

Garden of the Heart - Part 2

by J.R. Miller

The sermon explores the vital role of obedience to Christ in fulfilling God's purpose for our lives and the importance of each believer as a living stone in His spiritual temple.

Scripture: Matthew 5:14, John 14:15

Topics: "Purpose in Life", "Obedience"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the necessity of obedience to Christ in all circumstances, illustrating that true faith is demonstrated through immediate and unquestioning action. He encourages believers to recognize their unique purpose in God's plan, asserting that every life has significance and a role to play in the divine scheme. Miller also highlights the importance of being living stones in the spiritual temple, where each individual contributes to the overall structure of the church. He reminds Christians that they are called to witness for Christ in their daily lives, embodying His love and truth amidst the world's challenges. Ultimately, Miller reassures that God watches over His people, guiding and protecting them as they navigate life's journey.

Transcript

Garden of the Heart

J. R. Miller, 1906

The One Thing to Do

We have but one thing to do in any circumstances--to obey Christ. We have nothing to do with the question of our desires. Peter thought he knew all about fishing--but when his Master bade him cast the net at a certain point, though he thought nothing would come of it, his reply was: "At your word, I will."

It would make Christian life a great deal simpler for us, if we would get it definitely settled in our minds, that obedience is the one thing necessary in discipleship. It is never ours to consider the expediency of any command that is given to us, or to inquire as to the probabilities of success or failure in what we are bidden to do. The moment our duty is clear--it is ours to do it without question, without doubting, without reasoning. It is the lack of this prompt, energetic, unreasoning obedience, which is the cause of so much indefiniteness, indecisiveness, vacillation, and weakness in many Christian lives. We say we are saved by faith, and our thought of faith is apt to become intellectual, theological, or perhaps emotional. But the faith

which counts with God--is the faith which obeys instantly, and without question, every word of Christ. "Whatever he says unto you--do it," is the law of Christian life.

The lesson applies to our work in this world. What are we here for? God has a plan for every life, and for each individual life. There is no jumbling together of people, indistinguishably, in crowds, in the divine plan. Even the least and the lowliest life, has a place all its own in the universe of God, which it must fill, or there will be a blank in the great scheme. Dr. Peabody says: "Taken by itself, your life is a very insignificant affair; but placed in a universe which God has made, your life becomes of infinite importance. For God has chosen to work out His plan not in spite of you--but through you." It is this which lifts our little life out of insignificance, and gives us an importance in the universe of God, which is stupendous in its grandeur and its responsibility. To fail in our place, is to interrupt some purpose of God.

How are we to find out what our place in the universe is, and what we ought to do with our life? Does anyone know, and can anyone show us--but He whose we are, who has made us and planned for our course? We see at once, that if we leave God out of our life, ignore Him, and fail to recognize Him as our Master, seek no direction and guidance from Him--we can only wreck our career. The only ambition in life which is wise and safe, is the ambition to be what God made us to be, to do what God sent us into the world to do, to fulfill the divine purpose for our life. And it follows that only Christ can guide us in choosing our place and our work.

Many young people stand hesitating, when the time comes for them to decide upon their life course. Ask the divine Master what He wants you to do. Perhaps the answer will not be to your taste. You do not incline to it, or you think you have not the qualification for it. Do you think your all wise master would call you to this work or duty, if He did not know that you can do it, and do it well? When God came to Moses in the wilderness, where he was herding a few sheep, and called him to lead his people out of bondage, Moses pleaded his unfitness. God had to reason with him and urge him, before he would consent. Suppose he had continued to plead his unfitness, his inability, and had finally refused--what would the refusal have meant to Moses? Think of the honor he would have missed.

We do not know what noble service we are refusing, what high honor we are missing, when we decline the work to which God calls us, either because it is not to our taste, or because it seems too hard for us, or is too obscure. Why should we differ in judgment from our Master--when He asks us to do anything for Him, when He calls us to any particular work? Why should we tell Him that we cannot do what He bids us to do? Does not He know what we can do, better than we do? Was not this His thought for us before we were born? Has not He made us for the very service to which He would now send us?

Sometimes people think they are showing humility--when they decline some important work which comes to them. They say they are not worthy to do it. Humility is one of the noblest of the graces. But it is not true humility, which shrinks from any call or bidding of God. It is not true humility in Moses, which pleaded unfitness for the service to which the Lord was calling him. It would not have been humility in Peter or John, if they had told Jesus that they were not worthy to be apostles, nor had not education enough. It is not humility in any Christian who says, "I cannot; I am not good enough; I am too insignificant," when he is wanted by the Master for any Christian work. It is not humility--it is disobedience; it is refusing to take the place for which you were made. Though the work to which we are called may not be altogether to our mind, though it really seems too great for us, too honorable, or requires too much wisdom or skill, if Christ commands its, let us answer, "Master, I will do it." Then as we leap forward to obey, all the strength and wisdom we need for the work will be given to us.

Another application for the lesson, is to the events and circumstances of our lives. Simon thought the command for his Master did not show practical wisdom. Jesus did not understand fishing. Simon knew far more about that particular subject than his Master did, so he was not disposed to drop his nets into the deep waters. Yet, not to grieve his Lord, he did obey Him. Instantly he learned that Jesus really knew about fishing. Jesus knows about everything. The way He would lead us--does not seem to us the best way. We cannot see how good can come out of this particular experience. But here again we may depend upon the wisdom and the love of Christ. Is He not wiser than we are? Does not a child, with even common thoughtfulness, soon learn that there are matters which a good and wise father understands better than the child does?

We understand this in children who have learned that their father is wiser than they are. Why should not we older children learn that there are things in which our Father is wiser than we, and that we should be willing to entrust to His care, every experience of our lives?

The evangelist, Mr. Charles M. Alexander, relates a story he heard a woman tell in a church meeting. She quoted the words in the prophet's description of the Messiah, "The government shall be upon His shoulder." Then she gave two illustrations. She told first of a good woman with a large family and many household cares, who became very ill. She was in great distress, not knowing how she could be spared from her tasks, how the affairs of her home could be carried on without her. Then an old and trusted servant came into her room and volunteered to take charge of everything. "Give yourself no anxiety," she said. "Everything will go on beautifully." So the good woman turned over everything to the faithful servant--her pocketbook, her keys, all the care and all the planning. So we may trust Christ with all our affairs, and let Him do all for us. "The government shall be upon His shoulder."

