

Our Heritage and Our Hope

by C. William Fisher

The sermon emphasizes the importance of holding onto our heritage of holiness and not surrendering it to the pressures of a secular civilization.

Scripture: Daniel 3:16, Daniel 6:10, Acts 5:41, 1 Corinthians 16:13, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 11:36, Hebrews 12:1, 1 Peter 1:15

Topics: "Holiness Movement", "Spiritual Heritage"

Description

C. William Fisher preaches about the importance of rediscovering and rededicating to the heritage of holiness, amidst the dangers of diluting its demands and blurring its distinctive doctrine in today's society. He emphasizes the need to value and preserve the rich heritage of holiness, passed down by spiritual heroes, martyrs, and pioneers, despite the pressures of secularism and the temptations of a diluted version of holiness for possessions, pleasure, or popularity. Fisher calls for a return to the heroic commitment and sacrificial devotion of those who stood firm in their faith, even in the face of persecution and death, highlighting holiness as the only real hope for the present and future.

Transcript

PREFACE

If it is true, as a famous writer has said, that "life becomes a futile thing when it lacks a faith in the high meaning of its origin and the high meaning of its goal," then it is time for Nazarenes everywhere to rediscover the glory and grandeur of their heritage and to rededicate themselves to the promise and purpose of their destiny.

In this soft and sassy age, there is the ever-present danger of so diluting the demands and blurring the lines and distorting the distinctive doctrine of holiness that it becomes nothing more than an anemic idea, a flabby ideal, an arid cliché, and an emasculated shibboleth.

In this loud and brassy time there is the urgent need to take a grateful glance at the past -- at its spiritual heroes and their heroic achievements -- and then, with quiet poise, look confidently toward the future, with the inner assurance that the beliefs we hold are really true, and that those truths are still significant and relevant to the world's needs and to humanity's hungers.

In this time of transition and change, then, a time fraught with danger and filled with promise, may this brief message be a God-blest reminder that it was the spiritual dynamic of holiness that necessitated and enriched our yesterdays, and that it alone justifies and makes meaningful our existence today, and that holiness -- as a message, as a dynamic, and as a way of life -- is the only real hope we have of realizing the rich promise of our tomorrows.

C. William Fisher

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And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.

And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.

I Kings 21:1-3

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OUR HERITAGE AND OUR HOPE

"I am overwhelmed at times," said Albert Einstein, "with the sense of my great debt to those who have gone before me." If such a creative intelligence as Albert Einstein felt compelled to make that admission, then certainly the rest of us need to recognize anew our vast debt to the Pauls and the Luthers and the Wesleys and the thousands of unnamed Christians who have filled to overflowing the reservoir of our spiritual heritage with their own rich, red blood and who, with gnarled and bloody hands, have lifted the chalice of suffering and sacrifice to our soft and trembling lips.

One of the greatest dangers of our day is that we who draw from that reservoir of holy heritage will not replace our withdrawals with the full, whole blood of sacrifice and service, but will dilute it with the water of our easygoing lives and our partial surrenders and our shifting convictions until that heritage, once so great and so magnificent, will become so diluted that it cannot sustain our own loyalties nor be effectively passed on to a new generation.

May God help us to value our heritage of holiness so deeply that, regardless of the pressures of a secular civilization and the subtle suggestions of the enemy and the threats of a godless society, we will hold to our heritage and, with God's help, hand it on to those who follow -- untainted, untarnished, and undiminished in power and vigor and richness and meaning.

The story of Naboth and his vineyard is an inspiring and invigorating example of a man who refused to surrender his heritage -- even when pressured by a king. Ahab, the king, had a beautiful palace in Samaria but he wanted to improve his country house in Jezreel and thought he needed Naboth's vineyard to use as a vegetable garden. Ahab's offer to Naboth was very generous -- Naboth might choose a better vineyard or he might have cash. No hardship was involved -- except in regard to Naboth's principles!

Naboth refused to exchange or sell his inheritance and died because of his refusal. But Ahab, the king, found out there was a man in Samaria who could not be bribed or bought but who valued his inheritance more than he valued life itself, and could not be pressured into surrendering his heritage even by the royal pressures of a greedy king. Naboth lost his vineyard -- and his life. But he didn't lose his reverence for his heritage! No Ahab can take that away from a man.

I. OUR HOLINESS HERITAGE

Men who are associated with old and honored institutions are accustomed to boast of the age of their institution. How familiar are the signs in advertising: "Serving the public for over fifty years," "In business for over a century," "Continuous publication since 1837"! All such slogans try to impress the public with the stability and enduring quality of their product or firm.

Length of continuity in itself, of course, does not prove the institution or cause to be genuine or valid or God-directed. But the length of continuity of a God-originated, God-directed, and God-empowered cause does have importance and significance for everyone who is looking for something genuine and enduring. And the only cause that God has really backed, from the beginning, is the cause of holiness. He has given everything He has for that cause.

If anyone wants to get into something that has had God's redeeming attention and support from the beginning, line up in the cause of holiness. God has always had a central interest in that!

Who Started It?

It was God himself who conceived the idea of the holiness corporation, with himself as Chairman of the board and Christ, His Son, as President of the entire scheme of salvation, and the Holy Spirit as Executive Secretary in charge of operations, and with every true believer a vice-president in charge of promotion. And as is so often true when a son is made president, this Son started at the bottom -- no one can start lower than a manger. But with divine energy He worked His way up through the ranks until He reached the pinnacle of the Cross. But the arms of His executive chair were not curved -- for comfort, but straight out -- for suffering; and His feet did not rest on a desk, but on a nail.

Of course this Son had the job of president from the beginning (most sons do), but He had to come down to earth to get the "feel" of the business; and, my soul! how He got the feel of it! He got it by touching diseased bodies and blinded eyes and hurt hearts and soiled souls and lame lives -- and, finally, He got the "feel" of it by the cruelty and the crunch of cold, hard nails! All of this, just so He could be a President who would be sympathetic and friendly and understanding and forgiving!

The world has never seen another president like Him. He doesn't hand out orders with an iron hand; He hands out love -- with a hand that drips with mercy. He doesn't bark; He whispers. He doesn't strut; He suffers. He doesn't fire; He forgives.

God, then, has been in business from the beginning and His purpose has never been to make men rich, but to make men holy. His business is not to make men slaves, but to make men free. Of course there have been many workers and clients who have been lost to the firm, but the corporation still stands. And its slogan is, "Holiness unto the Lord." And its advertising doesn't read, "Since 1907," or, "Since 1517," or, "Since A.D. 33," or, "Since 4000 B.C." But it reads, "Since the Beginning!"

Let no one ever feel inferior because holiness didn't start until 1907. It didn't start then. Bresee didn't start it. Wesley didn't start it. Paul didn't start it. Peter didn't start it. Isaiah didn't start it. Moses didn't start it. God started it!

Don't ever be ashamed of holiness. Don't ever hang your head because you belong to a holiness church. Lift up your head and remember that holiness has the longest and most illustrious history and the brightest and surest future of anything that's ever been in this universe!

The Price Paid

The call to holiness has always been a call to heroism. Its challenge has never received the response of weaklings or worldlings. It has always been a cause that called for volunteers -- draftees are too weak of motive and mission to be accepted. Those who have fought in the cause of holiness have been the "Christian Commandos" --those who volunteered for the place of greatest danger in the mission that required the greatest courage. If holiness has never been a popular cause, it is not because it lacks appeal; it is simply because there have always been more cowards in the world than heroes.

But, thank God, there have been some heroes. The great reservoir of our holiness heritage has been filled by the blood of holy prophets and Christian martyrs. All the apostles poured their blood into the reservoir. So many early Christians were killed in the arena of the Colosseum that the sands of the arena were turned blood-red. But that blood was not lost. It trickled through the sand and into the great reservoir of a great heritage.

John the Baptist, moved upon by the Holy Ghost even before his birth, lived a life of rugged holiness and preached with the fire of God blazing from his heart and lips. But when he refused to soften or blur his message even for the lecherous Herodias, his life was doomed; and finally his head was served on a platter to the passion-lashed Herodias by the beautiful and supple Salome. The platter held his head, but it couldn't hold his blood! That had already flowed into the reservoir of a great heritage.

When Polycarp was condemned to death by burning, he was commanded to curse Christ; but he answered, "Six and eighty years have I served Him, and He hath done nothing but good; and how could I curse Him, my Lord and my Saviour?" Refusing to renounce his faith, he was burned

to death. But as the flames leaped around his body and licked into his flesh, his blood was dripping down through the faggots into the reservoir of a noble heritage.

Wesley, after pouring out his life in traveling over two hundred thousand miles on foot and on horseback, after preaching over forty thousand sermons, after decades of being vilified and slandered and ridiculed, died at eighty-eight, leaving less than fifty dollars in this world's goods. And yet, in the words of David Lloyd George, "He bequeathed to the world a heritage incomparably sublime." The blood that had flowed through that frail body for so long finally flowed into the great reservoir of a magnificent heritage.

Heroes of the Faith

But there have been thousands of men and women and young people whose names will never be known to anyone but God who paid the price for holy living in spite of the fires of persecution and torture. Although their deaths were not so dramatic or spectacular, they lived so unselfishly and sacrificially that their entire lives were a continual drip of their lifeblood into the rich reservoir of a great heritage.

Heroes of the faith, we salute you! You who through the ages, in spite of fire and dungeon and sword, fought a good fight, finished your course, and kept the faith! You who in the blazing light of public execution dared to stay true to a great Christ! You who in the dark corners of obscurity paid the great price of faithfulness to a great cause! You who marched through the colosseums and catacombs of history, undaunted by the ridicule of the mobs and unafraid of the persecutions of the mighty, but through it all gave glorious witness to the reality of God's grace in the soul, we salute you!

You battle-scarred heroes of the cause of holiness in America; you who slept on planks, lived in tents, prayed and fasted for days on end, suffered ridicule and jeers; you who were thrown into jails and were run out of towns; you who suffered poverty and sickness and heart-crushing defeats and yet fought on -- fought on in the great cause of holiness and added your lifeblood to the reservoir of a great heritage, we salute you!

And now, with heads bowed in honor to your sacrifice and suffering, and with hearts warmed by the example of your devotion and faith, and with wills steeled by your heroism and courage, we gratefully say with Austin Dobson:

Heroes of old! I humbly lay The laurel on your graves again; Whatever men have done, men may-- The deeds you wrought are not in vain!

II. WHAT "AHAB" OFFERS FOR OUR HERITAGE

Ahab's first offer to Naboth was a better vineyard than the one he already had. This is always Ahab's first approach: something of the same nature, only better. That is his first approach today. A religion, yea, but a "better" religion than the one we have. Not a reversal of values, only a

"better" and broader concept of those values! Not a renunciation of our heritage -- Ahab offers what he says is the same thing, but in a "different frame of reference." That is always the spearhead of Ahab's invasion. Oh, how subtle these "Ahabs" can be!

Who is it that has not heard Ahab's offer of a less demanding religion for the rugged implications of genuine holiness? Who is it that has not heard him say, "You don't have to give up everything just because you claim to be sanctified"; "You don't really have to work that hard in trying to win others just because you claim to be filled with the Spirit"! And on and on Ahab goes in trying to bevel the edges and blur the lines and soften the distinctions of real heart holiness. Not something different; just diluted! That is always Ahab's first offer for our heritage:

The tragedy is that Ahab has been so successful with so many. Many who have accepted his offer still give lip service to the idea of holiness, but they are untrue to the demands of holiness. Some of them still belong to holiness churches and give to holiness causes -- it's so much easier to give the pocketbook than to give the heart; but in their hearts they are untrue to their holiness heritage. They still know the holiness vocabulary, but they have long since lost the experience content of that vocabulary.

Surrendering the Sacred

One can always tell whether or not people have accepted Ahab's offer by the way they talk and act and look. They say things like: "Well, no one can live up to what everyone thinks is right, and we all see things differently anyhow, so I'm going to live my own life." Or perhaps they say: "Oh, a lot of those rules are silly anyhow; and besides, I live a lot better life than some of the people who keep all the rules"; or, "Well, I

don't care what they say; I'm not going to look like I'm about ready to topple into my grave."

When one loses the inner beauty of holiness character, one always tries to make up for it by an increased attention to the outside. When church movements lose the inner realities of their faith, they try to bolster it on the outside with showy buildings and facilities. It is the same with people. When the spiritual is descendant, the physical is ascendant.

I think now of a young couple, in their early thirties, who were both reared in holiness homes and who grew up under the sound of holiness preaching, and yet are today living lives that are a denial of the clear implications of true holiness. They both claim to be sanctified; that is, they say they are sanctified "if anyone is." But they are very vague as to what it means or why they profess it. They attend the Church of the Nazarene rather faithfully. They particularly are faithful to all the social activities of the church. (It is surprising how many "use" the church for social reasons when they can't make the grade socially anywhere else.) They both are very frank to admit that they "see things a lot differently" from what they once did. And they are equally frank to admit that they attend a show once in a while, and allow their little girl to attend fairly regularly. And while it is impossible for them to attend revivals except on Sunday morning, or do any calling or personal work at all, they can sit up far into the night playing Rook or canasta, or watching some comic program on their television. They have actually sold out to Ahab. And what a sellout! To surrender a heritage so rich and precious for that!

If that is holiness, then Paul and Wesley and other heroes of the faith lived and died for a lost cause. But the tragedy is that a holiness so watered down and so diluted is too weak to be passed on to their daughter -- or to anyone else!

Tolerant Today of Yesterday's Evils

But certain of the young people are not the only ones who have sold out to Ahab. There are older holiness people who also "see things a lot differently" from what they once did. They can remember when the lines of demarcation were more sharply drawn, when their own convictions were more distinct, their own habits of spiritual life were more vital and meaningful, and their own lives were more of a power of God.

But now they can smile indulgently at practices and attitudes that once would have brought condemnation to their own souls. There are those, even of the first generation, who are today smiling at the heavy nets they once used in deep-sea fishing. But they have never caught such big fish, nor so many of them, since they quit using those nets. Ahab's offer has been accepted -- nets are still used; but lighter, less cumbersome, less demanding ones are preferred. And then some wonder why their children are not interested in, or loyal to, holiness and the church, when in the span of their own lifetime the heritage has been so diluted that it cannot sustain their own loyalties, much less reproduce itself in their offspring.

A More Sophisticated Religion

Ahab's appeal is not only directed toward those who are looking for an "easy" religion; his appeal is also to those who look for a more "sophisticated" religion. He does not ask us to abandon religion -- yet; he simply offers us a more dignified, more beautiful, more ritualistic, more sophisticated kind. Is there anyone so deaf that he has never heard Ahab's clever suggestions? "You don't have to emphasize the fact that entire sanctification is a second work of grace -- just call it a deeper walk, a higher life, a fuller concept, a nobler insight; you will appeal to more and better people with that terminology, and even the holiness people will be fooled." "You don't really have to insist on the destruction of the carnal nature, or cleansing -- those are

very controversial terms, you know." "And the altar -- no need to place so much stress on that, for it really is not too dignified for intelligent people to crowd around an altar and cry and shout." "And speaking of shouting, don't you know that it drives 'respectable' people away from your church?"

And on and on Ahab goes, tempting us to surrender the rugged beauty of genuine holiness for the cheap facade of dignity and sophistication. And yet how many there are who have sold out to Ahab for that! A person, or a church, can become too "respectable" even for God! A person, or a church, can become so nice and so dignified and so dead that God can no longer use them in carrying out His redemptive will.

Spindly Specimens

A young lady in her twenties, born and reared in a holiness parsonage, educated in a holiness school -- the very food she ate and the clothes she wore and the education she received, paid for by sacrificing holiness people -- finally started attending and later joined a more formal,

dignified, and sophisticated church. It didn't mean too much to the church she left, or the church she entered. It doesn't do any harm, or good, to change labels on empty bottles. But she felt "emancipated," freed from the restraints and the requirements and the rebuffs that she had endured by belonging to a holiness church. And, as she explained to a friend, "It just got so that I was ashamed to invite my friends to church. But it is so much quieter and more dignified where I go now. And the pastor -- you'd love him; he never raises his voice, and no one ever shouts or says, 'Amen.' Everything is so much more beautiful, and I enjoy it so much more and -- the nicest people attend there."

Some of those who have sold out to Ahab so cheaply would almost convince one that Richard Niebuhr's statement is actually true -- "By its very nature the sectarian type of organization is valid for one generation only."

So many who have received so much have sold out so cheaply! They have diluted their blood-red heritage with the tasteless and flat water of sophistication until they are nothing now but pale, anemic, spindly specimens of a "holiness" which once was robust and rugged and rich and virile.

Something Different

When Naboth refused to accept a "better" vineyard than the one he had, Ahab offered him cash: If you won't take a better religion, then take money. That is always Ahab's next approach. If you will not surrender for another vineyard, perhaps you will sell for something that glitters.

Glitter of Possessions

How many have given up their heritage completely for the glitter of possessions! They have heard Ahab say, "You can't make a lot of money and keep your religious convictions." So they have given up their convictions. They have heard Ahab say, "You can't have the really fine things in life and stay true to your religious scruples." So they have surrendered their scruples. Some have gathered great possessions, some haven't. That is not the important thing. The important thing is that they have surrendered to Ahab; they have given up their religion; they have repudiated their heritage.

A young doctor of fine background and great potential was confronted with the choice of a career -- with or without Christ. After long deliberation he said: "I'm sorry, but I can't pay the price. I just can't be as successful and prosperous as I want to be, and expect to be, in this business and be a Christian."

Unfortunately, he apparently did not know of the great physicians, and some of them in the holiness ranks, who had not sold out to Ahab.

Whatever the wealth accumulated or the possessions gained, they are not worth the terrific price of surrendering a great heritage to a greedy Ahab. It was a young Jew -- And aren't Jews supposed to know about such things as profit and loss? -- who said, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Glitter of Pleasure

How many young people have surrendered their heritage for the glitter of pleasure! Ahab has said to them, "You can't have a good time and be a Christian"; "You can't really enjoy life until you forget restraints and taboos and rules and regulations"; "Don't be a fool! Have a good time! You're only young once! Enjoy yourself; it may be later than you think!" And so, under the constant insistence of Ahab's oily voice and the continuous pressure of a godless, sensual, sex-crazed, pleasure-mad, convention-defying generation, they have surrendered their priceless heritage for the glitter of cheap pleasure.

Some have had a good time, some haven't. That is not the important thing. The important thing is that they surrendered something that was priceless for something that was cheap. They surrendered something beautiful for something ugly, something big for something little, something eternal for something transient, something fruitful for something "funny," something heavenly for something earthly. And now they are no longer tip-top Christians, but topsy-turvy worldlings. They have slipped into a rut on the road of life. Their lives have changed from ideal ones to idle ones, and they are discovering that a life lived in the whirl of the world is a life of diminishing returns.

Whatever the pleasures of the world might be, they endure only "for a season." The glitter soon tarnishes, the glamour soon fades, the sparkle soon dims, the fizz soon evaporates, and the soul that surrenders the inner glow of a great heritage for the glitter of a cheap pleasure soon becomes nothing but a tarnished, tainted, tawdry thing -- a harp without strings, a cloud without water, a soul without God.

Glitter of Popularity

It is impossible to estimate the number of men and women and young people who have surrendered a great heritage for the glitter of popularity. That offer of Ahab's strikes at the core of personality. "You want to be popular, don't you? Well, you can't be with the stand you take." "You want to have friends, don't you? Well, you'll never have any if you belong to that holiness church." "You want other young people to like you, don't you? Well, they won't so long as you believe the way you do." "Don't be so narrow and so definite in your stand -- you'll never be popular that way!" And so thousands, hearing Ahab's whispered lies, have surrendered a magnificent heritage for the pottage of popularity.

It is always so easy and so tempting for one to move from persecution to popularity. But it is tragic for a person, or a church, when it makes that move. As Vance Havner says, "The church languishes when her members wear medals in the grandstand -- she prospers when they wear scars in the arena." But it is so much "nicer" and so much more "popular" to sit in the stands and cheer than to get down in the arena and bleed. The "nicest" people just don't do that! And no one can do it and be popular.

But what a puny, pampered, pusillanimous bunch of babies we are if we, as inheritors of a great tradition of suffering and persecution, whimper and whine and complain because a few people laugh at us and the

majority don't like us! The early Christians took the jeers of their day; we can't take the smiles of ours. The early Christians died for an unpopular cause; we can't even live for that cause today. The early Christians felt the slash of swords; we can't even stand the sting

of words. O God! deliver us from all the weak-kneed, namby-pamby, wishy-washy, watery-spined men and women and young people of today who won't even take a stand for a great cause -- simply because it is "unpopular"!

Conquer with Christ

Significantly, these three things the Ahabs of our day offer us for our heritage -- possessions, pleasure, and popularity -- are exactly the same three things that Satan offered Christ if He would bow down and surrender. Did Christ whimper because He couldn't have the world and all its pleasures? Did He whine because He couldn't be popular? No! Jesus, with a divine imperative in His voice, said, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

Let us then take our stand with Christ and say, "Get thee behind me, Ahab! Get thee behind me, Satan! Though you made me master of the whole world, with all its possessions, I would not surrender my sacred heritage. Though you emptied the wine cup of pleasure upon me, I would not sell you my inheritance. Though you made me the most popular and most famous person in the whole wide world, with honors piled high and prestige to peddle, I would not surrender my priceless heritage. Ahab, you might as well quit talking. My mind is set; my heart is fixed; my will is resolute -- I will never be untrue to this glorious heritage of holiness; and though you slay me, I will never surrender!"

III. HOLINESS, OUR HOPE

Does holiness really have a chance in a world that has grown cold and hard and secular and materialistic and godless? There is just one answer to that question:

Holiness is the only thing that does have a chance!

Everything else will ultimately falter and fail. Only holiness has the mark of eternity upon it. No cause can endure without God's backing, and the only cause that God really backs is the cause of holiness.

Lecomte du Nouy, in his book *Human Destiny*, talks about man as the "trunk line" and all other life as being in some blind alley, some dead end. Holiness is like that; it is God's principal redemptive thrust in human life. Holiness, poured out in redemptive love, is God's trunk line, and all other ideas and causes will wind up in some blind alley, some dead end. There is no future in anything in this world except holiness! Holiness is the only way that leads clear through. It is the only train with tracks through eternity.

The Only Hope

Our hope is not in our organization nor our machinery nor our administrative abilities. Our hope is not in our big churches nor fine choirs nor educational institutions. Our hope is not in the money we raise nor the people we attract nor the statistics we compile.

Holiness is our hope -- and it is our only hope!

Holiness is perennially a "movement," and when it becomes so tied up with organizational procedures and promotions that it is no longer the free-flowing "movement" of God's redeeming love -- when it becomes so

completely identified with organization and policy and administration that its freedom is stifled and its throb is softened and its mission is contained, the organization that does the "containing" ceases to be the primary channel through which God moves humanity to holy living.

Our task is to build a Kingdom, not merely an institution. The institution is just the scaffolding; the Kingdom is what we're building. Failure follows for any church that gives more attention to its scaffolding than to its building.

No, bigger and finer churches are not our hope. Bigger and better trained choirs are not our hope. Bigger and better organs are not our hope. Bigger and better recreational programs are not our hope. Bigger and better promotions are not our hope. Bigger and more complex organizations are not our hope.

Our only hope is holiness -- holy people with holy hearts living holy lives. That is our hope!

Holiness Calls for Heroism

A positive, vigorous holiness is the only thing that is able to call forth great heroisms and sustained loyalties from our people -- young or old. The real reason we have lost as many young people as we have is not that we have asked too much of our young people, but that we have asked too little. Really, about all we have asked of them is that they quit going to shows and dances and be sure to come to Sunday school and young people's meeting. What possible challenge is there in that? A person without any religion at all can do those things.

We have asked our people to be true to some prohibitions, when we have not given them the challenge of having inner resources that make those prohibitions intelligent or necessary or worthwhile. There is no romance in a negation. There is no sense of loyalty to a minus sign. There is no "pull" in a "no."

Our people, everywhere, desperately need to know that holiness is not a narrowing, pinching, limiting, containing experience, but a thrilling, expanding, enlarging, challenging, dynamic relationship that puts all of life atingle with adventure and alive with new interests and new projects and new goals -- all made possible if only they will leave the arid plains of mere morality and through the gate of God's grace enter the mountain areas of spirituality where there are matchless treasures so vast and so precious that it will take an eternity to explore them and to appreciate them.

Yes, holiness is a positive challenge. It is a thrilling affirmative. It is a vigorous exclamation point. It is a glorious "yes" to the will of God. It is a divine plus sign.

And men can rally around that sign! God's plus sign always has the vertical line a little longer than the horizontal -- making room for the feet -- which means, surely, that truth must ever march. That plus sign has claimed the allegiance of millions and sustained the loyalties of multitudes and called forth the highest heroisms from thousands.

A History of Heroism

The cause of holiness and inner righteousness has always called forth humanity's highest heroisms. When King Nebuchadnezzar commanded his people to bow their knees to his golden image, everyone in the whole realm obeyed except the Hebrew children -- "in whom was no blemish." And when in livid rage Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with the fiery furnace, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered in words of heroism that have rung through the corridors of the centuries: "O Nebuchadnezzar, . . . our

God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:16-18).

There is a future for a cause that can generate that kind of allegiance and faith.

When King Darius signed the decree forbidding anyone to pray to any god or man for thirty days, at the risk of being thrown into the den of lions, Daniel -- in whom there was neither "error or fault" -- when he "knew that the writing was signed, . . . went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Dan. 6:10).

There is hope for a cause that can inspire that kind of courage and fortitude.

When the high priest and Temple council had ordered the apostles beaten and had commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, the apostles flung back their answer, "We ought to obey God rather than men." "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple; and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:41-42).

There is a future for a cause that is able to infuse men with that kind of devotion and dedication.

When Luther stood before the entrenched might of church and state and was commanded to recant, he flung out those heroic words from his heart that have tolled freedom's bell for over four hundred years, and words that still make men stand up and salute: "Here I stand. God helping me, I can do no other!"

There is hope for a cause that can produce that kind of heroic commitment.

When the early pioneers of holiness in America were being ridiculed by their "superiors" and jeered at by their "inferiors" and were gradually being squeezed out of their pulpits by ecclesiastical pressures, they cried, "We will preach holiness -- and we will be heard!" And with

action to match the heroism of their words, they went out under the stars and under tents and under arbors and under ceilings of mission halls and scrubbed-out saloons, and preached the glorious truth of holiness until there arose over this broad land a renewed and revived holiness movement that is still spreading scriptural holiness across these lands -- and around this world.

There is a future for a cause that can produce such men with such sense of mission. There is hope for a cause that can move men to such devotion and such courage and such sacrifice and such heroism!

Needed: A Heroism for This Hour

The story is told of a young Chinese Communist who was tried for treason and sentenced to hang. As he was walking from the courtroom, he turned and looked at his judges and the people packing the room, and with a voice trembling and vibrant with emotion and commitment said: "All right, you've sentenced me to hang! And so I am going to die! But remember this: I am dying for a cause. What are you people living for?"

Dare we answer that burning question by saying, "We are living for pleasure"? "For popularity"? "For prestige"? "For money"? "For a finer house or a bigger car"?

What an answer! To squander a heritage so rich on trifles so tawdry!

To let an inheritance and a cause that cost so much blood and sweat and tears, slip so easily through our soft and flabby hands and our cold and careless hearts!

Dr. Louis Evans says that "religion to our grandparents was an experience; religion to our parents was a tradition; but religion to many of us today is nothing more than a convenience." What a tragic dilution! And that pattern of dilution can happen not only in successive generations; it can also take place in individual hearts and lives.

Is holiness, to us today, an experience, a tradition, or a mere convenience?

The time to stand up and be counted is now!

And with the help of God, we will stand up and be counted -- on the side of holiness!

And with God's help we will say to the Nebuchadnezzars of our day: "We will not bow down to your little gold gods. Heat your fiery furnace seven times over, but we will not bow down! Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us. . . and He will deliver us. . . . But if not -- praise God, even if He does not deliver us, be it known unto thee that we value our priceless heritage so deeply, we treasure our inheritance so highly, that we will never bow down and worship any god you may set up. For the Lord -- He is God!"

With God's help we stand today with tens of thousands of Naboths and say to the Ahabs of our generation: "We will not bow the knee to Baal. We will not sell out. We will not surrender our inheritance for anything you might have to offer. We will not sell our heritage for any possession

or pleasure or popularity you might bestow. Do what you will, but we will never surrender! You may hold us up to ridicule; you may take away our lives; but you can never take away our reverence for that heritage which we believe to be sacred!"

We stand today in the line of a great tradition and humbly say to the Wesleys and the Asburys and the Bresees and the tens of thousands of other heroes of the faith who suffered criticisms and persecution and ostracism and ridicule for the glorious cause of holiness: "You did not live and die in vain. We accept your challenge to heroism. And with God's Spirit to empower us, and with your example to inspire us, and with the cry of the world's lost millions to challenge us, we will march on! With the flag of holiness unfurled against the sky, we will sing as we march on our way: "Faith of our fathers, living still In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword! Oh, how our hearts beat high with joy Whene'er we hear that glorious word! "Faith of our fathers! Holy faith! We will be true to thee till death!"

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/c-william-fisher/our-heritage-and-our-hope/>

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