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Editor: T. T. SHIELDS

Associate Editor: ALEXANDER THOMSON

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

Address Correspondence: THE GOSPEL WITNESS, 130 Gerrard Street East, Toronto 2, Canada.
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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY

A Sermon by the Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, March 11th, 1934

(Stenographically Reported)

Broadcast over CFRB, 690 k.c., as is every Sunday evening service of Jarvis Street Church, from 7 to 8.30 o'clock,
Eastern Standard Time

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more
exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not
seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen
are eternal."—II. Corin. 4:17, 18.

O Lord, this evening once more we come in the name of Him with Whom Thou art in covenant, the name of Him to Whom all Thy promises are made, Whose requests Thou dost never deny. We thank Thee it is written that if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and that He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

We thank Thee for an High Priest Who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. We rejoice to remember His tender words to the disciples in the garden, The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Thou dost have pity upon us in our littleness, in our dullness of understanding. Thou knowest our frame, and rememberest that we are dust; therefore like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.

We would fain understand, O Lord, something more of Thy truth. We thank Thee that it is written, The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. We desire to make some progress in the knowledge of Thy truth, to become a little wiser because Thou shalt teach us, and enable us by Thy grace to learn. Therefore we pray Thee to give to us Thy Spirit. May we be subject to His ministry, that our understandings may be enlightened, that we may be able to understand the thoughts of God. It is written that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. Enable us to understand the things that are beyond the capacity of natural men. Give us spiritual perception. Give us eyes for the things that are unseen, and are eternal.

Look, we pray Thee, upon our radio hearers this evening wherever people listen to this service. May they be made aware of the nearness of God! May the testimony of Thy Word be made effective by the power of the Holy Spirit! May these hymns of praise awaken in many hearts memories of former days! Bring us all, we pray Thee, to Thy feet, into closer fellowship with Thee, to a clearer understanding and a deeper appreciation of spiritual values. Open Thy

Word to us, and open our understandings that we may understand the Scripture.

Be gracious to those who are shut in this evening. Some whom Thou lovest are sick. Be near to them. Minister to those who are able to listen to this service: some in hospitals, some at home, men and women variously conditioned, and just as varied in their requirements as are we who are assembled in this house. But there is no straitness with Thee. We have come to draw upon the fulness of Thy storehouses this evening. Enrich us all according to Thy riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Be near to those who long have lived a Christian life. Some of Thy servants who have ministered in word and doctrine, and who are now deprived of the privilege of preaching the gospel they love—may the Word which they have preached to others minister comfort to their own hearts. Help them to rejoice in God their Saviour; and may it come to pass that at evening time it shall be light.

Bless our dear Brother Greenway. We thank Thee for the measure of restoration Thou hast given him. Bring him back to us speedily, we pray Thee, in health and strength again; and may many years be added to him for the continuance of his ministry in this place.

The Lord direct us in every exercise of the hour. Glorify Thyself here and wherever the gospel of the grace of God is preached. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

It was in my mind this evening especially to address my message to such as have not yet become partakers of the grace of life, who are not yet Christians. But the text which I have read to you has strangely been thrust upon my mind. It may be supposed that it is not the sort of text that would ordinarily be used for an address to a congregation of healthy people—and you all look fairly well to-night:—but probably there is a very much larger number than this building contains listening to this service this evening, who are numbered among those who suffer affliction, and who are faced with all the perplexities that that involves.

Moreover, we none of us know when our turn may come, and it is well that we should be instructed in advance, that we may be able to meet the problems of life as they arise. That is my reason for turning aside from that which was mainly in my thought for this evening's meditation to discuss with you the principles wrapped up in these two verses. I have had experience enough as a minister to know that when the Spirit of God thus directs, if one is willing to be the Lord's postman, there are usually to be found some who have special need of the message. Some of them may be here; some of them may be numbered among the thousands of radio hearers whom we do not see.

This is a familiar scripture, and one which is often quoted, quoted perhaps sometimes quite glibly, and without a full appreciation of all that is implied in this profound statement.

I.

To begin, here is A STRANGE APPRAISAL OF THE ILLS OF LIFE. The afflictions of life are said to be "light", and to last "but for a moment". It is indisputable that *there is much affliction in the world*. How many millions of our fellow-creatures this evening are suffering pain! War is a terrible infliction which issues in a great deal of suffering. But even if war and all other forms of violence could be abolished we should not thus do away with the problems stated here.

I remember reading some years ago a very striking article by the late Sir William Robertson Nicoll, the Editor of *The British Weekly*, in which he said that statistically there were present in the world at that hour many millions of people who were doomed to die by torture,—by which, of course, he intended all who were suffering from cancer, tuberculosis, and other painful maladies,—some of them not knowing that the dread malady was within their frame. He meant that according to statistics a large proportion of the earth's population was doomed to make its exit from this world by the road of affliction and real torture.

There is not one of us who has not had to face that problem. Even though we are in health ourselves, we have seen others suffer. Perhaps some of you have had your share of physical affliction. But there is the problem. It is here. Many are endeavouring to discover and effect such measures as may alleviate the ills of life which spring from economic causes. We can only wish them abundant success. We should gladly welcome prosperity back again. Depression has lingered long enough with us. But I would remind you that if any system could be evolved which would remove all poor-houses, and obviate the necessity for relief centres and relief shelters, you would still need hospitals and doctors. Affliction is not the lot of the poor only: the rich are afflicted as well as the poor; the young as well as the old must often suffer pain.