The other story was of a boy who was out driving with his father. The father said: "You may choose today where we shall go, on what roads and to what places." The boy replied: "No, father, I do not want to choose the way. You always choose the loveliest roads and find the way to the most beautiful spots. I know I could not make the drive half as pleasant as you will." Then the father said: "Would you not like to drive, then?" But again the boy declined. "I don't want to drive, father. You drive so carefully. You always find the smoothest roads. You never take the wrong way. You never run against stones. If I drove I know I would run over rough places, and we would be jolted. I would rather have you drive." The boy had learned that his father could find better ways and would drive more safely than he could, and so he preferred just to sit in the carriage and let his father choose the way.

When we read of Christ, that the government is upon His shoulders, why should we not rejoice to leave in His hands the guidance and the protection of our lives? Think how wise He is--knowing all things, knowing how to choose this is better, safer, and wiser--than if we were to choose the way for ourselves.

Martin Luther, referring to care for tomorrow, says, "I have one preacher that I love better than any other on earth; it is my little tame robin, who preaches to me daily. I put his crumbs upon my window sill, especially at night. He hops on to the window sill when he wants his supply, and takes as much as he desires to satisfy his need. From thence he always hops to a little tree close by, lifts up his voice to God and sings his carol of praise and gratitude, then tucks his little head under his wing, goes fast to sleep, and leaves tomorrow to look after itself. He is the best preacher that I have on earth."

We sometimes say that love is the greatest thing in the world--but love always ends in obedience. We say faith is great, and so it is. It will move mountains. It enables us to do impossible things. But faith always

leads to obedience. So there is a sense in which obedience is the greatest thing in the world. No matter where we are, in what circumstances, in what confusions and perplexities, we have only to find the will of the Master--and do it. No matter in what troubles we are, in what meshes of trial, in what plots of enemies, this is always the way out. The way to the light, to the joy, to the liberty--is along a plain, straight way--the way of obedience.

As Living Stones

In architecture, the cornerstone occupies an important place in the building. It is the starting point in construction. The figure is used in the New Testament, where Jesus Christ is called the cornerstone of the great spiritual temple which is rising through the ages. In this case the cornerstone seems to include the whole foundation on which the building rests. Everything in Christian life rests on Christ. To leave Christ out of life, out of any hope, or trust, or joy, or plan--is to build on the sand. To have Christ as the ground of our hope, our trust, our confidence--is to build on the eternal rock.

But while the cornerstone is the most important stone in a building there are hundreds, thousands, of other stones which go into the walls, and each one is important in its place. A cornerstone alone, does not make a building. Every true Christian is a stone in the temple. Believers on Christ are called "living stones." Everything that belongs to Christ is living. Nothing dead has any place in His church. There is no such thing as a dead Christian.

The stones built into a wall, are of many different sizes and shapes. Some are large, some are small, and some are only little fragments used in filling in the interstices. Among Christian people, there are all measures of strength and ability. There are those who are great, fitted for large positions. There are those who are small in their capacity or experience. But every one has his place, and is important in his place. Some Christians fill a place of very great usefulness. They seem to be essential. Every church has its members who bear much of the burden and the responsibility. In every community there are those who are very useful. The weary and the discouraged turn to them for strength and help. But there are only a few such great Christians in any particular church, while there are many of lesser ability to bless. Yet the smallest and the least important, have also their place; and it is just as necessary that the little places shall be filled, and well filled, as that the greatest and most conspicuous positions shall be occupied.

The tendency is for those with small gifts to say: "My little will not be of any value. I could drop out and not be missed." But this is not true. The widow's mites meant more to Jesus--than the gifts of the richest Pharisee. The youngest and weakest Christian in any church has a place to fill and a work to do. If he fails in his duty, there will be a vacant place, a flaw in the wall, which will imperil the work.

Stradivarius, the old violin maker, said that if he did not do his best work--he would rob God and leave a blank in God's world instead of good violins. It is true of everyone whose hand slacks and who does not do his part, however small--that he leaves a blank where there ought to be something beautiful, something good. If you are not gentle and kind tomorrow, some life will miss the gentleness and kindness, and may sink down beneath its burdens. If you fail to be strong and true in witnessing for Christ tomorrow, the Master's cause will suffer at some point. We dare not fail the Master builder in our place, however small it is.

The other day a very old Christian said: "My work is now done. I cannot be of any use longer to other lives. My strength is all gone." But there is no member of the Christian community who is really a greater blessing, than this old man is. The influence of his life is felt everywhere. He takes no part any longer in

the activities of church and neighborhood. But he is loved by all. His life has been one of uprightness, honorable dealing, kindness to his neighbors, faithfulness as a Christian, and his ministry goes on, though his hand is too feeble now to do life's tasks. No Christian can be so old as to be no longer of any use. A piece of wood was burned. Its usefulness is past now, you might say. But its ashes were gathered up and strewn about the root of a plant, and the plant was greener next day.

We must not forget that there is not one needless stone in all the building. Every one is necessary to the completeness, the strength, and the security of the wall. And there is not one Christian in all the church of Christ, who is foreordained to uselessness, not one who is not needed, not one who cannot honor the Master and bless the world by some service. This is true of the weakest, and the youngest. It may be seen at the last, that many who think themselves the least and lowliest have done greater and more beautiful and more important work, than those who boast of their strength and their power.

So it will be with those who seem to fail, but who continue striving faithfully, doing their lowly work as well as they can. When the end comes it will be seen that what to them seemed failure--was beautiful with the beauty of Christ. God finishes the work that His lowly ones try to do for Him.

The stones which go into a building, must be made ready for their place before they are put into the wall. The preparation of these stones begins in the quarry. First there is the blasting which shatters the great solid mass of the rock. Then follows the work of breaking the stones into shape, and cutting, hewing, and polishing them until they are ready to be laid on the wall.

