

Starting Right

by J. Wilbur Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of starting right with God and being right in our own homes in order to be successful soul winners.

Scripture: Nehemiah 2:18

Topics: "Personal Revival", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the importance of rebuilding our lives and communities, drawing parallels between the desolation of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time and the struggles faced today. He emphasizes the need for divine help in reconstructing human lives, using a powerful testimony of redemption to illustrate the transformative power of Christ's love and forgiveness. Chapman highlights the decline in home life and church attendance, urging individuals to prioritize spiritual foundations in their families and personal lives. He calls for a revival of personal responsibility and commitment to God, emphasizing the significance of starting the work of rebuilding from within our own homes and circles of influence.

Transcript

"Every one over against his house," Nehemiah iii. 28. The first part of the Book of Nehemiah gives us a striking picture of destruction, and as we look about us we see a city in ruins: the walls are down; the homes have been destroyed; the people are in despair, so great is the desolation that even the temple has been defaced. When the tidings concerning the havoc which has been wrought in the city of Jerusalem reached Nehemiah he was well nigh heart-broken. Speaking about the story that had been brought to him he said, "And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire," Nehemiah i. 3. When he reaches the city of Jerusalem he goes about to view the ruins, and he thus describes his journey: "So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that He had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work," Nehemiah ii. 11 and 18.

This picture of despair as seen in the olden days in Jerusalem is almost if not altogether being repeated to-day. The case is really desperate. The need of Divine help in the re-construction of human lives has never been greater. Hosts of men find the following testimony a description of their own experience. It is a young university man who is speaking, and before a great crowd of people he says:--

"Probably nine out of every ten of you men standing in front of me know who I am and know my family well. You will no doubt be surprised to hear of the awful experiences through which I have gone during the past six months. Just six months ago, as most of you know, I was an active Christian worker, and there are many of you in front of me who as recently as last July sat and heard me preach. During the last six months trouble came upon me, and in a weak moment, losing faith in God, I took to drink, and sank as low as it is possible for any man to sink. Not even the prodigal in the parable could have fallen lower than I did. Disowned by my mother; cast aside by my brother and sisters; despised by the members and officers of the church to which I belonged and in which I preached, I was in every respect an outcast. Just before Christmas, whilst tramping on the road, I actually took the shirt off my back to sell it for drink, so miserable was I. My nights I spent in the open fields, waking in the morning covered with frost. Something seemed to compel me to attend the meetings in this city. I attended night after night, and although the singing and the address had a wonderful effect upon me, I kept struggling against the working of the Spirit, until the singing of the chorus "I am Included," brought home to me as never before, the fact that even I, wretched outcast that I was, had not gone too far. I then and there made up my mind to accept the promise of John iii. 16. From that time I have realized, as never before, that Christ went to Calvary not so much for the world, as He did for me. And I intend to devote the rest of my life to winning souls for Him."

There is surely cause for great alarm because of the present condition of affairs, and for the following reasons: Home life is not what it used to be. In the olden times the home was a harbour into which tempest-tossed souls came day after day, and thus protected, had time to regain lost strength and go forth again to battle with the storm. It was once true that fathers were priests in their own households and mothers were saints. The best memory that some of us have is that which centres in a home where love ruled and reigned; where Christ was honoured; where the Bible was read, explained and loved, and where the very atmosphere was like heaven. In many instances to-day this is missing and he is to be pitied who has not such a memory as this, and such an influence for good in his life. The family altar in too many households has been broken down or given up. "What led you to Christ?" was the question asked of a distinguished Christian worker. And the answer quickly given was, "My father's prayers at the family altar. They followed me through my manhood and compelled me eventually to accept Christ." When the family altar is gone from a home, it is like the taking away of a strong foundation from a building or depriving the arch of its keystone. Better sacrifice everything than this spirit and practice of prayer in the home.

It is barely possible that because of conditions family prayers may not be conducted to-day as in other days, but there is at least time for a verse of scripture and a prayer out of a full heart, and the influence of even so brief a service will keep the members of the household from many a failure.

Church attendance is not what it once was. The old-fashioned family pew is a thing of the past in too many cases. In other days the father, the mother, and the children attended divine worship in the house of God. They sang the hymns of the church together; they worshipped God with the same spirit of devotion; they listened to the minister's preaching and they came forth from such a service clothed with a power that made them able to stand against the mightiest influences for evil. Because the family pew is out of date many boys are wandering, and many girls have gone astray.

With the beginning of the fourth Chapter of Nehemiah there is a change in the story as told by the Prophet. There is a ring of triumph when he announces: "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work," Nehemiah iv. 6. And the completeness of his work is described when he says: "Now it came to pass when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed ..." Nehemiah vii. 1. I am sure it is quite

true that out from all the despair which sometimes appals us, we shall come into the same complete victory. But if we are to win others to Christ and if our work is to be a work of prevention, so that our children shall not go astray and our friends may not wander, then it will be essential that we should, like Nehemiah of old, begin to build everyone over against his own house. It is a sad thing to find so many people in the world who are a public success and a private failure. Great superintendents of Sunday Schools, and poor fathers; experienced Sunday School teachers, and inconsistent in their own homes; eloquent preachers and poor illustrations of the spirit of Jesus; famed for piety as revealed to the public eye and quite as famed for lack of piety, when living out of the lime light, in the common round of daily duties with those who know us best and ought to speak of us most highly.

If our work is to be as God would have it where shall it begin? By all means let it begin with ourselves. There is a text of Scripture which every Christian must say over and over. He might begin the day with it and it might not be amiss for him to say it over before he closes his eyes in sleep. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me," Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24. It is quite unnecessary to study the methods of men if we cannot bear the test of God's searching eye.

We must be right in our own homes. In a meeting conducted recently in Wales a gentleman rose to say: "I came to the meeting on Friday afternoon and made a covenant with God that I would speak to someone about Christ. It laid so hold of my heart that I went home and spoke to my little girl. I asked her if she loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and she said, 'Yes, I do.' I said, 'Will you accept Jesus as your personal Saviour?' 'Yes, I am willing to' she said. I went to the steel works, and had been praying that God would use me. I asked the young man with whom I was working if he were a Christian. He looked black at me, but I asked him to be honest before God. In a moment his face changed as he said without hesitation, 'I will accept Jesus as my Saviour now.'

"I was working during the night, and it came to food time, so I asked several of the men if they would come into the smith shop and have a word of prayer. There was a young man there whose little boy I had spoken to. This young man came to me at three o'clock in the morning to tell me that he would accept Jesus as his personal Saviour. I asked some of the men if they would come up to my house and have a little prayer meeting after work, at six o'clock in the morning. They came up and I spoke to them, quoting the texts John iii. 16 and John v. 24. Some of the men present were not saved. I asked them if they really understood the Scriptures, and they told me they did. 'Now,' I said, 'will you not accept Jesus as your personal Saviour?' and one who was in the smith shop told me that he had definitely given himself to God at three o'clock that morning. Then I asked a boy of fifteen if he understood the words. 'Yes,' he said, so I asked him if he would not accept Christ. 'Yes' he replied, 'I will.' The following night I spoke to another in the works, concerning his soul, and asked him if he had fully surrendered, because I knew he was in trouble. About one o'clock I spoke to him and said, 'Will you give yourself to the Lord now?' 'No,' he said, 'not now.' 'Well,' I said, 'come to the smith shop at food time and have a word of prayer.' After food time he came out, and started again at his work. Presently he came across to me. 'Well,' I said, 'have you fully surrendered?' 'Yes, Tom,' he said, 'I have given myself to Christ, now.'"

Beginning in the home it is quite easy to go out into a wider circle and serve. The tendency, however, is to begin in some public place, and oftentimes because of this we fail to win those who work by our side, who sit with us at our own table and who live with us day after day and for whom we are specially responsible. It will also be necessary for us to enlarge the circle and reach the people in our own places of business. Two business men journeyed into a New England city together for twenty years. One of them was a

Christian, the other was not. They were both dying the same day, and the man who was not a Christian when he heard that his friend was dying, had a right to say to his wife, as he did, "It is a strange thing that my friend and I have known each other so well, and love each other so dearly, that he has allowed me to come to this day without a warning."

A business man rose in a meeting to say, "I have been greatly concerned about one young man who works in my office. I asked him if he would not come to the office a little earlier this morning. When he came and we were alone I asked him if he knew why I had got him to come a little earlier. When he told me that he did not, I said to him 'I am a Christian, I have never spoken to you about Christ and I have asked you to come this morning that I might explain the way to you and urge you to take your stand for Him.' That morning I had the great joy of leading my employee to Christ. I gave him a little pocket Testament in which I wrote his name, and under his name I wrote this Scripture, 'Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee,' and after that I signed my name. Three days later," said the business man, "the young man of whom I speak, led three others to Christ, one of them was the head book-keeper in my office."

If we are to be successful soul winners it is essential not only that we should get right with God but that we should keep right with Him. There must be a quick confession of sin and a quick turning away from all that would work against Christ. Our friends with whom we live and labour are keen critics, and as a rule, just ones. They know when we are wrong and nothing so hinders a testimony as to allow a wrong to go unrighted. When before our own households and with those who know us best, and by whose side we toil, in shop, or store, or office, or with those whom we employ, we keep ourselves unspotted from the world, we have an unanswerable argument for Christ and a testimony as regards the value of following Him which cannot be gainsayed.

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