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**THE OPEN FOUNTAIN -- AND OTHER SERMONS**  
**By Joseph Gray**

"There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins."  
-- William Cowper

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**DEDICATION**

To Ruth  
My beloved wife, sweetheart, and counselor:  
the mother of my children, a teacher of other children,  
a minister of the Word of God,  
and a glorious Christian woman;  
this book is lovingly dedicated.

\* \* \* \* \*

**FOREWORD**

All through my ministry I have sought to be, not only a man of one Book, but a man of the whole Book. I have never sought to preach the Old Testament to the exclusion of the New. My richest sermonic ideas come from the great, classic, New Testament texts. My happiest moments of preaching are when I am systematically expounding some New Testament book.

But I have always been happy browsing through the pages of the Old Testament. The men and women who reside there come alive for me with fascinating facets of everyday living, and also with epic deeds of heroic courage.

In this book of Old Testament sermons I have sought to depart just a little from the beaten path. These are not the greatest texts or the great historical passages of the Old Testament, but they are themes and texts that have had an unusual appeal for me.

So here they are -- gospel sermons -- holiness sermons -- sermons for everyday living. I have found several of them unusually effective in my evangelistic ministry. May they bless and challenge your heart to greater zeal in the Master's service.

Yours in His glad service,  
Joseph Gray

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## INTRODUCTION

Someone has said that there is nothing mightier than the utterance of words when it is born in the depths of the soul. And there is nothing more dreadfully unimpressive than a disorderly dance of empty words -- a mob of Words carrying no blood, bearing no secret of the soul.

Out of the breath of a life lived with its varying moods and experiences, coupled with the writer's knowledge and grasp of the Scriptures, he imparts a vibrancy and challenge to men.

That which makes for permanence and lasting value must have a sense of relevancy and completeness, it must hold together giving a feeling of unity, and its most important parts must receive proper accent. In these messages one finds this completeness, this unity balanced with its major accents. Here is the exaltation of the work of Jesus Christ, the necessity of His atonement, its blessings and provisions of grace. The universality of the message of hope is again proclaimed.

Placing this volume of messages in print makes for a further assault -- a hand-to-hand battle with the pernicious forces of Satan. Without compromising orthodoxy, matched with the authority of the Word, the writer has placed within our reach a fresh approach to neglected, overlooked, but important scriptural passages.

With his rich background as pastor, teacher, and evangelist, the writer is ably qualified to present these messages. I warmly commend them to readers everywhere who desire the exaltation of our Christ, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7.)

Milton Poole  
Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene  
Lubbock, Texas

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## Chapter 1 THE OPEN FOUNTAIN

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness (Zechariah 13: 1).

A few years ago I was holding a series of revival campaigns in western Kentucky and southern Illinois. My brother-in-law, who was then pastoring in Paducah, said to me: "I would like to take you out and show you something rather striking."

We drove out from Paducah to the junction of two rivers. We looked first at the streams above their confluence. The one was a clear, limpid blue, bright and sparkling; the other was heavy with mud from the rain in its upper reaches, and it was a dark, roily, muddy brown. We saw the place where they came together, and watched the blue and brown waters roll on for a considerable distance side by side. Then we got back into the car, crossed the great bridge between Paducah and the town of Metropolis, Illinois, and drove downstream for a distance.

Now the river was only one color. The clear, sparkling blue was gone, and the heavy, chocolate-covered stream had taken complete possession of the full width of the river bed. So it is always in the things of this world. Sin triumphs and prevails over the good. Where the two run side by side, the evil soon takes over.

But thank God, there is a brighter side to the picture. My text tells of a fountain in the house of David, a supernatural fountain, the stream that flows from Calvary! And though men are continually pouring their sins into this fountain the stream of Calvary is not defiled. It still flows on, clear and sparkling! For twenty centuries humanity has been washing in that fountain, leaving there the blackness of their lives, and still the stream is a cleansing, purifying, life-giving fountain. Its waters are still unsullied by sin. This is God's way. A fountain that purifies all it touches but remains pure and clear itself!

Look with me at some of the qualities of that fountain.

## I. A HISTORIC FOUNTAIN

Our text tells us that this fountain was opened in the house of David. This takes us back along the stream of prophecy and history to the great Messianic promises.

A. The Promise to Eve (Genesis 3:15). When man fell in the Garden of Eden and the curse of sin and death came upon him, a curse was also pronounced on the serpent, the immediate cause of his fall. The serpent was told that it would now crawl upon the ground instead of retaining its former upright position. Adam Clarke, and many other great Biblical commentators, believe that the serpent walked upright before the Fall. Certain it is that it was cursed by being condemned to crawl upon the ground. But we particularly wish to call your attention here to the fact that coupled with the curse upon the serpent is the promise to the woman of a Seed who shall be the Redeemer:

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3: 15).

This sublime promise is the first pledge to humanity of a Redeemer to come. Two things are hidden in this passage that mark its sublime greatness. First, it is a Seed, a singular Seed. Through one Man, and one Man only, the promise is to come. There cannot be a multitude of deliverers, for "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12).

Second, there is a glorious truth hidden in the Hebrew text. The man is to utterly crush the serpent's head, but the serpent can only lacerate or bruise the Man Child's heel. The glorious final triumph rests with the promised Seed and not with the serpent.

B. The Promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3; 22: 17-18). Centuries pass -- the earth becomes vile -- men are wiped out in the Deluge -- one of the judgments of God. More centuries roll on. Finally God calls a man out of Ur of the Chaldees, Abram by name, to follow Him along an unexplored trail into an unknown country. After that journey his name is changed to Abraham, the father of the faithful, and God gives him a great triple promise. His seed is to be as the sands of

the sea and the stars of heaven; a great nation, Israel is to come from his loins; and in his special Seed, the Messiah, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

In this great pledge Abraham is promised three things: numberless descendants of many nations, one great nation (Israel), and one special Seed. The special Seed, of course, is Jesus Christ. The promise has now narrowed down to the chosen family.

C. The Promise to Isaac (Genesis 26:4). God chooses to emphasize His promise to Abraham by repeating it again to Isaac, and so points out that the promise is not to the fleshly seed but to the spiritual, not to Ishmael but to Isaac.

D. The Promise to Jacob (Genesis 28: 14). God thrice emphasizes His great promise to Abraham by repeating it to his grandson as well as his son. Again the first-born is passed over for the child of promise. It is now Jacob, and not Esau. Notice how many times in giving these Messianic promises this takes place -- the natural heir is not the promised seed.

E. The Promise to Judah (Genesis 49:10). When Jacob blesses his sons upon his deathbed, he utters many great prophecies concerning them that have been literally fulfilled. But again the greatest promise is of the Messiah to come. Again the oldest son is passed by and not only the oldest son, but also Levi, the progenitor of the priestly tribe. And not only the priestly tribe is passed by, but also the specially beloved sons -- Joseph and Benjamin. Certainly if Jacob had been following his human desires he would have chosen one of these. But Spirit-led, he chooses Judah. And not only is Judah promised the Shiloh (the Messiah) but he is also promised a line of kings until the great King comes.

F. David's King (II Samuel 7: 13, 16). And now having given a promise to four successive generations, the prophetic promise is held in abeyance until David comes on the scene about four centuries later. To him the promise is repeated of a line of kings, and a special King, the great Deliverer, who shall reign eternally on David's throne.

Another four or five centuries go by, and then Zechariah the prophet looks back over this line of glorious promises and sees One coming who will be the Seed of the Woman, the Seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Shiloh of Judah, and the King of David. And he sees that One open a fountain in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness.

Here then is no incidental picture by a Minor Prophet, but another in the great gallery of Old Testament pictures of the Christ.

## II. AN OPEN FOUNTAIN

Zechariah also tells us that this is an open fountain. It has been opened in a threefold way. It was opened ideally in the councils of God before the world was created. It was opened historically for every man when Christ died upon the cross of Calvary. It is opened individually when the individual swings open the heart's door and lets Christ come in and take up His abode.

Let me illustrate. A few years ago I attended a group Sunday school convention in Elgin, Oregon. The pastor was Rev. Hubert Helling, now a missionary in Japan. During the course of the day Brother Helling said to me, "Brother Gray, would you like to see my new Sunday school annex?"

I nodded my assent. I expected him to lead me through a door to another part of the building, but instead of that he led me to a blueprint on a bulletin board. It was still only an idea, but to him it was so vivid he spoke of it as an actuality.

Some eight months later we went back to hold a vacation Bible school and a revival for the church at Elgin, and Brother Helling greeted me with the same words, "Brother Gray, would you like to see my new Sunday school annex?"

But his time he opened a door and led me into an annex consisting of four beautiful classrooms. The dream had become an actuality.

So with the plan of salvation. Before ever God created man with the power of choice between good and evil, He visualized the plan of salvation. God did not make man fail, but if man should fail, the plan of salvation was ready to meet his need. And then when man failed, the plan became a reality at Calvary.

But let me carry my illustration a step further. Suppose I had said to Brother Helling, "Thanks for showing me the annex, but I do not think I will use it. We will struggle along with the old auditorium for the V.B.S."

What folly that would have been! But we did use it, and we packed in so many boys and girls that even the new building would scarcely hold them.

So today the open fountain is available for you. It is not just a plan in the vision of God. It is not just a historic actuality made real by the sacrifice on Calvary. It is for you, now! But you must avail yourself of its provisions and bounties if it is ever to become a personal reality for you instead of just a historic reality.

### III. AN ABUNDANT FOUNTAIN

But not only is this an open fountain, but thank God it is an abundant fountain. It is abundant in two ways.

First, there is room enough for everybody. Suppose, if you will, that by some gracious miracle of divine grace a revival should break out in your community that would break all previous bounds, and every man and woman and boy and girl in the community should find the Lord Jesus Christ; still the fountain would be abundant for every need.

Suppose the revival should transcend local boundaries and sweep over all of your state in one glorious day; still the fountain would not be exhausted or robbed of its life-giving power.

Let your imagination run wild. Assume that the revival should jump all state and national boundaries, and in one day all the multitudes of the earth should bow at the foot of the Cross and plunge into the fountain; still its inexhaustible supply would meet the unprecedented demand...

Just as an eternal stream flowing from the eternal snows in the high mountains is a perpetually refreshing stream, so this abundant fountain is continually replenished, because its source is in the heart of God flowing out through the sacrifice of Calvary. It is abundant for every lost son and daughter of Adam's race.

Second, not only is it abundant for everybody; it is also abundant to meet every need of every individual heart. The text says it is for sin, and for uncleanness. Here again is the dual quality of Calvary.

Here I may find forgiveness for every transgression of my life. No matter how guilty and black my past may be, there is power in the blood to wash away all of my sins. I can sing with Cowper:

The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day;  
And there may I, though vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away.

But there is more in the fountain than forgiveness. There is also cleansing. It is for sin and it is also for uncleanness. The inner depravity of my nature that forgiveness does not reach, that carnal heart that is enmity against God, that part of me that was shapen in iniquity, that old man of sin can be plunged into the fountain. The depravity can be purged out, the carnal heart can be changed to a new heart, the first Adam can be exchanged for the Second Adam, the old man can be crucified. This is my glorious privilege if I will come the second time and plunge into the fountain and be made every whit whole.

Moreover, the fountain meets my daily needs. If I toil in the heat of the day, Christ will refresh my heart. If I walk in the shadows, He will be my sunshine. If my friends forsake me, He will be my never-failing Friend. If I go down to death's door, He will be there to take my hand. Whatever the need, the fountain will satisfy that need. Thank God for the abundant fountain!

#### IV. A UNIVERSAL FOUNTAIN

Not only is this an abundant fountain, it is also a universal fountain. It makes no difference what my nationality may be, or what the color of my skin, or what my station in life may be, the fountain is available for me.

The fact that I was born in England does not adversely affect my standing and the availability of the fountain for me, and neither does it make me specially eligible, despite some theories that are abroad today.