It may be someone philosophically inclined would like to discuss the reason for this. But what profit would that bring us? Were we able to discover the why of it all, the fact would still remain. If in some case of imminent danger a physician were called, and he should refuse to act until some one had explained the cause of the accident, how unworthy of his profession he would be. The proper thing would be to minister to the patient first, and discover the cause of the trouble afterward.

It is indisputable that the fact of human affliction is here. This is a world of suffering. Even as I speak to you

there are countless millions of people who are suffering physical pain. Some of them endure indescribable agony. Some are tortured almost to the limit of human endurance. Make the world as pleasant as you may. Remove from it all accidents—if that be possible, all the results of war, all that can be directly accounted for by human wilfulness or ignorance. What then? I never pass a hospital but I thank God for the institution, and, at the same time, thank God that I am on the outside of it. I am grateful to those who have erected such institutions. I know of no profession more worthy of honour than that of the medical profession. No matter how much money you have, you cannot pay a really good doctor, if he is able actually to minister to you, and to relieve you of pain. I rejoice in the advance of medical science in all departments, and especially of preventive medicine. I hope they will discover a cure for cancer, and for all the other now-incurable diseases. But when you have viewed the prospect as optimistically as may be reasonable, when you have dreamed your dreams of the highest possible human success, what an enormous residue remains! The earth remains a world of affliction and pain in spite of everything that men can do.

The strange thing about my text is that it calls such pain and suffering, "light affliction" which endureth "but for a moment."

For the most part, *affliction seems to be heavy enough*. Most of us are brave enough when we are well. We are ready enough to give counsel to those who are sick—and it is well that we should be. It is well that the will of a sufferer should be reinforced by the will of a man in perfect health. Physicians very often render a large ministry in that way. But we have seen brave men go down, haven't we? We have seen men who rather smiled at people who talked of their operations and of their pains and aches, while they themselves were well, who after they had been afflicted themselves could talk about it all day long. The fact is, there are none of us particularly courageous in that matter. A doctor once said to me, "There is nothing from which I shrink so much as pain; I have seen so much of it."

Affliction is not light as a rule. There are other ills than that of physical ailments, but I am speaking particularly this evening of afflictions of the body. That is the subject of our text, the outward man's perishing, and the inward man's being renewed day by day. It is of the health of this tabernacle, and the ills to which it is subject, the Holy Spirit is speaking. I say, such bodily afflictions do not seem to be light. How often we have stood beside beds of pain, and felt we would give anything in life to be able to minister to the suffering one. We have seen them in the furnace of affliction, and have stood by utterly impotent to ease their pain.

What strange language is this that calls the affliction of the body "light"? Some of us have had to thank God for years for good health. Do not forget to give God thanks for that before you sleep to-night. If you have not an ache or a pain, praise God for it. Good health is an unspeakable blessing. Notwithstanding, I would not treat with contempt any promise or any proposal to lighten the afflictions of men. We cannot remove them, apparently: they are here. But what can we do to lessen their intensity? Not long ago I was in a home of sickness where the nurse said, "The doctor says nothing can be done beyond keeping the patient as comfortable as possible."

It is wise to keep the suffering one as comfortable as possible. But have we nothing but the doctor's drugs? For I have seen cases where the doctor's drugs failed utterly. How, then, shall we look upon affliction so as to call it "light"? There have been men who have learned such a secret. They have faced the fiery furnace without alarm—they have seemed even to welcome bodily suffering, and to have regarded it as "light".

The mind has much to do with physical pain, and when it is beyond the power of medical science to lighten the present affliction, the mind may sometimes supply an opiate which will mitigate the hour's agony.

What can make the afflictions of life light? God help us to understand it, for we may need it to-morrow!

And not only so, it is strangely said that *such affliction is "but for a moment."* It does not seem so to the sufferer. How I have known them to dread the coming of night, the long, long night of pain and agony! When sleep will not come, when there is no alleviation whatever of the pain, even one night seems almost like an eternity. Sometimes I have heard the afflicted say, "I dread the night. Then when the morning comes, almost equally I dread the day." Day and night are one long-drawn-out agony. Occasional sicknesses are bad enough, but when illness becomes chronic, how indescribably distressing it is.

There may be some who hear me to-night who have spent years in bed. I have known some of the Lord's choicest children who seemed to be chosen in the furnace of affliction. How can we say such affliction is "but for a moment", when day after day, month after month, year after year, passes and still there is no relief? A dear friend of mine in the United States with whom I ministered for a week or so a few years ago asked me to go to his house to see his wife, who was very ill. She was a comparatively young woman, a brilliant woman, a woman who had had a fine course at the university, a Doctor of Philosophy, with a keen mind. I went to see her, and talked with her about the things of God. She said, "The doctor tells me my ailment is cancer of the bone; and he comforts me by saying that it will take four years to culminate in death. Often, there is nothing he can give me; for when the pain becomes very intense it defies the effects of all opiates." Her husband told me how bravely she endured—but it did not seem "but for a moment" to her. "It will take four years to run its course, the doctors say," she told me, "and in that time it will not get better, but worse."

Could you sit beside the bed of a woman in that condition and read this text: "Our light affliction . . . is but for a moment"? How would you explain it? Only the Spirit of God can explain that: neither you nor I can do so. I say, it is a strange appraisal of the ills of life, and a standard that is not ours must be used. By our standards it is not "light"; and it lasts a good deal longer than a moment.