Quarry work is hard and painful. If stones had human feelings, they would cry out oftentimes, as the hammer and chisel do their pitiless work on them. Yet it is in this way, that they are fitted to take their place in the great building for which they are designed. In their rough, unhewn state--they never could be used, and would lie only as worthless blocks in the quarry. But when they have been cut, dressed, and carved according to the design of the architect, they are lifted to their place and henceforth are honored by all who look upon the noble edifice in which they fill so important a place.

All this is a parable of the way in which these living stones are prepared. God's Word is a hammer, and as we read it--its convictions, its commands, its corrections and its reproofs are hammer strokes smiting upon us. Trials, sorrows, and sufferings are the sharp iron tools which God uses in shaping and polishing our lives, and fitting us for our place as living stones in the spiritual building. No chastening is joyous for the present--but afterward we shall thank God for the sharp cutting which removes the unsightly roughness in us, and carves lines of beauty. We may not thrust away the hand which smites, for it is preparing us for worthy life and blessedness. "And now God is building you, as living stones, into His spiritual temple." 1 Peter 2:5

It is not hard to cut and dress natural stones so as to shape them for their place. They yield readily to the chisel and hammer. But these living stones have wills and can resist. If we would be made ready for our place on the wall--we must let Christ have His way with us, however severe and painful His discipline may be.

One of Paul's favorite words is edification. To edify is to build up. We are builders. Human lives everywhere are unfinished buildings, and everyone who passes by lays a block on the wall or adds an ornament. A hundred people touch you each day, in business contacts, in social fellowships, in friendships, in letter, in transient meetings--and every one of them builds something on the wall of your life, either something which will add to the adornment of your character, or something that will mar and hurt it.

Everyone who comes into our presence, who speaks a word to us, who even reaches us most remotely with his influence, leaves some line of beauty or some mark of marring on our character.

In a building, while all rests upon the foundation, each stone becomes in turn--a foundation for another stone to rest upon. Course after course is laid on the wall, until the topmost stones are in their place, and each one must support the block that is laid upon it. Jesus spoke of Peter as a rock, and said that on this rock He would build His Church. It was Peter resting on Christ that Jesus meant. The apostles were the first living stones laid on the great bedrock foundation, and ever since believers on Christ have in turn become rocks on which the Church of Christ is built. Today Christ says to each one of us as we confess our faith: "Blessed are you... and I also say unto you that you are a living stone, and upon this living stone I will build my church." It is a serious thing to know that Christ will build His Church upon us. Other people trust us and follow us, other people lean on us, depend upon us. As one stone in the wall bears other stones that are laid upon it, so must we by our faithfulness, our truth, our firmness, our security, be living stones on which others may build.

It is but a little portion, which is assigned to each one in God's great building. We should do our little part so beautifully; make it so radiant, so holy, and so true--that we shall not be ashamed of it when our work is revealed at last.

In Europe, long ago, a cathedral was being built. One day an old man, broken with the weight of years, came and begged to be allowed to do some work on the great building. The master architect did not suppose that the old man could do any important work because of his feebleness. But to please him he gave him something to do on the vaulted roof. Day by day the old man wrought there in the shadows. One evening he was missed--did not come down--and the men found him lying beside his finished work--the sculptured face of one whom he had loved long years before. When the building was completed and people came from far and near to admire it, they found this face that was so hidden in the shadows that only once a day, when the sunlight touched it, could it be seen distinctly. But the face was so beautiful that men waited for the sight of it when the light fell upon it, and then said: "this is the noblest work in all the cathedral. Love wrought this."

We are set to do our own little piece on the great temple in which God is to have His habitation. Let us do it well. Our love for Christ should be so great, so strong, so intense--that when our task is finished, the world will see that we have put the face of the Master on the little stone we have been set to adorn.

The Christian in the World

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." John 17:15

One of the great problems in Christian life--is to get through this world, without being harmed by it. Either Christians must be so sheltered that the evil of the world cannot reach them, or they must be left amid the evil--and kept unspotted from it. Jesus prayed that His disciples should not be taken from the world. He needs them here. A young mother whose husband had died said she would be glad to join him in heaven--but that her babies needed her here.

Some of Christ's followers have thought that the best way to live a holy life, was to flee from the companionship of men. But one does not get away from temptation, by being alone. We carry in our hearts, wherever we go, a great nest of evil things.

Besides, in fleeing from the world we would be fleeing from duty. Jesus told His disciples that they were to be the salt to check and prevent the spread of corruption. Every Christian is to make one spot of the world purer, sweeter, a holier place to live in. If we hide away from men, we are withdrawing the beneficence of our life from the world, and leaving our little allotted spot unblest.

Jesus said also that His disciples were to be the light of the world. He wants us to throw our light where it is dark, that we may be a comfort to others and cheer dreary lives. If we go off into seclusion, we leave those places unbrightened, which it was our responsibility to fill with light. The Master wants His friends in the midst of the world's evil--that they may cleanse it, that amid its sorrows and hungers--they may comfort it.

Then we can grow into spiritual strength, only in the midst of the world's actual experiences. No one in training to be a soldier is kept away from hardness, out of danger, beyond the lines of battle. A mother, who would keep her boy in the nursery, away from other boys, so that he may miss the temptations and disciplines of boyhood and have no roughness or hardness to endure, is making a mistake. If the boy is to grow into strong manhood he must meet the experiences which will bring out in him the manly qualities.

Not away from the world--but amidst its struggles and strifes--is the place where Christ would have His followers grow up. Jesus did not live His own life in quiet nooks or in secluded places, away from people. He was always right among them, and they continually thronged about Him and pressed upon Him with their needs. Then when He came to die He did not go away into some secret place--but died in the midst of throngs.

Yet while Christ wishes people to live in the world, He wants them to be kept from the world's evil. James gives this definition of true religion: "Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this . . . to keep oneself unstained by the world." This is an evil world--but the Christian is expected to pass through it without receiving a stain or blot. He is to engage in the business of the world--and yet to conduct all his affairs according to the laws of the heavenly kingdom. He is to mingle with the people of the world and live out the divine law in his own relations and associations with men.