The fact that a man is black of skin does not make him any less eligible for salvation. Men may set up two drinking fountains and mark the one, "White," and the other, "Colored," but there is only one fountain of salvation and it is for whosoever will accept it and drink of its life-giving waters. Men may post signs restricting Negroes to the side door or the kitchen door of a restaurant, but there is only one door to the salvation of God.

The fact that a man is a redskin does not shut him out from salvation. While pastoring in the Rocky Mountain area, I saw this brutally savage sign on a cafe, "No dogs or Indians allowed." But there is no such sign on the city of God or the church of Jesus Christ. It is true that the fearful, the unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars are all declared to be shut out of the city of God (Revelation 21:8). But it is their moral state, their failure to drink at the fountain, and not their physical, racial, or social status, that shuts them out.

The universal fountain is for all. It is an interesting fact that the human heart reaches out and claims Christ for its own regardless of race. In the native art of various nations, Christ has been portrayed as a Negro, a Chinaman, an Eskimo, a Malay, as well as a typical Nordic and a typical Latin type. All these variations are because the heart, whatever its nationality, recognizes the universality of the gospel, and reaches out and claims Christ for its own.

#### V. A PERPETUAL FOUNTAIN

Not only is Christ a Universal Fountain, but as far as this gospel age is concerned, He is a Perpetual Fountain. During the past few years I have been working in drought area. Wells that were considered never-failing have dried up. They would pump for a little while and then give out. Not so with Calvary. This fountain will flow as long as the church is in the world, as long as the Holy Spirit is actively persuading the hearts of men, as long as the gospel is being preached.

It is still our glorious privilege to proclaim Christ as Saviour. Although men's hearts are torn by doubt and strife, although men are fearful of the tomorrows in this atomic age, although sin mounts about us in an ever increasing tide, still men and women are finding God in vital personal salvation. Until the church hears the call of the Bridegroom to come up higher we may proclaim to men and women everywhere that this fountain is still open in the house of David.

#### VI. A PERSONAL FOUNTAIN

Last of all, this is a personal fountain. I wrote earlier in this message of the fact that the opening of the fountain ideally in the counsels of God and historically at Calvary does not open it personally for the individual heart. We must do that for ourselves.

The city of Pendleton, Oregon, takes great pride in its pure mountain water. I recall, when pastoring there, that in the springtime the drinking fountains along the street were turned on, and the icy water from the Blue Mountains bubbled and sparkled in an uninterrupted stream on every main street corner. But it was still possible in the midst of that abundance of water to walk down the street with parched throat and tongue and be just as thirsty as ever. The thirsty pedestrian needed to pause at the fountain and stoop and drink. So with Calvary: wherever the gospel is preached the



stream flows clear and sparkling for the taking, but the individual seeker must stop and drink for himself.

In my student days at Pasadena College, a man gave a lecture in the city that made a profound impression on me. In early manhood he had come West to find help for tuberculosis by living outdoors on the desert. In his nomadic, prospector-like wanderings, he became aware of the skeletons of many men upon the desert who had died for lack of water. And the tragedy was augmented by the fact that in many cases they had died within reach of water but did not know it was there so near to them. So this man devoted his life to the task of marking the water holes. He marked the poisonous water holes with danger signs, and he marked the desert trails and canyons at key points with signs marking the way towards good water.

Every year he would spend a few weeks lecturing and showing his beautiful colored slides, in order to gather enough money for a grubstake, and then he would spend the rest of the year wandering the desert and posting his signs. Incidentally, in devoting his life to this work, he proved literally the Master's words, "Whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17:33). For in doing his beloved work he found a goodly measure of health again for himself.

One slide he showed impressed me deeply. Since that time I have had the privilege of standing on the very spot where the picture was taken. It showed a narrow canyon with the camera set so that it took in both forks of the upper canyon. In one fork, dry and arid, was the skeleton of a man who had fallen on his face, reaching forward in his struggle for survival. In the other fork was a small spring bubbling from the ground and turning the canyon into a green oasis. The dead man had been that close to water without knowing it was there, and he had died without reaching it.

As I saw that picture it became a challenge to my heart concerning the stewardship of the gospel. Men dying without the gospel because no one had pointed them the way, and I held in my hand the key to the water of life, the power to direct them to its life-giving flow!

Here is an authenticated instance. I had heard the story and I had told it many times. Then in one of my northern California campaigns I told it in the presence of a former Swedish sailor who later had been a commander in the United States Navy. He confirmed the fact by telling me that in his younger days, as an apprentice sea-man aboard a Swedish ship, he had talked with the survivors of this very ship and heard the story from them that I am about to relate.

A sailing ship drifted into the region of the doldrums in the South Atlantic Ocean. It had no auxiliary engine, and this was before the days of radio communication. The ship lay becalmed for days, and eventually for weeks. The pitch boiled out of the deck because of the heat of the equatorial latitudes in which they were becalmed. The water kegs yielded up their last drops of precious fluid and began to fall apart because of their dryness. Men suffered in the intense heat and cried for water. Finally, when all hope seemed gone, the smoke of a steamship appeared on the horizon.

The flag of distress caught their attention, and the captain of the steamship used his signal flags to query their need. Flags were hastily assembled and the message flashed across the water:

"Water! For the love of heaven, send us water!"

The captain of the steamship read the message and ordered his own signal flags assembled to read, "Let down your buckets right where you are."

Back came the reply, "Do not mock us. We are in desperate need of water."

By this time the ships were in hailing distance of each other, and the captain of the steamship picked up his megaphone and called to them, "I am not fooling you. I mean it. Let down your buckets right where you are."

At the captain's command a bucket was thrown overboard at the end of a line. Then it was drawn up. The sailor holding the bucket presented it to the captain of the sailing ship. Gingerly he tasted of it, and then commanded his men to haul up all they needed. One taste had proved it to be fresh water. More buckets were plunged overboard and everybody received an ample supply of fresh water.

What was the explanation? The ship had drifted into the mouth of the Amazon River where it pushes in a tremendous current far out into the Atlantic Ocean. They were still out of sight of land, but an abundant supply of fresh water was flowing beneath the bows of the ship, while the men were dying of thirst.

O friend of mine, athirst for the water of life, hungry for Christ, yet hardly knowing how to find Him, let me exhort and entreat you to let down your buckets right where you are and partake of the water of life. Life has dealt cruelly with you. You need Christ's grace and powder in your soul. The fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness is flowing past your heart and life just now. Let your buckets down and receive of its fullness in your soul just now.

Let down your buckets right where you are!

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 2 BRASS FOR GOLD

And he [Shishak, king of Egypt] took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. And King Rehoboam made in their stead brassen shields (I Kings 14:26-27).

### I. AN ABUNDANCE OF GOLD

When Solomon became king of the united kingdom of Israel and Judah, God met him in the night hours and gave him an opportunity to choose one great gift for his own. Solomon asked for wisdom, and this choice so pleased God that He gave him (in addition to wisdom) riches, honor, and long life. God told him that he should have: "riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like" (II Chronicles 1:12).

How abundantly the promise of riches was fulfilled in the life of Solomon is revealed by reading the narrative both in the Book of First Kings and in the Book of Second Chronicles. Kings and queens brought of their riches and laid them at his feet. He sent trading vessels to the far corners of the then-known world and brought back almost priceless spices and other rich treasure. All this was in addition to the great treasures that David bequeathed to him with which to build the Temple.

Both Kings and Chronicles record the fact that he made silver to become as common and as plenteous as stones in Jerusalem (I Kings 10:27; II Chronicles 1:14-15). It is recorded that the weight of gold that came to him in one year was 666 talents (II Chronicles 9:13). Using the present value of gold as a standard, this would amount to approximately thirty-five million dollars (\$35,000,000). And this was his income in gold alone for only one year. This takes no account of his other income from precious spices and other great treasures.

It is recorded that when the Queen of Sheba came to visit him she brought him in one present a gift of 120 talents of gold, worth about six million three hundred thousand dollars (\$6,300,000) measured by our present gold standards. And this does not count the caravan of precious spices and jewels which she gave him at the same time.

Such riches stagger the imagination. Solomon, on the authority of the inspired Word of God, takes on a grandeur and splendor that pushes Croesus and Midas back into the shadows. Since these figures are all recorded twice in the two entirely different narratives of Kings and Chronicles with only minor variations, the possibility that they have been inadvertently exaggerated by a copyist's slip of the pen is eliminated. Even the present international multimillionaires, made rich by the profits of war and its aftermath, have not reached such staggering figures as these. Truly God keeps His promises.

But there is an implied promise of spiritual blessing for us in this narrative. Gold, throughout the Scriptures, is the symbol of the divine grace. And gold in such an abundance is a pledge that God wants to pour His grace in rich abundance over our lives.

I read in the New Testament: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work" (II Corinthians 9:8).

And again I read where Paul tells us that we may have "abundance of grace" (Romans 5:17).

The God who gave Solomon such amazing supplies of physical riches delights even more to give to His people "the exceeding riches of his grace" (Ephesians 2:7).

How foolish for us to live in such niggardly poverty when such a rich abundance is ours to command!

As I read on in the narrative concerning Solomon, I am struck by the lavish use he made of his wealth in the service of God. It is true that he also used it for his own house and for the great judgment hall that he built, but the narrative clearly indicates that he put the building of God's house first, and poured out his lavish treasure on the Temple before he built the other buildings.

The record declares that he overlaid the oracle with pure gold, and did the same for the interior of the house, the altar, the cherubim, and all the other furnishings. Then he made the doors that were a fifth part of the great wall and covered them also with pure gold. This is only a part of his lavish use of gold in the house of God.

So with us. God wants us to pour out on others the bounties of His grace that He has poured upon us in lavish measure. He wants us to pour them out with the same lavish hand with which He bestowed them upon us. And as we pour out the rich measure of His grace upon others, He pours it back into our lives in even richer measure to replenish the supply.

Among the other things that Solomon made of gold it is recorded that he made 200 targets, or large shields of gold, weighing 600 shekels each, and worth approximately ten thousand five hundred dollars each (\$10,500). He also made 300 smaller shields of gold weighing 300 shekels each, and worth about five thousand two hundred fifty dollars each (\$5,250). Not much more is said about them in the narrative concerning Solomon, but from what we learn of them later in the narrative concerning Rehoboam, it is evident that when the king went to the house of God an honor guard was formed in the great judgment hall, the shields were taken down from the wall and carried by the guard, and thus became a symbol of the king's worship of Jehovah.

Here again is a challenge to our hearts and a spiritual lesson. How imperative it is that we bring our best in our worship before God! Nothing less than our best is acceptable. If we worship bountifully we receive bountifully. If we bring only the dregs and offscourings of our lives to the worship of God we cannot expect Him to pour out His rich grace upon us.

What an impressive sight it must have been when Solomon's mighty men, carrying the great golden shields as the symbols of God's grace, escorted the king into the Temple, where he bowed and poured out his heart to God in lavish love!

## II. BRASS FOR GOLD

But now turn with me to the narrative concerning Rehoboam from which I selected the text for the sermon (I Kings 14:21-31).

Solomon was dead. Rehoboam was on the throne. He had spurned the advice of the elders and accepted the counsel of the young men, and as a consequence the kingdom had divided under his hand. He was left with only Judah and Benjamin for his kingdom. It would still have been possible for him to retain a measure of his former glory if he had followed God. Rehoboam's sin and wickedness in the northern kingdom of Israel would have made it possible for Rehoboam to be a great spiritual leader of all the twelve tribes of Israel, as well as to be the king of Judah, if only he had seized the opportunity.

But like many others, he missed the golden opportunity by his own selfish sinfulness. The record is that he led Judah into awful idolatry. They built high places, images, groves -- places of adultery in the name of religion. Sodomy and other abominations became common practices in the land. After five years of such abomination God said, "It is enough," and brought His judgments upon Rehoboam.

