had not enough faith and courage to face it. He went home and blew his brains out. But the other, dying from the same torturing death, faced it so bravely and cheerfully that he was a benediction to all about him. He moved about the eventide of life like a rich perfume.

In that fine Old Testament story twelve men went to spy out the land of promise. They all saw the same fields and forests, the same gardens and vineyards. They all saw the same enemies, the same giants that made their possessing the land seem impossible.

But here the similarity ended. The ten so fastened their gaze upon the difficulties that they lost sight of God altogether. Thus they lost their faith. The two, on the other hand, while seeing the difficulties, saw them in the light of God. Thus believing in God, thus seeing God, their difficulties, while great, were seen to be advantages rather than disadvantages. Therefore they said, "That will be bread for us." Throughout the Bible and throughout life we see nations and men facing the same difficulties; the one with triumph and the other with tragedy, and the deciding factor is faith.

III

Why is this the case?

1. Faith is the source of power. This is true when a man's faith is directed to no higher object than himself. The man who believes in himself
will be stronger than the man who has no confidence in himself. I read of three soldiers whose strength was tested and measured. They were put under hypnosis and told that they were very weak. Then they were told that they were very strong. Their strength, when they believed in themselves, was five times what it was when they had lost faith in themselves.

2. Just as there is strength in faith, even in oneself, so there is strength in faith in a cause. Any man who believes in a cause profoundly enough to commit himself fully to that cause will have a strength that he did not otherwise have. It is this full commitment to a cause that has made the Communist of today a powerful antagonist. Communism is for those thus convinced more than a political creed; it is a crusading religion.

In his younger years Hitler was little more than a neurotic failure. But he became a man of vast power. His power was born of his faith in his cause, the superiority of the German people to assure victory by force. But while this faith carried him a long way, it did not carry him far enough. There came a time when, through defeat, he lost faith in his cause. Then he cracked up and went to pieces.

3. Now, as faith in one's self or in one's cause is a source of strength, faith in God makes its possessor invincible. This is not to say that if you have sufficient faith, everything in life will come to you right side up. This is not to say that if you have faith everything you touch will turn to gold. Your faith will not exempt you from the slings and arrows of outrageous faith. The brothers of Daniel had faith but it did not exempt them from the fiery furnace.

But while your faith will not always guarantee worldly success, it will give inward victory. This is what the author of the First Psalm is saying:
He did not claim, as the authorized version translates it, that whatever a righteous man doeth shall prosper. What he said is this, "In whatever he doeth he shall prosper." His business may fail, his health may crack up, he may be called upon to live in a whirlwind and die in a storm. But regardless of what life does to him, the man who keeps his faith firm in God shall surely prosper.

One reason for this is that faith makes God a reality. "I have set the Lord always before me, because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved." There is no difficulty so great and overwhelming that a vital sense of God cannot help us to conquer. When he is realized, he dwarfs all else that can possibly oppose him.

Then faith in God enables us to become the recipient of infinite power. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Just as a living spring constantly overflows with a fresh supply of water, even so the man who is in touch with God through a vital faith receives power sufficient for himself. Not only so, "but out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water."

resources

Here, then, are living that are at once sane and sure. Faith in God is a privilege, it is a great luxury. But it is more than a luxury; it is an essential. It is that without which the very strongest of us cannot win. It is that with which the weakest of us may be more than conquerers. I am speaking to some who are at this moment facing dangerous and difficult crossings. You know that how you face your crossing is a matter of life and death. You can win where even the strongest fail if you approach your crisis with a firm faith in God.

This is the teaching of the Bible as a whole. It is the teaching of this great chapter in particular. It is the teaching of experience. After the disaster of Dunkirk, when England seemed on the brink of ruin, what was the decisive factor in the saving of the nation? How did that desperate day become
their finest hour? It was through the faith of one man who kindled faith in the
hearts of others.

Years ago I faced a situation in a church that seemed to promise nothing
but disaster. I had done my best to find a solution and had failed. A sense
of paralyzing fear and defeat was stealing over me. My sense of frustration and
failure seemed to be shared by the congregation. But there was one exception.
That man, facing the same seeming impossibilities that we faced, declared, "I
love to get into a hard place for my Lord. I love to get in a place that is so
hard that there is no chance to get out without you get down on hands and knees
and grovel in the dust before God." So what? That man became a rallying point.
His triumphant faith spread to other hearts. Tragedy was changed into triumph,
defeat into victory, death into life because He had faith. This, then, we
may count on as sure as the fact of God - no amount of skill can conquer our
difficulties unless we approach them in a spirit of unbelief. Nothing can
daunt us if we approach them with faith in God. To those who thus believe, all
things work together for good.
THE GREAT ESSENTIAL

"By faith, they (the Israelites) passed through the Red Sea as by dry land; which the Egyptians assaying to do, were swallowed up."

-- Hebrews 11:29

Here is a story out of a distant yesterday. Two groups, the Israelites and the Egyptians, journeyed down the same road. They took the same turnings. They were lighted by the same sun. They came to the same obstacle, the same seemingly impossible barrier. They came to the Red Sea. They both undertook to cross this sea. But here their likeness ends. The outcome of their adventure was by no means the same. For the Egyptians, the undertaking ended in disaster; while for the Israelites, it ended in victory. One found the Red Sea a terminus; the other found it a thoroughfare. One found it a roadway to death; while the other found it a roadway to life. On the next day, the Israelites were shouting the praises of God on the further shore, while the bodies of the Egyptians were being spit out upon that same shore by a nauseated sea.

Why was this the case? It was certainly not because of any superiority of culture and equipment on the part of these Jews. They were a horde of slaves. The Egyptians, on the other hand, were a proud and conquering people. Nor were the differing issues of their adventure due to the fact that these Israelites were the especial favorites of Heaven. God does not play favorites. If my house is dark this morning while yours is flooded with light, it is not because the sun has a prejudice against me and a fondness for you.
It is because you have opened the blinds and given the sun a chance, while I have refused to do so. If your life is lighted by the Sun of Righteousness, while mine is in darkness, it is not because He is a respecter of persons. It is rather because you have by your own attitude made this illumination possible, while I have made it impossible.

Why, then, I repeat, did the Israelites succeed while the Egyptians failed? It was not because of an outward, but because of an inward difference. The Egyptians came to this crisis without faith in God. They were simply out in pursuit of a horde of runaway slaves. They were out with no higher purpose than the recovery of their property. The Israelites, on the other hand, were making an adventure of faith. It was not a perfect faith. That was not necessary. If we have genuine faith to any degree, even as a grain of mustard seed, it becomes a power in our lives that enables us to do the impossible. The man possessing it, says Jesus, can toss mountains about as a juggler tosses a ball.

Now, this story may be old beyond your interest. Coming out of that far-gone yesterday, it may seem removed by millions of leagues from the perplexing time in which your lot is cast. Yet if some man of genius were today to give himself to the task of writing a story that would exactly fit into our present needs, I am not sure that he could improve on this one. Ours is a day of vast bewilderment. For some, old foundations have given away; old convictions broken down. Many have become cynical, embittered, disillusioned. Many have lost faith in God, faith in themselves, faith in any real purpose for the life that now is. What has this ancient writer to say to us in our bewilderment?
He ventures to tell us that what we need most is faith in God. Faith, he asserts, is not a mere elective in the school of life, it is a requirement; not a luxury, but an absolute necessity. He dares to assert that the difference between real success and utter failure, between victory and defeat, triumph and tragedy, is a matter of faith. He affirms that, when we come to the difficult crossings of life, that which will determine whether we shall win over or go down will not be our native ability, nor our skill and culture, nor some lucky break, but our faith in God. It is his conviction that faith is the one absolute essential in the business of living.

Now, while there are those who deny the necessity of religious faith, none can deny the necessity of faith in general. Some sort of faith is absolutely essential to the carrying on of the every day business of life. "Without faith," says this writer, "it is impossible to please God." We might without violence leave off the latter half of the sentence, and read, "Without faith it is impossible." What is impossible? Every really constructive and worthwhile something. We must have faith in order to do as commonplace thing as drive a car. It takes faith to press the starter. If you do not believe that such a foolish-looking procedure will get the motor in motion you are likely to refuse to "step on it." It takes even a greater faith to drive at the rate of sixty miles an hour over a road that you have never traveled before. It requires faith to mail a letter. What a foolish procedure it seems to intrust an important document to a little iron box fixed to a post! Then, faith is absolutely essential to the carrying on of the commerce of the world. Every store, every bank, would fail without it. Faith is essential to the work of the scientist. Unless he believes that this is
an ordered universe he will make no progress. It is on faith that every real home is built. And no home will last for an hour after faith is dead.

But faith in God is just as essential as is faith on the lower levels of life. This is true for at least two reasons:

1. Nothing really counts without it. Were it possible for one to possess all else, but have no faith in God, the business of living must be for that one nothing more than a sheer futility. This fact has been demonstrated by actual experience times without number. Take the case of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, for instance. He was a man of fine abilities. He had a royal stage upon which to use these abilities. True, his situation bristled with difficulties. But these might have been his opportunities. True the times were out of joint, but that gave him the big chance of setting them right. But what did he do with this situation that was so rich in possibilities? He made an utter mess of it all. He could find no finer task in the face of his nation's need than to play with the idea of suicide. He did not take the final plunge, but that which kept him from it was not any high sense of duty, nor any solid conviction, it was rather a sickening fear that he might find the after-life worse than the present.

"Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,-
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns,-puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?"

He was richly endowed, but wanting faith, he counted for nothing in setting the wrongs of his nation right.

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes is so richly endowed that he seems to possess almost everything. He has material wealth. He has vast power. He has ability to the point of genius. He
used his immense resources to experiment in the business of living. He tries pleasure. He tries achievement. He tries wisdom. But all his efforts at rich and joyful living end in disaster. "I hated life," he confesses, disgustedly. "Vanity of vanities!" he spits from his lips like dry ashes. What is the matter? It is not that life hasrenched all worldly treasure from his hands and flung him aside to die in shame. His cry of disillusionment is rather the cry of one into whose roomy hands life has dumped every gift except the supreme gift of faith. He has no faith, and wanting that, he wants all else of real value. Faith, therefore, is essential because all wealth without it leaves its possessor poverty-stricken.

2. Then faith in God is the great essential because if we possess it, however great our poverty in other directions, we are still rich. The truth is that nothing can really defeat us if we keep a firm faith in God. Life certainly deals far more harshly with some than with others. But it is not what life does to us that determines our triumph or tragedy. It is not the heavy blows that are dealt us that are the deciding factors in our victory or defeat. It is our reaction to these blows. And what that reaction is depends largely upon our faith. Paul discovered the truth of this in his own experience. It had cost him much to be a Christian. He tells us frankly that he has had to suffer the loss of all things. But he affirms that these losses have not impoverished him, but have made him vastly richer. And what he has found true in his own experience he is sure will be true for all of us. "We know", he declares, "that all things work together for good to them that love God." Faith, therefore, is the great essential because if we possess it real failure is impossible.
Why is this the case?

There is no magic about it. Nor is it true because faith in God exempts its possessor from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Such is not the case. God's flowers are not hothouse plants. To suppose that by believing in God we can avoid all life's rough places is to be disappointed. In the old-time Sunday-school stories, there was usually a good boy set in marked contrast to a bad boy. The contrast usually consisted in this: The good boy was always reaching in his thumb and pulling out a plum, while the bad one was coming out the little end of the horn. But life soon dynamites that complacent theory. As we look about us we are impressed by "the broad sameness of the human lot." Whether believers or unbelievers, we all come to our Red Seas. We all meet difficulties. Bad men sometimes go broke, and good men do the same. Bad men and good men lose their health. Bad men and good men bury their loved ones. The good of faith, therefore, is not that it gives its possessor exemption from the conflicts that are inevitable in a world like ours, but rather that it brings inward strength to triumph over them. It energizes our hearts with the power of Him of whom it is written, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged."

Illustrations of the truthfulness of this abound on every hand. I have in mind two men who recently suffered heavy financial losses. One of them still had enough left to keep him in comfort for a lifetime, while the other was so reduced as to be forced to accept charity. How did they meet this difficult crossing? The one who had lost only a part of his fortune locked himself in his room and took his own life. But the other is living today more abundantly than ever
before. He is even able to thank God for that which he once thought must work his ruin. Thus he passed through his Red Sea as by dry land, which the other assaying to do was swallowed up."

Such stories could be duplicated in almost every community. During the past three years more than 60,000 people in the United States have flung out of life by suicide. Many of these were hard hit. They were face to face with dire tragedy. Some had lost their wealth. Some had lost their health. Some had seemingly lost their very all. But this does not fully explain their failure. They were no worse off than many thousands of their fellows who are today carrying on and facing up to their situations with quiet hearts and steady eyes. Their real tragedy was that they became bankrupt in faith. A man may live on very little if he has much to live for. But the wealth of the world is not enough to live on when there is nothing left to live for. That which gives us something to live for is faith.

Now, assuming that you agree with the author regarding the importance of faith, how are we to come into possession of such a treasure?

In our search, there are a few beaten tracks that we shall do well to avoid. For instance, we are not going to arrive by constantly magnifying and talking up our doubts. A very wise man said recently that we talk our way into unbelief far more often than we think our way there. Nor are we likely to arrive by regarding our doubts as assets rather than liabilities: "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." The trouble with this fool is not in his head, but in his heart. Having dismissed God, he heaves a huge sigh of relief. He has
thus relieved himself from weighty responsibilities that he does not wish to meet. He has thus been enabled to descend from mountain heights where breathing was a bit difficult into a lotus land where he can relax. Of course no one who clings to his doubts because of an enervating fear of that which is high and exacting will ever come to a vital faith. No more will he who waits for the answer to all his questions. There will always be veils through which we cannot see, and doors to which we find no key. But this need not prove our undoing, for faith is essentially an adventure.

How, then, are we going to win? The process may be long and difficult, but the first step is plain. We must begin here and now to live up to the best that we know. However little we may believe, however far we may be from a living faith, if we have a will to believe, that expresses itself in obedience to the highest that we know, that is enough for a beginning. For the man who dares to live up to the light that he has will surely come to a fuller light. This is the explicit declaration of Jesus Himself: "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know." It is, also, the experience of an innumerable company that have tested it out in their own lives. Let us dare to put it to the test, and we, too, shall come into possession of that rare treasure that will enable us to pass through our Red Seas as by dry land.

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