

# The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

IN THE INTEREST OF JARVIS STREET BAPTIST  
CHURCH, TORONTO, AND OF EVANGELICAL TRUTH.

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PASTOR AND EDITOR

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Romans 1: 16.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 12th, 1922

## The Jarvis Street Pulpit

"THE SWELLING OF JORDAN."

A Sermon by the Pastor.

"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace wherein thou trustedest, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"—Jeremiah 12: 5.

"Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them." Thus Job (21:7-9) voiced the problem which since his day has puzzled many a righteous and afflicted soul. And we, too, perhaps, have wondered to see the fields of the unjust, like the children of a king, apparelled in emerald velvet, sparkling with dewy diamonds, or, over smiling faces, shaking out their golden tresses in the light of the harvest sun.

But that he who asks Job's question is on dangerous ground is evident from David's experience. He says (Ps. 73:2, 3): "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." And Jeremiah in the context is trying to run in the same slippery way. "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?"

And our text is the Lord's answer to this questioning. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee"—if you allow yourself to be distressed by these little things—"how shalt thou contend with horses?" How can you hope successfully to contend against the greater foes which must inevitably present themselves? "And if in the land of peace wherein thou trustedest, they wearied thee"—if under the most favorable circumstances you are faint-hearted—"how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?"—how will you stand when the whole current and tide of life is against you?

So that the principle of the text is this: that failure in the lesser things of life prophesies utter defeat in those things which are greater. I have no new thing to say this evening. I only desire to illustrate and emphasize what you already know.

I want to apply this principle to our conflict with sin, our struggle with circumstances, and to our meeting with the last great enemy, Death; and then, in a word or two, to show you how life's great battle may be made a glorious victory.

I. Let us begin with the application of the principle of our text to **Our Struggle with Sin.**

I think no one will question the great fact of sin. However unwelcome its presence, however forbidding or pleasant its aspect, however prophetic of ultimate disaster its first fruits, he must be blind indeed who fails to recognize that "sin has entered into the world, and death by sin." It is one of the incontrovertible facts of all human history, observation, and experience, that sin is here.

Nor will anyone question the necessity of our striving against sin. That sin is not a friend, but a foe, is self-evident. Like the fungus on the tree trunk, it thrives in the dark; it is a parasite which steals the life of another; it is a saprophyte which lives upon rottenness and death. Like the grain of sand upon the sensitive eye-ball, the pain which sin gives to the conscience should teach us that it is an evil thing, and ought not to be there.

After a time of feasting and merry-making in a certain Toronto merchant's house, the upper rooms were found in a state of disorder. Drawers had been opened and ransacked, and their contents thrown in wild confusion about the place, while many valuable jewels were missing; and it was known at once that a thief had been there, and the police were sent for. And when the songs of revelry have died away, who that goes through the house we call the world, into its upper and lower rooms, who sees the general confusion, the broken hearts, the ruined treasures, the blasted lives,—who, that notes the absence of the precious jewels of hope and peace and joy and faith and love,—who can fail to recognize the spoiler's work? And that spoiler's name is Sin. But how is that spoiler to be arrested and subdued?

Sin may be represented by many figures. It may be likened to a **footman** on slaughter bent. Sin and Satan are comparable to "a strong man armed," his heart on fire with hate, his quiver full of fiery darts to set the passions all ablaze; his sword of deceit unsheathed, Sin strides forth as a warrior to slay the souls of men.

Sin may be compared to Jehu's **horses** in their furious drive to Jezreel. Coming out of the distance like a dust-cloud, they gather strength, until, with irresistible momentum, they sweep down like an avalanche upon the already wounded Jorams, the children of Ahab, and grind them to death in the field of Naboth; swift as the whirlwind, cruel as the grave, they overtake the fleeing Ahaziah and leave them slaughtered in the way,—soon to trample beneath their pitiless iron heels the accursed Jezebels who have "sold themselves to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord." Such is sin in its fearful downward sweep; like the horse which rushes into the battle, and over the bleeding forms of thousands gallops to its goal.