But notice this. Rehoboam did not forsake the Temple of God and the worship of Jehovah. He committed all of these abominations at the same time that he faithfully observed all the ritual of sacrifice to Jehovah.

Like other Jews of a later generation, he sought to rationalize his religion. He said he would not have any other gods before Jehovah. He would keep the altar of Jehovah in first place, but would bring the altars of heathen gods just as close to the altar of God as he possibly could.

How much like that are many professing Christians today! They do not want to be called pagan or unbelievers. They go through the forms and ceremonies of Christianity while retaining the sinfulness of the world in their lives. They keep God in the foreground as far as nominal assent to His teachings are concerned, but they let sin and self and worldly pleasures crowd just as close to the altar of God as they possibly can without obscuring it.

Five years of Rehoboam's reign went by with the iniquities piling up mountain high, and then God moved in with His judgments. He used Shishak, the king of Egypt, as His scourge. As a consequence of the victory, Shishak laid tribute upon Rehoboam and the kingdom of Judah. The record is that "he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all" (I Kings 14:26).

The narrative goes on to say, "He took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made."

Because Rehoboam would not walk in accord with God's commands, he lost the rich treasure which was rightfully his as Solomon's son. If we will not walk in the way of God we will lose the rich heritage of grace which is rightfully ours as children of God. We will lose the heritage handed down to us by godly parents, and if they are alive to see our downfall, we will break their hearts as well as squander their heritage.

During the time that I was writing this chapter I had a conversation with a mother in Israel. Her son was in the revival services the day before, but he slipped out early to keep from meeting her and to keep from facing up to an altar call. He will not go home to see her because he is ashamed of the mess that sin has made of his life. His mother stood with tears in her eyes after the service that night and asked me to covenant with her that God would bring him back home. He has lost his home, his religion, his sense of well-being, and his faith in God. Yet he will not turn and find the grace that he needs.

But the most tragic thing in the life of Rehoboam is yet to come. The golden shields, symbols of the grace of God, are now in the hands of Shishak, king of Egypt -- symbol of our

archenemy, Satan. So instead of acknowledging his guilt and his need, Rehoboam makes shields of brass to replace the shields of gold, and goes on in the same old way.

He still assembles his royal guard in the hall of justice. He still takes down the shields from the wall. He still marches to the Temple and bows his knee at the altar of God. And with all of this, he still worships idols, and courts the practices of lust and evil in the name of religion.

He has not repented at all. He has made no sign that he is sorry that the judgments of God have caught up with him. He goes on as before with the pomp and ceremony of religion, but now the brass of human endeavor has taken the place of the gold of God's glory. He is trying to hide the fact that God has departed from him by keeping up all the outward forms when he knows the God given riches are gone.

Again, how kin that is to men of today! It is true both at the group level and at the individual level; men will substitute human endeavor when they lose the grace of God's glory.

While I hold no brief for any special type of worship, yet it is a noteworthy fact that as the glory departs from the church, pomp and ceremony increase. Churches which in their yesterdays were as simple and free as the apostolic church have increased their ritual to an alarming degree as their first love has died out. It is a natural instinct of the human heart to increase the outward form as the inner fire dies down. And by the same token, when a spiritual rebirth comes to the church, liturgy and religious trappings are discarded for freedom of worship.

Look back at the early centuries. The New Testament church was simple in its worship and almost entirely nonliturgical. As apostasy deepened and worldliness reared its head inside the church, forms and ceremonies increased. When the Reformation came, much of the form and ceremony was swept aside. But as the church entered the Sardian period, and had a name to live but was dead, liturgy and ceremony again became dominant. The coming of the Wesleyan revival again brought a swing away from liturgy to freedom of worship.

The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene has a statement on this matter. It reads: "The Church of the Nazarene is composed of those persons who have voluntarily associated themselves together . . . and who seek the simplicity and spiritual power manifest in the primitive New Testament Church" (1956 edition, section 23, page 35).

It might be well to ask ourselves occasionally if we are keeping this goal before us. We ought to ask ourselves whether our spiritual life as a church is the gold of divine grace or the brass and pomp of human ceremony.

What is true at the group level is true also at the individual level. Spontaneity of religion and freedom and fervor in prayer accompany a vital heart relationship with God. But as we lose our first love and compromise in our living and let down in our standards, we become stilted and formal in our personal worship of God. We become uneasy when the Holy Spirit pours himself out in blessing on other hearts. We are offended when the Shekinah glory manifests itself in the services. We do not care to see men and women weeping their way to Calvary. Yet all the time we maintain our shields of brass without the glory of divine grace upon our hearts as in other days.

Poor Rehoboam, guarding the shields of brass as zealously as if they were shields of gold, and going through all the ceremonies of the Temple as faithfully as of old! Poor modern Rehoboams, guarding the ashes of an empty experience of other years as zealously as if God were now present, and going through all the ceremonies of religion -- even inside the free form of worship of an evangelical church -- as zealously as if the grace and glory that were manifest in other years were still present!

### III. GETTING THE GOLD BACK

But thank God we do not have to close with this note of hopeless futility. There is another chapter to the story.

Rehoboam finished his reign, died, and was buried, Abijam reigned in his place. Abijam walked in all the sins of his father. That is practically all that we know about him. Then he died and was buried.

But now a new day is to dawn for Judah. Asa, the grandson of Rehoboam, comes to the throne. Turn with me to II Chronicles and read in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters the glorious account of the revival that comes to Judah under his kingship:

And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God: for he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him (14:2-5).

Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought the Lord our God, we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered (14:7).

Then when Zerah the Ethiopian came up against him with a million men and three hundred chariots, Asa cried to God with these words:

Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee (14:11).

In the next chapter Azariah the prophet says to Asa and his people:

The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you (15:2).

In response to this challenge we read:

And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; and all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them; and the Lord gave them rest round about (15:12, 15).

Last of all we read:

And he brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, . . . silver, and gold, and vessels (15:18).

While the golden shields are not specifically mentioned in the last passage, and no record exists of just how Asa recovered the vessels of the Temple from Shishak, it is evident that they are back in his hands. They may have passed from Shishak to Zerah, and then have been recovered when he overthrew Zerah. But however they came back, they are back in his hands because he has put God first, and put away the strange gods out of his kingdom. The groves with their sinful adultery in the name of religion, the sodomy, and all the other sinful practices have been renounced, and God has been given His rightful place in the lives of His people. And so the gold, symbol of divine grace and glory, has been restored to the kingdom, and the brass has been discarded.

So with us today. If we have drifted away from God's will for our lives, if we have let the glory leak out of our souls, we may return to His altar and put away the things of this world from our lives.

If we will do this, God will give us the victory over our enemies, He will bring back the joy and gladness into our lives, and He will restore the gold of His grace and glory.

We do not have to be futilely guarding brazen shields. We do not have to be Rehoboams. We do not have to be satisfied with profession without the reality of possession. We can have the gold of His grace back again in our hearts.

If you have drifted into worldliness or deadness of spiritual life, will you, just now, put it out of your life, and receive again the gold of His grace in place of the brass of human efforts? You can if you will.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Chapter 3 SPIRITUAL RAMPARTS

When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for the roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence (Deuteronomy 22:8).

Tucked in the midst of various and sundry laws concerning everyday living is this little gem of truth. It is part of Moses' farewell address to Israel in which he is preparing them for the



new mode of living they will encounter when they leave their tents for the more permanent buildings of brick and stone.

To understand all the implications you must take a good look at an Oriental house and the Oriental way of life. If you look at a typical house from the outside you will see no windows and only one strong door. It will be apparent that the wall encloses a garden and patio as well as the rooms. Grouped about the patio on three sides will be rooms, all opening inward on the garden. Above the rooms a flat roof stretches out to protect them from the elements. At one corner of the patio an open stairway ascends to the roof. If the house is large, a small guest-house may be built on a section of the roof. If such is the case, the portion of roof it occupies will be walled off from the rest of the house, and have its own stairway down the outside of the house. This gives access to the guest-house on the roof, yet keeps the rest of the roof and also the patio inviolate from intruders.

At nightfall in warm weather the roof, which has been deserted during the heat of the day, becomes a beehive of activity. Pallets which have been stored below, or in a closet on the roof, are pulled out and unrolled, and the flat roof becomes a family bedroom. Men, women, and children of the family, as well as guests, all spread their pallets on the roof and sleep on them to catch a breath of air.

Now it is obvious that under these conditions a flat roof without some safeguard at the edge would be a place of peril, especially to the young and to those unfamiliar with its pattern. It is even conceivable that a careless, sleepy householder might fall from such a roof himself. The roof must be built with a parapet, a rampart, a battlement. In other words, more adapted to our time, with a half-wall that would keep people from falling off the roof. In like manner we put a rail or half-wall in front of our balconies in churches and other public buildings. We take it so for granted that we never give it a thought. Yet when it is drawn to our attention we can see the folly of leaving it off.

Some years ago I was pastor in a northwestern city. In that same city was another church with a balcony. One Sunday morning while teaching a Bible class, one of the men stepped backward against too low a rail. It buckled him at the knees and he lost his balance and fell to the main floor. Fortunately his injuries were slight and no serious harm was done. But the balcony was closed immediately, and before it was used again a higher railing was installed for the safety of the people.

In General Lew Wallace's great story, *Ben-Hur, a Tale of the Christ*, there is a striking episode which forms the basis for much of the later part of the story, Ben-Hur is a Jewish youth of a good family. He and his sister are eating a late breakfast on the roof of the house. A Roman procurator, Valerius Gratus, is leading a group of Roman soldiers through that particular street. The Jewish people on the roof tops cry out against them and pelt them with stones and old shoes. In their excitement, Ben-Hur and Tirzah lean far out over the battlement to watch the scene. Ben-Hur notices that a tile is loose on the roof edge, and leans out with a shout of alarm to catch it, just as it comes loose and falls. Valerius Gratus receives the full impact of it on his forehead since he has just looked up at the shout. He is knocked from his saddle unconscious and believed to be dead by his soldiers. The rioting grows more furious, and as Gratus recovers consciousness he exacts a terrible vengeance upon Ben-Hur and his household.

The house is looted, all the wealth is confiscated by Gratus and Messala, Tirzah and her mother are confined to a secret cell in the tower, which is contaminated with leprosy, and Ben-Hur is condemned to the galleys for life. It is out of this episode that all the later story stems, including Ben-Hur's contacts with the Christ and the healing of his mother and sister.

I have given you this much of the story to indicate the important part the rampart plays in the Oriental house. This rather lengthy introduction and explanation of the rampart around the Jewish home was written to suggest to you that just as truly as protection is needed and ordered in the physical realm, so protection is needed and ordered in the spiritual realm. And so, applying this command to spiritual things, and especially to the sanctity of the home, we suggest a few thoughts under these headings:

1. Protection Is Needed.
2. Protection Can Be Provided.
3. Protection Will Be Honored.

#### I. PROTECTION IS NEEDED.

If there ever was a time when we needed to build spiritual ramparts about our homes it is today. The rising tide of juvenile delinquency, the decreasing influence of the average home, the larger place that outside interests play in the lives of our children, the advent of radio and television into the home, the waves of filth and smut in magazines and books, the lowering of moral standards in so many ways, the rushing pace of modern life -- all make it imperative that we build our ramparts firmly and strongly.

Yet in building ramparts we must not build our walls so high that they become prison cells. Sooner or later our children will have to mingle with the world, even if they do not partake of the pleasures of the world. When that time comes they need to be ready for the battle of life. To isolate them so completely that they know nothing whatsoever of life will be to subject them to a sudden shock against which they have no defenses. To use again the analogy of the ramparts, the rampart is a breast-high wall at the highest, not a wall that shuts out all vision and all access to the outside.

But building together as Christian families we can share in the task of building the ramparts, so that every member of the family from the youngest to the oldest feels that the ramparts are their ramparts -- not something imposed on them by others in an arbitrary and unreasonable way.