II.

What next? This text says that even in that **THERE ARE SOME COMPENSATING ADVANTAGES**, that these light afflictions have a ministry to exercise to us, to those who are subject to them; and that they "work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory". Look at the contrast: "Light affliction"; "weight of glory". Not only weight of glory, but "a far more exceeding weight of glory". Our affliction is "light," while the glory is to be weighty. Our afflictions "but for a moment", and

the glory to be "eternal". What does that mean? What do we mean by "glory"? "I reckon", said Paul, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"—not to us, but *in* us. The glory here spoken of is not objective to the sufferer, but subjective. It is in him; it is part of him: it is a quality of the soul. By a process of transmutation he is changed from glory into glory; he progresses toward higher things.

Here is a child who is sent to school, and labours industriously at his lessons in the lower classes, and lower schools, until by and by he enters university. By so doing his mind is not only informed, but disciplined, and enlarged, and permanently enriched in quality; for the end of education is not to cram a lot of facts into a man's mind, but to lead him out, and develop his mental powers so that he will be at home with the truth, and be able to think for himself. That is the object of education: it is not a possession but a process; not an attribute but a quality. As steel is tempered, as gold is refined, so the mind is changed in texture and habit, and enlarged in capacity.

The process of sanctification is the education of the soul, and "our light affliction" is part of the discipline of life. In the providence of God, though we may not now understand how, it is permitted to come in order to work in us a new quality of glory. There is not much glory in us now, is there? What a dumb, stupid lot we are! How little there is about us that glistens or shines. Yet we are to be prepared for glory by being ourselves made glorious. "Our light affliction" is designed to work in us that quality of glory.

The ancient alchemists used to try to transmute baser metals into gold. I should almost expect that such a science would be revived in these days when the price of gold is going up. I was in London last summer, and I saw a notice in one window, "Sovereigns bought here—for thirty shillings." In another store along the Strand I saw another notice: "Sovereigns wanted here—thirty shillings and a penny." Normally they are worth twenty shillings: now they are worth thirty shillings—or they were last summer. What are we but poor bits of clay, very common clay! And yet the precious sons of Zion are said to be "comparable to the most fine gold." The divine Alchemist proposes to change these—shall I dare to say it?—these lumps of common clay into the most fine gold. He only knows how to do it; and He says that this "light affliction" is a part of the process.

The affliction is "light", but the opposite figure is used to denote the result of this process of grace: the glory is to be heavy. There is to be a "weight of glory". And not only so, but a "much more exceeding" weight of glory. Refined gold, full weight, we shall be by and by when weighed in the balances of the divine Jeweller, when that hour shall come of which He speaks prophetically, saying, "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." There will be nothing light about us then, not merely gold-washed or plated. Many people are light now: some light in the feet, and some light in the head—and everybody, just now, light in the pocketbook. But we are going to be heavy-weights some day. We shall be weighted with the glory that will issue from these experiences of affliction.

Observe also the other word of contrast: "A far more exceeding and *eternal* weight of glory." That is set in contrast to the light afflictions which are "but for a

moment". Compare the longest day and the longest life with eternity, and if we were born to suffering, and were to suffer to the day of our death, after living to be as old as Methuselah—suffering all the time—compared with eternity, it would be "but for a moment." The longest life, by the divine standard, is but short; for what is your life? Mr. Brown read it: "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Life is vapoury, transient; but it is to be converted into that which is substantial, precious, eternal.

III.

How IS IT TO BE DONE? Is such transmutation to be unconditional? "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." There are many who see nothing but the things which are seen. They live in materialities. They have no correspondences beyond things they can touch, and taste, and handle. That is all of life to them. To them, life consists in the "abundance of the things" which a man possesseth. Could you make a man rich, you would render him a real service? Not necessarily. You could not thus solve this problem for him.

How can we look at "the things which are not seen"? How can one realize a world with which the senses cannot communicate? It is possible only as it is revealed to him by the Spirit of God. There are treasures beyond the reach of men, beyond the knowledge of men, beyond the understanding of men—realms of vast wealth awaiting our appreciation and appropriation. If all a man thinks of, and all a man sees, belongs to the visible and temporal, what can he see in his sickness but an unmitigated curse? Go to a man who is racked with pain, and who cannot see the unseen, and say, "It is all right. Your affliction is but for a moment, and will work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And he will say, "I do not believe it. I have no consciousness of any world beyond this. This poor body is racked with pain—that is the only world I know." If that is all he knows, his suffering will do nothing for him—unless indeed it brings him to a consciousness of God.

But as for those who profess to be Christians, we look, do we not, at unseen things? Stephen saw them. The veil was drawn, and he saw something that nobody else saw. He saw the dawn of a glory that was hidden from other eyes. When they were hurling stones at him, and his poor body was being beaten to pieces, while his sensibilities were like yours and mine, so that he must have felt the pain of it all, yet as they looked at him they saw even his face as the face of an angel; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." In that moment, as he was enabled by divine grace to say, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge", the very stones—dare I say it?—the very stones, by God's grace, transmuted him into beaten gold, and wrought in him "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" because he looked not at the things which are seen, but at the things that are unseen.

The angle of the diamond's facet must necessarily depend upon its attitude to the lapidary's wheel, upon the way in which it is held upon the wheel. And the effect of the discipline of life will be determined by our attitude toward it, by the attitude of soul, by the ability, God-given, to endure as seeing Him Who is invisible, even as Moses did. This miracle is wrought only "while

we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen".