And sin may be likened to a **river**—rising perhaps amid quiet pastoral scenes, it trickles from the hillside; or, like Jordan, from some snow-capped Lebanon or Hermon, only a little stream at first, it makes a channel for itself, and ever as it runs it grows in volume and in power, until, dashing with angry roar over the rock that would impede its progress; sweeping away, as though they were of straw, the dams which human hands have built, at last a swollen, sweeping, rushing, raging, roaring torrent, it flows downward to the unfathomable sea. Such is the ever-growing, widening, deepening, and ultimately resistless power

of sin. And if this be so you will see the force of the text's inquiry, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedest, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

The text, however, suggests another figure. At certain seasons of the year Jordan was a narrow, shallow stream, in many places easily forded. But in the time of harvest, when the snow on the mountains melted, it was swollen into a great river. And the space between the channel of the narrow stream and the outer banks of the river at harvest time was covered with a thick growth of reeds and rushes and shrubs of various sorts. And these wooded banks of Jordan were the home of numerous lions, whence they were driven by "the swelling of Jordan." Elsewhere in his prophecy Jeremiah predicts that the destroyer shall come up against Edom and Babylon (chaps. 49 :19 and 50 :44). "Like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong."

So that we have this view of the continually increasing might of those "principalities and powers" against which we all must wrestle if sin is to be overcome. Though we run with the footmen, we must contend with horses, too; and though we be equal to that first conflict **we must meet the lion** who comes up from "the swelling of Jordan"; we are warned that "our adversity the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." And John saw in his vision of "things which must shortly come to pass," many of which we believe are yet to be fulfilled, that there was war in Heaven—not in God's dwelling, nor in the abode of the saints, but in "the heavens," and Satan was cast into the earth, and his angels with him, and he heard one cry, "Woe unto the inhabitants of the earth and sea: for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time." (Rev. 12:12.) Driven forth like a lion from his lair by the swelling of Jordan, where is the Samson who will meet this lion and rend him as a man would rend a kid? This, then, is the picture: We run with the footmen, and though we have strength remaining to contend with horses, and press on to swim the swollen tide, we have scarcely struck out when the hungry jaws of an enraged lion are opened upon us, threatening us with destruction.

And now, **what are the facts of the case in the record of our struggle with sin?**

Are we wearied with the footmen? We have striven against little sins, so little we are ashamed to say it has been a struggle to overcome them. Against the outward forms of sin we have striven,—and many are weary with the effort to live a merely moral life. Then how will you fight the fierce battle with secret sins which ride upon horses? And if you are wearied with your attempt to stay those little rivulets of evil which, in what are called little sins, issue through eyes and mouth and hand, out of that reservoir of iniquity, the deceitful and desperately wicked natural heart,—when the channels are deepened, when the sluice-gates of the heart are forced back, and the fountains of the great deep are broken up,—"how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" If you cannot stay the plague of evil thoughts which, like the frogs and lice and flies and locusts of Egypt, swarm in your heart, how will you beat back the waves of the sea into whose depths your ever-hardening heart is so swiftly leading you? If you cannot crush the newly-hatched python beneath your heel, how can you resist it when, full-grown, it wraps its fatal coils about you? If you cannot extinguish the spark of evil, how can you save the temple when its stone and cedar and gold—body, soul, and spirit—have become glowing furnace-coals "set on fire of hell"? If the lion and the bear were too much for your strength in the wilderness, how dare you hope to contend successfully against "the

strong man armed," the giant of Gath, the champion of all the hosts of Phillistia? If you cannot curb the wild horse of passion as he canters merrily over the plain, how can you check him when he gallops madly down hill? And if sin gathers momentum with the years, and power with practice; while we, in the march of time, feel at last the grasshopper to be a burden, and desire fail, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedest, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

II. Let us now apply this principle to **Our Battle with Circumstances**. Jeremiah is puzzled over the prosperity of the wicked, and God reminds him that he is in "the land of peace" where such problems are most easily solved. David was similarly troubled, he tells us, "until he went into the sanctuary of God, and then understood he their end." And Jeremiah had the same opportunity. The walls of Jerusalem were not yet rased, the temple was not yet in ashes, the city was not yet a heap of ruins, with its king in chains; all of which would come to pass. Circumstances were as favourable for the prophet as they could well be; and the Lord asks him, if he learns not his lesson while the armies of the alien are far away and the sanctuary door is open, how will he be able to understand God's providence when judgment descends upon Jerusalem like an overwhelming flood. And you will readily see the application of all this to ourselves.