#### II. PROTECTION CAN BE PROVIDED.

It is impossible to lay down hard and fast rules for every phase of life that will satisfy everybody. Varying customs in various countries and in various parts of our own great country will color our thinking to some extent.

For example, a certain type of game may be played in one section of the country with no taint of gambling and Sabbath breaking attached to it, while in another part of the country it may be suspect at both points. Another example, in one community a certain type of community organization may be associated with worldly amusements to the point where a Christian cannot belong to it, while in another community the stress may be all on social service to the point where the Christian finds it a channel of joyful service.

Each individual Christian will find individual problems of conduct that must be met in the light of his own conscience and their relationship to the life about him. And so it will be with the home. No hard and fast rules will meet every situation. Conditions will arise which must be solved in the light of the immediate surroundings. But always there will be standards which must be met.

A. What does the Bible say? If the Bible expressly forbids it, then the argument is settled.

B. What does my conscience say? If my conscience condemns me, regardless of what anybody else does, then it is forbidden territory.

C. Does it hinder my spiritual life? If such is the case, then again it cannot have any place in my life.

D. Will it hurt my influence on others? Of course I cannot please everybody. No matter what I do, some will be offended, but if I know a certain course of action will cause men and women in general to lose faith in my Christian experience, then it is not for me.

Within the bounds of these standards a wholesome, normal, and joyous Christian life can be worked out in which both old and young alike will find it a delight to worship the Master and build a strong rampart around the home. The rampart will not be irksome but it will restrain the careless impulse. The rampart will not shut off all outside view but it will keep many things out.

Let us see, then, if we can find some of the stones with which to build our rampart even though we cannot particularize down to the last detail.

The first stone in the rampart we would consider is family prayer. Perhaps it would be even better if we considered family prayer as the mortar that holds all the stones of the rampart together. Certainly we must have a lot of it if our rampart is to be strong.

We hear the expression often these days. "The family that prays together stays together" Nothing binds a family together like real prayer. It eliminates quarrelsomeness. You cannot go successfully from a quarrel into family prayer, and you are not likely to go from family prayer into a quarrel. If you constantly face the fact of the family altar, the mere fact that it is there will tend to smooth the path of life. Don't be afraid to let the children pray for themselves. It will be good for them and good for you. Sometimes their prayers will be like a refreshing breeze from heaven because of their simplicity and childlike faith.

Another stone in the rampart should be complete honesty in all things. Do not tell your children not to lie and then send them to the door to tell the neighbors you are out. Do not brag about sharp deals at the shop or office and then expect your boys and girls to have the proper regard for "mine and thine." Do not constantly criticize the preacher in the family circle and then tell him what a good man he is at church. If you do, your children will soon lose interest in both him and you.

Another stone in the rampart should be constant and frequent use of the Bible. And here I want to register my protest against a common practice. Don't buy your children only small-type Bibles and expect them to read them. You may want them to have a small Bible to carry, but do make a large-type Bible easily available to them in the home. In public school readers, Sunday school papers, and every other type of child literature the largest type is reserved for the smallest children. Try giving your child a Testament with type as large as a primary reader, and watch him eat it up. Don't be so busy you can't read the Bible and Bible stories to even the littlest ones. Some of you will spend a hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars for a children's encyclopedia or a musical instrument, and then complain if you are asked to spend as little as five dollars for religious books for your boy or girl.

Build up another part of the rampart with careful, yet sane, Sabbath observance. Make the day different from every other day. Make the Sunday morning breakfast a special treat. Don't stay in bed till thirty minutes to Sunday school time. Give the Lord a little of the beautiful morning of His day. If you turn on the radio, try to have it minister to His glory. Don't spend Sunday afternoon in idle gadding about. Give some of your time to the family and some of it to the Lord's service. Honor the Lord by being in His house on Sunday evening. Perhaps you think you don't need the service, but the truth is you need it to make it a success.

Try to build such a happy relationship between you and your family that it will serve to build another section of the rampart. Take time to listen to your children's problems, and do your best to put yourselves in their shoes once in awhile. Find time to go with them to their public school activities. Be parents of whom they can be proud in their association with others. Out of such happy fellowship will come the quiet times when they will let you into their hearts and reveal their inmost secrets, and in times it will be easy to turn their faces toward God.

Build another stone in your rampart by making your home a place where your child would rather be than anywhere else. Find games that you can fully approve of, and put them in an easily accessible place for family use. Take some time to play with the family. Exercise a reasonable censorship over the reading matter that comes into your home, but don't be afraid to spend a little money and fill up a few shelves with good books, yet readable books. That is a lot better than a lot of shouted "Don'ts" every time the book or magazine is not to your liking. Put pictures on your walls that are a positive, radiant testimony for Christ. When doing door-to-door visitation or selling, you don't have to ask if some homes are Christian; the evidence is right there on the walls and the stand table. Yet it is not blatant or obtrusive. It is a real part of the home. Make the pictures on your walls, the books in your bookshelves, the sheet music on your piano, the magazines in your rack, the songs on your radio or phonograph, all minister to Christ without being ostentatious or hypocritical about it.

Build another stone into your rampart by making your children feel that Christian activity is a happy and a normal thing. Don't be afraid to recognize that there are, some other phases to life. Your children will have school and social obligations. Help them to honor them, but to honor Christ and the church first. Try to avoid clashes between the various loyalties, but within reasonable bounds, help them always to put Christ first.

Other stones to build into the rampart will occur to you as you go along: some sexual instruction, right attitudes in relationship to the opposite sex, modesty in dress, honor to old age, sweet yielding of individual rights, a temperate use of time, integrity of the given word, and above all. love -- love between members of the family circle and love towards God. If you are a father or mother seeking to build a rampart for your children, never let your own devotion lag.

### III. PROTECTION WILL BE HONORED.

It is my profound conviction that God honors the parents who diligently seek to honor Him in safeguarding the home.

Several families occur to me as I think along this line. I remember a widow woman whom I knew several years ago. She testified several times in my presence that, even though she was a widow, if God wanted all her six boys for Christian service He could have them all. The last time I checked on the family, every one of them was a full-time, active Christian worker. Preachers, singers, missionaries -- she had given them all to God, and God had given her in return a family to rejoice over.

I think of a fine Christian layman who was a member of my congregation. He sought to make his home a happy place for his boys. He organized a family orchestra, and augmented it with other youngsters in the community. At one time he gave up his business and moved to another community because he felt the boys of that community needed him. His boys were old enough by then to help him in that project. Now they are fine young Christian businessmen.

I think of another family who were my mainstays in another church. All the boys are now active, Christian laymen and the daughter is a missionary. Their home was a happy place to be in. They loved the Lord and they loved their family. My boy delighted to be with their boy, and the atmosphere was such we were happy to have him there.

I think of my own family. We tried to make home the kind of place I have described while they were growing up. All our children sought the Lord early in life, and they are all active Christians today.

I know some parents have not had such happy experiences, though they have been devoted Christians. But I still believe that God will honor us if we build spiritual ramparts about our homes, and then the blood of our children will not be upon our heads, even if they choose to jump over the ramparts. However it is better to build a fence around the top of the cliff than to build an elaborate hospital at its base.

How about your home? Are you building spiritual ramparts about your home to keep your boys and girls safe? You can if you will. It will cost you time and effort, but it will amply repay you in the lives of the boys and girls as the years go by.

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#### Chapter 4 THE POSSIBILITIES OF YOUTH

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

When the Word of God speaks with a command it is well to heed that command. In this verse there is a definite command of God, "Remember now thy Creator" It is not just a suggestion to be ignored or obeyed as our passing fancy dictates, but it is a clear-cut command, rejection of which will bring disaster in our lives.

Yet the commands of God are not arbitrary; they are always reasonable -- and this one is no exception to the rule. Here are four reasons why we should turn to God early in life.

##### I. YOUTH IS THE ONLY TIME OF WHICH WE ARE CERTAIN.

It is a common fault of humanity, and especially youth to feel that we have all the time in the world. But this is not so! We live in an age of disaster and sudden death. About us on every side are the marks of the age in which we live. On every highway about the city where I live are signs with little crosses on them denoting where highway travelers met sudden death. Here are seven in one group on an open road, not far away five more, six more at an intersection, four more at a railroad crossing. One here, two there -- so the story goes. Every morning paper carries the story of sudden death. There are pictures of disaster in various forms: hurricane, tornado, flood, fire, winter storms, asphyxiation, airplane disasters, train wrecks -- and this takes no account of the crimes of violence.

Two episodes stand out from my early years with striking clarity. Even though they were years ago, they still bring sobering thoughts today.

One occurred on an Armistice Day shortly after World War I. Two groups of students had gone out from our college on mountain hikes. I came home with my group and knew nothing of what happened to the other group until the next morning.

The other group had spread their picnic lunch in a grassy spot in a canyon. A stone carelessly kicked off the trail by a hiker above crashed into the skull of one of the boys from the school. Hastened out of the canyon on an improvised stretcher, he was met by an ambulance and rushed to the hospital for an emergency operation. He never regained consciousness. Fortunately, he was a splendid Christian young man. His death caused many of his classmates to ask themselves if they were as ready to meet death as he was. The memorial service at the college, and the funeral at the downtown church started a genuine revival in the community.

The other event took place in my student days and overflowed into one of my first pastorates. One of the boys in the dormitory received a telegram to come home at once, that his sister was seriously injured. Like most other students, the fare home was a problem. We made common cause with him and scraped out our wallets and coin purses, and rushed him to the night flier headed north. Next morning he had to change trains and was walking the station platform at the junction. He heard the newsboys crying out the news of a high school disaster in his home community. Purchasing a paper, he was confronted with a list of fourteen dead students, all well known to him, and all from the little community where he lived. Included in the list were the names of his sister, his sweetheart, and his cousin. He hurried home in time to see twelve of the fourteen buried in a common grave.

A year later, on the anniversary of that disaster, I was pastor in that same country community and learned more of the details of the disaster. A revival had been in progress in a small community Methodist church, about a mile down the road from my church. Some of those who were in the bus crash had sought and found the Lord in that revival. Two of the girls ran out of the house that morning and left the hymnbook open on the piano at the song they had been practicing to sing that night. For them it would have been a definite Christian testimony. But that was not all of the story. While some of that group had said a definite "Yes" to Christ in that revival, some of the fourteen had said a definite "No" to Christ. They were buried in a common grave in a community wide service, but the surface evidence would lead one to believe that they did not share a common destiny.

But it is not always death that changes our lives. We may hear a doctor's verdict that jolts us awake to the brevity of time, and ever after, life takes on a different aspect from what it had before.

Such was my experience. I came before a doctor for examination in the draft of World War I. Because I had been doing some government security work I did not come up with a group of draftees but met my doctor in the privacy of his own office. I walked out of his office stunned by the verdict that I had less than two years to live in the normal course of human events. Unwilling to accept his verdict, I stood a few weeks later before a specialist in a nearby city and heard him cut the time to one year.

That God in His infinite mercy chose to spare my life, give me an instantaneous healing, and send me back to a life of full usefulness a few months later was all a closed book to me that day.

Stunned, I gazed at the wreckage of my life. My application to the missionary board was withdrawn in a letter blurred with tears. My sermon notebook was closed, for the doctor had said I might die in the pulpit if I ever tried to preach again. My hopes and aspirations lay in a shattered heap at my feet, and I hurried away to a mountain retreat to gather together the fragments that were left to me.

At the foot of the Cross I found faith and comfort, and also a new set of values. Life has been better ever since because of the rich bounties of grace He poured out on my life in the hours of sorrow and need.

Youth is not only the one period in life most certain; it is also true that:

## II. YOUTH IS THE TIME OF DECISION.

It is a fact so well known as to leave little room for argument or proof, that the number of those who find God in the early years is so great in proportion to those who find Him in later years that the fact is startling and overwhelming.