IV.

What is THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY OF IT ALL? Is there some man here who will say, "I am not interested in that, sir. I am face to face with the bread-and-butter question, and I wish you preachers would address yourselves to the governments, and do something to give us better times. I think you would be better employed if you were looking into things of that sort than preaching about eternity, and about a future life. I am not interested in that." Oh, you are not? "No! I am interested in the things which I see, and that are present here and now. That is what I want, a better place here. I will be for the church when the church becomes expert in the science of economics and of government, when it alleviates the material ills of life, and makes the earth worth living in."

My dear friends, long before the church or anybody else can do that, you will have gone, and where will you be then? Hear me: "The things which are seen are temporal." Do you believe that? You business-man—you used to be a business-man; now you have no business. You were proud of your success four or five years ago, thinking you were as stable and as firmly established as the pyramids. But everything has gone from you, you have been stripped of everything—do you believe "the things which are seen are temporal"? Come, now. You are not a Christian. You do not go to church, but you have tuned in to-night. I want you to tell me whether you can say, Amen, at least to this passage of Scripture, "The things which are seen are temporal"? Many a man will say, "Yes, sir; they are. I do not see them any more, as mine. They have largely slipped through my fingers, and that which has not slipped seems now to be slipping."

Even men who as yet still feel that they have a competence, and are not quite on the edge of the precipice, have begun to feel that the very earth beneath them trembles, and that there is nothing stable and abiding in life. Why do I preach the gospel? Because I am commissioned so to do; and because I can see all over this great building pews that were once occupied by those who have passed over the river. Scores of them have gone on during the twenty-four years of my ministry in this pulpit. What if I had had unlimited power to make them rich? They would have left it all behind them. If I could have given them houses and lands, it would have profited them nothing, for the things which are "seen are temporal" and are not worth living for. Thank God if the depression teaches people that. It may, by God's good grace, prove a ministry of righteousness to many. At all events that is a fact, "The things which are seen are temporal." Your houses, your lands, your business success, your social position, your place in the estimation of men. A little while ago your wife said with a little pride, "I am recognized as someone of distinction." The name she bore, as your wife, was a name to conjure with. It could be effectively signed to a substantial cheque; for you, sir, were known to have a good bank account. When your wife went into a store, many hastened to wait on her—now they do not care whether she comes or not. You have found your circle of friends becoming smaller and smaller just in proportion to the diminution of your wealth and posi-

tion. You have proved in your own experience that the things that are seen are temporal.

There was One Who came to teach us how to live, as well as to make it possible to live. He was taken up into a high mountain and shown the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them, and offered it all if He would bow down and worship the god of this world. But He refused it. Why? He knew it was not the devil's to give for one thing, and He knew beside that the things which are seen are temporal; and He would teach us, as He said explicitly in His own word, "Lay not up for yourself treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." That is the place to make your investment. Invest your life, all there is of you, in the service of God. There will be no decline in Heaven's stock market. There will be no abandonment of the gold standard up there. I am wrong, gold will not be a standard where the streets are paved with it.

And hear me: "The things which are not seen are eternal." Therefore this "light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." How many of you have made choice of Christ? How many of you have been washed in the precious blood? How many of you, my radio friends, have been begotten again unto "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time"?

Have you trusted Christ? If you have not, I beg of you to make choice of Him this evening. Put your whole confidence in Him. Make surrender of all you have, and all you are, to Him; and He will use you, and make of you what He wants you to be. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Once upon a time there was a merchant named Mr. Worldly-mind, who sat in his office engaged in conversation with an acquaintance. They were talking together about things of common interest when the merchant's faithful servant, named Conscience, entered. He said, "Master, there is a Messenger without who desires to see you. He says his business is urgent; that it is important he should see you without delay." "What is he like?" said Worldly-mind. "Oh," said Conscience, "He is one of fair and benevolent appearance. He speaks kindly and graciously, and preferred his request in tender tones that I should advise you of his presence." "I am glad to hear that, Conscience," said the merchant. "Tell him I am very busy with Mr. Pleasure just now; it is not convenient for me to see him, but that if he will call again, I will give him audience." Conscience withdrew and delivered the message.

On a later day the servant came to his master again, saying, "Master, the Messenger who called the other day has returned. He says his business is still more urgent, and that he must see you to-day." "I recall your description of him, Conscience," said his master; "tell him I am busy with Mr. Business. We are laying

great plans here, and ask him to be good enough to call again." Conscience did so.

On a third occasion he returned with the same message. Again Mr. Merchant Worldly-mind was busy. He said, "Conscience, tell the caller I am very sorry to refuse him so often, but Mr. Money is with me now, and I am much occupied. I have not time to attend to his affairs; tell him if he will call again I shall be glad to see him."

On the occasion of the Messenger's fourth visit, Merchant Worldly-mind said, "Conscience, did you ask the messenger his name?" "Yes, master; His name is called the Holy Spirit; and He says He is the Deputy of the Prince of Glory, and that He comes to bring you word of a legacy that will greatly enrich you, and that it is to your highest interest to see Him. He begs you to see Him now." "I think I had better see him at once," said the merchant. But there was a friend with him whose name was Procrastination. The merchant said, "You will excuse me, please, Procrastination; if there is a legacy I cannot afford to miss it." "But," said Procrastination, "you need not hurry, if it is a legacy, it will keep; it can wait at least until to-morrow. Let us complete our business first." "Capital idea," said Merchant Worldly-mind, "you are right. Conscience, tell the Messenger that I am busy at the moment, but that I will see him without fail to-morrow. And before you go, Conscience, take a good draught of this wine. It is called the wine of good resolutions, and is prepared by Pleasure, Procrastination & Co. Drink deeply, and go and rest. I shall not need you further to-night."

