"Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

These are the words of Jesus. They were spoken by Him after His resurrection. He uttered them just before His ascension. Just before He lifted the hands in blessing that had throttled death and hell and the grave He enunciated this marvelous program to His disciples. He said, "Ye shall receive power, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria unto the uttermost parts of the earth." This is the program of the church of Jesus Christ for this age. It is our task as Christian men and woman summed up in one single sentence. And remember this is not the utterance of any man, but of our Lord Himself. He is telling us what we are to do. He is telling us the task of the church. He is announcing the program for His saints. This is a summary of all they are to do in this world to the end of the age.

What is the task? "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." That is the task of the church. That is the task of every individual in the church. We are to be witnesses. Now, you know the one big requirement for a witness. It is not absolutely necessary that a witness be eloquent. His big job is not necessarily speech making. It is not a supreme necessity that a witness be of high social or political position. It is not even necessary that a witness be highly educated. But what is absolutely necessary is that he shall have a first hand knowledge of the something about which he testifies.

And so our Lord said to His disciples, and to us, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." It was their task, as it is ours, to tell men what we know about Him. As you turn the pages of the book of Acts it will be borne in upon you more and more that that was the very heart and soul of the preaching of the early saints, whether they were laymen or apostles - they told people what they knew about Jesus Christ.

That was the theme of the first sermon that was preached after Pentecost. Something marvelous had happened to the disciples of our Lord. Peter stood up to explain the wonderful events. He explained it by telling them something of what he knew in his own personal experience about Jesus. He said that Jesus had received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, and had set forth this that ye now see and hear.

A little later when the crippled man was cured and the multitude had come together again Peter said, "Why look ye upon us as if by our own power or holiness we had made this man whole? God hath glorified His son Jesus." And with the miracle as a starting point he bore his personal testimony to the saving power of Jesus Christ.

The same is true of Stephen. Stephen was not a preacher, but he was a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. He was a man whose angelic face looks out upon us with wonderful winsomeness. The crime for which they stoned him was for his personal testimony of the lordship of Jesus. And even while he died he continued to bear witness saying, "Behold I see the Heavens open and Jesus standing by the right hand of God."

The same is true of Paul. No sooner had he had his eyes opened
in the city of Damascus than he entered into the synagogue, the story says, and preached. And the theme of his preaching was Jesus Christ. He bore his personal testimony to His saving power, to the fact that it was a true saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Our task then is witnessing. "We can not but speak the things that we have seen and heard." We testify day by day by virtue of what we are. What these men had seen and heard had utterly made them over. They spoke through the convincing language of transformed personality. Why does Niagara thunder? It can not help it. Why does the nettle sting and the honeysuckle breathe perfume? Because of what they are. So these men, and so we, witness through what we are.

We witness also through what we do. We witness by the way in which we conduct our business. We witness by the way in which we do our work. We witness by the way we spend our money. We witness by the way we amuse ourselves. We witness by the way we live. We are not all called upon to witness in the same way. But if you are a Christian, in some way you are bearing your personal testimony every day. And it is by this personal testimony that Christ expects us to bring in the Kingdom.

Now, the Master not only tells us in this text what is our task, He tells us also the sphere in which we are to exercise our task. He tells us where we are to witness. We are not to witness in some faraway dreamland. We are not to witness in some distant tomorrow. We are to witness, first of all, in the here and now. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me, first of all, in Jerusalem." Where is Jerusalem? It is home. We are to witness in our own homes.

Now, I am frank to say that that is one of the most difficult places to witness. It is also one of the most fruitful. Every day you are to bear your testimony to the saving power of the Gospel in your own life. You are to so bear that testimony that God will be able to say to you, as He did of His servant long ago, "I know Abraham that he will command his children and his household after me." Those of you who are here this morning are here because of the testimony around the family altar in the early days of your fathers and mothers.

You are to witness to your room-mate, to your friend, to your intimate companion. One of the sweetest experiences of my life was the winning of my room-mate to Jesus Christ when I was away at school. It was my first experience in witness bearing and I found then, as I have found since, that it is the most effective method of winning men to Christ.

We are to witness at Jerusalem, right where we are. It was not an easy place for Peter. Peter had failed at Jerusalem. Peter had said unkind things at Jerusalem. Peter had lost his courage. Peter had lied. It was a hard place for him to begin. But if you will not bear your testimony where you are there is no guarantee that you will bear it anywhere. If you are not interested in the salvation of the people at Jerusalem then there is absolutely no need of sending you to convert those in Samaria and in the uttermost parts of the earth.
But while we are to start at Jerusalem, we are not to end there. Some people's religion never gets beyond their own church. If they have a comfortable seat on Sunday and hear comfortable singing and comfortable preaching they are not in the least concerned about the other fellow. That is the essence of sanctified selfishness. Our religion is a going and a growing religion, or it is not the religion of Jesus Christ. We are to relate ourselves to God's program for the conquest of the world.

This does not mean necessarily that we are to be missionaries. It does mean that we are to have the missionary spirit, which is the spirit of Christ. It means that we are to live in our small sphere as citizens of the world. It means that we are to be so faithful to our opportunities of giving and to our opportunities of praying and to our opportunities of witnessing for Christ in our small circle that the whole world shall be made a little better by us. We are to be faithful, as much as in us lies, to the man who rubs elbows with us. We are to be no less faithful according as we have opportunity to the man furthest away from us, for we are to see in every man a brother for whom Christ died.

Now, what are the resources that God puts at our disposal for the carrying out of this program? Here is the task. Here is the sphere in which we are to perform our task. What is the power by which we are to perform it? Where is the dynamo that is to turn this great machinery? Where is the sun that is to illuminate this far reaching sky? Are we to do this work in our own strength? Does our Lord expect us to perform this tremendous undertaking in the energy of the flesh? He does not. He not only assigns the task, He also supplies the power by which we are to perform the task.

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me." That is the work we are to do. That is our program of activity. "Ye shall receive power." That is our program of equipment. And we can only carry out the program of activity as we carry out the program of equipment. If we fail to receive the equipment, if we fail to appropriate Christ's gift of power, then Christ's program fails so far as we are concerned altogether, and our possibilities become impossibilities.

We are to witness in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can hope to win in no other way. Even Jesus Himself did not enter upon His ministry till He had received this divine anointing. Before He ever preached the heavens were opened above Him and the Spirit of God came in bodily form as a dove upon Him, and when He came from the wilderness He came in the power of the Spirit. And when He stood up in the little church at Nazareth He said, "The Spirit of God is upon me because He hath anointed me to preach." And when Peter gave a summary of His life he said, "whom God anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil."

If this anointing was necessary for Jesus, it is also necessary for His disciples. For the servant is not greater than his lord; neither is he that is sent greater than he that sent him. So when Jesus had risen from the dead and the disciples were eager to go forth and bear their testimony Jesus said, "Not yet; tarry ye till ye be imbued with power from on high." And they were not considered to be ready for their ministry till they had been baptized with the Holy Ghost.

And so it is throughout the history of the church. There has been no man since that day who has been mightily used in the saving of men who has not had this as the secret of his power, that he was a man full
of the Holy Ghost. John Wesley preached with earnestness before he had come into this blessed experience, but his ministry was in large measure a fruitless ministry. It was only when he received the baptism of power that he set the world on fire.

So we are to witness through the power of the Holy Spirit. He enables us to witness, in the first place, because He makes Christ real to us. No man can call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Spirit. If Christ today is to you only a name, if He is only a figure in history you will have no power of witnessing for Him.

And for many of us this is sadly true. Our sense of the reality of Jesus is dimmer than the shadow of a dream. It ought not to be so. It need not be so. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to make Jesus a glad and winsome reality to everyone of us. "He shall testify of me", and the man who has in his heart a sure sense of Christ will have power in witness bearing because he can speak with assurance. He can speak with conviction. He can say in glad and enthusiastic certainty, "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."

The Holy Spirit gives power for testimony, in the second place, because His presence makes for boldness. How timid we are. How often we are pained and humiliated by our cowardice. But the presence of the Spirit of God delivers us from the bondage of our fear. And that truth bursts upon us again and again as we read these records of the early church. Again and again we read this: "They spake the word with boldness." "And when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John." A spiritual Christian is a bold and courageous Christian.

The Spirit of God makes for power in witness bearing, in the third place, because it gives a mighty motive. A fruit of the Spirit is love, and love is the greatest motive force in the world. Why were these early disciples so bent on giving? Why did that Quaker missionary say after fourteen years of almost unbelievable hardship, that he would gladly go through it all again to get to see one single black face light up with the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ? He said it because the love of God had been shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. We can not love people as we ought except we be spiritual people.

The Holy Spirit makes us mighty in testimony, last of all, because His presence makes for holiness of life. And after all there is no testimony so convincing as the testimony of a stainless life. How are we to be clean men and women? How are we to keep ourselves unspotted from the world? How are we to be conquerors and more than conquerors?

Look at our enemies. How terrible are our foes. "The lusts of the flesh", says Paul, "are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like."

How, I repeat, are we to conquer these hideous foes? How are we to destroy these noxious weeds that tend to grow so luxuriantly in the gardens of our souls? We can not pull them up one by one. We can not destroy them at all in the energy of the flesh. How is it to come about?
I remember as a school boy how I used to pass every day on my way to school through an oak grove. When autumn came and the leaves fell from other trees these oaks still held their leaves. The winds of winter could not blow them off. The ice and snow could not drag them off. Those oaks had about as many leaves at the breaking up of winter as they did in the very noon-tide of summer. How did the tree ever get rid of its dead leaves? Just this way. By and by the springtime came. New life rose into the tree, and that new life pushed the old dead leaves off the branches on to the ground. And that is our hope. Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

The power of a holy life is a tremendous power, and the words of a holy man are tremendous words. Account for it how you will, two men can preach the same gospel. Heard at the lips of one it leaves us listless and lifeless and dead. It quickens in us no longing. It stirs within us no fine impulses and aspirations after goodness and after God. Heard from the lips of another, this same message softens us and melts us and makes us to cry out in our heart of hearts for the living God. Why the difference? One man spoke in the energy of the flesh and the other spoke in the power of the Holy Ghost.

And now, for the last big question: How are we today, you and I, to enter into the program of Jesus Christ for ourselves? For my sermon, will be a profitless sermon if it does not bring to us the answer to this big question. Here is the program. How are we to relate ourselves to it? How are we to receive its power for witnessing?

In the first place, we must realize that it is part of Christ's program that we shall receive the Holy Spirit. We need to hear Him say again, "Tarry ye till ye be imbued with power from on high." We need to listen once more to those words so athrill and athrob with immortal hope, this promise: The promise of the Holy Spirit is unto you. This is Christ's purpose and deepest longing for every one of us. "For He that spared not His own Son, but offered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things."

We must realize, in the second place, our need of this divine equipment. We must see that it is an absolute necessity if we are to do the work to which our Lord has called us. We must see that all our activities and all our organizing and all our preaching and singing will be but the impotent shakings of a shorn Samson unless we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We must come to the place where we say, each of us, "I must have this power in my own life."

And then, last of all, we must yield ourselves to God in faith for the receiving of this power. "For we are His witnesses of these things, as is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him." If you will yield your life to God God will take your life and beautify it and fill it with Himself.

I am not saying what will be your emotions, but I do bear my personal testimony to this fact, if you will yield yourself to Him in confidence that He will keep His promise, He will not fail you. For He is saying now what He said years ago, "If any man thirst let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within his inner life shall flow rivers of living water. This spake He of the Spirit." So open your heart to Him. Lift up your heads, 0 ye gates of the heart, and the King of Glory shall come in. And with His
coming there shall come, as surely as God's Word is true, a new power for
witnessing. There will come to you a new power for witnessing, a new
power for so living and so witnessing that men and women will take
knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus.

I heard Dr. Myer say that he was stopping one summer at a lovely
hotel in Sweden. There was only one objection to the hotel and that
was that there was a little girl there who played the piano continually
and played it so horribly that she became a torment to the guests. A
few days passed and the greatest pianist in Sweden stopped at the hotel.
He too was disturbed by the girl's playing, but instead of running off
he went down and asked her to give him first place at the piano. She
yielded and soon the great parlor was packed with those who had been
cought in the spell of his marvelous music. And the when the
selection was over the great artist took the little girl by the hand
and bowed in the presence of the audience and said, "You are indebted
to little Bessie for the music you have heard today. She only gave me
the first place at the instrument."

And this is my word, for you: give the first place to Jesus Christ
and He will take it and will transmute your poor, blundering discords
into Heaven's own matchless music.
Text: 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 which I will appear unto thee.

We will recognize this at once as a part of the proceedings of an ancient court of law. Festus has just come into power, taking the place of one Felix, who, as Tacitus tells us as the historian, that rules with the spirit of a slave with all crustly and lust. Naturally he had left a good many unsolved problems to his successor. Among these unsolved problems was what to do with a certain notable prisoner who was then in the prison under the palace.

No sooner had the Governor taken his position than the Jews began to clamor for the handling of this man's case, until Festus, I think more for sheer self protection than to serve the hands of justice, decided to give this prisoner what admitted to a preliminary hearing. In the course of that hearing he asked the prisoner if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial. I imagine the prisoner surprised the Governor by knowing something of his rights as a Roman citizen. Asserting those rights, he refused to go to Jerusalem, but instead appealed to the Emperor.

This decision left Festus more annoyed than he had been before, but he saw a little light on the horizon. King Agrippa was going to pay him a courtesy visit. He put the problem before his majesty with the result that Agrippa, having heard that the prisoner's name was Paul, expressed the desire to hear him plea.

That was exactly what Festus desired. So the next day a great crowd gathered in the hall of hearing, among them the little citizens of the city and the ranking officers of the Roman Army. The Judge took his place on the bench and ordered the prisoner at the bar to
be brought in.

I can imagine there was no small craning of necks to see this poor chap. He was quite a personage. Even his enemies said, with bitter rage, that he had turned the world upside down. Anybody knows that it takes quite a juggler to handle a ball of that size. When he had taken his place before the Judge, Festus opened the proceedings by stating the question before the house. Then Agrippa looked down at the prisoner at the bar, who was also the Attorney for the Defense, and said "Paul, thou art permitted to speak for thyself".

At once Paul forgot his defense and went to the attack. That is really the only defense that works anywhere. I use to do a little football coaching. I was no great shakes as a coach, but I knew this and tried to drill it into my team - you'll never make a touchdown while the other side carries the ball. Even so, Christianity is eventually the aggressor. When it ceases to be aggressive it loses its glamor, its thrill, its power. In fact it ceases to be Christian.
It is a genuine joy for me to be with you once more. I assure you that I carried nothing away with me except the most delightful memories when I left here a little less than two years ago.

Let me read you a few verses from God's Word: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to his apostles whom he had chosen; to whom he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God. And, being assembled together with them, he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked him saying 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' And he said 'It is not for you to know the time or the seasons which the Father hath set in his own authority. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.' And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

That is Luke's version of the ascension. He tells the story a second time, or for the first time rather, in the latter part of his gospel where he said, "And he led them out as far as Bethany and lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass that while he blessed them, that he was parted from them." And the Authorized Version said "And was taken up into heaven". The Standard Revised leaves out the last phrase "he was parted from them and was taken up".

One great advantage in preaching by series as you ministers know, is that it
compels you to preach on texts that are not congenial to you. There are two advantages—one of them is "blessed is the preacher that knows where he is going when he gets up on Monday morning and doesn't have to wait until Friday to find out what he is going to preach about." Otherwise his congregation won't know what he has preached about! Amen.

Now it so happens that I am preaching a series of sermons in my own church on "When the Church Was Young", and the texts are taken from the Book of Acts. And when I came to this part about the ascension, it came home to me that after a ministry of thirty-nine years I had never preached on the ascension in my life. And yet, the ascension is one of the doctrines of the Church that is so important that it has worked its way into the creed of Christendom, which you have just recited either with some meaning in your own heart or with no meaning at all and thinking about something else as we so often do when we recite the Creed or say our prayers. You remember when the angel of the Lord touched the brother on the shoulder in his morning devotions and said, "Now, what are you asking for this morning?" He looked up in blank amazement and said "Nothin, sweet angel. I was just saying my prayers."

Now when you recited in your Creed "And He ascended into heaven, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead", what, if anything, did that "ascended into heaven" mean to you? I am persuaded that though this doctrine has worked its way into the Creed of Christendom, that to the average Christian it simply means nothing at all.

Now what happened at the ascension? What did Jesus do when He ascended? In answering that question I think it's well to bear in mind that there are three distinct periods—oh you might not say distinct, but according to the New Testament—three definite periods in the ministry of Jesus. First, there was that period of ministry that began in a sense with His incarnation. When "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us", God at once began to minister through that little Baby. But years later He locked up His carpenter's shop, to return to it no more and set out on the maddest mission that ever engaged a human soul. He set out for no less or no smaller purpose than bringing it to pass that the kingdoms of this world were to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. In His ministry He preached sermons and uttered parables that are miracles of wisdom. He performed miracles that are parables of teaching. As Luke put it, "He
went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, taking over harlots and outcasts and gathering little children into His arms to bless them." 'Til by and by, this radiant and beautiful ministry was punctuated by a real period that we call the cross. Now during this period Jesus was visible to all and sundry. His friends saw Him, but His enemies saw Him just as clearly. Those heard His voice who loved Him with a love that nothing could kill; and those who heard His voice also hated Him with a hatred that could not endure His being on the earth. His ministry was performed purely in the realm of the visible and was to be apprehended and understood by both friend and foe.

After His death there followed a brief period of ministry that Luke tells us "lasted just forty days". That ministry was a little different from His first ministry. It is different in the first place because it was a ministry to His friends only. It was very, very impressive and a writer of fiction would certainly have made it that way. It would have been very impressive if Jesus had come back to astonish Pilate who had crucified Him indirectly, or to have astonished that shrewd old devil Annas who was the real power behind the throne. If you seek for the meanest man in the Bible, Old Testament or New, you will find it there. It was Annas, the most consummate devil, I think, in literature in the Bible or out of it. But Jesus didn't come back to astonish His enemies; He appeared to His friends and to His friends only. Now since His ministry was to last only forty days, it seems that He would have come back and spent the entire forty days visibly before these friends. But He didn't. He appeared and He disappeared. Just why He did that, the New Testament doesn't tell us. I think the reason is very obvious when we think about it. He was trying to accustom these people to understand that He was no less real when He wasn't seen than He was when He was seen; and that He was no less near when He was invisible than when He was visible. And so, when two of those friends of His were going to the village of Emmaus on the morning of the resurrection - Cleopas was one of them. I think obviously the one who was with him was his wife, otherwise the name would have been given. Wives didn't count much then; they are the majority of the family now, thanks to the ministry of Jesus. But every Jewish boy was taught to pray every day "Thank God I was not born a Gentile, or a leper
or a woman”. And so there wasn't any use in giving her name, but here's a man and his wife going home from a new-made grave of the first Easter. Stranger drew near and entered into the conversation - and it was fine that their conversation was pitched on such a high level that He could enter into it without a break. And He asked them, "Tell me what's wrong". He likes to be told. God wants us to unpack our hearts with words. We don't tell each other enough. If I were a pastor of a congregation that the moment I got through preaching and pronounced the benediction, all of them made for the door, I wouldn't know how to preach to them. Not only that, I'd move and that would ruin them! And it's not just a matter of vanity either. If your physician gives you a prescription, when he comes around the next day or the next week and asks you "Did it do you any good?", he's not just trying to get you to flatter him. If it's not going to do you any good, he wants to change the prescription. I wouldn't know how to preach to folks that never expressed any appreciation. Oh I know - I was preaching at a place sometime ago and old Brother Lemon came forward at the close of the service and shook me limply by the hand and said "Preacher, if I weren't afraid that you would get stuck up, I'd tell you how much I enjoyed that sermon!" I said "Partner, if you knew how often the preacher got stuck down for every once he got stuck up, you wouldn't be so careful!" It doesn't hurt anybody to express your appreciation, not even your wife. Of course, she might faint, but she would recover. When I think of how much more smoothly the friction-fretted machinery of life would run if it were oiled a little more frequently by this fine lubricant of appreciation, I wonder - and it costs so little - that I don't use it more!

And so Jesus said, "Tell me about it", and they told Him about it. And after they had told Him, somehow the burden was lifted unconsciously and before they knew it, they were standing at their own front door. Sorry of it for that had been transported there by airplane and when they saw that the conversation was going to end, they invited Him to come in. Now you know how to invite anybody when you want them and you know also how to invite them when you want to save your manners and your dinner too. For instance, I say to you "You won't go home to dinner with me, will you?" Any idiot knows the answer to that is "No, certainly not". But they constrained Him and said "Come in
by all means." And He went in and as He became Guest and Host as He always does, and broke the bread, there was something about Him so familiar that they recognized Him and their eyes were opened and they knew Him. And when they hurried back to Jerusalem on that same day and evening, the disciples were behind closed doors in deadly fear. When Jesus came and stood in their midst, He said "Peace be unto you." When He had so spoken, He showed them His hands and side and then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. And then said Jesus again unto them, "Peace be unto you" and He gave them their old job back. When Jesus was crucified, they lost their jobs; the bottom fell out of everything. But then He said "As the Father hath sent Me, so send I you." And He breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit". And when they went away from the service with faces all alight, they met the gloomiest, saddest, bitterest, most disillusioned and broken hearted man I dare say in all the world that day, a man by the name of Thomas, and they said "Thomas, we have seen the Lord!" And Thomas said "I don't see Him." He wasn't visible. He said "I don't believe you; I won't believe you unless I put my finger in the print of the nail and thrust my hand in His side." A brutal doubter was Thomas. By which he meant "I won't believe under any circumstances." But he was an honest doubter also. And so when they met on the next Sunday for services, he said "I don't believe this story but I'm going to be there." If you tell me that the sun rises in the east and I say it doesn't do anything of the kind. "Alright", you say "tomorrow morning at sunrise time, face the east." And If I face the west, I'm not honest. He said "I'll give myself a chance." And Jesus came and stood in their midst and said "Thomas, here's my hand and my feet", but Thomas didn't have to take His hand. He said "My Lord and my God". But Jesus didn't compliment him, He rather rebuked Him. He said "Thoma s, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed." You had to have the testimony of your physical senses before you would believe. Blessed are those who can believe without it.

A ministry in which He was visible and invisible at times preparing them for the ministry which we enjoy today. The day in which He was taken up. So what happened when He was taken up into heaven? Did He leave this world where things were hard and tense and disagreeable and go off to a world where He could take it easy? No! What did
Jesus mean when He taught us to pray "Our Father who art in heaven"? Well, a great many folks believe that Jesus was locating God. Not a bit of it. He's not telling us where God is; He's telling us the kind of God He is. He's our heavenly Father. Heaven is the state or place of perfection. God is our perfect Father and so at the ascension Jesus didn't leave this world to go off to another world. He simply passed into the realm of the unseen where He could no longer be apprehended by our physical senses.

Now that the disciples understood it that was is evident by their attitude to the ascension. How did the friends of Jesus themselves think of it? We know exactly how they thought of it when they saw it in prospect. When Jesus told them He was going away, the bottom fell out of everything. They didn't even have a horizon in their lives where they might hope for a dawn. Jesus put it in these words "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts." They were heart broken. We can understand that. We have a good many sad experiences in this world - most of them glad experiences, thank God. A lot of folks never find it out. Do you know that I have discovered after a good long ministry that there's just about one man in twenty-five that knows when he is having good time? It's no trouble for me to find somebody that had a good time yesterday or is expecting a good time tomorrow, but it's the hardest job in the world to find a man that will look me in the face and say "Right now I'm having a good time!" Look at me, I am! Amen! These folks that sing "Backward, turn backward, 0 time, in your flight"! I don't sing it. If that were to happen to me this morning, I wouldn't be here. I'd be down at Flatwoods milking five old crinkledly horn cows!

Now then, I said goodbye to some of the tragic experiences we had. Of course, as young folks we don't mind telling goodbye. I ain't gonna tell you that one! But ere for those of us who are Christians when we part at the graveside, for instance, with those we love, it always breaks our hearts, however sure we may be of the morning's joy with them and with our Lord beyond this world with its griefs and its graves. So they look at it with broken-heartedness, but how did they look at it when they actually experienced it? And how did they look at it in prospect? Look at the picture: "And He led them out as far as Bethany" and when we saw them going along, they were a company
of thirteen at least. By and by when they came back, One was missing and the One who was missing was the One who was far the best loved - Jesus had gone. And they knew that they would never see Him again in that relationship. The natural thing for them to have done would have been to have gone back to Jerusalem, wringing their hands and sobbing over the dead, golden days that had dropped into the sunset. But what really happened was this: They returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Why? It was a strange thing to rejoice over. I'm going to give you three reasons - there are others.

First of all they went back to Jerusalem with great joy because they believed that this Jesus had ascended into heaven on their behalf. The night before His going away, He uttered those words that I dare say have put their arms around more stooped shoulders and that touch of healing on more hurt hearts than any other words in the New Testament. "Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me." I know this present generation doesn't think very much of heaven. We use to laugh at our fathers and we said "you are too other-worldly". Certainly as they look down upon us they could say this about us. We are too hither-worldly. We have got the present world so close up before our eyes that we are becoming utterly materialized. They believed that Jesus had gone into heaven on their behalf. Now you had better be interested in it. You are going to live somewhere, whether you like it or not.

Second, they rejoiced in the ascension of Jesus because they believed that in ascending His prayer had been answered that He prayed the last night of His life: "Glorify Thou me with Thine own self with a glory which I had with Thee before the world was." That is, they believed that Jesus, their human Christ who had walked with them, had taken His place at the right hand of God the Father; that He was now able to say "all authority in heaven and in earth has been given unto me" and that Jesus wasn't going to be king after while, that Jesus was King now - King of kings and Lord of lords; that at this very moment Jesus is King. That's the reason no minister especially has the right ever to preach a discouraging sermon. I heard a very able minister preach sometime ago and he spoke on the world situation. Of course a man can get pessimistic on the world situation, but he didn't throw one single ray of light on it. I say it was a wicked sermon! It was a sermon that was an insult to the
intelligence of men and a dishonor to God because whatever the world situation and whatever your own individual situation, over and against it stands Almighty God, greater than all.

Now what does it mean for Jesus to be King? We've got kingship and depotism mixed up in our mind so that we don't distinguish one from the other. We think of a king as saying "You can't do that and you shall not do that." No, if you want to go out here and steal and lie and get drunk, the Lord's not going to keep you from it. If you, as you are standing at the forks of the road, want to take the wrong turn, God is not going to take you by the nape of the neck and say "No, you can't do it". But He will and does say this, that if you do take the wrong road, you can't get down there a few miles and say "I don't like this road; I believe I'll go to the goal to which the right road leads." You've got to go to the goal of the road that you choose. You can go out and sow weeds if you want to, but having sowed the weeds, you can't decide that you will reap a harvest of wheat. Nobody gets away with anything. Nobody gets away with anything. This is a law-abiding world.

When I was pastor in Houston, I had a woman in my church who gave her son a sport model Ford car. He loved to drive it in high around curves and he went shrieking around a curve one day and ran into a telephone pole, and went out through the wind shield and if it hadn't hit him up about the head, it might have killed him. As it was, it sent him to the hospital and they phoned the minister and I hurried around. I'm not telling you something that didn't happen and I'm not making fun of the mother. This is exactly what took place. I hurried around and the mother came to meet me almost frantic. She took my hands in both of hers and said "Oh what have I done that this should have happened to me!" It sorta jarred me for a moment and then I pulled myself together and I said, "It didn't happen to you, it happened to him." And I saw that she was about to get mad at the Lord for letting her son hit that telephone post. I said "No, hold up. Let's be reasonable." I said "If the Lord were to reach down and snatch a telephone pole out from in front of a reckless driver even when he's your son, He might put one in front of me sometime when I was driving carefully!" I said "All I am arguing for is for every man to hit his own telephone post." Well, that's the kind of world you live
in. You may not like it but it's there. God reigns; Jesus Christ is on the throne and nobody gets away with anything, not America, not Russia, not Germany, nobody gets away with anything. The stars in their courses fight against them.

And then there's the blessed fact on having Jesus Christ on the throne and that's this: If we do leave this service and an enemy wants to tell a lie on you, or wants to do you an injury, or wants to break your heart, God will not keep him from it. But this He will do. If you will meet that disaster within the will of God, He'll change it into good for you. God couldn't consistently prevent Joseph's brothers from selling him into slavery. But it didn't end there. Because Joseph met it within the will of God, that road that they expected to lead to a slave pen, ended in a place on the Nile. Not always a literal palace, but always a spiritual palace. In other words, we know that in a God ruled world "all things work together for good to them that love Him."

Last of all, they rejoiced over this because they believed that this same Jesus who had ascended was going to come again - immediately, physically and visibly before their eyes. Now there's no use in arguing against that. That's just as plain as it can be. You know we Methodists have left the second coming of Christ, so-called and mark you, there's more than one coming of Christ, we have left it to those who we think live on the lunatic fringe of religion. But we don't tell what we believe about it ourselves. It's not enough to keep the other fellow's penned down. What is there in it? The first fact we ought to face then is that any candid reading of the New Testament will show you that the early New Testament saints believed in the immediate, visible, physical return of Jesus. Paul believed in it so - he didn't believe in it so much in his later ministry - but look how he taught the Thessalonians. He taught them so that a lot of them started to loafing. There wasn't any use in working and making a living; the Lord was coming back. That's not secretly the reason why some of you loaf! Amen! He had to set them right. It is an uncontrovertible fact that they all expected the immediate, visible return of Jesus. A second fact that is equally beyond controversy is this - that He did not so return. Nobody can argue against those two facts. But then what are we to conclude? That these saints were not Spirit filled, were not divinely led? Not a bit of it. The Old Testament prophets were perfectly sure of the first coming of Jesus, but they were so hazy as to the manner of His coming that nobody recognized Him by
His coming. And when they prayed even so, "Come, Lord Jesus", expecting a visible Christ.

What are we to understand? We are to understand this: That Jesus answered their prayer, and not only did He answer it, but He answered it much better than they prayed it. It all comes out in this, that we have a sneaking notion that a visible, physical Christ can do more for us than a spiritual and invisible Christ and that's dead wrong. Take for instance the apostles themselves. They associated with Jesus intimately in the flesh for two and a half to three years. And He was trying all the while to weld them into a brotherhood. Yet at the very last meal they had together, they went in spitting out hot words at each other and arguing as to which one of them would be the greatest among men.

"I think when I read the sweet story of old,
When Christ was here among men,
How He gathered little children like lambs to His fold,
I should have liked to have been with Him then.
I wish that His hand had been laid on my head,
That His arm had been thrown around me.
I should have liked to have seen His kind looks when He said
Let the little ones come unto Me."

A great privilege, but you have a far greater. Jesus Himself said so. That's the reason He said "It is expedient for you that I go away. If I go not away, the Comforter will not come, but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." Jesus came at least in the power of the Holy Spirit. That was the something of which the early saints were possible. In all the world in the conscious fellowship of a risen Christ, at my first defense no man stood with me; all men forsook me notwithstanding the Lord stood with me.

What is the advantage of a spiritual Christ? He is a universal Christ. Now we say that all things are possible with God. Now, that's not true. It's impossible for God to do a contradictory thing. He can't make a circle a circle and a square at the same time. And a physical Christ can be with you here in Nashville but He couldn't be with me over in Charlotte; while a spiritual Christ can be with every man every day everywhere. Not only that, but He can be among us and within us. When I think of the congregations worshiping around the world this morning - some of them in magnificent cathedrals, some of them in modest chapels, some of them in the open air, some of them in the jungles, some of them in private homes, - I don't know who make up the congregations, but I know one personality that's there and that's Jesus Christ, my Lord. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And not only can He be
with you, but He can be within you. Paul emphasized this fact, the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." I love to think it's significant. Listen to it again: "And He led them out as far as Bethany and He lifted up His hands and blessed them and it came to pass that while He blessed them that He was parted from them."
The last view they had of Him was significant. His hands were lifted in blessing. I love to think this morning that those same almighty, tender, nail-pierced hands are extended in a blessing over your head and mine, over America, over Russia. He'll bless us if He can, but the blessing that He offers will change the judgment if we won't receive it.

"Of His fullness" said John when he sought to explain the amazing difference that knowing Jesus Christ had made in him, "Of His fullness, have all we received, and grace for grace". Down on the old farm where I was raised it was the land of springs. Among those springs the most beautiful was the spring we called the basin spring. Water flowed from a majestic hill out over a great flat rock, as it perhaps had done for centuries, and it had chisled a basin in the face of that old rock. And that basin is always full of liquid life and laughter. I've gone to it in the bleak days of winter; I've gone to it at the noon-tide hush of mid-summer when all else was almost withered and still it laughed and sang. What is it's secret? It wasn't in the basin itself. When I asked why it was always full of life to overflowing, it pointed to the majestic hills and said "Of their fullness have all we received". All that Jesus can ever do for you, all that He can do for the world is not in some tomorrow when He captures away the saints. He's waiting to do that now. Son, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine. Instead of postponing it, you had better look into Christ's roomy hand. There may be something there this very moment that you need.

Let us pray: Jesus, Master, we thank Thee that in going away Thou hast come infinitely nearer. We thank Thee for Thy fellowship with us on the sunny days and most of our days have been sunny. Blessed be Thy Name! We thank Thee that Thou canst also so walk with us in the shadows as to change the shadows into the light of the eternal morning. May we hear Thee saying "This is My Body, My All, My very Self and it is given for you and to you." Give us to claim that. In Jesus Name. Amen.
WHAT HAPPENED AT PENTECOST

Of all the understatements that I have read, none, I think, surpass that of the gentleman who looked for the first time upon the awesome wonder of the Grand Canyon, as his eyes blazed with wide brilliance and amazement, he said, "something happened here". Even so, we may say of this great event known as Pentecost, something did happen here that gave birth to a new church, something happened here that absolutely changed the world. You could hardly exaggerate the importance of this event. You could drop whole decades of history into oblivion and not miss them as much as you would this amazing story.

Now what did happen? Suppose we let go for the moment the rushing of the mighty wind and the firey tongues, those phenomena that, I feel sure, were incidental and passing, and fix our minds upon what was essential, and abiding. There was something about this event that made an immeasurable difference. There was something about it that enabled an insignificant little group, without social, economic, or financial prestige, to change the world. Suppose instead of knocking at a door that seems shut in our faces, we enter this wide open door. Instead of trying to explain what mystifies us, let us look at what is obvious and clear as the sunrise.

Whatever this event called Pentecost was, maybe our best approach is this, to ask what it did for those who participated in it. There were those present who experienced Pentecost and who could testify as to the change wrought in them by this tremendous experience. What difference did it make in the participants? Had I seen them going up to the little service in the Upper Room and asked a citizen of Jerusalem "Who are these?"
"A bunch of fanatics" would have been the answer whose leader was crucified a few months ago. But they are nursing the mad delusion that He has risen from the dead, but they'll get over it after a little while. A movement can't last long that has nothing but a memory." But they didn't get over it. Something happened that enabled them to change the world. This is not theory. This is fact. Then what did happen?

PART I

The first result of Pentecost that I mention is this, it brought to those who participated in it a new understanding and a new awareness of the Divine, a new understanding and a new awareness of their risen Lord. Almost all of those who participated in Pentecost had known Jesus in the flesh, They had heard Him speak. They had inspiration of, felt a touch of His hand. They had known the thrilling/His personal presence. They were a group we have felt across the years to be envied. We have expressed our longing in that song

I think when I read the sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How he gathered little children like lambs to His fold;
I should like to have been with Him then.
I wish that His hand had been laid on my head;
That His arms had been thrown around me,
I should like to have seen His kind look when He said
"Let the little ones come unto me".

Well that was a beautiful and bracing experience, but if we can believe our Lord, we have a far greater opportunity than they had. He said as much to those grieving friends of His. When they learned that He was going away, their hearts were broken, but He
"It is better for you if I go away. If I go not away, the comforter, the helper will not come, but if I depart I will send Him unto you and He shall glorify me, because He shall take the things of mine and show them unto you. Though they had associated with Jesus intimately, they did not know Him. He could have said to any member of the twelve what He said to Phillip; "Hast thou been so long time with me, yet hast thou not known me, Phillip." But with this experience, there came a new understanding of Him, and a new awareness of His presence. They did not believe in Him, simply from the sound of His voice or the touch of His hand. They did not believe in Him, simply because they knew Him as a historic character. They believed in Him as a living presence. He was a present fact; He was among them as a group. He was with them individually. The experience of Paul was not unique. It belonged to each one of them. "At my first defense, no man took my part, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me and gave me strength.

Not only did they know Jesus as a presence among them, as walking with them, but He was a living power within them. This too belonged to them individually. "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, and yet not I, but Christ, liveth in me." They claim to have an indwelling presence. Now if I were to say, "Shakespeare liveth in me", you would expect me to have something of his magic music. If I were to tell you that the spirit of the artist, Turner, lived within me, you would expect me to splash sunsets on the canvas somewhat as he did. They claimed that Jesus Christ dwelt within them, and they demonstrated the fact by this greater fact that they were no longer imitators of Christ, but they reproduced Him. This then was the first great result that the divine became real. There came
to them a bracing awareness of God through Christ.

That has been the experience of Pentecostal saints across the years. Here is John G. Peyton bearing his wife and baby at the midnight hour in far off Hebrides. He seemed to take that hour to save them from the cannibals. It was a terrible ordeal. He must needs have gone made by that lonely grave, but for the conscious presence of Jesus Christ. He did not simply believe in Christ - he realized Him.

It was my privilege to know that great pastor and saint, George Truitt——, who served for so long as Pastor of First Baptist Church. He was a great preacher and a great believer. He told of going one day to one of our colleges where there was a brilliant young agnostic, who gloried in his agnosticism and gloried yet more in his power to answer some of his fellow students and even some of his professors. And the first night that Dr. Truitt he went to hear him, and after the benediction he made his way forward and met the minister. He said "I'd be glad to see you in a personal interview if you would grant it", and the preacher fixed at 9 o'clock the next morning for that interview. Promptly at the appointed hour the young chap came in. He opened the conversation by saying "I didn't come to argue with you or to get you to explain anything to me. I have come to ask you one question, if you will give me a frank and candid answer." He said "As honestly as I have answered any question in my life, I'll be glad to answer your question. What is it?" "Here it is" said the young man. "Last night I heard you speak, and you spoke of Jesus Christ as if you knew Him. I heard you pray. You spoke as if you were talking to a friend. Tell me, is Jesus Christ real to you?" Not do you believe the Bible, or do you
believe this or that, but is Jesus Christ a reality in your life?"
And the great saint answered, "I'll be glad to answer your question. As real to me as any friend I have in this world. Yea, as real to me as wife or child, is Jesus Christ to my heart." "Thank you", said the young man, and turned away. At the next service he came forward again after the benediction and took the preacher by the hand, and there was a light in his face that was never seen on land or sea. He said, "I came to tell you that He is real to me too."
These people went out from this experience with a sense of a living presence of a living Christ; among them, with them individually, and within them.

PART II

A second result of this experience was an unquenchable joy. It was a joy that was absolutely independent of circumstances. They were possessed of an invincible gaiety, an invincible glad optimism that was indestructable. They rejoiced when things went well. They rejoiced when the sea of life was smooth and they were making headway toward their desired haven. But they rejoiced seemingly no less when everything went wrong, when the storm was on, and when failure sat sobbing like a troubled ghost within the rigging of their ship. They rejoiced when they succeeded. They rejoiced when they failed. They rejoiced in the midst of honor and love. They rejoiced in the midst of dishonor and hate. Here, for instance, is a little handful of them going home from a terrible experience. They have been whipped. They have been scourged like galley slaves. But as they go on their way, they do not bewail the fact, they do not say it was harder than I expected and we are going to have to moderate our tone a little for discretion is the
better part of valor. They rather went away rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name.

Now this joyousness is a part of our Christian inheritance. Jesus was a joyous man. I think we have too often ignored that fact. If Jesus was not a joyous man, He was less than sincere, because He went about saying, "Oh, the gladness of the merciful, Oh, the happiness of the peacemakers, oh, the joy of those who see God." He had another word on His lips again and again and that was this: "Be of good cheer". He said it in the midst of the ravages at Sinner's Rock, He said it as He faced the cross. Now is there anything more aggravating than such a word on the lips of a man whose face creams and mantles like a standing pond. If he looks like a thundercloud himself, we resent his saying "be of good cheer". He is a bit like the chap who has said to everyone of us, "Cheer up! you don't have to die but once". But the answer to that is that that once usually kills you. Jesus was joyful and, naturally, loving us He wants to share His joy. If we may believe the writers of the Hebrews, He was a most joyous man that ever lived. His was the gladest face that ever looked out upon life. "Thou hast anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows." It is rather a striking fact that the last night of His life, when He prayed with His little family that He was going to leave in a lonely world where every one of them, with a possible/exception, everyone would die a violent death. He didn't ask for their protection, but He did pray this prayer: "Let the joy that is mine may be theirs, not the joy that was mine in the morningtide of my ministry when it looked like an easy victory, not the joy that I am expecting when I pass through this black tunnel of crucifiction out under the
What Happened at Pentecost?

clear skies of God's eternal morning, but the joy that is mine now as I kneel under the shadow of the cross:" the joy that was His, He prayed that it might be ours.

Why is this? It is because love wants us to enjoy for one thing, but the biggest fact is this — "the joy of the Lord is your strength." It is your strength for resisting temptation. If I am going to resist the call of the world, I must be convinced that I have something better than the world can offer. How, for instance, was Silas Marner cured of his love of gold? You remember he got his heart broken in his younger years and it embittered him, and he gave the love that he once gave to the woman that jilted him, to gold and he accumulated a bit of it, and when he'd come home from his he'd run his miserly fingers through it and hear its clatter and say "Oh, my beauties, my beauties." But he was cured of that love. How? You say somebody stole his gold, but that didn't cure him. Many a man has given up the world and then loved it just as much as he did before he gave it up. What cured him? One night he came in to see something glittering and sparkling in the firelight, and he rushed forward to run his miserly fingers once more through his golden hoard. But there was no clank. He found the silken tresses of a little girl, and Eppe had stolen in from out the night and was sleeping on his hearth, and little by little she stole into his heart, and as it was filled with this warm tender human love, the old petrifying golden love was driven out. He had something better. That was what cured him. The joy of the Lord is your strength. Walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Then it

Then it is your strength for winning others. I wonder if in all
the centuries anybody was ever won to Christ by a snarling, howling, disappointed professing Christian? You misrepresent your Lord, you make religion ugly and hideous. No wonder some people want to hold off from hard ordeal as long as possible. It was my privilege to know that choice saint, Bud Robison. I have never known a man I believe who lived closer to the Lord, and one day this man was conducting a testimony meeting and a churchman got up and told what a terrible time he had had trying to be a Christian. And Buddy finally stooped him and said, "Brother, whenever I hear a fellow get up and say he's had a hard time serving the Lord, I just want to take a plank and knock hell fire out of his head." Well, that may not be the most fit language, but it is a natural attitude. If you are not a joyless Christian, you are giving a lie to your religion. One thing this experience did for these people was to give them an irreplaceable joy of constant gaiety that nothing could destroy. It lighted a lamp of laughter in their soul that all the storms of the world couldn't blow out.

PART III

A third result of this experience was to give them a veritable passion for sharing their story with others. They had something that was too good to keep. When they were commanded by the same court that had crucified their Master a few months before to keep silence, thus and let Christianity die in its cradle, they answered "Frankly, why you aren't asking the impossible. We can not but speak the things that we have seen and heard. We are under orders in the first place, but more than all else, we are under inward orders. We have something that we simply have to tell. "We can not but speak the things that we have seen and heard." With this conviction, the first
response to Pentecost was a great mass revival service. We have
gotten away from faith in mass evangelism, most of us. In fact, we
have largely gotten away from faith in any kind of evangelism. If
we have a revival in many of our churches, it must come in under an
alias. It takes a daring preacher to announce a revival. And yet
revival is a beautiful word. It means the coming of a new spring
time to the Church and to the human soul. But beautiful as it once
was, and I can remember a day when the announcement would bring
people together in greater numbers and with greater enthusiasm and
expectancy. But, as a rule, it is not true today. Indeed the
opposite is true. In many of our good churches the announcement of
a revival would be about as attractive as to say "We are going to
have some interesting germs of a contagious disease on exhibition
next Sunday. Come out and bring the family and you may catch one or
more". I don't know exactly what has happened, but somehow in its
journey from the Jerusalem of yesterday to the Jericho of today, the
word Evangelism or Revival has fallen among robbers who have wounded
it and stripped it and departed leaving it half dead. And it takes
a rather reckless Samaritan to stop and administer first aid. But
if you shy around mass evangelism, you also shy around Pentecost.
They had a great revival service.

But they did not depend simply upon mass evangelism to reach
the world. They gave personal testimony. They went after men one
by one. I don't know how long it was after Pentecost before Peter
and John encountered that cripple at the gate of the temple. It may
have been weeks, it may have been the next day, but they were going
to prayer meeting, not even a Christian prayer meeting. It must
have been a rather dull affair. When they encountered this man who
had been a parasite all his life, not because he wanted to be but because he couldn't help it. He represents a group that every community has. They say there is no use in saying anything to him. He is unreachable, or he gets converted every year. And so everybody passed him up. But when this man turned to these two Pentecostal saints and asked for a penny, Simon went through his empty pockets and found none, and excused himself and hurried on to prayer meeting. No, he dais "silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give. I do have something—in the name of Jesus of Christ of Nazareth walk," and he took him by the hand and lifted him up and he entered with them into the Temple walking and leaping and praising God. That must have been an exciting prayer meeting, because there is nothing more exciting than to see somebody walk who has been forever a cripple. People come together not to see Jesus only, but Lazarus also whom he raised from the dead. And a resurrected is always an exciting experience. They went after the crowd. They went after the individual. They became a witnessing church. And after they had been reproved and warned that they were not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus, it was only a few weeks later til they were under arrest again and they were saying to them, "We commanded you not to speak, and now you've filled all Jerusalem with your teaching." Well, that was something over which to shout. We are not very much like that are we? I said to one of the greatest churches I ever served one day, "You depend on your Pastor's so completely, that when I'm out of town the Church is out of town, and if I were to leave you for six months and you got nobody in my place, you might as well dynamite the building. Now", I said, "our sister Church up here of another denomination, if it were to leave its
pastor and he'd be gone for a year, they'd hardly miss him. And you know a few weeks later he did leave. He's now president of a college. They were without a Pastor, I should say, for at least a year. But a few weeks later I was on the golf course one Monday morning and one of their leading Deacons said to me "We received 32 into the Church yesterday." Who got them? The Deacons got them. How long would it take the average Official Board and the average Church to win 32. To put it conservatively, 32 years. They became aggressive in their witnessing. That is true of a Pentecostal church or a Pentecostal man in every generation,

PART IV

A fourth result of Pentecost was that these people, home born Jews some of them, foreign born Jews separated before by wide chasms, became one. Luke tells us that the multitude of them that were were one soul. What is the biggest question before the house today? What has always been the biggest question - it is how to get on with other people. That is the biggest question in the world. Of course anybody could get along with me, but look at you. We just can't get along as nations, we can't get along as churches, we can't get along as groups, we can't get along as families. We simply can't live together. But with Pentecost this was healed.

Now the day on which this new church began to do business was as hate torn and hell torn as our world. There were wide chasms that separated Jew from Gentile, and there were chasms that separated the Jew from the Samaritan, and there were yet wider chasms that separated the Pharisees from the common run of the mill people that didn't know the law, that they pronounced a curse. And yet,
turn where you will, there wasn’t a chasm that divided people of that
day, that this Pentecostal Church did not bridge. The multitude of
them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. That is
necessary, it is not simply a piece of good advice to know how to
get along with people. It is essential. There is nothing in the
Universe so expensive as hate. There is nothing so conserving as
love, whether it is between a nation and nation, between group and
group, between individual and individual, we are bound up in a
bundle of life with each other and what hurts one hurts the other.

I went fishing the other day and got some poison ivy on my
left ankle. When it began to act up I hurried off and got me some
carbolic acid and I rubbed it in. I took mine straight. I forgot
one item about it. I use to dilute the acid, but I didn’t dilute
it and now it got action, and my whole body had an insurrection.
My hand said I’ll have nothing to do with it, I’m separated from it
by 3,000 miles; and my head said I’ll have nothing to do with it –
I wasn’t consulted when it was put on. But when we went to bed
that night we all stayed awake together. Pentecost welded people
into a brotherhood, and that was the purpose of the coming of Jesus
above all else – that men should become brotherly. He gave His few
precious years trying to weld twelve men into a brotherhood. Up
to this experience it seemed little more than a futile failure.

When they went into the last meal they had together Luke tells us
that they went in with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes, arguing
who was going to be first. How disappointing! But this experience
welded them into a brotherhood, and when they went out to face that
hard pagan world, those pagans looked at them with eyes full of
wistful wonder and said "how these Christians love each other". Not "how they knife each other", but "how these Christians love each other". And because they wanted love and to be loved, they were drawn into these little colonies of heaven. So this experience did these four things for those who participated in it. It gave them an awareness of the divine. They didn't simply believe in Him, they realized Him. It gave them an irrepressible gaiety, a joy that made them taller than any height. It gave them a passion for telling their story. It welded them into a brotherhood. No wonder that as a further consequence they were a powerful group. They were the most powerful group that this world had ever seen or will ever see again, until we enter into that experience. Now it is only a triviality to say that what they had we need. Some of us know what it means. Some of us do not know. But we have missed something, most of us, as Christians, and we have three times as many people in the Church, in proportion to the population, as there were a hundred years ago, Elton Trueblood tells us. But are we three times as dynamic, three times as powerful, three times as joyous, three times as winsome, as this little handful that changed the world two thousand years ago? What do we need? Some new Pentecost? No. We need to see the Pentecost that waits just above our heads.

When my room is dark in the morning, I have the shades drawn, and the sun is rising without, what I need is not a new sun. I need to open the blinds and let the sun in that has been shining for millions of years. And what we need is to let Him in. When I was a student I walked one day over to Boston, crossing a bridge that stood near where the bridge was said to have stood on which
Longfellow received the inspiration for his most beautiful song, "The Bridge at Midnight". And, being a bit romantic, I went and looked over the side of the bridge to gather a little poetry for myself, but if I ever saw a scene that was the essence of prose, that was it. The river, the Charles River, looked anemic. It looked as if it might be in the last stages of tuberculosis. I could see the mud and filth and wreckage, like ugly ribs, at the bottom of the stream. Down a little way were three vessels heeled on their sides, yawning, unsightly, useless, and bored, and I looked at them and turned away disgusted. I said anybody who can get poetry out of that is a million leagues ahead of me. So I went over into the city, stayed three or four hours, and when I came back across the same bridge I looked over into the same river, not with any expectancy, but the river wasn't the same. It had undergone a transformation. From a dying thing it had become a living something. It was prattling to itself like a happy child. The mud and wreckage, and the filth and ugliness at the bottom of the stream were no longer visible. Down below those bored ships that stood yawning and useless were floating buoyantly upon their keels, waiting in joyful expectancy to tramp the high seas with the commerce of the world in their arms. And I turned to that laughing stream and said, "What in the world has happened to you? What have you done to change yourself so?" It said, "I didn't change myself. When you saw me the tide was out. By and by the tide came in, the tide from the Atlantic that has so much to give, and all I had to do was to open my arms and receive it." And that, dear heart, is the key word of Pentecost, and it breathed on them saying, "receive ye the Holy Spirit." And we are witnesses of these things, as is
Also the Holy Spirit whom God has given to them that obey Him. Repent and be baptized everyone of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is every man's privilege. That is the privilege of our modern Church, and we'll never win, we were never expected to win, in the energy of the flesh, but only in the power of the Spirit, which is the power of Pentecost. May God help us to receive Him.
"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." This refers to the greatest event in the history of the Christian church. Yet, in spite of its vast importance, I think it is hidden from the view of many earnest church people because they fail to understand what is abiding and eternal about it. Suppose, then, in our study we turn away from what is obviously beyond our understanding... the rushing of the mighty wind and the tongues of fire, those things that were certainly non-essential and passing. And suppose we turn instead to what is essential and to what is abiding.

I

What really happened at Pentecost? Suppose we seek an answer, not in the event itself, but in the effect that that event had upon those who experienced it. What difference did Pentecost make for those friends of Jesus who entered into that experience? If it made no appreciable difference at all, then it is of little interest to us. But if it made a great and abiding and positive difference, then we better look with earnest eyes because it may have something to say to us that we especially need in our troubled and perplexed day.

The first effect that Pentecost had upon those who participated in it was this: It made them brotherly. It welded them into a brotherhood. Luke tells us that the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. This does not mean, of course, that they were a perfect brotherhood. This brotherhood was made up of imperfect men and women such as we are, but it was as near to perfection that the world had seen up to that time.

Now, it is evident to any careful reader of the New Testament that one purpose of Jesus, surely, and that a primary purpose, was to establish a brotherhood. When he gave the hallmark of discipleship, he passed by any creed that we might recite, or any mode of baptism, to this one test:— "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one toward another." He divided men into two groups—those who make for unity and those who make for division. He declared further that the man who made a division in the community, in the church, in the home, was no friend of his. He put it like this:— "He
that is not for me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

It is also evident that this purpose of welding his friends into a brotherhood had been very imperfectly realized during the days of his earthly ministry. John, whose name became a synonym for love, was anything but a broad-minded lover of men during the days of his fellowship with Jesus. For instance, he hurried one day to tell his lord that he had found a man casting out demons in his name but that he had forbidden because he did not belong to his particular group. John was against demons, but he could tolerate demons easier than he could tolerate men who did not belong to his one particular branch of the church.

Again, he and his brother came hiding behind the skirts of their mother asking that they not only be elected bishops but that they both be senior bishops in the church. It made his companions angry, but their anger was not due to the fact that they resented the selfishness of James and John. They rather resented it because they wanted first place for themselves. And even when they went into the upper room, for their last supper together, when they met that solemn night under the shadow of the cross, they did not enter that room in tears, with their arms locked with each other as the sharers in a common tragedy, they rather entered spitting hot words at each other. They were still arguing over the question as to who was going to be greatest. Up to the day of the crucifixion, Jesus seemingly had made little success in welding his fellows into a brotherhood. But after Pentecost it was different. When they went out over the pagan world, the pagans looked at them wistfully and said, "How these Christians love each other!" And because they wanted to love and be loved, they were drawn into these little colonies of heaven that sprang up like oases in that ancient desert.

2. A second difference that the experience of Pentecost made in the friends of Jesus was that it gave them a veritable passion for witnessing. They had a story to tell that sent them out to lay all but violent hands on every passerby, to compel them to feel what a difference knowing Jesus Christ made in their lives. Their sermons had in them little of denunciation. They were proclamations. Had I belonged to that ancient group of ministers, I might have spent a whole winter in Athens or Corinth denouncing false gods. But it is rather strange that these primitive preachers had very little to say about false gods.

Instead they held to Jesus Christ and said, "Look what we have found. Of his fulness have
all we received, and grace our grace."

Some to whom they bore testimony were eager to hear because they had hungry hearts. Some were prejudiced. Some were full of hate and resentment. But whether their preaching met with an eager response, or whether it involved them in trouble and shame and humiliation, they still went on with their witnessing. They could all have said with Peter and John, "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard." They were as eager and persistent as the most convinced communist is today. Bedell Smith said in his testimony before the congressional investigating committee recently that the Russian-trained communist was the most fully committed man in the world today. I hope he was wrong. What a tragedy if Karl Marx with his atheism can bring about a greater loyalty in human hearts than Jesus Christ with his cross. These ancient saints went out with a passion to share with a needy world what they themselves had found.

A third difference that this experience made in the friends of Jesus was this. It made them absurdly and unbelievably joyous. The first impression they made upon certain spectators was that they had had a few too many drinks. They said, "These men are full of new wine." There was about them a sunniness, a gladness—a gladness that was born of experience, a gladness that was born of an assurance of victory today and tomorrow, that filled their faces with light and sent them out with a song upon their lips whether to live or to die.

Because this joy was in no sense a child of circumstances, they rejoiced not only when they were victorious, not only when their message was gladly received; they rejoiced also when it was resisted and resented, they rejoiced when it involved them in suffering, when it involved them in shame. Here for instance are two of them coming from a most humiliating experience. They have been whipped as if they were slaves. But as they come away from this trying experience, they are not embittered and they are not downcast. Rather they come away rejoicing that they have been counted worthy to suffer shame for his pain.

Now, it strikes me that this is largely a lost note in our modern religion. We are more or less in earnest. But for so many good churchmen, their Christianity is a thing to be endured rather than enjoyed. It is to be put through as a duty. But it has become a weight rather than wings. Even in our leading church paper some time ago, there was an
article under this caption: "Sermons Not to be Enjoyed". Well, if that is the ideal, many of us have reached it. But sermons are to be enjoyed. If they are not, they will not be listened to. And religion is to be enjoyed. In truth, I have found Christians in every sort of circumstance, but I have never found one single fully committed Christian who did not have a song in his heart. This experience of Pentecost made those who participated in it men and women of an amazing joy. It was the joy of the present realization. It was also the joy of a great expectancy. They were sure that in spite of all present opposition, in spite of all present impossibilities, they were sure to win. Theirs was the joy of dauntless optimism.

In this, they resembled their lord. Jesus, in his last prayer for his disciples, prayed that "the joy that is mine may be theirs." At Pentecost, this prayer was answered for those who participated in it. Jesus himself was the most joyous of men. He had constantly upon his lips that great word, "Be of good cheer." The cheer that he offered for others he possessed himself. In fact, if we can believe the writer to the Hebrews, his was the sunniest fact that ever looked out upon this world, his was the most joyous heart that ever beat in a human bosom. "Thou hast anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows." At Pentecost, his fellows came to participate in this joy.

4. Through Pentecost, these men came into possession of power. It was through this experience that was fulfilled the promise of Jesus had made, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you." After this experience, they went out to do the impossible. After this experience, they went out to the overcoming of impossibilities and to accomplish tasks that any intelligent man would have said they could never accomplish. This is not simply theory. This is a matter of fact.

Suppose I had been a visitor in Jerusalem and you had pointed out to me this little insignificant group of one hundred and twenty as they made their way into the upper room. There is not an outstanding man or woman among them so far as the human eye can see. They were not conspicuous for their social position, their culture, or their wealth. Yet you say to me: "You see that little group yonder. It is not more than half as large as the official board in some of our stronger churches. Do you see them? They are going to shake this city to its foundation. They are going to shake all Palestine. They are going
to shake the Roman world. In fact, they are going to change the whole world, lift empires off their hinges, and alter the whole course of human history." I would have said frankly, "It's impossible." I would have told the truth. Yet the impossible became possible because these people had experienced Pentecost, and having experienced Pentecost, they had become men of power.

Now, it strikes me that if there was ever a day in human history when Christian people needed that experience, it is today. We have many men of culture and many men of influence in our modern pulpits. But we have too few of them who are really powerful men. We have the largest and strongest churches from the material standpoint that the world has ever known. And yet those churches, in spite of all their tremendous advantages, though they are accomplishing a vast deal, they are not accomplishing what we know in our hearts they could accomplish—many excellent and influential churches, but too few powerful churches. These people became possessed of power, of power that excelled the power of electricity, that excels the power of gravity, that excels atomic power. They became possessed with the very power of God. They became irresistible men and women.

II

Now, how do we account for this mighty change in these ordinary men and women?

Suppose we listen to the answer that they themselves give. They claimed that they had entered into the experience promised by their Lord, that the ascended Christ had received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and was now forth this that you now hear and see. They claimed that through this experience they had come to a new awareness of God as a personal presence. They came to a new awareness of the risen Christ as not only with, not only among, but within them individually. They speak of this experience as the coming of the Holy Spirit. They speak of it as the coming of the Spirit of God, or as the coming of the Spirit of Jesus. It all sums up to this:—that there came to those who experienced Pentecost an awareness of God. They did not simply believe in Him, they realized Him.

Now, as for me, I can believe that their testimony is true. I can believe it because they became the kind of men and women that I should expect Spirit-posessed, God-possessed men and women to become. Up to the time of Pentecost, they were more or less earnest. But they went out as rather feeble imitators of Christ. After this experience, they went
out to reproduce Christ. They went out to say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ. Christ liveth again in me. I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, and yet not I but Christ liveth within me." They went out to be the kind of men and women that we should expect Christ-possessed men and women to be.

Not only so, but they went out to do a Christ-like task. They went out to accomplish that which only God-possessed people can accomplish. If I say, "The spirit of Tennyson liveth in me," you would expect me to sing somewhat as Tennyson sang. If I claimed that the spirit of the artist Turner liveth in me, you would expect me to splash some of his fascinating dreams upon the canvas. They went out claiming that the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of God, dwell within in them, and they made their claim good for they accomplished in the world tasks so amazing and so impossible that we cannot explain them except in terms of men and women possessed by and possessed of God.

III

Now, any earnest man has to say within his heart; "This is what we need today. This is what the church needs." We too are confronted with impossibilities. We too are face to face with doors to which we find no key and veils through which we cannot see. We have reached the place where there is simply no getting on without the power of God. What we need then is the experience that came to these people at Pentecost. Bear in mind we do not need, as some are fond of saying, a "new Pentecost." We rather need to appropriate the Pentecost that is already ours.

Pentecost surrounds us at this moment as the atmosphere surrounds us, as the water surrounds the vessel in the sea. Our business is not to recapture, as my subject suggests, Pentecost. That carries the idea that God were trying to elude us, that we were willing but He was unwilling. Pentecost is not something to be recaptured. It is something to be received. When he came, he did not come as a transient guest, he came to abide with us forever. And his promise today is the same as his promise of yesterday. ("We are his witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God hath given to them that obey Him.")

How, then, shall we enter into Pentecost? How shall we come to possess this abiding blessing that is for every one of us? There is nothing more sure than this promise. There
is nothing more sure than that our lord never intended that we should carry on in the energy of the flesh. He knows that it is "not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord." Therefore, how shall we enter into this experience which is not an abnormal experience, but which is the normal experience for every Christian, an experience without which we are subnormal, without which we simply cannot arrive. If Jesus found this Spirit essential for the fulfilling of his ministry, how much more is that Spirit essential for you and me.

How, then, are we to receive him? It is not a matter of waiting, as at Pentecost. It is simply a matter of receiving. The writers of the New Testament fairly haunt us with that fact. The key word is, "Receive ye." And he breathed on them and said receive ye the Holy Spirit." "Repent and he baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus, and ye shall receive the Holy Spirit." And Paul said to those backward saints at Ephesus, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit, when you believed?" He is not a gift to be recaptured; he is a gift to be received. This is his word, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me."

If, then, this is not your experience, if then you are still painfully struggling in the energy of the flesh instead of in the power of the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for that tragedy? Not God, but you. He is not a power to be captured and used as you will. He is a loving heavenly Father who longs that you give Him yourself that He may give you Himself. "This is my body", my personality, my all, that was given for you and to you. He becomes yours the very moment you give yourself to Him. Therefore if, I repeat, this experience is not yours, who is delaying the great transaction? Not God, but you. May the lord grant that we may not delay any longer.
"And they were filled with the Holy Spirit."

-- Acts 2:4

I

The text marks the climax of a prayer meeting held in an upper room in Jerusalem many years ago. Those present at this prayer meeting never forgot it, and they made it impossible for the world to forget. Yet, they possessed none of the resources that we tend to prize. They had no political power. They were possessed of little wealth. Few, if any, of their names appeared in the social register. Their numbers were not impressive. There are perhaps more than ten times that number present in this service as took part in that prayer meeting. Yet, in spite of all their limitations, they went out from this service to remake the world.

What is their secret? What experience came to them in this upper room that made them what they were, and enabled them to do what they did? Certain mockers of that distant day found an easy solution; they merely said they were drunk, that they had gotten hold of some new wine. But nobody takes their explanation seriously. Drunk folks become sober. They generally wake up the next morning with an ill head, and an aching heart. But these people remained intoxicated to the end of the chapter. Drunk men do not greatly help, even while drunk, but these made a new world.
If this experience is not to be explained in terms of drunkenness, no more is it to be explained in terms of the sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, or as tongues of fire. To focus attention on these is to forget the essential in the non-essential. It is to become so absorbed in the husk that we forget the kernel. It is to be so taken up with the desired casket that contains a jewel that we forget the jewel itself. What, then, I repeat, really happened? Peter explains it in the following fashion: "This is that which is spoken of the Prophet Joel. "It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." That is, He said, God is making good a promise that He made long ago to the Prophet Joel. He elaborates this explanation a little further by saying that Jesus has done what He promised to do before He went away. He had promised to send another Comforter. Now, said Peter, having received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, He hath sent you which ye now seest and hear. In fact, our text tells the simple truth. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

II

Now, we shall doubtless understand better just what this means when we realize what this experience did for those who were privileged to participate in it. What difference did Pentecost make in the disciples themselves? Of course the full answer to this question is impossible. But I can mention the following:

1. It brought them a satisfying realization of the presence of the Living Christ. They no longer merely believed in Christ. They realized Him. They now understood those words of Jesus that seemed so bewildering and so impossible, when He
spoke them: "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come. But if I depart, I will send Him unto you." In the coming of the Spirit, Christ had come. And in the coming of Christ, God had come. Through this experience, they had been brought into a realization of the Divine Presence, such as they had never known before.

This Risen Christ was not only realized as with them, but He was within them. They were experiencing that glorious ministry of which Paul speaks: "Christ in you, the hope of God." They were experiencing what Paul later experienced, when he said, "I am glorified with Christ, nevertheless I live, and yet not I but Christ liveth in me." They had been made conscious of an all-sufficient indwelling companion.

2. Not only did this experience bring them a realization of Christ, but by so doing, it made them Christ-like. If I should say that Tennyson lives within me, I could only make good my claim by singing somewhat as Tennyson sang. These men made good their claim of the indwelling presence of Christ by reproducing Him. They came to share His mind. They came to be able to say: "For me to live is Christ." Those who came into contact with them were forced to take knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

(1) They had come to share His passion for man. They had been gripped by a compelling interest for others. They were so interested that they felt compelled to share. This sharing meant the eager giving of all they possessed. They shared their material wealth. "Neither said any man that aught of the things he possessed was his own." They did this, not by outward constraint. They did it spiritually, as naturally as the flower blooms at the kiss of springtime.
As they shared their material wealth, they shared their spiritual. Some seemed not to desire their gifts. But whether they met with love or hate, whether with prayer or with stones, they were so bent on giving that they continued to share even to the laying-down of their lives.

(2) Sharing in the passion of Jesus was sharing in His joy. One of the fascinations of the story of the early church is this abounding joyfulness. We find these early saints in many varying situations. Sometimes they are obviously victorious, and sometimes they seem utterly defeated. Sometimes they are appreciated. Sometimes they are hated. But, regardless of their circumstances, we never find them without their joy. "Here is a group that has just been cruelly whipped, but how do they receive their disgrace? "They return, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

The joy that we see lighting the faces and expressed in the eyes of these saints of the long ago has been characteristic of the Church when it was vitally alive through all the centuries. When Wesley began to do business in England, religion was stale and insipid. It was gray and unsightly and dull. But, at the preaching of Wesley, people began to enter into the experience of Pentecost. At once the Church began to live. Chas. Wesley alone wrote no less than six thousand hymns. A woman, who was an atheist, sponsored a meeting for Stanley Jones in South America. A few years ago, she explained her interest by saying, "I wanted to hear you because you have a song in your heart. South America is very short on music."

One of our weaknesses, I am sure, is just here—We are so short on music. We do not have the strength and the courage of a great joy.
(3) Sharing in the passion and joy of Jesus, these men also came to share his hope. What a dauntless optimist was their Lord! Of Him, it was written in the long ago, "I shall not fear, nor be discouraged." Nothing daunted Him; nothing made Him despair. And these people became hopeful with His hope. They discovered that God was a hopeful God. Therefore, Paul preached: "The God of hope, fill you with all joy and peace, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." This, "That you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit," there is nothing that we need more today, than a fresh baptism of hope.

(4) Being hopeful, they were naturally courageous. How do we account for the sturdy courage of Columbus as, amidst jeers and threats, he continues to sail westward. He is buoyed up by a great hope. He was sure that there was land ahead. And so it was with these heroes. They believed that there was land ahead of them, a new and radiant land, from which evil should be driven out, and where Christ should be King. And in this hope they dared all dangers; they hurled themselves against impossibilities, dauntless and unafraid. Many of us have about lost our nerve, because the experience of Pentecost is no longer a reality.

3. Not only did this experience bring to them a realization of Christ and make them Christ-like, but it welded them into a brotherhood. First, it made them one, individually. It made them integrated personalities. It also fused them into a fellowship. They became, in a true sense, one with that oneness for which Jesus prayed in his High Priestly prayer. It is such oneness as is possible only through the power of God. You cannot weld two pieces of steel, unless
they are hot. And human hearts are not really welded together except in the hot fires of the Holy Spirit. There was unity here. Uniformity is death. All corpses are practically alike. It is in uniformity of the Spirit where there is oneness along with infinite familiarity.

4. Being made one, they became possessed of power. A unified personality is always a powerful personality. But a unified group is immeasurably more powerful. One such can chase a thousand, but two can do more than chase two thousand. Two can put ten thousand to flight. But, these are not only powerful because they have become one, they are powerful because, being thus welded together, they have become individually and collectively a channel through which the Spirit of God might flow out to the remaking of the lives of men. Christ fulfilled His promise—"out of their inner lives should flow rivers of living water." The tasks they accomplished were not accomplished through their own strength, but through the strength of Another. In telling the story of their achievements, they did not put the emphasis on what they had done, but upon what God had done with them, and through them.

III

What effect did these men who had come to realize Christ, and to reproduce Him, who had become unified and powerful, have upon the world? It is not surprising that their effect was amazing. These men made the wilderness and the solitary place to become glad, and the desert to rejoice and to blossom as a rose. They faced grim mountains of impossibilities, but they tossed them aside as mere light and trifling nothings. They breathed upon that barren and wintry world like a victorious springtime, and death gave place to life. They began their work
of transformation at once. We see it appear before our eyes.

1. They got the attention of the people. That is the first step in changing anybody, or any group. If nobody listens to the preacher when he preaches, he might as well be making mud pies. He is wasting his own time, as well as the time of those who are pretending to hear him. These people, fresh from the experience of Pentecost, could not be ignored. They were vastly different. Folks asked in awed whispers, "What meaneth this?" And the multitudes came together greatly wondering.

Now, one of the worst calamities that can befall a church is to lose its question mark, to get to the place where it no longer inspires wonder. The church does not have to have universal approval. Some of its most victorious days have been those of bitter persecution. Its deadest days are those in which it can be ignored. And the surest road to this deadly evil is to cease to be different from the world. When Samson went down to Gaza and Delilah began to search for the secret of his power, he at last told her his secret in this fashion: "If I break my vow of allegiance I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

Then you notice the terrible penalty that he would have to pay for his unfaithfulness. It would not be that he would become worse than the world about him; he would only become like any other man. For the Church to fail, it is not necessary that it become more blind, more selfish, more impotent than the man of the world; it is only necessary that it become like the world. One of the supreme weaknesses of modern Christianity is that those who claim to be Christians are so like those who make no such claims. We are oftentimes just as weak, just as hopeless, just as joyless, just as
loveless as they. And these early saints won attention because they were so different.

2. Not only did they win attention by being different but their difference wounded and disabled those who were forced to recognize them. They became incarnate consciences. They were living rebukes, all that was low and mean and selfish. Their spiritual beauty so awed them as to compel them to cry in deep penitence, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

But, if they brought a sense of sin, they also brought a hope of deliverance. As they looked at these radiant saints, they said to themselves, "I am not like that." But they, also, said, "By the Grace of God, I may be like that." And so they asked for their secret, and when Peter spoke in the power of the Spirit to them, they then and there came to share in the blessings of Pentecost. And that day 3,000 were born unto God. And from there, the fire spread literally round the world.

IV

Now, what has this message to do with ourselves?

I answer, that. It has everything; it is the gospel. And if it is not true, we have no gospel. What is its message to you and me?

1. It tells us that the need of the disciples before Pentecost is our need. It is not only our need; it is our absolute necessity. What would these disciples of Jesus have done without this experience? Little more than naked nothing. But for this experience, the Church would have died in its cradle. They had known Jesus personally in the flesh. They had met Him after His resurrection. But that was not enough. Therefore, Jesus said, "Tarry ye, till you be
embued with power from on high."

Not only was this experience necessary for them, but Jesus Himself living His life with our limitations must needs do His work in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we read that when He came up from His baptism with water, He was baptized of the Holy Spirit. And Luke tells us that it was in this power that He lived His life, and did His work. "Whom God annointed with the Holy Spirit, and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." Now, if this experience was necessary for the disciples and for Jesus Himself, it is also necessary for you and me.

2. Not only does this tell us our supreme necessity, but it also tells us of our supreme privilege. The life abundant is for everybody. As Peter faced that hungry-hearted and defeated multitude of the long ago, he was able to say to them with joyful confidence; "The promise is unto you." And so He says to us today. This is not an abnormal experience to just a few; it is a normal experience to every follower of Christ. And if we do not enter into it, we are subnormal. We are trying to do in the energy of the flesh what can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Not only do we learn here of our supreme necessity and of our supreme privilege, but we also learn how this privilege may become ours. There is more than one condition in the New Testament for the receiving of the Holy Spirit. But all of them may be summed up in one, and that is personal and unconditional surrender. "He that spared not His own Son: but delivered Him up for us. How shall He not also with Him freely give us all things." When we give all, He gives all. I know we are told to repent, but repentance only means personal surrender. I know that the Spirit is given in answer to prayer, but it is a
prayer, not that seeks to change the will of God, but that seeks the surrender of our own will. The Spirit of God surrounds you in this moment as the atmosphere. We do not have to persuade Him to come in. All we have to do is to open the door.

Will you welcome Him? Remember, you are not seeking for power, for peace, for joy. These are the effects of His coming. You are seeking to let Him into your life. If you will do that, all the rest will come of themselves. As you bow head and heart, invite Him. Remember He comes as a guest. And, then, go out to live in the faith that He has kept His promise with you. If you do this, He will not disappoint you. You will find yourself in newness of life.

While a student of Harvard University some years ago, I passed over the Charles River, and looked down into its waters, the same waters unto which Longfellow looked, when he wrote "The Bridge at Midnight." The scene before me had little of poetry in it. It was one of almost unrelieved ugliness. I could see the wreckage and filth in the bottom of the stream, and down below I could see certain vessels turning upon their sides, unsightly and useless. By and by I went away in disgust.

A few hours later I came back and looked again, and all was changed. The wreckage and filth at the bottom of the stream was no longer visible. The unsightly vessels were now floating upright on their keels, getting ready to make their way across the seas, with the commerce of the world in their arms. What made the difference? When I looked the first time, it was at ebb-tide. But when I looked the second time, the tide had come in. The tide from the sea, the infinite sea, that has so much to give. And what God has to look upon with infinite
sorrow in our lives, and many of our churches today, is an ebb-tide. All we need is to remove the hindrance, and allow the tide to come in. When that is done, it will be written of us, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit."
Something is happening in Jerusalem that is forcing people to think. The leaders among the Jews were quite sure that with the crucifixion of Jesus His disciples would be scattered and that the movement set in motion by Him would be ended forever. But in this they have been disappointed. At this very moment this small and seemingly insignificant group of Christians is forcing the attention of the city. Something is happening that their adversaries find hard to explain. "What does this mean?" they ask in excited bewilderment.

It is always a good day for the church when it compels attention. Blessed is the church that cannot be ignored. Blessed is the church that keeps its question-mark alive and up-to-date. Men will never act with us until they think with us. They will never think with us until we get their attention. We are not likely to get their attention until they see something taking place in our own lives, in our services, that cannot be fully explained in terms of the human. Blessed is the church the lives of whose membership and whose services can only be fully explained in terms of Almighty God. It was a great day for this church when it compelled puzzled and bewildered men to ask questions.

You will recognize this as a part of the story of Pentecost. Pentecost is the greatest event in the history of the church. Nothing more important ever happened on this planet than Pentecost. But in spite of this fact there are many earnest churchmen to whom it simply means nothing at all. They see in it something that has nothing to do with life that now is. They get their attention so focused upon the rushing of the mighty wind and the fiery tongues that they miss...
what is really essential and abiding. Suppose we take our eyes for the present
off those things that confessedly we do not understand and think of that connected
with Pentecost that we cannot help understanding. If we are puzzled by what hap-
pened at Pentecost, we need not be puzzled at the effect that this marvelous event
had upon those that participated in it.

I

Let us look then at the change wrought in these early Christians by the experi-
ence of Pentecost. What were some of these changes?

1. By this experience the disciples of Jesus were welded into a brotherhood.

As we turn the pages of the New Testament, nothing is more obvious than the fact
that it was the purpose of Jesus to build up a brotherhood. "By this," He said,
"shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." He declared
that we might distinguish between those who were His friends and those who were His
foes in this fashion. Every one who helped in the building of a brotherhood was
His friend. Every one who made for division was His foe. He put it in these
words: "He that is not for me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me
scattereth abroad." Jesus knew that only as men are brothers can life be secure
on this planet.

But though He gave Himself with utmost earnestness to this task, at the time
of His death, He seems to have made little progress. While he had gathered about
Him an inner circle of twelve men, yet even these were by no means united. When
they went in to their last supper with Him, they were spitting hot words at each
other in angry argument over which should be first. When it became necessary for
one of their number to assume the role of slave, it was not one of the disciples
that took upon himself this role. They were too proud and angry. It was Jesus
who girt Himself with a towel and washed His disciples' feet. When Jesus was
arrested, these friends scattered like frightened sheep. They were far from being
a brotherhood.
But with the coming of Pentecost, this was changed. Doctor Luke was able to write not only of these twelve, but of the others that had joined themselves with them, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. In this group were home-born Jews and foreign-born Jews who had heartily hated each other. Little by little there were drawn into this brotherhood men and women of Samaria upon whom every respectable Jew looked with utter contempt. Then the chasm between Jew and Gentile was bridged. These once divided people came to live together as brothers.

In fact, it is evident that it was these little groups of brothers, "colonies of heaven" Paul calls them, scattered over the Roman Empire that impressed that pagan world as almost nothing else. "How these Christians love each other," they said with wistful wonder. Then because they were eager to love and to be loved, because they yearned to get into an atmosphere that was warm with the summer-time of brotherliness, they were drawn into these groups. Thus it was that that pagan world was changed. Thus the wilderness and the solitary place became glad, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as a rose.

2. A second result of Pentecost was that those participating in it came to be possessed of a passion for sharing their experience with others. They had an eagerness to witness for their Lord that was absolutely irresistible. They told their story to hungry-hearted men and women that were eager to hear. They told it to those who heard in scorn and contempt and who persecuted them for their pains. But regardless of the response of those to whom they spoke, they went out from their high experience to lay all but violent hands on every passer-by to tell them of the marvelous change that had been wrought in their own lives.

That result took place immediately. No sooner had the bewildered on-lookers asked, "What does this mean?" than Simon Peter stood up all eagerness to give the answer. The story said he stood up with the eleven. He was the spokesman, but they all stood with him. He had their backing. It is a great day when the pastor, not only can speak, but when his congregation stands with him. Standing thus, with
the eleven, he bore witness. He gave his testimony, nor did he give it in vain. By his witness and through the witness of his fellow Christians Simon saw three thousand added unto the Lord that day.

Not only did Simon witness before the great crowds but he witnessed also to the individual. A little later he with his friend John was on his way to a three o'clock prayer meeting in the Temple. He was accosted by a panhandler who asked for help. This man was a professional beggar. When Simon had searched his pockets and found them empty, he said, "Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give." Then with an enthusiasm as hot as that with which he witnessed to the great multitude, he spoke to this beggar. The result of his testimony was that the beggar was changed into a giver. There was a new face at prayer meeting that day, for he entered with Simon and John into the Temple, "walking and leaping and praising God."

By this time the authorities were beginning to get a bit uneasy. Simon and John were arrested and kept in prison for the night. The next day when they were brought before the authorities, the very men who had crucified their Master, the court decided to let them off with a very light sentence. They commanded them not to preach at all nor to teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John seem to answer with joyous amazement, "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard! Silence for us is an utter impossibility." That this was literally true is evidenced by the fact that when they were again arrested a few days later these authorities said in indignation, "We commanded you not to teach at all nor to preach in the name of Jesus, yet you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching."

In the city at that time there was a brilliant Grecian Jew named Stephen. This man gave his testimony with such telling effect that the story says, "They were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke." Being unable to answer him with words, they answered him with stones. They dragged him outside the city and mobbed him. But the fact that witnessing was dangerous did not silence these dauntless souls. They were driven out of Jerusalem, but with a strange logic Luke
saying, "Therefore, they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." By their persecution these authorities did not put out the fire. They only scattered it until the whole Roman world was ablaze. These folks then had a passion for witnessing, a passion I fear that much of the modern church has lost.

3. A third result of this experience was that those who participated in it became amazingly joyous. Those who looked on could neither understand nor explain their gladness. A few weeks ago they had been the saddest people in all Jerusalem. Now they were the gladdest. What has happened? One man of the crowd could find no better answer than to say that they had had a few too many drinks—they were full of new wine. Well, liquor does make some people joyous while under the influence of it, but it won't last. At the end there is usually an ill head and an aching heart. But this drunk did not wear off. They were possessed of a joy that absolutely nothing could destroy.

It is easy to be joyous at times when everything is going our way. It is easy to be joyous when we are winning the fight and going from victory to victory. But the joy of these people did not depend upon the applause of the world or upon outward success. Here are two of them, leaders among the apostles, prominent and dignified men, yet when they are disgracefully whipped, there is neither resentment nor depression nor bitterness. Instead we read this absurd sentence: "They departed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

4. Then as a result of this experience, these men who had once been hopeless, these men who had seen their Master crucified, these men who had seen their dreams come to dusty nothing, were now possessed of a dauntless optimism that enabled them to face the starkest impossibilities with complete confidence. The prayer that Paul prayed in his letter to the Romans had been answered in rich abundance for them. They were abounding in hope. They faced the future with a certainty of victory for themselves and for their cause. They were out on the biggest crusade in all the world. With a firm confidence in ultimate triumph they were abounding in hope.
5. Finally through this experience these men and women came to be possessed of an amazing power. In fact, in the possession of this power they did the unbelievable. They accomplished what the maddest of men would have said they could never accomplish. Look at them as they gather in the upper room. They are 120 in number, just a few more than on our official board. Suppose I had stood by and watched them as they entered into their service and said, "Do you see that little group? They are going to shake this whole city to its foundation. They are going to shake all Palestine, they are going to shake this entire Roman world, they are going to breathe on all the subsequent centuries like a gulf-stream, they are going to lift empires off their hinges and change the whole course of history." "Impossible," any sensible man would have said. Yet that they did it is a fact of history. They became possessed of an amazing power.

II

Here then are facts of history. A little handful of people in the long ago, passed through a certain experience that welded them into a brotherhood that gave them a passion for witnessing that made them unbelievably joyous and hopeful, that gave them power beyond the human. This is not guess-work—this is a matter of history. This is an effect to which the centuries bear witness. How then are we to account for this change? What was it that made in these ordinary men and women such an unbelievable difference?

Suppose we listen to the testimony of those who pass through this experience. Of all others they have the best right to speak. They were there. How do they account for it. They tell us—not all using the same words but it adds up to the same thing—that through this experience there came to them an awareness of the Risen Christ. They came to know this Risen Christ as a present reality. He was both within and among them. Through this awareness of Christ they had become aware of the Eternal God. This became the testimony of those who heard and believed their story. Always they are made glad and hopeful and strong by the fact that they are not alone. Always they are entering into the richness of the promise
made by the Master Himself. "Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the age." Peter at the very first declared, "God has done this." Before the end of his sermon he declares that Christ, having received from the Father the promise of the spirit has shed forth this that you have now seen and heard. It is all the work of God." God has come to dwell with and within them.

If you find their testimony hard to believe, then I think two considerations will help you. First, it seems reasonable to me that their testimony is true because they went out to live lives such as we would expect God-possessed men and women to live. "They took knowledge of them," we read, "that they had been with Jesus." There was that about them that was Christ-like. Here is one being stoned to death but he does not die in bitterness with face clouded by hate. They saw his face as it had been the face of an angel and this was his last prayer, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Of what does that remind you? It reminds you of the prayer that Jesus uttered on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Not only did these people go out to become the kind of men and women we should expect people to be who are aware of God through Christ, but they accomplished the results that we should expect such people to accomplish. They breathed on that hard world like a reviving springtime. The results of their ministry were marvelous almost beyond belief. In fact, they were so marvelous that you cannot account for them in terms of the purely human. Always those who had a part in it were explaining it as Paul explained it. He showed not what he had done, but what God had done through him.

Here then is the testimony of honest and good men and women. They declare that they had through Pentecost become personally aware of God, that through this awareness they had been re-made.

III

What then have these facts to say to you and me?
1. This experience of Pentecost is not for the few but for the many. It is not for some rare somebody. It is for everybody. A Pentecostal Christian is not, as some believe, an abnormal Christian. He is the only one that is normal. To have less than this is to be sub-normal.

"This blessing," said Peter is to you and to them that are far off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." We are to enter into this experience as those of the long ago entered into it, through a personal surrender. "We are witnesses of these things, as is also the Holy Spirit whom God hath given to them that obey him." This is not a second blessing though most come to a deeper consciousness of God after regeneration, but at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus there was not a really regenerated Christian among His followers. It was the experience of Pentecost that changed these friends of Jesus from mere imitators of Christ and sent them out to reproduce Him.

How then, I repeat, are we to come to this awareness that will give us joy and hope and victory. How have we come to enjoy the light and power of electricity? We have done so by obeying the laws of electricity. Even so, we come to the satisfying experience of God. It is not something that we are to take. It is something that we are to receive. It is not a prize that we are to buy. It is a gift that we are to accept.

This fact is emphasized over and over again. The standard word is "Receive ye." "And he breathed on them and he said, Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me, out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water." When we drink we receive the water. This water gives satisfaction for ourselves. It gives something to share with others. Surely our needs are just as genuine as the needs of those disciples of the long ago. Surely our opportunities are just as great. If we are to remake a broken world as they remade theirs, we can accomplish it only as we enter into their experience and become laborers...
together with God. As we do this as a church, the multitude will come together, greatly wondering, saying, "What does this mean?"

face to face with our supreme God...
Peter and the Crowd

God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Acts 2:36

What a crowd! There they are from their varied countries, "Devout men from every nation under heaven". Those allergic to the masses would have been wrecked by such a multitude. Those opposed to mass evangelism would have been horrified. For this service, the most memorable in all church history, this service that has changed the world more powerfully perhaps than any other ever held was the first instance of mass evangelism in the Christian church. The sunrise that burst upon these men and women has since gone around the world.

In the light of this fact it is rather strange that Christians are so far apart in their opinion of the worth of mass evangelism. There is one group who regard it as about the only way of winning men and women to Christ. Then there is a far greater number who regard it with rather critical eyes. Some have allowed the counterfeit to hide the genuine. They are so deeply shocked by the shams and abuses of evangelism that they have rejected it altogether. Many have never seen a real revival. They have seen highly organized movements that have been full of sound and fury and have signified next to nothing. They have read of wild orgies, the jerks and the what-nots, 'til they have lost confidence in mass evangelism as a method.

Then some shy away because such evangelism, if it is real, is costly. Whenever there is a campaign where men and women are really born unto God it comes at a cost that many comfort-loving saints are not willing to pay. It is when Zion travels that she brings forth sons and daughters. When a child is born into this world, it means that some woman has had to go through the valley of the shadow of death.
Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility. (I Peter 5:5)

As Peter writes this word I am sure that he is back across the years to one of the most painful and trying experiences of his life. Once more he is in the upper room to share with his Master and his fellow disciples the last supper. The meeting was doubtless secret. Hence there were no servants present to perform the necessary task of washing the feet of the guests. Perhaps Simon thought of rendering that service himself. But his angry effort to convince his fellow disciples that he was the greatest of the group, caused him to dismiss the thought, with horror. He could not contradict all his high claims by stooping to such a slavish service.

Then to his amazed horror, it happened. The Master is actually girding himself with a towel, a kind of a slave’s apron, to perform a task that Simon and his fellows were too proud to perform. The Apostle, after all these years, feels his face burn with shame. “You shall never wash my feet”, he declares in an effort to recover some few shreds of his tattered self-esteem. But driven from this position, there was nothing left for him but to permit his Lord to do for him what only the lowest were supposed to do.

Thus this proud man received one of his most impressive lessons in humility. Why did Jesus do this lowly deed? He did not do it to win for himself personal honor. He did not do it primarily to set an example. He did set an example, but that was the result of his deed rather than its cause. He did this necessary service because it was necessary. He did it without any reference to himself whatsoever. Thus he showed what humility is at its beautiful best. It is not, as
We often suppose, thinking meanly of ourselves. It is rather forgetting ourselves in the serving of our fellows.

Now Simon, humbled by this experience and countless others, urges his fellow to clothe themselves with humility. This he does with the realization that we are going either to deck ourselves with humility or with pride. By this he of course does not mean that the humble man is 100% humble or that the proud man 100% proud. He never means that one of these traits will predominate in all. But the long last we put the accent on one syllable or the other. Simon affirms by a quotation that we ought to clothe ourselves with humility for two reasons. First, "God opposes the proud." Second, "He gives grace to the humble."

**Part I**

Why does God oppose the proud?

The writers of the Bible are all one in affirming that pride is God's pet hate. God hates pride not because he loves the humble man, but refuses to love the proud man. He loves them both! He hates pride because pride is humanly hurtful. God is opposed to everything that hurts men. That is the reason that we can be sure that he is opposed to war. He is opposed to the liquor traffic. He is opposed to race prejudice. He is opposed to every form of injustice. Whereas, he is opposed to pride because pride is one of the supreme enemies of mankind.

**1. God has to oppose pride because pride builds its house upon a lie.** This is true of pride in all its forms: pride of possession, pride of attainment, pride of ability, pride of race. To be proud of these in the sense that we have nobody to thank for them but ourselves is as silly as it is false. "What have you, questions Paul, that you did not receive?" The answer is, "Nothing." I realize that you have worked, but it had been to take out of our hands every treasure
except those for which we are solely responsible there would not even be any hands left to us.

Then pride often convinces us of the lie of our own uniqueness. That was the trouble with the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray. He was not like other men. He was beautifully different. I have met these unique individuals again and again. Being unique they can do with impunity what would bring to others shame and ruin. I came upon a glaring example of this not so long ago. A friend told me of a young man, a member of the church and an active worker, whose shoddy reputation for sexual laxity was little short of a scandal. When one took him to task, the offender answered with a pride that Lucifer might have envied, "Am I to blame because I look like a Greek god?" of course such conduct as his in an ordinary man would have been hideous. But such was not the case in one so beautifully unique as he.

Not only do these often believe in the lie of their uniqueness, but also in the lie of their exemption from those dedications that are necessary for others. Sometime ago I preached to a college congregation on the necessity for the new birth. I was later told that one highly cultured sister was outraged by my sermon. This because I did not exempt great artists and the like. In their pride some of these may exempt themselves. But in so doing they are building on a lie. Everybody whether genius or moron must have material bread. Even so everybody must have the bread of life. To build on the foundation of your uniqueness is to build on a lie.

2. God opposes the proud because pride is a foe of our highest usefulness. The proud man who has only himself to thank for his good fortune is without a sense either of gratitude or of obligation.
Thus it never occurred to the rich farmer that he ought to share the wealth of his overflowing barns with those who had helped him to fill those barns. I had a friend who was pastor in Galveston, Texas during that terrible disaster of more than fifty years ago. A tidal wave swept over the little city, drowning thousands. As a minor calamity, it spoiled all the underground wells. That created a problem, since all the drinking water had to come from a few overhead wells.

This pastor having rescued perhaps a score of boys and girls and took them into his own home. He also rescued one man. It so happened that this man possessed an overhead well. When therefore the children began to cry for water, my friend took his bucket and went with perfect confidence to the home of the man whom he had just saved from drowning. But, believe it or not, this chap took his stand in the gate and forbade the preacher to enter.

"Get out of my way," said the minister, "or I'll smash this bucket over your head". Under the circumstances I think it was a downright Christian word. What was the matter with the ingrate? He was virtually saying "If you hadn't saved me I would have got out someway. Therefore I am under no obligation to be of service to you or to anyone else."

At times pride kills our incentive in another way. Here is a task that we know we ought to perform. But we are afraid that we might not do it quite so well as another. Indeed we might make what would seem a complete failure. In that case we should wound our sensitive pride. Therefore when it is our time to bat, for fear we might not make a home-run, we refuse to play the game altogether. Sometimes we even call this slily bit of cowardice humility. But it is not humility. It is pride at its ugly worst.

Then pride often besmirches our service by ugly motives. The Pharisees had a thousand good deeds to their credit. For those deeds
our Lord tells us they were paid in full. Having performed them that the praise of men might pander their pride, they got their reward. Nor did saints of this type perish in the long ago. The coin that proud Sir Launfal threw to the beggar was worth a hundred cents in the dollar.

Yet:

"The beggar left the coin in the dust
Better to taste the poor man's crust,
Though he turn me empty from his door."

His gift was poisoned by the pride of the giver.

Surely those engaged in Christian work know how easy it is to perform our service with an eye on the approval of our fellows. As I preach to you, I desire your approval. I should very much like for you to appreciate me personally. But if that should become of supreme importance, then what might be beautiful becomes ugly. Such a motive would kill the prophet within me. For such preaching I should have no reward from my Father nor would I have any from man if he should be wise enough to read my motives. Pride kills our possibilities for highest service.

3. Then pride makes for strife. Perhaps it is the greatest producer of hate that we know. How many nations have strutted their bloody way across the map to end in death because their pride, having made them an affront to others, had thus worked their destruction? One reason peace is so slow in coming is that every nation is proud of the fact that it is better than every other nation.

Pride also makes for strife between man and man. Joseph is one of the most beautiful characters on the pages of the Old Testament. But he was not always so. Born in a home where there were four sets of children, he was by far the most gifted and the most handsome. His doting father spoiled him shamefully. Teen-aged Joseph became as proud of himself as his father was proud of him. But his older and more
cloddish brothers saw in him little more than a gaudily dressed swagger. Therefore at their first opportunity they fed fat the grudge they bore by selling him into slavery. It was only after he had died to his own self-importance that he came to his best possibilities. Pride makes for strife.

4. Pride naturally shuts the door of the kingdom of Heaven. That gate is too narrow for any man to enter who is proud. By thus shutting the door of the kingdom, it becomes a supreme killjoy. We hardly take Jesus seriously when he declares that the humble are joyous. But multitudes know from experience that the proud are not joyous. In fact, the more proud we become, the more wretched we become.

Had one told Haman in the early years of his struggle for recognition that he would one day climb so high that he would be second only to the king he would have been thrilled. No doubt he would have expected that achievement to bring him to a climax of happiness. But when he at last reached his goal, when everybody had come to bow to him, he was more miserable than he had ever been before. The fact that one stubborn Jew named Mordecai refused to bow so wounded his pride that he got himself hanged in an effort to get revenge. Naturally, therefore, God is against pride because pride is against man.

Part II

God gives grace to the humble. God gives to the humble for the simple reason that the humble are willing to receive. God cannot give to any man what that man refuses to receive. Countless thousands who have heard the call of God, who have looked wistfully toward offered salvation, have turned away because of their pride. God was willing to give but they were not willing to receive. God loves humility because it is humbly helpful.
1. As pride builds upon a lie, humility builds upon the truth.
The house of humility rests upon a solid foundation of fact. Humility
faces the facts about ourselves. First, we face the fact that we are
grand creatures made in God's own image. But we face the further fact
that we have somewhat marred that divine image. This is true, not of
a few, but all. "There is no distinction; since all have sinned and
fall short of the glory of God". The humble face the fact that we
all need salvation.

2. Humility makes possible our best service. It gives an in-
centive. Realizing that everything of worth has come as a gift, we
say with the psalmist, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his
benefits toward me?" We affirm with Paul, "I'm a debtor". That is
we are under obligation to serve every man that we have an opportunity
to serve.

Then service rendered in humility is the most effective service.
The humble man makes himself one with the needy whom he seeks to serve.
He does not try to impress by his superiority. He does not say by his
attitude, "You ought to be god and strong like me". To try to serve
without humility is often to insult and wound rather than help.

3. Humility makes for peace between man and man. Just as pride
makes for strife. Now and then I visit churches that are made ugly
and weak by internal discord. These divisions are never led by the
humble. I have seen homes fall apart that might have been held to-
gether if the husband or the wife or both had only possessed sufficient
humility.

4. Finally, humility is the doorway into the kingdom. Not only
so, but it is the very life of the kingdom. We can neither enter nor
continue in it except through humility. Aesop tells a striking story
of a frog who desired to spend the winter in some ancient Florida.
It was too far from him to hop. Therefore he decided to thumb his way. Two wild geese responded, but were at a loss as to how to carry this extra burden. However the ingenious frog solved the problem. He found a string, as ed each goose to grip one end of it while he with his strong jaws laid hold of the middle. This done they were at once on

Part III

Now since humility is absolutely essential, how can we come to possess it?

I think we can here wisely sit at the feet of Simon. He was once one of the proudest of men, but now he is one of the humblest. Not that he tells us so. He is not proud of his humility, otherwise he would not have any. But humility breathes through every line of this gracious letter like a sweet fragrance.

For instance in speaking to the elders of the church, though he himself had grown old in that position of leadership, he addresses them not as a superior, but as “fellow elders”. He urges further that they tend the flock of God without domineering over those whom they are seeking to serve. Divine help is a necessity for all of us. But it is supremely necessary for the man in an official position in the church. How easy it is for a so-called prince of the church to degenerate into a proud spiritual pauper!

Many years ago the Master had paid Simon this great compliment:—

“You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church.” Many wise commentators believe that Jesus is thus proposing to build his church
on Simon Peter rather than on the faith that Simon confessed. But it seems clear that Simon himself does not agree with those commentators. Therefore instead of saying, "Come to me", he said, "Come to him, to that living Stone... and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house." Thus Simon regards himself as one of those living stones and therefore no more the foundation of the church than his fellow Christians.

How then did Simon come by this humility? He did not arrive by sheer force of will. Still less did he attain by comparing himself with some shoddy saint whose failure was glaring. That is what we often do and thereby only strengthen our pride. "We is me", is never wrung from the lips of any man who has an eye only for the faults and failures of others.

How then, I repeat, did Simon arrive? There were countless tender ministries that had made their contribution. But this I am sure was supreme: He knew himself so greatly loved that he had been redeemed at no less a cost than the cross of his Lord. Generally speaking there is nothing more humbling than to have had any creature love us well enough to suffer on our behalf. I heard sometime ago of a man whose seeing-eye dog had saved his life by the giving of his own. So what? That man did not strut. He rather took the torn body of that dog in his arms and sobbed over it. I think his tears did him credit.

Simon had therefore not gone in quest of humility. It had come to him when pride had been done to death by the stroke of the cross. Indeed, no man can swagger on that skull-shaped hill called Golgotha. If there is by nature a prouder man in the New Testament than Simon, that man is Paul. But he became one of the humblest of men. How had
it come about? Here is the answer, "He loved me and gave himself up for me." That realization has brought countless thousands to their knees. Therefore the real saints of all the centuries can join in this glad song:

"When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."
God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Acts 2:36

What a crowd! There they are from their varied countries, "devout men from every nation under heaven". Those allergic to people would have been wrecked by such a multitude. Those opposed to mass evangelism would have been horrified. For this service, the most memorable in all church history, this service that has influenced the world more powerfully perhaps than any other ever held, was a striking example of mass evangelism. The sunrise that burst upon these men and women on that distant day has since shone all round the world.

In the light of this fact it is rather strange that Christians are so far apart in their views of the worth of mass evangelism. There is one group who regard it as about the only way of winning men and women to Christ. But there is a far greater number who regard it with critical eyes. Some have allowed the counterfeit to discredit the genuine. Of these many have never seen a real revival. Others can not forget the wild orgies, the jerks, and what-nots of other years. Others still have seen highly organized movements that left them cold because they seemed full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Hence, these have given up faith in this type of evangelism altogether.

There are yet others who shy away for another reason. They are afraid of this kind of evangelism when it is real, it is very costly. A campaign that results in women being born unto God is costly. In fact, it comes at a price that many comfort-loving saints are not willing to pay. It is only when Zdun travels that she brings forth sons and daughters. When a child is born into this world, it
means that some woman has had to go through the valley of the shadow of death to make that miracle possible. It is only when the church is sacrificial enough to be willing to pay the price that a real revival can take place.

But be the causes what they may, this form of conquest does not meet universal approval. There are many excellent churches where to announce a revival would be about as wimsome as the announcement that certain forms of contagious disease were to be put on exhibition the following Sunday. Somehow this musical word, in the journey from the Jerusalem of yesterday to the Jericho of today has fallen among thieves who have wounded and stripped it and have departed leaving it half dead.

This may seem strange when we remember that revival simply means the coming of new life. It is bursting upon a wintery church or community of a spiritual springtime. Who objects to spring? Well, as a boy, I did. It was that season when I had to leave the little village school where I took no more thought than lilies and go to work on the farm. Of course springtime brought much that was beautiful, but it also brought weeds and poison ivy and sassafras sprouts. In fact it brought so much that I did not like that I would have gladly passed it up had it been in my power. Yet had I done so, we might have starved. Even so the church that passes up the revival will not, in my opinion, prosper as it might.
in order to make that miracle possible. It is only when the church is sacrificial enough to be willing to pay the price that a revival is possible.

But be the causes what they may, this form of conquest does not meet universal approval. There are many excellent churches where to announce a revival would be about as inviting as the announcement that certain forms of contagious disease were going to be put on exhibition the following Sunday. When these church members hear of such a campaign they remember the words of the scripture, "A prudent man forsseth evil and hideth himself". Therefore they retreat to the fastnesses of their homes or to the wide open spaces on the highways.

This may seem strange when we remember, revival simply means the coming of new life. It is the bursting upon a wintery church or community of a spiritual springtime. Who objects to spring? Well, as a boy, I did. It was that season when I had to leave the little village school where I took no more thought than lilies and go to work on the farm. Of course there was much beautiful that grew, but there were also weeds and poison ivy and sassafras sprouts. I liked much about spring, but there was so much that I did not like that I could have passed it up had it been in my power. Yet had I done so, we might have starved. Even so the church that passes up the revival will not, in my opinion, prosper as it might.

Part I

Who is the preacher on that memorable day? Even at Pentecost there was a preacher. He is not as important in our thinking as he once was. Sometimes he is seemingly insignificant. Yet God has never been able to run his church without him. Through the centuries it has pleased him through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

The preacher on this occasion did not perhaps meet universal approval on that day. Certainly he would not on our day.

His name was Simon Peter. He was a one-time fisherman and a bit of a

Part II
of a roughneck. In dealing with crowds he was a complete amateur. He had never studied elocution. He had not even taken the Dale Carnegie course.

Not only was he an amateur in public speaking but he was without formal education. He had no diploma, he did not have a single degree. Multitudes were moved and thousands were brought to the foot of God by men who had never attended college. That queer genius, Bud Robinson, who won thousands and whose English could so use, bad English as to captivate you for his Lord.

Indeed so often has God used poorly equipped men for the work of evangelism that the word evangelist has become in the minds of many as a kind of synonym for ignoramus. But of course this is not true. God has used such men mightily in spite of their limitations. Yet they are not the only ones he has used. Paul was a great evangelist. He taught people publically and from house to house. Yet Paul was not quite an illiterate. Neither was Wesley or Jonathan Edwards nor Charles G. Finney.

But if Simon Peter was handicapped by his lack of training, that was far more than compensated for by assets. What did he possess that compelled the attention of this multitude and won their hearts?

First, there was a boldness, a self-assurance that his hearers found irresistible. This boldness was not what of the old Simon, when he was full of swagger and felt that he was born to keep everybody on the right track. It was a boldness born of a great conviction. It was born of a solid certainty. He had come to know something of infinite worth, to know it beyond a peradventure.

Being thus sure he spoke with authority. A person who can speak with authority even on a matter of secondary importance will command some attention. But there is something compelling about the man who can speak with authority on the supreme question of the relation of God to the human soul. I should never have selected the woman that
Jesus met at the well as a promising evangelist, yet she was no ordinary woman. She had perhaps been beautiful once and witty, too. But now she was tarnished—an ugly bit of damaged goods. But we read that many believed because of the saying of the woman. She had come from a first hand interview with Jesus and therefore spoke with authority.

Simon spoke with a compelling urgency. He was deadly in earnest. He believed in the importance of what he was saying. People have a way of listening to the man who is really in earnest. Indeed, he is the man to whom God listens. When an earnest man goes to prayer, the angels open the windows. Peter spoke with compelling and passionate urgency and earnestness.

Then he spoke simply. Everybody could understand him. He also used 

something of Simon's experience, for the supreme qualification of this

he proclaimed shocking truth, but he did it with such a passionate desire to help that those who heard could not take offense. He could be plain without being abusive. Abusive preaching requires less heart and less intelligence than any other type in the world. But to speak plainly, lovingly and yet cuttingly requires a heart made tender by the grace of God.

This brings us to the final asset that Simon possessed. He was strengthened by having his fellow Christians stand up with him. That is a source of power. I am thinking of a beautiful saint who was my associate. His very presence in the pulpit made preaching easier and I think more effective. For the minister to be alone is like trying to kindle a fire with one stick of wood. It takes a great deal of oil to kindle a fire under these circumstances. But fortified by his fellow, makes preaching more effective. And if this is true of the presence of a saintly man how much more true in the conscious presence of Jesus Christ! These assets made Simon not simply a good and gripping preacher but a powerful one.
and interesting preacher. They made him a powerful preacher.

Part II

Not only was there a preacher present on Pentecost but there was a sermon. The sermon to-day has fallen into disrepute. One has defined the sermon as that which a man would go across the continent to deliver, but would not go across the street to hear. Well, some sermons are dull and futile. Even many ministers have lost confidence in preaching, for the preacher in handing... the world... preaching... In their program of conducting the church it comes about last. In my opinion, it should be first. There are three parts to Simon's sermon.

First, "This is that!" Simon is explaining something that is taking place before the eyes of the multitude and in the lives of himself and fellow believers. "You are witnessing," he declared, "a mighty act of God. What you are seeing is God doing. He is acting in accordance with his own promise. He appealed to the scriptures which they all believed. He said, "God has told us he was going to do what he is doing now-- pour out his Spirit upon all flesh." Simon does not mean that all flesh has been baptized with the spirit, but that the spirit has been made available to all men.

His message was for the then and there. It is the same message that they spoke to their own times, because their messages were timely they were also timeless. Simon was following the example of his Master who said when he preached in his village church, "To-day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Even so Simon declared that now God is fulfilling his promise. "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes."

The second great assertion that Simon makes is that while God has poured out his spirit he has done this through Jesus of Nazareth. Then that they may be sure of his meaning, he tells them that the Jesus who poured out the Holy Spirit is the one who had walked their streets, who had taught in their synagogues and their temples. He is the Jesus...
who had been authenticated to them by the life he had lived and by the mighty signs and wonders that God had done through him.

"Some of you doubtless witnessed some of his miracles. We his intimate friends can bear witness to all of them. I was present when four men brought a helplessness cripple, and being unable to get at Jesus, let the poor chap down through the ceiling to the very feet of his Lord. I heard Jesus say, 'Your sins are forgiven you'."

"There were those present who could not accept this. They thought that for Jesus to claim to forgive sins was blasphemy. But he knowing their hearts said, 'Which is easier. To say your sins have forgiven you or to say take up your bed and walk? But that you may know that the son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I say unto you, rise take up your bed and walk'."

"This Jesus who was attested to you by God himself, you rejected. Not only so, but though children of the law you crucified him through the hands of lawless men. But God raised him from the dead because it was impossible for death to hold him. This resurrection is not a myth but a fact. Your own scriptures bear witness to it. David who was not only the king that ushered in your golden age, but was also a prophet declared centuries ago that God would raise Jesus from the dead."

"We are eye witnesses of his resurrection. We have seen the risen Lord for ourselves. Indeed it is a holy awareness of his presence through the Holy Spirit that accounts for the fact that we have passed out of despair into hope and out of weakness into power."

This brings Simon to his third assertion. "You are witnessing now before your very eyes a mighty act of God. God has poured out his Spirit upon us. We are prophesying in that power. God has done this mighty work through Jesus of Nazareth. He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and poured forth this which you now see and year. Then what feellnes
SIN OF IGNORANCE

"I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." — Acts 3:17

Simon Peter is here discussing the supreme crime of history. Of all the ugly deeds of which man has been guilty since creation, none is more ugly than this. What was the awful sin that crucified Jesus? Simon declares that it was ignorance. Of course, there were other sins that played their part in this death. Envy played its cruel part, as did also greed and cowardice. But that without which the crime would have been impossible was ignorance. More than to any other sin, the death of Jesus was due to the sin of ignorance.

Simon Peter has as his authority for this assertion the word of the Master himself. When Jesus hung on the cross, he prayed this prayer, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The common interpretation of this is that Jesus, in praying this prayer, is offering a palliating circumstance. It would seem as if he were saying, "These men are not as guilty as they seem because they are acting in ignorance. Did they know what they were doing, as black as is their crime, it would then be blacker still."

But there is another interpretation that is possibly closer to the truth. When Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do", he may have meant that while they knew they were doing wrong, the wrong of which they were guilty was far greater than they themselves could realize. We can never know the horrible consequences
of one wrong choice, of one evil decision. It was impossible for these to know the awful consequences of the crime they were committing, how deadly it would be both to themselves and to others. But whichever interpretation we take, the truth remains that Jesus is here asserting that the crime of his crucifixion was a crime of ignorance.

II

This is not the only crime of which ignorance has been guilty. Through the centuries it has been one of the deadliest foes of mankind. I am of the opinion that it is public enemy number 1.

1. Think of the harm it has done to physical health. There was a time when plagues used to decimate whole populations. These plagues were born not of the will of God, but of unsanitary conditions. The people died because they were ignorant. Having no way of knowing better, they were not morally to blame. When such things happen today, we are to blame. We know better. Disease-breeding slums in our modern cities are more than misfortunes; they are a sin against society and against God.

2. It is ignorance that lies back of much of our intolerance. When John told his Master one day, "We saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not us", he expected the Master's approval. He was acting in good conscience. He thought there was only one way to do the will of Christ and that was to belong to his particular organization. His sin was not so much the sin of meanness as of ignorance.

What was the reply of Jesus? "Forbid him not, for he that is
not against us is for us." Thus Jesus is saying, "He is engaged in the same high enterprise that you are. He is only doing his work in a different way." There have always been those who have insisted on uniformity. They forget that our God is a God of infinite variety. For instance, Jesus healed three blind men. To one he said, "Receive thy sight". He touched the eyes of another. The eyes of the third he anointed with clay and spittle and told him to go wash in a certain pool. Had I found these three men in conference and had asked how Jesus opens blind eyes, each would have given a different answer. Not only so, but they would then probably have become angry at each other and have organized three separate churches.

Of this ugly sin we have all been guilty. The Puritan fought for religious liberty. When he had won it, he denied it to others. This, I think, is perhaps the most serious charge that we can bring against the Catholic church - a church that through the years has had many good deeds to its credit - it does not believe in religious freedom. If men are not willing to worship according to their way, they must be compelled. This is as unchristian as it is foolish. How absurd to think that worship can be compelled. We can no more force one to worship than we can force one to love. Such a practice may bring about uniformity, but it will be the uniformity of death rather than of life.

Take Spain, for instance. For centuries freedom of worship in this nation has been almost completely denied. With what results? This for one - Spain has come from the proud place of leadership that
it occupied a few centuries ago to be a negligible quantity. There
is no measuring the harm that this unfortunate nation has suffered
through intolerance. But in looking at the evil that this ugly child
of ignorance has wrought upon others, let us not forget our own
guilt. Let him among us who is without the same sin cast this first
stone at others. Intolerance is a child of ignorance.

Then it is ignorance that lies back of much of our racial
antagonism. Hitler and his followers became obsessed by the conviction
that they belonged to a superior race. Being superior, they had rights
that other races did not have. But a conviction of racial superiority
is a child of ignorance. There is no superior race. Anthropologists
tell us that given an equal opportunity, one race is just as capable
of progress as another. To deny this is not to show superior knowl-
edge, but superior ignorance. How much of our contempt for others
is born not so much of our wickedness as of our ignorance!

Just as ignorance is a sin against society, so it is against the
individual. As we glance over our yesterdays, I have an idea that
some of the choices of which we are most ashamed were born of ignorance.
This ignorance may have been not so much the result of your lack of
ability to know, as of your unwillingness to know. A man told me a
terrible story recently, how he was brought into bondage to drink.
That slavery stole upon him like a thief in the night. At last he
felt himself, hopelessly bound as a fly in the web of a spider.

There is no measuring the tragic results that have been born of
the ignorant assumption on our part that we are different, that we can
do what others cannot do and get away with it. Paul was warning against this type of ignorance when he said, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." What he means is, this is an ordered world, a world where nobody gets by with any wrong thing. Therefore Paul is saying, "Face that fact. Don't play the fool by shutting your eyes to it. Remember that the sin of deliberate ignorance may be the most ruinous of sins, both for the individual and for the group."

III

Now, as deadly as ignorance is, we are not to conclude that all ignorance is wicked. Such is not the case. There are various kinds of ignorance.

1. There is a kind of ignorance that is more of an asset than a liability. A certain poet spoke of "where ignorance is bliss." Of course, in saying that ignorance is ever bliss, he is using too strong a word. But there are some things it is better not to know, at least from experience. I know that it is said "knowledge is power". That is true of some knowledge, but there is also a knowledge that is not power, but weakness.

Some time ago a young man came to me with a sordid confession. He told me how he came to take his first fling into dissipation. He had been associating with a friend of boys older than himself. They had boasted of their ugly adventures as if they were proud of them. As this young fellow listened, he became ashamed of the fact that he had no guilty stories of his own to tell. Therefore, he sought to remedy his ignorance by a knowledge of which he was now sadly ashamed.
Some years ago a young man of my acquaintance, while touring Europe, was invited to visit some of the worst night spots in the city of Paris. To quicken his interest he was told of some of the moral monstrosities that he might have the privilege of seeing. But he was wise enough to refuse the invitation. He gave as his reason that he could not look upon such sordid scenes and then wholly forget them. It is well to bear in mind that there are some pictures that are too ugly to hang upon the walls of memory. Nobody was ever the richer for knowing moral ugliness through experience.

There are those who seek to entertain their friends by telling questionable stories. Now, I confess that I love a good story. My mother was an Irish woman. I saw her in many trying circumstances. But I never saw her when her eyes could not sparkle with laughter. I am happy to say that I inherited some of her sense of humor. But with all of that I have never seen the fun of filth. I never saw anything in carrion to make me laugh, whether that carrion was in the form of a dead animal or of a rotten joke. There is an ignorance that is more of an asset than a liability.

Then, there is an ignorance that is neutral. We sometimes find it in our hearts to pity our pioneer ancestors. They had so few conveniences. There was so little to bring them a thrill. They knew nothing of the automobile, the stream-lined train, the airship. They knew nothing of the movies, the radio or the comic strip. They weren't even speaking terms with Superman. How far we have run past them! Yet I am not sure that all our gadgets have added one whit to our real joy in living.
One has called attention to the fact that if Grandpa missed his stage coach, he could wait for another for a day or a week, with quiet contentment. But if we miss one leaf in a revolving door, we feel a bit outraged. We can outfly the eagle and outswim the fish. We can reach our destination far more quickly than the pioneers, but we do not have any more purpose or any more inward contentment when we get there than did they. Our knowledge, as it relates to the creation of gadgets, is largely neutral. We are neither the better nor the worse for possessing such knowledge.

3. Then there is an ignorance that might be described as merely unfortunate. To have no taste for good reading, for instance, could hardly be classified as a positive sin. But thus to miss the privilege of losing yourself in other men's minds is at least a misfortune. When I was in college I noticed in the papers that Parsafel, that famous Wagnerian opera, was to be played in one of the theaters of Boston. I decided to attend. I secured my ticket well in advance and went with high expectation. But I found the performance about as thrilling as a session with the dentist. This was the case not because of any fault of the author or the artists, it was my own fault. Yet I have never felt guilty. Grand opera did not come to my village of Flatwoods every day. Therefore, my ignorance was not a sin, it was just a misfortune.

Just as ignorance can cheat its possessor, it can also give him great nuisance value. Much of the harm in the world is done by folks who do not mean any harm. They are just ignorant. More than a quarter of a century ago I was assisting in a meeting in Waco, Texas. It was the custom in those days to call penitents each night, and generally they came. But this meeting was an exception.
What was the matter? There was a young chap, a bit of a moron, named Leonard, who insisted upon being converted every night. He had the limelight all to himself and liked it. I do not know how many times the pastor took him aside and explained that he had been converted enough. I do know he did it at least once. Leonard would listen with all patience and agree not to come forward any more. But at the very next service he would find my appeal irresistible and give us a return engagement.

Finally the pastor, in the hope that he might be able to keep Leonard away, decided to preach himself. But he was doomed to disappointment. Again our perpetual convert came. I marveled at the preacher's patience as I saw him take him by the hand and hug him up close and whisper in his ear. When the sermon was over and we were at the parsonage, the minister's wife complimented her husband on being so gracious and asked him what he had said to the troublesome fellow. "I told him," came the shocking answer, "that if he ever came to the altar again I would knock his head smooth off." It was as ludicrous as it was pathetic. Yet Leonard was not wicked. He was not trying to ruin our meeting. He was being a nuisance out of sheer ignorance.

4. Then there is an ignorance that is a sin. There is an ignorance which is a guilty and ruinous and damning thing. Such was the ignorance of these who were the leaders in the crucifixion of Jesus.

IV

Why was their ignorance wicked?

1. It was wicked because it was deliberate. It was self-chosen. They might have known better. When a wise teacher assigns the
lesson, the pupil is held responsible if, by refusing to study, he knows nothing about it. Of course, if his ignorance is born of the fact that he did not have sufficient ability or training to enable him to master that particular lesson, then he is not held to blame.

It was my high privilege to attend the Webb School. Discipline was strict. I have known more than one boy to be soundly thrashed because of his failure to know his lesson. But I went for two full months in my Latin class without answering a single question. Yet my wise teacher, instead of rebuking me, gave me encouragement. Why was this the case? It was the case because he saw that my ignorance was not deliberate. He could see that I was doing my best.

These men who crucified Jesus had a chance to know better. By refusing to live up to the light which they had, their eyes went out. It is ever the case. However clear may be your vision this moment, if you disobey that vision, it will fade. The terrible penalty of refusing to hear is a lost capacity to hear. The penalty of refusing to see is blindness.

On the other hand, however little you may believe, if you live up to the faith that you have, it will grow stronger. However dim the light, if you follow that light, it will bring you spiritual certainty. This has been the experience of countless thousands. This may be your experience. It is the clear declaration of Jesus himself, "If any man is willing to do his will, he shall know."

Perhaps the man most responsible for the death of Jesus was Annas. He was a shrewd and powerful man. He exercised the power of high priest years after he had been stripped of that office. If he had a greater love than his passion for power, it was his
passion for money. Therefore, when he came to realize that Jesus was going to interfere with his selfish plans, he opposed him. To do this he had to shut his eyes to all that was good in him. So effectively did he blind himself that I daresay he went down to his house after the crucifixion feeling that he had rendered a real service. There is no more dangerously blind than the one who deliberately refuses to see.

There was another man who was just as antagonistic to the Christian movement as Annas. This was Saul of Tarsus. When Stephen of the radiant face was mobbed, Paul stood by and gave his approval. During the days that immediately follow he was more than an onlooker, he was an enraged aggressor. He entered private houses and dragged not only men, but women to prison. He thus became the greatest menace to the early church. But this man who was the greatest menace to the church became its greatest missionary. How did this come about? Here is the answer: Even in his opposition to Jesus, he was conscientious. He was speaking sober truth when he said, "I have lived in all good conscience up to this hour." But even that is not enough. Few have done more harm than those who are conscientiously wrong. Not only was Paul conscientious, but he had an open mind. He was willing to learn. Being willing to do the will of God, he was not disobedient to his heavenly vision. By thus surrendering he came to be able to say, "I know whom I have believed."

There are many fields of knowledge that are beyond our reach. I never expect to be a great musician, a great mathematician. I
never expect to be a master of astronomy. The wisest of us know but little in any field. But the supreme knowledge is open to every one of us. Whatever our educational opportunities may have been, we can all know God. This we can do by the dedication of our lives to him. Since it is our privilege to know God, to miss this knowledge is not only the supreme tragedy but it is the deadliest of sins. To possess this knowledge is to have life in the here and now and forevermore.
SIN OF IGNORANCE

"And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." Acts 3:17

In my last sermon I told you how Peter and John, by taking advantage of a wayside opportunity, had changed a beggar who, through no fault of his own had been a pauper for more than forty years, into a producer. As a result of the wise use of this opportunity there came to them one that was yet greater. One result of doing well the task that lies closest to us is that other and greater tasks are offered. If faithfully we enter the door that opens at our feet, we find ourselves face to face with yet wider doors. Here the words of Jesus are forever true, "To him that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance."

Now, just as the doing of smaller tasks leads to larger ones, so the neglect of the smaller task unfits for the larger even should it come. Many a young chap is only giving a meager fraction of his strength to his present tasks. He is waiting until he gets a larger opportunity before extending himself. While waiting to be put into a hogshead, he is rattling about in the shell of a mustard seed. The best way to claim the larger task is to do well the smaller. Here too it is true "from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

These men have dealt faithfully with one opportunity were given an opportunity to proclaim their message to hundreds, perhaps, thousands. This came about because an excited multitude gathered to find how the beggar had been transformed. Everybody wants to be different. Gathered to hear how this beggar had been transformed, seeing their own noses, speaking home to their longing. "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this or why look ye so earnestly upon us as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk?" The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers hath glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and
and rejected in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let him go. But ye refused the Holy and Just One and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know. Ye, the faith which hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you. And then, with a note of distress he adds: this word, "And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it."

The first fact that strikes us here is that Simon puts his finger on the specific sin that crucified Jesus. He affirms that the sin that drove the nails into those hands that had been constantly lifted in blessing was the sin of ignorance. In so saying we are not to understand that he is affirming that ignorance was sorely responsible. It was aided and abetted by other sins. Envy, that ugly child of ignorance, played its part. Greed had a hand, as did also cowardice. But none of these singly, nor all of them taken together, could have accomplished this crime without ignorance. The sin, then, that was supremely responsible for this greatest crime of history was the sin of ignorance.

Simon is dogmatic in this assertion because he knows that he has the authority of Jesus himself in making it. When Jesus hung on the nails he prayed this prayer; "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. That prayer is capable of two interpretations. The one interpretation is that Jesus is here offering a palliating circumstance. It is as if he were saying, "These men are terribly guilty but they are not so guilty as it would seem because they are acting in ignorance." Then he might have meant that while they were guilty, they were even more guilty than they realized because they did not know the terrible crime they were committing. Whatever interpretation we take, Jesus is affirming that this crucifixion was a sin of ignorance.

Now, if ignorance did not begin its deadly work on Cavalry, neither did
it end it there. Ignorance has been one of the supreme foes of mankind throughout all the centuries. Wherever we turn our eyes we see wounds made by its cruel hand.

1. Take, for instance, the havoc it has wrought in the matter of physical health. There was a time when plagues would decimate whole populations. These plagues were then regarded as acts of God. We know now that they were the result of unsanitary living conditions. Millions have been slain by ignorance. Of course, those who died through ignorance were not morally to blame. When we of today allow city dumps to breed ill health among us, we are guilty before God and man.

Just as ignorance has wrought havoc through to groups, so it has to individuals. As a lad I was stricken with pneumonia. I came so near to the crossing that our family physician said I would not live through the night. Looking back to that experience I know exactly how I contracted this deadly disease. I was playing Fox and Hounds at school one winter's day. I became very hot in the sun and took to cold, in describing I then removed my heavy coat and sat down on a steep where I soon fell off at once. It was not my intention that was not trying to commit suicide, but I came very nearly doing so out of sheer ignorance. Millions have wrecked their health because of ignorance.

2. Ignorance is one of the deadliest foes to our human relationships.

The problem of living together has always been difficult. It becomes increasingly difficult with the passing of the years and with the contraction of our world. Why is it that we find it so hard to live together? One major foe is ignorance.

Take, for instance, the sin of intolerance. One day John hurried into the presence of Jesus declaring, "We saw one casting out devils in thy name and we forbade him because he followed not us." "Forbid him not", answered Jesus, "for all that is not against us is on our part." "That is", said Jesus, "the man you sought to stop is doing the same work that we are doing, only he does not belong to our particular group."

Now, there is no doubt that John expected the approval of Jesus in what he did. What was the matter with John? It was not that he was malicious. He was
ignorant. He thought that what Jesus was after was uniformity. But such was not the case. God fulfills himself in many ways. Jesus healed three blind men.

To one he said, "Receive thy sight". He touched the eyes of another. The eyes of the third he anointed with clay and spittle and sent him to a certain pool.

Had these three come together in conference and one had asked, how Jesus opened blind eyes, each would have given a different answer and in all probability, each would have gone away and established a separate church.

I was trying to preach in a village of approximately one thousand people a few years ago. There were then some six or seven other churches besides the one at which I was preaching. Naturally, there was just enough life among them to criticize each other. One of the tragedies of modern Christendom is not the lack of uniformity but the lack of spiritual unity, a failure to realize that we do not all have to worship God in the same fashion, to be Christian.

Protestantism has been a great offender where Catholicism has been a yet greater offender. Theoretically we do believe in the right of every man to worship God as he pleases. The Catholic church does not so believe. Therefore, where this church has its way, freedom of worship is practically unknown. Pioneering spirits and questing opportunites are often repressed. It is this, I think, more than all else that has brought Spain from a first rate power to be a negligible quantity among the nations. Life is varied. The only real uniformity is the uniformity of death. All corpses are essentially alike. But what lies back of our intolerance? I think, the supreme cause is ignorance.

How much mankind has suffered through the centuries because each nation and each race has felt itself superior to the other. If my race is superior to yours, then my race has rights that yours does not have. The fact that Germany became obsessed with a sense of its own superiority accounts for one of the greatest tragedies of history. But what lies back of this superiority? Ignorance. Anthropologists tell us that given an equal opportunity, one race is just as
Then we show our ignorance in our failure to get along with each other as individuals. If you do not treat me right, I can do one of three things. I can break off diplomatic relations with you, or I can treat you as harshly as you have treated me, or I can meet your wrong with an invincible goodwill. I can practice the Golden Rule. This may not win respect but it will go further toward it than any other method ever tried.

A Christian gentleman told this story. He was hurrying out of Marshall Field's store where he had been doing his Christmas shopping when a snowball, thrown with considerable force, hit him in the back of his neck. As the snow trickled down his back he felt just as you would feel under similar circumstances. He looked about to see who had taken this unfair advantage. At once he spotted those responsible—three street urchins, fairly dirty, with their collars unfastened. Then his Christianity asserted itself. He grinned and asked, "How would you boys like a cup of hot chocolate?" When they agreed, he took them diagonally across the street to that hamburger joint.

Here he suggested that they might like a hamburger to eat with their chocolate. They agreed. But one each was not enough. When they had finished, the bill amounted to a little more than $1, but this was his rich reward. The oldest and the toughest of the lot turned to him wistfully and said, "Gee, Mister, I wish I had you for my daddy." So often our failure to get on together is not the result of sheer malice; it is the result of ignorance.

3. Naturally, ignorance wreaks its supreme tragedy in matters of religion.

He beheld the city and wept over it. There is something terribly striking about these tears. This man who is sobbing is about the sunniest man that ever set foot upon our planet. What is it that is breaking his heart? It is the ignorance of his people. "If thou hadst sinned no more," he sobbed, "what greater tragedy than for God, to come in human flesh and walk among us and we fail to recognize him. Certainly one of the supreme foes of mankind and one of its
deadliest sins is the sin of ignorance.

III

But having said this, it is well to bear in mind that all ignorance is not sinful.

1. There is a kind of ignorance that is more of an asset than a liability. I know the poet sings of "where ignorance is bliss", but he used too strong a word. I know we are accustomed to say "knowledge is power", but that is not true of all knowledge. There is a knowledge that has in it far more weakness than strength.

For instance, a young fellow told me some time ago of his first fling into dissipation. He had been associating with a company of youngsters older than himself. They had regaled each other with stories of their sordid adventures. I daresay a great number of them were false. We have a new type of hypocrisy today. Few of us claim to be better than we are, but many claim to be worse. Hearing these sordid stories, one young friend became ashamed that he had no guilty knowledge of his own. Therefore, he had made it his purpose to seek and won that knowledge, to his pain and shame. There is an ignorance that is an asset - that is ignorance of evil as a personal experience.

2. Then there is a type of knowledge that is more or less neutral. We are accustomed to pity our pioneer ancestors because they had so few gadgets to bring them a thrill. They knew nothing of the telephone or the telegraph. They knew nothing of the stream lined train or the automobile of the air ship. They knew nothing of the movies or comic strip. Not one of them had ever met Blondie or Superman. They would not even have known Andy-Gump had they met him on the street. Yet I have an idea they knew about as much peace of mind as we do. It is to be doubted whether all our gadgets have added one whit to our real joy of living.

3. There is a third type of ignorance that may be rated as a misfortune. Such ignorance cheats its possessor. When I went to my first grand opera, I
I went with high expectations, but I found the experience about as thrilling as a session with the dentist. The reason for this was not the fault of the author nor of the artists. It was my own fault. I was simply ignorant. But I felt no sense of guilt for this. Grand operas had not come to my backwoods village every day, so I had no chance to know. I missed something. The fact that I missed the enjoyment of this opera was not my sin—it was my misfortune.

Then my ignorance may be a misfortune for others by giving me a high nuisance value. Paul spoke of certain Jews of his day as having a zeal for God. That was magnificent. But while they had zeal it was not equal to knowledge.

Zeal is not enough. There are few individuals more harmful than the individual with a closed mind who is conscientiously wrong.

Years ago I was holding a revival meeting in a Texas city. We were having one convert every night and only one. He was a moron by the name of Leonard. At last the pastor took the chap in hand and told him that he had been converted enough. Leonard agreed, but at the next service he could not resist my appeal and came again, coming as always, alone. Then the pastor thought that he would preach. He might save the situation. But again Leonard was converted. This young chap was not maliciously trying to make our efforts ridiculous. He was not malicious—he was just stupid. Ignorance may be a great misfortune in that it cheats its possessors and gives him great nuisance value.

4. But there are times when ignorance is a deadly sin. It is a sin so deadly that there is no crime that it will not commit. It will even give its hand to the ghastly crime of the crucifixion of Jesus.

IV

When is ignorance a sin?

Broadly speaking, it is a sin when it is chosen. A teacher in school may find two pupils equally ignorant of the lesson. But that does not mean that they are equally at fault. As a young man I went to the famous Webb School. The discipline was strict. I have seen more than one young chap taken out from be-
side me and soundly thrashed for missing his Latin. But I went for two months in
that same class without, so far as I know, answering a single question. Yet
my wise teacher, instead of rebuking me, took me alone and encouraged me.
Why this difference? He saw that I was doing my best.

One of the most disastrous railroad wrecks that we ever had in my state was
caused by ignorance. A certain conductor, who had received the same orders at
the same station day after day, week after week, month after month, grew careless.
At last one day, when his orders came, he assumed that he knew what they would
be. Therefore he thrust them into his pocket without reading them. Had he read
them he would have learned that he was to take a siding to make way for a fast
express that was coming through, but in his ignorance he neglected his orders
with the result that scores were killed. This conductor was held responsible for
the tragedy because his ignorance was his own fault.

Such was the ignorance of those who crucified Jesus. They might have known
better. They had the prophets. Above all they had the personal presence of
Jesus himself. But they did not find him the kind of Messiah that they wished.
Therefore, they turned their backs on him with the result that the
terrible light that was theirs turned into darkness. Thus they came to crucify Jesus
without feeling the terrible deed as a crime but some of them doubtless felt
that they had rendered service to God. However bright your light, if you shut
your eyes to it, it will turn into utter night.

There were others who had their same chances and, by obedience, came to
spiritual certainty. Jesus did not burst like a sunrise upon a single one of these
apostles. There were doubtless scores of unanswered questions in the mind of
Matthew that day when he looked up to see himself searched by the tender eyes of Jesus. But when the Master said "Follow me", Matthew
obeyed, with the result that the mere pinpoint of light that he saw on that
eventful day grew into a sunrise.

Ignorance has always been a supreme foe but there is only one ignorance
that is deadly. That is our failure to know God. Though it were possible we might attain all other knowledge, if we missed the knowledge of Him, we should never know life worthy of the name. If we come to know Him, though it were possible we might miss all other knowledge, we are still infinitely rich, look in line.

This is life eternal - to know thee, the only true God, and hom whom thou hast sent as the Jesus Christ.

Now the good news that I have for you is that this knowledge is within the reach of every one of us. The Christ who is ever in search of us will be found if we only meet the conditions that are the same today as in the long ago. Here is the "Follow me". Begin here and now to live up to the best you know. Begin here and now to walk the road that you are sure that he would walk were he here in the flesh, and, if you persist, one day, just as certain as God lives, you will come face to face with him and you will be able to say as another one who was true to his heavenly vision, "I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."
"We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard."

These are gallant words. There is a ring of manliness about them that cannot but win our admiration. Then there is such a beautiful absence of anything smacking of self-pity, or of any tendency to whine, or apologize, or complain. I think when the Master Himself heard them He was glad that He had been to the Cross. Almost twenty centuries have passed since they were uttered, but after all these years they are as strong as granite, as sturdy as the hills, as thrilling as marshal music.

I

Peter and John have come into the spotlight. They had not set out to do so. It had all come about in the path of duty. But a day or two ago they were on their way to prayer-meeting. They were apostles but they had not outgrown the prayer meeting. They were very busy but they were not too busy to go to prayer meeting. The prayer meeting was possibly a rather dull affair but they did not think they could remedy that evil by letting it alone, so they went to prayer meeting. Some of you have forgotten the way. Others still have never learned it.

On their way they met with a certain annoyance. They were beset by a well known pest. At least this would have been the case had they not been the kind of men they were. A well known beggar asked them for help. They did not look especially annoyed, but each man searched his empty wallet and Peter said, "I have not a cent," and John said, "I am in the same condition." They were evidently not making a great success financially.
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But instead of saying to this beggar, "sorry, old man, I can't do anything for you," they rather said this. "Silver and gold have I none but what I have I give."

That declaration is literally saturated by good common sense. It is full of the sanest kind of religion. They recognized that there was other wealth than silver and gold. They recognized the fact that there was a treasure that you could not hold in the hand and could not deposit at the bank. There are folks who actually refuse to join the church because they feel unable to make any financial contribution. Now the church must have money, but it must also have more than money. The poorest of us are possessed of a treasure more precious than gold.

Notice too that these wise men when they found that they could not give gold did not refuse to give anything. "What I have I give." That is the whole duty of man. That is all that the richest and best equipped of us can do. And that much the weakest and the poorest can do. All God asks of any man is to give what he has.

If these men had no gold, what did they have? They had faith and the beggar was short on it. They had hope and the beggar's skies had grown gray. They had fine high courage and the beggar had given over the fight. They had love and the beggar knew too little of a brother's touch and a brother's interest. They had God and the beggar had never seen a vision of His face. What a gift it was, therefore, when Peter said, "What I have I give." They reached a hand to him and lifted him to his feet.

What a joy looked out from this beggar's eyes as he stood for the first time upon his own feet. Healed in body? Certainly! It is a small matter for God to heal a body. Healed also in soul. That is far more
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marvelous. Then Peter and John invited him out to church. He was glad to go. He went walking and leaping and praising God. He shared their pew. There was a new face at the prayer meeting and there was a new enthusiasm because there was present a new man. These were apostles but they were not above picking out one beggar and taking him to church with them. Moody started out unable to do anything bigger than that and because he did it well God was able to use him in an ever larger fashion.

When the meeting was over everybody was eager to know how this lame man had been made whole. There is nothing more exciting than a life remade. The people crowded around Peter and John and their new convert. The questions came quick and fast. They were almost ready to mob these apostles out of sheer admiration. But Peter broke in with his eager explanation. "Why look ye so earnestly upon us as if by our own power of holiness we had made this man to walk? God hath glorified His Son Jesus whom ye slew and whom God raised from the dead. It is thru Him," the apostle declared, "that this miracle has been wrought."

Now such preaching as that was dangerous. These Jewish authorities had crucified Jesus but here were two men daring to say that the One whom their leaders had crucified was the Son of God. Such preaching would certainly bring these leaders into disrepute. Therefore, they had Peter and John locked up for the night. The next day they were brought before the imposing crowd, to answer for their conduct.

When the court was in order and the prisoners were brought in, these staid and scholarly and religious dignitaries had to fairly gasp in amazement. Peter and John were expected to be filled with fear, but they were not. They seemed completely at their ease, quite as much so as the crowd itself. There beside them stood the man who had up to yesterday been
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a cripple all his life. There really was not anything to be said just then. At least, no one could think of anything, so the prisoners were ordered out while the members of the court held a council.

"What shall we do to these men?" That was the question that they asked one of the others in perplexity. They meant by this, "We have to do something. We cannot ignore them. We thought a few months ago when we crucified their Master that this troublesome heresy would be over but it is growing worse all the time." Happy is the church that cannot be ignored. The church in the years gone by, every spiritual movement has owed its growth not to its friends alone, it owes much to its enemies.

Then they hit upon a plan that from the human standpoint was very wise. They decided they would call these offenders and command them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus. How absurd it sounds to us today as we remember how eagerly these early Christians were burned at the stake, were fed to wild beasts or were hung on forests of crosses rather than give up the privilege of speaking. Yet, I repeat, from the standpoint of worldly wisdom the course taken by this court was quite sane and sensible. This was true first because silence is so easy. Understand they did not command these disciples to give up their faith altogether. They did not seek to humiliate them by compelling them to go back to the Temple and say that Christ was really an impostor and that they had been wrong. They said to them virtually, "You may be just as religious as you want to be, but keep your mouth shut. You may believe your story as strong as you please but do not tell it to others. The task of silence is not a heavy one. We know that. It has not taken any stern court of law to close our mouths. Many of us are silent as the dead thru sheer cowardice, or indifference, or love of ease."
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Then this course was not only ease but effective. These men were shrewd enough to know that in order for this infant church to die in its cradle, it was not necessary that it be killed, it only needed to be let alone. Silence will destroy any organization. Neglect will bury any institution. If these men and their fellows had complied with this command the story of Christ would have been utterly forgotten centuries ago. A silent church is a steril church. A steril church is a dying church. However strong it may be today, it will be dead tomorrow. Nothing can live that cannot grow.

II.

Having reached this wise decision the prisoners were recalled and the orders of the court delivered. "We have decided to deal with you very kindly. We are not going to imprison you. We are not going to have you stoned, we are going to deal with you in great mercy. We are just going to command that you not speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus." And what was the answer? The prisoners looked at the court with steady eyes and quiet hearts and said, "You are calling on us for the impossible. We cannot consider for a moment complying with your commands. We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard."

1. They could not but speak because they were the kind of men they were. They spoke thru their personalities before they ever opened their lips. There was that in the very quiet and peace that looked out from their eyes that spoke to these judges in a language that they could not fail to understand. "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. There was something about them that made them think of that majestic
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figure who only a few months ago had hung upon a cross. There was something about them that they could not account for except in terms of Jesus Christ.

That saying of Emerson's has grown hackneyed with much use, but it is as true now as when it was uttered. "What you are speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say." Sometimes what we are marvelously strengthens what we say. Sometimes it makes otherwise common place words to loom like a cannonade and shake like an earth quake. At other times it makes grand words seem cheap and trashy. It makes strong words as frail as a gossamer thread. Happy is the man whose Christian message is backed up by a Christ-like personality. "We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard."

2. They were compelled to speak with a compulsion of a great conviction. They were convinced that in Jesus Christ they had found God. They were convinced that in Him they had found all that life needs for time and for eternity. "Of His fullness have we received," John cries with delightful enthusiasm. "He has loosed us from our sins and made us kings and priests unto God. He has made us free. He has made life unspeakably rich. He has given us the privilege of going to God for men and of coming back to men with our arms loaded with blessings."

Then they were convinced that what they had found all others might find. They did not believe that the gospel was for a chosen few, it was for the world. They believed that the world was lost but they believed that it was capable of being saved. They knew that some of the sheep were out on mountains but they were absolutely sure that they might be brought back to the fold. This fine enthusiasm they had learned from Jesus. This high optimism they had found in fellowship with Him. He had
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said, "And I if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me." They were convinced that all these lost men needed to win them was just to see how winsome and altogether lovely Jesus is.

I wonder if we are not losing this type of optimism. I wonder if we are as sure of the sufficiency of our Saviour as these men were, Are we as sure of the conquering power of the gospel when it is delivered by one who has really been conquered by the gospel as those of long ago? These early saints knew no difficult cases. They laughed at hard situations. So has the church done in every generation when there has been a clear vision of Jesus Christ and a keen sense of His fellowship and leadership. These people staunchly believed that the world might be won, that all it needed was to have the story told as they themselves knew it.

They were naturally convinced further that it was their supreme business to tell the story. That was the one thing above all else that they had been told to do. Therefore, when commanded to keep silent they said, "We cannot, it would not be right. Whether it be right in the sight of God to harken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." These men were not living in the realm of their emotions. He who undertakes to build his religions life upon his emotions is certain to build upon a foundation of sand. "We must speak," they said, "not because we feel like it, we must speak because it is right. We must speak because to refuse to do so would be to sin against God and sin against man." If you never speak except when you feel like it you will let many a golden opportunity skip thru your fingers.

This is the conviction that needs to grip our hearts. There are thousands of people worthy and strong and full of fine possibilities that might be won in our city if a right effort was made. The gospel of Christ has a universal appeal. Many of those who stand aloof do so because they
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have never been invited. There are others who do so because they have no right understanding of what the church of Christ is undertaking to do.
Most of the criticisms of the church that we read in our current literature are criticisms that are at least fifty to one hundred years behind times. There are many excellent folks that pass our church doors that have little more accurate knowledge of what we are about than the heathen. They must be told.

3. Then these people were compelled by their loving loyalty to their Lord. He had befriended them, He had trusted them, He had done everything for them. Therefore, they felt that they simply could not fail. When Poly-car-p went to the stake and was asked to recant, he said, "Eighty and six years have I served Him and He has never done me anything but good, I cannot deny Him. These men said, 'We cannot refuse Him His last loving request. Our love and loyalty to Him, our love to the world thru Him makes it impos-sible.'

III.

And what was the outcome?

1. They went out to speak and in speaking they enjoyed a growing fellowship and an ever growing understanding of Jesus. To be silent is to die. "Every branch that beareth not fruit He taketh it away." Cease to give your testimony and there will come a day when you have no testimony to give. Doubts will beset you, you will be dogged by tormenting uncertainties. But it is amazing how doubts melt away in the warmth of an effort to do some good in the world. You will cease to believe your beliefs unless you see them become effective in other lives. Bring some friend into touch
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with Christ and you too will feel the touch of Him.

2. They went out to speak and in speaking they became a part of a growing church. How fascinating is a growing church! There is nothing in all the world that is equal to it. Let Christ be held up in pulpit and pew, let His spirit pervade the atmosphere, let its services be vitalized by the glowing enthusiasm of souls awakening for the first time to the knowledge of Christ and there is nothing this side of heaven that is so fascinating.

3. They spoke and in speaking helped to remake the world. The rapid spread of the early church is in part due to the preaching, but it was due far more to the personal testimony of the nameless saints, those who had found Christ went out to travel common place ways that were common place no more and to lay almost violent hands upon their friends to tell them of the new life that they had found in Christ. The next revival, says Mr. Moody, will come when a man is willing to take a walk with his friend for Christ’s sake.

Before the outbreak of the war there was an humble Christian woman who taught a Sunday School class in a little country church in the mountains of east Tennessee. One Sunday morning there was a pouring rain. She debated with herself as to whether she would go. Once she decided that it would not be worth-while. Then she thought somebody might come. Therefore she got her rain coat and walked four miles across the mountains. When she reached the church only one was present, a young man. She taught him and prayed with him and went home in the consciousness that she had done her best. By and by with the coming of the war that young man joined the army. He crossed the seas and never came back. But before he left
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he wrote a letter in which he said, "I wondered if you would come to church that rainy Sunday. I decided that if you did not I would not take religion seriously but if you did there was really something worth-while in it and I would know Him. You came and I do know Him and in the faith of Him I face the future. She won him because she could not but speak the things she had seen and heard."
"The man was above forty, upon whom this miracle of healing was shewed." The author of the Book of Acts as you well know was Luke. You will also recall the fact that Luke was a physician. Before he had become a Christian, before he had taken up the high vocation of the writer of Gospels he had been a medical practitioner. He was a man familiar with disease. He was a man deeply interested in the art of healing.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Luke gives great attention to this first miracle wrought by the apostles. For him it had a profound interest. To him it was genuinely wonderful. It was wonderful, in the first place, that this individual was cured at all. It seemed marvelous to this clear eyed and intelligent doctor that a man whose bones had heretofore been soft, whose muscles had been flabby and powerless, that one who had never walked a single step should in a moment receive strength to stand upon his feet and walk and leap in the joy of perfect soundness. I say that the man was healed at all was a matter of great interest and of great wonder to Doctor Luke.

Not only did Luke marvel at this miracle because one who was lame was made to walk but his wonder was increased because of the age of the man upon whom the miracle was performed. Had the one healed been a little child it would have been most remarkable. Had it been a youth or in the early stages of young manhood it would have also been remarkable. But the fact that the man was above forty was the very acme of wonder. Marvelous it was beyond words that one who had lain helpless and powerless for over forty years should suddenly be able to stand upright and walk and leap in the joy of perfect healing.

Now this wonder of Luke implies this: that miracles are not nearly so likely to happen after we get forty or beyond as they are in earlier life. His wonder implies, I think, that he looked upon middle age as a period of peculiar danger. I think Luke would have been in perfect agreement with the brilliant essayist of recent years who said that the most dangerous period of life is the period of the forties. I think he would have given absolute sanction to what another recent writer said. He was speaking of the discovery of what is known as the Northwest Passage. This is the passage that leads by way of the Arctic Ocean from the Atlantic into the Pacific. This man declared that while there were dangers in the Atlantic and dangers also in the Pacific, that the place of greatest danger, the place where most ships meet death, where the sailor is in greatest danger of finding his graveyard is in the middle passage.

Then he went on to show that the same was true in life. In the Atlantic of youth there are many sudden storms. There are many tempests that swoop down upon us and take us by surprise. Likewise, in the Pacific there are dangers that are real and in no sense to be discounted. But the place of greatest danger, the place where most ships meet death, where the sailor is in greatest danger of finding his graveyard is in the middle passage.

Those of you who have read the "Idylls of the King" will remember the young man who set out to win knighthood. Before he could win, the story says that he had to meet and overcome four strong enemies. The first enemy was the Knight of the Morning Star. The second enemy was
the Knight of the Noon-day Sun. The third enemy was the Knight of the Evening Star. And the fourth enemy was the Knight of Death.

Now this was the poet's way of saying that before we could overcome, before we are entitled to a place among the knighthood of God, before we are ready to sit down with the conquerors about the Round Table of the King we had to meet and win victories over the Knight of the Morning Star, which simply means the perils of youth. And we had to win over the Knight of the Noon-day Sun, which means the perils of middle life. And we had to win over the perils of old age and the perils of death.

These are all formidable foes but the most Luke seems to think and the most formidable we are persuaded to believe, is the Knight of the Noon-day Sun. There are many forms of destruction that threaten us in the course of our voyage from the cradle to the grave, but the destruction most to be dreaded, most to be guarded against is the destruction "that wasteth at noon-day."

I think that an appeal to your own experience will confirm that fact. The men who have gone hopelessly wrong, the men who have slipped and fallen never to rise again are the men, as a rule, who wrecked in middle age. When you turn to the Bible the most colossal failures are the failures of men in the middle passage. That was when Saul committed the sin that sent him finally upon the rocks. The same is true of Solomon. I know it is said of him that it came to pass when he was old that his wives turned away his heart after other gods, but he disobeyed God in the taking of those wives in the period of his middle life. That was also when Samson failed. That is the period which marked the downfall of Judas. In truth, of those who have fallen victims to the Knight of the Noon-day Sun it might be said that their name is Legion.

So I want to speak tonight especially to those who are forty or thereabouts. I want to address myself especially to the middle aged and to those of you who are soon to be middle aged. For, of course, you represent the bulk of this congregation though you would never confess it. As one who is a part of you I want us to consider some of the perils of the middle passage. I want us to arm ourselves with the strong arm of God lest we shall go down beneath the keen sword of the Knight of the Noon-day Sun.

Why is it that the period of middle life is one of special danger? This is true in the first place because that after we begin to get into the forties we tend to lose the idealism, the fine romance of our earlier years. As another points out youth grows sentimental and writes poetry. Old age also grows sentimental and writes poetry, though less than youth. But middle age does not. A middle aged man would as soon be caught with his hand in his neighbor's pocket as writing sentimental poetry. His is the period of prose. He has left far behind him the poetry of the dawn. He hasn't yet reached the poetry of the twilight. He is amidst the glaring prose of the noon-day.

You remember those two physicians who sat talking in the "Spinner in the Sun". One of them is a young man just beginning his practice and the other is an old man. And the young man says to the man of white hair, "You know I think it wonderful, the life we are called on to live. It is ours to be always helping, always healing, always giving. I thrill to think of it for it seems to me that I have been dedicated to a holy cause! What is the answer of the old man? This is it: "You will get over that.
Just past forty

Just wait till you have had to sue the man that you have healed in order to get your bill. Wait till you ride ten miles in the country some winter's night to take a little pain out of a baby's back and you will get over that." That is, "Wait a few years and all the romance and all the gleam and the glow and the glory will slip out of your life. And your calling will cease to be a calling. It will become a mere treadmill and you will no longer think of making a life. You will only think of making a living."

That is a danger that we especially face in middle life. All of us in youth are more or less seers of visions and dreamers of dreams. Heaven lies about us in our infancy.

"Shades of the prison house begin to close
Upon the growing boy,
Yet he beholds the light and whence it flows
And sees it in his joy.
The youth that daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended.
At last the man, he sees it die away
And fade into the light of common day."

"Born a man, died a grocer" is the illuminating epitaph upon a certain tombstone in France. It tells a sad story. And something like it might be truly written upon the graves of many of us. "Born a man, died a lawyer or doctor or a merchant or even a minister. Because the preacher is in just as great peril of losing his idealism as any man who sits in his congregation. Oh, how many a winged Pegasus has entered the Christian ministry to end in being nothing more than a common cart-horse, drawing ordinary rubbish about unclean and ordinary streets.

The man of forty is in danger, in the second place, because he tends greatly to lose the wholesome confidence of his earlier years. Our choice young men and women do not believe in everybody. They are not that foolish. But they believe profoundly and beautifully in somebody. They are hero worshippers. There are men and women that they tend to set upon a pedestal. But as the years pass by they are in danger of ceasing to be hero worshippers. They tend to quit believing in folks at all. They are deceived a good many times. They idolize one that they fancy is almost a god. Then they awake to find that the object of their worship was only an image of clay and they feel that they have gathered dust and dirt not upon their knees only, but upon their souls as well. They become worldly wise and cynical. They sneer at the confidence they once had. They throw away the rare jewels of their early faith as worthless googaws.

Then with the passing of the wholesome faith in man there also passes their early faith in God. God comes to be dimmer than a shadow of a dream. Heaven is altogether vague and far away.

"I remember, I remember the house where I was born,
The little window where the sun came peeping in at morn.
It never came a wink too soon, nor yet too long to stay,
But now I often wish the night had borne my breath away."
I remember, I remember the fir trees dark and high,  
It seemed to me their slender tops were close against  
the sky.  
It was a childish fancy, but oh 'tis little joy  
To know I'm farther off from Heaven than when I was  
a boy."

If you lose faith in man you will lose faith in God also, for if you will  
not in some measure trust man whom you have seen how can you trust God  
whom you have not seen?

Now, naturally with the passing or even lessening of this faith in  
man and God you lose your hope for any large conquest for righteousness  
in the future. "However bad anything is it may be made better", said a  
certain young man to one who was middle aged. "That is a sure earmark  
of youth", was the reply. "You will learn better than that after while.  
You will learn to expect that he who is filthy will be filthy still."

You remember the Knight Gawain who set out in search of the Holy  
Graal. His Holy Graal symbolized a holy life. It symbolized the triumph  
of right over wrong. This knight had a twelve month and a day in which  
to find it. But the very day of his setting out he came to a silken  
pavilion in a lovely grove. Here beautiful maidens lived and he passed  
his allotted time in sensuous pleasure. Then when he returned to meet  
his fellow knights at the Castle Hall he not only returned having failed  
to find the Holy Graal but he returned sneering and laughing at any chance  
that it should ever be found. "And by mine ears and by mine eyes I swear  
I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat and blinder than any noontday owl  
to holy virgins in their pious ecstasies henceforward." That is what he  
says. He has lost his faith and worst of all he doesn't even grieve over  
his loss. There would be hope for him if he did. But he rather glories  
in it. His loss of faith he looks upon as a gain rather than a ghastly  
and awful tragedy.

Then middle life is a period of especial danger, in the next place,  
because by forty we have lost in great measure our sensitiveness. We are  
ot so easily touched as we once were. Our consciences have grown a bit  
hard or our eyes have become dry. We do not shed tears easily. By this  
time we have grown very familiar with the sublime. God's truth is so well  
known to us it is a common-place. It no longer falls upon our ears with  
refreshing newness. The soil of our souls has been worn hard with the  
very footsteps of the heavenly Sower. Life tends to get into a groove,  
a fixed groove which is in great danger of becoming a grave.

Then last of all, we who are in our forties are in peculiar danger  
because this is a period of life's greatest hurry and rush and activity.  
It is a period when we tend to become most absorbed in things. We are  
carrying the heavy part of the world's load today. Our eyes are fixed  
upon our business. We are in danger lest we may become slaves to the  
things that are seen.

The two sins that Jesus seemed to fear the most, one very keen think-  
er has said, are the sins of avarice and the sins of self-sufficiency.  
And these are especially the sins of middle life. Occupied with getting  
we are in danger of becoming avaricious and covetous. Bunyan with a fine  
insight that amounted to genius was right when he put his Vanity Fair,  
not at the beginning of the way nor yet at the end. He put it in the
Just past forty

middle. Vanity Fair, you know, was a place where all sorts of worldly wares were sold and where the pilgrim's soul tended to forget its high quest and turn aside to the worship of things.

Then the sin of self-sufficiency is more likely to overtake us at this period than any other. For at forty, if ever, we are making our own way. We have begun to win our laurels if we are ever going to win any. We feel more capable of looking after ourselves than at any other time. You remember Mr. Livingstone in Santa Claus' Partner. He was a money maker. He was a success and he knew it. He wanted a million. He almost had it. And when asked why he wanted it he said, "So I can tell the other fellow to go to the devil." That is, he wanted to get where he could pat himself on the back and say "I don't ask anybody any odds. I don't ask God any odds. I am sufficient."

Of course with the absorption in things there comes quite naturally the fading of our sense of the spiritual. The man today who is in the thick of the fight and who is so busy attending to his business that he is forgetting God is not sinning so spectacularly nor so shamefully as the young fellow who is giving way to sins of hot blood and passion but he is sinning more dangerously and more ruinously. Above the heads of such men angels spread their wings and hold out golden crowns in vain. He has lost his sense of God. His worship is the worship of the muckrake.

What shall we say then to these things? First, if you ever expect to get on your feet morally, if you ever expect to enter into God's house walking and leaping and praising God, if you ever intend to be transformed from a moral liability into an asset, you had better see that that miracle is wrought before you reach middle life. Few men are converted after that period.

In the second place, if you have been converted keep sharp lookout as you undertake to drive the ship of life through the dangerous waters of the middle passage. Do not go carelessly and prayerlessly to battle with the Knight of the Noon-day Sun. You and I need to pray constantly the prayer of the ancient prophet, "Revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the stern stress of middle life. In the midst of the years make thyself known." Only God is sufficient to save us from the loss of our idealism, from the loss of faith, from the loss of sensitiveness and from that absorption in things that means the loss of God.

But if you are here amidst the dangers of the middle passage and have never been transformed by the power of God, if you are here and are still a moral cripple, still a beggar in this community for all spiritual benefits and a giver of none this story is told here for your benefit. Even though you have thrown away the best years of your life there is yet hope for you. A man may even be born again when he is old.

Look for a moment at the process by which this man was healed. You may come to healing by the same road. In the first place the apostles got his attention. They said, "Look on us." It is hard to get a man to look after he gets past forty. He is too busy looking in other directions. But they won his attention.

In the second place they excited his expectation. They led him to believe that something marvelous, something transforming might yet happen in his own life. He looked on them, the story says, expecting to receive something from them. They excited his expectation. That, too, is a very
difficult something in a man that has reached forty and yet, thank God, it is a possibility.

Finally, they aroused his will. They secured the response. "Stand upon they feet", they called to him. It was a thing that he had never done in all the more than forty years of his useless existence. But as he willed to rise he did rise. As he did his best to obey, strength was given him to obey. And the same is within reach of everyone of you here tonight regardless of what age you are. "Come unto me", Christ is calling If you will dare to respond He will receive you. He will get you on your feet. He will change you from a liability to an asset. He will enable you to walk on this dusty earth the glorious proof of the fact that miracles are still possible and that man may be born again even when he is old.
"When they had prayed"
--Acts 4:31

My text is a part of a sentence: "When they had prayed." I can imagine if some morning when the rain was on the roof and when you had more heartache than you knew what to do with, if you had been reading this passage and had read just thus far--"When they had prayed"--and the remainder had been torn away and lost, it would have given you pause. Or if you were standing at the forks of the road and did not know which way to turn, if the light had gone out of your sky, if a sense of your own weakness had overwhelmed you, you would certainly ask wistfully, "Did anything happen when they prayed?"

So may we ask, "Did they find prayer a help? Was it to them a force or just a form?" If it were only a form, then in all probability they threw it away as so many have done today.

What happens when you pray? Does anything? Do you expect anything to happen? Do the heavens remain just as black as they were, or is there a glint of sunshine through the clouds. Does winter still hold your world in its frozen fingers or do you feel the warm breath of coming springtime? Are you enabled to hear the song of birds and do you even catch the fragrance of flowers blooming under the snow? What does prayer mean to you? What does it mean to me? Not for any price would we pledge ourselves under no circumstances to pray during the coming year. Yet there are many even in the church that will throw away all its privileges without money and without price.

If we are to credit the saints, if we are to believe our own Bible, we must recognize the fact that prayer is our supreme privilege, and because our
our supreme privilege our most compelling responsibility. Think of the
place of prayer in the life of Jesus. It was the one work that really
eexercised all his energies. To be convinced of this, it is only necessary
to turn to the pages of the Gospels. As we read there, we discover that there
were times when Jesus moved with the peace and serenity and ease that makes
us wonder to this day. There were other times when He was obviously exerting
all His energies, when His sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to
the ground. When were His times of conflict and when His times of poise and
ease? Always His times of conflict were His times of prayer. Having
prayed, all else came about as a matter of course.

Even in the Old Testament, we are made to wonder at the marvelous
achievements of prayer. Think of that dark day in the history of Jerusalem.
A bloody despot, Sennacherib by name, was shaking the continents as Hitler
shakes them today. This despot sent the good king Hezekiah a letter, taunting
him with his weakness and urging him for the sake of himself and all his
own people to make a speedy surrender. His orders were based on such plain
common sense! Knowing the king to be a man of faith, he warns him against
trusting in God to deliver him. "Have the gods of the other nations been
able to deliver them?" he asks. "Look where my armies have marched and have
swept everything before them like a devouring forest fire. Do not play the
fool by trusting in God, for it will not get you anywhere."

When Hezekiah got that letter, the story says that he went in and spread
it out before the Lord. It is an old-fashioned way of putting it that I like.
He seems to say, "Lord, here is a letter that came this morning. It was
addressed to me, but it is really meant for You. It concerns You far more
than it does me. This man seems to think that You are no longer Lord. He
is sure that he can push You about as he has pushed the weak nations that he
has conquered. I do not know how to manage the situation. I am not asking you to do a thing. I am only putting myself and my people in Thy hands. Do as seemeth good in Thy sight."

So what? The king had hardly risen from his knees until a caller was at the door. That caller was the Prophet Isaiah. He said, "I have just come over, Your Majesty, to tell you that you need not be disturbed about that despot Sennacherib. He shan't come near the city. He shan't shoot a single arrow at its walls. I am going to put my bit in his mouth (that is, treat him like a horse); I am going to put my hook in his nose (that is, lead him about like an ox). He is going to be turned about and go back the way he came! And you know what happened. Just how it happened it is not ours to say, but that it did happen is a fact of history. Byron told it in this fashion:

"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail,
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances uplifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!"
This happened when they prayed.

Now Doctor Lake tells us that there were certain results that followed the praying of these saints of the long ago. I believe that like results will follow like praying today. I believe we need these results just as they were needed then. Their weaknesses are our weaknesses. Their problems are our problems. Their opportunities are our opportunities. Their victories may be our victories. What happened then when they prayed?

I

When they prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that Pentecost was repeated. Pentecost will never be repeated. Pentecost does not need to be repeated. At Pentecost the Spirit came as an abiding presence. He came according to the promise to abide with us forever. He is here now. We do not have to ask for his coming, but we do need to realize Him. We need to let Him into our lives. As these men prayed, they became possessed with the sure and bracing sense of God. As they prayed, their lives and hearts were illuminated by the light of the divine presence.

This is the one supreme and all-inclusive result of prayer. Whatever else real prayer will do for us it will always do this. It will make God real to us. Prayer is the means of opening the door of our hearts so that the ever-knocking Christ may come in to be our Guest, our Host, and our Friend. If you have ever had a clear and definite answer to prayer, you will remember that far more precious than the gift that you received was the sense of the nearness of the Giver. All those who make the best of their prayer privileges are constantly undergirded with a bracing sense of God. They are constantly filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now this is something for which we all long. It is more than a
longing; it is a necessity. There is nothing more obvious than the fact that God never intended that you and I should become our best and accomplish our best in the energy of the flesh. Jesus Himself did not do this. He lived His life strictly upon human conditions. When Luke, therefore, seeks to account for His marvellous ministry, he does not do so by saying that He was divine. He rather tells us that it was because He was appointed with the Holy Spirit and the power that He went about doing good. And as the Master could not do His work without the help of God in the presence of the Spirit, neither can His disciples. He is saying to us still, "It is not by might nor, by power, but by My Spirit." Prayer is a means of letting God into our lives.

II

When they had prayed, no man said that "none of the things that he possessed was his own." Prayer brought to these early saints a sense of stewardship. It brought to them a rich and overwhelming conviction of the complete ownership of God. They realized as never before that they did not belong to themselves. They entered into the experience of which Paul was speaking when he said, "You are not your own; you are bought with a price." This was a source of immeasurable joy. They were no longer responsible for themselves. They were in the Hands of the Infinite God. It was His to choose for them. It was His to have them in His constant care.

Since they were God's, all his possessions were God's also. They never any more confused possession with ownership. Two weeks ago I spoke to you about tithing. I said that tithing grows out of the absolute ownership of God. Since he owns all, we ought to set aside some bit of our wealth in acknowledgment of that ownership. The amount required in the Old
Testament was one tenth. Jesus endorses that dedicated portion, but He went further and declared that having set aside one tenth as the Lord's we should hold the other nine-tenths to be used as He directs. Since we are His, our wealth is His. Our children are His. As they prayed, this sense of the divine ownership broke upon them with all its healing splendor.

This is ever the case with true prayer. In fact, we cannot pray unless we are willing to give ourselves. Prayer is a high act of self-dedication. We grossly misunderstand prayer when we think of it as a stubborn clutching at God's skirts begging Him to go our way and to let us have our will. Prayer is a means of bringing ourselves into harmony with the will of God. If we are not willing to submit to His will, we cannot pray. If when you go to the place of Prayer there is a quarrel between you and God, if there is a surrender that He is calling upon you to make that you are unwilling to make, then one of two things is sure to happen: You are either going to give up yourself or you are going to give up praying—one or the other! Real prayer is a means of so dedicating yourself to God that you have a bracing sense of His complete ownership over yourself and all that you possess.

III

When they had prayed, great Grace was upon them; that is, I take it, that they won through prayer something of the graciousness, the winsomeness of Jesus. Did you ever think of the charm of our Lord? What a spell He cast over men! People of all generations have found His charm irresistible. It was so when He walked among men. The common people, which is to say the mass of people, heard Him gladly. An old gray-bearded like Nicodemus could not resist Him. Outcasts braved the sneers of the respectable to go into His presence. When mothers came with babies in their arms, they had
trouble for the little fellows insisted upon climbing down out of their mother's laps and climbing into His lap, and hugging His neck, and kissing His lips; He was so charming.

We Christians ought to share in some measure that charm. Some of us do, thank God! but some of us do not. I sometimes wonder if the greatest grief of our Lord is not so much the wickedness of the wicked as the ugliness of the saints. When that Pharisee stood up and thanked God "he was not like other men", there was nothing winsome about him. As he went away I can hardly imagine some forlorn and desperate soul slipping up beside him and saying, "Tell me your secret. I would give the world to have what you have."

Years ago a friend of mine told me that he was standing on a street corner in Nashville, talking to a friend of his who was a musician. Their conversation was broken into by the coming of an Italian who brought with him a grind organ and a monkey. He put down his organ and began to grind while his monkey danced. The minister watched his friend as he grew restless, but he decided to see how long he could make him stand it. So he began to tell him one of his best jokes. But the friend broke in saying, "Let us get away. That music is running me crazy." "Hold on," said the minister. "Do you know what he is playing?" As well as I remember it was this: Handel's, "The Conqueror Has come". A great piece of music, but in spite of that the musician hurried away in terror. A few years later one of the greatest orchestras in America was playing at the Opera House. It so happened that the minister and his friend attended the concert together. At the close of one selection my friend looked at the musician to find him standing up and waving his hat and his program in sheer ecstasy. "He looked to me," said my friend, "as if he were about to go crazy. Therefore, I grabbed him
by his coat and said, 'Sit down! You will make a fool of yourself!'

"Let me alone" came the reply. "That is Handel's "The Conqueror Has come!"

The same music that the Italian was playing on his grind organ, but there is a world of difference between music played on a grind organ to the accompaniment of a monkey-dance, and played by a great orchestral. And there is a world of difference between the grand symphony of religion of the Lord Jesus played prayerlessly in the energy of the flesh, and prayed prayerfully in the power of the Spirit. When they had prayed, great grace was upon them.

IV

When they had prayed, they were of one heart and of one soul. Prayer is a uniting force. It is almost trite to say that the greatest human problem is the problem of living together. Unless we learn to live together we are not going to live at all. It is also obvious to every reader of the Gospels that the prime purpose of Jesus was the building up of a brotherhood. He divided folks into two groups—those who make for brotherliness, and those who make for the opposite. "He that is not for Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." If you fail to be a gatherer you are no friend of Jesus. He gave one supreme test of discipleship. "By this shall men know that ye are My disciples, if you have love one toward another." In His last prayer this was His final petition that "They all may be one."

It was just this oneness of the early saints that was a supreme source of our power. There was not a chasm that divided the men of that generation that Christianity did not bridge. The society of that day was full of chasms even as today. There were the chasms among the Jews between the respectable and the outcast. There was the chasm between Jew and Samaritan, the chasm between Jew and Gentile, the chasm between master and slave,
between Roman and non-Roman, but all of these chasms, Christianity bridged. It established "little colonies of heaven" under the Roman Empire. The pagan world looked on with wistful wonder saying, "How these Christians love each other!" Because they desired to love and to be loved, they were drawn into them.

The need for oneness was never quite so pressing as today. Christianity has the answer, and prayer is the greatest means for its accomplishment. We cannot pray unless we are brotherly or at least are willing to be brotherly. There is nothing any more impossible than for one to get close to God and look askance at his brother at the same time. There is nothing quite so sure that as we come closer to God we come closer to each other. When the harp of my heart is tuned to the heart of God, when the harp of your heart is so tuned, you and I get in tune with each other. If we are not willing to be in tune with each other we cannot pray.

My father, as some of yours, was at one time a slave owner. When I was a boy, some of these slaves were still living on my father's farm. One of them, I remember, with a special honor and love to this day; Uncle Jessie we called him. He and my father were about of an age. They had lived together for many years. They trusted each other. They were both Christians, for Uncle Jessie was one of the rarest and most gallant-hearted saints that it has been my privilege to know. When my father was in his last and about his only illness, Uncle Jessie came to see him the first day. They prayed together because they shared a common secret.

When the evening shadows had gathered, Mother said to Uncle Jessie, "You may go home now. We won't need you tonight." But the old man stood with his white head bowed for a moment and then he looked up and said wistfully, "Miss Molly, if you would not mind making the old man a pallet
at the foot of the bed, I would be terrible glad to stay. You see the
squire might wake up in the night and want me, and I would hate for him
to want me and me not be here. So the pallet was made that night and all
the other nights until the end came!

Then one lovely September morning, the Angel of Release arrived and
my father went home. Among those that stood about the bed and wept was
Uncle Jessie. His tears were white tears. As the day wore on, I saw
him sitting alone under the shade of a tree that grew on the lawn. I went
up to speak to him. As I approached he said, "I wonder what the old squire
is doing now." Then without waiting for an answer, he laughed softly to
himself, "I know what he is doing," he continued. "He is meeting my father
and his father." And I came to understand why these two men were so close
together. Though they were separated by the wide chasm of culture and of
ignorance, by the wide chasm of race, by the wide chasm of master and
slave, they were yet bound together in the bonds of a tender and sweet and
holy brotherhood because they bowed at the foot of a common cross and looked
into the face of a common Christ. They knew how to pray and prayer had
brought them together.

V

Finally, when they prayed they became men of power. How few they
were! How inconspicuous! They were in number but little more than the
Official Board of this church. They had no great wealth, no great scholarship,
no conspicuous social standing. Yet they brought about an amazing revolution
whose might we feel to this day.

When they prayed, it says the place was shaken. It certainly was!
When they prayed, the city of Jerusalem was shaken. When they prayed, the
Jewish nation was shaken. When they prayed, the whole world was shaken.
Prayer releases upon us and through us the very might of God. Therefore, prayer makes possible the accomplishment of that which cannot be accomplished in any other fashion. We have an encouraging number of influential churches and influential laymen, but we have too few powerful churches, too few powerful laymen, too few powerful ministers. Here is an open road to power. When they had prayed, the place was shaken. If our grim and needy world is to be shaken out of its sin and failure into a new and better today, it must be brought about by men and women that know how to pray.
"When they had prayed..."

Acts 4:31

I.

When they had prayed. What then? There are times when we can read this passage rather carelessly. But I can imagine circumstances when to read such a word would give us pause. Suppose, for instance, that some morning driven by sheer and desperate need you were consulting the word of God. Suppose you were standing at the forks of the road and did not know what turn to take. Suppose that you were carrying a burden that seemed too heavy for your weak shoulders. Suppose there had been the setting of a great hope in your life that was like the setting of the sun, and in sheer desperation you had turned to this passage and you read thus far: "When they had prayed" then you found that the rest had been torn away and lost. What then?

I wonder if you would not pause wistfully and long for the remainder of the story. I wonder what happened then? You might say to yourself through lips white and drawn with pain, "Did anything happen?" Did the skies remain as black as they were before or was there a bit of sky with the sun looking through. Did the winter still hold the world in its freezing grip, or was there a new warmth in the air with the promise of new life? Did prayer help or did it not? Did they find prayer a force or a mere form?
These are very practical questions because we have our burdens, our heartaches, our unsatisfied hungers, our deep needs, even as these of the long ago. We need help, every one of us. Is there any help for us? Do we find the help that we need in prayer? If these people of the long ago found prayer a sheer futility I daresay that they flung it aside as something of no value. If prayer does not accomplish anything in your life and mine, sooner or later we will cease to pray. Some of us have already given it up. With others, it is a mere saying of prayers. We mouth over the same words day after day while all high expectancy lies dead in our hearts. The high art of prayer is one that too many of us either never develop or have forgotten.

II.

What is the good of prayer? Why pray?

That is a plain and practical question. It is also a very pressing one. Prayer involves many perplexing problems. There are those who can argue with considerable intelligence about its futility. But in spite of all these arguments the choicest men and women of each generation continue to believe in and to practice prayer. How shall we decide for ourselves as to its efficacy.

There is one group I am sure that if we consider the matter we shall refuse to consult. That group is made up of those who know nothing of prayer through their own personal experiences. If I were to undertake to discuss with you some scientific question about which I confessedly knew nothing, you would consider any statement on my part of little weight. Should I undertake to tell you of conditions at the South Pole when I had confessedly never studied those conditions, certainly I had never
visited that frozen land, you would consider my words of no value at all.

But in spite of this fact, we have a strange way of hearing with open-mouthed wonder the declaration on the subject of religion of some atheistical scientist, as if he were an authority in a field that he had never investigated at all. A man may be a very able scientist and yet know nothing of religion. A superb knowledge in one field does not make a man master in all fields. The experiences of an ordinary man who has prayed is worth infinitely more than the guesses of a great genius who has not prayed. By this I do not mean to imply that only ordinary men pray. It is the role of the intellectual giants of the centuries and you will find that those who have been men of prayer are in no sense inferior to their fellows who have not prayed. The advertisement of a popular car says "Ask the man who owns one." In testing the value of prayer I say "Ask those who have prayed."

Take Jesus for instance. Here is a man who confessedly had an intimacy with God surpassing any other man that has ever lived. Here is a man who was possessed of a spiritual winsomeness and of a power beyond that of all others. What did Jesus think about prayer? He thought of it first of all as plainly reasonable. He believed that God was not a despot but a father. He believed that being a father he longed to do what every good father longs to do, and that is be helpful to his children. Therefore, he said, "If ye then, being evil, if you with your imperfections, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" To the mind of Jesus prayer was supremely reasonable.

It was so reasonable that He practiced it. Jesus was permanently a man of prayer. In fact, He gave to prayer a place that was unique. Most of us who pray make prayer a preparation for the battle. When we are confronted by hard ordeals we try to fortify ourselves for the coming conflict.
by prayer. That is altogether reasonable and right. But with Jesus, prayer for preparation was the battle. Having won in prayer Jesus went forth simply as a victor to receive the results of his conquest.

To be convinced of this it is only necessary to turn again the pages of the New Testament. As we read the story we find that there are times in the life of Jesus when He is obviously struggling. There are times when He is fighting such a hard fight that his sweat is as of great drops of blood. But there are other times when He moves about His work with a poise and a serenity and an ease that amazes to this hour. When were His times of conflict and when His times of poise and ease? Always His times of conflict were his hours of prayer. If we take the New Testament alone for our guide, we should judge that the only work that really exercised Jesus was the work of prayer. Here He won his battle, out in the world He received the spoils of his conquest.

Take those works of wonder for instance. They were called miracles. Here a leper flings himself at his feet praying this prayer. "Lord if thou wilt thou canst make me clean." Life has dealt so with this man that he has ceased to believe in love. What answer does Jesus make? Does he agonize in an effort to cure him? Not a bit. He merely says "I will; be thou clean." Here he stands by the grave of Lazarus. He does not bow himself for a terrific struggle. He merely says, "Father I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I know that thou hearest me always." How easy he did his work.

Then take his dealing with the hostile crowds that thronged him during the latter days of his ministry. These were not stupid men, they were shrewd and keen debaters. They were eager to set him off his balance so that he would say some word that would discredit him. But never in the most exciting moments did he utter an ill constructed sentence. Had a
stenographer taken down everything he said, nothing would have needed to be added, nothing erased. "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" they questioned. "Show me a penny," came the answer. And he held the coin in his hand and said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars and unto God the things that are Gods." They fairly gasped at his canny answer. And from that time they dared not ask him any further questions. Jesus, infinitely the greatest spiritual genius of all time, believe in and practiced prayer. Those who have been most like him have also believed in and practiced prayer.

III.

Now look at the scene for which our text is a part. These men have been educated in the school of Jesus. Today their backs are to the wall. They are facing persecution. They have reached the place where there is likely to be some blood-letting. Naturally, therefore, they pray. For what do they pray? Not for a way of escape—"Grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they might speak thy message." "Lord," they say, "we are facing danger now. Give us the grit and gallantry to see it through with honor."

"When they had thus prayed," Luke says "that something happened." I daresay that Luke had got the report of this meeting from one who was present. What did happen?

1. "When they had prayed they were all filled with the Holy Spirit."

That is, prayer brought to these of the long ago a compelling sense of God. When they prayed they realized that God in the power of the Spirit was among them as a group and within their hearts as individuals. They became as sure of the presence of their risen Lord as they were sure of each other. God in Christ was to their hearts the supreme reality.

This was their claim, and we must confess that they lived the kind of
lives and did the kind of work that we should expect God-possessed men and women to live and accomplish. This was the power in which Jesus himself did his work. When Simon Peter undertakes to account for his Master he does it in these words "Whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power." It was this keen awareness of God that Jesus thought essential for himself, and certainly no less essential for his friends. Therefore, he said to them, "Tarry ye till ye be endued with power from on high." If this awareness of God was needed by Jesus and his friends, it is certainly no less needed by ourselves. Through our very weakness, our failures, our sins, or inadequacy, the Master is saying to us still "Apart from me ye can do nothing." Prayer is the means of making contact with the eternal God so that his unfailing fullness may flow into our unfailing emptiness.

2. "When they prayed they spake the Word with boldness." We are very timid in spiritual matters, most of us. We are timid in making investments. But nowhere are we quite so fearful as in making investments in matters of religion. I am told that times are a bit harder in our city than in former years. What institution will feel the depression most? Not the movies, not the beer joints, not the dance halls, not the night clubs--the Church. Prayer brings courage.

This is not theory it is experience. It would be strange indeed if it were otherwise. It is said the personal presence of Julius Caesar could change the most trifling soldier into a hero. I do not know whether this was true or not, but I know the personal presence of Jesus Christ can change the most trifling and timid saint into a hero. I have personally looked to ordeals with fear and trembling. But I have found myself in the midst of those trying experiences with a courage that was a surprise to my own heart. Prayer brings boldness.

3. "When they had prayed, great grace was upon them." As a means of
finding a more winsome personality, I know of nothing equal to prayer.

Here is the supreme secret of charm. I have known men and women of varied degrees of culture who knew the high art of prayer. I have known those who were naturally handsome, and others who were homely, but I have yet to find a single soul deeply schooled in prayer who did not have about them indefinable charm.

Some years ago a minister told me of a conversation that he was having with a certain musician when that conversation was interrupted by an Italian, who proceeded to give them a serenade with a grind organ with the accompaniment of a dancing monkey. He said that I noticed that my friend was getting restless. I thought I would see how long I could hold him. But in spite of all I could do he broke away. "Hold on," I said. "Don't leave. Do you know the tune of the piece that Italian is playing? It is Handel's "The Conqueror Has Come," one of the greatest pieces of music ever written." But in spite of all persuasion the musician left.

A few weeks later one of the greatest orchestras in America was giving a concert at the Opera House. This minister went in company with his musical friend. The concert was superb. At the close of one selection he was amazed to find his friend standing in his chair waving his hat and program in wild applause. "Sit down," said the minister, "You will make a fool of yourself." "Let me alone," came the answer. "Do you know what they were playing? They were playing Handel's "The Conqueror Has Come."

But there is a world of difference in a great master crowned by the art of music and a grind organ. There is yet a greater world of difference between the grand symphony of the religion of Jesus Christ lived out prayerlessly in the energy of the flesh and lived out prayerfully in the power of the Holy Spirit. "When they had prayed great grace was upon them."

4. "When they had prayed no man said that ought of the things which
Prayer is costly. It is costly because it means self-giving. No man can pray without self-dedication. Prayer is not to change God to your way of thinking, it is to change you to His. You will either give up that to which God objects when you pray, or you will give up prayer, one or the other. There is no greater hindrance to prayer than our refusal to do God's will.

How much of your property does God own? He owns it all. He owns you, He owns all that you have. It is well to give a tenth as the acknowledgment of this ownership. But real prayer involves the putting of yourself and all that you have into God's hands. For this reason, the grasping, greedy, selfish man can no more pray than a dead man can laugh and sing. For this reason, you can gage the spiritual life of an individual in a church pretty largely by her liberality. Here is a law that is as fixed as the law of gravitation. The hand that is not open to give cannot possibly receive. A praying man, a praying church, is a liberal man and liberal church. "When they had prayed no man said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own."

5. "When they had prayed they were of one heart and of one soul."

Prayer brings hearts together. Prayer is the greatest means of the building up of a brotherhood. If I tune my instrument with the first violin and you tune your instrument with the first violin we are in tune with each other. If I come close to God in prayer and you come close to God in prayer we come close to each other. Men cannot really pray with hate in their hearts. God cannot give you what you are not willing to share with others. You cannot truly pray for your brother without coming to love. Prayer will thaw out the most frozen heart.

Some years ago a beautiful girl, who belonged to my church, brought shame upon herself and upon her home. Her mother's door was shut in her face.
Therefore in the most delicate and most trying moment that ever comes to a woman's soul she had to lie down among strangers. When the baby was three weeks of age I learned that the mother was going to be turned out of her temporary home and there was no place for her to go. Though I had been warned that her mother was suffering from heart failure, and had forbidden her daughter's name to be mentioned in her presence; though I had been told further that to mention it to her would kill her; I went boldly to her home to kill her.

The interview was stormy. I have never looked into another such face. Her hatred against her daughter was chastly and terrible. By and by she promised that she would pray, that she would ask God to help her to forgive. That was the most I accomplished. I went home feeling that I had failed. But the last thing I did before leaving that town was to go at this grandmother's request and baptize the little chap that had come, branded with shame, into the world. But with the sanctified kiss of a Father upon his lips he has a right to a chance. But most marvelous of all, the ice had melted in that frozen mother's face, and there looked from her once tired eyes the peace of a great discovery. Prayer brings us together.

6. Finally, prayer brings power. It brings the very power of God. "When they had prayed the place was shaken." Yes, these praying men shook all Jerusalem. They shook Judea and Galilee. They shook Asia Minor. They shook Europe. They shook the world. And now we face our desperate day. The evils that stalk abroad are so gigantic that men's hearts are failing them for fear. We seem to be fighting our way through a terrible spiritual desert. But there is a way out. It was in the midst of an age of moral and spiritual drouth such as this that Methodism was born. They prayed as did these early saints. Through prayer they became pure. We ourselves are inadequate to the task, but "He is able to make all grace
abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” We shall never recapture the lost might of our religion till we learn again the high art of prayer.
"THAT UNPOPULAR SUBJECT"

"Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own." Acts 4:32

I

The text might be stated positively in this way: "Every man acknowledged that everything that he possessed belonged to God. Now this "every man" does not mean every man in the world. Had such been the case the Kingdom would have come in long ago. This means everyone that belongs to that little group of Christians that were at this time rejoicing in the blessings of Pentecost. These people who have just been on their knees; these people who can still feel the tremors of the building where they were assembled as it was shaken by the power of God. These people who have just been refilled with the Spirit of God. It is these who are saying, "Nothing that we possess is our own. All belongs to our Lord".

And to them it was not a gloomy and forbidding confession. They did not make it under any outward compulsion. They did not make it reluctantly and with tears of bitter regret. They made it gladly, joyously, enthusiastically. They made it with springtime in their hearts and with irrepressible music in their souls. "All that we have", they cried exultantly, "is His."

It is altogether probable, I think, that we agree with these ancient saints in their confession. For when they declared that everything they possessed was God's, they were not uttering any new truth. They were uttering one of the primary facts both of revelation and of reason. A man owned world is possible where God does not exist. But if we are believers in God, we cannot conceive of such a world. If that glad word is true that stands on the first page of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth", then we can never think of any part of this world as our own. To do so is practically atheism. "The earth is the Lord's in the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." Every flower that blooms is His. Every foot of land upon which we stand is His. Every star that keeps eternal lids apart in the night sky is His. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."

So we are ready to agree with these spirit baptised Christians of long ago that naught of the things that we possess is our own. I fear, however, that we do not do so with the same wholehearted joy and with the same sunny enthusiasm. I am afraid that there are many today to whom this thought is one that depresses rather than uplifts. I am afraid it offends us rather than thrills us with gladsome joy. But if such is the case, it is because we have not entered into the plans and the purposes of God as did these victorious saints of long ago.

Now, if we all agree, as I think we do, to this first fundamental fact, that God is the owner of all, I think we will be equally in accord upon the second fact that I wish to bring to your attention. If God owns all, then we ought to make some acknowledgement of that ownership. That
is true in the first place because God commands it. Not that He commands it for His own good. There is not a law in all the Bible that God has passed for His own benefit. There is not a promise that is made for His help. There is not a single page that is written in His interest. Every command, every law, every prohibition, every promise, every blessed hope held out is not for God, but for you and me. God commands us to make some acknowledgement of His ownership, hence it is for our good.

2. Then we ought to make some acknowledgement, in the second place, that we may realize this good that God intended. To take without making any return is to rob ourselves. To get without giving is to dwarf the getter. Our own sense of what is right, our love to God, our sense of gratitude for His blessings, all these put demands upon us that as moral beings we dare not resist. There is not man I think, therefore, that would deny that in return for the use of God's gifts we ought to make some acknowledgement. That has been the feeling of human beings in all ages and in all civilizations.

3. But if we are to make some return, what is to be the amount? What proportion of the substance that comes into our hands are we to render to the Lord? Who is to determine that proportion? Now, I think you will agree with me upon my third proposition, and that is this: The proportion should be determined not by the possessor but by the owner. That is God is to determine what proportion He desires in acknowledgement of His ownership. That is the rule among men. If I rent your house, I cannot rent it at my own price. You as the owner have a right to set the price. So God has a right to say how much He expects of you and me in return for the use of the possessions that He has put into our hands.

And that right God has assumed. He has told us the proportion that He requires. He has told us the proportion of time that he expects to be holy to the Lord. We are to observe one day in seven. We know this not by accident, but as a fact of revelation. God has put this law upon us, the law of the Sabbath, because we cannot do and be our best without it. The Sabbath is not for His benefit, it is for ours. These are the words of Jesus Christ. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. And it has been demonstrated over and over again that a right observance of the Sabbath is conducive to a man's highest development, physical, mental and moral.

Just as God demands one-seventh of our time, just as He demands a tenth of our substance. The law of the tithe is no more man-made than the law of the Sabbath. It is not a law of Moses. It dates back centuries beyond Moses. It is as old as Abraham and older. The tenth is theancient one proportion sanctioned throughout the Old Testament. It is the proportion upon which Jesus Christ set His seal in the New. It was never changed by Him for the simple reason that it is of the nature of a moral law. It fits into man's deepest needs.

Not only does the Bible tell us that God owns the world, that He demands a tenth of our substance as an acknowledgement of His ownership (5) it also instructs us as to how our tithes, as well as our offerings, are to be paid. (An offering, you understand, is a gift over and above the tenth)
How are we to pay our tithes and our offerings to God? We find the answer in Malachi, third chapter and tenth verse: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse". That is, as I understand it, the church is not to be a collecting agency. God is not to go out and collect what is due Him. We are to bring it to Him.

Now, I am aware that this flies into the face of about ninety-five percent of our Church financing throughout all Christendom. Or am I saying that it is wrong or wicked to send collectors out to induce those who owe the Lord to pay Him what is due. What I do say is that this method is not scriptural, and I am fully convinced that if a church would only be scriptural in her financial matters, we would find the largest improvement in every direction. God allowed man to put away his wife in the old days provided he gave her a writing of divorce. But this He did, said Jesus, because of the hardness of their hearts. So collecting is necessary many times because of the imperfect consecration of the people. Many of us are so indifferent, so lukewarm, so thoughtless that we keep God's money in our possession till somebody comes and duns it out of us. But I believe that you will agree with me that this is not the best way. It is not the best way either for the giver or for the receiver. Surely it would be better in every way if we would simply be scriptural and bring our tithes into the storehouse.

Then there is a second direction for our giving. And, mark me, this direction is not mine. And, understand further, that I am not giving it to you in a spirit of criticism. I am giving it to you with a very earnest desire and prayer that we may follow out God's plan for us in the matter of our finances. Not only are we to bring our tithes into the storehouse, but we are to bring them when they are due. And when are they due? The answer is not mine, but God's. "The first fruits are the Lord's." That is, you will put God first in your pay instead of second or third, or last. Remember that is His direction and not mine. It is the direction of the Bible, and of gratitude and of good common sense. Every Christian must put God first in his heart or he cannot be a Christian. In doing this it becomes an instinct of the heart to put God first in their giving.

What would you think of a husband and father who when he got his pay check would blow it all in on himself so that there would be a bare pittance left for the feeding and the clothing of his wife and children? Some men are like that, but, thank God, very few. And those that are so are lower than many of the beasts in the field. Jack Minor, the bird man of Canada, told me of seeing a family of wild geese - the father and mother and five goslings - light at his place one day. The old gander had his leg broken. But he stood there on guard and refused to eat a bite till his family had been fed. That was fine and generous. And yet a gander did that much for a bunch of geese.

But how is it with us in our financial dealings with God? We spend upon ourselves. We meet our own needs, many times we indulge in luxuries. We hold back what is due God till the very latest day possible. We compel our educational institutions to wait. We compel our mission boards to borrow money. And then just before the preacher starts to Conference we pay our pledge provided somebody will come and collect it. This of course is better than nothing. But it is not the way that appeals either to conscience or
to common sense. It is at once unscriptural and unreasonable. Once more I invite you to hear the word of God: "The first fruits are the Lord's."

II.

Suppose now that every member of this church should take God seriously in His direction for giving. Suppose you should earnestly tithe your income; that you should pay that tithe as the money comes into your hands, that is, week by week or month by month, or at the end of the year, provided you are paid off only once in the year? What would be the result? God tells us that this would be the result: "I will open you the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that there shall not be room to receive." If such giving would not result in spiritual enrichment, then the Word of God am well as the testimony of countless thousands will not do to depend upon.

And these blessings, you understand, would not come in payment for our honest dealing with God. The windows of heaven are already open. Pentecosts bend low above us, but we are unable to receive because we are unwilling to give. And, mark me, the hand that is fast shut in an effort to keep is too fast shut to receive. The giving heart is the open and trusting heart. And it is only the open and the trusting heart into which Christ can come. The right kind of giving brings you into the proper attitude for the right kind of receiving.

1. Such giving would be a blessing to the individual. If you tithe you give systematically. Giving is a form of worship. Any exercise, physical or spiritual, is better if done systematically. You cannot take enough exercise in one day to last you a year. You cannot eat enough at one meal to last you a month. You cannot play enough at one time to last you a life time. Tithing is helpful because it is systematic.

2. It makes giving easier. It would be very hard for you to pay one tenth of all your income in a lump sum. Many a man could easily pay $10.00 a month who would find $120.00 next to impossible in a single payment. The result is that by refusing to give systematically, we give at the end of the year in one sum what we should have been giving almost every month.

3. Then tithing makes giving a joy. The Lord loveth a cheerful giver, the Bible tells us. "Certainly that is the kind that we love. And we do not love any other. Suppose your husband should bring you a bouquet tomorrow night and when he got in the house he would fling it over into your lap and say: "There it is. I certainly did not want to get it, and I want you to know that I would not have done if I had not have been afraid there would be a family row when I got home." Nobody wants such gifts and yet many such are put off on the Lord. Some man goes and sweats with you for thirty minutes, and you at last produce your check book and say, "I will do it this time, but you need not ask me any more. I am thinking of asking for my church letter anyway." But if you have a fund that is already set aside for God's work, then giving is a pleasure. It is a joy to you and it is a joy to Him for whose sake you give it.
4. Then giving brings a sense of Christ into our every day life. And surely there is no greater need than that. The Devil is perfectly willing for God to have our Sundays if he can have our week days. But it is possible for every task of every working day to be a distinctly religious task. It is possible for you to handle the tools of your daily toil as piously as you handle the communion cup on Sunday morning. You have sometimes wished that you could engage in distinctly religious work. You have envied the lot of the missionary or of the preacher. But your work can be as distinctly religious as their's. Such may be the case if you tithe.

See how it works. If I am a carpenter I do my work in the consciousness that God has a part in every penny that I earn. He is my partner. If I am selling goods, He has a part in every dollar that I make. My business becomes His business. I can look up from the most common-place task with the consciousness that it is shot thru with the light of eternity because Christ is present and is interested in it. And not only am I partners with Him, I become a partner in all the enterprises in which my tithe is invested. I have a share in the work of every teacher in the Sunday School because I put something into the building. I have a part in every soul won by the missionary because I have helped him in his work. The best way that I know to bring a real sense of God into your workaday world is to tithe.

Then think what such a program would mean to the Church. It would save the Church forever from the reproach of being an object of charity. Surely it is time at least for church people to stop regarding this institution so dear to the heart of God as a charitable institution. Christ identifies Himself with His Church. When Paul was persecuting it, He told him that he was persecuting Himself. And when the Church is slighted, Christ is slighted. When the Church is allowed to beg like a ragged Lazzarene, Jesus Christ is allowed to beg. In heaven's name let us remove this reproach. There is something that is peculiarly sickening in turning the Son of God into a beggar. There is something horrible in making Him who the rich, for our sakes became poor, into an object of charity. And when we set about giving oyster suppers and ice cream socials in His name, then the disgrace reaches a horrible climax.

Not only would tithing remove the reproach of beggary from the Church, but it would put into our hands adequate funds for the doing of the work to which our Lord and Master has called us. Not that any amount of money will bring in the Kingdom of God. But a Church that will deal fairly with God in the matter of substance will be spiritually enriched and will prove to be a conquering church. Let the membership of any church, rich or poor, begin to tithe and there will never have to be another drive of any description till the end of time. Furthermore, let the membership of any church begin to tithe, and there will never be lack of spiritual power.

A proof of that is in the text before us. The church who came to the conclusion that all that they possessed was God's was a very small church and very weak. It was surrounded by enemies. It was facing religion centuries old. Our just beyond Jerusalem were heathen civilizations that seemed rotten beyond all hope. But these few folk that did not belong to themselves went forth to battle and the world was remade.
That Unpopular Subject - 6.

My appeal is to you who are willing, not by your lips, but with all that you have, to say that you are not your own. To say it so wholeheartedly as did our soldier boys in the days of the war. And the test of your consecration, I am persuaded, is right here, whether you will obey God in the matter of giving. If you will do this, then this church will surely be as fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.
A High Vocation

Joseph, to whom the Apostle gave the name of Barnabas—signifying son of encouragement—a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a farm which he had, and brought the money and gave it to the Apostle. (Weymouth) Acts 4: 36-37

Here is a man who changed his name. He did not do so of set purpose. No doubt he was quite content with the name given him by his parents. They had called him Joseph. That was indeed an honored name, coming out of the long-gone past. It belonged to one of the most radiant personalities that we meet on the pages of the Old Testament. Yet though it was an old and honored name, this radiant saint outgrew it just as we outgrow the clothes of our childhood.

Now this receiving a new name is not unique. I am thinking of a man in political life who some call "Snake". Mark you, I am not affirming that he has any resemblance to that crawling creature, yet certain of those who know him best have given him this ugly name. Years ago there was a native son in my state who had been christened Andrew. But there came a time when that name was no longer adequate. He was so tough and unbreakable that they gave him the new name "Old Hickory". There was another, who also had an Apostolic name, Thomas. But his friends changed that to "Stonewall". Even so the Apostles changed the name of this man, Joseph, to Barnabas which means Son of Encouragement. Therefore

This name Encouragement had not been deliberately assumed by the one to whom it was given. Joseph did not of set purpose go in quest of his new name. Without any seeking on his part it was given him by those who knew him best. They called him "Encouragement" because that was his real vocation.
Part I

Now in being a courage-bringer, Barnabas had an exceedingly high vocation. Certainly there are fewer finer services that one man can render another than to put heart into him when he is hopeless.

First, the courage-bringer is needed because so many are discouraged. In all history there were perhaps never quite so many frightened people as there are to-day. Some of them parade their fears and thus help their neighbors to panic. Others I am glad to say, who though discouraged, refuse to tell us just how frightened they are. I have always had a soft and tender spot in my heart for that ancient king of Samaria who was called to reign through dark and desperate days. His city was under siege. Food supplies had been completely cut off. The people were slowly starving. Yet every morning the king would walk along the city walls, dressed in his royal robe. I can imagine that some looked after him with hard eyes, feeling that he knew nothing of what they were suffering. But one day they got a glimpse, through a rent in his robe and saw that he had sack cloth within upon his flesh. He, too, bleeding from a hidden wound, was finding it hard to keep up his courage.

Then men like Barnabas are needed because courage is so essential. In the first place, it is essential to our joy. When we lose courage, we lose our song. When courage goes, all sparkle and laughter go with it. This hopeless heart gets no gladness out of any kind of sunshine.

Not only is courage necessary to our joy, but to our highest usefulness as well. If you have lost hope, you are no longer an asset, but a liability. The preacher in Ecclesiastes was a brilliant and gifted man. He might have been a most useful man. But his pessimism paralyzed him. He declared that while there might be one good man in a thousand, there was not one single good woman. Further-
more, he was sure that the crooked could never be made straight. Therefore the best he had to offer was "vanity of vanities''.

Elijah was a mighty man. His lion-like voice was heard throughout the whole nation. But one day we come upon this giant as he grovels under a juniper tree in utter discouragement. His lion-like roar has dwindled into the squeak of a Mickey Mouse as he requests for himself that he might die. In this prayer he was far less than sincere. Had he really wished to die, it would have not been necessary for him to have prayed about it. He would have only had to hang round Jezreel and Jezebelle would have taken care of it. Mighty man though he had been, God could make no use of him until he had rested him and restored his courage.

Not only does discouragement rob us of our joy and highest usefulness, it even causes some to fling out of life altogether. Perhaps you may have read a letter written by a chap who in his utter discouragement decided to quit before the whistle blew. It ran something like this: "I am of no use to anybody. Nobody gives a hang for me. I am just a peanut at the Yankee Stadium. I am going to step on myself and end it all." He was so short on courage that he threw himself away. Blessed therefore is the courage-bringer because we are often short on courage and because courage is essential to the business of living.

Part II

How did Barnabas go about his fine vocation?

First he encouraged people by the wise use of his money. What an ugly lie the devil has got across to a great many church people by telling them that money is a bit vulgar if not positively wicked. Many feel that the very mention of it tends to change the sacred into the secular and to reduce any spiritual temperature to the freezing point. When some years ago a company of women asked for our sanctuary
for a worship service we tendered the offering plates as well. But they
drew back with a kind of horror, saying "This is a worship service".
Even so, but any service that is too worshipful to receive an offering
is too worshipful to take communion or to sing "When I Survey the Wondrous
Cross". Believe me there is nothing more sacred than the so-called
secular.

Yet there are those who still insist on misquoting Paul by
saying "Money is the root of all evil". Paul said nothing of the kind.
Even had he said it, I affirm with all reverence that it would not have
been true. Money may indeed be the source of much evil if it is in the
hands of an evil man. But in the hands of a good man it may be the
source of endless good. Money in itself is neither moral or immoral.
It is non-moral.

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

One man can take a dollar and so use it that the very eagle on
it will turn vulture and tear at somebody's heart. Another can take
that same dollar and so use it that the same eagle will turn mocking-
bird to make music in somebody's soul. It was Jesus who told us to
change our money into friends. It was in this fashion that Barnabas
used his wealth. Money can be clothing for the naked, food for the
hungry, education for the illiterate, light for those that sit in
darkness.

I heard that queer genius, Bud Robinson, tell of meeting a chap on
the streets in Boston who bummed him for some money to get a bowl of
soup. But he told this beggar that he was going to dinner and would be
glad to have him as his guest. During that brief meal, Bud with a fine skill sought to introduce his new friend to his Lord. He then invited him to the little church where he was preaching. The man came and was converted. "Three years later," continued Bud, "I was way out in North Dakota. A great strong chap met me and lifted me in his arms as if I had been a little child. 'You don't remember me do you?' he questioned. "No", I had to reply. "Do you remember the chap that bummed you for some money to get a bowl of soup? I'm that man." "There he was", continued Bud, "so big and strong that if he had stomped his foot, you could have felt it a thousand miles, and he only cost 80¢." He as Barnabas encouraged by the wise use of his money.

Second, Barnabas encouraged people by believing in them. I meet those along the way who pride themselves that they can not be taken in. They can always distinguish wheat from chaff. "In my salad days," as Shakespeare says, "when I was green in judgement", I thought the same. But through experience I learned better. Sometime ago a chap told me such a convincing story that I went out in the night to get a check cashed to help him. His appreciation knew no bounds. "I will do anything for you", he declared, "I will come in the morning and wash your car".

"Good", I replied. "Do that and you will break a lifelong record". My doubt pained him so that the big white tears ran down his face. Solemnly lifting his hand, he vowed, "I hope God will strike me dead if I am not there in the morning to wash your car". Evidently he did, for I have not seen him since.

But the fact that you and I have been taken in is no excuse for our loss of faith. Jesus was taken in a few times himself. Yet he continued to believe in man with a faith that nothing could kill. The truth is that to cease to believe in man is also to cease to believe in God. It is equally true that to lose all faith is also to lose all power to help. It will destroy at once our motive for helping
He felt that this quitter would be more hinderance than help. But Barnabas could not believe it. So firm was he in his conviction that he parted company with his great friend, Paul. Which was right? Paul gives the answer when he writes from his prison in Rome some ten or twelve years later. He is now in a desperate situation. Knowing that parlor soldiers would be no good, for whom does he ask? Here is the answer, "Take Mark and bring him with thee for he is profitable unto me for the ministry". Barnabas had a hand in this great victory. He encouraged folks by believing in them.

Third, Barnabas encouraged people by being the kind of a man he was. What kind of man was he? Luke tells us he was a good man. The Bible is very sparing in the use of this word good as applied to men. In fact, only one other man on the pages of the book is given this high degree. I know the word is to-day not very exciting. We have somehow pulled its teeth. It seems to be suffering from "tired-blood", Yet it is the best we can say about any man. Stronger still, it is even the best we can say about God.

"So'midst the maddening maze of things,  
And tossed by storm and flood.  
To this firm faith, my spirit clings,  
I know that God is good."

There are times for all of us when the lights burn low. There are times when all the air seems out of our tires. In such hours of discouragement there is nothing short of God himself half so heartening as a genuinely good man. As a timid young minister, I have sat in my pulpit when I felt that it was impossible to go on. Then often a trusted friend would slip quietly into the pulpit, sit down beside me, put his arms around me and whisper in my ear, "God bless you, I am holding you up. I am remembering you at the throne of grace". So what? It marked for me the difference between courage and despair. This was the case not so much because of what he said, but of what he was. I was sure that he was a good man. Barnabas therefore encouraged folks by the
way he used his wealth, by believing in them and by being a good man.

Part III

Now the wonder of it is that his high vocation is open to every one of us. There may be some here present who are wet blankets. I've even met those who seem to take a delight in scattering tacks along the highway of life. But nobody has to take the heart out of others. Everybody can give his needy fellows a lift if he is willing to meet the conditions. There are many fine tasks that are beyond the reach of our hands. But all of us can follow the fine vocation of Barnabas. We can be sons and daughters of encouragement.

We can encourage by sharing the goodness of this ancient saint, Barnabas gave courage by being the kind of man he was. Just by being present he put heart into folks. Even when he spoke never a word his personality poured forth an ever conscious valor that helped to keep men on their feet. We all know such. "There he is, thank God," I used to say to myself of a radiant saint as he took his place in the pew. "I can preach better to-day just because he is here."

Then we can encourage of set purpose. Here is an obscure name that Paul lifts into immortality. "The Lord give mercy unto the household of Onasephorour for he oft refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain." How scholarly or gifted this man was we are not told. But we do know this that when he visited the big city of Rome and learned that his friend was in some unknown prison he went in search of him till he found him. Not only so, but Paul found his visit as refreshing as a draught of water to one whose lips were parched with thirst. Though a far lesser man he was able of set purpose to give new courage to one of the greatest saints of all time.

In a certain city during the last world war there was a fine Christian whose closest neighbor, a thorough-going grouch, had an only son at the front. One morning this man read that his neighbor's son
was missing. With great hesitation, he decided to make the bereaved man a visit. He rang the door-bell again and again without getting any response. At last he heard footsteps slowly descending the stairs. Then the door was grudgingly opened.

"I read the papers this morning," said the visitor hurriedly, "and I have come to extend to you my deepest sympathy." So what? That hard, dead face became alive with tenderness. Not only so but the one-time grouch threw his arms around his visitor and half lifted him through the door. He then buried his face upon his shoulder and sobbed out some of the bitterness of his broken heart. This done, he said, "Come upstairs, I want to show you something." Having climbed the stairs, he led him into his son's room. There were his tennis racket, baseball bat and his football. He had been an excellent athlete. There, also, on the center table was a revolver. "I was just on the point of using that when you came. Thank you for giving me the courage to continue to live."

A son of encouragement! What a vocation! And the wonder of it is, I repeat, that it is within reach of everyone of us.
FIGHTING GOD

"Lest haply ye be found even to fight against God". Acts 5-39

That is a fearful and shocking word. The men to whom Dr. Gamaliel was speaking were hard and cruel men. They were the men who were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. They were about as tender and merciful as a modern court of Russian communists would be who were called to sit in judgment on one who had rebelled against the state. Not only were these men harsh and hard by nature, but they were intensely angry. The men before the court had driven them into such a rage that they thirsted for their blood.

In thus desiring to put these troublesome preachers out of the way, they felt they were amply justified. This was not the first offense of the men now on trial. They had been before this court before. The first time they had been treated, as the court thought, with marked consideration. In stead of punishing them as they richly deserved, they had let them off with the command that they were not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But instead of showing their appreciation by obeying, they had filled all Jerusalem with their teaching. In fact, they had become a source of great embarrassment to the members of the Court. They even seemed bent on putting the responsibility for the death of Jesus upon themselves. Of course, as a matter of fact, they were responsible. They were of those who cried, "His blood be upon us". Yet, while all this was true, in the language of Hamlet; "They did not think it mete to have it thus put down".

Now when Gamaliel saw that they were bent on murdering these men either by legal or illegal methods, he spoke a word of caution. "Refrain from these men", he said, "and let them alone." Then he reminds them that other pretenders had risen who made great claims for themselves, but that when they had been put out of the way, their followers had vanished with them. "The
same will happen", he reminds them, "in the case of this Jesus of Nazareth if he is only an imposter. But if it so happens that he is not an imposter, then your fight against him will be sheer futility and worse. In that case you would be found fighting even against God. Such a fight would be ruinous and, of course, hopeless. Thus cautiously these men took a milder course. They were willing to fight the weak members of a despised sect, but they were not willing to fight God.

I

Now, though they were shocked at the very thought of fighting God, that was exactly what they did were doing. That is what we have done again and again. That has been a major role of our race since the birth of history. It is a grim and awful fact that man does fight God. The creature does make war against the Creator; the finite battles the Infinite. Mankind, through the centuries, has had a way of flinging itself against the bossis of the shield of the Lord Almighty.

This has been a characteristic of the race. Of course, there have been countless thousands who have made peace with God and who have dedicated themselves to him. These have ceased to oppose him and have come out to fight under his banner. But the supreme tragedy of our race is just this - our persistent quarrel with God. There is not an ugly wound upon society or upon the individual that is not born primarily of our fatal fighting against God. Our earth is scarred by the graves of buried nations and even of buried civilizations. How did these nations and these civilizations come by their death? The symptom of the disease of which they died may vary greatly, but basically the sickness of all of them was the same. All of them have died because of their tragic quarrel with God.

As is the case with races, nations and civilizations, so it is with individuals. There is not one of us who has not at some time fought against God. There are some of us who are fighting him at this moment. That is the most tragic fact
That is a fearful and shocking word. The men to whom Dr. Gamaliel was speaking were hard and cruel men. They were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. They were about as tender and merciful as a court made up of Russian communists called to try one who had rebelled against the state. Not only were they harsh and hard by nature, but they were angry. The men before them had driven them into a sheer rage so they thirsted for their blood.

They felt that their intense anger was amply justified. This was the second offense of the men now on trial. The first time they had been brought before them, they were treated, as the court thought, with marked consideration. Instead of being punished as they really deserved, they were let off with the command that they should not speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus. But instead of obeying, they had filled all Jerusalem with their teachings. In fact, they had become a source of great embarrassment and seemed bent on putting the responsibility for the death of Jesus upon themselves. Of course, they were responsible for his blood. They were of those who cried, "His blood be upon us". Yet, while all this was true, in the language of Hamlet, they did not think it was mete to have it thus be done.

When, therefore, Gamaliel saw that they were bent on murdering these men either by legal or illegal methods, he spoke a word of caution. "Refrain from these men", he said, "and let them alone". Then he reminds them that other pretenders had risen who made great claims for themselves but when they had been put out of the way, their followers vanished with them. "The same will happen", he reminds them, "in the case of this Jesus of Nazareth; if he is only an imposter. If he is what you think he is,
you won't have to fight, but if it so happens that he is what his fellows claim for him, then your fight will be sheer futility, for in that case you would be fighting against God and that, of course, would be hopeless. Thus these men took a milder course. They were willing to fight the weak members of a despised sect, but they were not willing to fight God.

But though they were shocked at the very thought of fighting God, even as you and I, that was just what they did. That is what we have done. That is what man has done since the birth of history. It is an awful fact that man does fight God. The creature thus makes war against the creator; the finite battles the infinite. We have a way of flinging ourselves against the embossed shields of the Lord Almighty.

This has been a characteristic of the race. Of course, there have been countless thousands who have made peace with God and who have dedicated themselves to him and have come out to fight under his banner. But the supreme tragedy of our race is just this - our constant quarrel with God. There is not an ugly wound upon society or upon the individual that is not born of man's persistent fight with God.

As we travel over the earth today we find ourselves walking over the graves of buried nations and even buried civilizations. How did these nations and these civilizations come by their death? The symptoms of the disease of which they died may vary greatly, but basically the sickness of all of them was the same. No nation has died because of certain unlucky circumstances. All of them have died because of their tragic quarrel with God.

As is the case with races, so it is with individuals. There is not one of us but what at some time has fought against God. There are some of us who are fighting him at this moment. That is the most tragic fact
you about us. If you are finding life bitter at this moment with despair and hopelessness, it is not due primarily to your circumstances. It is not due to what some friend or enemy has done to you. It is due to the tragic fact that you are fighting him who loved you and gave himself up for you. Man has fought each other for long centuries but the most horrible and senseless of all his bad choices has been that he has chosen to fight God.

II

How do we fight God?

We fight him when we resist his will. That is a familiar word in Genesis that says, "My spirit shall not always strive with men". The fact that God's spirit has to strive with men at all is born of the fact that man resists God. If there were no resistance there could be no strife. If there is strife in your home it means that there is a conflict of wills. If there is strife between you and your neighbor, it means that you are willing one thing and your neighbor is willing another. The fact, therefore, that God does strive with man means that God is seeking to induce us to go in one direction and we are determined to go in another; that he is inviting us to make one choice and we are bent on making a different choice.

When Jacob, after years of successful sinning, undertook to choose his possessions, we read that there wrestled with him a man until the breaking of the day. This wrestling of Jacob is often pictured as prayer at its best. At the end such might be the case, but the fact that there was any wrestling at all indicates that at first Jacob resisted God. There can be no wrestling where there is no resistance. It took God a whole night to bring Jacob to his way of thinking.

When was a school boy in my little backwoods village, one of our chief pastimes was wrestling. At recess and at the noon hour, there were wrestling matches between boys of all ages. But there was one
boy that never wrestled. No amount of persuasion, no amount of ridicule would induce him to take part. There were even those who tried force but all in vain. How did he manage? The answer is simple. When any boy laid hands on him to wrestle, he simply toppled in a heap. He refused to resist. It is impossible to wrestle with a man who yields at the first touch. The fact that God stressed that he wrestled with a man who resisted.

This wrestling is as universal as temptation. Who is tempted? Everybody. We are all tempted regardless of how well born we are. It is a great privilege to be well born. It is a great privilege to have flowing in our veins the moral momentum of pious ancestors. This will give our fight against temptation a greater assurance of victory, but it will not exempt us from temptation altogether.

In our fight against temptation, a wholesome environment is a great help. But no environment, however, calm and peaceful, will exempt us altogether. In the Middle Ages earnest men often hid themselves in the dens and cares of the earth to escape temptation, but they did not escape. Temptation was the first face they saw when they reached a place of security. A good environment is a great help, but it will not exempt you altogether.

Then high moral character is a great safeguard against temptation. The man who has constantly lived up to the best that he knows has thereby, generally speaking, both narrowed the range and lessened the intensity of his temptation, but no degree of moral attainment will exempt him altogether. Jesus never lost a single battle, yet that fact did not exempt him from fierce temptation. Temptation, then, is a universal human experience.

Now what is temptation? We usually regard it as did James, as purely a solicitation to take the lower road; to make the baser choice. But while that is true, it is not the whole truth. There are two sides to temptation. There are temptations upward as well as downward. On the first page of the Bible we read, "God said, the serpent said." God's voice was calling to the
The other was calling to the depths. But no man is ever invited to do the cowardly thing that he is not also invited to do the heroic thing. No man is ever tempted to be selfish that he is not also tempted to be unselfish. We may be sure the priest and the Levite were tempted to help the man by the wayside just as the Samaritan was tempted to pass him up. The two yielded to the lower voice while the latter listened to the higher.

Now, it is this persistent call of God to do and to become our best along with the temptation to make a lower choice that results in conflict. Why is the sea so tossed and restless? Why does not it lie down in placid contentment? Is it like a mud puddle? The earth has its muddy arms around it. Why doesn't it accept the situation and be content? It is restless because it is fighting with the heights. It has to say "no" to these higher voices every moment and every hour of each day. Therefore, just as it fights with the forces that would resist it, so we fight against the God who would resist us.

III

What are some of the results of this conflict between man and God?

1. When I begin to fight God I straightway get at war with myself. This is the case because my life will work when I live it according to his plan. It will not work in any other way. Therefore, just as the sea is in ceaseless conflict because it is played upon by the forces of earth and heaven, so we are at conflict the moment we begin to resist God. For God does not give up once we rebel against him. He persists in his effort to win us though oftentimes we become less and less conscious of those efforts.

2. When I fight God, I not only fight myself, but in fighting myself I lose the heritage that might be mine, or that inward peace. When Jesus went away he left us this legacy - "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." But we can never know inward peace at its best until we are at peace with God.
Having made peace with him, that inward peace follows as naturally as the flowers bloom in the springtime. "But there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked".

3. When by fighting God I lose my peace, I also miss the joy that would have followed hard upon the heels of peace. "The kingdom of Heaven", said Paul,"is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". But I can never know joy at its best until I cease my torturing conflict with God. Hope and joy are fruits that will not grow on nature's barren soil. All we can Christ we know is vanity and toil.

Paul discovered this in his own experience. One of the sadder stories of all history is that wrung from his lips, that when he had missed the peace and joy that comes of peace with God, "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me?"

4. If I fight God, I not only have war with myself but I tend to fight others as well. A lack of inward peace is fruitful in outward conflict. Many people are hard to live with not because they are naturally antagonistic to those whom they may love, but because fighting themselves, they tend to fight others. What Isaiah said of the individual is also true of the group; "there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked".

This man seemed to sum all supplication but the plain truth is that every problem that wrecks our distressed and tortured world today is fundamentally a spiritual problem. We have tragic conflicts in our homes, in our industries and international relations, primarily because we are at war with God. Recently on I heard a notable scientist speak this question; "Is there hope for the future?" The only hope he had to offer was the improving of the individual man. He had nothing very different to say as to how this improvement was to be brought about.

But we who are Christians claim to know the answer. Personally I believe
it is the right answer. There is no hope for the future except through a better type of individual. We cannot build a peaceful social order, we cannot build a peaceful world how of individuals who are at war with God and at war with themselves. God has the only answer there is. "And now, Lord, what want I, for my hope is in thee." When I get right with God I am on the way. I am ready to be trained to be right in all other relations. But the building of a right world out of wrong men is a sheer impossibility. There is no hope for this, either in time or in eternity, until we stop fighting God.

IV

What are we to do with this fact? The question is up to the individual. What am I going to do about it? What are you?

Let me begin by saying that the advice of Gamaliel is not enough. He was reckoned as a wise and sane man, but to act on his advice would be to allow any evil cause to grow and spread without resistance. It would allow a good cause to die for lack of support. Of all the choices we might make, none is more contrary to the will of Jesus than that of neutrality. "Refrain from these men and let them alone." That is about the best way I know to lose any value or to destroy any good cause. If you wish to destroy a beautiful friendship, those friends do not need to wrong each other. All they need to do is to let each other alone. If you wish to wreck a perfect marriage, it is not necessary for husband and wife to live in an atmosphere of a primitive whoop; all they need to do is to let each other alone. If you wish to destroy this church that has been many years in building, it will not be necessary to dynamite it; it will not be necessary to throw stones through the windows; it will not be necessary to kill off the official Board or to run the pastor out of town. All you need to do to kill this church is to follow the advice of Gamaliel — let it alone.

If I am to cease fighting God I must do more than merely surrender, if
by that I mean merely the giving up of those positive sins to which he objects. I must not only cease to resist him, I must come actually and aggressively to be on his side. I must dedicate myself to him and to his cause. I must say with Isaiah, "Here am I, send me." I must say with Paul, "What wilt thou have me do?" Paul had been a great fighter against God. Jesus told him so when he asked him this question: "Paul, why persecutest thou me?" Paul then and there made his dedication. How did he show the marvelous change that had taken place in him? Those who knew him had the opportunity of seeing in awed wonder that the man who had before persecuted the church was now giving his life to its upbuilding. He who had fought against God had this as his noblest thought when he neared the end of the journey: "I have fought a good fight".

This is your privilege and mind. If you strike your flag today, if you give your life to God, he will accept it regardless of how utterly you have failed him and fought against him in the yesterday. If you will give yourself to God today, he will not only accept you but more and more he will transform you. If you will yield yourself to God today, he will not only accept you and transform you but he will use you to his glory; he will make it possible for the boast of Paul to be your boast, both in time and in eternity; "I have fought a good fight". At this moment you are either fighting against God or fighting under his banner.
MINDING OUR OWN BUSINESS

"It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables."
Acts 6:2

The American Standard Revised gives this better translation: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables". This text marks a crisis in the early church. The beautiful brotherhood that came into being at Pentecost is being threatened from within. "There arose a murmuring," Luke tells us. That is a familiar sound in our world. We hear it in the home, where it often arises to the dimensions of a discordant war whoop. We hear it in our clubs and in our fraternal organizations. We hear it even in the church. In fact, I daresay that most every congregation has certain members whose chief interest in the church is a fighting interest. As long as things are running smoothly they are more or less indifferent. They almost lapse into a comatose state. But as soon as a row arises, they become alert and alive.

Now that there should have been a murmuring so close upon the experience of Pentecost is a bit disappointing. Such a fact serves to remind us that the church was never perfect, since it has always been made up of imperfect men and women like ourselves. But if this murmuring is disappointing, the way in which the disciples met it is altogether heartening. We may so react to criticism as to make it into a wind that retards our progress and at times even drives us upon the rocks. We can also so react to it as to make it fill our sails and bring us toward our desired haven. It was in such a fashion that these apostles used this murmuring.

Luke tells us that the Hellenists were murmuring against the
Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily
distribution. But their complaint was not against all the Hebrews.
It was rather against the Apostles themselves. This was the case
because the Apostles were responsible for whatever failure was being
made. The management of the financial affairs of this semi-pauper
church was solely in their hands. Therefore, when these people com-
plained, their complaint was against the leaders of the Christian
movement.

How did the Apostles react to this criticism? They might have
told those murmurers, "We were in this movement long before you
were. If you do not like the way we are managing it, get out." Or
they might have assumed the martyr role and said, "We are doing the
very best we can, yet instead of appreciating what we are trying
to do, you do nothing but complain." Such an attitude would have
been quite easy. It is always easy to mistake our wounded feelings
for the zeal of the Lord. But instead of taking this attitude,
they examined the criticism, confessed that they had been doing wrong,
and sought to remedy the situation. "It is not right", they declared,
"that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."

Now, wherein had they been doing wrong?

Their wrong was not born of the fact that these ministers had
taken an interest in the management of the temporal affairs of the
church. It was their duty to take such an interest. They were not
wrong in seeking to provide for the physical needs of the members
of their church. They realized that to talk about the bread of life
to people who lacked physical bread was sheer futility. They real-
ized the sacredness of the so called secular. Therefore, in
interesting themselves in the material needs of their congregation,
they were entirely right.

No more did their wrong consist in the fact that in trying to
administer the temporal affairs of the church they had not given en-
tire satisfaction. Nobody, either in pulpit or pew, ever gives entire
satisfaction in doing any work in the church. If I as a minister, or
you as a layman* set out with the hope and expectation of pleasing
everybody, we are doomed to disappointment. Nobody has a universal
appeal. However well a minister may preach, there are those who do not
think he can preach for "nuts". One congregation heard Paul up to a
certain point, then shouted him down. Another congregation walked out
on Jesus when he was preaching about the bread of life and reduced his
hearers from perhaps thousands to a mere twelve.

If they were not wrong either in taking an interest in the
temporal affairs of the church or in failing to give satisfaction,
wherein, I repeat, were they wrong? They were wrong in that they had
become so absorbed in managing the business of the church that they
were not giving proper attention to preaching. When Simon said, "It
is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve
tables", he did not mean, I take it, that they had quit preaching al-
together. He rather meant that preaching was being crowded upon the
side lines, that it was becoming an avocation rather than a vocation.
It was becoming one of many tasks instead of their central and supreme
task.

Now we can readily see how much more modern this story is today
than when it was written. If those ministers in the primitive church
were tempted to side-track preaching, how vastly greater has become that temptation with the passing of the years and with the multiplying of the machinery of the church. It is perfectly safe to say that there is not another man in the community from whom so much is expected as from the modern minister. We can appreciate the reply of a certain Bishop when a pulpit committee told him the kind of pastor they needed. "I know just the man", he replied, "but I am not sure that you can get him. His name is St. Paul". In response to these demands we have developed the finest body of church managers that the world has ever known. Among these also are many excellent preachers. But that our preaching has suffered on account of the pressure of these demands, I feel perfectly sure.

This I say with confidence because preaching is the most exacting of all tasks. It requires much time and thought. If the modern minister preaches as he ought, he must be given an opportunity. The church that undertakes to make its pastor a man of all work is seeking its own spiritual impoverishment and the impoverishment of its pastor. But many a minister has been so cumbered with much serving that he has not had a chance to realize his possibilities as a preacher. Thus it has come to a pass that the first question we ask about him is this: "Can he preach?"

Now if Simon was right in affirming that he and his fellow apostles were wrong in making preaching an avocation rather than a vocation, wherein were they wrong?

They were not wrong because the so called secular is less sacred than the spiritual. There are still those who have at least a vague conviction that the handling of money is less religious than the preaching
of sermons. If we can believe Jesus, if we can trust our own common sense, such is not the case. I preached in a church some time ago that prided itself on the fact that money was never mentioned in the pulpit. But that is surely no cause for pride. The truth is that the pastor who fails to preach on money fails to preach an adequate gospel. Any service that is too sacred to discuss money is too sacred to read the Twenty-Third Psalm or to sing "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross". These Apostles were therefore not wrong in sidetracking preaching because money is less religious than sermons.

No more were they wrong in giving a subordinate place to preaching because, as preachers, they had higher rank than those who were to administer the financial affairs of the church. There is no thought of rank here, nor is there anywhere else in the New Testament. Now and then I read about a prince in the church. Any man whose princeliness is not born of sacrificial service is far more of a pauper than a prince. That one man should lord it over another in the church of Jesus Christ is totally contradictory both to the letter and the spirit of the New Testament. These men chosen for the official board were to be men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. In fact, the moral and spiritual requirements for them were just as high as for their ministers. Wherein, then, were the Apostles wrong in failing to put a proper emphasis on preaching?

They were wrong because preaching was their job. It was to this particular task that they had been divinely called. We believe today in a called ministry. We believe that every preacher ought to be able to say humbly, yet gladly, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He hath anointed me to preach." We believe that he ought to be able to look
up from his task and say, "To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world".

In saying this we do not contend, of course, that the minister is the only called man. On the contrary, we believe that God gives to every man his work. The man in the pew ought to have as real a sense of mission as the man in the pulpit. The Holy Spirit divides to every one severally as he wills. We are all, both minister and laymen, to perform our many and varied tasks at the call of our one Lord.

Now since this is true, I think we can all agree that it is every man's business to mind his own business. It is your business to do the task to which God has called you. It is my business to perform as best I can the task to which God has called me. If I do this with complete consecration, then I am reckoned as perfect in the sight of God. If I do this, however little I may seem to accomplish in the eyes of man, one day my Lord will come to me all enthusiasm, saying, "Well done, well done".

If then, to mind my own business is the utmost that is expected of me, nothing less than this will do. It is well to bear in mind that there is no substitute for the doing of the will of God. That is a rather grim story in the first Book of Samuel. Whatever arguments you may have against the ethics of it, the conclusion drawn from it is in harmony with the best in the New Testament. Saul was given a command to perform a bloody mission. The flocks and herds of his foes were to be completely exterminated. But he was partial in his obedience. He killed the worthless and kept the worthful.

Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, his pastor, saying, "Saul has turned back from following after me". When Samuel heard it he
cried unto the Lord on behalf of his back-slidden king. Then the next day, having spoken to God on behalf of Saul, he went to speak to Saul on behalf of God. When he had arrived, Saul greeted him with a tone that oozed unction. "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have performed the commandment." Then the sheep and the cattle, by bleating and lowing, proclaimed his assertion a lie. But Saul had an alibi. He always had. That was the ruin of him. "I brought these along", he declared, "to sacrifice to the Lord thy God." Then Samuel replied with this great word: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice". There is no substitute for the doing of the will of God, whether you are a layman or a minister.

A friend told me some time ago of a conversation he had with a fellow passenger on a train. He discovered that his companion was a wealthy and highly successful business man. The business man became confidential and said, "I came very near to being a minister. In fact, I did preach for a while." "Why did you quit?" my friend asked. "Well", came the reply, "I did not wish to spoil a good business man by making a poor preacher." "How has it worked?" was the next question. At this the business man remained silent so long that my friend thought he was not going to answer at all. Then he said, "It has been a tragic disappointment." There is no substitute for doing the will of God.

This Old Testament parable is to the point. A certain man had been set free from all other tasks that he might guard a notable prisoner. It was of such great importance that this prisoner not be allowed to escape that the man trusted with the task of guarding him was warned that if his prisoner should escape, his own life would be the forfeit. But in spite of this warning, he did permit the prisoner to escape. Why? Not because
he was a deliberate traitor. He had only one reason to give: "While thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." He got so busy doing certain other tasks that he failed to mind his own business. There is, I repeat, no substitute for the doing of the will of God.

III

1. The choice of this official board was good, because the temporal affairs of the church were doubtless administered in a more efficient fashion by these men who were not already burdened by much serving. Not only so, but by this forward step, more people were set to work. Many who join our churches lose interest because we give them nothing to do.

2. The results were good for the Apostles themselves. Having been relieved of these duties that they had performed so imperfectly, they did not at once take a long vacation. This is not to say that a vacation is not just as religious as work. It is. They did not even slow down and take things easy. Instead, they gave themselves constantly to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. Prayer and preaching should always go hand in hand. Thus, having time to preach, they no doubt did much for better preaching.

3. The move was helpful to the entire congregation. We hear no more of the murmuring. Some folks murmur because they have nothing else to do. If the people who give much time to the criticism of others were to give themselves with equal seriousness to the work of the church, they would have neither time nor inclination to murmur. By this forward movement the threatened breach was healed and the church remained one.

4. The final natural result was that the church became increasingly victorious. With more people working, with better preaching, with a united church, we are not surprised to read that the word of the Lord increased. New gospels were being printed, not in terms of ink
First Methodist Church
G. Ray Jordan, D. D., Minister
Charlotte, N. C.

1. It was good for those who were chosen to serve on the officers' board. It gave them a purpose in their service. It is always wise to appoint those to perform that is always needed. Many who perform these duties are too young to be doing different work. Because we give it more work to do.

2. In fact, it was good for the entire congregation. With more people working with the church, there are more people interested in the church. The church can be more successful. We have more people involved in the church. We have more people that are interested in the church. We have more people involved in the church.

3. We have more people involved in the church. We have more people that are interested in the church. We have more people involved in the church. We have more people that are interested in the church. We have more people involved in the church.

4. Without people, a fascinating guide will
and paper, but in terms of transformed lives. "The number of the dis-
ciples was multiplied and a great number of priests were obedient to
the faith".

Naturally, this has a different word for us.

Now, what does this mean for us?

1. We are to bear in mind that God gives to every man his work.
We are to accept our individual responsibility as a definite call from
God. This is as important for the man in the pew as for the man in the
pulpit. Remember that while the early church owed much to its great
preachers, it owed more to its consecrated laymen. The members of this
first official board so distributed the material bread of this semi-
pulpit-church as to make it the very bread of life to those who received
it. By their service they both preached the gospel in their own way,
and made it possible for their pastors to preach it more effectively.

2. Then I think it highly important that we, both pastor and
people, recover our faith in the power of preaching. Bear in mind that
in the New Testament preaching and salvation are related as cause and
effect. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
How, then, shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And
how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall
they hear without a preacher?" However much our faith in the power of
preaching may have dwindled, God seems still to believe in it. Preaching,
both through pulpit and pew, is still necessary.

Now, if the ministry of preaching is to come to its best, there
must be cooperation between pastor and people. If my ministry in this
church is to be fruitful, it must be largely through you. If we work
together, in the fellowship of the Spirit, then once more the word of God
will increase and the number of disciples be multiplied, even as in the
long ago.
STEPHEN AND THE RICH FARMER

"Seek ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom."

Acts 6:3

"But God said, Thou fool."

Luke 12:20

I.

The contrast between Stephen and the rich farmer is the contrast between a wise man and a fool. The Bible is constantly contrasting these two types of characters. The Book of Proverbs is given almost wholly to contrasting wisdom and folly, or the wise man with the fool. Such a contrast has nothing to do with mere intellectuality. The wise man in the scripture is intelligent, but he is more. The fool in the scripture is not necessarily unintelligent. Wisdom and folly are moral quality, not intellectual. According to this Book, Stephen was a wise man, the farmer was a fool.

Here we come again upon those two divisions that seem to many of us so arbitrary. This Book is written on the assumption that all of us fall into one of two groups. We are either wise or we are foolish. Of course, among the wise some are far wiser than others. Among the foolish, some are more foolish than others. But every man belongs to one of two groups. That was the constant assumption of Jesus. "He that heareth these sayings of man and doeth them I will liken him unto a wise man that buildeth his house upon the rock." The man who failed to obey was like a foolish man who builded his house upon the sand. There
were just two kinds of builders, the one wise, the other foolish. Again when Jesus pictured the ten Bridesmaids who were to attend the wedding, five of them were wise and five were foolish. There were these two classes and these alone. There were no intermediates. We are facing in this study these two types of characters in contrast, the wise man and the foolish.

II.

The author of our text regards Stephen as a wise man. Assuming that he is right, wherein is this man wise? Stephen is one of the most brilliant men in my opinion that we meet on the pages of the New Testament. But it is not his vast ability that constituted his wisdom. Others have been just as gifted as himself and yet vastly foolish. Wherein then was he wise?

1. He was wise in that he had a keen sense of values. He was wise in that he put first things first. He is described as a man full of the Holy Spirit. That means that he was a man who had given himself to God. It was this self-giving that made it possible for God to give himself to Stephen. Our Lord longs to give himself to every one of us. The salvation that he has to offer is always a gift. "The gift of God is eternal life." The standard word is, "Receive ye." "He breathed on them saying, receive ye the Holy Spirit." But we can only receive as we give. Stephen in wholeheartedly giving himself had made it possible for God to give himself. Therefore, Stephen could be accurately described as a man full of the Holy Spirit. Having come to possess this supreme value other values came as a natural consequence.

2. He was full of faith. Faith is essential to the best of living. It is essential in home life. It is essential in our commercial life. We cannot live in a world like ours without faith. Stephen was full of faith both toward God and man. He met bitter opposition. He died a violent death, but he never lost his faith.
How had he come by this strong faith? At first no doubt it had been as weak and feeble as our own. But he ventured on the faith that he had. He lived up to all the light that came to him and the light became brighter. The man who will be true to the light he has will come to a larger faith. It is not intellectual difficulties as a rule that make us of little faith. It is our moral difficulties. It is not keen thinking that puts out our eyes, it is muddy living. Stephen lived up to the faith that he had, and he came to be full of faith.

3. He was full of grace. That means he was gracious, winsome, charming. There was a fascination about him that belongs only to the God-possessed. He was so charming that those who touched lives with his were often wooed and won. Those who knew him wanted to be like him. The tragedy with many of us is that we are not charming in our religious lives. I sometimes think that the greatest grief of our Lord was not the wickedness of the wicked, but the ugliness of the saints. Stephen was full of grace.

4. He was full of power. The power that he possessed was such as can be accounted for only in terms of God. We have many brilliant men, influential men, able men. We have great and strong churches. But we have too few powerful churches. We have too few powerful men. Influence is good, but power is better. Paul did not have influence enough to stay out of jail. But he had power enough to open jail doors and to shake open human hearts. Stephen was full of power. In fact, his whole personality can be described as full orbed. He really lived the abundant life that is promised us through Jesus Christ. He was rich in his possession of God. This is a wealth that is available for every one of us. And wise is he who will accept it.

III.

This rich farmer is called a fool. "God said, Thou fool." It is a shocking
word. We do not argue with the Lord about it. We may nod our heads in assent and say, all right since you call him a fool a fool he is. But having made this acknowledgment we do not call the folks that are like him by such ugly names. We think them rather wise. Often we strive hard to be like them. But wherein was this man a fool?

He was not a fool because he had made a success. He was not a fool because he was rich. The Bible is very sane in its teaching about money. To be rich is never reckoned as a crime. To make money is never looked on as a sin. Money is power. Money that I have earned is in a sense part of myself. It is condensed energy. It is concentrated sweat. It is not the root of all evil as we are sometimes fond of saying. It may do vast evil, it may also do vast good. It is the power we can use for the making or the unmaking of men. But a man is not foolish simply because he makes money.

Neither was this farmer foolish because he had made his money in a wrong fashion. Of course, the man who gets his money by defrauding others, the man who wins his wealth at the price of another's want is a fool. The man who coins the nerves of others or builds himself up by tearing another down is playing the fool. But this man had made his money in a most innocent fashion. He had accumulated his wealth in a way considered most legitimate. It had come out of the ground.

Listen to the story: "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plenty." Here is the source of all material wealth. The ground! When I hear the word I am back again on the old farm. I am scenting the fragrance of the upturned sod. I catch the sweet aroma of the new mown hay. I am hearing the call of the Bobwhite to its mate. I am enjoying the concert given by a Cat bird in the thicket at the end of the furrow. I am looking into clear skies. I am going home at the close of the day from a toil that has been morally clean and white. This man had got his
money from the ground.

No more was this farmer foolish because having made abundant crops he sought some method of conserving them. He would have been foolish had he done otherwise. This Bible, and the God of this Bible hates waste. When the Master fed the multitudes he said, "Gather up the fragments that nothing be lost." The Christ that hasn't a crust of bread to throw away certainly hasn't a single man or woman or child to lose. To waste is wicked. One sin of the Prodigal was that he wasted his substance with riotous living. This farmer was opposed to waste. And in that he was not foolish but wise.

Wherein then was he foolish?

1. His first and fundamental foolishness was that he reckoned without God. I have no doubt that the Master knew such a man as this. I am quite sure that this farmer was an orthodox Jew. Had you told him that he did not believe in God he would have been angered and outraged. Intellectually he did, but practically he did not. In his intense purpose he was a thorough atheist. God was not a part of his program. Belief in God had to do only with the services of the Church. When that was over God was not in any of his plans and purposes.

2. Reckoning without God he confused possession with ownership. He thought because he possessed a farm he owned it. How modern is that folly. We still maintain that whatever of wealth comes into our hands is our very own and that we have a right to do with it as we please. That is not only flatly contradictory of the Scriptures, but of all commonsense. Whose world is this? Who made it? The answer of every believer is God. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Countless millions have possessed its wealth, but they do not possess it anymore. But God owns it from eternity to eternity. Therefore, to confuse possession with ownership is to play the fool.

3. Reckoning without God and thinking to possess was to own, this farmer had no sense of gratitude. He was a self-made man in the strictest sense of the
word. God had sent the sunshine and the rain just in the right proportion. Some of God's other children, his fellow-workers, had been faithful in their service. But he thought of none of these things. He had done it all himself. When he thought within himself he thought only of what a great chap he was.

4. Being without gratitude he was also without any sense of obligation. Listen to him think within himself. You can not always tell what a man is by hearing him talk, but you can tell by hearing him think. He thought within himself, "God has been good to me. My fellow-workers have been faithful. Therefore, I ought to appreciate what all these have done. I ought to show my appreciation by making some return." But that was not what he said at all. He thought within himself saying, "What shall I do? I have no room where to bestow my goods. I will pull down my barns and build greater ones and there will I bestow all my goods." He had no sense of obligation. And the man who does not realize his indebtedness is a fool.

5. Finally, he was a fool because he thought he could feed his soul on corn. He made the same provision for that God-like something within him that he made for his ox and his donkey. There can be no greater idiocy than that. He has already accumulated vast quantity of things. But in the here and now things have failed to satisfy. While Stephen was living fully, this farmer is living an empty life. Listen to him as he tries to quiet his dwarfed soul. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many days, eat, drink, and be merry." That is, enjoy yourself. But his soul was not enjoying itself. It was starving in the here and now. Yet he trusted to that starving diet to last him through eternity. Thus we see that the wise man lives in the here and now while the fool starves. The one leads a full life, the other one an empty one.

IV.

It is well to look at the final sin in the lives of these two men.
1. The fool. For years he had had more than he needed, but he was eagerly reaching out for more still. He had some very cherished plans that he was on the point of taking to completion. But just as, in his own mind, he was getting ready to live he had a visitor. Death slipped in through his close locked doors, set his clay covered spade against his rosewood bed and pushed him out into the cemetery. "God said, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." The man didn't even own his own soul. Thus he slipped into the dark.

How much did he take with him? Nothing. All the wealth he had was in a barn. It is of a kind that we can hold in our hands but cannot take with us. I remember a neighbor years ago that worked like a slave till he was an old man. He slaved as if his eternity depended upon his pennies. By and by he was paralyzed. He lay in helpless rage upon his bed while his family took by force his accumulated gold from under his pillow. He watched them with inward rage. When the end came there was little left. But had there been millions it would have done him no good. His was a wealth that will not last. "The man," says this Bible, "the man," says commonsense, "that gives himself to the accumulating of what will not last and what will not satisfy even while it does last, that man is a fool."

2. Look at this brighter scene. Stephen is proclaiming his gospel. Being a man of power he awakens opposition. Those to whom he speaks are not able to answer. In their rage they drag him out of the city and mob him. Those who have borne witness against him take off their outer garments and throw them down by a young man named Paul, and stone this wise man to death. Soon this brilliant and gifted young man is a battered corpse.

But there was one something that the stones could not do. They could pound the life out of his body, but they could not pound the radiance from his face or the faith and love from his heart. "They saw his face," the story says, "as
if it had been the face of an angel." As he died he prayed this prayer:
"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Thus he went out to meet God
with an unconquerable goodwill like that of his own. In his death hour he
prayed the same prayer that Jesus had prayed as he died on the cross. Stephen
had those values that last. He was wise because he had chosen a good that
satisfies today and will satisfy through eternity. That choice is before you
and me. It is an old story, but it is the only story. Therefore, I challenge
you afresh now with these brave and wise words,—"Choose ye this day whom you
will serve."
STEPHEN AND THE RICH FARMER

"Seek you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom."

Acts 6:3

"But God said, Thou fool."

Luke 12:20

I.

Here is another one of those arbitrary divisions of which we spoke last Sunday evening. We said then that Jesus was constantly dividing folks into two groups. They are the ready and the unready, the fruitless and the fruitful, the living and the dead. Here there is a division on the basis of wisdom and folly. This man, Stephen, is represented as a wise man. In the study of this character we learn what the Scriptures mean by wisdom, the kind of man the writers of the Bible count wise. In the Rich Farmer we see the opposite type of character. This man as seen through the eyes of our Lord is accounted a fool. This is a division that is found again and again in the Bible. The whole Book of Proverbs was written to distinguish between the wise man and the foolish man. Jesus made that same distinction again and again. For instance, when he had finished the Sermon on the Mount, this was his final word, "He that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a
rock. And he that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, I will liken him unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." Here were two types of men and only two, the wise and the foolish.

The same thought is brought out in that memorable parable of the wedding. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten bridesmaids, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all the bridesmaids arose, and trimmed their lamps. But foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out. Intowrestudy for thiævening we have a contrast between the wise and the foolish.

II.

Look then at this wise man Stephen. Why is he called wise? As you have doubtless observed, wisdom and folly in the Bible have nothing to do with mere intellectuality. Wisdom is a moral and spiritual quality. Folly is the opposite. Here is a man that the Bible accounts wise. Wherein is he wise?

1. He is wise in his attitude toward God. He is a man full of the Holy Spirit. This Book accounts no man wise that reckons without God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Stephen had such an attitude toward God that made it possible for God not only to walk with him but to live within him. God always surrounds us as the water surrounds the vessel, as the atmosphere surrounds our bodies. He constantly stands at the door and knocks. But some of us in our folly refuse to let him in. Stephen was wise enough to open the door. Being thus wise he came to experience the feast of the fulness of life.
This same fulness is available for every one of us. It is, therefore, a part of wisdom for us to share with Stephen this enriching fulness. But in spite of this privilege some of our lives are very empty. There is little of God, and therefore little of beauty in them. I remember standing years ago upon the bridge between Cambridge and Boston. I looked down into the river where Longfellow was looking when he received his inspiration for his poem, "The Bridge at Midnight." The scene was anything but beautiful. I could see the mud and wreckage at the bottom of the stream. Further down the river were some vessels made for the wide expanse of the ocean. But they were stranded upon their side, unsightly and useless. I turned away with a feeling that kindled disgust.

But a few hours later I had to cross this stream again. Once more I looked into its waters. Everything had changed. I could no longer see the mud and filth and wreckage. Now the vessels were upright on their keels, ready to tramp the seas with the world’s commerce in their arms. Ugliness had become beauty. Stale prose had been changed into poetry. Why the difference? The tide had come in. The tide from the sea that has so much to give. There you and I are, that unsightly stream. Our wisdom is to let the infinite tides of God into our lives. That was the wisdom of Stephen.

2. Being full of God he was full of faith. He was full of a great and courageous confidence. Trusting in God he trusted also in men. When we cease to believe in God we cease to believe in each other. When we cease to believe in each other we grow fretful, and peevish, and sinful. All the helpful and happy folks are folks with large confidence in our humanity. Such believers have their faith justified. How many an ordinary man has been made into something extra ordinary with the confidence of a good woman. Believing the best he found the best. It is ever so.

"There are loyal hearts, there are spirits brave,
There are souls that are good and true
Then give the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you."

Being full of faith he confronted life with high courage and hope. He saw much that was wrong, but he believed that something could be done about it. Wrong, sin, opposition, disaster, these are never altogether fatal till we come to accept them. It is only when we face life's difficulties in a spirit of fear rather than a faith that our defeat becomes sure. Here was a joyous, hopeful, courageous man because he was a man of faith.

3. Full of the spirit of God and full of faith he was quite naturally full of grace. That is, there was a charm about him, a winsomeness, a magnetism that could be accounted for only in terms of God. Church people sometimes get the reputation of being vastly lacking in attractiveness. Sometimes ministers are by no means distinguished for their charm. But where this is the case it is because we are lacking in Christ-likeness. Thus lacking we become ugly in our religious lives. I wonder sometimes if the greatest grief is not the wickedness of the wicked, but the ugliness of the saints. Stephen was full of graciousness and charm.

4. Stephen was full of power. Power is something more than mere influence. Luke tells us that those who heard him speak were not able to resist the spirit of wisdom by which he spoke. Facing the opposition that the early Church faced it greatly needed power. But the need was no greater then than it is today. Some of these men did not have influence enough to stay out of jail, but they had power enough to break open jails and remake the world.

This power possessed by Stephen was more than physical. As he gave his testimony he aroused intense opposition. His foes unable to answer his arguments resisted to violence. That is a weapon in which men have trusted through the centuries. Violence can work terrible destruction both to him who wields it and to him against whom it is used. This man that Luke calls irresistible is dragged outside the city
and mobbed. This gallant and brilliant young disciple is left a battered corpse.

That doesn't look much like power. On the contrary it looks like utter weakness. But what happened as a result of that seeming failure? It is impossible to measure all the results. But it was one that went far towards remaking the world of that day. Among those having part in this ghastly crime was a brilliant young man named Saul. He was in it to kill. He heard the testimony of this brilliant young preacher. He saw the radiance in his face. He tried to forget the scene later. At last he surrendered to the Christ of Stephen. I am quite sure that the greatest influence in capturing for Christianity under God was that of Stephen.

Here then is the secret of wisdom. It begins with the recognition of God. It leads us so to give ourselves to God as to make it possible for him to give himself to us. Possessing him we come to possess all that life needs. Through him we come to live abundantly, fully. We come to be Christ-like as we give ourselves to him. We too can share Stephen's faith, his graciousness, his power. Surely we can do nothing wiser than to possess ourselves of this offered wealth.

III.

Look next at this Rich Farmer. The Master calls him a fool. It is a good thing that he labeled this poetry, or we should never have discovered its real name. Out of respect to our Lord we call this character here betrayed a fool. But we do not call such men fools when we meet them at the church, or in the club, at the Chamber of Commerce, or on the marts of trade. We esteem them wise. We honor them in life and build monuments to them when they are gone. But in spite of it all, here still is that ugly word, fool. Why was the Rich Farmer a fool?

He was not a fool because he was successful. The Master never set any premium on failure. He was not a fool because he made money. Wealth in itself is never
considered evil in the Bible. Money is not a root of all evil, as we sometimes hear. Paul never said anything so false or so foolish. Money wrongly used may become the root of all evil. It may also be a power for great good. Money is condensed energy. We can use it to the making or the wrecking of men. It is good or bad according to the use to which it is put.

No more was this man a fool because he had made his money in a wrong and dishonest fashion. Of course, ill gotten gains are never in any sense any real gains at all. If you are wise you will not desire wealth that is stained with dishonor. You will not seek for money that comes wet with the tears and crimson with the blood of your fellows. Such money is a curse. But this man had not won his money in a dishonest way. He had gotten it in a fashion that through the centuries has been considered most honorable. He had got it from the land.

Listen to his story,—"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plenty." When I read that I am back again on the old farm. I can feel the caress of the sod upon my bare feet. I can catch the fragrance of the new mown hay. I can hear the Bobwhite call to his mate. I am thrilled by the concert being given by the Cat bird in the thicket at the end of the furrow. I am going home in the gloaming as the day fades into golden, and then into gray, and then into the deep blue of the night sky. I am going home weary, but from a day of innocent toil. This man had taken his wealth from the source of all material wealth, the ground.

No more was he a fool because having made his wealth he sought to conserve it. He would have been a fool had he done otherwise. It is not wise to waste, it is little and silly. God himself has nothing of value to throw away. When the Master fed the multitudes he said,—"Gather up the fragments that nothing be lost." If the infinite God has nothing to waste, surely that is the case of you and me.

Waste is not only foolish, it is wicked. The sin of the Prodigal was that
he wasted his substance with riotous living. When we use any kind of our wealth, whether it is in terms of money or in terms of personality for mean or secondary ends we are wasting it. When this farmer therefore looked about him for some way in which to conserve what he had gained from the soil he was playing the part of a wise man. Wherein then, I repeat, was he a fool?

1. He went wrong where Stephen went right. He was a fool in that he reckoned without God. This does not mean that this farmer was an atheist. I am quite sure that he was thoroughly orthodox. Intellectually he believed in God, practically he did not. He conducted his business day by day just as he would have conducted it if Revelation had been a myth, if God had been a lie.

2. Reckoning without God he confused possession with ownership. He thought because he possessed a farm he owned a farm. Of course, if there is no God such a claim might have a bit of sanity in it. If nobody created this world I suppose one has as much right to it as another. That is certainly the theory of the Godless today. They believe that right is a question of mind. But if God did create the world then it is his and not ours. The wealth that is yours today will not be yours tomorrow. Other hands fingered it before you got here, and other hands still will finger it when you behind the vale have passed. To confuse possession with ownership, therefore, is to play the fool.

3. Having no sense of God's ownership this man was without gratitude and without any sense of obligation. He had been highly successful. The sun and the rain had come at just the right time and in just the right proportion. His fellow-workers had been faithful. But this counted for nothing. He had none to thank for it but himself. He was under no obligation to anybody but himself. He never thought within himself saying, "How can I help those less fortunate?" He thought only of how he might keep all that he made for himself.

4. Then he was a fool because of the confidence he had in the wealth that he had accumulated. Up to the present he had had more of the material than he
could use. This abundance had not satisfied him. He had been heart-hungry and restless. That comes out in what he said to his hungry soul, "Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, enjoy yourself." With more than he could use he hadn't been able to enjoy himself yet. But all he needed in order to find the joy that he had missed was to pile up a little more. He was a fool because he thought he could feed his soul on corn. He thought he could satisfy the God-like within him by the same diet that he gave his donkeys.

5. Finally, he was a fool because of the method by which he sought to save his wealth. He put it all in a barn. I can think of no bigger piece of idiocy than that. The one thing that survives is human personality. To invest in that is to make an investment that will last forever. But he put all his in a barn. He had no conception of any wealth except that which he could hold in his hand. In himself he was a pauper. It was only on the outside that he was worth a penny. His whole career of idiocy is summed up in that one word, "He was not rich toward God." He had not the wealth that God alone can give.

IV.

The sharpest contrast between this foolish and wise man is brought out as they face the last curtain. We are privileged to be in at the death scene of both of them. Of course, death did not make them what they were. But as we see them pass from the seen into the unseen we are able to know something of the wealth that each carried with him.

1. The fool. Just as he was getting ready to live, with the busy hum of the builders in his ears, while his self-congratulations were upon his lips, he had a caller. Death slipped in without ringing for the butler. He set his clay covered spade against the rosewood desk at which the man was working and pushed him out into the cemetery. When they found him his head was bowed upon his plans, new and better barns. They said, "How much did he leave?" The only an-
"Stephen and the Rich Farmer"

answer was, "He left it all." There are no pockets in a shroud.

2. But the wise man. "They stoned Stephen as he called upon God saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. . . And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord lay not this sin to their charge." There were certain things that the stones could do against Stephen. They were cruel and ruthless. They were able to batter the life from his body. But there were certain values over which they had no power. They could not rob him of that faith that gave him such a joyful heart, that his face was as the face of an angel. They could not kill that goodwill that made it possible for him to die even as his Master died, with a prayer for his enemies on his lips. The fool reckoned without God and lost everything. This wise man made his choice of God, and found the best in the life that now is and went out enriched to all eternity.

What is your choice? Fundamentally it is the choice either of the fool or of the wise. If you make the fool's choice, you are guilty of a two-fold blunder. You choose what will not satisfy even if you win. You choose what even if it satisfies you cannot keep. But if you make the choice of Stephen you have that which will meet your deepest needs now and meet them throughout eternity. What have you that is going to last? Stephen had God. And having God he had faith, hope, and love. Therefore, he is richer today than he was two thousand years ago. "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three."

These abiding values may be yours for the taking. To claim them is to be wise. To miss them is to stamp your brow with the music of eternal idocy.
PICKED MEN

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:4-2

I.

The background of this text is interesting. It marks a new departure in the organization of the early Church—the spiritual awakening that began at Pentecost. The risen Christ is demonstrating his ability to weld men formerly far apart into a brotherhood. That is one of the most striking characteristics of early Christianity. To the mind of the average Jew there were only two groups, Jew and Gentile. For the Greek too, Greeks and Barbarians. For the Romans too, Romans and enemies. But these various groups were far from being united within themselves. This was true of the Jews. These were divided into two groups, separated by a wide chasm. There were the Conservatives and the Liberals. The Conservatives were the home born Jews untouched by the culture of the outside world. The Liberals were the foreign born Jews. Who, while sharing the faith of their brethren were yet more liberal because of their contact with the culture of other nations, especially of the Greeks. These Conservatives and Liberals looked askance at each other, and often allowed their suspicion one of another to blaze into hot hate.
But among those converted on the day of Pentecost were both Conservatives
and Liberals. There were some who had never been out of Palestine. But there
were others who represented, as Luke tells us, every nation under heaven. In
spite of the wide chasm that had separated these they were in the process of
being welded into a brotherhood. They acknowledged the Lordship of a common
Christ. They had been baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit. Already those
without were beginning to say what was said later with wistful amazement,-"How
these Christians love each other." This new religion was even then in process
of bridging all chasms and welding men, however previously far apart, into a
beautiful brotherhood. It was little short of tragic therefore when something
happened to disrupt this brotherhood and to set men glaring at each other as
they had done in the days before they had met Jesus.

What happened? Some of those who accepted the new faith were at once
ostracized and disinherited and disowned by their families. This was true of
some of the Conservatives as well as of the Liberals. Those thus disinherited
were faced by dire poverty. They had nothing upon which to live. It was to
meet this emergency that certain men urged by a spirit of brotherhood sold their
possessions and brought the proceeds and laid it upon the altars of the Church.
This money had to be distributed by somebody. The task was undertaken by the
apostles themselves. They failed to give satisfaction. They were accused of
playing favorites. Maybe the accusation was false. Maybe it was true. There
is no way of knowing. The apostles at least did not argue their side of the
case. They saw that old buried hates were in danger of coming to a resurrection.
Therefore they sought a means of conserving the brotherhood.

"There arose a murmuring." What a familiar word that is. What a familiar
experience. Of all the difficult things for our poor fallen race there is nothing
more difficult than learning to live together. "There arose a murmuring." That
happens among the most intimate and devoted of groups. Sometimes it takes place in the home, and keeps up till there is an explosion. It arises in all our human organizations. It even arises in the Church. This murmuring does not mean wholesome, constructive criticism. It means one man criticizing and accusing another.

"There arose a murmuring." How tragic! Here were men and women upon whose lips the shouts of Pentecost had hardly grown silent. Yet, they were glaring angrily at each other, finding fault with each other just as other ordinary sinners were doing in Jerusalem. It is unspeakably sad. Yet, since it happened I am glad that Dr. Luke has told us about it. It saves us from that almost irresistible tendency to idealize the past. How wistfully some of us look back to the good old days: "Men have been doing that," says K. Jerome, "ever since Adam's fifty-fourth birthday." But if you look to the good old days for perfection you will be disappointed. The Church was never perfect. This is the case for the simple reason that it has always been made up of faulty human material such as you and I are. Even in what some consider the "Golden Age" there arose a murmuring.

But if we feel a touch of sadness over the fact that these Christians were glaring at each other, their threatening to divide into separate groups, that ought to be offset by the gladness born of another fact. When they saw that relations were strained, when they saw that great harm was threatening the brotherhood and the world, they set about to prevent the tragedy. Neither side took the bit in its teeth and said, "We will have our way regardless." They did not say, "No man can treat me as you have and get away with it." Instead they settled their differences in a spirit of Christ. These apostles seemed to confess that they had not made a success, therefore, they proposed another plan.

II.

What was the proposal? "Seek ye out among you seven men of honest report
full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." That it, they proposed a further organization of the Church. They proposed the selection of an Official Board. If these ministers had been greedy for power they would have insisted on keeping the finances of the Church in their own hands. But they were not out for themselves, but for the brotherhood. Therefore, they ask that this Board be chosen, whose duty it was to administer the financial affairs of the Church. This was a wise move for many reasons.

1. It set the apostles free to do the particular task for which they had been chosen. The purpose remember in relieving them of the responsibility of administering the business affairs of the church was not in order that they might have a prolonged vacation. It was not that others might work while they remained idle. No more was this Board chosen because the work of administering the material affairs of the church was beneath the dignity of the apostles. There is no thought of superiority of one above another here. Distinction in the Church in the sense that one is to exercise Lordship one over another is something into the genius of Christianity. There is no task that is small that we do for our Lord. Every task that is done in the spirit of love is a great task. The violet is as much a part of God's plan as is the giant redwood, the smallest rivulet as the Mississippi.

These ministers needed relief because it was only by being set free from this task that they could perform their own. We believe in a called ministry. By this I do not mean, as you will see later, that the minister is the only one that is called. But we do believe that God has chosen certain men for the proclamation of his Word. He expects every minister to be able to say with deep humility, and yet with gladness, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath appointed me to preach." Speaking out of my own experience you cannot know how deeply conscious I am of my unworthiness, of my many failures,
yet, through it all there has been that bracing confidence that I am where the Lord wants me to be.

Now, I have always had a conviction that while the minister should be a man of varied interest, he should have one interest as supreme. He should be able to say, "This one thing I do." When Paul wrote to his son in the gospel, a gifted young minister named Timothy, he gave him this wholesome instruction with regard to the work of preaching the gospel, "Give thyself wholly to it." There are some men of great physical, and intellectual, and spiritual vitality who can do many things. Personally I have felt it in my heart to envy such. But knowing my own limitations I feel their achievements beyond me. I have, therefore, put all my eggs in one basket. I believe one of the dangers of the minister in this complex age is to sow himself broadcast. Like Martha, he is likely to be encumbered with much service. He threatens to become afflicted with St. Vitus dance as he flits from one meeting to another and from one committee to another. The congregation that expects the minister to do all sorts of work is seeking its own impoverishment in the impoverishment of its leader. These men were wise in suggesting an Official Board because they already had as much as they could do.

Then this move was wise because these men could administer the temporal affairs of the church better than these apostles who were already loaded with all they could carry. The choice was good for the church as a whole. It was good for the members of this Official Board. Some of them who might not have been otherwise known came to be some of the most daring and brilliant leaders in the early Church. It was a member of this first Official Board, Stephen by name, who has the honor of being the first of the Christian martyrs. These men were picked by a spirit-guided church. I believe that the Christ who gives to every man his work as truly called them to their ministry as he called the apostles to theirs. The need of a divine call for the minister is not one whit more pressing or more
III.

Notice next the qualifications that these early stewards were expected to have. Nothing is said as to their business and culture or lack of it. Three characteristics are mentioned.

1. They were to be men of good report. That is, they were to be men about whom good is reported. They were to be men not only of solid character but of unstained reputation. The Church is a family. When one member of the family goes wrong it reflects on every other member. When one member achieves honor every other member is honored. I have known many stewards along the way that fulfilled this high demand. If I had known them and had known nothing of their church I would have said to myself, "I am going to visit that church. If this friend of mine is a sample of the kind of men that Jesus Christ is making through that church I want to know it and to be a part of it." Blessed is the man who reflects honor upon his church.

2. They were to be men of wisdom. That is, they were to be men of sanctified commonsense. They were to be wise enough to know what the Church is about. What is the Church seeking to do? It is trying to build up a brotherhood. Trying to make men and women one body in Christ. "Why this," said Jesus, "shall all men know that they are my disciples if you have love one toward another." When Jesus gave the acid test of those who were his friends and those who were his foes he did it in this fashion, "He that is not for me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Paul was emphasising the same truth when he wrote to his converts, "Let everything be done with a view to building."

We are here then as the builders of men. We are the builders of a brotherhood. We are the builders of the Church. Individuals tend to fall into ruins
even as houses do. We all need bolstering up at times. Let everything, every penny that you give, every prayer that you pray, every stranger that you greet, let everything be done with a view to building. Our work, you see, is to be constructive. We are to help not to hinder. We are to make friends not enemies. We are to bear in mind always that we cannot saw wood with a hammer.

Then we are to be wise in what our own local church is doing. We are to be wise in the handling of its financial obligations. The Church is a religious institutions, but it is just as truly a business institution. Its affairs, therefore, ought to have the same careful thought, the same careful consideration that you would give to your own business. The steward is to be wise in his appraisal of values. He is to realize that the spiritual values represented by the Church underlie and undergird all other values. The Church has that to say to our modern life that is its one hope. The Church is to salt the earth or the earth will rot down. Being thus wise in our appraisal of values we are to put the cause of Christ and his Church where it belongs. Where does it belong? Where did Jesus put it? He put it first. "Seek you first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness."

There is no measuring the worth of that layman who really takes this course. Blessed is the man that knows how to love his Church and to build it and in so doing he builds his fellows. In so doing he gives youth a better chance. In so doing he makes for a better home life. In so doing he builds a better world. You are to be men of good report and of wisdom.

3. Finally, you are to be men full of the Holy Spirit. By this the author means men with a sense of God in your lives. Here we are brought face to face with the fact that the qualifications for a minister are not one whit higher than those for the layman. We are all to be Christ-like men. We are to be men who live in his fellowship. We are to claim for ourselves that promise, "Lo I am with you alway, every day, even to the end of the age."
"Picked Men"

The reason for these high requirements is very evident. They grow out of the fact that nothing we do in the Church is an end in itself. If teaching a class in the Church school were an end in itself, then anybody could teach who was skilled in the art of instruction. Anybody could preach who could use enticing words of man's wisdom. If handling the financial affairs of this weak church required nothing more than business skill then any man with a gift for handling money would do. But we are seeking to win men and women, boys and girls to Christ and to build them up in Christ. All we do is a means to that high end. Because we are seeking to build a brotherhood of Christ-like men and women we all, whether we work in pulpit or pew need to be possessed of the spirit of Christ.

IV.

What was the result of the choice of this Official Board?

1. Old wounds were healed. Growing antipathies were done away with. People who were finding fault with each other and glaring at each other made up. There is nothing that kills a church like internal strife. It is hard to destroy any nation unless that nation has foes within. It is utterly impossible to destroy a church by outside attacks. But it soon crumbles when its own membership comes to glare at each other.

2. This church coming to possess a new unity, a new love one for another, came to possess also a new and deeper joy. There are many things that fight against our real happiness. It may be destroyed by fear. It may be destroyed by varied forms of sin. But hating somebody is the most fruitful source of wretchedness that I know. A brotherly church is a joyous church.

3. Thus united and joyous they became a victorious church. "The word of the Lord increased," Luke tells us. That is a suggestive phrase. "The word of the Lord." You would think that they were printing some new Bibles over in Jerusalem.
But this is not what it means. It was something far finer and more impressive. Men and women were being won to Christ and were going forth to be living words of God. To touch them was to be made aware of the divine presence. There was a friendliness, a carefreeness, a boyant joy and hopefulness about them that drew to them despondent men who wanted to love and be loved. Millions of folks are lonely today. They want fellowship. They will come to the Church where they find men and women who are brotherly enough to be friendly and to share the faith they have found in Christ with their needy friends. God grant that we may be such a church.
We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. - 2 Thes. 3:1

There is a scene from which we are referred by Acts and Colossians and Ephesians, but these primitive preachers were facing a problem that time became more pressing with the passing of the years. Under the pressure of many duties they were in danger of making the preaching the word of God one of assiduity rather than a vocation. They became more and more the fulness of the Spirit they gave their own time and made it their business of every day. We ministers of today need to make that same resolution not other men in society is expected to do. It is my constant desire that I may be able to lead the my ministry as a word to be brought to every available means to every available. We must single out our first one. It is my contention that through this means we can explain to all men that the ministry of the word is upon one and not upon the Second. Because that is what the word of God is upon one and not upon the Second. Because that is what the minister is doing in our lives. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission. We claim the right to do simply mission.
has helped to bring preaching into disrepute, so
day in any community and say to the
average man: "Come out to church and
you will hear a good sermon." As a
truth in bed and believe a word of it.
We have cried "Wolf! Wolf!" so many
times without producing a fired missile;
for we have fired so many volleys of
tongue practice without once looking to kill
that he is no longer takes us seriously.
Yet it is my conviction that it is
working that America needs. Today's
church is the fastest moving freethinker. When
much as the right hand of preaching. Let there
be light! Great bright in the peaceful
in some measure among our
while France around. That the church is
today can go far toward regaining its
appeal and power by the right kind
of evangelistic preaching.
What then are these? The essentials
of evangelistic preaching?
1. It ought to be interesting, of course it
ought to be true, I can understand that;
should be true, I am assuming that she
has been alone in not enough. i.e. her
best self in the truth. It can in such a
may hear the truth. True man in such a
faithful and littleless fashion that it causes
spin. We need drama from Fred Astair
die failed."

In comparison will it?

We are interesting can fail
to get attention. Without attention we
fail everyday. Preaching is not art
and, but a means to an end. It is to lead to action. But before facts act with us, they must have birth with us, and before they arise with us, they must know what we have to say.

Therefore though what we say may be as true as the Sermon on the Mount and as fundamental as the Decalogue, if only we might better be understood, minds, we might better be convinced. Mind us, we are wasting time, and that time we are wasting upon the people of our congregation, not only by what we are saying, but by what we are saying, instead of our people against preaching and scattering our people against preaching.

So that the true duty of a preacher, is to have the understanding, there are certain factors back a preacher, the gifts. But every preacher can have gifts. But not every preacher can be interested. He must believe what he is saying for he must believe what he is saying, for he must believe what he is saying. And if he is sufficiently interested, he must believe what he is saying. And if he is sufficiently interested, he must believe what he is saying.

Of course, the interesting thing is something forming through time is something forming through time. Something forming through time is something forming through time.

Going down the street the earnest faces. Going down the street the earnest faces.
in little more than to a well-dressed sermon.

not only must we be interested in our own sermon, but in those to whom we are preaching. There is an echo in human

are preaching. There is an echo in human

Your minister preach? A reader asked

your minister preach? A reader asked

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greatest of the Scottish Saints was pastor: How
did he preach? Came the answer: He preached
did he preach? Came the answer: He preached

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flaunt" that is "the masses heard them,
A good sermon is an act of religious education. But what is the point of sermons if they do not reach the hearts of those who hear them? What a waste of time to preach to an audience that is not listening. The message of Jesus is the most effective way to reach people. He preached with authority and certainty, and people believed in him.

What was the reason for this? It was because he offered a different plan of living. He did not believe in the front-line attacks. Such attacks often fail to drive people out. An attack often fails to drive people out even when it succeeds. Such attacks are temporary. They create a sense of security, but it is only temporary. People need a lasting change. They need to be transformed. If a frontal attack on an enemy were to succeed, it would permanently damage it. But if we permanently damage something, it will not be able to recover. Suppose you were to pluck up every tree in the forest and pull up every root. The wheat fields would be left without roots. They would wither and die. People need to be transformed.

But I must also tell you that this is not necessarily the case. Transformation does not always mean a change. It can be a simple change in behavior. The point is to keep the people in the right path. "The path to the mosque is the path of truth." Yes, but any path that leads away from the path of Allah would be a false path. "We do not want to have it." This is the true answer.

Where do the preachers want to lead this? They want to lead people to the path of Allah. They want to lead people to the path of truth. They want to lead people to the path of righteousness. They want to lead people to the path of love. They want to lead people to the path of compassion. They want to lead people to the path of peace.
women. She had been married five times. That for that distinct day was quite a record.

Pat asked his conversation with Jesus.

"When are you going," Pat asked Jesus, "to tell the people about the gospel?" Jesus said, "Tell them, not about the body, but about the soul of the gospel. For years, yet you, Plumber of the village, you, have been that long to know you, you have been that long to know Jesus."

"Are you going to tell the people about it? What? Read the report, it will make you stronger!"

An evangelist from America showed the difficulties and to the point. He had the preacher who had a clear view of the tongue. Before he began to float, he took the seat and began to float. Fifty in the room were out of it.

4. The evangelist"
When he arrived, furthermore others were there as well.

"Daddy," said a keen and interested young man to his father after what must have been thirty minutes of seemingly endless wandering in the wilderness. "Daddy, what were you trying to get us to do? What's the meaning of all this.

"Nothing," might have been the answer, but it wasn't for the only man in all the family was far as I knew was ever hit a target at which he was not shooting. Was it the book that began, "It is shooting time," he said, or did it stand alone, "It is shooting time?"

He bore an array of arrows. To let fly at a mark in a space in the woods in a certain order was a great surprise to him. It was an even greater surprise to the man of war. The arrows were, not merely for target practice, but for action. Some were aimed for action, some for practice. How else was one to learn and how else was one to know that the majority of those in your church who have joined and speak from the pulpit from a desk of some kind, I have made many times with fear and trembling, I hope in not very with the knowledge that one has no business to expect them to obey, but of my business to enable them to obey. To preach with interest, simplicity, you must look at the Author, is nearly always that which makes it interesting.
Dr. Clovis G. Chappell,  
Waverly, Tennessee.

Dear Dr. Chappell,

Today I made reservations for you at the Parker House Hotel here in downtown Boston, next door to Tremont Temple Baptist Church. Your reservations are for January 3 and 4. As you doubtlessly have noticed, our office is in the Tremont Temple Building and I would appreciate a call from you when you arrive at your hotel.

A newspaper man who handles our publicity has urged me to emphasize the importance of sending 300 to 500 words from your message to our office. One of the great weaknesses of Protestant publicity, he says, is that prominent evangelical Christian leaders come and go in the big cities across the land and there is never a word in the newspapers or on radio-television. If you will take the time to give us the essence of your message, he will go over it carefully and pick out the part the newspapers will use and prepare it newspaper style. This story, quoting you, will actually be mimeographed and mailed a few days before you speak and if the papers have space for it, the story will be in type before you get up to speak. We have found this method to be the only successful one and last year the speakers at our Evangelism Conference were quoted by Religious News Service all across the country. Here is an opportunity to get your message beyond the walls of the church and out into the world. I hope you will find it possible to cooperate. We should have your material at least one week before the Conference begins.

Looking forward to a great Conference and the blessing of the Holy Spirit, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Howard R. Keeley
Executive Secretary.