One survey made some years ago by the American Sunday School Union revealed this figure: 85 per cent of those who became Christians did so before they were eighteen years of age. Other surveys give results so strikingly similar that they seem like carbon copies of the same survey. Like many other pastors and evangelists I have conducted inquiries as to the age of conversion in many congregations, and the results always come out to about the same percentage.

When I was a boy I lived near a pottery in England. I watched the potter with fascinated gaze as he shaped the clay on the potter's wheel into lovely vessels of various shapes. He would reach into the box of clay beside wheel and take out a piece of clay from under the damp cloth. While his feet busily tramped the treadles that turned the wheel, his skillful hands fashioned the clay into its final shape as it spun around on the wheel. Most of the time the vessel would come to perfection and be carefully lifted onto a board for its trip to the baking kiln.

But sometimes a lump of clay would develop a flaw or a bubble on the wheel that could not be kneaded out by his skillful fingers. In that case the lump of clay was deposited in a second box, smaller than the original one. When he was through with the original lump of clay he would take this second box of clay and shape it into less attractive and coarser forms than the original clay. If the flaws occurred again on the second or third trip to the wheel, he would throw the discarded clay into a scrap box, significantly called "the hell box." He explained to me that if the clay was worked too many times the grain or fiber of it would become so coarse it would not make an acceptable vessel at all. Not being a potter, I do not know if that is true of all types of clay, but it was true of the clay at these particular potteries at least.

What a challenging picture of God's dealings with our lives! Continued rebellion against His will eventually brings us to the place where rejection by Him is the only possible termination to the picture. Furthermore, continued rejection of His will eventually makes the power of decision for Him almost, if not entirely, impossible in our lives.

## III. YOUTH IS THE TIME OF PLASTIC PREPARATION FOR CAREER AND SERVICE.

Dwight L. Moody was fond of saying, "You save an old man and you save a soul, but you save a young man and you save both a soul and a life." How true that is, and yet how frequently we



neglect child conversion and concentrate entirely on adult conversion! Yet not only is youth the time of decision for Christ; it is also the plastic period in which careers are formed.

In the artistic realm most of the great careers begin early. Occasionally there is a late-blooming flower like Grandma Moses, but for one like this there are hundreds who are well on the road to great careers before they are out of their teens. In many others the impelling urge was there even if it did not come, to full fruition until later years.

Mendelssohn was filling the house with sweet melodies at the midnight hour when he was only six, because of the dynamic urge within him. I heard Yehudi Menuhin, the great master of the violin, move a great audience with his playing when he was only a lad in knee breeches. Michelangelo was whipped time, and again as a boy for defacing the whitewashed walls of his father's dwelling with drawings made with charcoal taken from the family fireplace. William Cullen Bryant wrote his great masterpiece, "Thanatopsis," when he was only seventeen. And so the, roll of great young artists might be stretched out indefinitely.

But not only must the divine spark be manifested early in life; it must be cultivated and prepared for its field of service. Preparation is an essential element of service.

When I was called to preach in my teens, I felt that I must be at it overnight, and so wrote to my district superintendent. His reply on a penny postal card was chilling to my new-found enthusiasm, but contained some of the soundest advice, I have ever received. He wrote:

Dear Joe:

Don't forget that a call to preach is also a call to preparation!

Your brother in Christ,  
H. H. M.

Turn to the life of Jesus and see that the ratio there is thirty years of preparation for three years of service. Turn to Moses and see that the ratio of his life was eighty years of preparation for forty years of service, and the bulk of his work was done in two brief years after he led Israel out of Egypt. Paul was skilled in the wisdom of the Hebrews, and he was a graduate of the Sanhedrin school, a long and arduous intellectual preparation. Yet after meeting Christ on the Damascus road in his dynamic conversion, he still found it necessary to spend three years in the desert of Arabia in the school of Christ (Galatians 1: 17-18).

Some years ago when J. Berg Esenwein was the editor of the Writer's Monthly, he devoted the whole front page of the magazine one month to this capsule editorial set in bold type:

#### **APPRENTICESHIP**

Don't despise an apprenticeship. Careers, like skyscrapers, are begun in the cellar. If you think you are the exception go ahead and find out. -- J. Berg Esenwein --

Dr. P. F. Bresee, founder of the Church of the Nazarene, delivering a commencement address at Deet's Pacific Bible College, the forerunner to Pasadena College, said something like this:

If I had only ten years to live, and knew that at the end of that ten years I should be called upon to give a final account of my stewardship, I would spend the first five years of my life in preparation for my work, knowing that I could win more souls to Christ and accomplish more for the kingdom of God in the last five years, equipped and prepared for the task, than I could do in the whole ten years without adequate preparation.

It is because of these two factors -- the early upthrust of the divine spark and the necessity of adequate preparation, plus the, elasticity of the mind in youth -- that it is vital for young people to give their hearts to Christ early in life and link their Christian experience on to the choice of a career. This is especially true if that choice of a career takes the form of a call from God to some special avenue, of full-time Christian service.

Businesses recognize this necessity. Few businesses will accept a man to train for any responsible position who is over thirty-five years of age, some even limiting their choices to men under twenty-five. Every large college campus is crowded in the spring with representatives of big business firms and government agencies, seeking to capture the choicest youth for their business activities while they are still plastic.

Missionary boards recognize this necessity also. Very few boards will give any consideration to a man or woman over thirty-five. The necessity of plasticity is evident in the learning of new languages and customs and in the adaptation to life on foreign soil.

Even homeland churches are setting more and more of a premium on youth at the helm. Some of us who are older may feel this is being pushed too far and we are being laid on the shelf too soon, but the fact is there whether we like it or not.

And so, in a very practical manner, it is reasonable to "remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth," lest life sweep past you before your decision is made and so the best opportunities of life are gone forever.

#### IV. YOUTH IS THE TIME OF NO REGRETS.

The last half of my text says, "While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

One of the greatest tragedies of life is the fact that many men and women look back and realize that, if only they had started their Christian life sooner, much heartbreak might have been avoided.

The young man who sows wild oats before his marriage may learn to his lifelong sorrow when he takes a premarital physical test that he cannot bring a clean body to his bride as a part of the new life.

The young woman who marries early and breaks off the marriage almost immediately, may find that early divorce looming mountain high when she seeks the Lord. God in His infinite mercy will blot out the past transgressions, but two living husbands and two families certainly complicate the problem of Christian living.

Many an older man looks back with a broken body, an enfeebled brain, and a weakened will on the damage wrought in his life by an excess of liquor consumption in his earlier years.

Many an older woman -- faithful to her marriage vows -- yet mourns the fact that she married out of the will of the Lord and is joined to an unbelieving husband. Her prayers and tears go up for him at the throne of grace, yet there is a desperate note in her praying that hints of the unhappiness back of those prayers.

Any man who has sat behind a pastor's desk for many years has a large casebook of such memories in his heart and mind. He never reveals them to others, for they are part of the sacred confidence of his ministry. But they color his counsels, his exhortations, and his preaching whenever he comes to such texts as the one in this message.

Dwight L. Moody tells of a man who rejected God several times in his early life and came to the evening of his life in a mental hospital saying over and over again, "Oh, if I only had! Oh, if I only had!"

God grant that no such experience shall ever come to blight and sadden your life. If you have not already done so, act today on the words of the great Preacher: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

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## Chapter 5

### TOO FAR TO JERUSALEM

It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt (I Kings 12:28).

#### I. GOD'S PROMISE TO JEROBOAM

Turn with me to the court of Solomon in the latter days of his reign. He who once was an ardent young king filled with zeal for God's house, and enjoying exceptional manifestations of divine glory, now is a blase', disillusioned, world-weary, much-married man. Following the religious patterns of his various wives he has built many pagan altars in Jerusalem, even though his earlier great achievement was to build the great Temple for Jehovah. Because of his failure and idolatry God determines that much of his kingdom shall be taken from his hand and that of his descendants and given to another. In order to keep His word with David that he should never lack a son to sit upon his throne, God determines that the tribe of Judah and also little Benjamin shall

remain in the kingdom of David's family, but that all the rest shall be taken away from them. Turn with me, to the First Book of Kings and begin reading at chapter eleven and verse twenty-six for the events of the next paragraph.

At the court of Solomon is a young man named Jeroboam. He is a skilled warrior, a courageous hero, and a prudent and wise leader of the troops committed to his care. And he is a faithful steward of the king's goods. One day Jeroboam walks the dusty roads outside of Jerusalem and is met by the prophet Ahijah, the Shilonite. As they stand alone in the border of the field, Ahijah tears his new white garment into twelve pieces. Ten of these pieces he gives into the hands of Jeroboam and tells him they are the symbol that he is to become the ruler of the ten tribes. Ahijah declares plainly that this is to happen to Jeroboam because Solomon and the people have forsaken Jehovah and worshiped other gods. But there is a condition to the promise that Jeroboam is to have the Northern Kingdom: "If thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and commandments, . . . I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house" (I Kings 11:38).

Solomon learns of the conversation between Ahijah the prophet and Jeroboam the soldier, and seeks to take Jeroboam's life, and so Jeroboam flees to Egypt for refuge.

Solomon dies and is buried with great pomp and splendor and his son Rehoboam comes to the throne. But the men of the ten tribes have had enough of the despotism of Solomon and the heavy taxation under his latter regime. So they come up to the coronation of the young king Rehoboam with a question on their lips and a plan of action in their minds. With them stands Jeroboam, the anointed of God, hurriedly recalled from his Egyptian exile. Rehoboam foolishly rejects the moderate counsel of the older men, accepts the violent counsel of the younger men, and threatens the ten tribes with grievous taxation, forced conscription, and other heavy burdens, and so the revolt is on.

In definite accord with God's prophecy concerning him, Jeroboam is crowned king of the ten tribes, and Rehoboam is left with only the two-tribe kingdom of Judah.

Now turn back with me to the books of the law for a definite command of God as to how Israel (and here I use the word for the whole nation, not for the ten tribe kingdom) was to behave when they were in the Promised Land. In his farewell address in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses definitely sets forth the command that they are to worship in no other place than the one God chooses. Not only are they forbidden to sacrifice to other gods, but they are not even to sacrifice to Jehovah in any other place than He chooses for them. Of course, during the Tabernacle period that place is first Gilgal and then Shiloh. But after David has taken Jerusalem and established it as the capital, he moves the ark of the covenant and the Tabernacle there from Shiloh. And so now Jerusalem becomes God's chosen dwelling place and the sacrifices are to be offered in no other place. Three times a year all the men of Israel are to appear at the solemn feasts at Jerusalem. God promises that if they will faithfully do this He will keep all enemies from invading their borders while they attend these solemn feasts. God kept that promise, as He keeps all of His promises. In times when Israel were attuned to God they faithfully attended the feasts three times each year. And not once was the land invaded when the feasts were held and faithfully attended, although the

neighboring countries knew of the custom. Yet when Israel neglected the feasts and stayed away from the place of worship, their land was invaded again and again.

## II. JEROBOAM'S DASTARDLY SIN

Now Jeroboam looks back on the ancient custom and becomes afraid, even though God has definitely promised him the kingdom, and has already fulfilled that promise. But he cannot let well enough alone; he cannot trust God to work out His full will for him.

He visualizes the people making their pilgrimages up to Jerusalem, the capital of Rehoboam's kingdom, and he cannot stand it. He feels the trips to Jerusalem will be too great a strain on their loyalty and they will turn their hearts back to Rehoboam as king. He cannot trust them with God, even though God has brought him thus far along the path of promise. So he devises a plan to keep the people at home in the northern kingdom of Israel. He already has a political capital at Shechem in Samaria, and now he seeks to devise a substitute for Jerusalem as their religious capital.

His kingdom at the southern border reaches within fifteen miles of Jerusalem at the town of Bethel. And so, at Bethel on the southern border and Dan on the northern border, he erects, not one, but two places of worship. Then he erects two golden calves and declares these are the gods that brought them out of Egypt. It was the molten calf that had gotten Aaron and the children of Israel into such disastrous trouble in the Wilderness. But Jeroboam ignores the solemn warning from the past and builds his false altars. Then he piles sin upon sin by ignoring the ceremonial Levitical law and putting men who are not of the tribe of Levi into the priesthood, although God definitely gave the priestly office to that tribe and that tribe only.

Now he proceeds with a sanctimonious air to tell another lie. He tells the people it is all for their benefit. It is too far to go to Jerusalem, it will take too much time and energy, and so he has erected these places of worship to make it more convenient for them than the trip to Jerusalem. At the same time he changes the dates of the solemn feasts to different months of the year, so that it will not be easy for the people to go on to Jerusalem anyway, as it would have been if the feasts were held at the same time.

Then he employs another stratagem to wean them away from Jerusalem. It seems that he throws all of his weight into making Dan even more popular than Bethel. He puts the strongest of his new priesthood, and his own personal prestige, and more wealth into the high place at Dan than into the one at Bethel. So that even though the bulk of the population live close to Bethel, they are led by these stratagems to make Dan their main place of worship. Off they go, from the heavily populated plains, through the mountains and semiarid regions, at great personal inconvenience, to worship at Dan.

Jeroboam said it was too far to go to Jerusalem, and pretended to be solicitous for his people's welfare, when actually he was making their worship harder. Even if they did go to Bethel, just a few more miles would have taken them to Jerusalem; and if they went to Dan, he was taking them over a far more difficult trail, even while he told them it was for their benefit.

In so doing, Jeroboam is repeating the devil's oldest lie. From the beginning of time Satan has told the human race that it costs more to go with God than it does to go with the devil, whereas the exact reverse is true. Satan told Adam and Eve that God did not mean what He said; that if they partook of the forbidden fruit they would not die, but instead they would become gods. And so, listening to his voice, they found exactly the opposite to be true. They did die, physically and spiritually. They did not become gods; instead they lost their Godlike nature and came under the curse of sin.

And so it has been all through history. The devil says to every man and woman, "It will cost you more to go with God than it is worth." He says it is inconvenient, it is unpopular, it is not fashionable. So men give up God's way and go with the devil, only to find that it has cost them infinitely more to go with the devil than it would have done to go God's way.

### III. THE RESULTS IN THE LIVES OF JEROBOAM AND THE NATION OF ISRAEL

Look with me at the way this is demonstrated in the life of Jeroboam and in the life of the nation.

Jeroboam said, "I have to do it my way or I will lose the people and lose the kingdom." But God had said that if Jeroboam would walk with Him then He would establish his family upon the throne. But Jeroboam took the short cut and cheated in his relationship with God. As a result his dynasty died out with his son Baasha, and the throne went to another family in two short generations. Furthermore, his beloved son, Abijah, sickened and died as a direct judgment of God. And all through the later history of Israel, Jeroboam is known by the obnoxious epitaph: "Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin" (II Kings 13:11 and many other places). Even Israelite kings who started reformations and revivals were not able to get away from the influence of Jeroboam and the golden calves.

Not only Jeroboam himself was affected by his sin, but all Israel was affected. The nation of Israel never did have the great reformations and revivals that the kingdom of Judah had. And always it was Jeroboam's sin that hung over them like a heavy pall. In the final outcome it proved their doom and undoing. Israel as a nation was carried into captivity a hundred and fifty years before Judah. And although Judah was eventually carried into captivity as a result of her sinfulness, yet she repented and was restored to her own land after seventy years of captivity. But there is no record in the Bible anywhere that Israel was ever restored as a nation. Individuals of the Northern Kingdom came back to God and into the economy of Judah, until at the time of Christ individuals of most of the tribes are mentioned as being in Palestine. Yet nowhere is there a record that northern Israel as a nation turned back to God, and much of the later enmity between the Jews and Samaritans was because of the hybrid religion that had sprung up in the Northern Kingdom as a result of their paganism and idol worship. Whatever the prophetic future may hold for ten-tribe Israel in the way of restoration, she has paid a high price for following Jeroboam in the worship of the golden calves.

### IV. SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

And what was true for Jeroboam and Israel is just as true for men and women today. The devil still says it costs more to go with God than it does with him, that it is "too far to Jerusalem," but actually he leads men and women to a far-off Dan. He makes them pay the piper in dead earnest for the tune he has played for their dancing feet.

Let us look at some of the people of this generation who have thought it would be too far to Jerusalem, and now have found that Jerusalem would have been cheap at any price.

The devil says it will cost too much to be converted, that the price is too great to pay in the way of repentance and restitution. And so he leads men and women on to wreck and blight their lives rather than pay God's price.

I remember a revival I held in my early ministry in the old Fifth Street Mission in Los Angeles. In that revival a man sought and found God who had been a forger and had just been released from San Quentin. His joy was great in his new-found experience. But in a night or two I preached on restitution. At the close of the service he walked up to me and held out his hand.

"Good-by, Preacher," he said. "It will cost me too much to straighten up my back tracks. I'm not going any further with God."

In spite of all my limited powers of persuasion, he walked out into the night, turning his back on God.

That same night while I was preaching on restitution a man came up against the fact that years before he had stolen a car, and while he had been professing to be a Christian for several years he had done nothing to make it right. He refused to do anything about it that night, and he began to go steadily downgrade both morally and financially. The last time I saw this man he was standing at the door of a supermarket with a tin cup in his hand. Certainly he paid too much in not going to Jerusalem.

I was in school with a young man, the son of a minister, who during an unusual tide of spiritual blessing gave his heart to God. Two mornings later, when a spontaneous testimony service broke out in the classroom, he sat silent and glum. Finally, under repeated urging he said: "I won't pay the price, I won't go with God, I won't fix things up." And he never did as long as I knew him. He embarked on a life of crime. He was imprisoned once for petty larceny, and later he was imprisoned again for highway robbery. He broke his father's heart and hurried him to the grave. He said he wouldn't pay the price, but he paid a bigger price than if he had gone with God.

I remember some of my pals before I was converted. There was the night the gang got up and walked out of the mission we all attended. And I remember their leader saying: "It's all right if Joe and Bert go with God. We won't do anything to stop them, but we are not ready to pay that kind of price. We want some fun first."

I also remember that out of that group one went to the penitentiary for a sex crime, one became a dope fiend and a fugitive from justice, and one was hauled out of the courtroom cursing

the judge and his mother and threatening to kill them both when he got out of the reformatory. They all paid too big a price for their good time.

It is not always that spectacular. Sometimes the dividing line of decision is so fine it is hard to see, and the results of sin are not so sudden and so drastic in the life. But all over the United States are men and women who have told me that the price they have paid for not becoming Christians has been a hard and bitter one.

The devil tells people it will cost them too much to be sanctified, and so they fail to pay the price, and ever after they live in the shadow of what might have been. Whatever the last unsundered thing is in our lives, we must yield at that point. If we say, "I am all on the altar, but --," we will butt the sacrifice clear off the altar.

I remember a gifted classmate in school who backed away from holiness of heart and life over a call to the mission field. The last time I saw her she was in a Chamber of Commerce booth at a trade fair as a demonstrator. Nothing she was doing was particularly wrong, but there was such a look of haunting sadness in her face that I could not help comparing it with the radiant gladness I had seen on her face at other times, and the same radiant gladness I had seen on the face of a former classmate of hers a few weeks earlier who had paid God's price and gone out as a missionary. She was now on furlough, radiantly alive with God's grace, while the other girl was mournfully sad over the choice she had made.

I think of a young man who could sing heaven and earth together, and there was hardly a dry eye when he lifted that beautiful, lyric tenor voice in praise of God. But he let ambition dominate him and defeat God's will in his life. The last time I heard of him he was a singer in a cheap cabaret, and the tawdriness showed on his face and in his voice. Certainly he paid too big a price to go the devil's way.

Sometimes the devil's challenge is that it will cost too much in the choice of a career.

I remember a young man in a college revival. He was brilliant, personable, and eloquent. He gave his heart to Christ and became radiantly alive with God's grace. Then in a few days he stood in the college chapel and gripped the back of a chair with such intensity that his knuckles became white under the strain, while the cords throbbed tensely in his neck.

"I will not be a preacher," he said. "I am going to be a lawyer. My heart is set on being a special pleader before the highest courts, and I believe I can make it. I will not be a little two-by-four preacher. It is too much for God to ask of me."

He stuck to that determination, and the tragedy is that he never became either a preacher or a lawyer. The last time I saw him he was carrying a paintbrush and a ladder. Now house painting is an honorable trade and I have some good friends who are good Christians and good painters. But what a disappointment for a boy who had great preaching potentialities and also aspired to plead before the United States Supreme Court! Certainly the devil lied to him when he told him it was too far to Jerusalem.



Sometimes the choice of a career does not involve preaching at all, but still involves supreme loyalty to Christ. I think of the principal of a high school, a graduate of my own alma mater. He would not bring his mother to the Church of the Nazarene where I was pastor for fear it would jeopardize his standing in the community. He has gone high in the educational system of his state, but it has cost him more to follow his selfish ambition than to follow God.

I compare him with the high school teacher and his wife in one of my recent revival campaigns who were the first at the altar to pray with seekers and the last to leave. They were young, just beginning their career, but they were not afraid to put God first. I think of my schoolteacher daughter who is leaving her imprint on her classes for God and righteousness. I think of the organist of my present home church, and the church secretary of the same church, both wonderful Christian teachers wholeheartedly devoted to God. The organist leads the largest Morning Watch in the city in the junior high school where he teaches. I compare these five teachers with the first teacher I mentioned, who is now a superintendent of schools. He is a success educationally, but he broke his mother's heart. Certainly he paid a far greater price not to go with God than any of these five paid to go all the way with Him.

Sometimes the price that must be paid is in the choice of a companion, or the willingness to go through life without a companion if it is the will of God. I think of the young woman I knew years ago who was called to the mission field. She gave rich proof of her ministry by working with natives of her chosen field here in the homeland. Her radiant, victorious experience was contagious, and her singing was a joy and a delight to hear. She had her appointment from the missionary board, her passport was okayed, her steamship transportation was purchased, and her passage booked. Then in the last month of her stay in the homeland she became wildly infatuated with a young man. She canceled her passage, revoked her appointment with the missionary board, and about the time she was to have sailed for the field, she married her suitor. There has been no stark tragedy in her life. Her life has moved on a fairly even keel. But that is just the point. It has been too even. Instead of the glory of the heights of achievement and faith, she has lived in the flat valley of mediocrity. Certainly she paid dearly for not going to Jerusalem.

I think of a man who told me recently that over forty years ago, in spite of the warning of friends, as a young Christian man he chose to disregard the admonitions of scripture not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, and married a woman of a group definitely outside the pale of orthodox Christianity. For over forty years he has lived a Christian life under a definite handicap. His children have nearly all chosen to follow their mother in her religious persuasion, and he finds his life very lonely indeed. He is a good Christian man but he certainly paid too big a price in not going to Jerusalem.

I contrast these with some others I have known who have said they would go with God even if it cost them their love life. Very rarely does that happen. There is nearly always a much better companion a little farther down the way, as there was in my case. But even the occasional one who never does find a satisfactory companion testifies that it was worthwhile going with God.

My mind goes back to a man I met in the first year of my Christian life who faced up to the decision not to go God's way in practically all the phases of life I have mentioned. I had just recently given my heart to Christ; then just a little later God had sanctified me wholly, and later

called me to preach. All this occurred in the space of three short months and naturally I was bubbling over with blessing and with enthusiasm for my new-found Christian experience.

One Sunday afternoon this man invited me to go home with him for dinner. After dinner as we sat under the grape arbor, he told me his own experience, as a warning to me not to walk in the same pathway.

About forty years before, as a single young man; he had given his heart to Christ, and God had called him to preach. He was a successful young farmer, and he asked God for the privilege of taking off that year's crop and using the money to get started. With sweet reasonableness the Holy Spirit granted him his desire. But when the crop was off he began to argue with God.

"Lord, if I could just plant and harvest another crop, I would be much better off financially -- I would not need others to help me -- I'd be able to support myself."

And God let him do it!

The second crop was harvested, and again he argued with God that one more crop would set him up for life. By this time the spiritual glow was gone from his life. During the third season he courted and married, and dismissed the idea of preaching from his mind. Two boys were born to them, and then his wife went suddenly and violently insane. He made and spent three different fortunes trying to find a remedy for his wife's insanity, before she finally died.

That Sunday afternoon under the grape arbor, he said: "Joe, I don't say she went insane because I disobeyed God. Probably the seeds of insanity were already there. But I cannot help wondering if the hand of the enemy might have been stayed in her life if only I had obeyed God when first He called me. O Joe, whatever you do, go all the way with God, and never turn your back on His plan for you.

"I am now an old man. My life is broken. I am a Christian again after many bitter years away from God, but I can never recapture what might have been if only I had gone all the way with God."

Whatever interpretation you may put on some parts of his story, certainly he paid a bitter price for his failure to go all the way to Jerusalem.

How about you today? Are you worshiping Jehovah God at Jerusalem? Or are you worshiping false gods at Dan and Bethel? The choice is yours but remember this -- there is a price to pay whichever path you take.

If you go with God you will pay the price of complete surrender to His will, but you will find abundant mercy and eternal glory in the New Jerusalem. If you go with the devil -- despite his promises concerning the immediate prospect -- you will find shadows and sorrows all along the way, and outer darkness instead of the New Jerusalem at the end of the trail.

It costs more to go with the devil than it does to go with God.

Which way will you go?

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## Chapter 6

### THE DOOR OF THE PRINCE AND THE RIVER OF LIFE

Scripture Lesson: Ezekiel 43:1-5; 44:1-4; 47:1-9; Hebrews 5:8

The last part of the Book of Ezekiel contains one of the most interesting prophetic studies in all the Old Testament, presenting a picture of the end times not found in just the same manner in any other book. Chapter thirty-seven presents the valley of dry bones, a picture of Israel's national revival which is occurring in this generation before our very eyes. Chapters thirty-eight and thirty-nine present the story of Gog and Magog, the prince and the land which occupy so great a place in the end-time picture and come up with fury against the land of Israel and are destroyed with such violence that it takes seven months to bury the dead. Gog is identified by many Bible scholars as Russia, and linked with Daniel's king of the north. Beginning with chapter forty, Ezekiel and the angel with the measuring reed present a picture of a rebuilt temple. No temple yet built fills the details of this vision. In the judgment of many Bible scholars Ezekiel is speaking of a temple still to be built in the time of Israel's restoration, and the sequence of chapters bears this out. In chapter forty-seven the miraculous stream issues from the temple and flows into the Dead Sea to heal its waters. Chapter forty-eight is a new apportionment of the land to the tribes of Israel.

But it is only incidentally that I wish to write of the prophetic side of these chapters. For there is embedded in these prophetic studies what is, for me, one of the richest devotional messages in the Word of God. And it is this personal application of the message and its spiritual significance of which I wish to write.

I would like to predicate all that follows on the thirty-eighth chapter. Just as Israel was a valley of dry bones, and needed the breath of the Spirit of God upon it to come to life, so we when we were without Christ were dead in trespasses and sins, a valley of dry bones, and in the words of the prophet, "very dry." But there came a day when we met Christ and became new creatures in Him. The Holy Spirit poured His life-giving touch upon our lives, and instead of a valley of dry bones we became a living army of newborn souls for Christ. This is the basis on which all that follows must be built. We must be born again, we must be new creatures in Christ Jesus, before we can experience the riches of His grace.

#### I. THE GLORY OF THE EAST GATE

Now turn with me to the first scripture selection from the forty-third chapter, where the messenger of God is conducting Ezekiel on a guided tour of the yet-to-be-built temple:

Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: and, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. And it was according to the appearance of the

vision which I saw . . . when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the house by way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house (Ezekiel 43:1-5).

If you will read this passage carefully you will notice that the glory of the Lord came into the temple from the east, and swept into the temple through the east gate.

Go back with me now to the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the prototype of all the temples that were to follow. God gave Moses the blueprint for the Tabernacle on Mount Sinai, and so the features it stresses are God-given. The Tabernacle consisted of the outer court, in which stood the brazen altar and the brazen laver; the holy place, where three pieces of furniture were installed, the table of shewbread, the golden candlestick, and the altar of incense; and the inner sanctuary, the holy of holies, in which was installed the ark of the covenant with the mercy seat above it. Now notice this -- there was one door into the outer court, one door into the holy place, and one door into the holy of holies. Each one of these was a testimony to the fact that Christ is the only Door into salvation. Humanly speaking, it is no great surprise that there was only one door into the inner sanctuaries, but when you consider that Israel was camped on all four sides of the Tabernacle, it seems as though there would have been doors into the outer court on all four sides to permit of easy access. But God had something in mind more important than the convenience of the people. He was foreshadowing the plan of salvation. The one door led straight to the brazen altar, symbol of conversion, and onward to the brazen laver, symbol of sanctification. To permit other doors would be to permit men to bypass the atoning blood and the cleansing laver, and that could not be! They must come by God's route or not come at all.

Furthermore, the one door pointed east, and the standard of the tribe of Judah was always pitched in the center on that side. Messiah was to come from the tribe of Judah. So even the location of the door as well as its uniqueness testified of the Christ to come.

As men began to build the Temple -- first Solomon, then Ezra and Nehemiah, and then Herod -- they kept the integral features of the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies, even though they surrounded them with a multitude of other courts and corridors so that the outer court was actually no longer the outer court. They also kept the feature of the one door into the holy place and the holy of holies. But they added other doors to the court of the priests and the court of Israel, which corresponded to the outer court in the Tabernacle, thus invalidating God's witness to Christ as the only Door of salvation, and making a way into the inner sanctuaries without coming by way of the blood-sprinkled altar and the cleansing laver.

And so today, men tell us there are a thousand ways to God, and a thousand doors to heaven, meaning thereby that men of any creed under heaven may find their way to God and heaven without the necessity of coming by way of Christ, the unique Redeemer of the world.

But when the glory of the Lord came into the temple of Ezekiel, it came by way of the east gate, thus vindicating God's message of Christ as the only Door. For as we shall see in the next passage, immediately the door was shut to all but the Prince of Glory himself.

## II. THE SHUT DOOR

Now turn with me to the second passage from the Book of Ezekiel and let us move forward to the second cycle of the story.

Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and he shall go out by the way of the same. Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house; and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord: and I fell upon my face (Ezekiel 44:1-4).

Ezekiel is brought once again by the angel of God to the east gate, and he finds the door is shut. It is shut because the glory of the Lord has come that way, and so now, for all time to come, the gate is reserved for the Prince of Glory himself. It is His, and His alone. No other can ever come in through that gate. From now on the north gate will be the public gate, and the east gate will be shut up for the prince himself. Just when He will come in bodily presence and just how the details of this prophecy will be fulfilled are not my concern just now. But I do want to draw another spiritual lesson from it.

Permit me to ask you a question or two. Do you have a sanctuary gate to your heart that is His and His alone? Do you have a place where He can come in and commune with you, and no one else will have access? Do you have a place of fellowship so intimate with Him that all else is shut out when He is there?

As a single young man I had a job with irregular hours which often left me with time on my hands in the daylight hours. I had a good friend who ran a grocery store. His home was elsewhere, but back of the store he had a small apartment where he and his wife could rest and cook some of their meals between waiting on customers. It had comfortable chairs, some good books, a phonograph, and other things to make it enjoyable and comfortable. I formed the habit of dropping in during my free hours and chatting awhile. I would cross the threshold of the front door and set the little spring doorbell to jingling. I would wait till Bob had a lull between customers, and then we would go back into the privacy of the little apartment, and relax till the next customer came in.

"Joe," he said to me one day, "there is no point to your coming into the store and waiting around till I have time to invite you back here. Here is a key to the door of the apartment. Keep it, and let yourself in at any time that you want to visit with me."

I thanked him for the gift of the key. And now life took on a different aspect. I was an honored guest. Instead of coming in through the front door to the tune of the tinkling bell, I came in unannounced through the side door. But even though I came in ever so quietly, Bob knew I was there. If he was busy, he would stick his head through the doorway and say: "I'll be with you soon."

If no customers were in the store he would come back immediately, and we would have a good time of fellowship together. Sometimes he would be so busy with people coming and going

across the outer threshold that he would never get back into the inner room. But when he could not come, or was quite busy for a while, yet it seemed that his step was a little springier and his whistle a little cheerier. It seemed to say: "I have a friend. He is waiting for me. I know he is there, and I'll be with him as soon as I am able."

At times he would be so busy I would leave and go back to my work without a visit. But both of our hearts had been lightened by the sense of intimate nearness.

Did you catch a glimpse through this illustration of the thing I am trying to say? You can have an inner sanctuary of your heart to which He and He alone has the key. You cannot stop the busyness of life, and you cannot keep people from coming and going across the front threshold of your life. But you can keep them out of His secret chamber. And because you have that inner sanctuary of your heart, there will be times when His blessed presence is so near as to be overwhelming.

I do not mean to minimize here the constant, day-by-day, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and through Him, of the Christ, in your heart. That is a richness of spiritual life beyond compare. But there is a sense of fellowship even greater than that. If you have experienced it, you know what I am writing about. If you have not experienced it, no words of mine will express it. For over a third of a century the Holy Spirit has indwelt my life, and I would not be without Him. But then there have been times when the inner sanctuary has been even more wonderfully filled with His presence. Out on a hilltop alone with my Bible in the middle of the night, in a period of preparation for the pulpit, in the midst of a group when no one else knew about it, on a train crossing the continent and finding some sparkling sentence in a book, in the classroom reading out loud from a dry-as-dust textbook for a professor temporarily unable to speak, on the seashore watching the restless tides roll in, in the quietness of my morning watch -- in all these circumstances, suddenly His presence was there!

I have sought earnestly to keep a door in my life for Him and Him alone. Do you have such a door in your heart? A shut door to everyone else, where no one but the Prince may come?

### III. THE MIRACULOUS STREAM

Now turn with me to the forty-seventh chapter and hear the words of the prophet once more:

Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar. Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand;

and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.

And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on one side and on the other. Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh (Ezekiel 47:1-9).

Let us look carefully at this narrative, for it contains some remarkable pictures. Notice first that Ezekiel first saw the miraculous stream inside the temple. It was flowing out from under the south side of the altar and flowing toward the east. Then the angel of God took Ezekiel outside the temple to show him the miraculous stream on the outside of the temple. Notice that he was not allowed to go out through that east gate, even though that was where the stream flowed out. This gate, as we have already indicated, was reserved for the Prince. Ezekiel must use the north gate. But having used the north gate to get outside, he was brought back to the east gate to observe the miraculous flow. Of course there was no more suitable place for the miracle stream to flow out than through the door of the Prince. And make no mistake, it was miraculous. Allowing eighteen inches to the cubit, the generally accepted standard, then a thousand cubits represents fifteen hundred feet, a little over a quarter of a mile, which is thirteen hundred and twenty feet. In a little over a quarter of a mile it was over his ankles, in a little over a half a mile it was up to his knees, in slightly over three quarters of a mile it was up to his loins, and in a little over a mile it took him out of his depth. It was waters to swim in.

This is not like any ordinary river. It has been my privilege to live along the mighty Missouri River at several points. Some years ago I was pastor at Butte, Montana. Just above the town eastward was Pipestone Pass on the Great Divide. Several times we drove over the pass and onto the east slope to a favorite picnic spot where there was a little stream running through the meadow. We would all jump across the stream to get to our favorite spot, my son even jumping across with his youngest sister, then a little girl, in his arms. One day we followed this unnamed rivulet downstream to where it became a part of the Jefferson River. Then we followed the Jefferson down to Three Forks, where it unites with the Madison and the Gallatin rivers to form the Missouri River. By the time the three rivers come together the river has become quite a respectable stream. Then the river sweeps north through a mountain gorge, turns eastward, and deposits some of its waters behind the Fort Peck Dam, swings on east and joins up the Yellowstone River, turns south again across North Dakota and South Dakota, where it begins to attain majestic proportions and the bridges are few and far between. It sweeps on down between Nebraska and Iowa and Missouri, through the stretch where I have seen it eighteen miles wide in flood time. In Kansas City it joins up the Kansas or Kaw River and turns east and winds across Missouri to empty into the Mississippi just above St. Louis, nearly three thousand miles from Three Forks, and over three thousand miles from our little picnic ground. It is a mighty river, and no doubt becomes greater in its volume in its lower reaches than the miraculous stream we are studying. But it flows several hundred miles from its original source before it becomes waters to

swim in. Yet Ezekiel's miracle stream becomes waters to swim in, in a little over a mile, indicating it has an unusual source. No natural river that I know of achieves a miracle flow like this in the first mile of its existence.

So it is with the River of Grace in the individual heart. As soon as a soul is yielded to God and has touched the altar of God, the miraculous river of living water promised to us by Christ, and linked by Him with the inflow of the Holy Spirit into our lives -- that miraculous river becomes full-fledged, a mighty torrent of divine love and grace in our lives. We do not have to wait until we are all old graybeards to have the full flow of the Holy Spirit through our lives. We can have it just as soon as we meet God's conditions of complete consecration and complete obedience. And we can meet those conditions just as easily in the first flush of our Christian experience as we can at any later date, or more easily. We can have rivers of living water to swim in as soon as we meet God's conditions for the influx of the Holy Spirit.

The next marvelous thing about this miracle stream is the fact that "every thing shall live whither the river cometh." Look with me at the natural picture of Palestine as it existed in Ezekiel's time, and as it still exists today. East of Jerusalem is the south end of the Jordan Valley. The Jordan River flows down that valley in haste from its headwaters above Lake Merom. It flows through Merom and through the Sea of Galilee, finally slowing down to a winding stream as it progresses toward the Dead Sea.

Into the Dead Sea it pours its life-giving flood, only to have it swallowed up by the brackish, saline, chemical depths of the Dead Sea. That condition has prevailed ever since God rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah and created the present desolation. For about four thousand years the fresh, clear waters of the Jordan have poured down from the snowy slopes of Hermon and Lebanon into the Dead Sea, but have never been able to purify its lethal waters. No birds fly over it. No fish live in it. Its only value is the chemicals piled up in its depths. But what the Jordan River has not been able to do in four thousand years, the miraculous stream will do overnight, bringing back life to the Dead Sea. Its brackish waters will be healed. The fish will inhabit its depths again. The birds will fly again over the newly invigorated waters. Everything will live where the river comes.

So it is with the spiritual life. Ever since the fall of man, sin has been pouring its contaminating filth into the abyss of man's degradation. The natural heart without God is desperately wicked, deceitful, odious, hateful to self, and hateful to others. Man has also tried to heal that abyss by natural means. Education, culture, aesthetics, breeding, riches -- he has poured them all into the Dead Sea of iniquity in a desperate effort to heal the human heart. But the result has only been to contaminate everything he has poured into the sea.

But what man could not do for himself has been done for him by the miraculous stream flowing from Calvary! Wherever that stream flows, life comes! Without waiting for an aeon, an era, a century, or even a decade -- in a moment of time the life-giving flood brings healing into every heart into which it flows. And what the stream does for individuals it can do for communities and nations, IF they will let its healing influence flow over them. Thank God, ultimately, in God's day of final triumph, the river will heal the whole world. There will be a new heaven and a new earth cleansed from every taint of sin. Death will vanish, sorrow will disappear,



sickness will melt into perfect health. Imperfect knowledge will blossom into God's omniscience. And we who have been redeemed by the miracle river here will be citizens of that new heaven and new earth.

But not only is this a river that flows into our hearts with its healing touch; it is also a river that flows out of our hearts to bless a sin-cursed, thirsty, dying world. If we are in touch with that source of supply, then the stream that flows from our hearts will be never-failing, healing, life-giving to all with whom we come in contact. And the more we give out, the more we will receive. We do not need to fear that the river will be inadequate, for its source is in the heart of God and its flow is through Calvary, the great altar of God. From the altar it flows into our hearts, and then out from our hearts on the parched desert lands of humanity about us.

#### IV. THE FEEDING OF SUFFERING

Now turn with me to the last section of scripture for our study. In the Book of Hebrews is a remarkable verse that supplements the passages we have been studying in the Book of Ezekiel:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

Here are both a challenge and a mystery. How could the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, learn obedience? Surely if He was the Sinless One then He always knew how to obey! That is true -- yet there is another sense in which He must learn obedience, or discipline, and that is through suffering. The subject is too vast and too complex to be treated at all comprehensively here, but perhaps we can lay hold of the edges of it.

Let us illustrate it this way. When we come seeking holiness we must make a complete consecration; nothing less will do. But as we walk on in the way of holiness we walk into new light, and as we do so, we must continue to keep that consecration complete. We do not violate or belittle our initial consecration, but we do learn a fuller obedience through the discipline of life. That is a faint picture of the thing that happened in the life of Christ. He was perfect in His obedience from the very beginning. But His sufferings came to Him as a new experience, and to each of these sufferings He must say yes. So in that sense He learned obedience, and He learned it through suffering.

Now take that word suffering and apply it to our own lives in relation to the passages we have been studying. We were in the valley of dry bones -- we became animated by the Spirit of life. We came to the temple of God -- we saw the glory fill the house. We opened our hearts and let the river flow in from the miracle source at the altar of God. But there is a sense in which we find another source of supply as well as the miraculous stream from the altar, and that subsidiary source is the discipline and suffering that come into our lives. It seems almost unbelievable that anything can supplement the life-giving stream from the altar of God. Yet it is an amazing thing that in order to bless we must bleed, and in order to really have the full river flow through our hearts we must draw on all the sources of supply -- the miraculous stream from the altar of God and the supplementary streams from the suffering and discipline of life.

An experience of my own from the days when I walked in the "valley of the shadow of death" may serve to bring this out more clearly.

I was working as night watchman and pump tender in a quarry in Nevada. I had worked all through Saturday night, catching a cat nap here and there between my various duties. Now it was Sunday morning. I had left the quarry and eaten my breakfast, and now, having changed into my Sunday clothes, I was waiting for the train to take me to Carson City and the church where my good friend, Brother Collins, was the pastor. It had been a bitter cold, stormy night, and I was rejoicing in the morning sunshine after the storm, even though there was snow underfoot and a frosty sparkle in the air.

The train ground to a stop with its brass-covered engine and its bright yellow cars, the characteristic mark of the Virginia and Truckee Railway. I had ridden with the old conductor a number of times, and as he swung down the steps to the platform, I remarked on the storm of the night before and was amazed at his answer:

"Thank God for the storm."

I stopped dead in my tracks and he saw my amazement.

"I've got to get the train going," he said, "but go on and sit down, and as soon as I can I'll come and tell you what I mean."

A little farther down the line he dropped into the seat beside me and said something like this:

"Son, you wondered why I said, 'Thank God for the storm,' a while ago. You see it's this way. We have to have heavy snows in these mountains in the winter or we won't have water in the valleys next summer. But it's not enough to have just the snow. If we had only that, it would run off the first warm day of spring and create a flood. So we need hard, driving winds like the one we had last night to drive it into the deep ravines and canyons. Then we need days and nights of freezing cold to hold it in the ravines until the first runoff is over. If we have several storms in which the fresh snow is driven deep enough into the ravines and frozen in there hard enough, some of it will last until the dry, hot days of mid-July and August. That's why I said, 'Thank God for the storm.'"

We were pulling into another little community and my conductor friend rose to see about the business of the train. He did not return, but he did not need to. He had served his purpose. The train began to pick up speed and the rattle of the wheels over the rail joints began to click out a message, "Thank God for the storm -- thank God for the storm -- thank God for the storm -- thank God for the storm," in an ever increasing tempo as the train continued to pick up speed. And in my heart I whispered, "Thank You, Lord, for the message."

The train pulled into Carson City and I stepped out into the clear, crisp air. The snow crunched under my overshoes, and it beat out a crisp tattoo, "Thank God for the storm -- thank God for the storm -- thank God for the storm."

I did not hear my pastor-friend, Brother Collins, as he preached that morning, for I had already had my sermon preached to me on the station platform in that simple sentence, "Thank God for the storm," and in the ensuing explanation on the train.

For you to understand what it meant to me I must take you back a few months. A few months before I had stood in a doctor's office and heard him tell me I had only a year to live. My hopes and ambitions came tumbling about my ears. The doctor said I would probably die in the pulpit if I ever tried to preach again. (The fact that due to God's healing power I have preached over six thousand times since that time was something, of course, that was hidden from me at that time.) With scalding tears coursing down my cheeks I had withdrawn my name as a potential candidate for the missionary field. I had written to my sweetheart and broken off our engagement. Then on top of the doctor's verdict came a letter from England that my crippled sister had died. She had always been very close to me. But it was wartime, and civilian cablegrams were barred, and so she was in the grave before we received the word. Then came a letter telling me that my dearest chum had been killed in France. We had been converted just a night apart, and we had fought our beginning Christian battles together. We had both tried to preach for the first time on the same day in the same service. All this had happened in the space of a few months. My heart was crushed and only the eternal optimism of youth, combined with my faith in Christ, had pulled me through the dark days. I was in sore need of a lift to my faith, and the message of the old conductor had supplied that lift.

In just a few weeks more I was to begin to reap a rich harvest of blessing in my life, as the streams began to thaw, and their life-giving water flowed down on the valleys.

The great influenza epidemic of 1918 struck like a scourge. Many lay dying in their homes without adequate aid. In some cases bodies lay in the same home as sick folks, both uncared for until some visitor found them, because everybody in the home was too sick to do anything about it. Bodies were stacked like cordwood in the morgues for several days at a time for lack of caskets in which to bury them, and for lack of help to conduct the funerals and dig the graves.

But in my mountain fastness I was out of the main tide of the scourge, and I had time on my hands. The Spirit of the Lord whispered to me to write letters of comfort and encouragement to those who were going through the deep waters of sickness and bereavement. And so, from my own suffering, a stream began to flow to bless the lives of others.

Then a few months later, God healed me! He healed me thoroughly and completely! I picked up the broken threads of my life. Things were never quite the same as they had been before. New days brought new adventures, new friendships, and new problems. The days of suffering left marks on my life that I never quite escaped. But because I had been through the storms I could help others who were going through the testing times themselves.

Have you been in the valley of sorrows or in the "valley of the shadow of death"? Has your path led through a storm of financial reverses? Have you suffered through the misunderstandings of friends? Have you been disappointed in Christian leaders? Have you been so beaten by the storms of life that you nearly fell by the wayside?

Take courage! Thank God for the storm!

Out of the storm will come the riches of His grace. They cannot supplant the miracles of Calvary and Pentecost, but they can supplement the great work done for you there. You will be a richer, better Christian, and a greater power of usefulness in the Kingdom because of the dark and stormy days.

Let me close with a few questions.

Have you been at Calvary and met the Prince?

Have you tarried until you have been filled with His glory?

Have you let the river of your life pour out in blessings upon others?

Have you resented the storms, or have you let them become a source of blessing to yourself and to others?

Can people say of you that everything lives where the river of your life flows?

You can say, "Yes," to all of these questions if you will!

The river of life and its tributaries of suffering can flow through you to bless all those about you.

God grant that it may be so in all the tomorrows of your life.

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THE END