GOD IS GUIDE

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Acts 13:2

This text is a part of the story of the sending out of the first missionaries. It tells us that this new adventure was made under the direct guidance of God. Of course, every Bible reader knows that I was not shot up to this text for a sermon on divine guidance. I could have turned almost anywhere in either the Old or the New Testament. In truth, the whole Bible is in a sense a handbook of guidance. The affirmation that it makes over and over again is this: "God is guide".

This ought to be good news. On almost the first page of the book we meet a man who is seemingly doing a mad and foolish thing. He is leaving the populous city of Beer to journey into the unknown. But while this looks like madness to us, to Abraham it is the height of sanity. He has a conviction that God has spoken to him, that God is guiding. He is sure that as he responds to this guidance, he will usher in a new day. That his conviction of divine leadership was based on reality is indicated by the fact that by his adventure he helped to enlighten the world.

Here we meet a man named Moses who though born a slave, was yet in the providence of God, adopted into the royal family. One day in hot anger he struck a blow in the defense of his enslaved people. He did this with the firm conviction that his efforts on their behalf would be welcomed and appreciated. But when he found that this was not the case, he fled into a foreign country where he forgot the woes of his people and where the fires of his hot enthu...
immortals that we call the Prophets. Here was a unique group of men whose voices still speak with a note of authority. They were not of their time, they were above their time. They claimed that they were divinely called, divinely led. They began their messages by affirming, "Thus saith the Lord." They went forth to live mightily because they had a mighty sense of the undergirding of God. Thus the pages of the Old Testament are radiant with great personalities who came to their greatness through divine guidance.

If the Old Testament asserts that God is guide, the New Testament, if possible, makes that assertion with greater emphasis. Jesus himself is the outstanding example. His life from beginning to end was lived under divine guidance. "Then was Jesus led of the Spirit into the wilderness." That was true of his life as a whole. Even in so small a matter as, relieving the embarrassment of a bride whose refreshments had been stolen, he went not out without a groom, by furnishing wine, he had divine guidance. In fact, the supreme secret of the beauty of his life is that it was lived completely within the divine will. As he stood at the end of the journey, he could say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:4)

As with the Master, so with his servants. Take Paul, for instance. Here, along with Barnabas, he is going out under divine
guidance as a missionary to the Gentiles. These men were sent by the Holy Spirit. But they were not guided only at the beginning, but all the way through. Paul indicates that he knew both the constraint and the restraint of the Holy Spirit. God opened one door before him while he shut another. Why he was forbidden to preach in certain places and called to preach in others, we are not told. But God was guiding, and when Paul gave in his report at the close of each journey, he told not what he himself had done, but what God had done through him.

Now, this guidance that characterized the saints of the Bible has characterized the saints of God throughout the centuries. In fact, Paul makes experience of this divine guidance the test of our sonship. "As many as are led of the Spirit, they are the sons of God." There is not a Christian but has in some measure experienced divine guidance. Some of us are as sure of the guiding hand of God at certain crises in our lives as we are of our own existence. Because this is true, many of us would not care to change a single major decision that we have made. Even the most faulty of us can agree, I think, that "there is a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may." Thus both the Bible and experience affirm the fact of divine guidance.

II

That a loving God such as Jesus reveals should guide his children seems to me altogether reasonable.

1. It is reasonable because of our ignorance. Everybody needs guidance. However wise we may be, there come times when our own wisdom is not enough. At such times if we cannot find a guide that is

2. God's guidance is reasonable because if we face the quest some guidance, we learn to guide it one faces.
real, we turn to one that is false. Once we forsake the fountain of living water, we are likely to hew out for ourselves cisterns, "broken cisterns that can hold no water".

Think, for instance, of a great philosopher like Herbert Spencer. Not flipping a coin to decide whether he should marry George Eliot. Think of those who play their hunches. Think of an anointed king like Saul going into the darkness of a cave to consult a medium. Think of that prominent business man who declared that he never made an important decision without first consulting his favorite fortune teller. Some time ago I was riding with a husband and wife, both good church people. The wife had to stop at a news stand to buy a magazine on astrology. She, as Hitler had once done, was seeking to guide her life by the stars. It is reasonable to believe that our loving Heavenly Father will guide us because we so need his guidance.

Then such guidance is reasonable because God has a plan for every life, which he knows that he can only realize through our cooperation. When Jeremiah went down to the potter's house, he saw a man seeking to shape a bit of clay into a cup. That clay was not a thing of beauty, but of ugliness. It was not poetry, but prose. But there was a place where this ugliness had given way to beauty and where this bit of prose had become poetry. That place was in the mind of the potter. He was not working at haphazard; he was working according to plan. Even so, the Divine Potter is seeking in love to shape each one of us according to his holy plan. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect him to tell us what that plan is if we only give him opportunity.
The experience is reasonably because that alone gives us the needed confidence and assurance for facing life's trials. In fact, change is good as a formative experience was very different.
Finally, it is reasonable that God should guide because it is only through such guidance that we can face our tasks with adequate confidence and assurance. I turned from an excellent position in the teaching profession to take my first charge as a young minister. That charge was beset by difficulties. But I could have faced them gladly had I not been gripped by a torturing uncertainty. I would tell myself in utter agony, "You have played the fool. You have given up a business where you were being of real service to take one where you are rendering no service at all. You have run without being sent." When I could bear the agony no longer, I went back to teaching with my mind made up that under no condition would I be a minister. But God never lost patience with me. After two years of reaching I made a new start. The years since, in spite of many disloyalties, have been radiant years. I have been joyfully sure that I was where God desired me to be. God guides because he has a plan. He guides because he alone can give us the guidance that is sure. He guides because, through such guidance, we are saved from anxiety and fear and can walk with assumed step.
III

Assuming then that God guides, how does he guide?

Our Lord guides in many ways, some of which I can only mention. He often guides through the counsel of consecrated friends. He guides through his providences. He guides through his word. In the Bible we come face to face with those who are experiencing divine guidance. These tell how they came to realize that high privilege. But I am going to emphasize three methods of guidance that are more or less familiar to all of us.

1. God guides through the voice of conscience. This I say being fully aware that such guidance may be very far from infallible. I can tamper with my watch until it will not keep accurate time. Even so I may tamper with my conscience until it ceases to be a reliable guide. We have all known very conscientious people who were at the same time contentious and unchristian. In fact, there are few people who can be more harmful than those who are conscientiously wrong.

Some years ago a certain minister and singer were conducting services in my church. It so happened that whenever the singer would announce a hymn, the minister would at once announce another. Naturally there was a clash. The minister affirmed in red faced anger, "The Holy Spirit tells me what hymn to sing". The singer, with equal anger, claimed that he also was divinely guided. At last I was compelled to tell them that while I was willing to concede that they were both conscientious, I was also sure that they were both conceited and selfish and childish. Here conscience had ceased to be the voice of God and had become
the voice of the devil.

Then we may miss the guidance of God through conscience by persistently refusing to hear its voice. Years ago it became necessary for me to rise very early in the morning. To assist me in this unwelcome task, I secured a boisterous alarm clock. That clock would never fail to wake me so long as I responded to its call. But now and then, having heard it, I would turn over to rest just five minutes more to find that that five minutes had grown into three hours. I found further that if I continued to do this for two or three mornings consecutively, then my clock would alarm in vain.

But if we have an enlightened conscience to which we have given ear, it may still be to us the very voice of God. After hundreds of interviews, I am convinced that most of us when we stand at the forks of the road, know instantly what turn we ought to take. Of course, if we hesitate, if we begin to rationalize, we can easily end in utter confusion. But, rightly honored, the voice of conscience may be for all of us the voice of God.

2. God often guides through common sense. He has given us an intelligence that he desires us to use. Some time ago I was assisting a small boy in arranging his toilet. When it came to putting on his shoes, he could not tell the right from the left. I, therefore, put on the left shoe for him. He then wanted me to tell him which foot the other shoe went on. But in my stubbornness I refused. I thought his common sense ought to give the answer to that question.

Even so God tells us through our own common sense something of his plan for us. For instance, he tells that it is our business to
take part in the game and not merely to sit on the side lines and criticize the players, that we are to help and not to hinder, that we are to lift and not to pull down. He makes us sure that we are to be clean rather than unclean, courageous rather than false. In a world where the need is so great, our common sense tells us that it is the will of God that we should help to meet that need.

Then it is a matter of plain common sense that he desires that we not only play the game, but play our best. If you were a member of the football squad in your school, you would be ashamed to play half-heartedly. The writer of the 119th Psalm makes God say, "I hate those who are half and half". As a churchman you are a member of the team. It is your business to play the game. It is your business to play the best you can. Not only so, but it is your business to keep yourself fit to play. This God tells us through our common sense.

3. Finally, God guides us directly through the Holy Spirit. There is an inner Voice that speaks. There is a Kindly Light that leads. I dare say there is not one of us but that at some time has heard that Voice and recognized it for the very voice of God. Sometimes we have been responsive. Sometimes we have been rebellious. But to all the Voice has spoken. This is a fact both of Scriptures and experience.

IV.

Since God guides, how may we experience that guidance? This has been answered in some measure in what I have said before. But there is yet this that needs to be said.

1. If we are to experience the guidance of God, we must begin by living up to the light that we have. The other day a little chap
passed his plate back for another helping before he had eaten what had already been given him. His request naturally was refused. Our younger son used to like his chocolate half sugar and half chocolate. Many a time he has asked for more sugar when we could only answer, "Stir up what you have." So God has often to answer us.

Surely God is as wise as we. It would be futile for him to give us a fuller light when we are not using what we have. But if we follow the wise advice of Carlyle and do the duty that lies nearest to us, then the next duty will become known. Divine guidance does not mean that God gives us a blue print of our whole journey. Last week I drove home in the night from a town sixty miles away. My headlights were so good that I could see every foot of the road. But even then those lights were not good enough to shine all the way to my home the moment I turned them on. The road only became clear as I traveled it. So it will be with your road. Therefore, begin here and now to live up to the light you have and the needed light will be given. Then you, too, can sing, "One Step Enough for Me."

2. If we are to have the guidance of God we must make a habit of prayer. It is significant that throughout this Book of Acts and throughout the whole Bible, for that matter, guidance was so often given to those who were at prayer. Of course, the prayer that brings guidance is a prayer that tells God of our needs. It is a prayer also that gives God an opportunity to tell us. If we talk all the time, we have no time to listen. To those who pray, sincerely seeking to know the will of God, guidance is given. Of course, if our prayer is merely seeking to get God's consent to do our own will, then there will be no guidance.
We find an illustration of this truth in the story of Balaam.

One day a delegation came to Balaam from King Balak asking this prophet to do him a certain service. Balaam, being a religious man, wisely sought the guidance of God before reaching a decision. Thus sincerely seeking to know the will of God, the answer was clear. He was told that he could not accept the commission that Balak had offered. Therefore he brought his refusal to the delegation and sent them away. That should have settled the matter.

But a few days later a second delegation came from the king. This delegation was larger than the first and made up of more prominent men. They also promised a richer reward. "Let nothing hinder you from coming", they urged the Prophet. Then what? We expect to hear Balaam answer, "I have told your Master that I cannot come to him. It is against the will of God". But instead of taking this plain course, he told the delegation that he would pray over it.

That was when his light went out. His first prayer was answered because he was earnestly seeking to know the will of God and do it. But through this second prayer, he was seeking to do his own will without too great an affront to God. Therefore, he only succeeded in finding utter moral confusion. He was at once told to go and not to go. The angel of the Lord stood as an adversary against him, yet urged him to continue his journey. There is no light for us if we merely seek to please ourselves without displeasing God. But if we seek in sincerity to please ourselves, there is a kindly light that leads -
"If you have anything encouraging to say to the people, speak." (Newmouth) Acts 13:15

The scene is the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia. A group of the devout have met for worship. I have an idea that this was not a very large congregation. In all probability these people were not vastly hopeful. They were in no sense radiant with expectation. Perhaps they were grimly holding on—the few among the many—a little island of faith in a wide sea of paganism. Naturally, therefore, when those in charge saw two strikingly radiant strangers in their congregation, they invited them to speak.

But you will notice that this was not a blanket invitation. They did not ask Paul and Barnabas to speak on just anything in the heavens above or the earth beneath. They asked them to speak only on one condition, that is, if they had something encouraging to say. What the invitation implied is: "If what you have to say is going to blow out the wavering tallow dip that is ours, if you have nothing to say except what will further cast a gloom over our already darkened skies, if you have only that to say that will further deflate our already too flat tires, then, for Heaven's sake, keep silent. But if you have anything encouraging to say, speak."

Now, I submit to you that if Paul and Barnabas speak at all, they are honor bound to speak an encouraging word. Some time ago, while I was lunching with a friend in another city, I brought up the name of a brother minister whom I greatly admired. But I soon saw that my host did not fully share my enthusiasm. In giving his reason for his lack of enthusiasm he said, "We knew that your friend had recently made a tour of the world. Our Pastors' Association, therefore, decided to invite him
to speak to us at two services, morning and evening, on his findings in the various mission fields that he had visited. I was a member of the committee of invitation. We wrote him of our desires and he agreed to come.

But when he came, instead of speaking on the subject assigned, he spoke on an entirely different subject. The members of the committee, therefore, were embarrassed. At the close of his address, we frankly told him of our embarrassment and asked that at the evening service he carry out his agreement. But at the evening hour he finished his discussion of the subject of the morning. Now," said my friend, "he failed to keep faith with us." And to this I had to agree. Even so, if Paul and Barnabas had preached a discouraging sermon after this invitation, they would have broken their agreement. They would thus have failed to keep faith both with God and man.

I

Now this has a permanent word for you and me. It is everybody's business to be an encourager. No man has a right to take the heart out of his brother. It is the duty of every Christian, it is in a peculiar sense the duty of every Christian minister to speak the word that brings courage. He is called by the prophet Isaiah "a herald of happiness". To him, to every Christian, has been committed the Gospel, the glad tidings of great joy. Therefore to discourage is not only unchristian, it is anti-christian.

Some months ago I went to hear a distinguished minister who had just returned from a tour of Europe. I think he was very tired, physically. He seemed very more tired spiritually. With his experiences in Europe as a background, he preached to us. The sermon was as depressing as a dust
storm. There was in it not one single word to make us hope for a better tomorrow. All that kept me from going away from the service on four flat tires was this - my depression was cast out in some measure by my indignation. I said in my heart and I say still, "no man has a right to preach a sermon of that kind". To do it is at once futile and wicked.

"But," you answer, "are we not to face the facts?" Is not the shallow optimist always a nuisance, if not a positive menace? To this I agree. I also affirm that the shallow pessimist can be even more of a nuisance and even more of a menace. If there are those who are blind optimists because they refuse to face the ugly facts of life, there are also those who are pessimists because they refuse to face the facts that are beautiful and bracing. Whenever any man speaks from pulpit or pew only the discouraging word, we may be sure that he has in part ignored the facts.

This is the case because no situation in the world, no situation in the state, in the church, in the home, no individual, is ever entirely bad. Jesus spoke of four soils. One was wayside soil, so hard that the seed sown upon it could not germinate. A second was rocky soil where the grain withered because of a too shallow rootage. Another was thorny ground where the wheat was crowded out by foreign growths. But there was also good ground that brought forth thirty, sixty and a hundred fold. In every situation, in the heart of every individual, there is always something good.

But even if this were not the case we would still be wrong in speaking the discouraging word. This is the case because over against every situation, however grim, there is always the mighty fact of God. No other book surpasses the Bible in its frank facing of the ugly facts of life. But there is a word that it sets over against these facts again and again. Having faced what seems ugly and hopeless, it adds: "But God". Joseph was sold
Joseph was sold into slavery. That was bad enough, "but God was with him". That changed everything. That caused this ugly road that seemed destined to lead to utter oblivion to lead to an immortality of usefulness. When life went to pieces for David, we read of him this word: "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God". It is at once the duty and privilege of every Christian, whether in pulpit or pew, to be an encourager. "Iron up - lift up your head!"

Why should we encourage?

1. We ought to encourage because so many people are short on courage. How many are depressed as they view our world's situation? When I was a young minister there was a thrilling battle cry in the hearts and on the lips of many Christians. That was "Evangelize the world in this generation". It looked like a possibility. Then came the World War with its crash of hope, and yet with a rebirth of courage as we dreamed of a brave, new world where men should beat their swords into plow shares and their spears into pruning hooks and remember war no more. But these hopes have been greatly dimmed in our day. The shout of, "Hear, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and his Christ" seems far from realization. Some of us are greatly discouraged as we view the church from our post hostilities. Some occupy the seat of the scornful, but those who are too free for that sometimes take the seat of the mournful. And when we see it pictured on the pages of the book as a glorious church, having neither spot or wrinkle or any such thing, when we sing "Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God", we find it hard to read or sing with conviction. Some of us are discouraged about one that we love. Somebody very dear to you is breaking your heart. He is a bond slave of some vile habit that threatens to squeeze all the fine juices out of his life and cast him away upon the cinder pile of the burnt-out and worthless. You have prayed and waited but it looks like nothing good is going to happen. Or maybe you are discouraged about yourself. You have looked at these rich and
roomy promises of the New Testament with a measure of expectation, but now you have to confess that in your case they have failed to work out. We ought to speak the encouraging word because so many are discouraged.

2. We ought to speak the encouraging word because courage is so essential. It is essential to the joy of living. If you have lost hope and heart, if you have no expectation for the dawning of a better tomorrow, then you are miserably poor, however full life may have filled your hands with things. But if you are still expectant then you are rich, even if you have only a "broken hope for a pillow at night". Courage is essential because without it life loses its song.

Then courage is essential to our usefulness. I do not care how brilliant you are, how gifted, if you have concluded that the crooked can never be made straight, if you are convinced that this sorry old world is going on its downward way forever, then God can't use you. Elijah was a mighty man and a good one, but while he lay whining under the Juniper tree, complaining that he was the only good man in the world, God could not use him. He was only so much savorless salt.

Not only is courage essential to our joy and usefulness, but without it we become positive liabilities. I have seen a few who seemed to take a kind of pride in the name of realism, of persistently speaking a discouraging word. They seemed to think there was a virtue in scattering tacks along the highways of life to puncture their brothers' tires. But there are others who discourage by being discouraged themselves. To meet them on the street is to have them go through your pocket like the artful dodger, though they may never a discouraging word.

3. Finally, we ought to speak the encouraging word because we have that word to speak. If this were not the case, to be a discourager would be a
tragic misfortune, but with such a word as we have, to fail to be encouraging is not our misfortune, it is our sin. In proof of this look at our supreme Source Book. Of all the heartening books in the literature of the world I make bold to say that the Bible is supreme. Of all the books to put a new spring in the step and a new song in the heart, none other is equal to this book that we call the Word of God.

This note of encouragement runs all through the Old Testament. "Thou hast given me the tongue of him that hast taught," said one of the greatest of the prophets, "that I might know how to speak a word in due season to him that is weary." There are so many weary folks, weary with their failures, weary with bearing the burdens of their discouragements. As believers in God, we have just the word they need. To such we can say that you do not have to face any dark experience of life alone. "Yea, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need fear no evil, for God is with you."

Now and then you and I are called to face men and women who are desperate. A man came to see me some months ago who felt that for him the bottom had fallen out of everything. He seemed sinking into the waters of a shoreless sea. But I had just the word for him. "The Eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are Everlasting Arms." I can remember a day of storm when my fear was changed into courage because my father gathered me in his strong arms. Even so, the Eternal Father gathers his discouraged and frightened children. This note runs through the Old Testament.

It is even more emphatic in the New. Here we find men and women with shining faces and sparkling eyes going out to face stark impossibilities, to face discouragement and persecution and death in all its forms. But with fine hopefulness they changed all its discord into music. The New Testament is by far the most emphatic book ever written. I do not think many would
Yet on the surface it is rather strange that this should be the case. It tells of the most wicked and stupid tragedy that ever took place on the planet. It tells how God broke into history as a little child. It tells how when to manhood grown he gathered about him a group, who in the beginning had no thought of his unique Divinity, but who ended by worshipping him, by believing that he told sober truth when he said "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." But the religious leaders of the day could find nothing better to do with this Incarnate Goodness than to hang him on the cross. There can be no more bitter indictment of human wickedness and stupidity than that.

Yet, one wonders if that grim crime has set a mark of worth on every man. We can believe that man is a great creature because he has on him the mark of the God who created him. A little less than divine, but all supreme reason for believing in his worth is because of the cross. Nothing else has done so much to give us a sense of man's supreme worth than that we can see in every man a brother for whom Christ died.

Now, this Christ of the New Testament had a favorite word. He spoke it both by his lips and by his life. It was this, "Be of good cheer". He said it in the presence of the ravages that sin had wrought. When they brought to him a man who was reaping the harvest of his ill spent years he said to that man: "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee". So it is our privilege as Christians to say to every man, "Whatever harsh things sin may have done to you, be of good cheer, you can enter here and now into the experience of the forgiving Christ--our God."

Then, when Jesus had come to the end of his journey, when he was facing what seemed utter defeat, he said, "In this world you shall have tribulations but be of good cheer, for I shall overcome the world. Though the world has
done to me the worst it could do, I have lived abundantly and victoriously."
That same abundant and victorious life he makes possible to you and me.
Therefore, out of the Bible and out of the book of human life we have the
word of sure hope for every man, regardless of his circumstances.

III

How shall we speak the encouraging word?

1. We ought to speak it of set purpose. A certain man who had been
through a tragic experience and had come to know afresh the adequacy of God
declared that since then he had gone about his daily task as a man walking
over a battlefield after the battle caring for the wounded. Few finer
things can be said about any man than that said of Job, "My works have kept
men on their feet."

Now, there come times in the life of every one of us when we need that
encouraging word. The fact that it is my privilege to speak thus at this
hour is due under God to those who in times of crisis in my own life have
steadied me by their encouragement. In the light of this fact I wonder my-
self that I do not give more time to encouraging folks. I can agree with
the great Dr. Watson. As he came close to the end of his ministry he said
to a group of his younger brethren, "If I had my ministry to go over again
I would preach more encouraging sermons. Be pitiful, my young friends, be
pitiful, for every man is having a hard time."

2. Not only are we to encourage by what we say but we are to encourage
most of all by what we are. There are those who can put heart into us just
by being what they are. To bring courage in this fashion calls for a vital
experience of God. Encouragement is one of those beautiful streams that
flow spontaneously out of the consecrated life.

You remember that word from Jesus, "If any man thirst let him come to
me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water." One of those rivers, I repeat, is the river of encouragement. "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that ye abound in hope (overflow with hope) through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Barnabas, one of the men to whom this invitation to speak was given, was a man of that kind. So proficient was he in bringing courage to folks that his friends simply had to give him a new name. The name given him by his parents was thrown away. He came to be called "Son of Encouragement", because no other name would fit. To come into his presence was to be refreshed. To shake hands with him was to go away feeling that life was priceless and that it was good to be a man.

Now, the measure of our power to bring courage to others is in a large measure the fullness with which we possess such courage ourselves. There is little use for me to say, "Be of good cheer" if my own face is mantled with gloom. It is futile for me to cry "Courage" to you, if you see my own knees smiting together. But if you feel throbbing in my heart the courage that I commend, then such courage is as contagious as cowardice.

Look at this picture. A vessel is going to pieces in a cruel storm which has made it a plaything for gloomy days and black nights. Passengers and crew, though brave men by nature, are not brave any more. They are panicky, for all hope that they shall be saved has been taken away. Then a man stands forth in their midst and shouts this word, "Be of good cheer". Then what?

They do not swear at him. They do not threaten to toss him in the sea. Instead, we read this amazing response - "Then were they of good cheer." The courage of one man has brought all their dead hopes to a resurrection. Why
so? As they listened to Paul and as they looked into his radiant face, they said in their hearts, "This man really has the courage that he is offering to us. This man is dead sure that the mighty God whom he serves is going to deliver not only him, but us as well. Thus Paul faced the situation that otherwise must have been an utter tragedy."
FASCINATING AS A SERMON

Acts 13 - 42 "The people earnestly begged to have all this repeated to them on the following Sabbath." Weymouth

Here is an arresting scene. A certain minister has finished his sermon. The benediction has been pronounced and the congregation are now filing out of the sanctuary. But instead of uttering a united yarn and hurrying each to his own home, they linger behind to speak to the minister. In fact, they form themselves into a committee of one and unite in making a request of the preacher. And what a queer request! They are begging him that the sermon that he has just finished might be repeated to them next Sunday. They have found the sermon so thrilling, so inspiring, so gripping, so fascinating, that they can ask for no greater favor than that he repeat it on the following Sabbath.

I

Now the first fact that we face in this text is this: That the sermon was fascinating, that it held the attention of those who were present. In fact, so thrilling did they find the message that I dare say if something happened that was unusually wonderful during the coming days, they compared it with this sermon. They said, "Why, that is amazing. It is as fascinating as a sermon." But that saying, "as fascinating as a sermon," had not found an abiding place in our language. Were I to use such an expression before a modern audience, it would make them laugh out loud in sheer scoff. It would be like saying, "as live as a mummy," "as handsome as a hippopotamus, as undesirable as money."

The phrase that has actually come to keep house with us is this - "As dull as a sermon." Tragic to say, we have come to accept it. So much is this the case that in a recent article in one of our leading religious journals, the writer heads his article with this caption: "Sermons not to be enjoyed." Well, if that is really the goal, then
the one most likely to reach that goal is the one who is most listless both and lazy, intellectually and spiritually. Yet can one really gather such grapes of thorns and such figs from thistles? If the way to preach the best possible sermon is to be the most lazy and indifferent man possible, then that is the only place I know in the universe of God where the law of sowing and reaping does not operate.

Sermons not to be enjoyed? In Heaven's name, why not? Is not the very meaning of the gospel good news? When Jesus was born and our earth was serenaded by the music from another world, did not the angel declare, "Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people?" Does not the gospel contain the mightiest of all romances? The romance of the Heavenly bridegroom in search of his bride. Is it not the greatest adventure story ever written? Is not the story of the New Testament the greatest tragedy in all literature? Also the greatest triumph? Everything is there to grip the interest of the hearer and to make the sermon to be ______

Of course, I am aware that the prime purpose of the minister is not to be entertaining. But it is far more his prime purpose to be entertaining than it is to be boring. Whenever a sermon is boring there is something dreadfully wrong either with the sermon or with the minister himself. A sermon ought to be enjoyed. It will be enjoyed however much a rebuke it contains, if it is a real gospel sermon preached by a man with the gospel in his heart. It is the duty of every minister to see to it that his sermon is ______(machine buzzed.) The first essential of a good sermon is that it be interesting.

I know to some this will seem like majoring on minors. It will seem as if we are putting the accent on the wrong syllable. The first essential of a sermon, you say, is that it be true, that it contain gospel. And yet everyone of us has heard sermons that contain gospel, that were true,
and yet the truth they had was so dead that it produced no effect upon the hearer. In fact, it did not make the so-called hearer listen at all. A sermon may be as fundamental as the Decalog, and as true as the Sermon on the Mount, and yet accomplish naked nothing. Furthermore, it may accomplish even worse than nothing. This will be the case if it is not interesting enough to win and hold attention.

A sermon ought to be interesting in the first place because if it is not, the congregation will not listen to it. It is not safe to assume that the congregation that confronts us Sunday after Sunday is made up solely of people who have come to hear us preach. Some of them have come for that purpose, thank God, and if we have dealt with them faithfully and have won their confidence, they will come in greater numbers for that purpose. And yet in every congregation there are those present who have not come to hear the preaching at all.