Conscience took a good draught of the wine, and went off to deliver his master's message. After a while Mr. Procrastination left. The evening wore on to midnight. The merchant sat down with his books and said, "I must now see how my affairs stand while I have quiet." He opened his books, and when he had examined them for an hour or so, he clasped his hands as if in great agitation, as he said aloud, "I am in a sad state. I am on the verge of bankruptcy, in spite of all my efforts. Perhaps that legacy of which I was informed will balance my books, and put things right. I will call for Conscience, and have him send for the messenger." He opened the door of an enlightened judgment, and, now past the midnight hour, the silence of the house was broken by his startled cry, "Conscience! Conscience! Conscience!" But there was no answer. He called again: "Conscience! Conscience! Conscience!" His voice died away into silence. He listened, but there was no answer. Conscience was fast asleep!

Merchant Worldly-mind returned to his books, and as he pondered his state, he thought he heard a footfall without. He listened! Yes; surely he heard the step of someone approaching. "Ah," said he, "the Messenger is coming Himself; I will open the door, and bid Him welcome." He advanced a step toward the door when, to his amazement, the door began to open of itself. Slowly someone was entering without asking permission. He stepped back, and stood as though petrified, as a strange fear gripped his heart. At length, the door swung wide, and in walked one with sightless eye-sockets, with bony fingers, without thought, or heart, or feeling, cold as his own home, the grave. He sprang upon the merchant—"Spare me, O Death!" he cried. But it was too late! Forever too late!

THE WORD OF GOD IN RELATION TO GUIDANCE AND PRAYER

A Bible Lecture by Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto,
Thursday Evening, March 8th, 1934

*Sixteenth in the 1933-34 Series of Thursday Evening
Lectures on Biblical Theology, which is included in
the Curriculum of Toronto Baptist Seminary*

(Stenographically Reported)

Lesson Text: II Samuel, chapter seven.

The Second Book of Samuel once more, and the seventh chapter. In the study of these inspired histories we ought not to confine ourselves to an examination of the record as being merely the chronicles of certain events, of something that happened at a certain period, that has no direct relation to life to-day. The elements of human life are evermore the same, and history repeats itself, as the proverb has it, largely because human nature, and the circumstances of life, are practically the same from one generation to another.

We are to remember also that this Book reveals the overruling and superintendence of divine Providence in all the affairs of human life. There are principles entering into the formation of human character, directing the course of human conduct, and determining human destiny, which are always the same. We must look beneath the mere letter of things, therefore, in order to discern and understand the significance of the principles which underlie human affairs. We find that the Bible throughout is a book of principles which may be applied to all the circumstances of life.

The story of the chapter before us is briefly this: There came to the kingdom of Israel, under David's reign, a period of national tranquillity. The enemies of Israel withdrew, left them alone for a little while; and David had rest "round about from all his enemies".

It is very important that we should learn how to employ our brief periods of rest—if we are permitted any. When engaged in strenuous warfare, pressing the battle to the gate, our thought, our time, and all our energies, are fully employed. But in times of rest and reaction, of comparative quiet, there is always the possibility of our making mistakes.

David reflected that he had built a house for himself, a permanent structure, a house of cedar, while the ark of God still rested in the tabernacle, the place of curtains which he had prepared when it was brought from the house of Obed-edom, as we saw last week. It was in his heart to build a house for the Lord, and he consulted Nathan the prophet: "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." And Nathan advises him to do exactly as he had planned. Later, by a special revelation, Nathan was directed to go to David, and to correct the counsel he had formerly given him, to tell him that the Lord did not require him to build a house for Him. The Lord disclosed His purpose respecting the house of David for the future, and this brought David to his knees; and we find him earnestly engaged petitioning the Lord that he would do as He had said.

I.

First of all, there is A LESSON IN THIS STORY RESPECTING THE MUCH VEXED AND SOMEWHAT INVOLVED AND DIFFICULT QUESTION OF DIVINE GUIDANCE. I sup-

pose we all feel the need of a higher wisdom than our own, in order to direct our steps. We have an example here of how David, who had acted with such extraordinary sagacity and consummate wisdom in other matters, here entertained a mistaken idea, a proposal that was not in harmony with the will of God. His plan had to be corrected, and his energies directed in another channel.

We may conclude therefore that *even a very good man, such as David, with a record of unusual wisdom behind him, is still capable of making a mistake.* David was a good man, a man after God's own heart. He had acted wisely in many extremely delicate and difficult situations. He had shown a wisdom that was more than human. He had conducted himself in many a strenuous battle in such a way that victory rested with his armies. And yet at a time of comparative quiet, when he had time carefully to estimate all the elements of the situation he faced, we find him, at such a time as that, apart from divine intervention, making one of the greatest mistakes of his life. It surely ought to teach us that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps". No matter what experience in life you may have had, however you may have avoided the pitfalls of the enemy and escaped the perplexities which the unwisdom of others has thrust upon them, however splendid the record of the past, and however excellent the qualities of your own nature, remember it is written, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." "The steps"—not only the general course of life—"the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way."

We may learn, further, that *a good man may be wrong in planning what seems to be a good work.* David was not proposing to build a house for himself, but a house for the Lord. It had become a matter of concern to him that the ark of God, important as it was, was dwelling within curtains, that that which was representative of Jehovah's presence in the midst of His people was given a resting place inferior to that in which the king himself dwelt.

Surely it is a good thing for good men to take thought for the progress of the work of God in the world! Surely David is not to be blamed for not being indifferent to the position of the ark. On the surface it would appear to be a praiseworthy project which he submitted to Nathan when he intimated to him that it was in his heart to build a permanent house for the Lord. And yet in all this he was entirely wrong. That which he contemplated was directly contrary to the plan of God for him.

We need to be on our guard against situations like that. We are in danger sometimes of saying, "It cannot be wrong to do good." What is it to "do good"? What is the meaning of "doing good"? It must be right to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to educate the ignorant—to do a great many good things. There may be many things that are good in themselves, that are not your special duty. It is imperative that we recognize that. We may be led astray from the will of God, even in the doing of those things which seem, by all human standards, to be essentially good. It is not an easy thing to know just what we ought to do under certain circumstances. We may allow the good to become the enemy of the best.

David was a man of high privilege, and of great resource. He was king. Already God has prospered his kingdom, and it was within his power to build a

house for the Lord. He had, so to speak, the money to do it. You say, "If only I had money, what good I could do!" Are you sure? It would put a great responsibility upon you. If we had a great deal of money, we might prove ourselves to be bigger simpletons than we now seem! It requires more wisdom to spend money than it does to make it. Because it is within your power to do certain things which seem, in themselves, to be good, it does not necessarily follow that you ought to do them. If you happen to have a dollar in your pocket when some man comes to you and asks you for help, and you have the disposition to give him the dollar, it does not necessarily follow that that is exactly what you ought to do. I am pointing out to you how easily we may be betrayed into foolish action in the direction of what seems to be in itself praiseworthy.

You say, "In such cases, where shall we look for counsel?" It might have been supposed that David acted rather wisely in consulting with such a man as Nathan. Nathan was a prophet of the Lord, and he was a good prophet. Nathan was a man with a very worthy record. He was not a time-serving religious parrot, but a courageous servant of the Lord, as later events prove. Furthermore, his life had been given to the ministry of the Word: he had been a medium through whom the counsel of God had been communicated to many people.

David may have argued, "If my own wisdom needs supplementing, I can think of no one with whom I may more profitably take counsel than with Nathan the prophet. I will tell him what is in my heart." There are people who do nothing without asking the advice of several friends. You know the type? They are always asking people's advice. They do not always take it, but they ask for it. There are some people who collect other people's counsels as some other folks collect stamps. What for, I do not know unless it be to put in their album. It is not always the wisest thing to ask other people's advice. There are occasions in life when we must take the responsibility of individual action, and know for ourselves what is the will of God. We shall not necessarily be on safe ground because we consult such a man as Nathan.

David had acted wisely, as I have said, on many occasions hitherto; and Nathan had given wise counsel on many other occasions. But this was one time when Nathan made a mistake and said the very opposite of what God wanted him to say. Surely that should teach us that good men may not only go wrong themselves, but may sometimes unwisely advise other people. There are people who are always ready with advice. I do not know that that was true of Nathan, but there are such people. They are something like Alexander Cruden, the author of Cruden's Concordance. He was a very clever man, but was subject to mental aberrations. We may all, perhaps, be indebted to that sad fact—for I do not know who else could have produced a concordance such as this. It required a peculiar type of mind to render that particular service. But Alexander Cruden wanted to have himself appointed as general corrector of the people. He wanted to be "Alexander the Corrector". And he must have had a very numerous progeny, for I have met with many people who imagine themselves to be just as competent to correct all and sundry as Cruden supposed himself to be. They are ready always to advise anybody, on any subject. Their counsel waits on the tip of their tongue, and on the slightest provocation—or on no provo-

cation at all—it rolls off. "If I were you I would do so-and-so." How wise they are!

In this instance Nathan was wrong, as David was wrong, David proposed to do something for God, and Nathan said, "Go, do all that is in thine heart." This was a miniature convention, when two good men conferred to see what one of them should do. Such unwisdom issued from that conference that it was necessary for God especially to interpose to save David from a foolish course of action.

There are still people who advise one with the other about everything in the world. Not only the political, but religious leaders as well, can do nothing without calling a meeting. One wonders sometimes if there is any way, after all, of knowing the will of God, so that we can find out just what the Lord wants us to do, and get on with the business. Here is a lesson which ought to make us very humble, and teach us that we need to exercise great care in all our worthiest ambitions, that our hearts may be assured that we are in the way of God's will.

David consulted his pastor, and the pastor was just as wrong as the king. But *both were satisfied*. And it is quite possible to be perfectly satisfied in a course that is not of God.

I remember a lady's coming to our services some years ago, and asking for an interview. She said, "I have a problem; it is a problem of divine guidance." "What is your trouble?" She said, "I want to find out whether or not I ought to be baptized; at present I think I ought not." I said, "What is the ground of your present feeling?" She said, "I have been a Christian for thirty years, and a church member. I was baptized in infancy. I do not remember it, but I have been assured that I was. My father and mother were godly people, and it was by their will I was baptized." "What, then, is your difficulty?" "Just this", she said, "In all those years I have been perfectly satisfied with my baptism." "What is the matter now?" She said, "My question is this: do you suppose the Lord would have permitted me to be satisfied with this position for thirty years if I were wrong?" "How do you usually find out what the Lord wants you to do?" I asked. She said, "I ask God." "And do you expect some special sky-writing, some unusual vision?" "No." "In the ordinary course of life, if you would know the will of God, what is your procedure?" "I go to the Word, of course." "In these thirty years, have you brought this problem that now faces you into the light of God's Word?" "I do not know that I have." "Did you ever read of Christ's baptism?" "Yes." "Who was satisfied then?" She thought a moment and then said, "There was a certain satisfaction expressed; a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" "Have you ever asked God during these thirty years whether He was satisfied with your baptism? It makes little difference whether you are or not—is He satisfied?" "I have never asked Him." "Do you mean to tell me that for thirty years you have never opened God's Book and asked for light on the subject?" "No. My father was a good man, my mother was a good woman", etc.

David asked Nathan about it, and he approved. "My minister approved my proposal; he was satisfied." So were David and Nathan, and both of them were wrong, as we are all most likely to be unless we do what Nathan did that night. When Nathan got home God spoke to him. He said in effect, "You have given David the

wrong advice. You must go back and see him again, and tell him what I say, not what you think." Yesterday it was, "Thus saith Nathan"; to-day it must be, "Thus saith the Lord."

I am myself confident that there is no possible situation in life that can come to anyone of us, whether it has to do with the intricate and intimate details of our individual experiences, or with some larger public duty, or social obligation—there is no situation in life which can produce problems which are insoluble to the Word of God. It will solve them all, if only we consult it. I submit to you that even when your pastor, or some other good friend, undertakes to advise you, you had better make sure that that advice is in harmony with the Word of God. Take time to examine the question. So often I have said to you, but I say it again: please do not put upon me the responsibility for your conduct at any point. I will exercise my office as well as I can, and teach so far as God may give me light, the word of the Lord; but evermore I must insist that every one of us must give account of himself to God. We must ascertain the will of God for ourselves in respect to all the problems of life.

How different, oh how different, was the counsel which David received from Nathan after Nathan had had a talk with the Lord! He reversed his decision entirely. God began with a negative position. He said, "Go back over the history of my people, and see if I ever told anybody to build me an house." Remember the principle, "If it were not so, I would have told you." If God had required certain things of us, He would not have left it to us to make the discovery. It is not necessary that we should be either wise or zealous beyond that which is written. We had better wait until we can find scriptural warrant for what we believe, and for what we do.

"Go and ask David", said the Lord in effect, "what put that into his head. Ask him if he can find in anything I ever spoke through any prophet from the beginning until now one word to suggest that I desired anybody to build me a house." Do not try to do what God does not require you to do. You will have enough to do to do as He has told you. Do not multiply His commandments. Let us keep within their dimensions, and we shall have quite enough to occupy us.

II.

What did Nathan tell David? It is a very wonderful thing, and goes to the heart of many of our perplexities. Will you follow me? David said, in effect, "I want to use all my resources to build a house for the Lord. I want to do something for God." And I am not at all surprised that Nathan should have said, Amen, to that.

I do not often get downtown, but I was there Monday. I saw a mother who was a perfect lifeguard of a woman. She had a little child with her, who was not more than three years old. It—he or she—had just made a great discovery: it could walk! It had not known how long. Going along the street, I expected to see it fall every minute. Mother was saying, "Give me your handie." "No! No!" he said. No—I think it must have been a girl! She toddled along with her hands behind her, refusing to take her mother's hand. I said to myself, "That is like all of us. The Lord says, 'Give me your hand.' We reply, 'No! No! I can manage myself'."

We are like children too. If father has a day at home, and is at work with hammer and saw, that little boy

wants to do it all. Father lets him play about, but he could do the thing in half the time if that youngster would go to bed. He cannot make any contribution, but he thinks he can. He wants to use the hammer and saw.

"I would like to build a house for God." That is man's idea of religion, doing something for God. The priests and prophets of religion usually say, Amen, to that proposal. Just imagine some rich man in a church—as rich as David—imagine his telephoning his minister one day, saying, "Come over and see me." The minister goes over, and this is what the man says, "This is a nice house I have here, and I think we ought to have a new house at the church, a new Sunday School hall. I have plenty of money, and will pay for it." What do you suppose the average minister would say ("Go ahead!") He would say exactly what Nathan said, "Good! good! I will publish that abroad; I will tell everybody." Listen: here is the heart of the matter. I remember years ago reading this chapter when it came to me with such a thrill I felt almost as though I had heard a voice out of the sky. How little are we able to do for God, even though we desire it! Nathan came to David and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Go back over the past, and you will find that I never suggested to anybody that he should do what you say."

I think Nathan paused a moment, as though he would say, "David, can you stand it? Listen! Listen! ALSO THE LORD TELLETH THEE THAT HE WILL MAKE THEE AN HOUSE." David said, "What! I said, O Lord, let me do something for Thee." The Lord said, "David, be still. I will do something more for you." "Let me build a house", said David. "No," said the Lord, "I will build you a house. I will give you the plans and specifications of it now. I will tell you what sort of house it shall be."

Nothing is more difficult than for us to learn that God is waiting to be gracious. God wants to do something for us. What was the difference between Mary and Martha? I got a letter from Nova Scotia the other day enclosing a cutting from a newspaper, a poem, about the sons of Martha. The authoress had sent a copy of her poem to Rudyard Kipling, for Kipling has a poem on, "The Sons of Martha". Kipling replied by return mail, saying he had never quite been able to understand the story of Mary and Martha, but he gave his best judgment on the subject. That judgment, however, was the opposite of the gospel.

Evermore you have those two religions: the religion of Martha, cumbered with much serving, trying to do something for God; and the religion of Mary that teaches her that she should sit quietly at His feet, and allow the Lord to do something for her. That is the

difference between works and grace; between the religion that is man-made, and the religion that is from above, and which recognizes God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

That was one thing David learned by listening to the revelation of God, that God did not need anything he had to give. One would really suppose that God is very poor, and almost ready to go on city relief, to hear some people talk. But, saith He, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." God never comes begging of you or me. He does not need anything you have. It is His delight to give, and always to be giving. We never honour God so much as when we throw open every avenue of our being to receive the very life of our Lord.

"Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house." He said, "David, I am going to raise up a son unto you. I am establishing my covenant with you, I am going to make a promise to you for the son that is coming after you. It is to be an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure. I will not remove your son out of my sight as I removed Saul, for his kingdom shall be an enduring kingdom." He drew the veil and said in effect, "David, you thought you would like to build me an house of cedar, did you? Cedar lasts a good while, but any material house will crumble after a while—let me show you something." He drew the veil aside, and David looked down through the centuries to see God at work building him a house. Giving—giving—giving—always giving. Grace—grace—grace. The headstone put on at last, as the builders cry, "Grace, grace unto it."

When David saw God's plan he fell on his face before the Lord, crying, "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" I fancy he said to himself, "I was going to build a house that would perish in due course. Now God has shown me that He will build me a house that will never perish."

Some of you remember Dr. Keirstead. He had one little mannerism I used to enjoy very much, for often his physical posture was an expression of the operation of his mind (You remember, Brother Whitcombe?) When his soul was spreading its wings and flying away into the wide spaces of eternity, he had a way of shading his eyes as though looking afar into the future. That is what David did when Nathan delivered God's message of grace: he shut out everything else and looked into the future,—**"A GREAT WHILE TO COME. AND IS THIS THE MANNER OF MAN, O LORD GOD?"** David said, "That is something bigger than I ever thought of. That is exceeding abundantly above all that I could ask or think." That is from the New Testament, but in principle it is in the Old. It is the operation of grace. When a man sees what grace can do, he always cries out like that, "It is exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to his power that worketh in us."

So much, then, for the problem of guidance. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." Do not forget to whom that promise was spoken: it was spoken to a man who had just come back from the far country, and who had resolved to stay at home, who had just said, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me

from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." Then the Lord's answer, "That being so, I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." I can almost see God taking David by the shoulders, saying, "A little closer. Come a little closer. I will instruct thee and teach thee." David looked—and exclaimed, "Thou has spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"

III.

This lesson, now, **RESPECTING THE PHILOSOPHY OF PRAYER.** David was going to do something. David was going to serve the Lord with his hands, and on his feet; but the prayer closes with David on his knees talking to God. That is Mary's religion. It does not mean that he did not get on his feet. It does not mean that he did nothing, by any means. But he let God do something for him.

I should like to take that prayer of David in detail, but I remind you of this, that the thing which David had conceived is now banished from his mind, and he does not pray about it at all. Something else has come in. The thing for which he prays he had never, in his wildest fancy, dared to imagine. The thing that he asks God to do for him is something that is entirely beyond all human conception. No man would ever have dreamed of it. He saw an everlasting kingdom. He saw his Son sitting upon the throne, King over a dominion that should never pass away; and he learned that day, as Abraham had learned at an earlier day, to see Christ's day: "He saw it, and was glad." He saw that Messiah, the Anointed One, was to be his Son after the flesh; that in Him there was to be a union of Deity and humanity reigning over an everlasting kingdom. It is no wonder David said, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"

And it was when that divine revelation came to him that David learned to pray. You cannot pray without a divine revelation, because you do not know what to pray for as you ought. Do you see? Imagine a little child, brought up in the slums. He never had more than a few coppers to spend for himself in his life, and five cents was a fortune. His clothes had been ragged; he had never been particularly well fed. Imagine his adoption by a man of incalculable wealth. His foster-father can do anything for him, give him anything he wants. Suppose that man of vast wealth were to say to that little urchin of the slums, "Ask me anything you like, and I will do it for you." Do you know what he might say? If his father said, "Where would you like me to take you?" I expect the lad would say, "Down to Woolworths." In fact, he had never seen the inside even of that store, but had looked through the window. This man of vast wealth looks upon that child, and he thinks of his life "for a great while to come", saying to himself, "I wonder what are his potentialities? I must plan for his training, I must plan for his education, I must plan for his vocation, and his establishment in life—I wonder what he shall be? I must study him to see what his aptitudes are, so that I may lead him out in the right direction."

Then you find this man of wealth, after lavishing all his love upon this adopted child of the slums, every day and night planning—planning—planning for the child, the youth, the young man. Do you not suppose they

will be bigger plans than that little child could plan for himself? Do you not suppose they will be on a grander scale than he could imagine? Do you not suppose it will require vast resources in order to execute those plans? That little boy does not know how to talk with his father. He does not know what to ask for, because his little mind cannot conceive his father's resources. His father calls the lad to him and says, "Johnny, I think we will do so-and-so to-day; we will go so-and-so. Would you like that?" "Oh, I had not thought of that. Yes; daddy. