

DANGER LINES IN THE DEEPER LIFE

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Simpson's pastoral warning about the spiritual dangers that can accompany the pursuit of deeper Christian experience, identifying false teachings, unbalanced emphases, and subtle deceptions that threaten those seeking the higher life.

11 Chapters

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Danger Lines in the Deeper Life

1. BOCHIM, OR THE CAUSE OF SPIRITUAL FAILURE

"And they called the name of the place Bochim." Judges 2: 5.

The Book of Judges has a very important place in the plan of divine revelation. It expresses a truth of great importance, and a lesson of deep and solemn moment, namely, the danger of spiritual declension after great spiritual blessing. The Book of Numbers is a sad book, for it tells of the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness for forty years after God took them out of the land of Egypt. But the Book of Judges is a far more sad and solemn book, for it tells of the failure of Israel after they had entered the land of Promise, a failure that lasted not forty years, but four hundred years. It tells us of the danger of backsliding after we have received the Holy Ghost and known Jesus in His fullness, a danger most real and alarming. It is against this danger that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews so often and so solemnly warns the believers to whom that epistle was addressed, and bids them "give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end."

There is a place in the discipline of Christian life and the wise and faithful dealing of God with His people for both warning and promise, for both hope and fear. No one is so unsafe as he who recklessly dreams of safety without vigilance and obedience. God has planted beacons all along the way, not to discourage us with needless fear, but to save us by wholesome caution and vigilant obedience.

This book stands in a larger sense for the declension of the Church of Christ after the apostolic age, and it well represents the Dark Ages of Christian history; but in its individual application, it may also represent the danger in our personal Christian life, of going back even from the very baptism of Pentecost and the deepest and highest experiences of the Holy Ghost.

The story of Judges begins with a record of victory. "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the people asked the Lord, saying, 'Who shall go up against the Canaanites to fight against them?' And the Lord said, 'Judah shall go up; behold I have delivered the land into his hand.' And Judah said unto Simeon, his brother, 'Come up with me unto my lot that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with thee into thy lot.' So Simeon went with him. And Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and Perizites into their hand."

This was all as it should be, and manifested the spirit of faith, obedience, and humble dependence upon God. A little farther on we read that they even took Jerusalem, and they captured Hebron and other strongholds, and they pressed down to the country of the Philistines, and drove their enemies from most of their strongholds. It seemed as if they still possessed the victorious faith of Joshua, and had in their midst the same Almighty Presence of their divine Leader.

But soon we begin to see the first indications of the coming failure. First of all, Judah begins to pause in his career of triumph, and we read the first word of defeat and discouragement. (Chapter 1: 19.) "He could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." Soon after we read of the partial failure of Benjamin, "And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but the Jebusites dwelt with the children of Benjamin in

Jerusalem, unto this day." It was not "could not," now, but "did not."

Next we find Manasseh failing to drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and the neighboring towns. "But the Canaanites would dwell in that land." (Verse 27.) Next Ephraim becomes discouraged, and fails to drive the Canaanites from Gezer. (Verse 29.) Zebulun also allows the enemy to remain in his town. (Verse 30.) Asher yields to the inhabitants of Zidon and his cities; Naphtali fails to drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh. (Verse 33.) And Dan flees before the Amorites of his mountain land. So that there was scarcely a tribe of Israel that had not in some degree compromised with the enemy, and given place to their foes whom God has sent them to completely extirpate from the land.

The steps of their failure are very striking as we follow them in detail.

First. They simply let the enemy remain. They seemed to have had no fear of them, and just failed to completely exterminate them. Next, however, we find them deliberately putting them under tribute, and keeping them there for the purpose of making gain of them, and getting something out of them. This is where the world gets in, in our modern Christian life. We make terms with evil; we not only allow it, but we use it. We think there is no harm in taking the money of wicked men for religious objects, and meeting them half way. We are willing to be agreeable to the world in order to have a good influence over it, and we end by falling completely under its power. Next we find the Canaanites dwelling with Israel (chapter 1: 27); but a little later we find Israel dwelling with the Canaanites (3: 5 and 1: 33). Israel begins by treating the Canaanites as guests and tributaries, and ends by finding them masters and conquerors.

Next we see the Canaanites driving the children into the mountains. They now have grown strong enough to dictate and demand as evil always does, after we have given it standing-room for a little while.

Next comes the intermarriage of God's people with the enemy. They meet in the social intimacies of life. They find the people of the world agreeable and profitable, and they consent to the forbidden fellowships and intermarriages of the godly and the ungodly, which in every age have preceded a time of corruption and great wickedness. No child of God has any right to intermarry with the ungodly, and a true parent dare not consent to such a union without involving the eternal well being of the child. It is never safe to disobey God, and I have no hesitation in saying that I would not perform such a marriage ceremony.

The next step is partnership in idolatry and the forsaking of Jehovah's worship for the shameful rites of heathenism. Chapter 3: 6, 7: "And they took their daughters to be their wives, and they gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods, and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves."

The culmination of all this soon came in the anger of Jehovah, and His severe and righteous judgment upon His disobedient people. And so we read, "The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies roundabout, so they could not any more stand before their enemies, and whithersoever they went out the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them; and they were greatly distressed." (Chapter 2: 14, 15.)

What a dreadful thing it is to have God against us and to know that He who controls the, very breath of our lives, and all the elements of destruction around us, is compelled by His very nature to deal contrary to us, and to consume us, even as fire must consume every combustible thing that it touches! God is compelled to be against sin, and while He pities the sinner He hates the sin; and while we are against God, His very presence must be to us a consuming fire, and even heaven would be hell to the sinful soul, and it would fly from the awful blaze of His holy glance as from a lightning flash and long to hide itself in hell.

But there is something even more sad than this, for we read that God gave them up to the power of their enemies, and allowed the Canaanites, whom they themselves had trifled with and taken into covenant, to be the thorns and snares of judgment and temptation to them.

There is nothing more terrible in all the judgments pronounced against them than this: "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." (Chapter 2: 3.)

"And He said, 'Because this people hath transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto My voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died. That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord, to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.'

And so God allowed them to be filled with their own devices, and tempted and tried by the very results of their own disobedience. Nay, further, we read in chapter 3: 8, that He even "sold them into the hands of their enemies," and gave their foes a power to subdue and enslave them which they themselves could never have claimed without the divine permission. Henceforth the Canaanite, the Philistine, the Syrian, and Assyrian, the Babylonian, and the Roman, were but the executioners of divine judgment, and wrought their conquests and captivities by direct divine permission.

Dear friends, all this represents a very awful truth, which the New Testament undoubtedly confirms, namely, that God's last and most terrible judgment is to allow the devil to have power over the disobedient soul, and to permit temptation to overcome and to torment and punish us because of our willful disobedience to the will of God, and our rejection of the grace that would have saved us. The saddest thing about the condition of the poor sinner is that while he thinks he is free, and has the power to reform and do as he pleases, he is the helpless slave of Satan, "taken captive by him at his will," and he never can be free until he repents and renounces the dominion of God's great enemy, and appeals to the blood of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost to break the fetters of his captivity.

And there may come a time in the life of a wicked man, when, through persistent rejection of light, and right, he shall be given over, as we read in first chapter of Romans, "to a reprobate mind, and to vile affections," and he shall find within him a power compelling him to evil, and possessing him with the devil just as one can be possessed and constrained by the Holy Ghost.

This is the explanation of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. This is the last stage of impenitence and despair. This never comes to any soul until he has rejected and refused the mercy of God, and deliberately chosen evil instead of good, and Satan instead of God. God punishes him by letting him have Satan to the full, or as it is expressed so graphically in the first chapter of

Proverbs, "They would none of My counsel, they despised all My reproof, therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." But it is possible even for the child of God to be delivered over to the power of temptation through a continuance in willful and persistent disobedience. The very things that we choose become our punishment, and we find ourselves through our own deliberate disobedience, under terrible forms of temptation which we have not the power to resist. The reason is that we are in a place where God never wanted us to be. We have brought upon ourselves our own tormentors. The grace of God is equal to all his will for us, and He knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, but He has not promised His grace for self-imposed burdens, dangers or situations that are contrary to His divine purpose.

There is nothing sweeter in life than to be conscious of being so encased in the armor of the Holy Ghost, that the Wicked One toucheth us not, and every fiery shot glances off, as the shot and shell are repelled by the armor plate upon the battleship, and we walk through the hosts of hell as safe and unscathed as if we were treading the courts of heaven. But there is also an experience where we are conscious that Satan has a power over our hearts, that the fiery dart does pierce through and stain the sensitive soul, that the evil instigation does become a part of our very thought and feeling, and that we are not in perfect victory over the power of evil. This is the meaning of the Master's prayer for us, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One."

Oh, beloved, this is the meaning of hell. This is the beginning of torment. This is the retribution of sin. This is something even more bitter than the wrath of God. It is the culmination of the first step of unbelief, disobedience and spiritual declension. Let us guard against the first step, and let us ask Him to save us from the causes which led His people of old into these depths of wretchedness and sin.

II. The causes of Israel's failure.

The first cause was incomplete and unfinished work. They did not thoroughly finish the battle; they entered into compromises with evil; they failed to be thorough and whole-hearted in their dealing with Him. Let us look well to it, that we give no place to the devil, and that we allow the world and the flesh no standing ground.

All Satan asks is toleration of a single root of bitterness, unbelief and self-indulgence; but as surely as God is true, that single sin will destroy us in the end.

Again, they failed to recognize their temptations as God's provings to see what they would do. He allowed these things to come that He might test their obedience, and so He lets temptations come to us not that they may overcome us, but that they may establish us. If we would ever recognize them as God's tests, and rise above them to meet His higher will, they would become occasions for grander victories and higher advances.

But, thirdly, the real secret of their failure was their lack of a true, personal and independent hold upon God as the source of their strength. There is one passage in the opening verses of this book which explains the whole situation. (Judges 2: 7.) "And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that He did for Israel." Here we see the cause of the whole trouble. They leaned upon Joshua, and Joshua's immediate successors more than they leaned upon God. They got their ideas and inspirations from human leaders, but they did not stand personally rooted and grounded

in God for themselves, and when the shock of conflict came they failed. Indeed, their own language on a previous occasion shows that they did not really understand their own helplessness, and their utter need of Jehovah.

In the closing chapter of the Book of Joshua we read, that when that great leader had gathered the people together at Shechem, and had given them his parting charges, they answered with unreserved assurance, "We will serve the Lord, for He is our God," and Joshua answered them, "Ye cannot serve the Lord." (Joshua 24: 19.)

Doubtless what Joshua meant was they could not in their self-confident strength do anything but fail and sin. But they had not learned the lesson, and, confident in their self-sufficiency they did fail and sink into the lowest depth of sin and misery, and the triumphs of Jericho, Bethhoron, Hebron and Gibeon ended in the tears of Bochim, and the captivity of their foes.

Thank God there is an antipodes to Bochim. It is that other place of which the inspired prophet has said, "Thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah" (Isaiah 62: 4). Bochim is the place of weeping; Beulah is the place of love and joy. Bochim means the failure of our strength; Beulah means married unto Him, and kept by His power from stumbling and from failure.

Let us go to Bochim, and learn our helplessness, and then let us go forth to Beulah, and, leaning upon His love and strength go forward, singing: "Thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ Jesus;" "I can do all things through Christ, who is my strength."

2. SINNING AND REPENTING

"And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of the spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges which delivered them out of the hand of those that had spoiled them, and yet they would not harken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them. They turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so. And when the Lord raised them up judges then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it come to pass when the judge was dead that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers in following other gods to serve them. and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way." Judges 2: 14-19.

This, in a few sentences, is the story of the whole Book of Judges. It is a story of sinning and repenting. It is a picture of the Church and the Christian in a state of deep declension, and it is a declension all the more deep and dark because it followed a condition of the highest spiritual blessing. It came, not as the wandering in the wilderness did, after their deliverance from Egypt, but it came after their victorious entrance into Canaan, and their enjoyment of the life of victory and the fulness of God's blessing.

Its historical parallel is the story of the Dark Ages in the history of Christianity, when for centuries the Church sank into apostasy and worldliness, and for a thousand years the light of truth and holiness was almost wholly blotted out; and this after the story of Pentecost and the light of apostolic days. It has its individual parallel in the experience of a child of God, when, after the baptism of the Holy Ghost, he falls back into spiritual declension and disobedience, and returns to a life of sinning and repenting. It is a far sadder experience because of the light and the power he has known before, and the lessons of this book may well warn every one of us to give all diligence to "hold fast the beginning of our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end."

Let us look at the two first examples of God's dealing with this sinful people.

The first is the story of Othniel (Judges 3: 7-11): "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot their Lord, and served Baalim and the groves. Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim, king of Mesopotamia. And the children of Israel served him eight years. And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel who delivered them, even Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel and went out to war, and the Lord delivered Chushanrishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand, and the land had rest forty years, and Othniel, the son of Kenaz, died."

The next is the story of Ehud (Judges 3: 12-30): "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord strengthened Eglon, king of Moab, against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord, and He gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees. So the children of Israel served Eglon, the king of Moab, eighteen years. But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, a Benjaminite, a man left-handed, and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto him, and he was sitting in a summer parlor which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said unto him, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh and thrust it into his bowels . . . And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seraith. And it came to pass when he was come that he blew a trumpet on the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them, and he said unto them, Follow after me, for the Lord hath delivered your enemies, the Moabites, into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty and all men of valor, and there escaped not a man. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel, and the land had rest fourscore years."

These two incidents, following each other in direct succession, illustrate the progression of evil, and at the same time the progression of grace on the part of God.

We cannot fail to notice here the aggravation of repeated sin. We read in the seventh verse, "That the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord;" and we read in the twelfth verse, "That the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord." But the effects of their repeated sin were much more serious than in the first instance. After their first disobedience we are told that God sold them into the land of the enemy, and they served him eight years. But in the second instance the Lord not only gave them into the hand of their enemy, but we are told "that the Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel." And this time they served the enemy, not eight, but eighteen years.

Here we find God working on the side of their enemies, and giving them power to afflict His people, and we see that the effect of continuance in sin is to prolong the period of our chastisements and to fix the habit of evil until it becomes almost permanent. It is an awful truth that evil men wax worse and worse, and the power of sin to hurt us and to hold us increases with every repetition. It was not merely that God prolonged their captivity by His arbitrary will, but it seems as if they themselves have been so paralyzed by their sin and judgment that they did not even think of turning to Him for eighteen years.

It would seem as if God always listened to them when they cried unto Him, but the saddest effect of their sin was that they even forgot His former mercy, and failed to lift up to Him their penitent cry. But over against their sin how marked the mercy of their longsuffering God. The moment they turned to Him in prayer and penitence, He heard their cry and sent them help. How striking is the expression, "And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord He raised them up a deliverer." His mercy was instant, and His deliverance was complete.

And then when He restored them from their captivity, the duration of the blessing was in proportion to the length of the judgment. When He saved them from the captivity of Chushanrishathaim eight

years long, He gave them rest for forty years, and when He saved them from the captivity of Eglon, eighteen years long, He gave them rest for eighty years. It would seem as if His mercy was graduated in a scale of progression in contrast with their sorrows and their sin. The days of blessing were more than four times as long as the days of punishment and pain.

Is there one who reads these lines who is looking back to some dark chapter of backsliding and spiritual loss? Take comfort even from the story of Israel's sin. Only turn to God in truehearted repentance and obedience, and He says, "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker worm, and the palmer worm (My great army that I sent against you)."

How beautiful to observe in the story of Simon Peter, that when the Lord restored him after his threefold sin, He gave him a threefold blessing, and commission as if he would put a mark of honor over against every scar that the disciple had brought upon himself. "He will make us glad according to the days wherein He has afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."

Yes, such is the mercy of God, but, oh, how much better and sweeter the grace of God which is able to keep us from stumbling, "to preserve us blameless unto the coming of the Lord," and "to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

There are some further lessons in connection with these incidents that are well worthy of our careful attention. You will notice how all through this period the people were dependent

upon human leaders. Indeed this seems to have been their bane all through. They were faithful to God as long as Joshua lived, but they have no direct dependence on Joshua's God. Theirs was a reflected goodness, derived from the circumstances and the people that surrounded them. And so they were true to God while their judge led them on to victory, and ruled over them afterwards, but when he died their heart, like the sapling that has been only bent, sprang back again to its natural willfulness, and as the writer has so well expressed it: "They ceased not from their own doing, nor from their stubborn ways; they went a whoring after other gods, and turned quickly out of the way their fathers walked in."

Here we see the whole root of bitterness, a superficial experience, influenced by persons and circumstances, while our natural heart still remains, and we are not personally united to the Lord Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Ghost, for ourselves. The promise of this dispensation, thank God, is not that we shall have Othniels and Ehuds, Joshuas and Calebs to lead us, but that the Holy Spirit shall be "poured out upon all flesh," and we "shall not need to teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Him from the least even unto the greatest."

We are therefore to look for our spiritual types not in the condition of the people at this time, but in the spirit of the leaders. These men were patterns of what each of us may be today in the power of the Holy Ghost.

In Othniel we see, according to the literal meaning of his name, The Lion-hearted man, the man of faith and holy courage. We have heard of this man before. It was he who, at Caleb's challenge, had dared to assault the stronghold of Kirjath Sepher, chapter 1, verse 12, and as a reward for his victory won the hand of Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, whose name means "Grace." And with her he received a dowry of special grace and blessing. Othniel stands for the faith which in the very

first teachings of our Christian life dares to take the victory and receives the fulness of grace for ourselves, and then, later, when others need our help, we are prepared to lead them into the same victory which we have won.

There is a story back of every story. There is a life behind every public record of triumph and distinction. The Othniel who led Israel to victory against the mighty emperor of the East was not the creation of a moment, was not the accident of a great occasion; but was the outgrowth and development of a long-past history, when as a young man he met the crisis hour of his own life, and dared to believe God and overcome his enemies in the strength of God and to win the blessing which enabled him now to meet the greater occasion, and to stand as the first of Israel's judges and conquerors. And so there comes to each of us a moment when we meet life's issues all alone, and as we stand true and triumph over self and sin, God's mark is placed upon us, and He puts us aside for the day when He will need a brave leader and a chosen instrument for some of the great occasions of the world's history; and it will be found true again, as it ever has been true, "that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly unto Himself."

The other incident of Ehud and his deliverance of Israel is not quite so clear at first sight. For Ehud stands before us, apparently, in the light of a secret assassin. By deep subtlety and in the disguise of a friend he gains access to the presence of Eglon, the oppressor of his country, and, asking a private audience, he whispers in his ear the awful secret, "I have a message from God to thee," and then, swift as the lightning flash, he pierces him to the heart with the hidden dagger, and strikes down the life of his country's oppressor. Indeed, a good many commentators have tried to excuse Ehud's act, or at least to exonerate God from all responsibilities for it by calling attention to the fact it is not said, as in the case of Othniel, that the Spirit of God came upon him. They seem disposed to apologize for him, or at least to make him responsible for his own act, and leave it as at least a doubtful thing. But a candid reader cannot fail to notice that the inspired writer makes no such attempt to evade responsibility, but frankly speaks of Ehud as the deliverer that God raised up to save His people, and recognizes his whole career as that of a divine leader and judge.

How then shall we justify his act of apparent murder? Surely, the answer is plain. It was not Ehud's act, it was not an act of private vengeance or even patriotic fervor; but he gives us the explanation himself in his awful message to Eglon. He was acting as a divinely appointed judge, and the executioner of God's sentence against a wicked and condemned man. "I have a message from God to thee," is his solemn word as he suits the action to the word, and strikes down the bold and impious transgressor at his feet. He was simply acting as the judge upon the bench when he sentences the murderer to his doom, or as the public executioner when he fulfills the decree of the state and takes the life that has been forfeited by law for public crime. Ehud in this acts by divine command, and in the divine name, so that his victim stands before us as the type of our spiritual oppressor, and Ehud as the example of that faith which meets the enemy, not in our own name or strength, but in the name and strength of Jehovah, and triumphs even as He.

Is there not for us an inspiring lesson in this attitude? Is it not our privilege to identify ourselves with God in all we say and do, and to go forth to lives of victory in His name? Is not this the very meaning of that strong expression, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus?" Is it prayer? Let us identify ourselves with Him, until it shall not be our prayer, but God's prayer in us, and we shall know that the answer must be given. Is it temptation, let us meet

the devil as a conquered foe, and standing in the very person of our victorious Lord, let us say to Him, "I have a message from God to thee. He bids thee fly." Get thee hence, Satan, in the name of Jesus; and in that mighty name we shall cast out demons, and tread upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy. Or is it service? Are we called to speak for our Master or our fellow men? Again, let it be not our message, but His; not our ideas; and opinions, and pleadings, but the very word from the throne, delivered to men with the authority of God, and let us look into their conscience and say in the name of our Master, "I have a message from God to thee," and our words will be clothed with power, and the Holy Ghost will convict men of sin and righteousness and judgment, and seal our messages with precious souls and lasting fruits.

This is the true spirit of ministry. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracle of God. If any man minister, let him do it as the ability that God giveth, that God may in all things be glorified through Jesus Christ."

3. SHAMGAR, DEBORAH AND BARAK

"And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Heb. 11: 32-34. Compare with Judges 3: 31 and 4: 14, 15.

The night brings out the stars, and so the darkest times of national and church history are always the occasions for the development of the highest types of genius and character. The long, sad story of the Judges revealed a Deborah and Barak, a Gideon and Samson, an Othniel and a Jephthah. The times of Ahab and Jezebel were made illustrious by the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, the dark night of the middle ages was made luminous by the testimony of a Wyckliffe, a Luther and a Knox.

The story of divine mercy and Christian faith is written on the dark background of human sin and crime. We are to look at a few of these stars of the night as they shine in the firmament of the Book of Judges.

I. The story of Shamgar (Judges 3: 31) introduces us to a humble farmer in Southern Palestine, whose only weapon was the implement of his daily toil, and whose battlefield was a country road, but who stands forever illustrious among the heroes of faith and the saviors of his country. Following his simple plow and oxen, and carrying in his hand the rude ox-goad, which was just a long wooden shaft, with a sharp prod at one end, and an iron shovel at the other, to clean the plowshare, he suddenly found himself surrounded by a band of Philistines, the precursors of another invasion of the land. Seizing his ox-goad by the small end, and turning it into a formidable club, he suddenly charged his foes, and, as they turned and fled before his fierce attack, he pursued them with such resistless fury that before the day was over six hundred of them lay dead around him. Doubtless it was more than human prowess, but like David's battles, one of those times of supernatural inspiration, when God Himself took possession of His chosen instrument, and one was able to chase a thousand, and send dismay into the hearts of a host of enemies. Doubtless this battle was a crisis in the history of his country, and stayed some greater invasion, and as these men went back to tell the tale of their strange disaster, their neighbors began to think that if one man could do such wonders, it would scarcely be safe to meet an army of such men.

Now, Shamgar represents in some very striking ways the spirit of Christian faith and victory. Here we see a man standing in the ordinary walks of life, and meeting an emergency as it comes to him, without stepping aside from the path of ordinary duty. He does not need to mount a pedestal, and be placed in some illustrious position, to be a hero, but he just stands in the place where God has put him, and there becomes illustrious through the force of his own personal character and conduct. He does not go out of his way to find a mission, but he meets the events that come to him in the ordinary course of life, and turns them into occasions for faith and victory.

He represents the men and women who stand in secular callings, and who find a pulpit and a ministry just where God has placed them, amid the tasks and toils of daily life. He stands for the businessman at his counting house and in his office, and finds a thousand opportunities for fighting the battle of the Lord, and doing good to his fellow men amid the circumstances of his daily calling.

I know a humble shoemaker in a New England town who finds in his little shop every day a dozen opportunities for preaching Christ, as well as living the Gospel, and who has been used of God to lead scores of his visitors and customers to the experience and the blessing which has transformed his own heart and life. I know a captain on one of our coast lines of steamers who preaches the Gospel in his plain and modest way to tens of thousands of his passengers every year, and whose little cabin has been the birthplace of hundreds of precious souls for whom he lies in wait with ceaseless watchful tact and love. I know more than one businessman whose office is an object lesson of Bible texts and divine messages, and who never meets a caller without some hint of eternal things, and never writes a letter without some little enclosure which can speak for God and salvation.

Shamgar did not have to wait till he had a sword or spear or battle-bow from the armory, but he took the weapon that lay next at hand, and he turned it against the enemy, and so God wants your real resources just as they are, to be used for Him. He is asking thee, "What is that in thine hand?" and Moses' rod, and Dorcas' needle, and Shamgar's ox-goad, and David's sling and stone, and Joshua's ram's horn, and the lad's five loaves and two fishes, and the widow's little can of oil are all that he requires for His mightiest victories and His grandest ministries. Give Him what you have, be faithful where you are, do what you can, and He will do the rest.

"If you want a field of labor,

You can find it anywhere."

Shamgar's may seem a little victory compared with Gideon's, and so it was, so far as numbers were concerned, but doubtless it was used of God to prevent some greater invasion, and render needless some more costly victory afterwards; and so the little things we sometimes do, the faithfulness with which we meet some trifling opportunity may prevent some greater disaster, or be the occasion of some mightier blessing than we can at the time foresee.

It may seem but a little thing for a brave woman in a dark and stormy night to dash along the railroad track and signal the rushing train to stop before it reaches the broken bridge, but that single act of heroism saves a hundred lives. It may seem a little thing for a little band of heroes to hold a pass against an army, but that was the key to the whole situation. It may be a trifling thing for a quiet English girl to find a ragged street urchin, and induce him to go to Sunday school by giving him a suit of clothes, and then, when he played her false, to hunt him up weeks afterwards, and give him another suit of clothes, and yet again the third time to refuse to be discouraged by his deception, until at last her patience triumphed, and that boy was won for Christ; but the day came when that little act of tireless love was God's first step in the evangelization of the millions of China, for that boy became Robert Morrison, the pioneer of modern missions in the East, and the first in that glorious line who shall yet come with their trophies from the land of Sinim.

Ah, these are the little things that God loves to glorify! God help many of us to watch for these wayside opportunities and win these battles of faith and fortitude while we may.

II. Our next illustration is the story of Deborah and Barak. Here we are introduced at once to a new instrumentality in the work of God, namely, the ministry of woman.

Deborah stands before us in strong contrast with the customs and prejudices of her time -- a woman called to lead in a great national crisis, and to stand in the front both of statesmanship and war as the head of the nation. It goes without saying that this is an unqualified recognition of the ministry of woman, and with such an example backed up by so many honored successors, let no man deny the place of woman in the history of nations and the ministries of Christianity.

At the same time the story of Deborah is as clear in limiting as it is in permitting the ministry of woman. It gives no encouragement to the "new woman" in her absurd attempt to usurp the place or the appearance of man. A mannish woman is an outrage upon her own sex and a caricature of the other sex. She falls between two fires, for she falls short of manhood, and she falls out of womanhood. Christ Himself has established the natural and spiritual law that the head of every woman is the man, and the head of the man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God. This is the type of womanhood that Deborah represented.

While she knew that she was called by her spiritual qualifications to lead her people to deliverance from the enemy, yet she took particular pains to find a man to be the executive officer of her plans, and the leader of God's hosts in the divine campaign. Her chief business was to put Barak in the front, and then stand by him with her counsels, her prayers, her faith, and her wholesome reproof, for Deborah was a practical and sensible woman. Her name signifies "the bee," and she was well provided with the sting as well as the honey, and knew how to stir up Barak by wholesome severity as well as encourage him by holy inspiration. He is a very foolish man who refuses to be helped by the shrewd, intuitive wisdom of a true woman, for while her head may not be so large, its quality is generally of the best; and her conclusions, though not reasoned out so elaborately, generally reach the right end by intuitions which are seldom wrong. Woman's place is to counsel, to encourage, to pray, to believe, and preeminently to help. This was what Deborah did, and in this Deborah was the type of woman's sceptre, which is that of yieldedness and love rather than dogmatism and defiance.

Again, we see in the story of Barak a man of weak and timid faith, losing much by his diffidence, and yet used of God and lifted to a diviner faith by the inspiration of Deborah. Barak shrank at first from the unexpected call to lead a little army of ten thousand men against the myriads of Sisera, and he only consented at last on condition that Deborah should go with him. By his timidity he lost not a little of the honor that he might have won, and his sharp and penetrating monitress plainly told him that the victory should not be wholly to his credit, for God should deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman; and so there were really two women in this case, and Barak was sandwiched in between them. With Deborah in front, and Jael in the rear, and Barak in the midst, even poor, weak Barak became one of the heroes of faith who shine in the constellation of eternal stars, upon which the Holy Ghost has turned the telescope of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

Yes, God can use the weakest instruments, and He generally does choose the poor in spirit, and the temperaments that are naturally the opposite, to clothe them with His supernal might, and use the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the strong, and the things that are despised, yea, and the things that are not, to bring to nought the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Look at Isaiah, when God called him to his splendid ministry. How little he thought of himself, as he cried, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips!" and yet God used him to unfold the majestic visions of Messianic prophecy.

Look at Jeremiah, as he shrank back into his conscious nothingness, and cried, "Lord, I am a little child," and yet God took that trembling reed, and made him a pillar of strength and a fenced brazen wall of resistance against the kings, the prophets, and the priests of Israel, and the grandest figure of the last days of Jerusalem. Yes, He can take us in our weakness and nothingness, and make us strong in His might to the pulling down of strongholds.

Barak was not always weak; there came a time when he responded to the inspiring call of faith and became a hero. Deborah's message to him is all alive with the very spirit and innermost essence of the faith that counts the things that are not as though they were. "Up!" she cries, as she rouses him by a trumpet call from his timorous inactivity; "for this is the day," she adds, as she shakes him out of his procrastination, "in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand." She goes on to say, as she reckons upon the victory as already won, "Is not the Lord gone out before thee?" She concludes, as she commits the whole matter into Jehovah's hands, and bids him simply follow on and take the victory that is already given.

Is it possible for faith to speak in plainer terms, or language to express with stronger emphasis the imperative mood and the present tense of that victorious faith, to which nothing is impossible?

Again, we have here the lesson of mutual service. This victory was not all won by any single individual, but God linked together, as He loves always to do, many cooperating instruments and agents in the accomplishment of His will. Here was Deborah representing the spirit of faith and of prophecy. There was Barak representing obedience and executive energy. There were the people that willingly offered themselves; the volunteers of faith. There were the yet nobler men of Zebulun, and Naphtali that jeopardized their lives unto the death, the martyrs of sacrifice who are the crowning glory of every great enterprise. And there was Jael, the poor heathen woman away out on the frontiers of Israel, who gave the finishing touch, and struck the last blow through the temples of the proud Sisera, while high above all were the forces of nature, and the unseen armies of God's providence; for the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, and the flood of the Kishon rolled down in mountain torrents and swept the astonished foe away.

Still again, we see the curse of neutrality, and the pitiful spectacle which seems always to be present -- the unfaithful, ignoble and indifferent ones who quietly looked on while all this was happening, and not only missed their reward, but justly received the curse of God's displeasure and judgment. And so, in the Song of Deborah, we hear of Reuben's enthusiastic purposes, but ultimate debates and doubts, and he does nothing. We see her fiery scorn for those who stayed among the bleatings of the sheepfolds, rather than the trumpet of the battle. We see her sarcasm strike the selfish men of Gilead who abode beyond Jordan; the careless Danites, who remained in their ships, and the men of Asher who, secure in their naval defenses, lingered yonder on the seashore, and took refuge in their ports and inland rivers, while, above all the echoes of her denunciation, rings out the last awful curse against the inhabitants of Meroz, a little obscure city that probably had taken refuge in its insignificance, because its inhabitants had refused to come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Beloved, God's mighty warfare is raging still. Let us beware lest we, too, shall hide in vain behind our littleness and meet at last the same tremendous curse, because in these last days, when millions are dying without the Gospel, and the coming of our Master waits but a few short years of heroic faithfulness, we perhaps shall hear Him say, "Curse ye the servant who refused to use his single talent and his single pound, just because it was so small, and came not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

Finally, this scene is a pattern page, from God's book of remembrance. Some day we shall read the other pages, and find our names recorded either with inhabitants of Meroz and Reuben, or with the victors of faith who stood with Deborah, Barak and Jehovah in the battles of the Lord. Oh, shall we shine like stars in the night now, and then like the sun in the kingdom of our Father?

4. GIDEON; OR THE STRENGTH OF WEAKNESS

"God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, . . . that no flesh should glory in His presence." 1 Cor. 1: 27, 29.

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor . . . And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Judges 6: 12, 14.

"And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands." Judges 7: 2.

The strength of weakness leaning upon God, and the weakness of human strength -- this is the paradox, this is the spiritual truth of which Gideon's life is the illustration.

I. We see this principle illustrated in Gideon's call. Hiding behind his winepress and seeking by stealth to thresh a little wheat for his family without being discovered by the Midianites, the angel of the Lord suddenly appears before him with the startling greeting, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor!" Gideon felt anything but a mighty man of valor, and he must have looked it, too, as he began to apologize and explain to the angel the helplessness and distress of his people, when the answer came as the Lord looked upon him, and said, "Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel. Have I not sent thee?" And Gideon understood that it was not his might nor valor, but the Lord's, that was to save his country. It was the strength of faith which is always the strength of weakness because it is the strength of God.

This is always the story of grace and the secret of supernatural power. It is ever a paradox to the natural mind. "When I am weak, then am I strong," is the proper inscription of every victorious saint.

God comes to the sinner and by a word of sovereign grace pronounces him forgiven, and that word makes him what it declares. He comes to the sinful soul, and says, "Now are ye clean through the word that I have spoken unto you," and that word creates the fact of his sanctification. He comes to the struggling Jacob, and by a word transforms him into the conquering Israel. He comes to the stormy Boanerges, and, lo, he is henceforth the gentle John, rising above all human probabilities and natural causes. Grace speaks and it is done, and faith counts the things that are not as though they were, and Gideon, the trembling fugitive from his foes, stands panoplied the next hour in the strength of God, the mighty victor.

II. But next we see this principle in the test of Gideon's faith. Henceforth he is no longer the natural man, but the man of faith; but how weak his faith is, and how slowly it develops into maturity and confidence.

First, he asks a sign from his supernatural visitor that he may know for a certainty that it is the Lord, and so he prepares an offering and brings it to the angel, and as he presents the kid and unleavened cakes, lo, the staff in the angel's hand touches the offering, and it is consumed in a

moment in flames of fire. No sooner has Gideon's test been granted than he breaks down with a cry of fear. "Alas, O Lord God! because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." Gideon is reassured by the comforting message of the Lord. "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die," and so he builds an altar unto the God of Peace, and goes forth to take his first step of faith and obedience.

This begins at his own home and his father's house, for there the altars of Baal are erected, and the worship of the false gods of the Canaanite is carried on beneath his own roof. God's first command is to build an altar unto Jehovah, and offer upon it his father's bullock in sacrifice to Jehovah, and then tear down the altar of Baal and cut down the grove. Still we see the timid man and the trembling faith even in his obedience. He takes a few men and stealthily by night he secretly does what he was commanded, and in the morning his neighbors look with astonishment and anger upon the wreck of their shrine, and the evidences of Gideon's bold rebellion. They soon find out who the guilty party is, and their cries are loud and unanimous that he shall die. But Joash, his shrewd father, tactfully turns aside the anger of the people by suggesting that if Baal is a true God, he ought to kill Gideon himself, and should have been able to defend himself against

the insult offered to his shrine. The father's brave attitude turns the tide, and God sustains His obedient child, as He ever will the heart that dares to trust in Him.

But no sooner has Gideon begun his grave task than the devil also begins to stir up his forces and resources. The Amalekites and Midianites assemble with a mighty army of one hundred and thirty-five thousand men, and pitch their camp in the valley of Jezreel. Then the Spirit of God comes upon Gideon, and he blows a mighty trumpet call and, lo, the people of his city and his clan gather around his standard; and from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali volunteers pour in, until Gideon stands at the head of an army of thirty thousand men.

But again we see his faith begin to falter, and once more he comes to Jehovah for a reassuring word or sign. God is very gentle with his trembling servant; He sees the true purpose of obedience, and He gives him time to be sure. He always does. When God commands us to take any important step He always will grant us all the certainty and all the strength we need.

Gideon asks a sign suggested by his simple pastoral life, namely, that the fleece upon the floor of the barn shall be filled with dew while all around is dry; and, sure enough, next morning he wrings a bowl of water from the soaking fleece, while not a dewdrop is to be seen on flower or blade of grass. Still Gideon shrinks from going forward, and once more asks a sign from God, namely, that the token of last night shall be reversed, and that the fleece shall be dry the next morning, while all the ground and grass shall be soaked with dew. Once again God answers his request and grants the asked-for sign.

There was one good thing about Gideon's second request. He was willing to have his sign turned upside down. Sometimes when we are asking guidance we want it all one way, and this is usually the reason why we are so oft misguided. We are biased in our preference. We want the dew always in our fleece, and we are not so willing that it shall be dry; but Gideon's will was so fully surrendered to God that he was ready to take His answer either way, and so God could teach him. Not by these signs does God promise now to direct His children. For He has given to us His Holy Word and His Holy Spirit to show us the way in which we ought to go.

We should be very careful in resorting to the lot, or by opening our Bibles at random, and a presumptuous and superstitious dependence upon auguries and portents which leads so many astray.

In the Holy Scriptures we have a standard of right and wrong upon which we can always depend for the general principles at least which should direct our actions, and in the voice of the Holy Spirit we shall always have the special guidance which we need in particular circumstances. But there are certain conditions which we must ever observe. "The meek will He guide in judgment." The yielded and willing heart will find His way. The selfish will, the heart that chooses its way and then comes to God to have Him indorse it, will be very likely to go astray.

The apostles gathered, from combining all the leadings in a given case, that God was directing them at an important crisis, and so the wise man will ever bring to every question not only the general principles of the Holy Scriptures, and the special whisperings of the Holy Spirit, but also a sanctified judgment and a calm, deliberate consideration of all the circumstances and providence concerned, and then will hold all humbly before the Lord in prayer, and suspend all action until impressions become absolute convictions and he can go forth with certainty and rest to follow the path that has been indicated, and leave results with God.

III. Next, we see the principle of our text illustrated in the selection of Gideon's men. It was a good thing for Gideon that he was weak and timid enough to wait at every point for God's next word. It is quite possible for us to receive a command from the Lord and then to go forward blindly to obey it, and really find ourselves at last, in some measure at least, out of God's order even in seeking to obey Him, because we did not stop and hearken all along the way for His further orders. God does not give wholesale a manual of instructions for all the future, but He guides us step by step and day by day, and it is necessary for us at every moment to hearken and obey. Had Gideon gone right on with his thirty thousand, with floating banners and clanging trumpets and patriotic enthusiasm, he would surely have been defeated, and all God's promises would have failed. And so he wisely waited for his leader to point every step of the way. Beloved, we have not only a manual of instructions, but we have a living Lord, and a Leader to help us carry out our instructions. Let us walk closely with Him. For while with one breath He says, "Observe all the things whatsoever I have commanded you," in the other He says, "Lo, I am with you through all the days, even unto the end of the age."

This is the mistake the Church has often made; she has taken a set of doctrines and rules, and bound them up in a volume of instructions, principles and rules, creeds, confessions and doctrinal principles, and then gone forth to carry them out herself. We have no hesitation in saying that even the Bible without the Holy Ghost is not a sufficient guide for the Church or the Christian.

So as Gideon waits and hearkens, another message comes: "The people that are with thee are too many." And God begins to sift them, and, lo, Gideon beholds his splendid army melting away like snow upon the mountains, until two out of every three have gone back at the bidding of his fears. So God still tests us and lets us retire from the tasks for which He knows we are inadequate.

Ah, brother, you think it was God that led you to abandon that work for Him? Nay, God let you abandon it because He saw that you were afraid and would have failed, but had you dared more you might have had more.

But even the ten thousand that are left are still too many, and so there is a second test and God again lets them test themselves. Oh, how solemn it is to know that every step we take we are weighing our own lives, and writing our own record, and fixing our own place of service and reward!

Gideon brings them up to the water brook, and simply watches them while they drink. The most of them, intent only upon drinking, and forgetting all about the foe, kneel down on the river brink, and drink and drink till they are satisfied, oblivious of all else, and never dreaming of the enemy who may be lurking right across the stream, ready to spring upon them in the unexpected moment. These men will not do for God's work, and so He puts them all aside. But there are a few, only three hundred, who go down to the water's edge in a very different fashion. With eyes alert they look around in every direction to guard against surprise or ambush, and then they just stoop down and lap the water with their hands, mouthful by mouthful, at the water's edge, watching between every mouthful for any possible surprise or assault, ready at a moment's notice to stand armed and equipped for the battle. Ah, these are God's men, and Gideon sets them aside while the others go home with the timid ones, unfit to be used of God in His commission.

Beloved, how solemn, how true all this is for you and for me! God is always bringing us down to the valley of decision, to the test place of life. He gives you some blessing, some draught from the fountain of love and prosperity, and He watches to see how you will drink, and, lo, you become absorbed in your blessing; you get right down like them to drink and drink, and forget everything else. You show where your heart is, and God cannot trust you in His enterprises. Perhaps He gives you money, and immediately you become absorbed in business or pleasure, and you are not quite ready at God's call for the sudden emergency or the subtle opportunity.

Perhaps He gives you some friend, and that friend becomes more to you than Christ, or the call of duty, and He has to set you aside, not from heaven perhaps, but from His highest will. Perhaps it is some special service which is the test. He lets you have a soul or a work for Him, and, lo, you become absorbed in your work, and you cannot hear His voice, you cannot watch His hand, you cannot be adjustable to His will, and, God says, "Go home, drink all you want to; sleep on now, and take your rest, the opportunity is passed."

Oh, how the days are telling! Oh, how God is testing! Oh, how, unconsciously to ourselves, each of us is being weighed in the balance! God help us to be watchful, to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

God does not give us notice of these tests before they come. This is an examination where the questions are not submitted to the candidates beforehand. We understand it all afterward, and, oh, how we wish that we had watched! It is not only for the rewards of glory, but it is for the sake of higher service here that our Master is picking out day by day His followers and preparing the vessels unto honor, which are to be sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared for every good work. God wants a chosen people.

Dr. Chalmers had a phrase which might well illustrate the story of Gideon's band. It was the expression, "out and out." He used to say God wants us to be "out and out." Gideon's people were "out and out." First, they were picked out from the thirty thousand, and then they were picked out from the ten thousand. There was a double selection, and so today God is picking out a people

from even His professed followers, and then from these, yes, even from the consecrated ones, He is picking out a people who have not only received the Holy Ghost, but have followed Him truly through all the tests and all the deaths, all the way, so that He can say of them, as we read of the followers of the Lamb, in the day of His appearing, "The people that are with Him, are tried, and chosen and faithful." God makes us "out and out." God keep us tried and chosen and faithful. Then the "little one shall become a thousand," and the weakest saint "more than conqueror" through the omnipotence of God.

5. THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." 2 Cor. 10: 4.

"And the three companies blew the trumpets and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands and cried, The sword of the Lord and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place around about the camp; and all the host ran and cried and fled." Judges 7: 20, 21.

This is the crowning illustration of the supreme lesson of Gideon's life, the strength of weakness. In the weapons of Gideon's warfare as well as in Gideon and his followers, we see how God can use the weak things of this world to confound the strong, and the things that are not, to bring to naught the things that are.

In the commencement of the final assault we still see the timidity of Gideon himself. As God sends him forward for the final attack upon the Midianites, He recognizes the fears of His timorous servant. "Arise," He says, "get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered them into thy hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah, thy servant, down to the host." And so God again encouraged the trembling faith of His child by giving him another sign. Stealthily Gideon and his servant creep down to the edge of the hostile camp, and they listen cautiously outside one of the tents of the sleeping soldiers. It is just after ten o'clock at night, and the camp is wrapped in profound slumber. But one of the sleepers is suddenly wakened from a troubled dream, and he is telling his comrade how in his dream a round cake of barley bread came rolling into the host of Midian, and struck the tent and smashed it into ruins. The companion of the sleeper at once interpreted the dream. "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel, for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." That is enough to satisfy Gideon that God is already working, and the fears of the enemy are prophetic of their fate.

And so God is ever working for those that trust Him. He can fight our battles for us in the very hearts of our enemies, and discomfit them before the conflict begins. Oh! for the faith to recognize our unseen Ally, and the forces and resources which are waiting at His command on every side to cooperate with those who trust and obey Him. The soul that you are seeking to save, and to which you may speak the final word to lead it to decision, has been under a preparation for that word through a whole chain of divine providences with which you have had nothing to do; and when you pass on God has still other agents and influences to take up your work and carry it on to consummation. When Elisha stood at Dothan surrounded by the Syrian armies it seemed to his frightened servant that all was lost; but there were armies in the sky and on the mountain tops more mighty than all their foes. And faith reckons on the unseen, and steps out into the darkness alone with God to find that He is just as able to turn the Midianites against each other as to strike them by the sword of God and that He is already beginning to melt their hearts like wax, and prepare them by their very dreams for the panic and disaster which is so soon to follow. So it matters not if Gideon's forces are but three hundred against one hundred and thirty-five thousand of his foes. It matters not that their weapons are but lamps, and pitchers, and trumpets, for they do

not need to strike a blow in this great battle. Jehovah is going to turn the Midianites against the Amalekites, while Gideon's army stands waving the torch and blowing the trumpet of victory as they shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

These simple and apparently foolish weapons are fitting types of the weapons of our warfare which "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

1. THE PITCHER

This was just a vessel of earthenware. It did not need to be strong or beautiful. If it had been of iron, or of brass, it would have been useless. Its very frailty was its chief advantage, for it was of no service until it was broken. How well it represents these vessels of clay through which God is pleased to accomplish His high commissions and concerning which He says: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," and "Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness unto God." These members are represented here as weapons. Our hands, our feet, our lips, our eyes, our ears, our physical senses are all so many weapons to be used against evil and for the Lord. Gideon's vessels had to be empty. And so God requires our bodies and spirits to be given to Him exclusively, and to be emptied of all our willful, selfish and absorbing preemptions and ready at any moment for His use and service. Then, when they are filled with all of His indwelling life and broken like Gideon's pitchers so that the light may shine through, God will use them in their very weakness for the revelation of His glory and the accomplishment of His plans. We need not be troubled about the breaking of the pitchers. God will do that, or, at least, allow it to be done, but the circumstances and trials, perhaps the wrongs that come to us will furnish the occasion for the victory of His grace. I have seen a child of God standing unmoved amid intense provocation, when the natural impulse would have been to speak the quick word and to take up and resent the wrong in a manner that might have seemed to the world more dignified and becoming. But instead of this there was nothing but the flushing crimson of the brow, the starting tear in the eye, the self-suppression that cost a moment's effort, and then the gentle silence and the sweet smile, and I have seen a strong man broken down by that victory of love and led to seek the grace that enabled a Christian child to triumph over his unkindness, and to let the light of God's love flash through a broken vessel and shine out because of the cruel wrong. I have seen some worker for Christ stand in silence and misrepresentation and wrong and wait for God to vindicate, and in the waiting days exhibit the spirit of Christ and glorify God by that silence as no self-vindication could ever have done, and then in the end come forth with God's own seal of approval and a vindication that human word's could never have afforded.

God lets these things come in our lives just that we may through them reveal the light of His grace and the Spirit of Him, whose agony in Gethsemane and shame upon the cross were but the background on which the glory of His grace shone out with a luster transcending even the Transfiguration light.

2. THE LAMPS

Gideon's lamps represented not only the light of truth and the source of all light, the Holy Ghost, but more than this -- the light of the indwelling Christ as an actual life in the innermost soul of the child of God; for the lamps were inside the pitchers and the Lord of Life must be in us if we would

shine. They say that travelers in Arctic zones can take a piece of ice and shape it into a burning glass to concentrate the rays of the sun until they can kindle fires. But not so can human souls be kindled. The medium must be burning, too. Icy hearts cannot set other souls on fire.

"Thou must thyself be true,

If thou the truth wouldst teach.

Thy heart must overflow, if thou

Another heart wouldst reach."

In speaking of the true seed of the kingdom Christ says the good seed are "the children of the kingdom." And so again He says, "Ye are the light of the world." It is not what we say, but what we are and what Christ is within us that constitutes the strength of our testimony and the power of our life. It is the life of Christ within shining through the broken vessel in a suffering saint, a feeble instrumentality that most honors God and most effectively works for His kingdom and glory.

3. THE TRUMPETS

This is God's symbol of the Gospel message. A trumpet is just an artificial voice proclaiming a loud and startling message of alarm, or warning, or of command. How perfectly it represents the message of the Gospel. The trumpet is not a musical instrument. It has no fine inflections of tone and no sweet cadences of elocution, but it is a loud, short, sharp summons meant to arouse and to move. The very word used for preaching is based on this figure, the trumpet of the herald. When Christ sent forth His disciples to preach He did not say, Go, and give eloquent orations and artistic speeches, but He said, Go, and proclaim as a herald the glad tidings of salvation. Our message should be as clear and as urgent as the herald's trumpet, and so simple that none can misunderstand it. This was what John the Baptist said he was, "A Voice." There was not much honor in being a voice to express another's thought and message.

This is the chief business of the missionary of Christ. Let us not be misled by the inductions of our own reasonings and led into the idea that we are sent forth to heathen lands simply to gather about us bands of little children and train them up in the truths of Christianity and thus gradually prepare a Christian community; giving up as comparatively hopeless the hardened hearts of those that are mature in years and steeped in sin; for God sends us to these sinful and hardened lives, to men and to women, to homes and families, to the cannibal chief and the savage barbarian to flash before him the light of the living Christ, and proclaim in his ears the message of his God; believing that He who spoke to Midian's myriads in the very dreams of the night, and filled their hearts with fear, can still speak to the hearts of men and arouse them to repentance and obedience by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Let this be the aim of our work and the claim of our faith, and we shall still find that the weapons of our warfare are as mighty as of old, and that we need not be "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

4. THE BATTLE CRY

The battle cry of Gideon's band is full of instructive meaning. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" it is translated, but if you look closely at the verse in Judges 7: 18, you will see that the word "sword" is not in the original, and it might truthfully be translated "God and Gideon" or "Jehovah and Gideon." It was indeed a startling battle cry -- "God and Gideon!" There was no waste of words, but there could be no heightening of emphasis. The very words were almost as startling as the blast of the trumpet loud and long. "God and Gideon!" How it rang out over the midnight air until it echoed back from the hills and ravines, until it was answered back by the shrieks and groans of the terrified and wounded men. "God and Gideon," it was a fitting watchword linking together the two great principles of divine operation and human cooperation. God comes first, for the battle is the Lord's. It is He who strikes down the enemy. It is He who uses and prepares the instrument. It is He who turns the foemen upon each other. It is He who fills their hearts with fear, and really decides the battle before it begins. It is He who is still present in all His unchanged omnipotence, and whose eyes run to and fro throughout the earth to show Himself upright in behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him. It is He who saves us. It is He who sanctifies us. It is He who is our Healer, and Deliverer in temporal distress. It is He who, as the God of providence, still works in the events and circumstances of life in answer to His people's prayers. It is He who sits upon the throne -- an ever present God, making all things work together for good to them that love Him. It is He who by the Holy Ghost convicts the world of sin and of righteousness and judgment. He can break the hardest heart. He can change the most obdurate will. He can break down the iron walls of Hindu caste, and bring tribes and nations to seek and acknowledge Him. He can change the persecuting Saul into a humble apostle of Jesus Christ. He can prompt the hearts of men to lay their treasures at His feet, and supply the needed resources for the work of the Gospel and evangelization of the world. He does not need our religious tricks and our shameful compromises with the world in order to gain the favor of the rich and win the popularity of the crowd. Christianity is supernatural power, and the same God that led Israel with a Pillar of Cloud and Fire, who spoke at Pentecost through the tongues of flame, and opened Peter's prison door, and then struck his persecutor down upon his throne in his impious pride, is waiting to work the greater wonders of His grace in these last days of Christian advantage. Oh, for the sword of God! Oh, for the faith to claim it! Oh, for the proof of the promise, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He worketh."

There is the sword of Gideon, too. There is a place for man's obedience as well as for man's faith. So Gideon must himself be true, and his three hundred men must be adjusted and ready, and they must follow him just as closely as he followed Jehovah; for his command is urgent and imperative, "Look on me, and do likewise. As I do, so shall ye do." There must be perfect unity and precision of action. There is not much for us to do, but what He bids us, that must we do, and do just as He bids us to. And then, when the victory was won and the tide was turned, there was still something to do. The foe must be followed up and pursued; the battle must be complete; the enemy must be cut off in their retreat at the fords of Jordan, and the very men that had been rejected the day before, the nine thousand seven hundred who had been sent home because of their failure at the testing waters, they now were permitted to come in at the finish and cut off the fleeing foe. And so there was a part for all.

This was the part of Gideon, and this the object of our obedience and fellowship in the Gospel. God teach us to trust, as if all depended upon God, and to obey, as if all depended upon us.

6. SELF-RENUNCIATION AND SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT

"Not I, but Christ that liveth in me." Gal. 2: 20.

"But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." Gal. 5: 15.

"Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you." Judges 8: 22, 23.

"The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them," etc. Judges 9: 8-15.

These various passages constitute a composite picture representing with peculiar vividness the nature and malignity of self.

1. Self-Renunciation. It stands out finely in the last chapter of Gideon's life. After fairly winning and deserving as the world goes, the honor of a crown, he had the grace and the humility to refuse it; and so his life stands out consistent to the close. It began in nothingness and ended in self-abnegation. Many a beautiful life commences gloriously, and when God has blessed it, it gathers to itself the honor and glory of His blessing and ends in self-consciousness and fleshly pride. Saul commenced in apparent modesty, hiding under the stuff, but Saul ended a king of pride and the monument of humiliating failure and irretrievable ruin. This is often true of some noble Christian enterprise which is blessed in the days of its weakness and dependence upon God, but when it becomes strong and successful it is apt to rise into self-sufficiency and end in worldly conformity and the curse of selfishness. This has been the bane of Christianity in every age. Peter crucified with downward head became Peter the Pope and Prince of Christendom. And Prelacy has followed Papacy as far as it dared, and now ecclesiastical pride in a thousand new forms threatens the purity and simplicity of the Church of Christ with the same peril. A republican form of government does not save a people from the kingship of human selfishness. The spirit of social preeminence, political bossism and personal ambition runs through all our institutions and social life, and the Church has lost her power because the disciples are still disputing who should be the greatest. Christ's answer is forever unequivocal and plain, "He that will be great among you, let him be your servant, and he that will be chief let him be your slave." There is no more necessary thing today than to guard the Church of God against the preeminence of men. No wise Christian worker will want to throw the shadow of his own personality too strongly across his work or become necessary himself to the success of his cause. God wants no Popes, whether they be on Caesar's throne, in St. Peter's Palace, Episcopal Sees, Salvation Army Dictators or Christian Alliance leaders. Let the secret of our strength be the simple apostolic rule, "One is your Master and ye are all brethren," "In honor preferring one another."

2. Self-Aggrandizement. If we see self-renunciation in Gideon we soon find the opposite in his son. The story of Abimelech and the parable of Jotham, which crystallizes its lessons, stand out forever as the portrait of self in the most subtle and destructive forms. Abimelech was the illegitimate son

of Gideon, born of a Shechemite mother. He seems to have been ostracized in some measure from the family and lived at Shechem with his mother's relatives, while the other seventy sons of Gideon dwelt at Ophrah, their father's home. After Gideon's death the spirit of selfish ambition seized Abimelech, and, playing on the clannish jealousies of his brethren, the Shechemites, he persuaded them to join him in a revolutionary movement, setting himself up as king. He took the devil into partnership with him by going into the idolatrous temple of Baal Berith, and taking out of the treasury the money with which he hired a set of worthless fellows as the nucleus of his army. With these he made a sudden descent upon his father's home, and murdered all his brethren except Jotham, his youngest brother, who succeeded in escaping. Then he had himself proclaimed king, and assembled all the people in the valley of Shechem for the public coronation. There, in the historic Vale of Ebal and Gerizim, with glorious pageantry the coronation ceremonies were opened, when, suddenly, Jotham from an overhanging crag about eight hundred feet above the valley, appeared in view and uttered the striking parable of the "Bramble King," startling the crowd and the king with his sudden apparition and his strange and sarcastic message which all could not fail to understand, and then as suddenly disappearing into the mountain recesses.

Jotham's parable was at once a portrait and a parable. It held up in words of burning scorn the meanness and the fleshliness of selfishness, and at the same time it told in unmistakable language the sequences that were sure to follow.

And surely they did follow in Abimelech's career, for after three years of apparent quietness and some show of well doing, the curse began to unfold and the prophecy to be fulfilled. Abimelech and his Shechemite friends became estranged and more and more obnoxious to each other, and treachery met treachery, and hate met hate, until it culminated in a revolution against Abimelech by the men of Shechem. This was followed by warfare until the Shechemites were murdered by thousands, their city razed to the ground and sown with salt, and the last remnant of the citizens burned up in a horrible holocaust of cruelty, with the ruins of their stronghold. Abimelech presses on against his enemies ravaging with fire and sword until at last he brings his foes to bay in the stronghold of Thebez, where, at last, a rock hurled from the battlements by a loyal woman crushes Abimelech's skull, and ends his destructive life with the violence which he had himself visited upon so many others. Truly fire had come out from the bramble of Abimelech to consume the men of Shechem and at last the fire consumed Abimelech himself.

The lessons of this story are rich, varied and most vivid.

1. We see the origin of self-aggrandizement. It is born of the flesh, even as Abimelech was born of the strange woman of Shechem. Self in all its forms, however subtle and disguised, is the fruit of the carnal nature, and it is the very root and center of the life and sin. It is no use to attempt to cut off our sinful acts, habits or propensities until we strike the very heart of evil, our self-life, where the little "I" is exalted and made king, and everything made tributary to our own will, pleasure or honor.
2. Self lives on the selfishness of others, and uses the same principle in them for the gratification of its ends. Abimelech appealed to the men of Shechem by ties of race and blood, and by the inducements of their own self-interest. And so self-aggrandizement becomes a web of countless coils woven and interwoven with the selfishness of others, until hand joins in hand, and a thousand chords of mutual self-interest bind together political parties, commercial monopolies, criminal confederacies, and the baneful associations of evil men which so largely constitute human society.

Each is bound to the other by his own selfishness, and the man who knows best how to play with the selfish passions of others makes them all tributary to his own needs, while the devil sits supreme as king over all. When you see a man appealing to the selfishness of others you may be very sure that he is selfishness incarnate.

3. We see self in partnership with Satan. Abimelech goes to the house of idols and gets the means for his unholy war from the temple of Baal. The devil is always ready to advance the funds to carry out any scheme of human selfishness. He is a very liberal investor in selfish trusts and sinful monopolies. You can always get money for a political campaign and a whiskey trust even when missionary societies are threatened with bankruptcy. Millions and millions of dollars are being thrown away every day in Satan's investments and sin's cooperative societies, and the cause of Christ is languishing by reason of the selfishness of its followers. The devil has his providences as well as the Lord, and the man who wants to plunge into the depths of Satan will find plenty of capital waiting his call and wonder often at his own success.

The devil not only provides the means, but also the men. And so Abimelech soon finds a lot of rascals ready to follow him and do his bidding. Alas, there are plenty of such men still to be found! They swarm on every side waiting for employment. They are recruiting by thousands; and a hundred to one they are to be found at every corner, as compared with the volunteers we seek for Christ. They are the peril of modern society, and some day they will rise in myriad swarms like the Vandals who swallowed up old Rome, and in the dark tribulation days will capture this world for Satan. Selfishness is ever ready to use them as its minions, and things that some men would not do themselves they are willing to let these sons of Belial do. There are many that sit in the high places with kid-gloved hands and polished manners who never perhaps shed a drop of human blood, nor soiled their feet and hands with the grosser forms of crime; but they are murderers and criminals all the same, and they do not hesitate to use the basest tools to carry out their purpose; and some day they shall, stand red-handed and pale with agony as David in the hour when God proved him guilty of another's crime.

5. Next we see self unmasking itself and sinking to the depths of cruelty to accomplish its purpose. Abimelech never stops until his hands are imbued in the blood of his own brothers, and sixty-nine of his own father's children, boys that played with him in childhood have been butchered on the very stone where the angel half a century before had accepted Gideon's offering. Perhaps Abimelech had no idea, when he began, of being a fratricide; but he was, all the same. When a burglar enters the house of his victim his direct object is not to murder, but he is armed for the worst, and if murder is necessary to accomplish his design or protect himself he is not going to shirk it; and so, when we start out upon the pathway of selfishness and sin, only the mercy of God can keep us back from the utmost extremity of evil and iniquity. Well may we all thank God that we have not been left to go farther than we have.

6. Next, we see the foolishness and short-sightedness of selfishness. How vividly Jotham brings all this out in his exquisite parable of the Bramble King! The Olive Tree did not want to be a king because it would cost much to leave the fatness of its fruit and the richness of its soil for the empty honor of waving over the other trees. The Fig Tree had no desire for a glory that would rob it of its sweetness. The Vine was too sensible to sacrifice its luscious grapes and its reviving wine, which even God appreciated, and which was a blessing to man, for the sake of a brief preeminence over

other trees. The only shrub that could be found willing even to consider the proposition of royal honors was a little thorny bramble, which had no fruit to sacrifice, no blossoms to lose, and no real business in life but to be a nuisance and torment to others. And so the Bramble enters into negotiations with the trees with a view to its coronation as their king. It expresses a little courteous surprise and scepticism about their sincerity in appealing to it, and almost suggests that they would not have come if they could have gone anywhere else, and then adds, with a touch of sarcasm: "If, in truth, you anoint me king over you then come and put your trust in my shadow." The bramble means business. If it is to be a king it insists on the complete subjection of all the other trees under its thorny sceptre. If a bramble could smile, this one must have smiled at the mention of its own "shadow." And then it adds with a deeper touch of sincerity: "And if not," now it is really speaking out its honest thought and intention, "let fire go out from the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon."

But now to return to our point. We see how little attraction supremacy had for the olive, the fig tree and the vine. They had something better to do than to rule over others. They had a mission of beneficence, sweetness and service; and a man anointed with the Holy Ghost, and fed on the sweetness of Christ and bearing fruit for God and man, is not craving after self-aggrandizement. Empty glory can never fill the human heart; vanity and pride are no substitutes for the joy of the Lord, the fulness of the Spirit and the sweet rest we find at Jesus' feet. A life of holy service for others is much more delightful than receiving and seeking their honor.

Let us not be so foolish as to waste our lives in such pursuits as the bramble. The society queen is earning a broken heart. The ambitious political leader is laying up for himself the disappointments of a baffled ambition, and perhaps the curse of an evil conscience and an avenging God. God made us for Himself and for the ministry of love. Let us give no place to that wretched self which is but a sapling out of Satan's root. A bramble by nature, it has been a curse to us as it will be to everybody else.

7. We see the evil fruition of self as it works out in the destiny of others and then reacts in our own destruction. Abimelech's life is the historical fulfillment of Jotham's parable. For a little while the bramble king seemed like an olive or a fig tree. His thorns are not yet fully grown. For three years Abimelech seemed to do fairly well. So self hides its sting for a while, and under its nice manners and winning smile it almost looks like an angel; but when the test comes the sheathed claws appear, and the slumbering serpent awakes with its envenomed sting. The men of Shechem had harbored a serpent in their bosom who was going to sting their lives to death. What an awful picture of treachery and destructiveness! Abimelech oppresses the Shechemites, and the Shechemites attempt to dethrone Abimelech, in turn to be themselves consumed and destroyed by his vengeance, until he at last is destroyed in the final turn of the wheels of retribution.

How true are the apostle's words, "If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." A selfish spirit is a torment to everybody, and at last the greatest curse to itself. Like the scorpion, it spends its life in stinging others, and then, at last it gathers up itself and with one final effort stings itself to death. So many a woman has destroyed the honor and purity of others, and then has hurled herself into the dark abyss. So many a man has gone on corrupting innocence with his heartless selfishness, and then become himself the avenger of his crimes.

It is not possible for selfishness to make anybody else happy, and it is still less possible for it to make its possessor happy. It is a bramble by nature, and its only end must be the crackling thorns and the consuming flame. Old Aesop gave its true character in his instructive fable of a fox, who, falling down a precipice, clung to a bramble to break his fall, and found that the bramble had torn him worse than the fall. He turned to it in anger and disappointment and reproached it for its deceitful cruelty, and the bramble honestly replied, "How can anybody expect to catch hold of me, when the business of my life is to catch hold of others?"

Oh, may God open our eyes to see the curses of selfishness! If there is one thing in us that seeks for honor and glory it is a bramble, and it can only bring us misery and the flames of judgment. Let us repudiate it and follow the life of holy beneficence, and find our rich reward in the sweet, divine joy of holy usefulness.

How shall we be saved from the curse of selfishness? Let us gaze on two pictures:

Let us look back at Eden's gate and see the bramble. Alas, it is the symbol of our curse; it is the fruit of sin; it is the first outcome of man's sad fall.. "Thorns and thistles shall the earth bring forth to thee until thou return to dust from whence thou wast taken." And so the bramble stands as a representation of man's sin and God's curse. Shall we make it our king? Shall we join hands with Satan, whose own fall began with selfishness and pride? Oh, shall we not rather turn our back upon it for the Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God?

Then let us take another look and gaze on Calvary. What is this that lacerates our Savior's brow and wreathes His gentle face with such a rude, tormenting crown? Ah! it is the old bramble again; it is the crown of thorns. What are those drops of blood that stain His face, and the tears that mingle with them and flow down His cheeks? Ah! they are the brambles of my selfishness; they are the thorns of my pride. It was this selfish "I" that I let not only crush my fellows, but even murder my Lord. It was not only for our sins He died, but it was for our selfishness, and in that death we die.

Ah! that is the secret of victory over self. "We thus judge that if One died for all, then all died. He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again."

Then I turn the picture round, and yet I see the vision of Hope in that thorny crown of His. I see the thorns and brambles of my selfishness fastened to His Cross, and I know that I, as well as my sin, am dead indeed. The man that was, is now no more. I have nailed him to the cross with my Lord. There he hangs upon the bowed head of my Redeemer. I am a new man born out of heaven, united with the risen Christ; no longer I, but Christ that liveth in me. And now, like Christ, my place is to live the life of self-renouncing love, and win the highest place by forgetting all about place and seeking only to serve and bless. Blessed Master, help us thus to cease to be, and let Thee be in us instead of us, so that it shall be truly, "No more I, but Christ who liveth in me."

7. JEPHTHAH, OR THE FAITH THAT LEADS TO FAITHFULNESS

"Well done, good and faithful servant." Matt. 25: 21; Judges 11: 30 to 36.

The story of Jephthah illustrates with great power two important principles in the divine economy. The first is that God uses the things that are despised to confound the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. The second principle is, that God not only wants men who can trust Him, but men whom He can trust.

I. Jephthah was born a child of misfortune. Through no fault of his, the bar sinister was upon his life, and he was cast out as a poor bastard boy, despised by his brethren, forsaken by his family and thrown upon the cold mercies of the world. In most persons this engenders a spirit of misanthropy and bitterness, and often develops into hard and heartless unbelief and ungodliness.

How natural it is to say, "What is the use of trying, everything and everybody is against me; the very heavens are hostile, and either there is no God or there is no God for me; religion is for the fortunate and favored ones. I am a child of cruel fate, and as everybody is against me, I shall be against everybody, except as I can use them for my own advantage." This is the natural development of human character apart from the grace of God. But grace always proves an exception to every ordinary and natural law. And so in Jephthah's case we find this poor little child of shame and wrong rising through the pressure of unfavorable circumstances to stronger elements of character and nobler qualities of life, and wringing strength and success from the very difficulties that threaten to crush him. This was not through mere personal qualities in Jephthah, but it was undoubtedly through the grace of God, for we find Jephthah a man of deep devotion and intense fidelity to God.

His life resembles another eccentric one, of which we read in the book of Chronicles, namely Jabez. His name signifies "sorrow," and he when born was such a little, wizened abortion, that his mother called him "Jabez," expressive of the sorrow that he had caused her. And so Jabez was thrown into life as a little miserable good-for-nothing, but when he grew old enough to think and pray, he turned from his distressing circumstances to his God, and we read of him this glorious chapter: "Jabez called upon the Lord God and said: 'Oh, that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!'" And it is added, "God granted him that which he requested."

So it was with Jephthah, when all else forsook him then the Lord took him up, and, trusting in Jehovah, he lived to have a glorious revenge upon his unkind people by bringing them a blessing instead of the curse that they had given him.

We have a little touch of his character in the name he gave his new home. He called it the land of Tob.

Tob means "good," and this is but a little straw to tell how the wind blew in Jephthah's life.

We read of another man later in Hebrew history who called a certain land that Solomon gave him, "Cabul." Now, Cabul means "disagreeable." Poor Hiram looked at his country through the green glasses of discontent, and everything was green; but Jephthah looked at his land in the golden light of faith and hope, and all was bright.

Beloved, God wants His people to be delivered from sorrow just as much as from sin. Israel's long and sad failure in the wilderness all began in the spirit of discontent, and, "as it were," murmuring. They did not murmur outright, but they, "as it were," murmured, and from this they went on until the climax was rebellion and judgment, the loss of Canaan and the curse of God. There is in the spirit of gloom, sadness and discontent a morbid and unwholesome touch just as defiling as actual sin. It chills the whole temperature of the spiritual life, and hurts every plant of faith and love. One breath of frost in Florida destroys the orange crop for years, and one touch of morbidness and selfish sentimental sorrow will not only chill our own spirit, but will depress everybody that we come in contact with, and lower the temperature of a whole community of happy Christians. Let us live in the "land of Tob," and let us accept the fulness of His atonement, who not only bore our sins and sicknesses but our sorrows, too.

The name of Jephthah himself is significant. It means "God opens," and it expresses, no doubt, the trust which looked to Jehovah to open his way and clear his path of all difficulties and trials until the valley of Achor became the door of hope, and the thorns and thistles of sorrow became the myrtles and the palms of victory.

Next we find Jephthah surrounded with a most unfavorable set of companions. The narrative calls them "vain fellows." They were the outcasts of society, and men who had been thrown as waifs upon the current of life and they naturally gravitated to a stronger center like Jephthah. Now, such companions are not favorable to the development of the highest character.

How often we hear people complaining that others have led them to do wrong. And yet we find in the story of the Bible that many of God's noblest lives are molded through the very influence of uncongenial associations. Joseph grew to the very pinnacle of moral greatness in defiance of the people around him. David, in his exile years, was surrounded by the outlaws and outcasts of Israel, but through the power of his own personality and the grace of God that was with him, these men became transformed into his noblest followers and friends, and afterward were made the very princes of His kingdom. So the Lord Jesus Christ takes us, a company of poor, worthless sinners and things that are despised, and, by the transforming power of His grace, He lifts us into His own likeness, and crowns us with His own glory. And so, as we are thrown into the society of evil men, be it ours to lift and ennoble them, and instead of letting them draw us down let us lift them up to the mounts of blessing, where God has set us, in order that we may be the lights of a dark world and shine the brighter through the very darkness that surrounds us.

They tell of a good Methodist preacher in England, who was arrested and put in jail because of his street preaching. He prayed so loud that the very authorities of the jail were glad to get him out. There is no place, and there is no society where we may not live the life of Christ and receive the glory of His indwelling. There is no depth of sin and misery so great but that He can lift us up, and turn our sorrow into joy and our curse into a blessing.

Still, He uses the "base things of the world and things that are despised, yea, and things that are not, to bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh may glory in His presence." And so the day came when Jephthah's brothers were glad to send for him to be their deliverer, and Jephthah had the high honor of returning good for evil, and saving the people that once despised him. This is the way that God loves to vindicate us -- to make us a blessing to those that hated us and wronged us. His promise is, "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

When Jephthah responded to their appeal, and came for their help, we see in his very words and acts the spirit of godliness and a lofty faith. We are told explicitly that all his words to his own people were "before the Lord." He spoke as in Jehovah's presence. And so when he sent his challenge to his enemies, it was couched in language of the loftiest faith. He repelled their claim by reminding them how they had treated Israel in the wilderness and forced a conflict, and then how God had taken their land and given it up to His own people, and destroyed the power of Og and Sihon, their giant kings. And now Jephthah referred the battle once more to Jehovah, and went against his adversaries in the name of Jehovah God. The battle was not his, but the Lord's, and such faith never can be confounded. It was not long before Jephthah returned in triumph from the slaughter of his enemies. His country was delivered, his claims vindicated, and his enemies were destroyed.

II. But now we see in Jephthah another lesson, not only of the loftiest faith, but the sublimest faithfulness. In the hour of peril he had vowed a vow unto Jehovah, pledging that when he returned in victory the first object that he met should be dedicated to the Lord, an offering to Him. As he came back amid the acclamations of universal triumph, the first who met him when he approached his home was his beautiful daughter, and as he realized all that his vow had meant he was overwhelmed for a moment with the deepest emotion. But not for an instant did he hesitate in his firm and high purpose, nor once did that dear child shrink back from the sacrifice imposed upon her, but stood nobly with her father, demanding that he should fulfill his vow to the utmost, and together they stood true to their covenant God.

There has been much discussion as to the real meaning of Jephthah's vow, and the real fate of Jephthah's daughter; but there are several passages and constructions which can leave no doubt in the mind of a candid reader that it was not a literal human sacrifice that Jephthah offered, and that the fair child was not slain upon the altar like the children of Ammon before their god of fire, but that her fresh life was given in all its purity as a living sacrifice of separation and service to Jehovah.

In the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy we find the most solemn warning given to Israel against imitating in the least degree the cruel and wicked rites of the Ammonites, especially in offering human sacrifices. Now these Ammonites were the very people against whom Jephthah had gone forth to war, and as a godly follower of Jehovah he must have been familiar with the commandments of the book of Deuteronomy. For him, therefore, to directly disobey these solemn injunctions would have been to prove false to all his character and all the meaning of his victory in the name of Jehovah.

Again, in the twelfth chapter of Exodus, it is clearly taught that the firstborn of Israel were all to be recognized as the Lord's, and liable, therefore, to death, like the Egyptian firstborn. But, instead of

their lives being literally required, they were redeemed by the blood of a lamb, and the Paschal lamb was offered instead of the life of the Hebrew, and that life was still regarded as wholly the Lord's, given to Him in living consecration, of which the whole tribe of Levi was regarded as the type, and, therefore, it was separated unto the service of the Lord as a substitute for the lives of the firstborn.

In all this was clearly taught the lesson that what God required from His people was not a dead body, but a "living sacrifice." It is much harder to live for God than to die for God. It takes much less spiritual and moral power to leap into the conflict and fling a life away in the excitement of the battle than it does to live through fifty years of misunderstanding, pain and temptation. It would have been easier for Jephthah's daughter to have lain down amid the flowers of spring, the chants and songs of a religious ceremonial, the tears and tributes of the people who loved her, and know that her name would be forever enshrined, than to go out from the bright circle of human society and all the charms of youth and beauty and domestic and social delight, and live as a recluse for God alone, giving up the dearest hope of every Hebrew woman, not only to be a mother, but to be the mother of the promised Christ; giving up also, along with her father, the fond desire of a son to share his honor and his sceptre, to prolong his name. All this it meant.

This was the sacrifice she made. And so we read that she did not go aside to bewail her approaching death, but she went aside for two months to bewail her "virginity," the loneliness of her own life -- then she gladly gave her life a living sacrifice to God.

There are several other considerations that might be added if necessary to establish this construction of the passage. It is enough to briefly refer to the fact that the phrase in verse thirty-nine is in the future tense, and refers to her future virginity and not her past, and also that the translation of the fortieth verse in one of our versions is that the daughters of Israel went yearly "to talk" with the daughter of Jephthah four times in a year. It is not necessary to pursue the argument further. Enough for our present purpose that we catch the inspired lesson. That lesson is supreme, unqualified, unquestioning fidelity to God. Jephthah is the man that can depend upon God, but Jephthah is also the man on whom God can depend.

God is looking for such lives, and on such men He will put the weight of His highest service and His eternal glory. God help each of us to be such a man of whom the Psalmist says, "He sweareth to his own hurt, and he changeth not."

How tender and beautiful the lesson which this passage gives to the young as well as the old! Just as Isaac stands out in the older story in a light as glorious as Abraham in yonder sacrifice on Mount Moriah, so Jephthah's daughter's sacrifice must not be forgotten in the honor we pay her father. Sweet child of single-hearted consecration! God help her sisters and her followers to be as true. Oh, beloved, do not wait until desire shall fail and age chill the pulses of ardent youth, and the world will fall away from you itself, but when the flowers are blooming, and the cup is brimming, and the heart beats high with earthly love and joy and hope, then it is so sweet, it is so wise, it is so rare, to pour all at His blessed feet, as Mary poured her ointment on His head, and some day to receive it back amid the bloom and joys of yonder land, where they that have forsaken friends and treasures, fond affections and brightest prospects for His dear sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall have the still richer joy of knowing that they have learned His spirit and understood His love.

8.

"Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." 2 Cor. 6: 17.

Compare Judges, chapters 13-16.

The story of Sampson is an illustration of this text. The principle of which Sampson's life is a sad embodiment is set forth in the symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the iron and clay mixed together, and the image partaking of the strength of the iron, but also, alas, of the weakness of the clay. This is the story of Sampson – divine strength mingled with human weakness, supernatural power hindered by the touch of earth and the taint of sin.

The story of Sampson forms one of the closing chapters of the period of the Judges. He had godly parents. The Lord appeared in a vision and promised the birth of a son, accompanying it with the most solemn injunctions -- first, that the mother should be separated according to the law of the Nazarites before his birth; and, then, that the child that should be born should also be a Nazarite from his birth and separated unto God from his mother's womb.

In due time the child was born and carefully brought up according to the divine command. His hair was allowed to grow in perfect naturalness, and he abstained from wine and all strong drink, and lived a life of abstinence and purity. On arriving at manhood the Spirit of God began to move upon him in the form of extraordinary physical strength. Along with this began the peculiar temptation of his life -- a tendency to self-indulgence and unhallowed associations with the daughters of the Philistines. This, at last, became the snare that ruined him.

His first error was to set his affections upon a Philistine maiden of Timnath, and to marry her contrary to the advice and wishes of his parents. On his way to her home he performed the first great exploit of his life -- the slaying of a lion in a thicket by the way. This marriage was a sad one, and ended in the murder of his bride and the family by the Philistines, followed by his retaliation upon the enemies of his country and the burning up of their cornfields by an army of blazing foxes that he sent across the country.

For twenty years he was the terror of his enemies. He used to boldly visit their towns and hamlets, usually in some doubtful associations with one of their women, but he defied their attempts to take him; until at last, through the snare of Delilah, to whom he had rashly given his love and confidence, he was betrayed into revealing the secret of his strength and fell into the hands of his foes, who bound him and put out his eyes and then immured him for the rest of his life in a solitary dungeon.

There he deeply repented of his sin and folly, and God heard his prayer and gave him one more opportunity to use his colossal strength for God and his country in the last act and tragedy of his life, the pulling down of the vast amphitheatre, in which he had been led forth to make sport for the Philistines, and he and his enemies together perished at the last; but those that he slew at his

death were more than all those he slew in his life.

He passed out of Jewish history -- a marvelous example of what God might have done with a thoroughly separated man, and yet of what self-indulgence and sin can do to hinder the most glorious promise and the most gracious purpose of God.

I. We see a bright beginning, full of glorious promise and possibility. We see God choosing a human life and revealing a high and mighty purpose for a human career, and then we see all this hindered and defeated by earthliness, selfishness and sin. What more could God have done to show His purpose of love and blessing? Twice He came in vision to announce the birth of Sampson, and again and again He 'manifested His supernatural power in the life of His servant, and the mighty possibilities which He was ready to accomplish if He could only have found an obedient and faithful instrument; and yet all this was baffled and hindered by the disobedience and folly of the man whom He had sought to bless and use.

It is a very solemn and awful thing to think how we can hinder God's purposes of love for us. Oh, ye, who have been born of holy parentage; ye, whose childhood has been environed with every holy association and every godly influence; ye, who are the children of a mother's prayers and a father's faith; ye, whose early days have been overshadowed by the very wings of the Almighty, and whose inner consciousness has felt the touch of heaven and heard the whisper of your high calling; remember that, after all this, you may, by your wilfulness and folly, destroy even your own blessing and hear your Master say at last, as He said to His own of old, "How often would I, but ye would not."

II. We see the necessity of a life of separation and entire consecration, if we would become the vessels of the Holy Spirit and the instruments of God's highest blessing. The Nazarite, under the Mosaic institutions, was the peculiar type of a life of separation. He was set part from his childhood to be dedicated peculiarly unto the Lord and separated from all earthly and sensual indulgences. Just as the priest represented the idea of nearness to God, the Nazarite and the Levite represented the idea of separation to God.

This is one of the profoundest principles of God's whole plan of redemption. From the very beginning God purposed to separate a peculiar people unto Himself. We see this in the separation of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel and the Church of Christ, which just means the called-out ones. The very name "Ekklesia" signifies "the separated ones." Man's failure to meet God's thought in this has been the cause of all the failures and disasters of the past. The awful wickedness which preceded the flood was brought about from the mingling of the holy seed with the people of this world, the intermarriage of the children of God with the daughters of men. And in these times the same cause is about to produce similar effects. There is a melting away and a breaking down of all barriers between the church and the world, and the end of it is going to be a condition of things as shocking and terrible as in the days of Noah, and the progeny of such frightful and monstrous unions will once more bring upon the earth a deluge, not of water, but of fire, to sweep the godless race away.

God must have separated vessels. He will not drink out of the devil's cups. We must not only be His, but His alone, bear His monogram, and be His peculiar people. Oh, ye, who bear the name of Jesus and are playing with the world, receiving its attentions, intermarrying with its people,

allowing it to invade the very church of Christ and in the name of religion turn God's holy sanctuary into a place of social entertainment and sometimes indecent exhibitions that would even disgrace a theater, you are opening the floodgates of the coming judgment; you are inoculating the body of Christ with the very poison of leprosy; you are draining all the fountains of spiritual life and power; you are repeating the story of Sampson, and the end can only be the same that came at last to him -- blindness, bondage, paralysis and death. "Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

III. We see in Sampson a picture of the supernatural life and power that God can give to a consecrated body. Sampson was not a physical giant; at least, there is no reason to suppose this. The Philistines could not understand his supernatural strength. If he had been like Og or Sihon or Goliath, of gigantic stature, they would easily have comprehended it, but he seems to have been a man of ordinary appearance and his power was entirely superhuman. It was not through brawn nor bone, but it was because of the divine life that possessed his being and filled his frame with the very strength of God. Just as the electric wire, when filled with the current, has in it the whole power of the battery and can turn the ponderous wheels of a mighty factory, so a human frame may be so possessed with the Holy Ghost that the feeblest may be like David, and David like the angel of the Lord.

There is no doubt that David attributed his stupendous exploits entirely to the physical strength that came to him from Jehovah. His battles were all battles of faith, and he could literally say, "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms." We have seen the power of demoniacal possession sometimes in a human body, so that an insane man had the strength of a dozen men. Why should not the Holy Ghost be able to give the same power to a human arm?

And so Sampson was able to wrench asunder the jaws of the lion, as he would a kid, to carry on his shoulders the pillars and gates of Gaza with their weight of tons and walk with them ten miles to Hebron, and to lift up the pillars which supported the vast amphitheater and literally tear the building to pieces by his arms.

So, still, God is able to put His strength into a human frame, if wholly separated unto Him, so that it can resist the power of disease; can throw off the influence of a poisonous climate; can endure hardship and suffering, and can go through life, like Moses, with unabated strength until life's work is done. The Holy Spirit has this for His separated ones in these last days. It is part of the purchase of Christ's redemption and the partnership of His resurrection and ascension power, and if we are but empty of all that hinders and open to His unrestricted life and power He will dwell in us, and make us to know the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward, according to the working of His mighty power which He brought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavens.

But not only was Sampson an example of physical power, but also of God's supernatural working in the circumstances and providence of life. When he was ready to faint with thirst after the victory over the Philistines when he had slain a thousand of them with the jawbone of an ass, he cried to God in his extremity, and God opened a fountain of water until he was satisfied. There is a realm of natural forces and providential surroundings where faith may still claim the interposition of our

Almighty Lord in all the emergencies and circumstances of life. While the Spirit dwells within us as the source of every needed grace, the Son of God is reigning on His Father's right hand. He has said to His disciples, "All power is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth; and, lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age." This mighty Christ is able to do anything for us that we really need in the line of His purpose for us and the work He has committed to our hands. Are we proving all the power of Jesus' name and all the possibilities of the Spirit-filled life?

IV. We see the withering touch of earthliness and sin. Very gradually did the poison insinuate itself into Sampson's life; very gradually did he allow the snare of temptation to weave its meshes around him, until at last he was a bound and helpless captive in the power of his destroyer.

First comes the visit to the enemy's country. He had no business to go down to Timnath in the first place, except as God might send him as a soldier and as a judge; but he went, and then he looked, and then he loved, and then he longed, and then disobeyed his parents' counsel, and then he took the fatal step which linked his life with the daughter of his enemies.

Yet God did not forsake him immediately. Again and again He showed His power with His servant through a score of years and helped him out of his troubles, and doubtless often spoke to his heart and warned him of his danger and folly. But Sampson still went on in the same self-indulgent course, only getting, as we always do, deeper and deeper into the mire of lust, until at last we find him at Gaza in the house of a woman of ill repute, and at last we see him in the valley of Sorek in the lap of Delilah, who represents the world's delights and the very abandonment of selfish pleasure.

But even there an instinct of self-preservation and peculiar sacredness seems to have lingered to the last. This evil woman, Satan's master-piece of temptation, had been urged by the enemies of God and of Sampson to find out the secret of his strength. They had offered her a bribe of three thousand dollars, which in those days was worth ten times that sum. It would secure her affluence and honor. And for this she sold herself, and determined that Sampson should sell himself, too. With wily tact and womanly pleading she began begging him from day to day to tell her his secret, and, at last, appealing to his nobler nature, to his manly, generous impulses, to his love, she told him that if he loved her truly he would trust her without reserve.

Ah, it was his heart that betrayed him at last! Dear one, perhaps you think you did not mean any great wrong. You never intended to yield your principles, your virtue, your conscience, but they did get the better of you; you trusted somebody and in a moment of impulse you were lost. So poor Sampson fell. So it is that the lost sheep ever goes astray. It is not a wolf. It does not mean any wrong. It is just a foolish sheep. It wanders, it forgets, it dallies and it perishes all the same.

Evil is wrought by want of thought

More than by want of heart.

Oh, how tragical is the picture of Sampson's last temptation and fatal fault! Oh, how the fingers of the devil felt for his very heart, closer and closer, until at last they stole his secret and crushed out his life. He knew that there was danger and he played with it, day by day, putting it off and still holding the citadel, but letting the enemy come nearer and nearer, as he told her that they might bind him with green withes and he would be helpless; and then she betrayed her true character,

and he might have seen the fiend in the fond lover, as she called his cruel foes. Hastily, Sampson sprang to his feet and tore his bonds asunder, and drove them from his presence in dismay. Next, he told her that they might bind him with fresh cords and he would be helpless. And then, again, in the test, the cords tear asunder, and she fell, hysterically weeping, and told him that he did not love her, and pleaded for his confidence; and then his heart was touched, and, oh, how near he grazed to the very edge of the precipice! One trembles when they hear him talk of his Nazarite locks, and tell her that if she would weave them together he would be bound and helpless; and so she weaves them and pins them in a knot, and takes the pin of a weaver's loom to fasten them securely. And now she thinks she has him, and, again, the ambush of men is sprung upon him, and again Sampson springs through the meshes of his snare, and, perhaps, seizes the pin of the loom to beat them from his presence. How narrowly he has escaped! If he had but taken the warning! Oh, if he had but listened to the throbbing of his heart when the Spirit knocked! But a woman's tears and a woman's hysterical pleading at last conquered Sampson's own weak heart. God's hour of long suffering had reached its margin, not through Sampson's triumph, but through Sampson's failure; and the man who might have been a lighthouse on the shores of time must become a beacon on the sunken rock and the dangerous reef, warning others to avoid the place where he was lost. So, at last, the strong man bows; the surrender is made; the secret is told. Doubtless, he exacted from her the most sacred pledge, and she vowed she would never tell it. Doubtless, she swore all that he wanted her to keep his secret, but she had him lulled to sleep and the locks were shaven; the bribe was in her hands and the enemy was upon him. Sampson rose, as before, and shook himself as at other times, and thought he was as strong as ever. He knew not that the Lord had departed from him. The awful progression is completed. Lust hath conceived and hath brought forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

V. Sampson's retribution was as terrible as his sin.

1. He lost his strength, and spiritual paralysis always follows surrender to temptation and compromise with evil.

2. Next, he lost his liberty. He was bound and helpless in the hands of his foes. When once we yield to the enemy we have no power to keep from yielding again. Our defense is departed from us, and we are "given over to a reprobate mind to do those things that are not convenient." Eternal sin is the most terrible part of eternal punishment.

3. He lost his sight. When we yield to sin and Satan our eyes are put out by our enemies, and we cease to know the difference between right and wrong. Our once clear conceptions of God's high and holy will are blurred and blotted out, and we wander in the darkness, not knowing at what we stumble.

He became a sport and spectacle for his enemies, and they used him to grace their entertainments, to be a public mockery at their revels, to honor their false gods and put to shame the very name of the God he loved. The most terrible part of Sampson's punishment was to hear the shouts of his enemies as they boasted of the triumphs of Dagon over Jehovah and the defeat of Sampson and Sampson's God, he knowing all the while that it was his sin and folly that caused all this shame to the name of Jehovah, and the cause that he, above all men, was sent to guard.

But at last repentance and contrition came, and, in his humiliation, bondage and sorrow, Sampson at last awoke to the meaning of his life and asked God for one more chance to be true. To prove his sincerity and the deep reality of the death of self, he was willing to sacrifice his very life in his last exploit, and he only asked of God that he might die in the service of his country and in the destruction of his enemies. He was like the Roman nobleman that plunged fully armed into the chasm at the city gate, which none but he could fill. He was like the soldier who, having betrayed his colors, asked only that he might once more lead the forlorn hope on the battlefield, and die with his colors in his bloody hand and his life laid down in the midst of his enemies. Our service is never worth anything until our life goes along with it, and everything is laid down, even life itself, if God requires it. Sampson has always been looking after his own pleasure, but now, at last, Sampson is dead to self and ready for the noblest achievement of his life.

God takes him at his word, and one day in the height of a great national carnival, while hundreds of thousands of Philistia's nobles are crowding the galleries of the vast amphitheater, whose roof was supported by two great pillars in the center, and all were waiting for Sampson to come forth and make sport for them in his blindness, Sampson's strength is given back to him for one last achievement, and, gripping the mighty pillars, with one stupendous effort he tears them from their foundations, and with a crash of thunder and ten thousand cries of terror the building is in ruins and the proud boast of the Philistines is turned into a death shriek of despair. Sampson is victor in his death, and has accomplished more by dying than he had done in all his twenty years of living.

Beloved, by Sampson's death scene let us learn to die to self and sin, and then we, too, shall "wax valiant in fight, turn to flight the armies of the aliens and out of weakness be made strong."

Nay, more, let us see in Sampson's death the type of a greater than Sampson, whose death accomplished also the destruction of His enemies and ours, and taught us both how to live and how to die, He died for us that we might live, but He died for us that we might die, and in the power of His cross, with its holy sign translated into every fibre of our being and every service of our life, let us go forth to live for Him who died, in "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death."

9.

"No man can serve two masters. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Matt. 6: 24. Compare Judges, chapters 17 and 18.

The remarkable incidents of these two chapters illustrate with great vividness the principles of our text. These chapters contain the story of Micah, and are a medley of sin and crime that not only condemn with the bitter irony of truth the follies and sins of the dark ages of the Judges, but apply with caustic severity and awful truthfulness to the social and religious abuses of our own times.

I. We have a picture of dishonesty.

Micah, a young man of Mount Ephraim, steals from his mother eleven hundred shekels of silver, and for a time conceals his ill-gotten gain. At length, alarmed by her angry curses, he comes and repents and restores the money.

Here we see a very common picture; dishonesty and crime commencing in the home circle, in the first penny stolen in secret from mother's drawer and leading to a life of lawlessness and crime.

Absolute righteousness in the minutest particular is essential to all religious character. We find a lack of righteousness today in the constitution of society, and singular corruption of conscience about right and wrong. There are men and women who can speak of deep religious experiences and extraordinary public services, who yet seem to be unable to appreciate the absolute necessity of strict integrity and uprightness in the matter of property, of debt and of business transactions between man and man.

II. We have here a picture of passion, in the story of Micah's mother. When she found her seven hundred dollars were lost, she was very angry, and she cursed so loud and so long that it seems to be the only thing remembered about the transaction. It made such an impression on Micah that he never got over it until he restored the money; but the moment she saw her shekels again she forgot all about her passion, and even about the crime of her boy, and she fell into another passion of delight, and blessed him as extravagantly as she had cursed him before. "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son." The old lady had a little streak of religion running through it all, and probably thought that she was a very good sort of woman. It never occurred to her to sit down, and tell her boy about his wickedness and lead him to true repentance. All she could think of was that she had got the shekels back.

How like many a mother, alternating between the passionate love and the passionate anger, which are both alike natural, animal and devilish!

III. We see next a picture of counterfeit consecration.

"I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the Lord from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image." What a strange medley of religion and idolatry! Micah's mother had plenty of religion, but it was not any good because it was mixed. The need of the world is not religion; all

people have religion, and the less a man has of God the more he has of religion, as a rule. The pagan of Africa, the heathen of China, have far more religion than we have. They sacrifice and give and do far more in the service of their idols than we do for Christ, but it is the devil's religion. Back of all their idolatry, they, too, like Micah's mother, have a dim idea of the Lord, and will tell you that these images and fetishes are but forms and stepping stones through which they rise to the true God. A Roman Catholic who mumbles her rosary and counts her beads and looks up to the saints and images on her altar, and the Buddhist who talks about Nirvana, alike claim that they are doing it unto the Lord; and above all and behind all religions there is the same deep sense of God and desire to meet Him. But this does not make it any better. The motive does not make the forbidden act right.

And so in our religious ceremonials, we may have much piety in building our chapels and erecting our altars, and contributing to the costly machinery of our splendid rituals and keeping our fasts and our Lenten services; but it is idolatry all the same. Oh, what a surprise will await many a devoted worshiper when he finds in the last day that God has accepted none of his foolish sacrifices, and all this expenditure of money and time and bodily exercise has been as vain as the grossest idolatry of heathenism and the licentious orgies of Baal worship.

But notice in this old lady's consecration how she betrays herself by an act of real insincerity in the midst of her pretended sacrifice. "I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the Lord," she says, and yet, when it comes to business she only took two hundred out of the eleven hundred shekels and kept the rest. She was the grandmother of Ananias and Sapphira. She was not even honest in the little religion she had.

We see the same spirit in heathenism today. The Chinaman will try to cheat his god as openly as the Christian worshiper who puts a bad penny in the plate, if he can do it unnoticed. It is the custom of the Chinese to offer clothing and articles of furniture at the graves of their ancestors. They are made of tissue paper and set on fire, that they may go up in smoke and reach the dead for their habiliments in the land of spirits, but I noticed that the Chinaman always made half a garment -- one side of a pair of pants or jacket. The reason given was, the gods would not notice it and he would save the other half.

How natural it is to let self come into our very devotions, and how much we need the faithful admonition of Paul to his brethren at Corinth: "Now, therefore, perform the doing of it, that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have."

IV. A picture of ritualism.

Micah makes the image and sets it up in his idol temple, with a whole ritual of idolatrous worship. He has a house of gods and an ephod and teraphim, and, to make the whole thing complete, he consecrates one of his sons to be priest. It is all a piece of man-made religion. Now, here is the point where the emphasis lies. Micah's religion was all manufactured according to his own patterns. And this is the essential defect of all forms of false religion -- they are all man-made. It matters not whether they are the grossest idolatries of pagan nations, with their common fetishism and priestly idols, or the licentious forms of gross idolatry, which but express the passions of the human heart, or the more artistic and ideal religious systems of more refined ages, with their Confucian morality, their Buddhist philosophy, or their ancient Vedas and Shastras; whether they

be the dreams and pretended revelations of Mohammed and Joe Smith; whether they be the imposing ceremonials of the papacy, or whether they be the elaborate rituals of the modern Church; they are all but the thousand man-made forms of so-called worship. The essential fault of every one of them is that they are human, that they are based upon the traditions or inventions of man, and not upon the revealed word and authoritative commandment of Jehovah.

God's command to Moses was that he make all things according to the pattern shown him in the Mount, and Christ's command to His disciples was an echo of it, teaching them "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." And, therefore, the devil has tried to get into the very Church of Christ, and institute a whole system of theological teaching and ceremonial worship that God never revealed nor commanded, and change the whole divine system of the church into a piece of human machinery which he could manipulate at will.

How much of our religious work today is entirely human! Our revivals are gotten up by careful organization and artificial mechanism. Our worship is sustained at an enormous cost by trained performers who belong to the world, flesh and the devil on six days, and for a consideration give a few hours to the Lord on the Sabbath. And much of our so-called religion is what the apostle describes as "teaching for ordinances the commandments of men;" and, again, "ordinances which all are to perish with the using after the commandments and doctrines of men."

But after Micah had arranged his whole ritual, he felt that something was lacking. He wanted God to recognize his man-made church, and give it a touch of authority and sacredness. And so, one day there came along a young Levite from Bethlehem Judea, and sojourned a few days with him; and Micah, finding that he belonged to the Levitical line, invited him to become his priest and take charge of the temple and service that he had recently fitted up, and offered him a salary of ten shekels a year, equal to about \$6.40, besides a good suit of clothes and his board; and the young man considered the call, finally accepted it, and was installed as the hired preacher in Micah's church. Then Micah was at rest; he felt completely satisfied. He had got just enough of God in his man-made church to justify him in calling it a religious institution. And so he rubbed his hands with delightful self-complacency and said, "Now I know that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to be my priest."

And so men and women today are making up their various religious programs and wanting only to get ecclesiastical recognition, to get some Levite with real apostolic succession to countenance the thing, and it is all right, no matter whether God approves or disapproves; and, alas, it is only too easy to get ecclesiastical recognition for any form of doctrine or medley of so-called worship. Let a man of liberal mind and attractive personal qualities go forth among our people as a public teacher, and win their confidence and applause by his books and lectures, as one of our recent visitors from abroad has done, and then let him publish to the world a creed which could be accepted by a Unitarian, a Jew, yes, even a Spiritualist, as well as a Christian, if he is tactful enough in pointing his phrases and prudent enough in guarding his expressions, that man can stand as the acknowledged representative of the most conservative of the churches of Scotland and England, and be recognized as a true Levite. Let a man in the wild license of modern theological thought and the passion for freedom and originality, cut up this Holy Bible with his pen-knife until nothing supernatural is left, and laugh away the Pentateuch and the books of Isaiah and Daniel, and yet he can secure the highest place in our theological seminaries, and be

recognized as a star lecturer at our Christian conventions and retain his standing without challenge. Nay, let the very sanctuary and temple of God be prostituted to religious entertainments and exhibitions that would scarcely be counted decent on the stage, and the regular program of parish work include the weekly dance as well as the weekly prayer meeting, and yet it may all be canonical; and the members and officers of this man-made medley fold their arms in self-complacency, like Micah, and say, "It is all right, seeing I have a Levite to be my priest."

V. We have a picture of the sad fruits of religious compromise. The sequel of the story of Micah is ironical and most tragical. A band of freebooters from the tribe of Dan pressing forward after new territory came to the house of Micah, and, finding his priest, asked counsel about their movements and were encouraged on their predatory expedition. They went forward, and finding a beautiful region returned to their own tribe and organized a powerful force, and these, following in the footsteps of the pioneer party, first came to the house of Micah, and stole his priest and his gods; and when he followed them, protesting and pleading, they coolly advised him to go home for fear he should get hurt, and marched on with his booty, leaving him only the cold comfort of their scorn. And then passing on, they invaded the peaceful territory that their pioneer party had discovered, and put the helpless villagers mercilessly to the sword, taking possession of their country where they, in turn, organized an idolatrous shrine and seat of worship which became in succeeding years the most corrupting influence in all the religious life of the nation. Thus we see Micah's sin and folly bearing fruit -- first, in his own suffering and loss, and the ruin of all his cherished hopes and plans, and the very loss even of his religion; secondly, in the cruelty and wrong which swept away a whole defenseless community; and, thirdly, in the long-continued and baneful influences which it started and kept in operation throughout all the centuries of Israel's history.

These are the effects of religious compromise and the sin of Micah in every age. First, they lead to the bitter disappointment and ruin of the worshiper, and the day surely comes when the devil will steal the worthless religion that he gave his wretched follower, and leave him nothing but scorn and despair. Secondly, superstition leads, and always will lead, to cruelty and crime. False religion becomes a persecutor and a destroyer of the rights and liberties of men. The two most cruel and destructive influences of medieval and modern history have been Mohammedanism and Romanism, and they are both forms of false religion, very similar in their history and religious principles to Micah's hybrid religion. The early conquerors of South America took possession of the land in the name of God, and even the very geographical names of the country today bear witness to their pretensions of piety, but the ruin of the aboriginal races and the degradation which still rests upon the land today, bear witness to their cruelty, rapacity and wickedness. Thirdly, the leaven of false religion becomes a corrupting principle in all the future history of a people. Micah not only succeeded in corrupting his own family, but also in laying the foundation of evils that lasted to the latest age of their history and corrupted the whole nation, leading eventually to the captivity of the race and the sins and sorrows of threescore generations. And so when we defile the streams of divine truth and life we poison a whole generation. When we plant the tares in the midst of the wheat, we leave behind us the seeds of thorns and thistles for the eternal burning. Men may think it a very innocent thing to play with "higher criticism" and toy with ritualism, but they are undermining the faith of their own children, they are kindling the incendiary fire that will burn up their altars and their homes, and they are pioneering the awful procession of anarchy, socialism, immorality, crime and the very horrors of lawlessness and wrong which will usher in the days of

Antichrist and the catastrophe of the world.

10. OUR KINSMAN REDEEMER; LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH

"Thy Maker is thy Husband, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah 64: 5.

The Book of Ruth is really a part of the Book of Judges. It is a sort of vignette inserted on the background of that mingled picture of the dark ages of the Old Testament, and is thus a sort of companion picture to the one last given us, the story of Micah. Both are incidents gathered out of the same period of Hebrew history and illustrating the life of the people; the one on the dark, the other on the bright side.

There is another dark picture on the canvas which we have passed over. It is the shocking series of incidents recorded in the last three chapters of Judges, all growing out of a single unholy relationship. It is the story of a licentious woman destroyed at last by the very wickedness that she had herself pursued; and of a sinful man who allowed her to draw him into her wicked life, and who, through her influence, became unfaithful to his high calling as a priest of the Lord. Out of their relations grew, at length, a frightful crime which involved in a destructive civil war all the tribes of Israel -- a war which did not cease until three armies had perished and one whole tribe in Israel had become almost extinct. So fearful are the consequences of even the slightest sin. How solemn and how true is that little verse in James which gives the pedigree of sin: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death!"

But we pass over this dark picture, and we come to the story of Ruth. It is like a little oasis in a desert. Goethe has called it the finest poem in human language; and yet how few of the children of God really understand its beautiful meaning and teaching. It is said that a literary man once read it in an English drawing-room to a select company of cultivated people, slightly changing the principle names and the style of the story, but reading it substantially as it is given in the Bible, and his audience was delighted with this new and wonderful literary production, and eagerly questioned him about its authorship and origin. They retired, with significant silence, when they learned that it was one of the books of their neglected Bible.

It is scarcely necessary to recall the incidents of the story -- the famine in Bethlehem, the emigrant family, Elimelech and his wife Naomi, with their two boys, Mahlon and Chilion. Then came the death of the father and the marriage of the two boys to two maidens of Moab, named Ruth and Orpah. And then, in due time, they died and the three widows were left alone in a foreign land. Then Naomi turned homeward, but with unselfish consideration, she tried to dissuade her daughters-in-law from the journey which promised so little for them or her. Orpah, the more demonstrative of the two, expressed great affection, and went home; but Ruth clung to Naomi with those ever memorable and noble words, which have been inscribed with the point of a diamond as the loftiest expression of loyal affection and devotion: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be

buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

And so two lone widows came back to Bethlehem and began to seek a livelihood in the humblest way. Ruth took upon herself, as a loving daughter, the support of the home, and went out, like Jewish maidens, to glean in the wheat and barley fields. It was there that she met Boaz, the rich farmer, who had heard of her kindness to her mother and her maidenly modesty and who became attracted to her, and showed her special kindness without sacrificing in any way her own womanly independence. Naomi, meanwhile, kept watching with motherly intuition the whole situation, looking constantly to God, in whose wings they had come to trust. At length, Naomi found that Boaz sustained to her and Ruth the peculiar relation of the Goel, or nearest of kin, whose duty it was to redeem her husband's inheritance and take his widow to be his wife. Naomi advised Ruth to take the bold yet modest step by which she could claim her rights.

The sequel, we all know. Boaz recognized the claim, but kindly told her that there was another who had intervened; but, should he refuse to do the kinsman's part, he, Boaz, would be true. And so it came about that the nearest kinsman declined to do his part lest he should mar his own inheritance in merging his name in another family; and then Boaz stepped in, redeemed the inheritance of Elimelech and took Ruth as his bride; and out of this union came the birth of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. And thus Ruth, the daughter of Moab, became the grand-mother of David, and the ancestress of Jesus Christ, the Son of man, and the King of kings.

I. We see in this story some beautiful examples of domestic virtue and lofty character. How fine is the picture of Naomi, one of the much-abused class of mothers-in-law, who was, indeed, a true mother, and who so wisely sought the interests of her children and deserved and gained their confidence and love.

Perhaps the sorest need of society today is true mothers, and the guilt of many a lost girl lies heavy on the soul of selfish, ignorant and unholy motherhood.

How beautiful is the character of Ruth; her filial love, how true; her maidenly modesty, how perfect! This is woman's finest jewel, and her most attractive quality in the eyes of every true man. This was what drew Boaz to her, because she went not after the young men, but clung to the maidens and stayed with her mother when her work was done.

The social freedom of our day is bound to bear its fruit in social corruption. "If she be a wall," says Solomon, "we will build upon her a palace of silver; and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar."

Then Ruth was an industrious maiden; she was not afraid of hard work. It is not a bad suggestion for our idle and pleasure-loving girls to know that it was in the harvest field that Boaz fell in love with her, and even when he did, he let her stay in the harvest field, only making her work a little easier, but not for a moment destroying her independence by offering to provide for her without her own honest labor. Luther has well said, "The devil tempts men, but the idle man tempts the devil;" and this is just as true of woman as of man.

Above all is the piety of Ruth. It was not merely the love of her mother that made her true; but it was the love of her mother's God. Very finely Boaz alludes to it when he speaks of "the wings of the Almighty under which she has come to trust."

Just as fine, in his way, is the character of Boaz. He is wealthy and influential, but simply and unostentatiously he goes down to his field and works with the men, and yet he maintains his dignity and reserve, and holds his position without pride on the one hand or undue freedom on the other. How fine his chivalrous spirit and manly respect for Ruth! How delicate and thoughtful his kindness; just enough to encourage her, but not enough to hurt her self-respect! How just and upright his conduct in relation to the nearest of kin, giving him every chance to claim his rights, although his own heart was so deeply interested in Ruth, and then meeting the obligation so nobly! And how manifest his deep piety and his recognition of the piety of Ruth and Naomi!

One of the finest evidences of lofty character is the power to discover the noble qualities of others, and we see in Boaz that fine touch that fully recognized the nobility of Ruth and Naomi, and was as honorable to him as it was to them.

What beautiful examples we find in this pastoral poem to mothers, to daughters, to maidens, to men, to all classes and ranks of society, especially in these days of social heartlessness, homelessness and selfishness!

II. We have in this story a beautiful illustration of divine providence. We see God working in human affairs to carry out His divine purpose. We see Him overruling the sorrow of former days to bring about some greater blessing. Sorrowing one, He that watched over the lone widows of Bethlehem will some day wipe your tears away, and make you even thank Him for the trials that now you cannot understand.

We see Him leading out that family, in order that, through them, He might lead in this daughter of a Gentile race, and make her a partner in the hopes of His people. We see Him fitting the times and seasons of our lives in bringing these wanderers back to Bethlehem just at the right time, the harvest season. We see His loving care of His children finally expressed in the beautiful figure of Boaz, "the wings of the Almighty." Under those sheltering wings His children still lie, and the God of the widow and the fatherless is not dead, but through each perplexing path of life He will guide their footsteps, providing for their need and safely leading them home.

III. We have a type of redemption. In the helpless condition of Ruth we see the picture of our lost condition. Ruth was born of a Gentile race, and the race that was especially under the curse. Moab literally means "son of his father;" and we know that the tribe was descended from the accursed union of Lot and his daughter. Ruth well represents the sinful state of God's redeemed people under the curse of a fallen race. She was not only a Gentile and a stranger, but she was a widow; her natural protector was gone, and her nearest kinsman who had the right to redeem her refused. How well she represents our helpless condition; not only lost, but none to help, and even the very Law, which came, as it seemed, to save, was helpless and unwilling to deliver the sinful soul.

But, in beautiful contrast with all this, how fine the picture of redemption unfolded in this Book! Under the Mosaic law, there is a statute providing for what is called Levirate marriages, under whose provisions a family name was not allowed to perish from the tribe; and so, when a man died, his brother was to take his wife and redeem his inheritance and raise up seed unto his brother. Now, under this provision, Elimelech and his sons having died, it was the right and duty of the nearest of kin to step in and save their inheritance and family name, and through the widow

raise up seed unto the dead husband. This, of course, involved the forfeiture of the kinsman's own family name, and marred his inheritance; but it was recognized as a patriotic and social duty, overriding personal considerations.

Now, this is just what Boaz did for Ruth, and what the nearer kinsman refused to do. Boaz merged his own personality and family in Ruth's family, making a real sacrifice, and thus he became her kinsman redeemer, and then, also, her husband.

This is the beautiful type of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. For us He has sacrificed His own divine rights. This is what the apostle meant when he said, "That being in the form of God, He thought it not a thing to be eagerly grasped and retained that He should be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Christ gave up forever a place of dignity and right on yonder throne, where He was known as God and God alone. Henceforth, He is forever known as man, still divine, but not exclusively divine, but united to the person, flesh and form of a created being, and His whole inheritance merged in ours. He lay down His rights and His honors, and took up our wrongs and reproaches, our liabilities, disabilities and responsibilities, and henceforth He has nothing but His people. He is the merchant man seeking goodly pearls, who, having found one pearl of great price, sold all that He had and bought that pearl. The Church, His Bride, is all He owns; He has invested everything in us. The Lord's portion is His people; therefore, let us make up to Him what He has laid down; let us understand His sacrifice and love, and let Him find in us His sufficient and everlasting recompense.

But the redeemer not only sacrificed his own inheritance, but also brought back the forfeited inheritance of the dead husband; and so our precious Goel has brought back for us all that we lost in Adam, and added to it infinitely more -- all the fulness of His grace, all the riches of His glory, all that the ages to come are yet to unfold in His mighty plan, victory over death, the restoration of the divine image, sonship with God, triumph over Satan, a world restored to more than Eden blessedness and beauty, the crowns and thrones of the coming kingdom, and all the exceeding riches of His grace and kindness toward us which in the ages to come He to show. All this and more is the purchase of His redemption,

"In whom the tribes of Adam boast

More blessings than their father lost."

But the best of all the blessings brought by the Kinsman Redeemer is Himself. Not only does He redeem the inheritance, but He purchases the bride and He becomes her Bridegroom. When Boaz bought the inheritance of Elimelech he took Ruth also in and she became his bride. And so our blessed Kinsman Redeemer is also our Husband. Not only does He come down into our nature in the incarnation, but He takes us up into His person in that wondrous betrothal which is to reach its consummation in the Marriage of the Lamb.

IV. Once more we see in Ruth's example the pattern of a faith that dares to claim and enter into all the possibilities of its inheritance. It needed on the part of Ruth a very bold and decided act to claim her rights under the Levirate law. They would not have come to her as the snowflakes fall, but they had to be recognized and definitely claimed. And so her mother told her all about it, and

showed her that she was doing no unwomanly or immodest thing to put herself at the feet of Boaz and in the place of which she was entitled and leave upon him the responsibility of accepting or refusing her. Still, it cost her many a struggle and many a tear before she robed herself in her wedding garments and, stealing through the eventide, lay down at the threshing floor of Boaz, putting herself and all that was dear to a woman's honor at his mercy. It was the abandonment of faith, but faith must always abandon itself before it can claim its blessing. It was thus that Mary, in later days, consented to risk her very reputation at the angel's message and believed for the mighty blessing that was to bring the world its Redeemer at the cost for a time of even Mary's reputation. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," she cried, "be it unto me according to Thy word," and the answer came, "Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be an accomplishment of the things that were told her from the Lord." And so faith must ever claim its promised rights. Every victory costs a venture and the blessing is in proportion to the cost. Faith must still see its inheritance under the promise and then step boldly forward and take what God has given. Salvation is not now bestowed as mercy to a pauper, but is claimed in Jesus' name by a trusting child who inherits under his Brother's will. So we take His forgiveness and so we must take every blessing and answer to our prayer all along the way. God has given us the right to take this place of boldness. We are not presuming, but we are honoring His word. We are not entering beyond our rights, but we are showing our confidence in our Father's truth and love by daring to take all He has dared to give. So let us have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus

"And to its utmost fulness prove

The power of Jesus' name."

V. Finally, the fruit of the union was the dynasty of David and the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of man, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Ruth's faith brought her into a family of princes and a kingdom of glory. And so for us, too, redemption means a crown and a throne at the Master's glorious coming. But back of the throne and the crown lies the love story of redemption and the bold appropriation of faith. We must learn to know the Bridegroom now if we would sit with Him upon His throne then and share the glory of His millennial reign. Oh! shall we take Him as our Redeemer, our Husband, and our coming Lord, and have Him say to us, "Thy Maker is thy Husband and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall He be called."

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