Some have come to meet their friends. Some have come from force of habit. Going to church is a good habit. We make our own habits and our habits in turn make us. Therefore, it is wise for us to make good habits since they make us. Going to church is one good habit. Jesus possessed it. He went up into the synagogue on the Sabbath Day as his custom was. Some, they, come to church from force of habit.

Others come in order to meet their friends. With them it is a part of their social life. Others come from a sense of duty. They are there because they have listened to the stern daughter of the voice of God. It is the way of certain Protestants to put on a hair-shirt. It is their way of enduring hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. If this sounds extreme, remind yourself of how many times some glad hearer has approached you at the close of the sermon and said, "I actually enjoyed that sermon", by which he meant to say, "I didn't intend to enjoy it. I intended merely to suffer
through it. I intended to be bored as usual. But you took me by surprise, you made me listen. You aroused my interest. You changed what was usually a pain into a pleasure, so that I enjoyed the sermon.

Now in winning and holding the attention of our people, we have both hindrances and helps. Among the helps is the presence of the blessed Holy Spirit, who always longs to take the things of God and to reveal them to each individual heart. Then we have as our help the eternal hungers and thirsts of the human soul. We have as our help today the sense of defeat and frustration of so many people. Very few of us are sure of ourselves any more. We are not sure of our world. We are not sure of our nation. We are more prepared than in many centuries to say "And now, Lord, what I wait for?" My hope is in thee." We feel more sure than we did a generation ago that there is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

We are still not very greatly exercised over our quite decent and respectable sins. If Lady Macbeth were to wring her hands before a modern audience and say, "Out, out, damned spot, out, out", it would leave the audience fairly cold. The Prodigal coming home with his confession "I have sinned against Heaven and in Thy sight", does not grip us very firmly. But there is one thing that he said that comes close to all of us and that is this: "I perish with hunger". We all know that we need something that we do not possess. As I look out upon life today, I think I see that the face of humanity is little more than one gaunt with falseness. This ought to help us to preach.

Along with this help are hindrances. One is the hindrance of those who have heard us over and over again, and who feel that they know pretty much what we are going to say. They are the kind of folks that our fathers used to call "gospel hardened". Then we are speaking Sunday by Sunday to a movie educated audience. These people are accustomed to get a maximum of
entertainment and information with a minimum of effort. They are, therefore, not trained to put themselves to very much trouble to concentrate. If we, therefore, fail to be interesting, they simply do not listen.

I know the answer to that. We say they ought not to be that way. Yes, but they are that way. If my physician were to come to see me and discover that I had a bad case of small pox, it would be futile for him to say to me, "You ought not to have smallpox, you ought to have chicken pox." But it so happens that I do have small pox in spite of that fact. And the modern congregation being a movie educated congregation is used to the maximum of thrills with the minimum of effort, and therefore it is not easy to grip and hold their attention. In order to do this the sermon simply must be interesting.

2. Then we must grip and hold the attention of our people because the sermon is not an end in itself. I know how easy it is for a man who delights in preaching to make the sermon an end. I know how easy it is to go home from a service with a degree of complacency, if your sermon has gone off well, though there is no indication that it has accomplished any worthwhile results. But to make the sermon an end in itself is as futile and idolatrous as it is for the fisherman to burn incense to his own net.

It is the purpose of every sermon to bring about certain results in the hearts of the hearers. A sermon is to if folks act with us, they must first think with us, and if they think with us they must first hear what we have to say. Therefore, if we fail to win their attention, if we fail to make them think with us, and therefore we fail to induce them to act with us. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary that a sermon be interesting or it will lead to no action.

3. The preacher, therefore must be interesting or he will merely waste his time. It is utterly futile to talk right on when nobody is paying any attention. Since attention is so necessary it is the preacher's
business to see to it that he has it. He must not merely guess about it. He must be absolutely certain that his people are with him or that they are against him.

Now, there are those ministers who are never sure of the attention of their people because they cannot sense the situation. Now and then I find a minister who comes to the close of the conference year and his people request his removal. Such a request takes him entirely by surprise. He thought he was getting on beautifully. One reason that they ask for his removal is because he can't sense the situation. Any man who cannot tell what his people are thinking will never speak with success. Then we can tell whether our people are listening or not by looking at them. Now and then I see a preacher who goes through his sermons with his eyes fixed on the northeast corner of the sanctuary. He simply takes off with his sermon and forgets the congregation. There are others that are so bound by their notes or by their manuscripts that they do not have a chance to look their congregations in the eye. I am not here arguing as to the merits of preaching with or without manuscript. I am perfectly aware that preaching from a manuscript has certain advantages. I am also aware that there are many highly successful ministers who use a manuscript. Yet I make bold to say this, that these same ministers would be more effective if they did not use a manuscript.

It is well, therefore, for the minister to look his congregation in the eye. If you look at them they are more likely to look at you, and if you look at them you can tell whether they are listening or not. If you find they are not, you can act accordingly. Especially I would advise that you watch your boys and girls. If you find them listless or fidgety, the chances are that you have lost your adults as well, because I have discovered that any sermon that a boy or girl of ten or twelve years of age cannot get
something out of, is being wasted on the adults. They are not listening to it. Watch your congregation and know for certain if they are listening.

Now, if you find that they are not listening, for heaven's sake, don't just stroll on and leave your congregation to go in one direction while you go in another. It is not always possible to shift gear, it is not always possible to recover a congregational sheep that has been lost, but there are many ways of doing it, and I think it is better to do something shocking than simply to stroll right on, barking on a cold scent when you know that you are not getting anywhere. Remember that the preacher who preaches when nobody is listening is wasting his time.

Not only is such a preacher wasting his own time, but he is wasting the time of his congregation. Scores and hundreds of busy and hard-pressed people have come out to the sanctuary, and you are wasting their time. Not only so, but you are worst than wasting it. You are preaching in such a fashion that you are training your congregation in the dangerous and tragic art of inattention. You are preaching a sermon that is so dead that when they hear a live sermon they will have been so inoculated with one that was lifeless that the live is not likely to take on them. The best equipment for listening with keen appreciation next Sunday is to listen with keen appreciation this Sunday. The audiences that are easiest to preach to are the audiences that are accustomed to listen to their ministers Sunday by Sunday.

I know that this is not the commonly accepted view. You young ministers especially feel that if you wanted an easy time in preaching you would need to go to some congregation that had never heard a real live sermon in all their days. Therefore, if you are alive, you would come to them as a glad surprise. Coming upon you would be like discovering streams in a desert. But as plausible as that might sound, the opposite is true. The more a congregation is accustomed to listen to its own minister, the better they will listen to you.
I had occasion to put this matter to the test only a few months ago. I held a week's meeting in two separate churches in the same city. One of these churches had as its minister an excellent man who majored upon almost everything else except preaching. He was a good financier, a good builder, a good organizer, but his preaching came as the last thing of importance. Therefore, his people were not accustomed to listen to him. Being not accustomed to listen to him, they did not expect to listen to anybody. He had cried, "wolf, wolf", so many times without producing the beast that they had lost all expectancy. In fact, they had almost come to believe that their wasn't any wolf. Now, preaching to these people was not easy. Almost every service was a battle. I entered into every sermon with the exclamation of Ezekiel in my heart, "Can these dry bones live?"

The other church had a minister who was the opposite. He did other things but he majored on preaching. He was alert and alive. He knew the gospel in his own life and preached it. Therefore, when it came my time to preach these people leaned forward expectantly. The very expression of their faces, the very atmosphere said, "This is what has brought us to church. We want to hear the messenger of God who has come to speak to us this day."

The result of their expectant listening was to bring me to my best. It was to make every service a bit of a luxury. It changed preaching from a bit of prose into exquisite poetry. To face an audience like that is to thank God that he called you into the ministry. Therefore, let us keep in mind that this business of winning the interest and attention of our people and holding that attention is a matter of supreme importance. If preaching is to get action, it must first be listened to. If we fail to win the attention of our people we waste our own time, we waste their time, and not only so, but we send them away the less fitted for hearing a real sermon when a vital preacher comes along. There are few greater sins of which a minister can be guilty than to be deliberately and consistently dull.
Now, if we are to be interesting, how are we to go about it? Of course, there are many factors that enter into the answer to this question. We are not all equally interesting in ourselves. There are some preachers that are far more gifted than others. There are some that by nature are as winsome as sea music. There are some that are endowed superlatively with that something that for lack of a better name, we call personal magnetism. And yet, while our gifts differ widely, I maintain that there is no real gospel preacher who talks out of his own experience who cannot be vitally and grippingly interesting. How, then, I repeat, are we to be interesting?

1. In order for me to be interesting, I must be interested. I must be interested first of all in what I am saying. I must be interested in my own sermon. Have you ever heard a man preach when you felt he cared nothing in particular about what he was saying? That he was merely mouthing overplatitudes that if they had been fresh and young had grown now into the seer and yellow leaf of life. Every good sermon has in it an element of surprise. I love to hear a man preach when he makes my nudge my neighbor and say "yes, that is true."

But if I am to bring surprise to my hearer, I must have some of that surprise in my own soul. Now sometimes we lack newness and freshness in our preaching because we are preaching old sermons that we have preached over and over again until they have lost all newness to us. Don't misunderstand me, I am not warning against repeating sermons. The only sermon that ought not to be repeated is the one that was not worth preaching the first time. Sermons ought to be repeated. It adds to the ease and fluency of the speaker. But while it is well to preach old sermons, it is a deadly thing to preach nothing but old sermons. Every minister ought to hang the words from the lips of Jesus above his desk, "Remember Lot's wife." When the mayor's wife was fleeing the doomed city of Sodom, she did not intend to take up her permanent abode by the roadside. She made just a temporary stop. But
that stop became permanent. So often the minister makes a temporary stop in preparing sermons, with the result that the stop becomes permanent. For the penalty that a man pays for ceasing to prepare new sermons is that he loses his capacity to prepare them. And as he loses his capacity to prepare new sermons, he loses his capacity to preach with equal effectiveness the sermons that he prepared yesterday. As an evidence of this it is only necessary to think of how so often men who give up the pulpit to go into some executive office lose the freshness out of their preaching. Very few men who remain long on a district preach as well after they get off as they did when they went on. Very few bishops can preach as well ten years after they were elected to that office as they could when they were elected. This is the case because they have been compelled to give their time so exclusively to executive work that they have not been permitted to prepare new sermons. And the penalty, I repeat, for preaching old sermons is that they lose their capacity to preach new ones, and the freshness and the glow and the glory go out of the sermons that they preached yesterday.

A second reason for the loss of interest in our preaching is that we have allowed our Christian experience sometimes to grow old and cold. Sometimes with the minister his religion becomes little more than a memory. A beautiful memory, it is true, but a memory, nonetheless. The great feared apostle this. Therefore, he kept under his body and brought it into subjection less by any means after he had preached to others, he himself might be rejected. Blessed is the man that keeps a fresh sense of the redeeming grace of God in his own heart. Blessed is the man that can never approach his pulpit except in holy wonder as he shouts in his heart, "To me is this great gift, that I might preach the unsearchable riches of Christ." The man whose sermons are new and whose experience is new will always be interesting because he is interested in them himself.
2. A second necessity if we are to be interesting, is that we be interested. We must be interested in those who have come to hear us. One secret of the spell that Jesus cast over men was that he cared. Every man that listened to him felt that here is one that cares for me. Not simply for my soul but for me personally. He was interested in folks individually. Interest begets interest. Anybody who is interested in me makes it necessary for me to be interested in them. So when the minister is deeply interested in his congregation, they answer back with something of his glow. This, I think, is the reason why most of us can preach better to our own congregation than to any other group in the world. We know them, we are interested in them. We know that here is a man who is having a hard battle with some subtle temptation. There is a woman whose home has just been broken and whose heart has broken with it. Here is another mother who has lost her child. Here is a youth in life's green spring who is trying to find himself. And as we look into their eager faces we long with another fairly to lay hold on the tree of life and shake it till its leaves fall for their healing and its fruit for their feeding. "How did your minister preach?" one asked of a certain great Scottish preacher. Answer, "He preached as if he were just dying to see us saved. That man preached interestingly.

2. If we are to be interesting we are to be human. People are not interested in the abstract, they are interested in the concrete. When Foekes said that the greatest study of mankind was man, he spoke a great truth. We are interested in people. We are not interested in folks who if you prick them they would not bleed a drop. Of all the uninteresting people in the world it is the professional, the ecclesiastical, the man who has become more preacher than he has man. Whenever this happens to any minister, three strikes have been called on him.

It is Emerson who tells us of having gone to church one day and of
seeing something that made him feel as if he never wanted to attend that
church again. It was a beautiful snowy day. He said/everything was
real, that is, everything except the minister. He alone was spectral. He never said a single word that said he had/sinned or ever repented,
ever laughed, or ever wept, ever loved or ever hated. He was just an ecclesiastical nonentity. Therefore, having sat in his presence, he felt
that he did not wish to go to church anymore. It is essential if we are
to be interesting that we remain human. In order to do this it is a great help to live with folks. Paul preached not only publicly and from house
to house. Every minister ought to live with his people, if not to help
them, then to help himself. No man will remain human in the finest sense of the word, who simply withdraws himself from his people and tries to live in a castle in the air. And when we seek, I repeat, to be human, when we become more minister than man, then we are out.

3. If we are to be interesting, we must speak of things that really matter. Things that matter not to the man in the moon or to the man of a century ago, but we must speak of things that matter to the people who are present at that moment. We must speak of the things that matter to those persons in the hear and now. The other day I went to a civic club and the speaker was introduced and when he had announced his subject, he said, "It does not matter, as you see, what I say about this subject." Well, when he had finished, I think all the audience would have agreed with him. His subject was a triviality, in the first place, and no man can speak well about nothing.

Here we find a part of the secret of the spell that Jesus cast over his audience. He spoke of things that mattered. He spoke of the great hungers and thirsts of the soul. He spoke of how a man might know God. That is our privilege. I love to realize that when I preach the gospel, I am dealing in
something that matters now and matters infinitely. I love to know that I am
dealing in something that not only matters now but will matter forevermore.

The other day a chap said rather flippantly, "Well, it will not matter
a hundred years from now." That is true of most of the things about which we
exercise ourselves in these days. It will not matter a hundred years from
now. But this gospel that has been entrusted to us, it will matter what we
say a hundred years from now. It will matter ten hundred years from now.
It will matter ten thousand years from now. It will matter ten million years
from now. As long as I am I, as long as you are you, as long as God is God,
it will matter what we do, and what others do with this tremendous truth that
who
we have been sent to preach. Blessed is the man has a vital message for
his people. God pity us when we come before a hungry hearted congregation
to deal in trivialities that do not matter. Jesus said to be interesting is
to speak about something that matters.

Not only must we speak about something that matters, but we must speak
about those matters with simplicity. Preaching is to be understood. There are
those who are prone to forget this. I think the older I grow, the more I
come to appreciate the beautiful grace of simplicity, the short sentence,
the short word, those sermons that are so beautifully clear and simple not
simply that the intelligent can understand them, but that the unlearned
cannot help but understand them.

On the other hand, I think the older I grow the more impatient I
become with the man who is deliberately obscure and hard to follow. Remember
there is absolutely no merit in being difficult to understand. Anybody can
muddle the water. It has always been my conviction that anything that I can
see clearly, I can make my hearers see it clearly also, and if I cannot make him
see it clearly, then the chances are that I am muddled in my own thinking.
There is no finer grace than the beautiful grace of simplicity. It is worth
giving morning, noon and night to your cultivation of it.

Now, I am aware that there are those who do not agree. I am thinking of an excellent man now passed to his reward who would never use a word of four syllables if he could find one of five. I never heard him make a simple statement, hurriedly, in my life. When he told of a certain man who thrust another in the side with a spear instead of stating the fact he declared that he smote him in the midriff of his quivering viscera when I knew they that a great number members of the congregation didn't even know that had a quivering viscera.

I am thinking of another man who fancied himself as a scientist. He delighted in using pseudo scientific terms. He especially reveled in cosmic. And one day a ministerial friend of his who saw how widely he was missing his congregation said to him, "Why don't you cut out that scientific jargon and speak the English language to your people?" Instead of appreciating the suggestion he turned upon his friend in indignation and said, "I am not going to compromise my literary style."

Now that was not only silly, but that was bordering close upon wickedness. In the New Testament preaching and salvation are related as cause and effect. We are out so to preach as to bring about salvation, but what of the preaching that seeks to save a literary style the worth of whose salvation is highly questionable instead of trying to save the man who hears. Blessed is the man who sees to it, who makes it his business that his hearer understands exactly what he is saying. To fail to do this is to miss the purpose of preaching.

Winston Churchill tells the story of the lad who was playing on the wharf of a seacoast village years ago. It was a bitter cold day and the little chap lost his footing and fell into the icy water. A sailor who was not far away saw him, and at the risk of his life, dived into the cold water and rescued the lad and gave him back to the arms of his frantic mother.
The next day, as the sailor was walking down the village street, he saw the mother coming, leading the lad by the hand, and fearing that there would be a scene, he looked about for some alley down which to duck, but there was none and he had to go on and meet her. But there was no scene, at least, not a sentimental one. Instead the mother came to him and said with positive indignation, "where is Jimmy's cap?"

The sailor was puzzled for a moment and then he said, "Madam, I wasn't diving for Jimmy's cap, I was diving for Jimmy." Now, you can dive for Jimmy's cap if you desire, but what you are really after, and what I am after as a minister is Jimmy. Therefore, I must not only speak what is worth speaking, but I must speak it in such a fashion as that my hearer can understand it.

Finally, not only must I speak what is worth speaking and do it with simplicity, but I must speak with authority. I do not mean here the authority of the school, or the authority of the letter, but the authority of experience. Somehow we feel when we hear any minister in the deeps of our souls whether he knows what he is talking about or not from his own experience. This is not to say that we are not to preach beyond our experience, that all of us have to do. But it does mean that while recommending the water of life to others, our hearers must feel that we have visited the spring for ourselves, while recommending the bread of life they must feel that we ourselves have faced it and found it to satisfy the hungers of our hearts.

Every minister, therefore, owes it to himself to be able to say in the presence of a congregation, many of whose members are very uncertain, "I speak that which I do know and I testify that which I have seen. I make bold to say that any man who comes before a congregation regardless of his limitations, if he has a fresh and authentic word of God in his own heart, that man will be interesting.

I should certainly, had I been on the committee, not have recommendd the
woman for the ministry to whom Jesus spoke at the well, yet when I saw her in her enthusiastic excitement for get her water vessel and start back to the village, and when I asked her what she was about and she told me that she was going on a preaching mission, I felt like laughing out loud. "You?" I said, "why the very street boys know you. Your name has been blown like a filthy rag about the streets of this filthy village for years. And you are going back to tell them about Jesus!"

But she wouldn't listen to me. She hurried on her way because she knew something personal for herself. And it stands written in the record: "Many believed because of the saying of the woman." She had many a handicap. She was ignorant about a great many things. But she had had personal, first-hand dealings with Jesus, and so she spoke interestingly and she spoke effectively.

Some years ago I invited a man to preach at a midweek afternoon in my church in Birmingham. I had told some of his stories. As a result the house was almost filled. He was a man who had little formal education. He was a man who made as many grammatical errors and more than D. L. Moody used to make, but he had the root of the matter in. He made us laugh and he made us weep. He made us say in the deeps of our souls, "Surely God is in this place." I have never seen any audience more charmed and more gripped in all my ministry. It was not because he was a man of great culture, but he spoke of things that mattered and he spoke of them simply and he spoke with a note of authority.

Here, then, is one essential of preaching. Preaching must be interesting. If it is not interesting, then we are wasting our time. If it is not interesting, then we are doing more harm than good. We are not only falling to help but we are doing positive hurt. But if we ourselves are interested in what we are saying, if we ourselves are interested in folks, if we are human,
if we speak simply, if we speak about things that matter, if we speak with a note of authority, then, in the language of Paul, we will both save ourselves and those who hear us.
THE QUITTER

"But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them
and went not with them to the work."

Acts 15:38

"Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

II Timothy 4:11

Here are two views of one man. Here is how a certain member of the early church looked when seen through the eyes of Saint Paul. "He will not do," said the great apostle, looking at him with kindly yet honest eyes. "I am not accusing him of being dishonest, I am not accusing him of being an enemy, but he is too soft, he cannot take it. He is a good parlor soldier, he does well on parade, but on the day of battle he is conspicuous for his absence. I do not question his intentions, but having tried him out I have found from actual experience that he is a quitter. When life grows hard and men of solid courage are needed he is not only no help, he is in the way."

But here is a word from that same apostle written just a few years later. He is writing from a prison cell. He has clashed with the authorities. Many of his friends are afraid of him. To be loyal to him now involves danger. But in this desperate hour when Paul looks about him for someone in whom he can trust, when he thinks of the friends upon whose courage he can depend with unshaken confidence, he takes up his pen and writes this sentence: "Take Mark and bring him with thee: for
he is profitable to me for the ministry." And the astonishing and heartening fact about these two sentences is that they are written about the same man. John Mark, the quitter, has become John Mark the steadfast. That is something to make the deadeast of us thrill with high expectancy and hope.

I.

Who was John Mark? He was the son of a certain wealthy, or at least well-to-do woman, named Mary who lived in Jerusalem. Mary was probably a widow as her husband is not mentioned. We know that she was well-to-do because she had a roomy house in which she took care of a large number of guests. Her home was intimately connected with the early church. She was doubtless a hostess of Jesus more than once. Some scholars think that it was in an upper room in her house that Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples. Probably it was down her stairway that Judas stumbled out into the dark to betray his Lord. This wealthy woman had one son, John Mark, by name, whom she doubtless pampered and spoiled more than was good for him.

John Mark who was quite a young man naturally felt the spell of Jesus. But it did seem that up to the time of the death of Jesus he had not become a confessed disciple. Perhaps he came nearest to doing so the night that Jesus was arrested. There is a sentence in Mark's Gospel that is thought to be autobiographical. It runs like this,-"And there followed Him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body: and the young men laid hold on him: and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked." Here is the picture. On that fateful Thursday evening Mark was preparing himself for bed, or he had just come from the bath. Suddenly he heard a tumult in the street. Opening the door to a slit he inquired what was happening. "We are going out to Gethsemane to arrest a prisoner," one shouts from the crowd. "What is his name?" Mark asks. "Jesus of Nazareth," comes the answer. "Jesus of Nazareth, why the man asi just left his own home a
a little while ago. He is no criminal. Young Mark resolves not to see him arrested without a protest. He will go to his side, die by him if necessary.

With the spell of Jesus thus upon him this young man seizes the first thing that comes to his hand, a sheet perhaps, throws it about his nude body, and with utter forgetfulness of himself and the ridiculous figure he makes, hurries out into the night. He reaches the garden just as the soldiers are making the arrest. As he plucks up courage to hurry to his side he runs into a group of his friends. They are not there as the enemies of Jesus or his friends. They do not mean any particular harm. But most of the harm in the world is done by those who do not mean any. These thoughtless young men lay hold upon John Mark, with loud laughter perhaps. And the timid young fellow who was facing toward Jesus forgets his high quest, leaves the linen cloth in their hands and flees in shame through the night. It was a tragic collapse that perhaps left a scar upon the soul of John Mark for many days to come.

After the crucifixion Mary's home became even more a center for the early church than it had been before. It would seem that the apostles and other Christian leaders made this home their headquarters. Among the guests who most frequently met here was one of the choicest leaders of the early church, Barnabas by name. It was Barnabas who though a wealthy man had sold all his possessions to lay all the proceeds upon the altars of the Church. It was Barnabas who did more than any other man to save Paul for the Church by believing in him when all others feared him and distrusted him. It was Barnabas who through his tender and courageous sympathy for all in need earned for himself that finest of new names, the Son of Encouragement. He had a genius for making folks believe in themselves and believe in tomorrow. His very presence made hearts with sobbings cause them to sing.

In such a wholesome environment as this it is but natural that John Mark was healed of his shame and self-pity. It is evident that he at last came openly to confess Jesus. By and by when news came to Jerusalem that both Jews and non-Jews
in Antioch were turning to this new faith, Barnabas was sent to investigate. We read that when he came and had seen the grace of God he was glad. Seeing what a great opportunity confronted the Church in this thriving city he sent for the biggest brain and the hottest heart of that day. For a whole year Barnabas and Paul preached in this city. Among those who assisted them was doubtless this young cousin of Barnabas, John Mark. He had been welcomed into the fold and had become a trusted worker.

Then came that great moment when it was decided that Christianity should become a world religion. Here is the simple story. "As they ministered unto the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for work, I have called them." These men went out to spread the gospel through the non-Jewish world. This is one of the big events of history. It is more important than all the fifteen decisive battles of the world put together. There was one other man that belonged to this distinguished company. We read that they had John Mark to their ministry. What an opportunity for this young man! He had as his friends and companions two of the greatest men of the Church. He was out on an enterprise the biggest in all the world, the preaching of the gospel to every creature. Their first step was Cyprus. Here things went well for the missionaries. Cyprus was the home of Barnabas. It might have been the home of Mary before she moved to Jerusalem. If not, Mark had doubtless visited his cousin here and did not feel that he was entirely among strangers.

But leaving Cyprus the little company sailed to Asia Minor, and landed at a city called Perga. This city was entirely pagan and strange. Here something happened of which Luke does not see fit to tell us. But for some reason John Mark walked out on his two companions. Possibly they went to wake him one morning and found his bed had not been slept in. There was a brief note saying that he was leaving. Upon leaving he did not return to Antioch from where he had begun the
enterprise that he was deserting. He made straight for Jerusalem, to mother, home, to where he knew he would be a pampered and spoiled favorite as in the days of old. Thus he became John Mark the quitter.

II.

As to why this young man deserted we are not told. But of this we may be sure, it was for a reason that did him no credit. This is evidenced by the fact that Paul found it impossible to trust him after this collapse. Paul, I have remarked, had a genius for friendship. All such men are great believers in their fellows. But Paul because of this tragic breakdown ceased to believe in John Mark. When he and Barnabas were planning to set out on a second missionary journey and Mark offered his services, Paul would have none of them. Thus we may know that Mark's desertion did him no credit.

He certainly did not leave these two friends because they did not need him. They were just two pitted against a whole pagan world. Certainly if ever a man was needed, that man was John Mark. Of course, the situation was hard, of course the task was tremendously big, the demands were overpowering, the need was compelling. When John walked out, threw down the task, shirked his responsibility, therefore, he could not tell himself that they do not need me anyway. Neither can you, neither can any man. A number of guesses have been made as to why John left.

1. It may be that he got his feelings hurt. It may be that he felt himself slighted, that he resented that he did not have as prominent a place as his two older companions. Possibly he resented the growing influence and power of Paul. When the enterprise began it was the enterprise of Barnabas and Paul, but it had not got fully under way till it became the enterprise of Paul and Barnabas. May be John Mark resented this. Sometimes we allow a petty resentment to rob us of life's finest prizes.

2. I have an idea that a better guess is that Mark became discouraged. The
pagan world was so big, the movement of which he was a part was so small, the vast majority was heading in one direction. He with an almost insignificant minority was struggling in another. "What is the use" he said, "It is futile we can never get anywhere." The same mood is distressingly prevalent today. Thousands have grown reckless in their own personal lives, have fallen in with the multitude because they feel themselves impotent and useless and powerless to stand up against the destruction that is threatening to overwhelm the world.

3. When hope went, of course courage went also. As long as we are sure of victory we can keep up courage. But when we become sure of defeat our courage falls into utter collapse. John Mark was by nature a timid soul. He had a streak of cowardice in him. That was evident by his flight in the garden. Here he went hot and cold, and though he despised himself for doing it, he set out dogged by despair and fear to hide behind his mother's skirts. No wonder Paul had ceased to trust him.

III.

But the heartening fact is that John Mark came back. This faltering and failing and blundering young man became one of the staunch men of the early church. He wrote the gospel that furnished Matthew and Luke with much of the material that they used in the writing of their own gospels. How did this transformation of Mark take place? How did this bit of putty become rock? How did this coward become a hero? Of course he was remade by the power of God, but on the human side, I think, his transformation is due mainly to three men.

1. Paul. What this great apostle did for Mark was to jar him into wakefulness and compel him to take a good square look at himself. When Barnabas suggested that he go with them on their second missionary journey, Paul uttered an emphatic no. It is easy to imagine his answer. "Mark is a nice young man, but missionaries must be of sterner stuff. Even pagans will suffer for their faith, Mark is too
soft. That fact makes him a hindrance rather than a help." And when Barnabas said, "If you don't take him I will not go with you." Paul said, "So be it."

And this great apostle parted from a friend to whom he owed much, because he refused to endanger his mission by taking John Mark. And John had sense enough to know that a good and kindly man like Paul would not take such an attitude without reason. Paul gave him the rebuke that he needed.

2. A second man that helped Mark was his cousin, Barnabas. Mark needed rebuking, but he needed more. He needed encouragement. He needed somebody to save him from his self-contempt. He needed somebody to convince him that he was still capable of being trusted. Brave hearted Barnabas, true to his name, became here a son of consolation. He said, "Mark, it breaks my heart to separate from Paul. We have dreamed and prayed and preached and suffered together, but I am going to give him up and take you with me on my preaching mission. I am doing this in the faith that you will not let me down.

3. But it is my guess that the most helpful, single personage in the remaking of Mark was none other than Simon Peter. Simon Peter was no more tender hearted than Paul and Barnabas, but he knew how to sympathize as they did not. He himself had passed through a great collapse. He himself had known the wretchedness and heartache of bitter defeat and failure. Therefore, when he took Mark under his wing he told him his own story. He told him how he had once sworn that he didn't know Jesus, how Jesus had taken him back, and how he would also take John Mark back. Then this man Simon made him his private secretary and came to call him, Mark, my son. And this Gospel of Mark is largely Jesus seen through the eyes of Simon Peter. Mark was made to see himself by Paul, he was made to see his possibilities through Barnabas and Peter.

Here then is a story that comes close to ourselves. We have all been more like John Mark and Simon Peter than we have like Paul and Barnabas. Few of us have not played the coward, few of us have always been in when duty called, few
indeed that do not realize the need of a new start. The vast majority of us, I daresay, look rather wistfully toward the "land of beginning again."

It is said that just before the outbreak of the first World War there were three young officers, all lieutenants, who belonged to a certain regiment in the British army. As the war clouds began to gather one of them was gripped by the sickening fear that when the test came he would become a coward. This became such an obsession with him that through the influence of his father, who was a high official, he got himself dismissed from the army. His dismissal came the very day his regiment was ordered to France. As his two lieutenant friends went away to the front, he himself went to Ireland where he was engaged to be married to a charming Irish girl.

One day in Ireland as he and his bride-to-be were preparing to go for a ride the postman came and handed the ex-lieutenant a little box. He opened it in the presence of his fiancé and two white feathers floated out upon the carpet. The girl laughed a ringing laugh and asked for an explanation. The lieutenant told her the truth. Then her laughter died from her lips. Two hectic spots came upon her cheeks. She reached up and plucked a spray of white feather from her plume, put it in his hands and walked away without a word.

Then that young soldier with his life fallen in ruins about him, squared his jaw, took up the white feather and placed it in the box, hurried back to England where he joined the army under an assumed name. Soon he found himself again in his old regiment. One night there was an excursion into No Man's Land by one of his lieutenant friends. He didn't come back. The returned soldier asked the privilege of going for him. At first the officer sternly refused telling him it would be suicide. But when the soldier said I would like to commit suicide in that fashion, he gave him permission. So he went, found his friend, brought him in, and laid him on the floor of the trench to die. As the dying man searched the face of his rescuer he recognized him and he smiled, "Tom," he said, "I knew you would come
I knew you were not a coward." Other days went by and there was a charge to over the top. Then a stinging pain in head and shoulder. When the young fellow came to himself he was in a shell hole half off and half on an officer who was moaning and sobbing in delirium for water. He took his canteen and drained the last drop into his lips then fainted. When they found them their bodies were stuck together with blood. But they were surprised to find between them also a crimsoned white feather. Then the young chap was invalided at home where he received the victoria cross. When he was coming away from this ceremony he passed a line of people. At the end of this line he was greeted by a beautiful Irish girl, who was wearing the garb of a Red Cross nurse. He spoke to her and fumbled in his pocket and found a little box, stained with the mud and blood of the trenches. When the girl opened it in the secrecy of her room there floated out one white feather. The deserter had come back, the coward had become a hero.

This is the story of John Mark.
"Paul thought it not good to take him with them who had deserted them and went not with them to the work." (Acts 15:38)

"Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." (II Timothy 4:11)

Here are two estimates of the same man. More striking still, they are not only estimates of the same man, but they are given by the same man. Look at the first: "Paul thought it not good to take him who had deserted." John Mark had come forward offering his services for a difficult enterprise. He proposed to accompany Paul and his cousin Barnabas on a second missionary journey. But Paul vetoed it with emphasis. He virtually said, "He is no good. He will not stand up under pressure. He is all right when the going is good. He makes a fine parlor soldier. But when things grow tense, when courage is needed, when a man must have the grit to stand up in the face of scorn and shame and hardship and opposition, Mark is not the man on whom you can count." Paul thought it not good to take him because he knew him for a deserter.

Here is this same man's estimate of John Mark some ten years later. At this time Paul is not on a missionary journey. He is imprisoned in Rome. His friends are few. To be associated with him is no longer a road-way to popularity. He is passing through experiences that test a man's soul. Only the steadfast, the courageous, the gallant-hearted are of any worth as friends in situations such as that of Paul. For whom does he make request when his desperate hour is upon him. Thinking of that long list of friends that he had accumulated across the years, he calls for John Mark, the one-time deserter. "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry." The coward has come back. The deserter has become a hero. Here, then, is a story that comes very close to life.
I

What do we know about Mark?

1. He was the son of a well-to-do woman living in Jerusalem by the name of Mary. In all probability, Mary was a widow since her husband is never mentioned. That she was a woman of means is indicated by the fact that she had a roomy house that made it possible for her to entertain many guests. There was perhaps no home in Jerusalem quite so intimately connected with the Early Church. Mark's mother had doubtless been hostess to all the apostles. In all probability she had been hostess to Jesus Himself more than once.

It is highly probable that it was in this home that Jesus gathered with His disciples to celebrate the Last Supper. It was down the stairway of this well-known home that Judas went to plunge out into the night when he betrayed his Lord. It was out of this home that Jesus went with His other disciples a bit later to wrestle in Gethsemane with His mysterious agony. In all probability John Mark was very friendly to the Master at this time, though he may not have yet avowed his faith.

It is thought that John Mark was the young man referred to in the Gospel of Mark alone as following Jesus decked only in a linen cloth.

Here is the story: "And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked." This is the picture. John Mark has just been awakened by a tumult in the street. The hour is late. He is preparing himself for bed. Possibly he has just come from the bath. But knowing that something unusual is afoot, he opens the door to a slit and asks, "What is happening?" One shouts from the crowd, "We are going to Gethsemane to arrest a prisoner." Mark starts to shut the door but his interest is quickened. "What prisoner?" "Jesus of Nazareth," came the answer.

That word worked a transformation in listless Mark. Jesus was his friend. He had just been his guest. He will not suffer Him to be arrested without a protest. With a fine madness, he grabs the first covering that comes to his hand. It is a
linen cloth. He wraps it about his nude body. Forgetting the rather ridiculous figure that he makes, he dashes down the street. He reaches the garden just as the soldiers are on the point of making his arrest. He makes toward Jesus, resolved to share His danger, to die with Him if necessary.

Then something unforeseen happens. A group of young men, possibly acquaintances of Mark's, see him and are astonished at his ridiculous appearance. These young men are there, not as the friends of Jesus, nor yet as His enemies—they are merely on-lookers. They do not mean any special harm. But most of the harm in the world is done by folks who do not mean any. Unmindful of what they are doing, they lay hold on Mark, perhaps with loud laughter. The young hero takes his eyes off Jesus, comes to himself, and his courage slips from him as does the linen sheet. Then he rushes panic-stricken into the night. That left a wound on John Mark's soul from which it took quite awhile I daresay to recover.

As Mary's home had been the home of the church before the crucifixion so it was afterward. It was in this home that the people had gathered for united prayer just after the death of James when the sword was suspended by a thread over the head of Simon Peter. It was in this home that Mark's cousin Barnabas stayed when he was in Jerusalem. In was to this home no doubt that Barnabas brought his friend Paul when the latter came to Jesus just after his conversion when everybody was afraid of him. Everybody mistrusted him except one—that was his friend Barnabas, the son of consolation. Naturally, this wounded and humiliated young man, Mark, recovered from his shame. He came out openly to avow the faith that was his mother's faith and the faith of his mother's distinguished guests. By and by when news came to Jerusalem that both Jews and Gentiles down at Antioch were accepting the Christian faith they sent Barnabas down to investigate. "When Barnabas," says the story, "came, he saw the work of the Lord and was glad, for he was a good man, full of the holy spirit." By and by this good man Barnabas sent for his friend Paul to help him carry on the work of the Kingdom in Antioch. To this vigorous and growing Christian community also came Mark. He was not a leader, but he was a part of the
stirring events that were in process of re-making that ancient world.

II

Then came John Mark's big opportunity and his tragic failure. It was from this city of Antioch that the first Christian missionaries were sent out to begin the evangelization of the world. Here is the story. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them........So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed."

When we think of all the heroic saints who through the centuries have gone out to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, when we think of those who have dared to believe with Jesus that Christianity is a world religion, we must put Paul and Barnabas at their head. But these two great souls did not go alone. They had John Mark as their attendant. What an opportunity, what an honor, what a privilege!

Their first stop was at the island of Cyprus. Here the missionaries were treated with honor. Cyprus had been the home of Barnabas. His cousin Mark had perhaps visited him there. Their ministry in this field was without hardship. But from Cyprus they sailed for Perga in Asia Minor. Here everything was different. John Mark reached the conclusion that he was not cut out for a missionary. One morning when his friends went to awake him, they found that his bed had not been slept in. Perhaps there was a note telling them that they need not seek him—he had gone back to Jerusalem. Why did Mark leave? Many explanations have been offered. There have been some keen apologists for Mark. They have told us that the text says, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul,"—that therefore the enterprise was not really Mark's. But whatever Mark's reason, we can be sure of this—that it was not a good one. Had it been a good one, large-hearted Paul, who lived in the spirit of the Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians, would not have mistrusted him as he did.

Why indeed did he go back? Certainly it was not because he was not needed. It was not because the work was beneath him. It was not because it was not roomy enough and important enough to enlist all his powers. Many guesses have been made
in an effort to explain this decision. Let me give a few of them. First, some think that Mark left on account of his resentment against Paul. When the missionary enterprise began, Barnabas was the leader. The Holy Spirit had said, "Separate me Barnabas and Paul," but they had not gone far in the enterprise before Paul became the leader. Perhaps John Mark resented seeing his brilliant cousin thrust into second place. Perhaps he himself was not honored as he thought he ought to be. Perhaps he said, "If Paul is going to treat us like this, I am going to quit." If Mark quit from resentment, he becomes a part of a great multitude.

Second, it has also been suggested that Mark was desperately home-sick. He seems to have been an only son. He had been tenderly nurtured. He had been in a sense tied to his mother's apron-string. Surrounded by strange faces, he was gripped by a homesickness that tortured him. At last he forgot his high quest and said, "Whatever the consequences, I am going home."

Third, I think the real reason for this decision was a lack of moral earnestness connected with a certain amount of softness. Mark's faith up to this time was a bit of an inherited faith. He had leaned on the strength and courage of others. He had looked to this missionary journey as a high venture. It was to be an opportunity to travel in strange lands. It was to be a bit of a triumphal procession where troops of pagans would come readily and eagerly to accept the faith. But it did not turn out that way. Mark found himself at times a subject of laughter and scorn. He saw that opposition was to be expected. Worse still, there was positive persecution! He could not take the gaff. He was not in earnest enough to pay the price. He wanted to be religious, but he wanted a cheap religion. He was willing to follow the Lord but on his own terms. Therefore, when he found himself climbing the hill of difficulty, he slunk away and went back home. He belongs to that great company who insist on a cheap religion which is a religion that satisfies neither God nor man. Therefore, he forgot his high quest and put out for home, resolved that he was through with the missionary enterprise for life.
But that was not the end. Ours is a Gospel of a second chance. It is more than that—it is a Gospel of a third chance, a fourth chance, of a hundredth chance. It is a Gospel of a thousandth chance. Our Lord calls upon us to forgive until seventy times seven. He Himself would certainly not do less. Mark had a streak of weakness and softness in him, but the Gospel demonstrated its power to make him over. He wrote the Second Gospel which is really the first. Tradition says that he founded the first theological school in Alexander where he died a martyr.

How was this failure made anew? How did this coward become a hero? There were three men in his life who I think under God remade him.

1. Paul's contribution was in jarring Mark and compelling him to see himself. One day Paul said to his friend Barnabas, "Let us re-visit the churches." Barnabas was willing. "All right," he said, "we will take my cousin John Mark with us."

"No, you won't," said Paul. Paul was face to face with the test that comes to us sometimes of hurting an individual or hurting a whole cause. He loved John Mark, hated terribly to humiliate him by refusing to take him, but he had not seen sufficient marks of repentance. He said, "Even pagans will suffer for their faith. John Mark by his cowardice did not prove an asset—he proved a liability. I am for the largest good for the largest number. Therefore, I refuse to take him.

Fine, gentlemanly Barnabas resented such sternness. You remember Paul said, "Love does not have a paroxysm." But Luke tells us there was a paroxysm here. These two saints became so indignant that they separated. John Mark was the cause of a falling out between two of the best men of the New Testament. I rather think the paroxysm was on the part of Barnabas rather than that of Paul, though Paul did stand firm, saying, "I would love to have you alone, Barnabas, but if Mark has to go I will go alone first." Mark knew that Paul loved him. The fact that a great hearted saint like that thought him useless and worse than useless must have given John Mark furiously to think.
2. A second great help in the recovery of John Mark was the love and understanding of Barnabas. Both of these men were right I think in regard to Mark. He needed the rebuke of Paul. He needed the clinging confidence of Barnabas. When he saw this brave and generous cousin of his turn his back on about the best friend he had in the world rather than hurt him and let him down, it must have put the ease-loving Mark upon his mettle. He must have resolved that he would not disappoint a man who had believed in him and had stood by him at such a price.

3. But the final and supreme influence on the human side, I think, in the recovery of John Mark was the influence of Simon Peter. Paul and Barnabas were both helpful, but they had never passed through the experience of John Mark. When Mark had told his story of shame, when he had confided in the apostle the dismal fear that he would never be any account, Peter told the shamed young fellow his story. He told him how he had boasted of his loyalty. He told him how after that boast he had lied. He told him also how Jesus had forgiven him, how He could hardly wait to get the door of His tomb open to send the word, "Tell My disciples and Peter."

Here then is a story for all of us for we have all failed. Some of us have failed so many times that we are half persuaded to quit trying. But bear in mind this healing fact—no failure need be final! The difference between the finally defeated and the finally victorious is not that the one failed and the other never did. It is rather in this—both failed, but one took his failure as final and the other his to start anew. "When the cup was marred in the making, he made it again."

That is a gospel for John Mark. That is a gospel for all the John Marks such as you and I who yet have it in us by the grace of God to have a sentence like this written about us, "He is profitable unto me for the ministry."
"A BUSINESS WOMAN"

"The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul."

Acts 16:14

This is a part of the thrilling story of the conversion of a business woman named Lydia. She was evidently a woman of some culture, also of wealth and position. According to the records, she is the first convert to Christianity on the Continent of Europe. What an army of converts has come since then, but at the head of these walks this woman, Lydia.

Yet it is my firm faith that given a chance, God does guide. I am sure that there is a kind of light that leads those who are willing to follow. Speaking out of my own experience, I must confess that I am often far more convinced of that divine leading as a fact of the past than of the present. Looking back on my yesterdays, I am sure that at certain turns the good hand of God was guiding.
Yet I have often been too slow to claim this as a present experience. Then I have been equally hesitant to claim the sanction of God for all my choices; I have done too many foolish things. Then I have been made the more shy by hearing claims of Divine Leadership from the lips of those who had just done something very questionable, if not positively wicked. There are those that blame God for some of the most vicious deeds of which they are conscious.

Paul really believed that as he acknowledged God in all his ways, He would direct his path. Being thus attentive to the Divine Voice, his plans were often upset. The will of God is a disturbing element in our lives if we take it seriously. God has a way of upsetting our plans and sending us upon a road that we had no purpose of walking.

This means that the guidance of the Spirit not only constrains, but restrains. It is under the constraint of the Spirit that Saul had set out on this missionary journey. It is under the guidance of that Spirit that he was carrying on his work, but when he sought to go into Asia, that province of Asia Minor in which is located the City of Ephesus, God said "No". When he then turned to Bithynia, again God shut the door in his face.

Now it was after this that Saul made his way to Troas. Here he had a vision of a man of Macedonia. This man was holding out his hands in appeal and saying, "Come over and help us". At once Saul accepted the appeal of this vision as the constraint of the Holy Spirit, so he with his companions that included Luke and Silas set out at once and made their way to the City of Philippi.
This was the first city of the province and a Roman Colony.
This was also the first Christian to invade Europe.

Now arriving at his destination, naturally his eyes were open wide in search of the man whose call he had heard. But if there was a single man in that great city who desired the help of Paul and his friends, there was no evidence of it. When they began to seek for him, naturally they turned first to find a synagogue, but there was not a synagogue in the city. The Jews were either too few or too indifferent to build one. Then a few days later when the Sabbath came, they went out by the riverside where they had hopes that there might be a place of prayer. It so happened that their hopes were well founded; they discovered a group of women who had gathered for prayer.

As we read the story we see that this little congregation had not come together to hear the famous missionary and his friends, they had come together for prayer. But having made contact, this great evangelist went at once to the task.

II

What, I wonder, did Paul say to this very disappointed congregation. There was not a single man present. Women in that day did not have a very high standing. They were regarded more highly among the Greeks than among any of the ancient people. But here they counted for so little that a Rabbi did not speak to a woman
on the street. You remember that when the disciples of Jesus returned from the village and found Him talking to a Samaritan woman, they were astonished. They marveled, the story reads, that he talked with a woman they were amazed that Jesus should talk to this woman at all. Yet it is amazing what a large part woman played in the history of the early church.

As Paul sat down among this little group, he did not whisper to Silas to do the talking or say I am going to wait until I can get a congregation. Paul was interested in the multitude, he was interested also in the few and in the individual. He taught publicly and from house to house. I wonder what he said to this little group.

I can imagine he got at once to the heart of his message. He told these women how the Eternal God had broken into human history in the coming of Jesus Christ. He told how this Jesus having lived his life within the will of God, had been crucified and that wounds that all of mankind had been healed. He told them of his resurrection, and that those who had known Him and loved Him and believed Him became aware of Him as a constant presence both among them as a group and within them as individuals. He told them that this thrilling and transforming experience was for them, each personally.

So what, we do not know how many converts Paul had that
Sabbath, we are sure that he had one. "One who heard us was a woman names Lydia from the City of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods who was a worshipper of God." The Lord opened her heart to give heed what was said by Paul.

The Lord opened her heart; that does not mean that Lydia had no part to play in this conversion. "Behold I stand at the door and knock." That is as far as our Lord goes. He never crashes the door; he did not do so in the case of Lydia. He only opened Lydia's heart in that through the Spirit brought to Lydia of the truth of what Paul was saying, then she herself opened the door. This woman, therefore, became a Christian as everyone does who turns to our Lord at all by hearing and believing.

III

This service was not as exciting as the one at Pentecost; there were not three thousand saved here, only one and yet this was a tremendous event. It would be impossible to measure its greatness. The genuineness of Lydia's conversion at once became apparent. That is always the case. You cannot no more hide a new nature within a human heart and keep it hidden than you can put springtime into a garden without its giving expression to that springtime in terms of fruits and flowers.

Lydia was not a Jewish woman though she had been converted into the Jewish Faith, but when she found Jesus Christ she was at once gripped with a passion for helping. She was especially fitted to
help not only by the new lift that she had experienced by her ability and position and wealth.

She was a seller of purple from the City of Thyatira, and her native city was conspicuous for its wealth. One source of its wealth was the wool trade, another was purple dye. This dye came from two sources: from the root of a small plant that grew about the city; and it was also found in a small shellfish. One of the shellfish could produce a single drop of dye. This dye was, therefore, quite expensive. We are told that it also cost more than two hundred dollars a pound. Lydia, doubtlessly, shared in the wealth that this dye with its purple cloth produced.

Her wealth and position here further indicated that she could set up headquarters in this Roman Colony of Philippi. Here, no doubt, she was prospering. Her husband was not mentioned, possibly she did not have one, but she did have a household. That is, she had a home of her own with a revenue of servants.

One way she saw she could help was by inviting these homeless missionaries to her own room quarters. Her invitation was pressing. We all know quite well how to invite these folks to our home who we hope will not come. We simply say, "you won't go home with me will you?" That calls for but one answer, "certainly not." Lydia pressed her invitation. Luke uses the same word here that he uses in the twenty-fourth chapter of his Gospel. You remember how Cleopas and his companion had traveled with Jesus to their own front door, then Jesus made as he would continue his journey, but they constrained him saying abide with us. That is they all
put rather violent hands on him and said you must come. It was so that Lydia compelled Saul and his friends to make their home in her home.

Now this marks the beginning of Christianity in Europe. It also marks the beginning of the church that of all others, Saul loved the best. Of all the writings of this great apostle, none is more beautifully tender nor more tenderly beautiful than the one he wrote to the Philippians. This church seems to have deserved this love for it gave love in abundance. Thus loving, it shared with Saul in his great ministry in every way possible.

Now the fact that Saul does not mention Lydia by name in his letter does not mean does not put a question mark as to the worth of her contribution. She was possibly young when this letter was written, she may have moved back to her native city, more probably she had moved to that Eternal City to which Saul was bound. But be that as it may, it is my conviction that the deep devotion of this gifted woman heartened Saul and his friends during their mission at Philippi. I believe also that her radiant spirit and deep dedication gave the church a spiritual lift that left in it an abiding springtime.

What is this to say to you and me? It tells us that the size and quality of the congregation is none of our business. I heard a man preach to a little handful of people who were assembled in a great church. His sermon was finished more than fifty years
ago, and yet something that he said lives in my heart to this day.

It was certainly a dismal looking [missing word] when a lay preacher stood up that snowy day and shouted in an [missing word] all but empty church, "look unto me and be ye saved". But the church wasn't quite empty, there was a young chap there named Charles Spurgeon and the Lord opened Spurgeon's heart that he should believe. He looked and was saved. Not only did he look but his face became so radiant that he induced countless hundreds to look with him. Lydia [missing word] also has a word to say to us who sit in the pew. It is easy to preach to a great congregation than to an empty house. The presence of people inspires the speaker to preach. To a congregation of five or six scattered individuals is often like trying to kindle a fire with one stick of wood that takes a lot of oil.

But if a little handful tends to discourage the preacher, they often discourage each other in a more deadly way. How easy it is for one of these lonely souls to look at the other and say in his heart "nothing doing". But the worth of a service to you is not measured by the multitude if you will so attend as to believe and allow God thus to open your heart. He will come in, and that service will be to you the very beginning of days.
THE JUDGMENT

"God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness." Acts 17-31

My subject is The Judgment, or to put it more accurately, it is the judgments of God. In reciting our creed, we have just asserted our faith in a future judgment. "That he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." But in spite of this fact, I am quite sure that this belief which we have asserted is for many of us not a genuine conviction. The average man today is about as deeply interested in the judgments of God as I am in the doings of Young Widow Brown, whose trials and tribulations go out over the air day by day. How is it, then, that such an old fashioned faith has worked its way into the creed of Christendom?

I

One easy answer to that question is to be found in the Bible. The fact that this wisest of all books has so much to say about the judgments of God ought not to be ignored. As it tells of God's amazing love and mercy toward us, it tells also of his judgments. On its very first page we come face to face with the fact of judgment. Treat the story of Adam and Eve how we may, this fact we cannot dodge: when they proved disobedient to God, they suffered for it. Judgment was visited upon them. The penalty that they suffered was not merely the slap of an ill-natured God. It was the inevitable consequence of their disobedience.

This is true of the judgments of God always. Never does he punish us in anger. I have known parents who, conscious of the fact that they had neglected a child and then lost that child,
believed that God was punishing them in anger. That is to misunderstand God altogether. I knew a man years ago who refused to eat. He grew weaker and weaker till he fell into a coma and was only saved by forced feeding. Yet nobody blamed his weakness and narrow escape on God. He was only suffering the inevitable consequence of the violation of law.

Stern Amon thundered against the nations that surrounded Israel in tones that awe the heart. But having won the attention of his hearers by condemning their enemies, he then pronounced judgment upon Israel herself. As he warned of a coming judgment, so did others of the great prophets who came after him. Some of them did so with breaking hearts and tear stained faces. The judgment that they promised came to pass with the result that the nation was swept into exile.

At times judgment walks hard upon the heels of wrong doing. Exact poetic justice is meted out as quickly as reaping follows sowing. A man by the name of Naboth is stoned to death. Wild dogs lap up his blood down by the pond. Other days go by and the dogs are again lapping blood by that same pond. It is rich, royal blood. It is the blood of Ahab, who shared in the murder of Naboth. While the writers of the Old Testament do not affirm that exact poetic justice is always meted out in this fashion, yet they do agree that every offender is judged. They sum up their convictions in these grim words: "Be sure your sin will find you out."

When we turn to the tenderest pages of the New Testament, we find this note of judgment not softened but sharpened. Paul, speaking to the intellectuals of the Areopagus, tells them that God has appointed a day
in which he will judge the world. Before Felix, he reasoned of "righteousness, temperance and of judgment to come." In his letter to the Romans he reminds them that God is going to judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. Writing to the Corinthians, he declares that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Where did he, with the other writers of the New Testament, get such an idea? They learned it in part from the Old Testament, but they learned it most convincingly from the lips of Jesus. By far the most harsh and shocking words with regard to judgment were uttered by our Lord. In parable after parable he reminds us of the judgments that men inevitably suffer as a consequence of their wrong choices.

For instance, the man with one talent was cast into outer darkness, not because he had wasted his talent but because he had failed to use it. The man who built his house upon the sand had to see the work of his hands become an utter wreck, not because God was angry at him, but as the inevitable consequence of his own foolishness. The five foolish girls failed to get into the marriage feast. They were separated from their wise sisters and from the privileges of the feast as a consequence of their un-readiness. That debauch, rich Pharisee who once gave a banquet every day found himself beyond death in the grip of tormenting memories because no other destiny was possible for one who had lived in utter neglect of the needy at his own gate.
amples. We come had in America the institution of slavery. Not
one shall set a trench about thee and cut thou art within the
house, and thou shall not lament them, nor another that is
not thine. But there is no judgment adequate to refer to
maintain the Bible seriously, and show all classes that
wrong seriously weakens our moral fiber. With every refusal to see the
light, we in some measure lose our capacity to see. But it is
equal to refusal, unless we hold in the judgments of God as we believe
the Bible, and are willing to accept the law. I believe in the
to account mathematics reasonable. I think, has liquor drinking
been the cause for many cases of the first place because the judgments
and facts of national history. We cannot demonstrate solely upon
the Bible for the record of God's judgments. These are written
will over the pages of our bloods yesterday. Many misrepresentations
in the long ago that believed, that right makes right. Other are
clear nations that cover anyone at the appearance of the wall. They
themselves judged God, because it is the same. Then,
your own judgment upon yourself. Some have already sentenced them-
selves. Now, we have to go solely to ancient history for the ex-

amples. We once had in America the institution of slavery. Not one part of America, but the nation was judged. What wonderful people are the Germans! Their genius is evidenced by the fact that twice in a single generation they have threatened to conquer the world. Yet Germany has now been judged, together with our own and the other nations that shared her sin. Judgment is a fact of history.

2. Not only is judgment a fact of history, but it is a present fact. Nations and men are being judged now. Nations and men are now making those choices that enable God to say, "Come ye blessed," or compel Him to say, "Depart from me, ye cursed." Right now the judgments of God are abroad in the earth. Every time we stand at the forks of the road we face inevitable judgment. With every wrong choice we weaken our moral fiber. With every refusal to see the light, we in some measure lose our capacity to see. But it is equally true that every right choice brings new strength and every loyalty to truth a clear vision. Judgment is a present fact.

Not since I have been a minister, I think, has liquor drinking been so common among church people. Now I am quite intelligent enough to know that every body who takes a drink is not going to become a drunkard. Yet this fact remains — liquor is not on the side of the angels. It is not on the side of little children. It is not on the side of the home. It is not on the side of the church. Liquor doesn't play on our team. That, every church member knows. Therefore, when you take the side of the liquor team, you pass judgment upon yourself. Some have already sentenced themselves to this, that they can now do without a pang what once
brought the torture of an outraged conscience. Judgment is a fact
of the here and now.

3. Believing, then, that judgment is a fact of the past and
of the present, it is easy for me to believe in a judgment to come.
I shall be judged tomorrow by the turn I take whenever my road forks.
I shall be judged when it takes that final turn that brings me face
to face with the life to come. At death we are all judged. At the
hour of our departure, we go each to his own place. I know there
are those who fancy that, as Kipling puts it, "We lie down for an
eon or two." But that, I am sure, is not the teaching of the New
Testament.

For instance, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul affirms
that to be absent from the body is to be present in the Lord. Jesus
said to the revolutionary who died by his side, "Today thou shalt be
with me in Paradise." Do not, I beg, think of your loved ones who
have passed on in Christ's fellowship as being asleep in some cem-
tery. Those who have died in the Lord are even now consciously
alive in his presence. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying" not
blessed shall be, but "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord
from hence forth."

If then, we go at death each to his own place, why is there a
final judgment? I confess that I can only grope here. But it is my
conviction that the Final Judgment is not in order to determine our
destiny, but that we may enter into the fullness of our reward. "We
shall all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ,"
writes Paul. We shall be made manifest to ourselves as well as to
others. We shall there see the full consequences of our right choices.
We shall perhaps see how that by touching one child for Christ, we were through that child enabled to touch a score. We shall see how that score in turn was able to touch thousands. We can see how a choice for good or ill is like a stone dropped into a quiet lake, how the waves of our influence spread to the end of time and then lap upon the shores of eternity.

III

How what is the basis of this judgment?

Let it be said at once that it is not creed. No man is to be approved for his orthodoxy, or condemned for his lack of it. Nor are we to be judged on the basis of our church affiliation. You may claim that yours is the only church, but that claim will be futile as you stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Nor are we going to be judged by the position we have held in the church or in society or in the world. At the Judgment these things will not matter. Therefore, many that were first will be last and many that were last will be first. What then, I repeat, is the basis of judgment? In answering this question I am going to confine myself to the words of Jesus.

1. Every idle word. Our Lord declares that we shall give account at judgment for every idle word. That sounds harsh at first glance. It makes us feel like asking God with angry Job, "If I do sin, what is that to thee, O thou Spy upon mankind?" But what is the idle word? It is the unguarded word. It is the word we speak off the record. What I say in this pulpit is not of necessity a revelation of what I am. I am on guard here. The unguarded word is
the word that reveals the real man. When, therefore, Jesus declares that we are to be judged for our idle words, he means that we are to be judged for what we are, that character determines destiny.

2. Brotherliness, expressed in costly kindness. Jesus, in his picture of the Last Judgment, shows us two groups, both of which were surprised. There were those who were surprised at being turned away. There were others who were equally surprised at being made welcome. What was the difference between them? One group had simply failed in being kind. They had not been brotherly. They had refused to love. The others had persistently possessed hearts so full of love that they had gone out of their way to help those who were hungry and naked, sick and in prison. Here, then, Jesus is telling us again that we are judged by what we are. Character determines destiny.

3. Finally, we are going to be judged on the basis of our attitude towards Jesus Christ himself. That is the fundamental test. Listen to his own words: "For judgment as I came into the world." Of course, judgment was not Jesus' primary purpose in coming. He came to seek and to save. But judgment is one of the inevitable consequences of his coming. When Jesus was sentenced to death, it was Pilate and those associated with him who were judged, not our Lord. To reject him is to prefer darkness to light. It is thus to brand yourself as evil. It is the same story over again. Wrong choices lead to wrong character, and wrong character to wrong destiny. Character determines destiny.
IV

Here, then, is a great certainty. We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. This is the affirmation of the Bible. It is an affirmation, in a peculiar sense, of Jesus himself. It is an affirmation of history and experience. What are we to do in the light of this fact? I answer with a story that is so old that to some it will be new.

Years ago a distinguished judge, at the risk of his own life, stopped a run-away horse that was being driven by an ignorant driver. A few weeks later, this same man committed murder and was tried and found guilty before the judge who had befriended him. Then came the question, "What have you to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you according to law?" "Judge," came the tearful reply, "don't you know me? I am the man you saved." "Yesterday," came the sorrowful answer, "I was your savior. Today I have to be your judge."

Even so, Jesus Christ must be for every one of us either Savior or Judge. If we accept him as Savior, we have nothing to fear. "He who believeth in him is not condemned."
And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

Act 20:22

I.

Here is a man doing an admirable thing. He is taking the hard road when he might have taken the one that is easy. He is going up against danger when he might play safe. He is facing up to discomfort and privation when he might be comfortable. He is throwing away his life in closing the prison door upon himself, when he might go free. What a strange piece of conduct.

This he is doing, not from any hopes of worldly gain. There is, I believe no money in it. Men will risk everything for gold. Let gold be found at the north pole of the equator and men will flock to it without regarding what it might cost them in terms of personal suffering. But, here is no hopes of worldly gain whatever. If it is possible for him to make any division in his material wealth, it is to lessen it rather than to increase it.

No more is this man following the hard road because that is what is expected of him. Sometimes we take the difficult turning because we feel in a sense compelled to do so by the demands of public opinion or by what is expected of us by our friends. But such is not the case with Paul. "Don't go up to Jerusalem" They plead as they fairly lay hands upon him. It will certainly get you into trouble. It will mean the loss of your liberty, perhaps mean the loss of your life. You are the most valuable man among us, we cannot spare you. Now be sensible and don't go. Then matters grew worse. They began to weep over him.
At last Paul turns upon them "What mean you by weeping and breaking my heart? Your tears do not change in the least the necessity of my going." I have to go in spite of your tears, you only make it harder. At last, they gave up. You cannot argue with a man who has a conviction. You cannot argue with one to whom an inner voice has spoken. "You speak of bonds and imprisonment, said Paul hotly. "What of it?" I am ready not only to be bound in Jesus, but to die for the name of Jesus Christ." Now what can you do with a man like that? Just make it nothing.

II.

Now it is this high choice on the part of Paul that is of the very essence of the cross. Cross bearing, we are taught, is a necessity. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross." But, what does Jesus mean by this? What is it to bear the cross? We sing "Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone and there's a cross for me." That is profoundly true, but what does it mean? What cross are we to bear? Just what does the cross mean in your everyday life?

Many of us, I am persuaded, it must mean very little. It is an affair that is exceedingly beg and hazy. A vast popular himn says "On a hill far away stands an old rugged cross." Far away indeed for many of us. It is a historic fact that has grown very mysty and very dim with the passing of the centuries. In some way perchance it is connected with our salvation. In some way it should touch our lives. But it all seems very mysterious and very far removed from our everyday struggles, sorrows and failures. We think of the cross as we gather about the Communion table. We wear it as an ornament, but as a practical working experience in our daily lives, to that we are too often strangers. What then, I repeat is the cross? Your cross and mine. Life for most of us is full of burdens. We appreciate what Paul meant when he said," Everyone shall bear his own burdens." I have mine. You have yours. Just what your burden is I do not know. It maybe a burden of pain. It maybe a burden of personal
loss. You have just turned away from a new made grave and the burden for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still. It maybe a burden of some secret sorrow that you do not bear with anyone but God. These burdens, we often speak of as our cross. But such burdens, while they maybe very heavy and very grievous they are not cross bearing at all. What then is it to bear the cross? The cross is a burden that we bear of our own choice. It is not something that is thrust upon us against our will. It is something that we take up, that the call of love, a distinct inner voice. That is what it meant for Jesus. He did not have to bear the cross. He did not have to die on Calvary. But through his entire life he chose to get under the burdens of others. He chose the way of the cross and when at last that choice brought him to Golgotha, he makes it plain that it is of his own choosing. Life is not being wrrenched from his grudging fingers. "No man" he declared properly taketh it from me. I lay it down myself.

In what sense then are you bearing a cross? Only in so far as you are doing things for the sake of others that you do not have to do. That gift that you made, That kind word that you spoke. That hard fight that you made for anothers deliverance. That was cross bearing. Who ever dares to suffer that others may be helped. Who ever is willing to take the hard road that his brother might find life a bit richer. Who ever of his own choice bleeds through anothers wounds or weeps through anothers tears. That man is bearing his cross. That man is a part of the brotherhood of those who have heard the call of Christ "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

But while the burdens that are not incident to life are not cross bearing, they may become so. One day a man from dark Africa was paying a visit to the country of his fathers. He was a swarthy, husky chap, bent on seeing everything that was to be seen. When he entered the city gate he encountered a crowd, he determined to find what it was all about. So he got to the center of the crowd and discovered that three prisoners were on their way to the place of execution. Just then one of them staggered and fell under the weight of his heavy cross. Before he had time to know what was happening
an iron hand gripped him by the shoulder and a gruff voice shouted, "Pick it up." Simon went hot and cold. Why, of all others, should this shameful thing happen to him? Must he be humiliated and disgraced by having a cross loaded on his shoulders? But the voice that commanded was the voice of Rome and there was no denying. With bitter shame and inward curse he bent his back to the load and began his march toward Calvary. "I am sorry to have involved you in my difficulty," a quite voice might have said, "But I thank you for your help." And Simon turned and looked at the prisoner at his side. What a tender face and how strong it was. Simon somehow began to forget his shame. "I do not mind at all if it was any help to you."

Thus the two made their way to Calvary. Walked as if they walked alone. There were just the two of them as they climbed the place of the skull. There was just the two as they went to the cross. There was just the two when he said "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." There was just the two when he cried, "It is finished" Then this husky son of Africa who had borne the cross so grudgingly took it up for love sake and bore it to the end of his days. That which had once been his shame became his glory. That which had once been a weight upon his shoulders became wings to lift him up. A mere burden, galling and bitter was transformed by love into a cross that he bore with unspeakable joy. A cross is what we do for others and for our Lord at the call of love.

III.

Now what is the glory of cross bearing?

1. It gets the best work done that is done in this world. Jesus was sure that he could do something through his death on the cross that he could do no other way. All great work is done in that spirit. This is true of all great art and all great literature. It is true of all efforts to serve. There stood by the cross of Jesus, Mary his mother. The mother's place has been constantly by the cross. Therefore, her contribution to life has been the richest made by any other individual.
2. It is such cross bearing that takes captive our hearts. These folks that choose the difficult and dangerous way for love sake, they bewilder us at times. If there any thus, we try to persuade them, we tell them how foolish they are, how utterly mad, we say.

Pass not so near those outcast sons of men
Where walked your Christ ahead, lest you
Share the rebel's wrath
Beware the woe the bitter shame of him
Your flaming zeal speak not so real,
Keep on your prudent way with the crowd

But, those that refuse to listen to us bring us into their debt, challenging our admiration and make us bow our heads and hearts in their presence. Even while we fail they seem to understand.

Here are some Africans exposing themselves to daily dangers in the company of a lone white man. At last that white man dies. He dies upon his knees with 500 miles of African jungle between him and the sea. But these simple black men bear his body upon their shoulders, braving savage beasts and savage men till they make that long journey on foot to give the body back to his friends. David Livingston had taken the hard road for them and they are in turn glad to take the hard road for him.

3. Then it is such cross bearing that brings us to our best. "I am crucified with Christ" said a certain saint of long ago. But that did not mean I was a living stranger of life. It meant rather that he was living abundantly. I am crucified with Christ, yet will I live, he shouts of the life abundant. It is so "He that loseth his life, shall keep it unto life eternal." There are multitudes today who are dodging the cross. But the attitude of their conduct is seen in the fact that in dodging the cross, they are dodging all that really makes life rich, roomy and worth while.

This is not theory, this is experience. It was the experience of Jesus himself as he took his way toward Calvary, staggering under the weight of his cross. Certain women burst into tears of wild grief. Jesus turned upon them with a mingling of
sternness saying. "Weary not for me, I am doing the thing of all others I must
yearn to do, I am not on the way to defeat but to victory, I am not on the way
to death, but to life eternal." The way to live is to die. The way to rise is to
stoop. The way to the crown is the way of the cross. Begin today to bear your
cross and you will find it true.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.
"The Making of a Minister."

Acts, 26: 16.

"Rise and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister." The story told in this chapter holds for the world an abiding fascination. It will never grow stale. There will never come a day when it will not be interesting. So I think we are to be congratulated this morning on the privilege of being allowed to hear Paul tell once more how he came to be a minister.

First of all, we are brought face to face with the fact that Paul was not always the man that we find him at this trial scene. There was a time when he was altogether different from what he is today. A marvelous change has been wrought in him. There was a time when life for him took on a new departure. There was a time when the whole current of his being was changed into new channels. And that day was not just yesterday. It was more than a quarter of a century ago. Since then Paul has had opportunity to fully test the reality of his experience and the genuineness of his faith. He is no novice speaking out of the abundance of his experience. He is a tried veteran of the cross, telling us of a transaction between himself and Jesus Christ, a transaction whose genuineness has been tested by almost half a life time of strenuous living.

How did Jesus Christ succeed in making a minister out of Paul? I confess at once that we would never have expected it. Those who knew Paul were the last ones that would ever have believed that he would be converted and become a Christian missionary. Even after his conversion it was exceedingly hard for him to win a hearing among the older saints because they could not believe that the marvelous miracle was really true. They could not believe that Paul had really become a follower of Jesus.

The first view we get of him is the one calm, cool man in the midst of an enraged mob. A sunny faced saint named Stephen is being stoned to death. Paul is not stoning him. He is merely looking on. He is not urging on his murderers. He is simply standing by in indifferent silence. True, he guards the clothing of those who do the deed, but he himself seems to occupy a position of rather heartless neutrality.

And I am frank to say that this position is possibly the most hopeless that Paul ever occupied. From whom does the cause of Christ suffer most? Who injures and has injured most the progress of the Kingdom? It has not been the sworn enemies of God. It has been the neutral, the half hearted, the indifferent. These are the ones who are most harmful today. They are the ones who lie like huge stones across the mouth of the sepulcher. It is for this reason that Jesus Christ wished that the membership of the church of Liodecea was either cold or not. The positive enemies of our Lord do not wound him so deeply as those who are indifferent, who are half hearted, who are merely neutral.

But when we see Paul again his neutrality has passed away. That is, at least, more hopeful. From a mere spectator he has become the bitterest persecutor, "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church." He set himself deliberately to destroy it. He determined, so far as in him lay, to wipe out root and branch this growing sect that was even winning some of the priests to its fold.
And in the attainment of this end Paul was entirely conscientious. Let us not forget that. Paul was sure he was right. Listen: "I verily thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which things I also did." There are plenty of people today that think that it's right to do anything for which their conscience does not condemn them. We have a way of saying, "Let your conscience be your guide."

But conscience is not always a safe guide. It is like saying, to one who is studying music, "Let your ear be your guide." But you may not have a trained ear. If my conscience is to be my guide and is to guide me safely it must be a trained conscience. My fingers no more needed training for the playing of the violin than my conscience needs training in order for the proper discernment of right and wrong.

This conscientious Paul stopped at no crime. He persecuted people, he says, "even unto strange cities." At last having cleaned out Jerusalem, as he thought, he set out to render a like service in Damascus. But on the way he was arrested, as he himself put it, he was "apprehended." A light burst upon him and in the white brightness of that light he caught a vision of the risen Lord. The next moment he was prostrate upon his face in the desert dust and a voice was saying to him, "Rise and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee, for this purpose, for this purpose, to make thee a minister."

So God had a purpose in the life of Paul. He has a purpose in your life and mine. What was he trying to do with Paul anyway? What is he trying to do with you? What is he trying to do with me? He is trying to change us from rebels into servants. "Let my people go," He said to Pharaoh years ago. Why? That they may be free, that they may shout? Not primarily, - "Let my people go that they may serve me." That is God's purpose in every life. Even the Son of Man came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." God wants to make you into a servant.

And now I think God's will for you is just what you will for yourself, at least at the best moments of your life. You want to serve. At least you do if you have ever attained any spiritual stature at all. If you have ever passed from moral babyhood you want to be useful. You remember how Ulysses identified Achilles. It was by the fact that he chose weapons instead of toys. He chose that with which he might battle, that with which he might serve, instead of that with which he might merely play and amuse himself.

God tells Paul what He tells you and me, and that is that He wants to make a servant out of him. "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister." And this text does not simply tell the purpose of Christ's appearing to Paul, but it is also a revelation of the process.

How did Saul become Paul? How was this persecutor changed into a preacher? How did this menace become a minister? He was made so? we are ready to answer, by a vision of God. And that answer is true in a sense, but fundamentally it is not true.

What did this vision mean to Paul? What truth did it bring home to his heart that he did not know before? Just this, that Jesus Christ was not an impostor but the Savior of the world. It made him to
realize that the Man crucified on Calvary was not a pretender but the promised Messiah, the very Christ "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." And that same truth has been believed by you since your infancy, and yet it has never made you into a minister. You have never become a real live servant of God.

Why? For the simple reason that you have never done what Paul did. Why did this vision change Paul's life? For the simple reason that he responded to it. He lets us into the whole secret when he says, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." He cries with his lips in the dust, "Who art thou, Lord?" The significant word is "Lord." He is calling Jesus "Lord." He is enthroning Him as king. That, my friend, is conversion. And nothing else is.

And if you are to be God's servant, if you are to be in any way a Christian minister, - this experience must lie at the very beginning. You must accept Jesus Christ as Lord of your life. That is the one thing needful. That is the one essential. That is the fundamental requirement. Vitally, genuinely, whole heartedly you must enthrone Jesus Christ as Lord.

Nothing will take the place of this. No vision however glorious will be of any value without it. No amount of tears, no amount of prayers, no amount of effort will get anywhere without it. The first step is Paul's step, to call Jesus "Lord," not with your lips simply but with your whole being.

So you see that the process by which a human soul comes to make this surrender is not of prime importance. Men are brought to it in a thousand different ways. For a Saint Paul there is a flash and a fall and a rising again in the consciousness of the Lordship of Jesus. For a Matthew there is simply a call and a response. For a child there is a growing day by day into the consciousness of Christ as Lord.

On heart, remember that now you were converted or when, - these are interesting facts, but the supreme fact is have you come in your innermost being to enthrone Jesus Christ as Lord. If so, do not worry if you can not fix dates. Don't trouble yourself if there was no splendor such as Paul realized. We are told that there is a flower in the South Sea Islands that blooms with a report like the crack of a pistol. But that is not the way flowers bloom in your garden. One day there is a bud. That night that bud is baptized by the dew. The next morning the sun kisses open its lips. And the process has been noiseless, but one flower is as much open as the other.

So the process by which Paul became a minister is the same that is open to you and me today. It is the process of surrender. It is the process of yielding ourselves unto God. How do I become God's man and God's woman? The answer is so simple that we will not understand it. It is by a personal definite dedication of our lives to Him. If you are a sinner here at this moment just bow your soul while the preacher tries to preach and call Jesus Lord in real and tender earnestness and you will become His.

Now, how did this experience fit Paul for the work of the ministry? First, it got him upon his feet. It gave to him a holy self esteem. And mark, I say a holy self esteem. It was not a self esteem
born of his own conceit, but born rather of his own conscious relationship with God.

What does the world need at this moment? It is a prostrate world. It is a world that often grovels. It is a world stricken down under a burden of sin, under a burden of selfishness, under a burden of discontent, under a burden of weariness, under a burden of heartache and hate. What does the world need? It needs a power that can lift it upon its feet. It needs a power that can make it morally and spiritually erect.

That is not only the need of the world. It is the need of the church. We are not the upstanding men and women that we ought to be. We have not the moral erectness that we ought to have. We need a new baptism of self respect. We need the bracing uplift of a new and holy self esteem. We need to realize that the one absolutely essential thing in this world is the Church of Jesus Christ. We need the gracious uplift that comes from the consciousness of God’s presence with us and the fact that without such men the world rots down. Oh, let me repeat to you again, God can not save the world through a bunch of Uriah Heeps.

Paul had been a proud man before this experience, but he had never reached any such high moral stature as he has reached by virtue of it. How king he becomes! Wherever we find him he is a mighty upstanding God-conquered personality. The consciousness of the king Christ makes him king. He is the real captain on that vessel going to places in the Mediterranean. It is Paul. Who is the real king in this scene before the throne of Agrippa? It is Paul. Paul made erect by the presence of Jesus Christ in his life.

And believe me, hearts, the kingliest men that this world has ever known have been the men who began by accepting the Lordship of God as the supreme fact in their lives. What makes Elijah so unafraid as he rebukes the king? His consciousness of God. “It is God,” he says, “before whom I stand.”

That same fact accounts for the courage of Daniel. It accounts for the dauntless heroism of the apostles. It accounts for the kingly bearing of Luther. It accounts for the sturdy strength and upstanding majesty of the Puritan. “He groveled in the dust before his Maker, but he set his foot on the neck of his king.” And you can not account for his courage, for his audacious manliness except by the fact that he had bowed before God’s throne. Believe me, a real acceptance of the kingship of Jesus makes for kingy men.

Second, it was this experience that brought to Paul his motive for service. What was the motive that sent Paul on his tireless missionary journeys? What was it that kept him at it and always at it till the headsmen’s axe set him free to receive the victor’s crown? What motive power drove him night and day in spite of the perils of robbers and the perils of waters and the perils of false brethren?

First, there was the motive power of a divine authority. For Paul Christ’s word was law. That sounds trite. That sounds altogether commonplace. You are ready to say, “Christ’s word is law with almost everybody today.” But is it? Is Christ’s word law with you? You call Him Lord, but has He lorded it over you?
Take some of the most commonplace commands of His: "Love your enemies", - are you doing that? "Bless them that curse you and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you", - is that the law of your life, or do you pride yourself on the way you can nurse a grudge? Do you do that or do you simply love those that love you?

"Go ye and preach the Gospel to every creature." Have you ever taken that command with real seriousness? I know you have taken it seriously enough to give somewhat to missions. But have you ever taken it seriously enough to try to evangelize your own home? Have you ever taken it seriously enough to undertake to preach the Gospel to your own child or to your own husband or to your own friend? "Every branch that beareth not fruit", Christ says, "is taken away." Christ expects every man to be a witness. Paul from the time of his conversion set Christ's will as his law. He was driven on by the motive of a divine authority.

Paul was also driven on by the motive of a mighty love. He wanted to obey Jesus because the love of Christ had broken his own heart and had compelled his own tenderest love. What lies back of this man's ceaseless self giving? What is the motive force that drives him restlessly on? He lets us into the secret: "He loved me and gave Himself for me." The love of Christ constraineth me.

When Judson was asked why it was he became a missionary his reply first was, "I never had thought of that." And then he studied for a moment and said, "Well, I just thought that Jesus Christ would be glad to have me do it." That was the motive that sent him out for those lonely years of seemingly fruitless toil. He wanted to please Christ.

Then this experience brought into Paul's heart a new love for men. He had loved a creed before but now he loved men. His heart even breaks for the people here in the court, though many of them look upon him with cool and leering contempt. He is ready to spend and be spent for them though the more he loves them the more he be not loved. And heart, that is the divine gift of love. It only comes to those who dwell in the presence of Jesus.

And then last of all, it was in this experience that Paul got his message. It was here that his gospel was born. He believed that the gospel of Jesus Christ was the power of God unto salvation, not because of hearsay, not because he had reasoned the matter out but because he had tested it. His preaching was "the rich red wine from the grapes of his own experience."

I do not mean to say that Paul discovered everything that he knew about Jesus Christ in this one experience. Paul had a growing intimacy with Jesus. He was to bear witness not simply the things that he had seen, but of those things in which Christ would shortly appear unto him. He had a growing revelation of God and a growing and vital gospel to preach. But his preaching always was the product of his own experience.

And this, my friend, is the preaching that has been mighty in the upbuilding of the Kingdom throughout all the centuries. It is really the only preaching that counts. It was this kind of preaching that sent early Methodism over the world in a blaze of glory. It was this kind of preaching that made the old-time experience meeting a dynamo of divine power. Paul was a mighty theologian, but the most marvelous sermons he ever preached were those in which he told his own experience.
Do you know Melvin Trotter? He has gathered hundreds out of the streets of our cities that will one day walk the streets of that other City in white. What is the power of the man? It is not in his eloquent preaching. He says himself that he can not preach. I heard him one day as he said with tears, "I can only read a chapter to the folks and tell them my experience." But this experience he tells with shame and penitential tears and yet with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

One day a hopeless drunkard he came home to find his wife sitting with their one child upon her lap. The child was wrapped in his mother's skirt, for there was no covering in the house. And the little fellow was sick.

Mrs. Trotter had only one quarter. With this she sent her husband out for medicine. He was in the grip of the liquor habit and when he came to himself he was lying on a pile of ashes where the saloon had spewed him out. He got to his feet and went home. His wife met him at the door with a strange look on her face and said, "Melvin, you would not have done it if you could have helped it." And then she led him to the little cradle and the still form.

And that man got on his knees and put one hand on the dead baby's forehead and one around his broken hearted wife and vowed that he would never touch another drop of liquor. The next day he met an old pal and got hopelessly drunk before the funeral was over. And when he rose from the ash pile this time it was with the purpose of suicide in his heart.

But on the way he passed the Pacific Garden Mission and they were singing, "Throw out the life line." And this hopeless wreck went in, and when they asked for those who wanted prayer to come forward he went. He kneeled, he prayed and Jesus Christ saved him. And the gospel he preaches is born, as Paul's was born, of his own experience.

This kind of preaching the world will always hear. It will hear it because it is positive preaching and the world wants a sure word. And Paul stands in the presence of doubting and hesitating men and cries aloud and he says, "I know. I know Him. I know Jesus Christ. I know one who has might to take prejudice and hate out of a human heart because he has taken it out of mine. I know one who has skill to cleanse bloody hands because He has washed my hands and made them whiter than snow."

Some years ago I was holding a meeting for a gifted and brilliant preacher but one who never had conversions. Towards the close of the meeting he came to me with this word, "I have been wondering since you have been here why you have conversions and I don't." And he said, "I have reached the conclusion that you are dogmatic and I could never bring myself to be dogmatic."

What was he saying? "You speak with certainty, with conviction. You speak with great positiveness. I do not. I can not." And what was the result. He confessed it himself, nobody heard. Heart, he knew a thousand things that I did not know. Why should a man let what he does not know interfere with what he does know? I know who it is that saves, therefore I will turn aside from uncertainties and speak to the world of this certainty. It's a needy world and the time is short.
The making of a minister

Yes, here Paul got his message. He bowed a rebellious sinner and rose an obedient saint. And it never occurred to him after that to doubt the power of Jesus to save. And he told what he knew and men heard him.

And heart, if we will go with the conviction born of real experience in our voices men will hear us. How little of theology was known by that outcast woman that came to Jesus by the well curb! How utterly wrecked was her reputation, and yet when she rushed into the city with the word born of a personal experience we read this, "Many people believed because of the saying of the woman."

Now we are God's men and women, you and I. We have bowed, as Paul did, accepting the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. May that acceptance and that surrender be a vital and real something. If it is we will go forth with a new moral exactness, with a new motive and with a new courage. And when the world sees these marks of sainthood upon our faces it will not be faithless, but believing. Our Lord is saying to you and me today, "Rise and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister." May we know the

CCC:BB.
The Attorney for the Defense

But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee. Acts: 26-16

The text is a part of the proceedings of an ancient court of law. King Agrippa is on the bench as judge. When the prisoner at the bar takes his place before the court, the judge gives him permission to speak for the defense. This he does by going at once to the attack. His weapon of offense is the experience that had come to him as he journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus, more than a quarter of a century ago.

Part I

What had happened to this fiercely religious man who had made himself the greatest menace of the early church? Whatever it was, it had enabled him to make certain affirmations about himself that we should all like to make. He could now say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." He declared further that the old had passed and that the new had come. Indeed he boldly asserted that there was no question that one could ask about himself that he could not answer in terms of Jesus Christ. He put it this way, "For to me to live is Christ." That is: Christ is the author, the sustainer, the goal of my life.

Not only did Paul make these great assertions about himself but he lived in such a fashion as to demonstrate the truthfulness of his claim. He breathed upon the wintery world of his day like the reviving springtime. He knew suffering. He had been stoned. He had been to the whipping post so many times that his body was little more than one
big scar. He perhaps knew the inside of more jails than any criminal in the Roman Empire. Yet he lived so grandly, so abundantly, so joyfully that it is impossible to get a glimpse of his face across the centuries without being made wistful. "That", we say, "is the way life ought to be lived. That is the way I should like to live mine."

What then had happened to Paul? Paul had been converted. From an enemy of Christ he had become a friend. He had been born anew, born from above, born of the Holy Spirit. It was an experience so thrilling that he wanted to share it with everybody. He would wish for nothing better for this pagan court and the whole multitude assembled than that they be such as he himself was—though without his bonds.

Now, it was Paul’s conviction that such an experience as his is for everybody. Also, just as it is a universal privilege, even so it is a universal necessity. That is the assertion of Our Lord himself. To an earnest and humble-hearted churchman he said, "You must be born anew." Of course this must be the must of compulsion. Nobody has to be born anew. But unless we are born anew we cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

Nor is this an arbitrary rule. It is a fact that exists in the very nature of things. A spiritual birth is just as essential for entering the kingdom as a physical birth is for entering this visible world. How did we come to be in this world? There is no argument about it. We came through a physical birth. It is true that we were not consulted about being thus born. But that does not alter the fact that we only enter by birth.

It became the fashion a few years ago for some of our super-sophisticated youths to say to their parents, "I didn’t ask to be born". Quite true! Now would their parents have asked for them had they known they were going to be such nitwits. But suppose we could be consulted. Suppose I could sit beside you as an unborn man or woman and talk to you about coming into the world of which I am a part.
What would I have to say?

In sober honesty I would tell you frankly that this is a rather dangerous world. If you are born into it, you are going to have to work. There will be days of battle. If you are born into it you may get your shins barked. You may get your heart broken. You may have your face wet with tears. But along with that there may be many a compensation. You may know the joy of high adventure, the joy of greatly giving and of greatly living.

Then as a representative of this other world that we call the Kingdom of God, I could speak a far better word. I could tell you truly that it is a winsome country where God is my father, where every man is my brother and whose law is the law of love. It is a world where everyone is a light bringer and where everyone has the tang of salt in his soul. What a privilege to live in such a kingdom! And the wonder of it is that everybody may enter it by being born anew. The new birth is therefore at once a universal privilege and a universal necessity.

Part II

Now while the new birth is a universal necessity, we do not all enter this experience in exactly the same fashion. Now and then I meet a truly converted person who insists that all others must have an experience exactly like his. Also I meet good people who are troubled because they have not passed through an experience exactly like that of some Christian friend.

But we must bear in mind that our God is a God of infinite variety. Just recently he has brought about the miracle of spring. Upon the bare branches of the trees he has hung billions of leaves. But no two of them are alike. When Jesus was here he cured blind men. But he did not cure all of them in exactly the same fashion.
Take three for instance. One day he came upon a man born blind. He anointed his eyes with clay and spittle and sent him to wash in a certain pool. As soon as he had done this, the day dawned for him.

There was a second man whose eyes Jesus opened by a touch. Then there was a third man, Bartimaeus by name. He cried so earnestly for mercy that Jesus ordered him to be led into his immediate presence.

"What wilt thou", said Jesus, "that I should do unto thee?"

Thus he virtually put the key to heaven into the hand of this blind beggar. What, if anything, did he do with it? What do we do? What are we going to do now as he is putting the key into our hands? Bartimaeus did not answer, "I want my eyes opened, but not now. Perhaps you may be passing this way again some time." Instead, he asked for sight then and there. And Jesus said, "Go thy way; thy faith has made thee whole."

Now being blind myself I come upon these three men as they are rejoicing over their new daylight. "How does Jesus open blind eyes?" I ask earnestly. The first answers eagerly, "It is the simplest thing in the world. He anoints the patient with clay and spittle and sends him to wash in the pool." But the other two hear this with an amazement that is touched with indignation.

"That is not the case at all", answers the second. "He opens blind eyes with the touch of his fingers as one might open a prison door." "You are dead wrong", replies Bartimaeus, "I did not touch my eyes at all, yet I can see as clearly as anybody". Had they been like us they would doubtless have had a hot argument, lost their tempers and gone away to organize three separate churches. Yet they were all alike in that they had passed from darkness into light.

Some years ago as I was leaving a service that I had conducted for boys and girls a fine old gentleman met me on the street. He greeted me by saying, "I attended your service just now". "Glad to have you", I answered. "But", he said, "I did not like what you were
doing". Of course I knew I had struck a crank. All people who do not agree with me are necessarily cranks. But before I began to shoot I thought I had better see the target. So I asked, "What particular something did I do that did not meet your approval?" He answered, "You invited those boys and girls to come forward in token of the fact that they had accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. But five years from now—or ten years—or twenty years, they will not be able to tell you just when they were converted."

"What of it?" I answered, not knowing what he was getting at. "Why", he replied, "I would not give the pop of my finger for any man's religion who could not tell you the day and the hour in which he was converted?" "Why wouldn't you?" I asked. "Just because I wouldn't" was the illuminating answer.

But look at that. If you know the day and the hour in which you were converted, thank God for it. But there may be somebody rubbing elbows with you who is more conscious of life in Christ than you are who could not tell you to save their life when they were converted. The truth is, it is not when or where or how you felt when you were converted. The one fundamental question is: Are you converted?

About two years ago it became necessary for me to get a birth certificate. I could produce no written testimony to prove that I had ever been born. At last I had to consult a lawyer. "Your problem is very simple", he declared. "All you have to do is to find two people ten years older than you, to testify for you." My answer to that was, "I cannot find two such outside the book of Genesis."

Hence it looked as if I were not going to get my birth certificate. Suppose in my quest I should have gone into one court after another until I reached the supreme court. Even had these nine men turned me down still I should not have given up in despair. Instead I would answer,
"Alright, but what are you going to do about me?" One living man is worth all the birth certificates ever written.

Even so the supreme proof of the new birth is a new man. All of us have known such. Many of us are sure from our own experiences. We can sing even now,

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

We may all come to certainty but we do not come in exactly the same way.

Part III

How may we enter into this experience? Whether we are seven, seventeen or seventy, it is a possibility for all of us. A man can be born anew when he is old, though it is an exceedingly rare miracle. How God makes us anew may be beyond our understanding, but our part is so simple that only the childlike can accept it.

Many have been bewildered by this revolutionary experience of Saint Paul. "At midday O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me". "Of course Paul was converted", we say wistfully, "but no such light as that ever blazed in my commonplace sky." No! Nor in mine either. But perhaps it may hearten you to know that it was not this light that converted Paul. Paul might have gone from the shining of that bright light into a deeper darkness than he had ever known before. That light no more converted Paul than the sight of a gushing spring would save me if I were starving for water. I could only find salvation as I kissed the spring on the lips.

What did this light do for Paul? It brought him a conviction that has been yours from your mother's knees. It convinced him of
the unique deity of Jesus. How was he born anew? Suppose we let him
tell his own experience. Here it is: "I was not disobedient unto the
heavenly vision". That is, Paul so believed in Jesus that he gave himself
to him in utter dedication.

Here is another apostle who was as genuinely converted as was
Paul. But his experience is entirely lacking in outward splendor. Listen
to it. "As Jesus passed...he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the
seat of custom; he saith unto him, "Follow me". Then what? Did Matthew
burst into tears of sheer joy? Did he shout? Did he sing? Did he pray?
I do not know. But I do know this. He did the one essential thing.
He obeyed. He rose and followed him.

What then does Our Lord ask of us? He is not asking for our work,
our tears, our prayers, our money first of all. He is asking for us.
If he gets us, he gets everything. If he fails to win us, he gets
nothing. This is the road to certainty according to Our Lord himself:
"If any man is willing to do his will, he shall know". Give him yourself
and he will accept you. Give him yourself and he will begin here and
there to remake you. With some the consciousness of new life in Christ
is instaneous. With others it is more like the slow dawning of the
day or the slower coming of springtime. But "We shall know if we
follow on to know the Lord".

If then this new birth in Christ is not yours, what is the
cause? Who is responsible for the delay? Are you waiting on our Lord
or is he waiting on you? "I have set before you an open door and no
man can shut it". That is the door into His presence. "Behold I stand
at the door and knock". That is the door in your heart. God's door
always stands open. Too often ours is closed. When there is delay
the fault is always ours, never His.

Somewhere I read this story: A wealthy young bachelor was spending
the summer in the blue grass region of Kentucky. During those days
his heart was completely taken captive by a charming Kentucky girl in the sweet radiance of her early twenties. As soon as they were married he returned with his lovely bride to his palatial home in the great city. But after they had lived together for only three brief and beautiful years, one day in a terrible paroxysm of pain, she lost her mind and became a maniac. At times she was a raving maniac so that the neighbors heard her wild screams in the night and complained against her.

The husband being a man of wealth moved to another part of the city, bought an entire vacant block, builded a new home, and moved there with his demented bride. But even then there were those who complained. One day an officer of the law told the husband frankly that he would have to put his wife into an institution. "I cannot do that", he said, "I know that the one chance that my wife has of recovery is through me. If I let her down, she will die in a madhouse. Since I love her far better than life itself, I am not going to let her down!"

Then the family physician suggested that it might help if he would take her back down to her home in Kentucky. He went at once. It happened to be springtime. So he led her about the old fashioned garden, then down by the river side where the cowslips were blooming and the wild violets lifted up their modest faces. But there was that same wild look in her eyes. At last, broken in heart and hope, he took her back home.

When the car stopped at their own front door he lifted her out in his arms, for he had to handle her as if she were a little child. Then as he was climbing the stairs to their room, he felt her head drop on his shoulder. He did not know what it meant. But when he reached their room and had laid her down on her own bed he saw that she was asleep. It was the first natural sleep she had had for nights and days and weeks and months.

Though the night was young, being afraid he might wake her, he sat and watched from eight to nine, to ten, to eleven, to twelve. Then
from one to two, to three, to four, to five, to six. At last the east grew golden with morning. As the sunrise kissed her still lovely face, he saw her eyelids quiver and then her eyes opened wide. But the old wild look was gone. She then smiled at him as in the golden yesterdays. But even as she smiled her brows puckered into a little puzzled frown.

"George", she said, "it seems to me I have been on a long, long journey. Where have you been all this time?" And that devoted heart, speaking out of the memories of those bitter nights and days and weeks and months of watching said, "My darling, I have been waiting for you. That's all, just waiting for you."

Even so, Our Lord has waited for us. But we do not have to keep him waiting a moment longer. If you will begin to follow Him, he is ready even now to make you his servant and his witness as he did Paul in the long ago.
THE ATTORNEY FOR THE DEFENSE

"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." (Acts 26:16)

You will recognize this as a part of the proceedings of a court of law. The scene is a city of Caesarea about the year A.D. 60. Festus has just come into power, taking the place of one Felix. Felix was a freedman. He ruled, as Tacitus tells us, in the spirit of slave with all cruelty and lust. Naturally he left a good many unsolved problems for his successor. Among these unsolved problems was a certain preacher named Paul, who was then a prisoner in one of the cells underneath the palace.

No sooner had Festus taken office than the Jews both in Caesarea and from Jerusalem began to tug at him, urging him to do something with Paul. At last, in sheer self-defense, Festus decided to give this minister a private hearing. He went into his cell, found it all littered up with manuscripts, no doubt, and asked the preacher if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial.

No doubt to the amazement of Festus Paul indicated that he knew his own rights. Being a Roman citizen he had the right of appeal to Caesar. Knowing, therefore, that to go to Jerusalem would be certain death, he made this appeal. Festus naturally had to grant his request. Thus the brief examination ended, with Festus no further forward than he had been before. As he thought over the interview, he was worried. Then his brows cleared a bit as he said: "Agrippa is coming in a few days. He has conversed with
matters in these parts. I will put the case before him."

So, when a little later Festus and Agrippa were discussing matters of state, Festus said: "By the way, your majesty, there has been left on my hands a rather queer prisoner. The Jews are all excited about it, urging that I send him to Jerusalem and stand trial. But he has appealed to Caesar and to Caesar I must send him. But I do not know what to say to Caesar when I send him." "What is his name?" asked Agrippa. "Paul," was the answer. "Oh," said the king, "I know him. I would be glad to hear his plea." It was just what Festus wanted so he said: "Tomorrow you may."

The next day a great concourse of people came to hear him. Among them the leading citizens of the city and the ranking officers of the Roman army. Then the judge took his place on the bench and the prisoner was ordered brought in. I can imagine there was no small craning of necks to see this man. He was quite a figure. Even his enemies confessed that he had turned the world upside down. When he had taken his place before the judge, Festus opened the proceedings by saying:

"You behold the man about whom the Jews both here and at Jerusalem have made such ado, declaring that he ought not to live any longer, but I have brought him before you and especially before thee, King Agrippa, that after examination I might have something to write my lord. For it seemed to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to send with him the charges against him."

Then Agrippa said to the prisoner: "Thou art committed to speak for thyself." Then the prisoner, who was also the attorney for the defense, stretched forth his hand and answered for himself:

"I count myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer this day touching all things whereof I am accused, especially because I know thee to be expert in all questions and customs which are among the Jews. Therefore, I beseech thee to hear me patiently... Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead? I verily
made wistful and heart-hungry by it.

What, I repeat, happened to him? The answer is so simple and old-fashioned that it is almost a letdown to hear it. Paul was converted. Conversion is a word that threatened to slip out of our vocabulary a few years ago. Both minister and teacher in the Church School became a bit shy of it. But there is a lovely word in the Psalms which says, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." When the minister and the teacher began to forsake conversion, then the psychologists took it up. Of course, they did not call it by its old name. They called it re-education. Better still, they called it re-orientation-to-reality. I am sure you did not know I knew that. But a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

Here, then, was where Paul was born, born from above. He passed through that experience that Jesus urged upon a scholarly son of the Church when he said, "You must be born again." George Whitfield preached from this text three hundred times. When a friend asked him why he was constantly using "Ye must be born again" for a text, the great evangelist answered: "Because you must be."

But bear in mind that this is not a must of compulsion. It is a must that exists in the nature of things. If it were a matter of choice with you whether you should be born physically or not, and I were urging you to make the venture, I would say, "You must be born or you can never expect the joys, the sorrows, the laughter, and the tears of this world. You can never be thrilled by its sunrises and its sunsets, its summers and its springs. You cannot enjoy this human life unless you pass through a human birth."

As a physical birth is necessary in order to have the enjoyment of the life of this world, a spiritual birth is necessary for the enjoyment of the privileges of the Kingdom of Heaven. You do not have to be born anew. That is optional. But unless you are born anew, you cannot see the
Kingdom of God. But we are not to look upon this as a forbidding necessity, but as the highest possible privilege. Every man at his best longs to be different. Every man says at some time or another, "O for the man to arise in me, that the man I am may cease to be."

And mark you, there is no substitute for the new birth, no amount of serving, no amount of giving, no amount of culture that can take its place. But having said this, I hasten to add that all of us do not come to this experience in the same fashion. Our God is a God of infinite variety. When Jesus was here he healed three blind men. One he healed with a word. He touched the eyes of another. The other he anointed with clay and spittle and sent him to wash in a certain pool. Had these three come together and given their experiences, they would all have told a different story about the method of Jesus and might have ended by going off and organizing three separate churches.

We need to bear in mind that Paul was a mature man when he was converted. Naturally his experience would be different from that of a child.

Some years ago while coming from a meeting for boys and girls, a fine old gentleman stopped me and said, "I was up at your service just now. But I didn't like what you were doing." I knew he was dead wrong as soon as he said it. "To what did you object?" I asked. "You invited those boys and girls to come forward in token of the fact that they had accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Now five years from now, or ten, or twenty, they will not know when they were converted." "So what," I asked. "Why," he answered indignantly, "I would not give the pop of my finger for any man's religion who could not tell you the day and the hour in which he was converted.

Let us look at that. If you know the day and hour in which you were converted, thank God for it. But in all probability, there is someone sitting right beside you who is just as conscious in Christ as you are, and probably more so, who could not tell the day and hour of their con-
version to save their lives. I had a wonderful experience in the heart of the hills of Tennessee a few years ago. I was born. But as revolutionary as that experience was, I do not remember a thing about it. I have to depend strictly on the old family Bible to know when it happened. But even were I to get utterly confused as to the date, there is no use in arguing with me that it did not happen. I am conscious of life. Even so, there are those conscious of life in Christ who cannot tell to save their lives when that consciousness first began.

When I was a boy on the farm my father gave me a little colt. I at once got on good terms with that colt. I rubbed his nose and stroked his ears. I petted him. Now and then I gave him an apple core if I could spare it. One day I mounted him and rode off. Had you asked him years later when he was converted into a work horse, he would have answered in the language of Socrates: "Search me!" But there was another colt, the same age of mine, to whom nobody paid any attention and he was old enough to be converted into a work horse. He had such a terrific time that he bore the scars of it to the end of his days. Yet my colt was converted in a far more natural way than the other which leads me to say that the only sure way to have Christians is to raise them.

II

What did this new experience do for Paul?

It set him on the road to a unified personality. Mark you, Paul did not gain all his knowledge of Christ in this one experience. His was a growing experience. I try to remind the young couples that I marry that theirs must be a young love. "You will," I tell them, "love each other far better twenty-five years from now, or far less." "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will ap-
"The Attorney for the Defense"

pear unto thee." This experience found Paul at war with himself, crying, "O wretched man that I am." It brought him inward peace. "Who shall deliver me." He found the answer in Jesus Christ.

Second, this experience brought Paul his gospel. "I am proud of the gospel of Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation." He came to speak of it as 'my gospel' because he had made it his own. His theology grew out of his own experience. He was sure that Jesus Christ was able to save because he had tested his saving power in his own life.

Third, this experience gave Paul a new passion. He had always been an earnest man. God finds it difficult to do anything with any man who is not in earnest, but up to this time Paul had been chiefly in earnest about a creed. After this he became in earnest about a Person. He also became in earnest about folks.

Now I am not throwing off on creeds. Back of mighty living there is always mighty belief. No man ever does anything worth doing unless he is a man of faith. You can't grow a giant red wood tree in an oyster can. You can't float an ocean liner in a mud puddle. You can't hang the planets in the ceiling of the room. Nor can you have mighty living such as Paul had without mighty believing. But there was something harsh and hard in his creed. It called him to breathe out threatenings and slaughter.

After this experience his old heart was taken captive by Jesus Christ. Up and down he went over the earth with tireless enthusiasm. He knew the inside of more jails than any man in the Roman Empire. He knew ship wreck, stoning, He was acquainted with the whipping post. His body was little better than one great scar. "Why did he act like that?" I ask. "Maybe Festus was right in saying you were mad." "No," he answers, "the love of Christ constrains me."

Then as he gave his heart to Christ he gave it also to all sorts of people. Paul's love became a veritable house of many mansions, where he
housed the best and the worst princes and paupers. It is a thrill just to read a list of Paul's friends. Here he yearns over this king as if they would be life-long friends.

That in itself is an amazing miracle. It is easy to love some folks. They are as winsome as sea music. But to love others takes quite a bit of doing. I never had a church that I could not look out and see certain faces whose peace and sympathy made preaching easier. "There he is," I would say to myself. "There she is." Thanking God, I will preach better because they are here." Then maybe right beside them there would be someone else. And I would say, "There he is, too. The Lord helping, I will preach anyway." But Paul knew to a superlative degree the fine art of loving.

Finally, this experience made it possible for Paul increasingly to be like Christ. He came to the place where there was no question you could ask him about himself that he could not answer in terms of Jesus. He put it in this fashion: "For to me to live is Christ." Christ was the source of his life. He was the sustainer of his life. He was the product of his life. To touch Paul this day is to be reminded of Jesus Christ. Thus Paul lived richly, joyously, fully. Even so, we can live if we have his experience.

III

How was Jesus Christ able to do this for Paul? There was no magic about it. There was no compulsion. This vision came without any volition on Paul's part. Yet in itself it was powerless to remake Paul. He might have gone from this experience into deeper darkness. There is only one answer to this question. Paul put it in these words: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." If we live up to the light we have God will bring us into the full of life. The robe of spiritual certainty and thus to highest usefulness is the robe of obedience.
"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee
for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of
these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which
I will appear unto thee."

Acts 26: 16

The text is a part of the proceedings of a court of law. The scene is
the city of Caesarea about A.D. 60. Festus has just come into power. He
will take the place of one Felix. This Felix was a freedman, who as Tscitus
had ruled with a spirit of a slave with all cruelty and lust. Naturally he
left a good many unsolved problems to his successor. Among these unsolved pro-
blems was what to do with a certain notable prisoner who was then in one of the
prison cells under the palace. No sooner had Festus come into power than the
Jews began to tug at him this way and that, asking him to take action upon this
troublesome minister.

At last in sheer self defense Festus decided to give the man a private hear-
ing. He went into his prison cell and found it a bit littered up by manuscripts.
In the course of the interview he asked his prisoner if he would be willing to go
to Jerusalem to stand trial. The prisoner flatly refused to take any such course.
"I am a Roman citizen," he declared. "I have therefore the right to appeal to
Caesar. That appeal I now make." Thus the interview ended with Festus as much
perplexed about the matter as he had been before.
But as he thought the situation over he saw a ray of light. "King Agrippa is coming to visit me in a few days," he said to himself. "He is conversant with matters in these parts I will consult him." Therefore, when the king came and they were discussing matters of state, Festus said, "By the way, your majesty, there has been left on my hands a queer prisoner about whom the Jews are giving me no end of trouble. This prisoner has appealed to Caesar and to Caesar I must send him. But I have no word to say about him when I do send him." "What is his name?" asked Agrippa. "Paul," was the answer. "Why," said Agrippa with interest. "I have heard of him I should be glad to give him a hearing." That was just what Festus wanted. "Tomorrow you may," he said with enthusiasm.

So the next day a great concourse of people came together in the hall of hearing. Among them were the leading men of the city and the ranking officers of the Roman army. When the crowd was assembled, Agrippa took his place on the judge's bench and the prisoner was brought in. Then Festus opened the proceedings with,—"You behold here the man about whom the Jews both here and at Jerusalem have made such a to do, declaring that he ought not to live any longer." It seemed unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to send the charges. Therefore have I brought him to you and especially before thee King Agrippa, that after examination I might have somewhat to right my lord." Then Agrippa looked down at the prisoner at the bar who also happened to be the attorney for the defense, and said, "Paul, thou art permitted to speak for thyself." Then this strange man spoke for himself. But soon he forgot himself in telling of the wonderful experience into which he had entered on the day from Jerusalem to Damascus now more than a quarter of a century ago.

I.

What was it happened to Paul on this highway? As thoughtful people we must
be interested in that question. And whatever it was it made a tremendous
difference in the life of this great man. Whatever it was it so changed him
as to make him one of the most fascinating personalities of all human history.
Whatever it was it enabled him to put his hands on all the continents and push
them up into new zones of life. Whatever it was it gave him a strange power to
breath on all the centuries like a reviving springtime. It seems to me that no
thoughtful person could possibly look at this man without feeling that whatever
happened to him might happen to them.

What then took place? Answer:—Paul was converted. Here is where this man
of genius was reborn. Conversation is an old fashioned word. It was much upon
the lips of our fathers, but we of this generation have been somewhat afraid of
it. Many ministers and Church school teachers have shied around it. But there
is a beautiful passage in the Psalms that says,—"When my father and my mother
forsake me then the Lord will take me up." In like manner when the teachers and
preachers began to forsake conversion then the psychologists took it up. Of course
they did not call it by such an old fashioned name. They called it Re-Education.
They called it something more high sounding still, Re-Orientation to Reality. But
a rose by any other name will smell as sweet. These psychologists agree with the
New Testament upon the fact of the new birth.

"Now this new birth," Jesus tells us, "is a necessity." No amount of culture,
no amount of giving, no amount of work, no amount of religiosity will take the
place of it. Jesus was talking to a beautiful old saint when he said, "Marvel not
that I say unto you that you must be born anew." Jesus was speaking home to the
question of his heart rather than that of his lips when he told him that his su-
preme need was to be born from above. George Whitfield preached from this text
three hundred times. One day a friend asked him, "Why do you use the text 'You
must be born again' so much?" "Because," answered Whitfield frankly, "you must be."

This must, of course, does not mean compulsion. Whether you are born or not
is optional with you. What is not optional is your enjoyment of the privileges of the new birth. Suppose it were up to you to decide as to whether you were to be born physically? Were you hesitating I would say, "Life in this word is rather thrilling. But unless you are born you cannot see it with its blue skies, with its springtimes, with its sunrises and sunsets, with its lovely friends. Physical birth is necessary to life in this world. Spiritual birth is equally necessary to life in the Kingdom of God. There is absolutely no substitute for the new birth.

In emphasizing this necessity, in saying "you must be", we have sometimes made the new birth sound forbidding instead of what it really is, something infinitely desireable. Regeneration is more than a necessity. It is the most winsome possibility. Surely we realize that. Surely there is not one of us that is all he wants to be. All of us have said at times, "O, for the man to rise in me that the man I am may cease to be." All of us in our best moments have sung wistfully,

"I wish there was somewhere a wonderful place,
Called the land of beginning again;
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all our poor selfish griefs,
Might be left as a ragged old coat at the door
And never put on again."

There is such a place, and that place is here, and the time for it is now.

But while the new birth is a necessity we do not all enter into that experience in the same way. Our God is a God of infinite variety. Jesus healed three blind men. To one he said,"Receive thy sight." The eyes of another he touched. The eyes of the third man he anointed with clay and spital and told him to wash in a certain pool. Had these three men got together in an experience
meeting they would have all differed on Jesus' method of opening blind eyes and would doubtless have established three separate churches. Paul was a mature man when he came to this experience. Certainly we would not expect a child to enter into it as did this mature scholar.

A few years ago I was going back to my hotel after a service with a group of boys and girls. I met a find old gentleman on the street who said, "I was up to your service just now." "Glad to have you," I replied. "But I did not like what you were doing." My gladness subsided a bit. I knew at once that the old crank was wrong. "What particular something," I continued, "did I do that you did not like?" "You invited those boys and girls to come forward in token of the fact that they accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. Ten years from now, fifteen years from now, they will not know when they were converted."

"Well, what of it?" I asked a bit perplexed. "What of it!" he replied, "I would not give the pop of my finger for a Christian who could not tell the day and the hour in which he was converted." "Why?" I answered; "Just because I wouldn't," came the emphatic reply. That was not quite satisfying. If you know the day and the hour in which you were converted, thank God for it. But there may be somebody at your side that is more intimate with the Lord than you, yet they cannot tell when they were converted to save their life.

When I was a boy my father gave me a little colt. He gave me that colt the very day it was born. I at once began to get on good terms with it. I would rub its nose and stroke its ears. Now and then I would give it an apple core, if I could spare it. Then I put a bridle on it and led it about the barn. Then there was a saddle. Then I began to lean my weight upon it to see if it could hold me up. By and by I put my foot in the stirrup, mounted its back and rode it off. Not once did that colt throw me, kick me, bite me, nor paw me. Had you asked him a few years later when he was converted into a horse, he would have
answered in the language of Socrates,-"Search me."

But there was another colt the same age of mine. That colt ran the same pasture. But he did not belong to anybody in particular. He only belonged to my father. Therefore, nobody paid him any special attention. Nobody ever rubbed his nose, stroked his ears, or gave him an apple core. At last when he was three years of age my father said he was old enough to be converted. We taught him with difficulty. We harnessed him by sheer force. We hitched him up beside some tried old steward or deacon and ploughed him till he was broken down. Then we led him out to where the ground was soft and asked a colored brother to ride him. When he mounted that colt it was at the risk of his life. By and by when the wild creature had thrown one or two riders, torn up one or two harnesses, kicked the board out of the buggy, got so a strong man could drive him when he was tired. Ask him when he was converted and he could tell you the day and the hour. It was such an awful hour that he could never forget. But I submit to you my colt was broken in a far more natural way. Which leads me to say the only way to have Christians is to raise them.

II.

What did this experience do for Paul?

1. It gave him inward peace. It gave him what the psychologists call a unified personality. Up to this time Paul was often at war with himself, even as you and I. Scripture and psychology agree on the fact that there are certain evils that make inward peace impossible. One of these is selfishness. If you are the center of your world that world is constantly being pushed about, therefore, your peace is constantly being upset. Another is worry or fear. Thousands are cracking up today because they can’t stand the strain of worry. Nobody can have peace who is afraid. A third is hate. Hate may hurt the one against whom it is directed. It will prove hell to the hater. The fourth is guilt. Guilt
at its mildest brings restlessness. At its worst it tortures. Often it drives its victim mad. That was true of Lady Macbeth. That is what made her husband ask of his physician the question that millions ask.

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,

Raise out the written troubles of the brain

And with some sweet oblivious antidote

Cleanse the stuffed bosom from that perilous

Stuff that weighs upon the heart?"

Through conversion Paul found the answer. In the old days he was often restless and confused. He found himself becoming guilty of the wrong that he loathed. He found himself looking wistfully to heights that he wanted to scale but could not. Defeated, guilty, frustrated we hear him cry that cry that is almost universal: - "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Then this confused man found the answer. "I thank God through Jesus Christ . . . . . being justified by faith we have peace." This experience set Paul right with God and right with himself.

2. This experience gave Paul the gospel. Looking over his shoulder one day as he was writing a letter I read these words, - "I am proud of the gospel of Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Paul was sure of the gospel because it has worked in his own life. He came to speak of it as "my gospel." He went out to face his needy brothers with a sure word. In that he discovered all the wealth in Jesus through this one experience. His was a growing knowledge. He was to testify both of the things that he had seen and of those things in which Christ did appear to him. But his gospel was the story of the Christ who had saved and was saving him.

3. It was through this experience that Paul came to possess a new passion
and power. Paul had always been an earnest man. That is one reason why Christ was able to use him so mightily. There is no more difficult individual than the one who never gets in earnest. Nor is there any individual more uninteresting. Paul had been desperately earnest before he had met Jesus. But up to that time his passion had been largely for a creed. After this he had a passion for Christ and a passion for men. "The love of Christ constraineth me," he declares. To his fellows he wrote, "I am willing to spend and to be spent for you. Though the more I love you the less I be loved." Paul had learned the highest of high arts. The art of loving all sorts of folks. Therefore he told them the story of salvation with a fiery enthusiasm.

But there was not only passion there was power. There was about his ministry a light that cannot be explained in terms of the flesh. Paul became more than an imitator of Christ. He came to reproduce him. "For me to live," he declares, "is Christ." In me Christ lives over again. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, and yet not I but Christ liveth in me." What a tremendous claim! Were I to say the poet Shakespeare or the artist Turner liveth in me you would expect me to sing as the former and the splash upon the canvas as the latter. When Paul makes this assertion we expect him to remind us of his Master. In these expectations we are not disappointed. Touching him anywhere after nineteen centuries and we feel that we touch his living Lord.

4. It was through this experience that Paul, the one time divided and defeated man, came to live victoriously. "Thanks be unto God," he cries, "who always causes us to triumph." Nor did it ever occur to Paul to believe that his triumph was only temporary. He believed that through Christ he had come to possess a quality of life that must last forever. Facing all that death could do he shouts, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." I like Moffatt's translation even better. "Paul looking at all the foes of this world. Facing all that the grave could do, shouts the victory is ours, thank God." Here
then is a man who is living victoriously. He has inward peace. He has learned to live with and for his fellows. He has a quality of life that death cannot touch. This has come through the new birth. Surely then we are not speaking of dire necessity, but of supreme privilege when we say, "You must be born anew."

III.

How did Paul come to this experience? We need to be very careful here. Paul's conversion was so dramatic that some felt that that is an essential part of the story. There was a flash and a fall, and the next moment Paul was brushing the dust from off his knees saying, "It was a true saying... that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "If such a revelation were to come to me" we tell ourselves, "I, too, would be converted." But there was no compulsion in this light. Paul might have turned his back on it as we do on light that shines just as clearly for us.

How then did Paul come to find himself reborn through Christ. Here is the answer. "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." How did Columbus come to know that the world was actually round? At first his was only a theory. That theory became a certainty because he ventured on it. How does the scientist come to know in the laboratory? He makes a springboard out of a hypothesis and leaps into the unknown. Paul ventured on Christ and found him true.

Now this salvation that Paul found is a gift. We cannot put too much emphasis on that. It cannot be earned. It cannot be wrested from God's hands. If he is not willing to give it to you you cannot take it. The key word of the New Testament is "receive ye". You do not have to pound at God's door with bruised fist. He comes to yours. "Behold I stand at the door and knock."

This salvation that is God's gift is none other than the gift of God himself. "He is our righteousness our sanctification and redemption." To be saved is to have eternal God in the person of the Spirit to take up his abode in your heart.
That is what he is longing to do. The only reason he has not been there as a constant guest all through the years is because you were not willing to have him.

How then shall we give him welcome? When we give all he gives all. Begin where you are. Face the light, live up to the best that you know and you will come into the fullness of the light. When King Arthur's last surviving knight was asked to throw the wonderful sword of his kings back into the lake. It looked too beautiful to be thrown away to rust and to rot in the mud beneath the water. But when he dared actually to throw it away a hand reached out from the water, seize it, wielded it three times, and disappeared. The knight had not thrown the sword away in utter uselessness he had simply turned it over to a better hand. In asking for your dedication we are not asking you to throw yourself away. We are asking you to trust your life into hands of one who is able to do that above which we are able to ask or think. This is the way to live with yourself, this is the way to live with others. It is the way to a quality of life that will live forever.
After long abstinence, after long abstinence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them (I prefer Magnet's translation)--after long abstinence, Paul stood up in the midst of them and said:

1.

Here is one of the most fitting and tragic sea stories to be found either in the Bible or other. It was written by an eye witness. The eye witness who wrote it was no ordinary man. He had the seeing eye. He had a keen appreciation of the things that were really worth retarding. The story is told in dramatic form. In fact the whole story is really a magnificent drama of four scenes.

Scene 1.

As the curtain rises the picture before us is one of genuine beauty. It is a lovely day in early autumn. In fact summer seems to be giving a return engagement, leaving us something to remember it by. The skies are blue, the sea is one shimmering mirror. The gentle south wind carresses our face like the breath of an infant. As we enjoy the lovely weather we see four men upon the deck of a merchant vessel in the Port of Phœnix, off the coast of Crete.

These men are engaged in an important conference. They are discussing this matter which turned out to be a matter of life and death. Shall they winter in the Port of Phœnix, or shall they venture fifty miles further up the coast to the Port of.
It is interesting to note the personnel of this conference. Those who are invited to take part in it.

First there is the President of the conference, a young Roman officer named Julius. He seems to be a fine gentlemen. As a representative of the Roman government his word is final. It is even above that of the captain of the ship. A situation which would not prevail today. Present also was the captain of the ship, whose authority was next to that of this Roman official. Present also, quite naturally, was the owner of the ship. He also doubtless owned the cargo. He was vitally interested. It is probable he represented capital. Ship and cargo belonged to him—naturally he was invited to help decide this important question. The fourth man was one that we should hardly have expected. He was not a capitalist. He tells us that he had suffered the loss of all things. He was not a sailor though he had been born upon the shore of the sea. He was not a Roman official. He was a Jew. Not only that—he was a Jewish preacher. Not only that but he belonged to the despised sect of the Nazarenes. Not only that he was a prisoner under arrest going to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. It speaks volumes for the tremendous personality of this man that he was called into this conference.

Now as they discussed the advisibility of seeking a more commodious harbor, the captain of the vessel looking upon the weather decided that they might safely adventure. The owner of the vessel agreed with the captain. But Paul was of contrary mind, and being of contrary mind he spoke out. He said, "Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with much harm and loss not only to the ship, but also to our lives." But the final word was with the Roman official and he did what you and I would have done in all probability done under similar circumstances. He decided with the captain and the owner of the vessel. They were
men of the sea and ought to know, and this land-lubber preacher, of course, wasn’t expected to know what he was talking about. And so Paul was pushed aside and the decision was taken.

Scene 2.

No sooner had they taken their decision, because time was against them, that they put it into vote. At once they hoisted sail and were soon out of the harbor. But no sooner were they on the outside than the whole aspect of nature changed. The blue skies became black with storm clouds. The gentle south wind whipped around to the northeast and rose to the proportions of a hissing hurricane. The calm sea as if in bitter resentment, curled its lip and lay in wait, with lifted teeth, as if it could bite. They saw their mistake, but there was no correcting it. There are some things that do not have any next time.

But these men were neither weaklings nor cowards. They had faced danger before. They had faced death before. Therefore they were not unmanned by the danger that threatened them. They at once set about the task of making themselves as secure as possible. They took up the life boat, that in those days trailed behind the vessel. They tied up the ship, as we would tie an old fashioned trunk. And on the second day they threw out a bit of the cargo, and on the third day they even threw out some of the tackling in the vessel. That was about as much as they could do. Then came the fourth day, and the storm was still as savage as it had been before. Little by little it tore the sails into shreds, not only that, but it tore into shreds the morale of both the soldiers and the sailors. The Log records this tragic bottle. All hope that they should be saved was then taken away.

Now what did these men do when hope was gone? They did nothing. There is a kind of fear that puts into us, and drives
us to supurb activity. There is another kind of fear that paralizes us. We speak of being scared stiff. At one time while I was in college, every morning as I went to my early class, I would meet a huge dog. Now I am afraid of dogs, having been bitten by one when I was a small boy. I do not need a Psychoanalyst to tell me why I am afraid. But having discovered the cause I am still afraid. Though, I would speak in my most charming manner to this great monster, and he would look unpleasant, and pass by without taking undue notice of me.

But one morning when I met him, he had evidently had a bad night. Though I spoke to him in my usual friendly manner, he got a little more than a length past me, then he wheeled on his hind feet with a road. I did just what the dog psychologists say do. I looked him squarely in the eye. I did not budge an inch. But my reason for not budging, was not because I was remembering my psychology, but because I was scared stiff. These people being freightened sat in miserable, despairing, whining groups about on the deck, waiting for inevitable death among crawling things at the bottom of the sea.

Scene 3.

The third scene brought an amazing change. We read this thrilling word, "Paul stood up in the midst of them." That is something to make our hearts cheer. Here was a man who, to say the least of it, was different. It is easy to stand when everybody else is standing. It is easy to go with the crowd. It doesn't take much courage to stand up on Sunday morning and join with your fellows in reciting the creed, but here was a man who stood up and recited his when he had to recite it absolutely alone. He stood when no one else was standing. I think I have never heard a more moving speech than that of Winston Churchill when he said: "We are now fighting by ourselves, alone.
for ourselves alone." Paul might have said: "I am standing by myself alone, but I am not standing for myself alone."

The real reason that Paul is standing is not because he is necessarily braver than the men about him. It is rather because he believes something that the men about him do not believe. He has a faith that they do not possess. There is a difference between the believer and the unbeliever. The author of the last book of the Bible has said with hot anger to the men of his day: 'It doesn't make any difference whether a man obeys God or does not obey Him; whether he is a believer or an unbeliever, but wait until the test comes, and you will see that there is a difference between a man who believes in God and a man who does not believe in God. Jesus also emphasized that difference by saying that the life that was built on vital faith would find that faith as a rock when the storm came. That the life that was built on unbelief would find that unbelief as sand when the storm came.

The first Psalm declares that a man of faith is like a tree planted by the rivers of water. That is, there is a steadfastness about him that the other man does not have. He declares further that he is one of God's evergreens. His leaves shall also not wither. Now to appreciate an evergreen you need to see it in an hour of thankfulness. I remember an evergreen that used to stand on the hillside above my old home. I have gone to it in the springtime, when the other trees were decking themselves in their Easter finery, and it was not very impressive. I have gone again in the noontide of mid-summer, when the other trees were abounding in life, and there was little to choose between them. Then I have gone in the autumn tide when the other trees had decked themselves in their royal robes of satin and gold, and the evergreen looked almost commonplace. But I have gone at last, in the winter time
when the other trees were waving their skeleton hands in the wintery wind. Then it was that the evergreen stood out in its radiant and fervent glory.

Even so there was something about Paul that made him different. He must have looked very tall standing there among these defeated, grumbling men.

(Continued on next page)
I passed by a landscape some time ago that had been swept by a terrific storm, there was almost nothing left standing except one green tree. I do not remember just how tall that tree really was, but I do remember that it looked very tall, amidst the wreckage that was about it. After long abstinence Paul stood up, blessed is the man that can stand up at any time, but blessed still more is the man who can stand up in the time of storm, even though he has to stand alone.

Now in standing up Paul did not stand merely to rebuke—he did not stand to say I told you so, though he did tell them so. But the purpose of that word was not to rebuke, but was to win their confidence. He said: "I was right the first time, and I might also be right the second time." He stood up to say to those defeated and whipped men, 'Be of good cheer'. That is a Christian word. That is the word that was on the lips of Jesus again and again. That is the word that ought to be in our heart and upon our lips regardless of how desperate the situation. There are few things more wicked than taking the heart out of people. Whenever any minister preaches a sermon—that sends people away depressed and discouraged, with the light gone out of their skies, I maintain that that was not a Christian sermon, it was on the contrary, a wicked sermon. Paul stood up and said: 'Be of good cheer.'

But whether this cheer was of any value or not will depend upon what it has for its foundation. Why were these men to be of good cheer? All cheer was not based on a mere denial. He did not stand with the storm light in his face, and the vessel threatening to go to pieces under his feet, and say to those people, that the storm was after all imaginary. He did not
claim that he had demonstrated over sin, sickness and death; he did not refuse to face the facts. The Bible of all other books is a book that faces the tragic facts of life with open eyes. Paul faced the situation here.

did not

Paul based his encouragement upon any outward circumstance. He did not call attention to the brightening of the skies. They were not brightening. He did not call attention to the seaworthiness of the vessel. It was not seaworthy. He did not call attention to the capacities either of the soldiers or of the sailors. They had gone to pieces, and their courage had become powerless and their hope had been changed into despair; At the present time, all their contribution was less than nothing. They had become liabilities rather than assets.

Upon what then did Paul base his call to courage? He based it on the one solid foundation. He said: 'I believe in God'. That is the one sure foundation. That also is a foundation that is available to every man. And now Lord what wait I for. My hope is in Thee. How long will it take us to learn that there is no other name under Heaven hidden among men. How long will it take us to learn that unless the Lord build a house, they labor in vain that build it, and unless the Lord keep the city watchman awake but in vain.

Be of good cheer, said Paul for I believe God. That it will be even as it was told me/

How had Paul come by this definite base? For Paul was not believing in God in general but he was believing a specific promise of God. God had said to him; 'Thou must be brought before Caesar.' And Lo—God had given Thee all that had sailed with Thee. He was not then relying on God in general, but upon a specific promise that God had given him. How had he come by this promise? He had not found it in his Old Testament scriptures. As we read between
lines we can see how he came by it. While others had been looking at the storm, while others had been facing their grim possibilities and their sure tragedy, Paul had been looking into the face of God.

Being of the faith that God is not mastered by circumstance it is evident from this story that Paul had taken himself to task. Possibly he had begun by reminding God that he had purpose in the spirit long age saying that he must see Rome. Then he passed on to pray for his friends. But he couldn't stop there. He passed on to pray for these pagans that were on shipboard with him. They were all on the same vessel. and so he put his arms around every one of them, and held them up before God., and said: Lord, save them all! And he prayed until he received an answer. He prayed until there came to him an assurance, in the language of our Fathers he prayed through truth.

Now that is the kind of praying that is all too rare. Yet there are those still who take God seriously and who do pray true. I remember a friend of mine who told me this bit of his own experience. He did not tell it publicly. There are some things that are too sacred to share even with a congregation. He said: my little girl was very ill with membranous crupè, late one afternoon I took her in my arms to rest her a bit. She looked into my face and said: Daddy, am I going to get well? And I answered: Darling, Daddy doesn't know. Then he said, it came to me, that I might know, so when I had put her back in her baby bed, I hurried to my place of prayer, and I asked God not for her life. I said: God she was yours before she was mine, but she has asked me a question and if it be why will I should like to know the answer. And he said the answer came. She is going to get well.
I hurried back and told the good news to my wife. We went to bed as usual and about one o'clock that night I was awakened by the light turned on, and I saw my wife on one side of the baby's bed, and the trained nurse on the other. And I heard my wife ask this question: Is she dead? I did not say a word. I simply turned my face to the wall, and went to sleep. This I was able to do because I had prayed true. I had assurance. He was saying exactly what Paul was saying. 'I believe God.' That it shall be even as it was told me.

Scene 4.

Now the next scene shows us something of the value of a faith like that. What is the good of a man being able to say 'I believe God.'

First—look what it did for Paul. It gave him courage. It gave him serenity, and poise. It gave him freedom from fear, in the face of danger, death. Even if the ship goes to pieces when Paul finds himself among the creeping things at the bottom of the sea, he is still richer by having been able to face danger with quiet heart and with fearless eyes.

Second— not only did it help Paul, but it made Paul more helpful to his fellow. Paul, by believing in God, did not cease to cooperate with God. In fact, faith in God means cooperation. A faith that does nothing is in reality not faith at all. It is mere presumption. My father was a Christian farmer, but when the spring time came, he did not tell God to plant corn in one field, and sow wheat in another. He told me to do that. If my father had done nothing but pray, he would not have raised a harvest in a hundred years. On the contrary, he would have starved to death. Faith means co-operate.
Look at what a practical man of affairs this made Paul. These soldiers and sailors had been in a storm that had lasted for almost fourteen days. It had been almost impossible to cook. They had been too seasick and frightened to eat much of what was cooked. Therefore, in addition, to their despair and fear was the fact that they were weakened by hunger. As a result, one of the first things Paul did was to get a piece of bread and stand up in their midst, having asked the blessing, he began to eat and he advised them to eat, saying that you will need all your strength for the ordeal that is ahead. Though God is going to see to it that not a hair falls from your head. You must co-operate with God by eating and gaining strength in order to help him to save yourselves and to save others—that was good sense.

Not only so but Paul was able to induce these frightened men to co-operate with each other. They were the furtherest possible from doing it when they came upon the seas. That is an ugly and pathetic sight when we see the crew lowering the lifeboat under the pretence that they were going to cast an anchor. But when they are really seeking to save their own skins, and believe their fellow voyagers to their fate, told the officers that unless these remain in the ship you cannot be saved. We are all on the same ship, and we must co-operate. That is a good word for it today. It is certainly a good word for all Christians.

Now the sailors of the day would not be guilty of such cowardliness. We know that rats forsake a sinking ship. I think most everybody has heard about that wise work. But we are about a hundred percent in our agreement on the fact that rats will forsake a sinking ship. I think it is the exception rather than the rule, if we know why rats forsake a sinking ship. The average man believes that rats forsake a sinking ship because the
ship is sinking. But that isn't true at all. The captain
doesn't forsake it, and it is sinking for him just as well as
it is for the rats. Rats forsake a sinking ship, not because
its sinking, but because they are rats, and fear had unmanned
these people as it so often does, and it made them cruel and
heartless and rat-like.

But with the wise leadership of Paul, they ate and thus
strengthened themselves to co-operate with God in the saving of
their own lives. Not only so, but those who could swim, sprang
in first and they helped those who couldn't. And the strong
co-operated with the weak so that this tragic story ends with
a shout of victory as we read this word - so they all escaped safe
to land.

Now I know that it would be easy for the sinner to
say this is mere coincident - that they would have got on quite
as well if Paul hadn't been among the passengers or if Paul had
not had faith. I will confess with I cannot prove the
wrong but I am perfectly sure that Paul's presence made all the
difference between life and death. Paul's presence and Paul's
praying saved the situation just as fully as if he had made 275
trips from the wrecking ship to the shore carrying a man on his
shoulders each time. Of course, I could not prove that, but
neither could the sinner disprove it. But then here is a fact
that we need to bear in mind. Other things being equal, whether
you help or hinder, will depend upon the vitality of your
faith. We read of another preacher who was on a voyage on this
same sea, but he had broken with his Lord. He had torn up his
hidden certainties. Therefore, his fellow passengers had to
throw him overboard in order to keep the ship from wrecking.
We see all about us, either as Jonas, or as a Paul, either as
one who helps or one who hinders, and the measure and what determines
that more than anything else, is the vitality of our faith in
God. Blessed therefore, is the man, and blessed are his
associated if he can say whatever the circumstances 'Be of good
cheer' for I believe in God,
MEN THAT COUNT

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

Acts 27:25

The text is a part of the story of a storm at sea. It is grippingly and grippingly told. I know of no other story in ancient literature that gives a finer insight into maritime conditions of that distant day. The story is evidently the record of an eye-witness. Not only is it told by an eye-witness, but by one who had an eye for what was worth seeing. It is also told by one who has a knack of telling a story in a realistic fashion. As you read it, you can hear the roar of the tempest, the cracking of the vessel that threatens at any moment to go to pieces. You can feel the sting of the salt spray on your face. It is really a gripping drama in four scenes.

I

Scene I. Though this is a story of storm, the first scene is calmness itself. As the curtain rises, we see a group of men in conference on board a little merchant vessel in Fair Havens off the coast of Crete. The time is early autumn, but summer seems to have come back before its final departure to give the world something to remember it by. The skies are blue. The broad seas are one shimmering mirror. A gentle south breeze as soft as the breath of an infant caresses the face. No scene could be less threatening than the one upon which this little group looked that distant autumn day.

This little group is holding a conference. The personnel of those engaged in the conference is worth considering. The president and the man whose word is law is Julius, a centurion in the Roman Army. There is every indica-
tion that he was a cultivated gentleman. Present also, quite naturally, is
the owner of the vessel. He perhaps owns the cargo also. The vessel has
been leased to the government. Since he owns the vessel and since the confer-
ence being held concerns this ship, he is naturally present. He represents
capital. A third member of the group is the captain of the ship. In our day
the word of the captain is final. The captain had great authority then. Since
he is a man of the sea and has the responsibility of saving the vessel, he is
naturally present. The presence of the fourth member of this council takes
us by surprise.

Who is he? Though he is a Roman citizen, he is not a Roman soldier.
Though born on the sea, he is not a sailor. No more is he a capitalist. He
tells us frankly that he has suffered the loss of all things. Not only is he
neither soldier, nor sailor, nor capitalist, but he is a preacher. More amazing
still, he is a member of a despised sect. He is a Christian. Not only so, but
he is under arrest. He is now on the way to Rome to stand trial. It speaks
volumes, I think, for the personality of this great man that under the circum-
stances he was called into conference with this Roman officer and with the
captain and the owner of the vessel.

The matter under consideration is very important to themselves and to
their fellow passengers and to their fellow voyagers. They have met to decide
whether they will winter here at Fair Havens or go fifty miles further along
the coast to the more commodious harbor at Phenice. The day is so bright,
the sea is so smooth, the south wind is so soft, the distance is so short
that the captain of the vessel decides that, though the time of sailing is
passed, it will be safe to make the venture. The owner of the vessel who has
most at stake agrees with him. Paul objects. He frankly speaks his mind.
"Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only
to the lading and the ship but to our lives." There are two against one.

Captain Julius did what I should likely have done under the circumstances. He disregarded the opinion of the landlubber Paul and cast his vote with the two men of the sea, the Captain and the owner of the vessel.

II

Scene 2. Having reached this decision, they at once put it into effect. Listen to the story: "When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete." But they had no more than got out of the harbor until the whole scene changed. The smiling sea became black with storm clouds. The gentle south breeze whipped to the northeast and rose rapidly into a hissing hurricane. The sea pounded with winds which at once became angry. The great waves curled their lips and "lay in wait with lifted teeth as if to bite." But there was no turning back. We are fond of saying, "We will do better next time." But so many things do not have any next time! This was one.

But these men were far too sturdy merely to wring their hands over a mistake. They set to work to make the best of a bad mess. They determined to do all that was humanly possible to save the situation. First they ran under the shelter of a certain island and take the life-boat on board. In those days the life-boat was trailed behind. Of course, in time of storm it became a danger to the vessel and threatened to batter a hole in its hull. Having taken the life-boat on board, they next tied up the vessel with cables. They strapped it somewhat as we used to strap an old-fashioned trunk. This was done to keep the vessel from going to pieces. This was the work of the first day.

The second day the storm was as serious and black as ever. So desperate was their plight that they began to toss the cargo over board. They got rid of that for which the voyage was made. The third day the storm having increased...
Having taken up the life-boat, having left the ship, having lightened it of its cargo and furnishings, there was nothing more that they could do. Then came the final tragedy. Idle, drifting—All hope that we should be saved was then taken away. As long as hope lives everything in a measure is possible. But when hope is dead nothing is possible. Man won't fight without hope. They won't work without it. I looked into the face of a suicide sometime ago. As I asked in my heart, what did you do that for? Why did you quit before the whistle blew? He had doubtless helped to lighten the ship. But when the work was over and all had been done that human hands could do, there was another resource left. The waters leaped, the night winds blew, and we were flying ever we knew from specters in the night.

Then came the final tragedy. Idle, drifting—All hope that we should be saved was then taken away. As long as hope lives everything in a measure is possible. But when hope is dead nothing is possible. Man won't fight without hope. They won't work without it. I looked into the face of a suicide sometime ago. As I asked in my heart, what did you do that for? Why did you quit before the whistle blew? He had doubtless helped to lighten the ship. But when the work was over and all had been done that human hands could do, there was another resource left. The waters leaped, the night winds blew, and we were flying ever we knew from specters in the night.

It was not in the day of battle that we threw away the sword. We lowered the sails, Luke tells us, and so were driven. Idleness is a great test of courage. Work helps to keep up morale. And when they had to sit with folded hands and wait for what seemed inevitable doom, we lowered the sails, Luke tells us, and so were driven. Idleness is a great test of courage.

But it so happened that there was one man on board who believed that when all had been done that human hands could do, there was another resource left. He had doubtless helped to lighten the ship, but when the work was over and all had been done that human hands could do, there was another resource left.

Then came the final tragedy. Idle, drifting—All hope that we should be saved was then taken away. As long as hope lives everything in a measure is possible. But when hope is dead nothing is possible. Man won't fight without hope. They won't work without it.

I looked into the face of a suicide sometime ago. As I asked in my heart, what did you do that for? Why did you quit before the whistle blew? He had doubtless helped to lighten the ship. But when the work was over and all had been done that human hands could do, there was another resource left.
decision, this man turned to God. He believed that God always has the final word. He believed that there is always something that God can do. He saw that there was no hope in the captain. He did not count any more. Julius was a brave officer of the Roman Army, but he also did not count. The owner of the vessel with all his money could not buy an ounce of safety. He did not count. But still there was God, the Mighty God, in the hollow of Whose hand the sea raged and roared. He went alone to prayer and there he remained until the answer came.

III

The next scene brings us to the beginning of the dawn. It is one of the finest scenes that I know in all literature. I am sure that those who were present never forgot it. It makes my heart stand up and cheer to this day. Listen: "After long absence Paul stood forth in the midst of them." He had been away, alone with God. But he had not been talking to God about himself alone. He was sharing the needs of his fellow voyagers. And now he comes out among them and makes his way along the wind-swept, sea-drenched deck. Then as he clings perhaps to a piece of broken spar to steady himself while the ship threatens to go to pieces beneath his feet, and while the storm-god tosses from his red hands the thunder, this man lifts his voice and cries, "Be of good cheer!" What a word for an hour like that! Whatever may be our religion or lack of it, we all need such a word in this time of storm.

"Be of good cheer!" That is preeminently a Christian word. It is a call to courage that was on the lips of Jesus again and again. One day when they flung at His feet a man who had sowed his wild oats and was reaping them, Jesus said to that battered bit of human wreckage, "Be of good cheer! Thy sins are forgiven thee." And thus, He gave him a new chance. When He Himself had reached the end of the journey and the shadow of the cross was
upon Him and life seemed to be going out in utter failure, He turned to His friends with high-hearted gallantry and said, "Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world." And Paul, who so shared the mind of Christ, cries to his tempest-tossed fellows, "Be of good cheer!"

But whether this is a great word depends upon the basis of our cheer. It may be uttered in such a way as to be merely aggravating, if not silly. "Cheer up!" sometimes a friend says. "You do not have to die but once." But once is enough. That is usually fatal. "Be of good cheer!" another says. "The dangers that threaten you are not real. The skies are really very smiling. This ship is really very seaworthy. Everything is well, and we are on our way to our desired haven." If Paul had said that, they would have tossed him oberboard with some degree of justice. Thank God, Christianity does not call us to shut our eyes to grim facts that we know to be facts. Such denial may be a real cure for imaginary evils, but it is an imaginary cure for real evils.

Paul did not base his cheer on a denial of grim facts.

No more did he base his cheer on the outward and the visible. "Be of good cheer!" he might have said. "The storm is lulling, and the sun will soon be shining." "At the sun was not shining, and the storm was not lulling." "Be of good cheer! You may count on your officers. You may count on the crew. They will see you through." But they were not to be counted on. They were utterly powerless. "Be of good cheer, for this is a solid vessel." But it was not. It was threatening to crack up at any moment. Why then is there any sense in Paul's splendid call? It was sane because his cheer was based upon faith in God.

Listen to his whole appeal: "Sirs, he should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel
of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. I know that the God to Whom I spoke and Who spoke to me is dependable. He keeps faith. He will never let us down." Blessed is the man that can stand up in the teeth of the tempest and recite his creed.

"Though giant rains put out the sun,
Here stand I for a sign,
Though earth be filled with waters dark,
My cup is filled with wine.
Tell to the trembling priests that hear—
Under the deluge rod
One nameless shattered broken man
Stood up and drank to God."

Here is a man who stands up alone to drink to God. "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me." There can be nothing finer than that.

IV

What was the outcome? What is the good of such a faith as Paul's?

1. It was certainly good for Paul. That nobody will deny. Had the vessel wrecked and had they all gone to death together, Paul would have been the victor. The fear-tortured on board would have died many deaths before they ended among the crawling things at the bottom of the sea. Paul at least would never have died but once. He had something that could make him steady when the whole world seemed going to pieces. He had something that could give him joy when there seemed nothing over which to rejoice. He had something that could give him inward peace when the whole universe seemed full of storm. He had something that could give him strength and courage when all others had become weak and discouraged. Certainly Paul had a treasure that for himself was infinitely worthwhile.

But look what Paul's faith did for others. Paul saved the situation.
He saved the lives of these other two hundred seventy-five as surely as if he had taken each one upon his back and had swum to shore. How did he manage? First, when he had the assurance that God was going to see him through, he did not sit down and fold his hands. He cooperated with God. It strikes me that that is always sane. There are those who pray for themselves when they are sick but refuse to take medicine. I am not criticizing such. But if it is right to eat in order to have strength, it is sane to cooperate with a physician. "I bound up his wounds," said the Greek physician Galen, "but God healed him." Paul believed God was going to save the situation, but he believed that it was up to him and those on board to cooperate with God. This cooperation took three definite directions.

First, Paul knew that this crew with their passengers were desperately in need of food. During the storm they had not been able to cook. They had been too sick to eat even if they had had plenty. But now they were haggard and weak. Therefore, Paul took a piece of bread and stood up before them, asked the blessing, and then proceeded to eat, urging them to do likewise. Listen to the result. "Then were they of good cheer and took bread."

Cowardice is very contagious. But thank God, courage is too. As Paul stood there calmly eating, they caught courage from his courageous soul.

Second, when Paul held them together. The sailors under pretense of mending the vessel, lowered the life-boat in order to escape and leave the passengers to their fate, but Paul said, "Unless we stay together we cannot be saved." That was a wise word. It is wise for the family. Unless we hold together we break our heart and wreck the family. It is wise for the church. I can not carry on without you, not if I had the ability of Paul. You bring something into the services without which this church could not live. We must hold together as a nation or we cannot win the War. When the War is over, we must hold together as a world or we will wreck the world.
The man of faith is a unifying force.

Third, not only did Paul hold them together, but he induced them to help one another. Had every man simply sought his own safety, every member of the crew and passengers would doubtless have been lost. But when the vessel stuck and began to go to pieces, Paul ordered them that could swim to jump in first and help those that could not. And how does the story end? Some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, they all escaped safely to land. To whom did they owe their lives? Under God they owed their lives to this man who was a mighty believer. And mark me, if you and I are going to help our fellow voyagers to make the shore for the building of a better world, we must be men and women of faith. It is easy to stand up in the secure atmosphere of this church and recite our creed. But if we are to help keep the church together and thus to rebuild our shattered and broken humanity we must stand even in the teeth of the tempest and shout with Paul both with our lips with our lives, "Be of good cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."
Therefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me.

— Acts 27:25

This is one of the most gripping sea stories in ancient literature. It was evidently written by an eye-witness as we read it we fairly feel the lash of the spray in our faces. We hear the groans of the vessel as it threatens to go to pieces. We look death eye to eye. Luke who wrote this story was Paul's traveling companion. As he writes, he is telling his own experience.

But as the scene opens, it is one full of beauty and peace. Four men are having a conference on the deck of a merchant vessel. This vessel is anchored in the harbor of Fair Haven, off the coast of Crete. It is a lovely day in early autumn. The skies are blue. The sea shimmers in the sunlight like a polished mirror. The wind comes from the South, as caressingly soft as the breath of any infant.

The matter under consideration by these four men is one of great importance. On account of the lateness of the season, navigation is now dangerous. The weak craft of that day did not venture upon the high seas during autumn and winter. But these men are considering the wisdom of going fifty miles further up the coast in order to find a more commodious harbor. The day is so beautiful it seems that they may make the venture with absolute safety.

The personnel of this committee is interesting. The first member of the group is Julius. He is a soldier and a gentleman. Since his vessel has probably been leased by the government, and—
since he is an officer of the Roman Empire, he is in command.
His word is more powerful even than the captain's. He represents
military authority. A second man present is the owner of the ship.
He possibly owns the cargo also. He has a right to be present
because he is the most deeply interested of the four. He repres-
sents capital. The third member is the captain of the vessel.
He is to direct the sailing of the ship. He is a man of the sea.
The presence of the fourth member is a bit of a surprise. He is
neither a soldier, nor a capitalist, nor a sailor. He is
a land-lubber. Worse still, he is a preacher. Worse still, he
is a preacher of the most despised sect of a despised people. I spoke
I think such was the personality of this man, Paul, that he was
invited to share in this conference.

The whole discussion is not given. But we know the
results of the conference, and the position taken by each man.
The captain of the vessel was of the opinion that they might
safely reach the larger harbor. The owner of the vessel agreed
with him. Paul, however, was of the contrary opinion. He was
sure that they were making a mistake. Therefore, as was his
custom, he spoke his mind with great plainness. "Sir," he said,
"I perceive that this will be with great harm, not only to the
lading of the ship, but also of our lives." But when Julius had
the responsibility of casting the deciding vote, he naturally
voted for the captain and the owner of the vessel instead of
with Paul. They were men of the sea, and Paul was not. It was
decided that they should leave Fair Havens for Phenice.

The decision was at once put into effect, but the
vessel had hardly cleared the harbor before the whole outlook was
changed. The skies became overcast with black clouds. The
gentle south wind whipped to the north east, and grew rapidly
into a furious and hissing hurricane. The calm sea began to
wrinkle its brows, and curl its lips, and lie in wait with lifted
teeth as if to bite. The men on board felt themselves bound
together in the bonds of a common danger and of a common need.

The first view we get of them is their working together
to save themselves from a common disaster. They lift up the
life boat that in those days was trailing behind. They under-
girded the vessel with grappling cables; tied it up somewhat as
one today would tie up a trunk—this, to keep it from going to pieces.
As it was being pounded by the vigorous fists of the sea. Then,
the lightened the ship of its cargo, and then Luke tells us, "We
threw out with our hands the tackle of the ship." Passengers
and crew worked together for a common safety.

This done, there were those who thought mistakenly that
there was nothing more to do. Therefore, they began to wait in
idleness for whatever might happen. But the storm did not abate.
It grew more intense. The seas became more heavy, and those on
board sat with folded hands waiting. Luke says, "We let it drift."
Being idle, they drifted. Drifting, they headed towards disaster
because nobody ever drifts in any other direction.

Now, there is scarcely a foe that is not aided by idleness.
To be busy is a great antidote against fear. When one asked Marshall
Bry who was possibly the most daring of Napoleon's marshalls, if he
never felt fear, he answered,"I am too busy." But fear is far
harder to resist when one is idle.
"It was not in the day of battle,
That we threw away the sword,
But in the lonely hours of watching,
By the river by the ford.

The waters lapped; the night winds blew,
Full armed, the fear was born and grew,
And we were flying ere we knew,
From spectres in the night."

Idleness not only ministered to their fears, but enabled them to minister each to the fear of the other. Having nothing else to do, they began to prophesy disaster. When they met each other, they would tell of the wild time they had last night, and how things were going to be still worse tonight and tomorrow. They began to criticise Julius for his wrong decision. They criticised the captain for not being a better sailor. They began to look askance at one another. They ever went so low that the sailor group tried to escape and leave the men entrusted to their care to their own fate. Rats forsake a sinking ship, because they are rats. And Luke sums up their tragic plight by saying, "All hope that we should be saved was then taken away."

This, of course, marks the lowest depths. A hopeless man is a useless man. I looked into the face of a suicide not long ago. Why did he fling out of life? Why did he stand from under the burdens that his own shoulders had created to be borne by other shoulders? He lost hope. God can do nothing with a church that has lost hope. There is nothing like despair to clip the thaws of our strength and leave us a burden to ourselves and to others. About the saddest loss that any man can suffer is the loss of hope. We realize the truth of this, and yet not all of us act accordingly. I have known those whose supreme stock in trade seemed to be taking the heart out of folks. I have known people who could meet you on the street and go through your pockets and steal your moral coin with a skill that would have made the artful dodger green with envy. Yet, that is about the worst of
robbers.

"He who steals my purse steals trash,
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.
But he that filcheth from me my hope, my courage,
my expectation,
Taketh that which enriches him not, but makes me poor indeed."

What a spiteful sight this group of two hundred and seventy-six souls, hopeless, despairing, drifting to what they believe is inevitable doom!

III.

But suddenly a new day dawns. It comes from an unexpected source. "There is nothing more that we can do," these frightened, hopeless men said each to the other. But not so Paul. Paul determined that he would not meet this disaster halfway. He determined that he would not take it lying down. There was one more thing that he could do. He could pray. He could appeal to the God in the hollow of whose hands the sea waves roll. Therefore, Paul gave himself up to prayer. He managed to find among those confused and despairing men a place where he could meet God face to face.

And listen to the outcome. After long absence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them. Take a look at him. Here he makes his way out from the hull of the ship. He walks upon that wave-swept deck, He grasps a broken spar to steady himself, and then he lifts his voice above the roar of the sea and above the rage of the wind, and above the crash of thunder, and above the popping timbers of that foundering vessel. With the storm-light in his face, and with death laughing with hollow laughter, among the storm sheets of the rigging, he cries:

"Be of good cheer! Where is Julius? Never mind, he doesn't count now. Where is the captain of the vessel? No matter, he doesn't
count. Where is the man that counts? This man who is calling despairing men back to courage.

Of all the benefactors that we meet in this world, there are few, I think, that render quite so large a service as those who bring us courage. There is no finer art than that of changing sabbings into songs. Moffatt, in his translation of Job, has a sentence that is as challenging as martial music. It says of Job: "His words set men upon their feet." "Ow magnificent! Here is a man that is down. The waves and billows of disaster have roared over him till he is sure that he can never rise again. But Job comes by and speaks to him in such a fashion that he stands up and believes that after all life is a priceless thing and that it is good to be a man.

Isaiah was like that. "Thou hast given me the tongue of him that has taught, that I might know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." There are a lot of weary folks, weary with the burden of their own sense of failure, weary with the consciousness of the futility of their struggle. But Isaiah knew how to speak to such folks. God had taught him, the God of the smoking flax, and of the bruised reed. And Paul joins this company as he cries: "Be of good cheer."

This is a word that I wish I might make real to you today. It is preeminently a Christian word. It was on the lips of Jesus again and again. He uttered it in the presence of the ravages of sin. He uttered it amidst the upheavals of nature. He uttered it as he stood face to face with death. "Be of good cheer." Of course the vesting power of the word draws upon the foundation upon which it rests. There is no use to shout "Be of good cheer" unless reason for the cheer is given. But here
Paul had a reason.

what is the basis of this cheer? In calling these men back to hope, he does not ask them to shut their eyes to the fact. He does not say, "Be of good cheer because there is really no storm. Be of good cheer because this sea that seems so full of rage is in reality a very smooth and placid sea. Be of good cheer because I have demonstrated all sin, sickness and death, and know that such things do not exist." No, Paul was a stern son of fact, as was his master. And he can look all the tempests that rage in the face and confess their reality and yet say, "Be of good cheer."

Nor does he pass his cheer on the strength of their material resources. He does not say, "Be of good cheer because you have a brave captain." He does not say, "Be of good cheer because you have a ship that is strong, and sea-worthy." That was not the case. The ship was threatening to go to pieces at any moment. He based his cheer on the surest of all sure foundations. "Be of good cheer," he shouts, "because there stood by me this night the angel of God whose I am, and whom I serve. I asked him for your safety and he promised it to me. Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Therefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Here is a man who can stand up with every human hope gone, and recite his creed, and stand upon it strong and unafraid.

IV.

What was the outcome? You know. He saved the situation. Every man on that vessel definitely owed his life to St. Paul as if the apostle had carried every man to shore in his arms. But when Paul heard God's promise that he was going to save these men, he did not sit down and fold his hands and let
God do everything. That is not faith; that is presumption. Paul knew that they must cooperate with God. And look how in common sense and practical Paul was in going about it.

1. He made these half-starved men eat. During those terrible days of storm it had been impossible to prepare food. They were too sick and frightened to eat even what they had. But now Paul takes his place among them and tells them that they are too weak to be of any value in saving themselves as they are; that they ought to eat. And he takes a bit of bread and asks the blessing, and begins to eat, and they join him. That is what we need to do. Some of us, during these days, have been too frightened to take any of the Bread of Life. If we are going to cooperate with God, we must have spiritual strength, and to do that we must eat.

2. Paul held them together. When one group who were sailors and far better able to look out for themselves than the others wanted to get away, Paul said, "Unless these remain, ye cannot be saved." "For you to separate now," he seems to say, "will mean disaster to at least one group of you, if not to all of you." It would not have been so surprising if those members, ignorant of the ways of the sea, had tried to slip out and stand from under. But it is surprising to see the folks do so who knew, and who realized how desperately they were needed.

But that has happened more than once. While I was pastor in Washington, a woman of whose vital earnestness I have not the slightest doubt, came to me to tell of a great spiritual experience that had just enriched her life. She told me how she had been filled with the Holy Ghost, and then as I was listening for her to tell what crusade she was planning to launch for her church, she
MEN THAT COUNT

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." (Acts 27:25)

The text is a part of one of the most graphic stories in ancient literature. In fact, it is one of the most realistic sea stories in the literature of the world. It was evidently written by an eye witness. Dr. Luke, Paul's traveling companion, was no ordinary witness. He had a seeing eye and was skilled in telling what he saw. It would be worth any man's while to read and reread this story. It is more bracing and honest than racial music. It is the story of a storm. In reality it is a great drama in four scenes.

I

The story of a storm. When the curtain rises the scene before us is a picture of almost perfect peace. We see a merchant vessel in the port of Fair Havens, off the coast of Crete, an island in the beautiful Mediterranean. It is a lovely day in early autumn. The skies are as blue and clean as if God had just washed them that morning. The sea spreads out like a great shimmering mirror. The south wind caresses the face as softly as the breath of an infant. There is certainly nothing about this picture to suggest the storm.

On the deck of this merchant vessel are four men in earnest conversation. They are holding a conference. The matter under discussion is this: shall they winter in this small port of Fair Havens or go fifty miles further.
up the coast to the more commodious port of Phenise. The only reason there
is any question is the fact that the autumn being on, sailing has now become
dangerous for such frail vessels as traversed the seas in that time.

The personnel of this conference is interesting. Present as the chair­
man of the meeting is a young Roman officer named Julius. He is evidently a
gentleman. His authority is final, even greater than that of the captain.
This is the case because this merchant vessel has been leased by the govern­
ment. Present also is the owner of the vessel. He doubtless also owns the
cargo. Naturally he would be present as one deeply interested. He repre­
sents capital. Present also is the captain of the ship. He is a man of
the sea. His authority is greater than that of any other except Captain
Julius. The fourth member of the group is one whose presence we should
hardly have expected. He is neither a soldier, a sailor, nor a capitalist. He
is a preacher. He is a preacher of the despised sect. Not only so but
he is a prisoner. He is now on his way to Rome to stand trial. It certainly
speaks volumes for the force of this man's personality that he was invited
to take part in this conference.

Now when the vote was taken the captain of the vessel voted in favor of
going to the more commodious harbor. The owner of the vessel voted with him.
But Paul voted in the negative. He urged that they remain where they were.

"I perceive," he declared, "that this voyage shall be with much harm and
loss not only to the lading of the ship but also to our lives. Captain
Julius had the deciding vote. He did what I doubtless should have done under
the circumstances. He said, "Here are two against one. These two are both
men of the sea. This one is a land-lord. Therefore, I will cast my vote
with the men who have followed the sea." So it was decided that they should
leave Fair Havens for Phenise.

II

No sooner had they reached this decision than they put it into effect.
Listen to the story. "When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon." There is the picture. The vessel was hardly out of port until the whole scene changed from one of peace to tempestuous fury. The blue skies were hidden by scudding storm clouds. The gentle south wind swept to the northeast and became a hissing hurricane. The peaceful sea became angry and curled its lip and lay in wait with lifted teeth as if to bite."

The first day of the storm they ran under the shelter of a certain island. With this protection they took up the life boat. In those days the life boats were not carried on deck but were towed behind. Naturally in time of storm they became a menace. Their plunge would be likely to break a hole in the vessel. Having taken up the life boat they next used frapping cables to undergird the ship. They tied it up somewhat as we tie up a trunk in order to keep it from going to pieces.

On the second day they threw out the cargo, or at least enough of the cargo to make the ship safer. "On the third day we threw out," says Luke, "with our own hands (the passengers were evidently here helping the sailors) the tackling of the ship.

With the fourth day there was nothing more to be done. Everything that they knew to safeguard the life of the ship had been done. Therefore they could only sit and wait, hoping that the storm would abate, but instead of abating it became more furious. Their enforced idleness added to their panic. "All hope," Luke declares, "that we should be saved was then taken away." There they were, huddled upon the doomed ship, drifting to a disaster that they were powerless to ward off.

This scene is one of bleak despair.

III

The next brings us to a glorious sunrise.
When all others on board had declared that there was nothing more to be done, there was one man who did not agree with them. There was one man who believed that man's extremity was God's opportunity. He believed that however desperate the situation, however helpless we are, God is never at the end of his resources. He was sure that though the vessel was the plaything of this seething sea that he could still do something for it by appealing to him in the hollow of whose hand the seas rage and roar. Therefore he gave himself to prayer. So what.

Listen to the answer. "After long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said: 'Sirs, be of good cheer.'" I like this picture. It would be hard to find a finer in the Bible or out of it. Here comes a man perhaps from out the hole of the vessel. He has been alone with God. He makes his way among those desperate and hopeless men. Then while the sea rages and while the timbers of the vessel pop and threaten to go to pieces and while death laughs with hollow laughter among the torn shelters of the rigging he makes himself heard above the tumult of it all, crying: "Be of good cheer."

Now that is a great word anytime, anywhere. It is a downright Christian word. It was on the lips of Jesus again and again. He uttered it in the presence of the wreckage that sin had brought. When one day they brought a man to him who had sown his wild oats and who was now reaping them. He said to that man, "Son, be of good cheer. Thy sins are forgiven thee." And when he himself reached the end of the journey in seemingly utter defeat he said with the assurance of victory: "Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." So Paul shouts to this desparate crowd: "Be of good cheer."

But naturally if this word is to bring any real help the cheer offered must be built upon a solid foundation. "Be of good cheer." "Why?" one asks desperately. What is there to be cheerful about? What does Paul suggest? He did not tell them to be of good cheer because the situation was not bad after all. He did not deny the reality of the storm. He did not shut his
eyes to the fact that the vessel was threatening to go to pieces under their very feet. Thank God the cheer that Jesus Christ offers is never born of shutting our eyes to the grim facts of life. Paul did not base his cheer therefore on the denial of the grim danger that threatened.

No more did he base his cheer on the changing weather. He did not say 'be of good cheer, for the skies are clearing. There is already a glint of blue.' He did not say, 'be of good cheer because the storm is dying.' No more did he base his cheer upon the strength of the vessel, nor upon the trustworthiness of the men who had it in charge. Julius and the sea captain and the sailors were doubtless brave men but they had to confess that the situation was beyond their control.

Why then, be cheerful. Here is the answer. "Be of good cheer for there stood by me this night the angel of God whose I am and whom I serve, saying 'fear not, Paul, for thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." It is easy to recite our creed on a beautiful spring day when life is running with utter smoothness but here is a man who can stand up in the face of the tempest and recite his creed. I like that.

    Though giant rains put out the sun,
    Here stand I for a sign;
    Though warth be filled with waters dark,
    My cup is filled with wine.

Tell to the trembling priest that here
    Under the deluge rod
One tattered, nameless, man
    Stands up to drink to God.

IV

Then what? What was the good of Paul's faith? To begin with, it steadied him. Had the vessel gone to pieces and had Paul's body ended among the crawling things at the bottom of the sea, he would still have been conquerer. This faith enabled him to face the worst that the storm could do
calmly and without fear. Whoever you are, however interested you may be in religion, if you do not care to have a faith like this you simply have no appreciation of life's finest values.

Not only did this faith do something for Paul but it enabled him to do something for others. I have reminded you before how contagious is cowardice. It is as contagious as courage. This man became the savior of the situation because he had a faith that released the might of God. By having prayed Paul helped by cooperating with God. That is vastly important. God releases his power through human personality. I have seen people who trusted God for healing and would therefore consult no physician. I am not going to criticize such but personally I believe God works through physicians just as he works through food in order to give us strength. "I bound up his wounds," said Galen, "and God healed him." Having won the assurance that God was going to save the situation Paul used complete sanity and common sense in doing his own part and in inducing others to do so.

1. First, he ate. He took bread and asked the blessing before them all. And when those half-starved men saw him eating, men who had been too frightened and too seasick to eat, took some bread that gave them the needed physical strength for the struggle that is ahead.

2. He held them together. When the sailors lowered the life boat and sought to escape, Paul warned the officers unless these remained in the ship we cannot be saved. We must hold together as a church, as a nation, as a world or we cannot be saved. Paul did not care himself to come out and be separated from these pagans. He wanted a salvation that included them.