There are times and seasons, there are circumstances which are more favourable to our conversion and growth in grace, to our struggle against sin, than others, and if we do not make the best of these most favourable circumstances, how can we succeed amid less auspicious conditions? That is to say, if we are outrun "in the land of peace," what hope have we of winning "in the swelling of Jordan"?

**There are circumstances peculiar to youth which are favourable to righteousness.** Here is a young man whose vocation in life is not yet decided. These are his school days. He is not bound by some unholy occupation to a life of sin, like the professional gambler, the brewer, or the brothel-keeper. But he has ambitions which mark out for him a course which is manifestly incompatible with a goodly life, and he therefore says his ambitions forbid his becoming a Christian. Now, if he cannot throttle that ambition while it remains an unfulfilled desire, how can he ever turn to God when its realization has surrounded him with conditions as foreign to a Christian life as sin would be to heaven? If he cannot be a Christian while at school, and while his father pays for his bread and butter, what hope is there for his conversion when he depends for his livelihood upon the wages of sin? If he gives no heed to the Gospel of Christ in "the land of peace," is it likely he will hear the still, small voice amid "the swelling of Jordan"?

Again—youth is commonly comparatively free from those entanglements which make it hard to run even with the footmen. We have all a part in the moral sense of which we do well to be ashamed. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But as years roll on, "without Christ," the man is bound, like Samson, with many ropes which he may not break as did that mighty man when the Phillistines came upon him. Had Jesus come his way earlier, it had been easier for Zacheus to climb the sycamore tree to see Him before he had taken aught from his neighbours by false accusation, than it was after the necessity for restitution had arisen. And if in youth a man find it hard to confess the sins he has committed against his God, how much more difficult in later life to confess the sins committed against God and his

neighbour too. If it be hard to confess to having broken one commandment, how hard to acknowledge the transgression of the ten.

And again,—in youth, the fact that conscience is tender is a circumstance peculiarly favourable to the beginning of a godly life. If a boy or girl makes no progress with his or her studies when the teacher is present to correct mistakes, and impart knowledge, is it likely the unlearned lessons will be mastered when the teacher is absent, and his voice is heard no more? And if, when the physical eye is bright, and the mental vision is unclouded, and the body is robust, if then a young man having opportunity fails to learn wisdom, is he likely to show a greater aptitude for learning when “those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the almond tree flourish, and man goeth to his long home?”

And if, my young friends, while your moral perception is but a little blunted, while still the sun ascends the heaven, so that there is light to discern between good and evil; if while conscience is your faithful, persistent and painstaking teacher; if now you fail to learn the alphabet of that wisdom whose beginning is “the fear of the Lord,” how dare we indulge the hope that in later years when Satan, “the god of this world” shall have more fully “blinded your minds,” how dare we hope that then, “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, which is the image of God, shall shine unto you”? Again I say, if conscience is not heard above the gentle merriment of youth’s land of peace, how shall her voice be heard in mature manhood or old age above the loud “swelling of Jordan”?

But time would fail me to tell you of the bridges men burn behind them in the onward march of sin; of the retreats they make impossible but for God’s sovereign grace; of the wells they poison, the gardens they waste, the cities they destroy, the fires they kindle, the lions they call from their lair—all making it as difficult, if not as fatal, to retrace their steps as to continue in their course.

But this I must say of “the land of peace” in which, I suppose, most of us here were born,—if a man does not turn from sin to holiness, from Satan to God while he is a member of a Christian household, while under the influence of a godly home; if there be not begotten in him a love of righteousness, and he learn not the fear of the Lord while he waits in the courts of the Lord’s house, and listens to the songs of Zion; while it is not impossible, is it at all probable, when removed from the associations of a godly home and the influence of the Gospel, and the Christian Church, into, perhaps, a godless community, among worldly if not vicious companions, and subject to all the hardening influences of a materialistic age, and a sceptical generation—is it likely that under such conditions he will prove more susceptible to holy influences than when living in that hallowed place which he is proud to call his father’s home? If Joseph does not learn to hate evil, and to shun his brother’s evil example while his soul is surrounded by a gracious father’s influence as his body is wrapped by a loving father’s coat of many colors, how will he summon the moral courage to withstand his temptress in his Egyptian master’s heathen home? If the little Israelitish maid fail to apply herself to get a knowledge of her mother’s God at home, before the Syrians come and take her away captive, how will she be able to bear witness to the power of the prophet of Samaria when she waits upon the wife of the great but leprous Naaman? If Daniel of the children of Judah, go not up to the house of prayer in Jerusalem ere Nebuchadnezzar come and burn that “holy and beautiful house” with fire, how will he find grace in Babylon to purpose in his heart

that he will not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, or with the wine which he drank? And if he hath no courage to request of the prince of the eunuchs that he not forced to eat and drink forbidden things, how will he despise the golden image, defy the king's decree, pray with windows opened toward the loved Jerusalem of youthful, happy memory, and sit down at last in triumph among the lions whose mouths his God hath shut?

David's Gadites who "separated themselves unto him, unto the hold," to be "helpers of the war" had "faces like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains." And "these are they that went over Jordan in the first month when it had overflowed its banks; and they put to flight all them of the valleys, both toward the east and toward the west." They who were "swift as the roes upon the mountains," who ran with the footmen without wearying, these were they who triumphed in "the swelling of Jordan."

III. And now let us apply this principle to our inevitable meeting with the great last enemy, Death. Of all our foes he is the foe we fear the most.

I will venture the assertion that we are all looking to some future day when we shall obtain the mastery over sin. We recognize the necessity of such a victory in order to our eternal well-being. It is as patent that sin must be subdued in order to everlasting bliss, as it is evident that the blaze in the cellar must be extinguished if the house is to be saved from destruction. But many of you, my hearers, have not learned this wisdom. Until to-night, you have been defeated in your struggle against sin, in many instances because you did not struggle. But you hope, somehow or another, to win the battle, if not before, in the hour of death. It is a vain hope, almost impossible of realization.

If now, this calm Sabbath evening in the house of God, while you are in possession of all your powers; if now sin is too strong for you, and Satan wins the day; what hope is there that you will find it easier when the body is racked with pain, and the mind is delirious, and death throws his black shadow over all—what hope is there that then you will see things more clearly, and obtain the victory of faith?

If, when health is exuberant, and mind and body are at their full strength; if, when circumstances are most favourable—if now sin and Satan be too strong for you, if these grim warriors are now your masters, what hope of victory can you have, when health declines, and vision fades, and the life-tide ebbs, and they, as strong as ever, are reinforced by the irresistible conqueror—Death?

"The sting of death is sin." And if in "the land of peace" where the Healer's wounded footprints mark the sands of time, and the balm of grace is offered without money and without price, if here you find no antidote for that fatal sting; when, at God's harvest time, the tide from the mountains of time flows down to the shoreless, fathomless sea of the dead; when from the thicket of Jordan, Death, in his most hideous, horrid aspect, shall rise like some vile sea-serpent, and with sting extended, open his great black jaws like hell—oh, wicked, wearied, waiting sinner, "how will thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

IV. And now let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. We have all failed, in every race, in every work, in every war; miserably, criminally, utterly failed. The footmen have been our conquerors. The smallest sins have reigned as kings over us. And as for the horses, those stronger sins, they have dragged some of you in your blindness at their chariot wheels—as Elisha led the Syrians by a milder method, into the very stronghold of the enemy.

Having failed thus far to fulfil the law of righteousness there is no hope that we may yet succeed.

When the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, when the immaculate snow of Lebanon and Hermon shall melt, when the flood of righteous wrath shall break from the great white throne, in that "swelling of Jordan," when the day of God's wrath is come, who shall be able to stand?

When the feet of the priests who bore the ark, which was a type of Jesus, touched the swollen waters of Jordan—the waters stood up in an heap, and the people who had been wearied with the footmen in the wilderness, crossed in triumph dry shod, through "the swelling of Jordan" to the promised land. So shall it be with those who bear the true Ark of the Covenant, Jesus, in their hearts by faith.

Jesus ran with the footmen—but was never wearied. He contended with horses—yea, He was with the devil, and with the wild beasts in the wilderness, and still He was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners. He lived your life and died your death, my brother, and won the day for you. "The strength of sin is the law" and when the stream which had its rise at Sinai flowed on and broke upon the cross, ere His thorn-crowned head was bowed beneath the flood, the Saviour cried, "It is finished." And Death was swallowed up in victory. And victory was made possible to all believers through the atoning blood of the Lamb.

Sinner, repent! Believe! And shout, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

### **GLORIOUS GOOD NEWS.**

We confess to having great pleasure in spreading good news. We are content to let evil tidings walk—it will arrive too soon in any event; but we would fain give good news wings. And this is the news: Everywhere about us there are signs of revival. God has shown us many mercies in Jarvis Street. We have rejoiced in many conversions and additions to our membership; but there is a deep conviction in the hearts of our members that God has some great thing in store for us, and we are living in daily expectation of a great religious awakening.

"Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" "Revive us again"? Why "again"? Why should not our spiritual life, individually and collectively, be maintained at the highest level? There are those who speak of religious revivals with but thinly-veiled contempt. But what is the testimony of universal human experience? The race lives by revivals. What is a birth but a revival,—the re-birth of another life even now in some measure declining? What is the spring but a revival, and the harvest but the fruit of it? What is the dawn but a revival, when out of the silence and repose of the night men return refreshed to the activities of the day? Do we not hear, too, of trade revivals, of revivals in the realms of music, and literature, and art? Do not they who do business in great waters live by revivals? When the tide is at the flood the ship puts out to sea.

Thus it is in accord with the nature of things that there should be revivals of religion. The Bible is a history of religious revivals. No: we must not sneer at the word "again." We all need reviving again! And we praise God we are being revived. What are the signs? First, a still deeper and more earnest spirit of prayer. What times of refreshing were Saturday, Monday and Wednesday last. Monday was a holiday in August; but the prayer meeting room was crowded to the walls; every seat occupied, and for nearly two hours the people poured out their hearts before God; and then the voice of

praise ascended! At ten or fifteen minutes past ten we closed, and everybody said, "too soon." The same was true of Wednesday. The lecture hall was nearly full of people, and more than full of the presence of the Lord.

Then we are hearing of conversions. Wednesday night a man of fifty or over was present, who had come to the house of one of the members and asked to be taken to church that he might learn more of Christ. The Spirit of God had called him out of bed the night before, and for three hours he had cried for mercy, and then he said something happened, he did not quite know what, but the burden left him and he had rest. We heard his testimony, and again on Wednesday. This is the Lord's doing.

There is blessing resting also upon the open air work. Large numbers are being convicted of sin, and some have been definitely converted. Believers have been baptized the last two Sundays, and others will be baptized next Sunday. Thus the work goes on. The tide is coming in. Let us be afraid to be absent from any meeting lest it should be God's set time for the cloud-burst of blessing we believe is coming. *Hallelujah!*

### NEWS AND NOTICES.

On Thursday last a council composed of delegates from the Baptist churches of Toronto, convened in Jarvis Street Church, ordained to the Gospel ministry the Rev. A. H. Barham of the China Inland Mission. The meeting was a very happy one, rich in spiritual fellowship and blessing. Mr. and Mrs. Barham are members of Jarvis Street and have, with their son and daughter, made a large place for themselves in our affection. Mr. and Mrs. Barham leave for China Wednesday, and we shall have the pleasure of hearing a few words from them Monday evening.

**An historic sermon.** From time to time, requests have been received for copies of the Pastor's sermon on "The Christian Attitude Toward Amusements." This is the sermon which was preached February 13th, 1921, and produced such an effect as ultimately to transform the character of the whole Church. This sermon will appear in the next issue of *The Gospel Witness*. As the Witness costs about five cents a copy to print, members of the congregation requiring more than one copy are kindly asked to assist in defraying the cost of publication. The amusement craze is almost paralyzing many churches. Let us pray that God may use this message to bring to others the blessings it brought to Jarvis Street.

## The Church Calendar

For the week beginning Sunday, Aug. 13th, 1922.

### SUNDAY

- 10.00—Prayer Service in the Church Parlor, Mr. George Greenway.
- 10.30—Communion Service.
- 11.00—Public Worship. The Pastor will preach.
- 3.00—The Bible School will meet.
- 2.30—Open-Air Work with the Gospel Car, starting from Jarvis Street Church.
- 3.00—The Parliament Street Bible School, at 250 Parliament Street.
- 5.30—Open-Air Service on Gerrard Street.
- 6.00—Prayer Meeting in Church Parlor.
- 7.00—Public Worship. The Pastor will preach.

MONDAY, WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY—8.00—Prayer Service.  
THURSDAY—8.00—Open Air Service, Gerrard St. gate of Allen Gardens.