Some Christians have to live and work all the week among those whose lives are unclean, unholy. It would seem to be impossible for them to keep themselves unspotted in such contacts with evil. Yet that is the problem of Christian living which is set for them. Anyone should find it possible to live purely among those who are pure; and a true, honest, and sober life among those who are true, honest, and sober. But Christ's followers are to live purely, honestly, and soberly-- among those who disregard all these laws of God. And this is not impossible. A traveler tells of finding a sweet flower growing on the edge of a volcano's crater. Likewise, there are Christian lives--gentle, pure, unsullied, white with heaven's whiteness, yet living of necessity in the very midst of this world's vileness, on the very edge of perdition!

Some people try to decide the question of right and wrong in detail. They make one catalogue which they label worldly, and another which they call unworldly. Different people make different lists, according to their training or habit. What one puts on the catalogue of allowable pleasures or amusements -- another puts under the ban as forbidden. It is interesting to note where the line is drawn and to ask the reason for the distinction. For example, checkers, dominoes, and chess are put by some good people into the unworldly catalogue--games a Christian can play--while cards and certain other games are labeled worldly. In some places certain kinds of plays are considered proper--but dancing is regarded as immoral. It is not a great while since, in many Christian homes, a piano must be kept closed on Sunday, but an

organ was regarded as unworldly. These are illustrations of some good people's efforts, to distinguish between the worldly and the unworldly.

Yet a little thought will show that this method of classification is not satisfactory. One may follow the most approved catalogue of conventional morality, doing only the things that are regarded as unworldly--and yet be utterly worldly in heart, in spirit! We cannot decide what is the evil of the world, by any such scheme of labels. How, then, can we know what is the evil from which Jesus asked His Father to keep His disciples from? True religion is not a matter of catalogues; its essential quality is obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount makes it very plain to us, also, that this obedience is not to be merely an outward form--but in spirit, extending to the feelings, motives, and desires.

The consensus of opinion says, for instance, that certain games are unworldly and therefore proper for Christ's disciples. A little company of Christians sit down together some evening and begin to play "Letters." It is certainly harmless--only the making of the greatest possible number of words out of the letters in the player's hands. The game is labeled innocent, harmless--but have you never seen the players, or one or more of them get into unseemly strife about some detail as they play--the admissibility of a word, for example, or its spelling? Perhaps an angry quarrel followed, and possibly some of the Christian player sulked the remainder of the evening. The evil of the world in this case, was not in the game--but in the unlovely behavior which resulted. Although the game had the sanction of Christian usage, the participants certainly were not kept from the evil of the world.

That which makes an act worldly or unworldly--is its spirit, its moral character. One may be engaged even in acts of formal worship, and yet be sinning against God. It is only a mockery to sing hymns and recite prayers--if there is in the heart no true praise, no homage corresponding with the profession which one makes. The Pharisees made long prayers and professed great devoutness. But Jesus, who saw into men's hearts, said they were hypocrites. "Not everyone that says unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." When Jesus prays that His disciples may be kept from the evil of the world--He is asking that while they are in the world, engaged in its work, its evil pressing all about them, the corruption may not touch them.

The problem of Christian living is not to avoid temptation, not to escape enmity, injustice, wrong--but in all our experiences, even when evil surges about us like a flood--to keep our hearts pure, warm, true, and loving. There are some people who are called to endure unkindness and unlovingness perpetually. They cannot change their condition. Even in their own home the atmosphere is unfriendly. Things which tend to embitter them are always present. They are unfairly and unjustly treated. Harsh words are ever falling upon their ears. How can they endure all this wrong, this injustice, this unfairness, and not be harmed by it? The answer is that they are safe and unhurt--so long as they keep love in their hearts.

Love was Christ's refuge, in all the hatred and bitterness which swept like sea waves about Him. He loved on in spite of all reviling and persecution, all denying and betraying. If He had once lost His patience, or grown resentful, or become provoked--His life would have been stained. It was so in all His temptations. Satan brought his suggestions of evil to the heart and mind of Jesus--but Jesus gave them no hospitality, and they left His soul unharmed. We have the same refuge. We cannot keep the evil from flying about us, whispering in our ears, alighting at our heart's windows--but we can keep it from soiling our souls! When we are wronged by others, it is easy to sin by giving way to bitterness--but we can keep ourselves from the evil, by keeping ourselves in love, by refusing to be angered, or to allow our hearts to entertain any bitter feeling.

Jesus prayed to His Father, to keep His disciples from the evil of the world. It is the will of the Father in every case to answer this prayer. He desires us always to be kept from evil. He permits temptations to come to us, for in no other way can we be made strong--but He never means us to yield to them. He intends that we shall resist, and when we resist a temptation, it flees and leaves no harm upon us.

Our Father desires always to keep us from evil. Why, then, does He not always do it? Is He sometimes not able to keep us? Are there some assaults of evil that even God cannot withstand?

The other day one was almost bitterly complaining of God because He had allowed a friend to fall into sin, after earnest prayer had been made that he would keep this friend. Why did He let him fall? We must remember that God does not keep us from evil by force. He does not build walls round us to keep us from being assailed. How, then, does God answer this prayer, that we shall be kept from the evil of the world?

Physicians tell us that the best safeguard against epidemic and contagion is vigorous vitality. Health is the best antiseptic. If one is perfectly well, full of the energy, the glow, the force of life--one can go anywhere. The weak are exposed. A man took typhoid fever recently and died in ten days. The doctors said his vitality was so low when the fever seized him, that he could not fight off the disease. If he had been in prime physical condition, he would have got through easily.

"If you wish to be insured against the plague--keep up your health." The same is true in spiritual life. If your soul is in splendid health--you are safe. The Master said of those who believed on Him: "They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them." The devotion of the first disciples was wholehearted, unquestioning, unreserved, and they went amid the greatest dangers, unharmed. They walked in the filthiest highways of the worst heathen cities--and never got a stain on their garments! There is no other way of being sheltered now, for God will build no castle walls about you; you must be kept from within. A young Christian said that he could not be true to his Master where he was working--the only Christian in the shop, with a score of jeering, mocking companions. He was told to get full of Christ and stay where God had put him, and do the work he had been sent there to do. He did, and God made him His witness. Instead of being swept down by the evil--he mastered it and made his shop a sanctuary.

Our aim should not be, therefore, to seek easy places to live in; or to get away from temptation and persecution. We are to stay where God has placed us! The Master needs us right in the heart of the world's evil--that we may change it into good. But we must be full of Christ, or the evil will master us instead of being mastered by us. If we would bless the world, our hearts must be separate from the world and full of God, and our lives must be given up to the service of God and our fellow men.

Witnesses for Christ

The followers of Christ are so identified with their Master, that everything they do affects His cause. He depends upon them for their help in all His work. On His cross, as He died, Jesus said: "it is finished." His work was done; redemption was complete. But when He returned to His glory--He left His disciples on the earth, and their part was to carry the good news to all men. For this they were responsible. This responsibility is ours in the present age. If we have received the good news we are, by virtue of this very fact, divinely commissioned to bear it to others. "Let him who hears say, Come."

George Macdonald tells of a boy who wished he could become a painter that he might help God paint His clouds and sunsets. God needs no help of human hands in painting the splendor of the evening skies--but

He does want us to help other lives. Consciously or unconsciously, we are all the while either helping or hindering Christ in His work. Every day we either honor His name--or dishonor it in what we do or in what we do not do.

Before Jesus went away from earth, He told His disciples that they should be His witnesses. This referred not only to the words they should speak concerning Him--but to every influence of their lives. Sometimes in a court trial, a great deal depends upon what one particular witness may say. Men are brought long distances to testify in certain cases because of the importance of what they know. The other day a witness journeyed all the way from South America to the United States to occupy the witness stand for by five minutes, to answer only two or three questions. Recently several distinguished men traveled a thousand miles to say a few words in court regarding the personal character of an accused man and his standing and reputation for integrity in his former home. None of us know how much we owe to the testimony of our neighbors concerning us, the good words they speak of us, the kindly mention they make of the things we do. If false or calumnious things are said of us by an enemy, the testimony of those who know us in our everyday life, is our sole refuge. Our reputation is the composite of all the things that people who see much of us and know our daily lives, witness concerning us.

We are Christ's witnesses. In His earthly life, He had many enemies who sought to injure Him. They made many charges against Him. They accused Him of being an imposter. His disciples were His witnesses. They knew Him intimately. They had lived with Him in closest relations, day after day, month after month.

If there had been anything evil in His life, anything untrue or inconsistent--they would have known it. After He had gone, they were sent out to testify to His life and character. They were to tell all men what they knew about Him. The world must learn the truth about Jesus--else it would not accept Him as Savior and Lord. It was very important that His disciples should declare what they knew about Him. On their words Christianity was to be founded. If they spoke doubtfully, if they failed to be faithful in their witnessing, if they withheld any part of the truth which they were to tell--the mission of Christ would fail. They had all their purposes and hopes of redemption in their hands. Christ had done His part, and now had committed all to these men, His witnesses. It was essential that they should prove true witnesses, speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about Him.

Now we are the successors of the first disciples and the witness for our own time. The world needs today a proclamation of Christ, which we only can make. Every generation must have its own witnesses. What was said about Him by His friends nineteen hundred years ago, will not be testimony enough for this year. New questions are always arising, and each must have its own answer. The friends of Christ today must be His present day witness. Past faithfulness was beautiful in its time--but the world must be shown like faithfulness now. There have been Christian heroisms in every century--splendid testimonies to the faith of Christ's friends in that century--but it will not be enough to point to these, when men ask us in this twentieth century for evidences of Christianity which will satisfy them. Christ must have His witnesses among those who now confess His name.

Some of us would like to choose for ourselves--our place of witnessing. It is easy to rise among Christian people on a quiet Sunday and say, "I am a Christian, too." But it may be harder to stand up tomorrow among those who do not love Christ and say the same words. A young man finds himself to be the only Christian in the office where he works. He shrinks from showing his colors there. But he is the only one Christ has in that office. If he should fail to witness for his Master in the presence of the men who are there--they will fail to hear about Christ, perhaps will be lost for lack of a word, and the blame will be his.

Christ knows where He needs us and our service, and we should never fail Him wherever we are.

We do not know the harm we may do any day--by our failure to speak the word which our Master wants us to speak. We are often warned of the hurt which our careless words may give to a gentle heart. We should beware also of careless silences when weary ones need the cheer, the comfort, the kindness which we could speak. Many of our worst failures as witnesses for Christ, are in not doing the things we ought to have done!

A settlement worker found a young Christian girl in a very unhappy state of mind, because she had to work in a mill when she wanted to study and advance in life. She was a worthy girl, capable of making a good deal of her life. But at present her home needed her help and it was impossible, therefore, for her to give up her uncongenial work.

The friend gave the girl a book which she thought might help her, and left her to work out the problem for herself. The book suggested certain things the girl might do, even in the mill, to make her life splendidly worth while.

"You know," she said one day, "there is only one of the twelve girls in my room who is a Christian." "Well," suggested her friend, "there is your opportunity." Since then, the girl has not only been happy and at peace herself--but she has brought several of the girls to Christ and spoken to others who are interested. She accepted her assignment as Christ's witness--and the noisy, uncongenial mill has become a place of glad service.

Witnessing for Christ is not all done in words. Much of the best of it is in life, in disposition, in the way we bear trials, in patient endurance of pain or suffering. We always represent our Master, and in every phase of our experience, we are His witnesses. It is well to be among His friends in the place of prayer--we confess Him when we gather thus with His faithful ones; but we are to confess Him also when we go out among men. Our faces should by their shining show that we have been with God and have been strengthened and blessed.

Such witnessing for Christ means oftentimes, more than any words one may speak. We do not know how we may cheer and strengthen others by a look of quiet peace on our faces, when we go about among people. An unhappy face in a Christian does not tell of victory in life's struggles and does not commend Christ to those one meets. But a face irradiated by an indwelling joy, shining with the light of trust and confidence, is a testimony wherever it is seen to the love and peace and power of Christ.

Confessing Christ in church services is right--but we must continue our witnessing when we go out into the world. This is not always easy. The Rev. J.H. Jowett tells of a man who attended a meeting and said, a few days afterward: "I was never so blessed and lifted up in soul in my life as I was that hour. It was like being in heaven. But," he went on, "unfortunately, I had to be at work at six o'clock next morning, and before eight I was wondering what a preacher of last night would say about living a Christian life if he had to be in our factory as I have to be." It may not be easy to go on Monday morning, after a quiet spiritual Sunday, into a mill or store, or into the busy mart, to meet with all sorts and conditions of men, and continue our faithfulness and the fervor and rapture of our devotion. But, nevertheless, we are to be Christ's witnesses in our Monday places of work--as truly as in our Sunday places of worship. When the power of the Holy Spirit is in us--the noise of a factory, the rush of business, or the cares of a mother's life in her home--will not break the spirit and sweetness of the life we are living for our Lord. Anyone can be devout in a meeting for prayer, where there is nothing to distract or annoy him, nothing to excite or trouble

him. The real problem, however, is to carry the peace of God and the spirit of Christ out into the fret, worry, and noise of the weekdays. But this is not impossible. The presence of Christ is as really with us on the weekdays when we are at our common tasks--as it is on Sundays when we are at our devotions.

True, we cannot make heaven yet for ourselves, in this life of struggle and care. At the best we shall have our failures, our defeats, our stumblings, will make mistakes, and will not reach our high ideal. But here is the test: will we go on fighting, striving, undiscouraged in our hard days here, just as determined to reach our ideal after a day of failure as we were when we set out in the morning?

This every young Christian should be able to say. He cannot say more while he is still in this world, beset with infirmities. He will live no day perfectly--yet he will never give up striving to become perfect.

Every morning the Master says to us anew, "You shall be My witnesses today." A hundred times before nightfall we shall have our opportunities to witness. The opportunities will come to men in their business. They must be honest, they must think of the man with whom they are dealing. If they deceive him in a bargain, if they tell him a falsehood, if they drive a sharp trade, they may chuckle over their shrewdness--but they cannot look Christ in the face in the evening and be at peace. The opportunity comes to the women in their home life and social life. They must be patient, sweet, unfretted amid the irritations, provocations, annoyances, and trials of household care, in contacts with neighbors, in disagreeable situations, in perplexing social experiences. "What do you do--more than others?" suggest the standard of Christian life. You are to be a little more patient, kind, thoughtful, sweet, than the women who are not Christians. You are to do things which nobody but a Christian would do, and do them in a way that only a Christian would do them.

We represent Christ wherever we go. He is not here today in human form--but He sends us in His place. We are to act for Him, speak the words of kindness He would speak if He were here, do the deed of love He would do if He were in our place. We must be faithful to our mission. We must never be silent when we ought to speak. We must never speak when we ought to be silent.

Guarded From Stumbling

"My help comes from the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth! He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep. Indeed, He who watches over Israel never tires and never sleeps. The Lord Himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade. The sun will not hurt you by day, nor the moon at night. The Lord keeps you from all evil and preserves your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go--both now and forever." Psalm 121:1-8

The promise of heaven is very alluring to Christian hope. But how can we get there? Seen and unseen perils beset the way, and we have no strength to defend ourselves, or to keep our lives from hurt. To meet these dangers, however, we have the promise of a Guide who is able to guard us on all the way from falling, even from stumbling--and to bring us at last unharmed, without blemish, to the door of our Father's house. "For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14.

The Bible gives many assurances of protection to the children of God, as they pass through this world. They dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. They take refuge under the wings of God. The angels of God have special charge over them, to keep them in all their ways. A mother, after a sore bereavement which changed all her life, was grieving at having to leave the old home where everything had grown sacred. Tears filled her eyes as she took the last look at the familiar

scenes--house, grounds, trees, and hills. Her little boy tired to comfort her, and as he looked out of the window of the car, he said: "Why, mother, God's sky is over us yet. It's going right along with us." We never can get beyond the blue of the heavens; we never can get out from under the shadow of the Almighty. Wherever we may have to go--we shall always have the love of God over us.

There are also promises of protection. We have the assurance that God will not allow our foot to be moved. So the divine thought extends even to our feet and to our steps, one by one. There is not an inch in all our pathway through this world, which is unwatched, on which the eye of God does not rest. The most watchful human love must sometimes close its eyes in sleep. The most loving mother must sometimes steal from the bedside of her little sick child for a minute's rest. But the divine care never slumbers nor fails, even for a moment. "He who keeps you will not slumber."

There is a stronger sense of security in knowing that someone is watching--when we cannot watch. On shipboard, when the passengers are in their berths, it cheers them to hear the call from the lookout, hour after hour, telling them that all is well. We go to our beds at night in our city homes with a quieter trust because the watchman is on his beat outside. In camp, in the enemy's country, in times of war, officers and men sleep, though there is constant danger of assault, because all night long the sentinels wake and guard the lines. In this world of danger, we need never vex ourselves with fear or anxiety--for God is watching, and He never sleeps! There is not a moment by day or by night when we are unguarded. There can be no sudden surprise or danger by which God can be taken unaware.

Physical protection is not all we need. There are those who have every comfort and luxury, a happy home, loving friends and all that is needed to give them freedom from care--and yet they are beset all the while, with other dangers of which they do not dream. The worst perils are not those which threaten our bodies. We dread accidents, which might wound us or break our limbs. We dread contagions which smite us low in sickness. We dread robbers who might carry off our treasures. But these are not the worst dangers, and being guarded from these is not the truest keeping. Sometimes robbers come in the darkness and take away money or silver or jewels from a home. But that is not the worst robbing. We may lose all our treasures--and yet be rich.

There are robbers which pick no lock and take not a dollar of treasure--yet which rob lives of possessions more precious than money or gems. We need a guardianship more watchful than that of any man. When Jesus was going away, He commended His disciples to His Father's care. He did not ask that they should be kept from suffering, from persecution, from sword or stake or dungeon. What He asked was that while in the world they should be kept from the world's evil. There is no other real peril; if we are kept from sin, nothing else can really harm us.

The keeping of our bodies and of our home is part of the divine care. But we need also spiritual keeping, and this, too, we have in the divine guardianship. "The Lord will keep you from all evil." There is really but one "evil." It is not sickness, it is not loss of money, it is not pain, and it is not sorrow. One may suffer in all these ways and not be touched by evil at any point. It is protection from evil which we need most of all, and this we have in God. When we are enjoying the greatest prosperity we are sometimes in the greatest danger. "When you see me begin to get rich, pray for my soul," said a good man to his friend. The keeping that we need most is from spiritual perils, and this we have in God.

The refuge against spiritual dangers is not built of stones. One may be in a castle, safe from all earthly assault, and yet be in the midst of enemies. God Himself is the refuge of His people. One of the great

promises of the Old Testament is: "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You." God is the keeper. God's omnipotence is the wall of the refuge. God's love and care are the warmth and comfort of the dwelling place. But how may we be admitted to this shelter? The promise of keeping, is for him whose mind is stayed on God. That is our part--the staying of our heart and mind upon God. That means trust.

One who had just had a wonderful proof of the divine thought and care in opening a way, said: "I wish I could learn to trust when I begin to be in need. I had a hundred evidences the last year that God is caring for me. But every time I begin to need help I get afraid, as if I had never known of God's protection." We should trust God without question, without seeing help in sight. That is what "stayed on God" means--quite confidence and implicit obedience. Then comes peace, perfect peace.

A New Testament assurance of divine keeping runs thus: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me--and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." Christ does not think of us in flocks--but as individuals, one by one, as our mothers do. In a collection of relics picked up on the field of Waterloo is a ring, set with a large pearl, and on the pearl the miniature of a beautiful girl's face. The ring was worn by some soldier in the battle, and we can think how his eyes lingered on the portrait and how it inspired him with courage as he entered the battle. Thus the Master carries our faces on a pearl of love. In all our perils, struggles, and sorrows--He has us in His heart. "I know them...They shall never perish... No one shall snatch them out of My hand."

Another word tells us that our life is "hidden with Christ in God." Love always makes a holy shelter for those it keeps in its heart. Think how the mother by her love, weaves a wall of safety about her child. Think how a friend throws about his friend, an invisible protection. So does the love of Christ surround the trusting life with an invisible protection which nothing can tear away. A Christian woman, having to cross the river late at night, was approached by a stranger. As the boat was landing he said: "I see you are alone." "No, sir, I am not alone; I have a friend." "I do not see anyone," he said, looking round. The woman quietly answered, "Jesus Christ is with me," and the man turned and fled into the darkness.

There is another word of Christ's, which brings strong assurance of safety in time of danger. "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." Luke 12:6-7. Does God care for sparrows? If a little sparrow is cared for by God and is not forgotten, will He care less for one of His children? Not less--but immeasurably more!

Then there is the Master's familiar word about the numbering of our hairs, which is very suggestive. God does not count people's hairs--that is not what the word means. It means that He takes note of the smallest things in our lives, the smallest events, the smallest cares, the least dangers. Our God is great--but He knows our names and loves us individually, the least as tenderly as the greatest. His guardianship extends also to all our life, to the most insignificant circumstances and experiences.

Then we are told also that our Lord is able to guard us from stumbling. This is a great promise. We are too lenient with ourselves, and too charitable towards our own failures and falls. We set too low a standard for our own lives. We say, "No one can live perfectly," and then we hide under that confession of weakness every time we come short. Yet He is able to keep us even from stumbling. In the Te Deum is the petition, "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin." This should be the Christian's prayer every morning. Though we may not reach the lofty ideal, this aspiration should never die out of our hearts. Our aim should

be to live each day without sin. We do not need to yield to temptation. The mighty One is ever by us, and our power to endure is not measured by our own frail strength. He, the strong Son of God, who is ever with us--is able to guard us even from stumbling.

God does not intend to keep us from being tempted. We must all meet temptation. An untempted life is weak and insecure. But in permitting us to be tempted--God does not mean that we shall fall into sin. Temptation is not sin! When God lets us be tempted--it is that we may overcome and grow stronger.

So while heaven seems far off and while the way is full of enemies and dangers, yet no believer, not even the weakest, need perish on the way, nor fail to get home. Christ the mighty One has build a road through the world, a safe and secure road, on which all His friends may journey under His guidance and guardianship, without hurt until they enter the Father's house.

The Bible in Life

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Colossians 3:16

Just how to use the Bible so as to get from it the help it has to give, perplexes many good people. Some have an almost superstitious regard for the book. They think that it's physical presence will ward off dangers and bring blessings. Many a soldier, as he enters a battle, throws away his pack of cards--and puts a New Testament in his pocket and then feels safer. Some people suppose the Bible will answer their questions and mark out their duty for them in an infallible way. So when they have some serious problem which they cannot solve, they open the book at random and put their finger on a verse with their eyes closed, and take that verse as containing and inspired direction. But in no such way does the Bible offer to help us. It is not a fetish.

It is meant to be a book of life to us--but it must be used intelligently. It helps us from within, not from without. In one place we are exhorted to let the Word of Christ richly dwell in us. The Word of Christ consists primarily of all the very sayings of Christ which are preserved for us in the Gospels. There are not many of these--we can read them all in a little while. But they are the most wonderful words ever spoken. Then in a wider sense the Word of Christ includes all divine revelations. The Bible is a marvelous book. It contains lofty, spiritual teachings, which are meant to change earth's wilderness into a heavenly garden.

The Word of Christ does its work from within. Hence it must get into our heart and we must let it dwell in us. We can shut it out if we will. It cannot enter into our life unless we let it enter, nor will it stay with us unless it is hospitably entertained. It will not do anything for us either if we keep it out. A Bible lying on our table will not make known to us any of the wonderful revealings it contains--we must receive its words into our heart.

A great deal of advice has been given in books and sermons concerning the best way to study the Bible. The fact is, however, that not many people do study it. Many read books about the Bible--but not all of these read the Bible itself. Many know a few bright and great verses--but know nothing about the book as a whole. They find a little garden spot here and there and visit it now and then, breathing the fragrance of the flowers and eating the fruits they find there--while the vast continent of the Scriptures lies unexplored beyond. If we read any other book as most people read the Bible---we would never properly understand it. The Bible should be studied intelligently. It should be studied thoroughly, for every portion of it is profitable for instruction, for correction, for comfort, for help.

If the Word of Christ is allowed to dwell in us richly, what will be its effect on our every day life? For one thing, it will transform our character. The Word of God is a lamp. Wherever it shines it reveals the faults, the flaws, the blemishes, the wrong things in hearts and lives. It shows us our selfishness, our envy, our jealousy, our lack of love, our doubts, our inconsistencies. We should count ourselves happy the day we discover a new fault in our life or character--not happy because the fault is there--but because we have discovered it, that we may rid ourselves of it. Where the Word of Christ dwells--it reveals faults and cleanses.

But cleansing is not enough. It is not enough not to do sinful things. Religion is not made up of negatives and "you shall nots." Jesus says that His words are spirit and life. They are like seeds; seeds gathered from heavenly gardens and brought to earth. When planted in human hearts, things of heaven will grow there. In Derbyshire, England, there are said to be some flowers which are not found in the English flora. The story is that in the far away days of the Crusades a knight from Derbyshire went, with others, to the rescue of the Holy Sepulcher. When he came back, after years filled with brave deeds, this crusader brought home with him seeds of Oriental flowers, which he planted on his estates. They grew there, and now, centuries afterward, they are still growing. The Words of Christ are seeds brought from heaven. They were planted in this world and are now growing all over the lands where the gospel has gone. Every true Christian life is a little garden where love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and other spiritual things are growing.

The Word of Christ is to be a guest in our heart. Where His Word is thus welcomed and permitted to dwell, Christ Himself is guest. There is a story of a gentle and loving child who found her way into a loveless and prayerless home and stayed there, changing everything by the sweet, gracious influence of her life, until the home became a place of love and prayer. Wherever Christ is Guest--all of life is brightened, dull task work is made like angel ministry, friendships are sweetened, burdens are lightened, and commonplace circumstances are transfigured.

The reason we have so little of Christ in our lives, and are so little like Him--is because we have so little of Christ's Word dwelling in us. The housekeeper makes the home. She puts her own taste, good or ill, the beauty or the un beauty of her own spirit, the gentleness or the ungentleness of her own heart--into her housekeeping and her homemaking. You know the woman by the home she makes. If the Word of Christ lives in us--it will be housekeeper in our hearts; and it will make the life like itself. If it is a guest in us, it will be homemaker too.

Every influence of the Word of Christ is toward beauty and joy. Some homes have always a somber air. Some people's religion seems to make them severe and ungentle. But that is not the Christly way. The religion which the Word of Christ inspires, is sunny and songful. Someone writes: "We want a religion that softens the step, turns the voice to melody, fills the eye with sunshine, and checks the impatient exclamation and harsh rebuke; a religion that is polite to all, deferential to superiors, considerate to friends; a religion that goes into the family and keeps the husband from being cross when dinner is late; that keeps the wife from fretting when the husband tracks the newly washed floor with his soiled boots and makes the husband mindful of the door mat; that keeps the mother patient when the baby is cross, and amuses the children as well as instructs them; that projects the honeymoon into the harvest moon, and makes the happy home like the Eastern fig tree, bearing on its bosom at once the tender blossom and the glory of the ripening fruit."

If the Word of Christ dwells in us--it will make us helpers of others. It will so saturate and sweeten our thoughts, our dispositions, our tempers, and our feelings that the love of Christ will flow out in all our common speech. It will make our words gracious and kind. It will keep us from all bitter, censorious, acrid, and hasty speech. It will inspire in us all helpful words. In no department of life do we more need to be divinely taught--than in the use of our tongues. Many people seem never to learn the fine art of Christian speech. Even in their efforts to do good, they speak unadvisedly, hurting when they want to help, making wounds of grief bleed afresh when they wish to give comfort. We need to pray continually for a gracious tongue--that we may know how to sustain with words him that is weary.

The possibilities of helpfulness in speech are almost infinite. One who has a consecrated tongue, a tongue thoroughly imbued with love, and completely under the sway of grace, can be the inspirer of all that is holy and beautiful in others, a comforter of sorrow, an encourager of those who are disheartened, a guide to inexperience, and in a thousand ways, a helper of fellow pilgrims. We should think much of the ministry of our own speech. If only we learn how to use the marvelous power we have in our tongues for Christ, there is no danger that our lives will not be worth while.

Another of the results of the indwelling of the Word of Christ is a joyful life. The Word of Christ puts psalms and hymns and spiritual songs into our lips. Joy is a Christian duty. We do not begin to realize the need of joy in those who bear Christ's name. In no other way can they truly and fitly witness for the Master. A Christian should never be discouraged, should never doubt the outcome of good from all that seems evil. A wailing, complaining, fearing Christian is failing his Lord.

In countless ways does the Word of Christ in the heart reveal itself in the life. It assures us of comfort in sorrow, of strength in weakness. It makes shining faces; it keeps songs always singing. It makes men bold, and women patient and kind. It blesses homes; it enriches and beautifies lives.

The Making of a Home

No work any man can do for Christ, is more important than what he can do and should do, in his own home. No measure of faithfulness in public Christian duties, will excuse fathers and mothers for the neglect of the spiritual care and culture of their own households. Perhaps, too, there is no part of Christian duty which is more apt to be neglected in these days, than that which we owe to our homes. On the one hand the business life and club life of many men, make them almost ciphers of influence in their own families, especially in the line of pious influence. On the other hand, the social life and other outside engagements of many women, so fill their hands that they find little time for the beautiful and gentle service they might render in their own homes.

A great picture was being exhibited for the first time in the artist's studio. It was rich and beautiful. But those who were present that day saw that it lacked something. It seemed all mist and cloud--hazy, incomprehensible. The artist himself, as he looked at the picture, noticed the lack. Taking his brush, he put a touch of red on the canvas, and that changed everything. Some homes seem to have in them everything they need to make them perfect. They have all the equipments and conveniences that modern taste and skill can provide. Health and happiness, the gladness of hospitality and the pleasures of refined social life yield their portion to the comfort of these homes. Yet so

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