3. Not only did he hold them together but he induced them to cooperate, to help each other. When the vessel broke up he ordered the men who could swim to jump in first. These helped those who could not swim. With the result that we hear this about the ending: "They all escaped safely to land, and Paul had saved the situation." Paul, the man of faith. He had saved it just as really as if he had rescued every man personally.
Who then are the men that really count in this world. They are the men who through faith can release the power of God on their own lives and on the lives of others. Years ago I was sent to a church that seemed a hopeless wreck. I decided to undertake a revival. I sent for my old friend whose deep consecration I knew to come and assist, not by preaching but by prayer. Day after day as the meeting went on folks would meet us and say, "There is no hope." But my friend would smile upon them as if they were telling good news, and answer, "You would not say that if you knew my Lord as I know him." Thus we went on, my friend leaning on the Lord and I leaning on him until there was a victory that worked a moral revolution in that church. There is no measuring the power of the man in any day who can stand up in the teeth of the tempest and say with conviction: "Be of good cheer for I believe God."
A DRAMA OF THE SEA

Acts 27:25 - Wherefore, sir, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

This text is a part of the greatest sea story in the Bible. It is one of the greatest and most gripping in all literature. The man who describes it is an eye witness. He passed through its thrills and its horrors. The picture is so clear that it almost makes one seasick to read it, were it not for the fact that he is braced by one of the most commanding and uplifting personalities of all times.

The story is really a drama in four scenes. As the curtain rises the scene is one of surpassing beauty. It is one of autumn's rare days when summer seems to have given the world a return engagement. The skies are blue. The sea spreads out like a great shimmering mirror. The south wind caresses the face with the gentleness of the breath of an infant. We see a little merchant vessel in the Port of Fair Havens on the Island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. On the deck of this vessel are four men engaged in earnest conference. The question before them is one of great importance, whether they shall winter in this little port or go to a more commodious one 50 miles up the coast called Phoenix.

There are four members of this conference. The president of the meeting is a Roman Centurion named Julius, evidently a fine and cultivated gentleman. Present also, naturally, is the owner of the ship. He probably owns the cargo as well. Also present is the Captain of the ship. His word would be supreme today, but it was not then. The word of the Roman official

was supreme. The fourth member of this quartet is one we would hardly have expected. He is not a man of the sea, though he was born on the coast. He is neither a soldier nor a sailor. He is not a capitalist. He tells us frankly that he has suffered the loss of all things. Indeed he is a preacher and a preacher of a very despised and troublesome sect known as Christians. He is not even a free man. He is under arrest and is on his way to Rome to stand trial. It speaks volumes for the personality of this man that he was invited into this conference.

When the vote was taken, the owner of the ship, who has most at stake, votes to go to the more roomy harbor of Phoenix. The Captain of the vessel, agrees with him. The day is so beautiful and the skies are so calm. Paul, the landlubber, is of a contrary opinion and he speaks his mind freely saying "I perceive that this voyage is going to be with much harm and loss, not only to the lading of the ship, but also to our lives." But Junius, who has the deciding vote, since there are two against one, naturally takes the side of the owner and the Captain of the vessel. They are men of the sea, while this man is a landlubber and a preacher and, of course, is not supposed to know anything in particular about practical affairs. So much for the first scene.

When the curtain rises on the next scene it is one of sharpest possible contrast. Having made their decision they at once put it into effect. But no sooner were they outside the harbor than the skies became black with scudding storm clouds. The gentle South wind whips into the northeast and quickly rises into the
dimensions of a hissing hurricane. The glassy sea, as if in
resentment, goes into a rage and "curls its lips and lies in wait,
as if to bite." But though they know they have reached the point
of no return, in this particular voyage, they are not cowards.
They have flouted danger all their lives and they are rugged
and brave men. They are not going to meet their fate lying
down. So they at once set themselves to doing everything that's
humanly possible to make the vessel secure. They run under the
shelter of an little island while they lift the lifeboat, which
trailed behind in those days, onto the deck. Leaving it there
it would have rammed the vessel. Then they tied the frail
wooden vessel with frapping cables, somewhat as we use to tie
up an old fashioned trunk. That occupied the first day.

The second day, the storm continuing, they in their despera-
tion lightened the vessel by throwing out some of the cargo.
Tossing the very purpose of the voyage into the sea. The third
day was just as black, as the first and second. So they con-
tinued their work of making themselves secure by throwing over
board a part of the tackling of the ship.

Then came the fourth day when they had done everything that
was humanly possible, and when in enforced idleness they had to
face their grim situation—it was easier when they had something
to do—idleness made their terror the greater. And so Luke tells
us "when neither sun, nor moon, nor stars in many days appeared and
no small tempest lay on us, all hope that they should be saved
was then taken away." They sat about with their grim discouragement,
utterly defeated, some whining, some blaming their officers, some
blaming one and some another, but all ending in the same thing—
a whine and a groan of despair.
Now there was one exception, and this exception is the thrilling part of the story. The third scene is one that lifts the heart and sets the heart to dreaming. While 275 of those on board said, "we have reached the end of the trail, there is nothing more we can do, there was one exception out of this 276. One man believed there was something else to be done. He believed it was in the hollow of God's hand that the seas raged and roared. He believed that there was always something that God could do. Therefore he betook himself to prayer.

And having prayed, and having prayed victoriously, he came out among those whipped and defeated people with this brave and cheering word on his lips.— I can see him as he slips along the deck with the storm light in his face, with the winds hissing and the rains pattering against him.— He grips a bit of broken spar, perhaps and lifts his voice above the wail and roar of the tempest and said "be of good cheer!" What a man! "Though giant rains put out the sun, here stand I for a sign. Though earth be filled with waters dark, my cup is filled with wine." Tell to the trembling priest that here under the deluged world, one broken, nameless, desperate man stood up and drank to God." He still believed that there was something God could do.

There are two words that walk like angelic twins across the pages of this book, and that is these two words, "but God". Of all the books that face up to the grim and terrible in life, no other book surpasses the Bible. I defy you to find a book braver in facing the most devilish that can be done and suffered but always against the worst that man can be do, stands
the best that God can be and do, "There they crucified him." You
couldn't go beyond that! "But God raised him from the dead."
And so this man stood and shouted this great word "be of good
cheer!"

What a shock; what a joyous shock! - That is a Christian
word. That is a word that is on the lips of our Lord again and
again. He said it in the presence of the ravages that sin had
wrought. He said it as He faced the cross - "Be of good Cheer!"
I have overcome the world".

But whether that word is a source of consolation or a
source of irritation, depends upon the basis upon which that
cheer is founded. "Be of good cheer!", and I
turn on him and say, with a kind of indignation "be of good
cheer when the vessel is going to pieces? Why be of good cheer?"

Well, he didn't base his cheer on anything that the human
eye could see. He didn't say "be of good cheer because this
ship's captain and because the Roman Centurion can save the
situation!" He knew they couldn't. "Be of good cheer because this
He knew
ship is seaworthy." It wasn't. It was threatening to crack up
under their feet any moment. "Be of good cheer because you can
depend on these sailors." But you couldn't depend on the sailors
nor the soldiers either. "Be of good cheer because the sun is
about to break through." Not a bit of it. The skies were as
black as they had ever been. Why then be of good cheer? "Be
of good cheer," he said, "because there stood by me this night
the angel of the God whom I serve, and he said 'fear not, Paul,
for thou must be brought before Caesar.' "Therefore be of good
cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."
There is a foundation that never gives way. There is something against which to lean our weak shoulders in a time of storm. I know it will never let you down.

Now, having brought this bracing word to those who were with him, in this terrible calamity, then what? Well, the fourth scene is one of activity. Paul was a great believer; he was a man of a mighty faith. But faith that is real goes into action. Faith that is real cooperates with God. My father was a Christian farmer. He was a man of prayer, but when the springtime came he didn't pray God to sow oats in this field, and plant corn in that. He didn't pray God to dig up those million sassafras sprouts; he prayed me to do that. If he'd left it to God he'd have starved to death, and his children with him. There is a part that we must play and there is a part that God must play.

Paul cooperated with God in the first place. He gave those people a new courage. He took a bit of bread and stood up there on the deck and said "you've been a long time without any food, you must take some bread or you'll be too weak to accomplish anything". And he set an example - he asked the blessing there, and ate himself, and then, since courage is courageous, -- Bob Ingersol used to say bitterly "why didn't God, if there is a God, make courage and health contagious as it did cowardice and sickness?" The answer to that is: He did it just at times exactly that. One courageous man can steady a whole frantic mob, just as one coward can lead a mob into utter disaster and defeat.

By coming to a new courage himself, he gave a new courage to those that journeyed with him. Blessed is the man that can
bring courage to folks that are frightened, that can dry a
boy's tears without tweaking him by the nose and using a
handkerchief. He brought courage to these men who had lost their
courage; hope to these men who had lost their hope. Then he in-
duced them to cooperate with each other.

You know the sailors, contrary to the law of the sea, let
down the life boat, pretending that they were going to cast an
anchor. When Paul discovered that what they were really doing
was trying to get away and save their own skins and leave their
fellows to disaster, Paul said "we're all on the same boat." He told an officer "unless these remain, unless we hang together
we're going to hang separate." Having heard that, the Centurion
saw the sense of it and cut all the ropes and the boat dropped
into the sea.

We have learned, at least we should have learned, that we
are bound up in a bundle of life with the other man. We may not like the fact that if we burn our
finger it will give pain, but it's a fact nonetheless. We are
bound up in a bundle of life. What hurts you hurts me. What
hurts me hurts you.

Years ago my brother and I were milking one morning and
there were two yearlings there, gentle things, somewhat in the
way, and we decided we'd see which one of them could outpull,
and so we wrapped their tails together and caught hands and
those wise yearlings looked 'round at each other and said "there's
a catch in this. I don't like you much, but if I break away
I'm liable to hurt myself as much as I do you." But they didn't --
they said "I don't like a bone in you" and they pulled apart
and we had an extra tail in our hands. In order that my father might not see he I didn't know but what he might faint at the sight of blood - we ran the yearlings off up the hill. When he came back again a week or two later, father looked him over and said "that yearlings" lost a tail; he's hung it on a stump." I didn't set him right, but what I wanted to say was "No, he lost his tail because he wouldn't cooperate. He wouldn't realize that he was bound up in a bundle of life with the other fellow."

Paul said "unless these remain, you can not be saved." And that's just as true of the world at large as it was of that little vessel that was threatening to go to pieces. Not only did he induce them not to forsake the sinking ship, as rats have a way of doing; he induced them really to help each other. And so the men who could swim sprang first into the ocean and they helped those who could not swim. So that the story ends triumphantly - setting some on spars and some on broken pieces of vessel - and so they all escaped safe to land.

What a victory! And who won it? It was a victory of God, of course, but it was won through human instrumentality. It was won through one single man who, in a time of storm, could stand up because, through prayer, he had been girded by the very strength of God.

Years ago I was transferred from Oklahoma to Texas. I was a very young man. It was my third year in the ministry. Arrived at the seat of the Conference, everybody was discussing one appointment, and that was Blooming Grove. The Pastor had come up short in his accounts to the tune of $40,000 and had to quit the ministry and membership of the church, and they would
close every story of it with "God bless the man that goes to Blooming Grove." I didn't even pray for him. I knew where I was going. But at the close of the Conference, when I went in to hear where my brethren were going, I hadn't been in there five minutes, 'til I was read out to Blooming Grove.

Well, if a mule had kicked on the side of the head, I wouldn't have been much more stunned. I went down to Blooming Grove and found it bad, even beyond my expectations. I saw there was no living with it unless we had a change. I decided that we'd have a revival. I had a friend. He was not a preacher; he was a farmer. He was not a speaker, but he could pray. I was asked by a magazine some time ago to write a story of the greatest Christian I have ever known. He was the man.

I sent off and got him to stay in the parsonage with me to pray as I tried to preach. Day by day we went to church. Almost never did we go or come that we didn't meet some one of discouragement who said "well it's going just like it always has gone. No body can do anything with this situation." But he would smile upon them as Paul might have smiled upon those frightened men, and said "My brother you wouldn't say that if you knew my Lord as I know Him."

What he was saying when the storm was on, and the knees of everybody else had gone weak was "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." So the meeting dragged on until we came to the tenth night. I got there a bit late for some reason. The house was crowded. My friend was sitting on the pulpit steps, and when I came in he saw me and he sprang up and hurried down and put his arms around me and whispered in my ear and said "Say what the Lord tells you to say tonight. She's
going to break loose."

I preached and made an appeal and nobody moved. I said "If anybody wants to go, we're going to tarry a while, and I think that next 15 minutes were the climactic 15 minutes of my ministry. A revolution took place. Something happened that nobody would have believed could have happened. The Church was remade, and the community has never been quite the same since. What was the matter? One man stood up and said "I believe God."

The storm is on. It's over the wide world. If God hasn't the answer, there is no answer. Blessed is the man that so prays that he can stand up and say to his frightened fellows: "Wherefore sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God."
AN INCREDIBLE ESCAPE

Acts 27:44 - All escaped.

How utterly surprising! If ever doom seemed an absolute certainty, it is here. This is not the verdict simply of an onlooker. It is the verdict of a very wise man who suffered through the ordeal. "All hope," he said, "was then taken away". Such is the surprising end of the most dramatic and the best sea story in all the Bible.

PART I

As the curtain rises upon this dramatic story, we see the little merchant vessel anchored in the port of Fairhaven off the coast of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. It is one of autumn's rare days. Summer seems to have come back to give the world a return engagement. The skies are unspeakably blue. A gentle south wind, as soft as the breath of an infant, carresses the face. The sea spreads out in smiling beauty, as calm as a great meadow. Nothing could be more beautiful and more peaceful.

Now on deck of this little merchant vessel are four men engaged in earnest conversation. The personnel of this little committee is interesting. Chairman of the group, and the one whose voice is final, is a young gentlemanly Centurian. He takes precedence even over the captain, a situation that would not occur in our modern day when the captain's voice is always final. But this vessel had been leased by the Roman government and so this Centurian has the final word. Present also was the captain of the vessel. We expected him. And then present too was the owner of the vessel, and perhaps the owner of the cargo as well. With so much at stake, his presence was expected, but the presence of the next man takes us by surprise. He
is neither a soldier, nor a sailor, nor a capitalist. He is instead a preacher. Not only so, he is a preacher of a despised race, and if a still more a despised sect. He belongs to the sect of the Nazarenes. He is a Christian. Not only is he a preacher, but he is also a prisoner. He is on his way now to stand trial before the emperor. Certainly we did not expect his presence. Certainly also it speaks volumes for the personality of this great man that he was invited to participate in this great conference.

Now the question before the group is this. Shall they remain in the small port of Fairhaven, or shall they go fifty miles further up the coast to a more commodious harbor? It was an open question because it is autumn and sailing in the autumn in that day in the Mediterranean Sea was deadly dangerous. But the day was so perfectly beautiful that the captain of the vessel thought they might make the venture with a minimum of danger. And so he voted to go to the more commodious port. The owner of the vessel, who had most at stake, joined the captain in his vote to try to make the larger harbor.

But here again to the surprise; I think, of all present, this land lubber, this man who was, as we said, neither soldier, nor sailor, nor capitalist, had a different mind on the question. He thought that the adventure would not be safe, that it would be with much loss, as he said, not only to the ship but to their lives. "It is a deadly dangerous adventure and my advice is not to take it."

There were three then against one. Then came the vote. The captain and the owner of the vessel voted "Yes". Paul voted "No". Julius, the Centurian, had the deciding vote. How did he vote? He voted as you and I should have probably voted in his situation. He said "These two men are men of the sea, they vote to go; I am going to
vote with them since this preacher does not know the sea as these others know it." And so the decision was taken that they should leave Fairhaven for the more commodius harbor, Phoenix. At once they put their decision into action.

In the second scene the situation is vastly changed. Nature does an about face. The blue skies have become black with scudding storm clouds. The gentle south breeze whipped to the northeast and rises quickly into the dimensions of a hissing hurricane. The once placid sea, as if in resentment of so sudden a disturbance, begins to rage and curl its lip, and lie in wait with lifted teeth as if to bite. Every member of the committee knows that a mistake has been made. Those who had no vote in the matter know that a mistake has been made. They know also that they have reached the point of no return. They can not alter their decision. They must now face the consequences of their wrong choice.

But these men are not parlor soldiers. They are men who have been hardened by facing many a danger. More than once they had had a fisticuff with death, and they are too brawny and too brave to take their fate, whatever it be, lying down. And so they set about at once, taking every measure to guard against disaster. First they run under the shelter of a little island and take up the life boat, that in those days trailed behind the vessel. But, of course, in time of storm it became a menace rather than a help.

Next they tied the ship up, using frapping cables. They were trying to keep the frail thing from falling to pieces. So they roped it somewhat as we use to rope an old fashioned trunk. Then on the second day they threw out part of the cargo. That is, they
An Incredible escape

threw away a bit of the purpose of the voyage in order to be able to make the voyage. And on the third day they even went to the extreme of throwing out some of the tackling of the ship.

On the fourth day what did they do? They did nothing. There was nothing to do. They had gone as far as their human ingenuity could take them. And then came that inevitable rotting down of morale that goes on in idleness, whether it is voluntary or enforced.

With nothing to do but to wait for the coming end; with nothing to do but to look at the hour so close at hand when they would be just bits of human wreckage among the crawling things at the bottom of the sea. He wondered they went to pieces, so far as their morale was concerned, and Luke writes of them, and he was among the lot, "all hope that we should be saved was then taken away". As a result of their decision they had reached despair.

The third scene there is a hint of the dawning of a new day.

It came about, as great movements always come about, through one God-girded man. There were two hundred and seventy-six men on this vessel. Of those two hundred and seventy-six, two hundred and seventy-five were whipped. They had given up hope. They were huddled together on the deck, blaming their officers, or blaming fate, or blaming the storm. But they were without hope. And then there came the hint of a day.

"After a long absence," we read, "Paul stood forth in the midst of them! "Paul stood up", is the modern translation. While others were despairing, Paul who faced the same danger and the same ordeal, and believed that though all the ingenuity of man had gone for nothing, he had realized that their self efforts had proved fatal. Though there was nothing man could do to save himself, God could do.
The Incredible Escape

"Thus believing he gave himself to something. And so he went alone and engaged in prayer. And we can readily tell the nature of his prayer. For what did he pray? He did not say "Lord save me". He did not even confine his prayer to "Lord save me and my fellow Christian, Luke". He prayed for all on board. They were all on the same vessel. He prayed for the soldiers and the sailors. He prayed for the pagans. He prayed for those who were hard to live with and for those who were kindly. He put his arm around every man on board and so he came with this word.

"Be of good cheer! For there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God whose I am and whom I fear, saying 'fear not, Paul. The law must be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given thee all that sailed with thee'." He had given Paul the whole crew because Paul had asked for them. And these men who were without hope, listened to this amazing message, who, when everybody else was down, stood up. "Paul stood up." I like that. It is easy to stand up when everybody else is standing. It is easy to recite your creed when everybody else is reciting it. But when you stand alone and recite alone, that takes something. What a man!

Though giant rains put out the sun, here stand I for a sign.
Though earth be filled with waters dark, my cup is filled with wine.
Tell to the trembling priests that hear unto the deluge rod,
One battered, broken, trusted man stood up and drank to God.

Paul stood up because through faith he was girded by a strength that others did not have and that he could not have had except for his confidence in God.
AN INCREDIBLE ESCAPE

All escaped. Acts 27:44

How utterly surprising! If ever doom seemed an absolute certainty, it is here. This is not the verdict simply of an onlooker. It is the verdict of a very wise man, Dr. Luke, who suffered through the ordeal. "All hope was then taken away". Such is the surprising end of the most dramatic and the best sea story in all the Bible. We may decide this drama ended sooner.

Scene I

As the curtain rises upon this story, we see a little merchant vessel anchored in the port of Fair Havens off the coast of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. It is one of autumn's rare days. Summer seems to have come back to give the world a return engagement. The skies are unspeakably blue. A gentle south wind as soft as the breath of an infant, carresses the face. The sea spreads out in smiling beauty, as calm as a shimmering mirror. Nothing could be more beautiful and more peaceful.

Now on deck of this little merchant vessel are four men engaged in earnest conference. The personnel of this little committee is interesting. Chairman of the group, and the one whose word is final, is a young gentlemanly Centurion named Julius. He takes precedence even over the captain, a situation that would not be true in our modern day when the captain's voice is always final. But this vessel has been leased by the Roman government and so this Centurion has the final word. Present also is the captain of the vessel. We expected him. Present too is the owner of the vessel, who perhaps owns the cargo as well. With so much at stake, we naturally expected him.

But the presence of the next man takes us completely by surprise.
it somewhat as we use to rope an old fashioned trunk. Then on the second day they threw out part of the cargo. That is, they threw away a bit of the purpose of the voyage in order to be able to make the voyage. On the third day they even went to the extreme of throwing out some of the tackling of the ship.

On the fourth day what did they do? They did nothing. There was nothing to do. They had gone as far as their human ingenuity could take them. Then came that inevitable rotting down of morale that always goes with idleness, whether voluntary or enforced. With nothing to do but to wait for the coming tragedy; with nothing to do but face the grim fact that they would soon be just bits of human wreckage among the crawling things at the bottom of the sea, no wonder that they went to pieces. Luke writes of them, and he was among the lot, "all hope that we should be saved was then taken away."

As a result of their decision they had reached despair.

Scene PART III

The third scene brings a hint of the dawning of a new day. It came about, as great movements always come about, through one God-girded man. There were two hundred and seventy-six men on this vessel. Of those two hundred and seventy-six, two hundred and seventy-five were whipped. They had given up hope. They were huddled together on the deck, blaming their officers, or blaming fate, or blaming the storm. But they were without hope. Then there came the hint of a day.

"After a long absence," we read, "Paul stood forth in the midst of them". "Paul stood up", is the modern translation. While others were despairing, Paul who faced the same danger and the same ordeal
did not despair. He believed that though all the ingenuity of man had
gone for nothing, that though their self efforts had proved futile,
there was still something God could do.

Thus believing he gave himself to prayer. We can easily tell the
nature of his prayer. For whom did he pray? He did not simply pray
"Lord save me". He did not even confine his prayer to "Lord save me and
my fellow Christian, Luke". He prayed for all on board. They were all
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and for those who were kindly. He put his arm around every man on
board. Therefore he came with this word.

"Be of good cheer! For there shall be no loss of any man's life
among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel
of God whose I am and whom I serve, saying 'fear not, Paul. Thou must
be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given thee all that sailed
with thee.'" He had given Paul, the whole crew because Paul had asked for
them. When these men who were without hope, listened to this amazing
word from one
man, who when everybody else was down, stood up. "Paul stood up." I
like that. It is easy to stand up when everybody else is standing. It
is easy to recite your creed when everybody else is reciting it. But
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with wine.
Tell to the trembling priests that here was the deluge rod.
One battered, broken, trusting man stood up and drank to God.
(P. Flannery)

Paul stood up because through faith he was endowed by a strength that
others did not have and that he could not have had except for the
undergirding of the Everlasting Arm.
The Incredible Escape

And having so delivered himself, these people did not fully believe him, but as they listened to that word, "Be of good cheer!", what a futile word it would have been if Paul had not had the cheer in his own heart. As they listened to him, they said, "I can't believe it, but this I can believe, this man here believes it. He really thinks that his God is going to do something. By some mad chance maybe he will."

Their skies began to be lighted by a little gray of the dawn, and they began in some measure to share his faith. "I believe God", he said. That was the foundation on which he builded his hope. And there is no other foundation.

"Be of good cheer!" I believe in the weather; no, the weather was just as black as it had ever been. "I believe in the seaworthiness of the ship; no, it was threatening to go to pieces under their feet.

"I believe in the Centurion, and in the captain, and the owner. No, they were good decent men, but they were powerless. I believe in the soldiers and the sailors. No, they were utterly futile and were huddling together in despair. I believe in God. That is something that you can stand on, and the very ribs of nature may break up under your feet, but it will be for you only the rocking of an infant's cradle. I believe God.

And having thus delivered himself, what next? Paul didn't sit down and leave it all to God. There are times when we have to leave it to God, because there is nothing we ourselves can do. But in almost every instance faith leads to cooperation. If I shouted "Fire!" and nobody moves, it is because you didn't believe. If you believed, you would make for the door. My father was a Christian farmer, but he didn't pray God to plant corn, in one field and sow wheat in another. He prayed me to do that.
The Incredible Escape

All

If we had done nothing but pray, we would have all starved. And even when the crops were made and the food put on the table, if we had refused to eat it, we still would have starved. We have to cooperate with God. Everything we do is a matter of cooperation.

Now having given assurance that God was going to see them through, Paul said "You've got to do your part. First, you are so weak from long fastings because during this storm they were unable to prepare food and unable to eat it if they had prepared it. You have to cooperate with God in their own fastings are too weak. You've got to look after this body. You need to eat something" And he did something more than urge. He took a bit of bread, and standing there on that storm swept deck he asked the blessing and began to eat. And, listen to this, then they were of good cheer. Faith is such a beautifully contagious something. They were why that they took bread and were helped to eat bread themselves. It was a part of God's plan that He work through human bodies. The body is as sacred as the soul, and you have bodies as well through food, and one or be saved shall not have any right to damage it anymore than you do to damage your soul.

Then a little later, when the sailors began to do about the most contemptible deed that sailors could ever do, to play the coward in a way that would be utterly impossible for a manly man, when they sought to escape and leave their fellow voyagers to their fate, Paul, desiring the truth, and cowardly purpose, and said I seeing what they were up to said, "Unless these remain in the boat, we can't any of us be saved. We are all on the same boat, and what hurts one, hurts the other. What will wreck one will wreck the other. We must be saved together, or we won't be saved at all." How slow we have been to learn that. All the tragedies, almost that have come to our world have come because we have never learned that we can not have a New Testament salvation unless we are willing
to share it with somebody else. I believe in individual salvation with all my heart. But I believe it is something that simply has to be shared. No nation can be saved alone. No group can be saved alone. What hurts one nation hurts the other. What hurts one group hurts the other. What hurts a white man will hurt a black man. What hurts a colored man will hurt a white man. What hurts one church will hurt another. We sometimes feel that if one church in our city goes to pieces, that it may build up our church. But it never does. We are bound up in a bundle of life with each other, and we can no more loose our selves from our brothers, than we can loose ourselves from our own shadows. "Unless these remain in the ship," Paul said, "You can not be saved."

They remained in the ship, and instead of every fellow for himself, the command was given that those who could swim jump into the sea first and then those that were more helpless could come later. Those swimmers could help the nonswimmers. And so it was, and the story had this happy ending, "all escaped safe to land." What a surprise! It is a surprise to us to this day, but how incredible their surprise must have been to those who participated in this very exciting ordeal.

Who was the most useful man, the most essential man aboard this ancient merchant vessel? If a vote had been taken when the ship was anchored in the port of Fairhaven, and when the skies were so blue, and when the south wind was so soft, I know who wouldn't have been elected. That Jewish preacher wouldn't have been. The only vote he would have stood a chance to win would have been from his fellow Christian, Dr. Luke. But after they had reached land, and after they were received, and were treated kindly by the strangers among whom they landed, if you had asked anybody "Who is the most important man with you, do you have the word?"
in this group, the one to whom you owe the most, Paul would have been elected unanimously. He saved every man on board as truly as if he had swum out with each of them on his shoulders. Paul took Jesus seriously when He said, "All things are possible to him that believeth". There is no greater service that we can render in our generation than being after the manner of Paul, believing in Him. May God help us. Give us better faith. Lord merci...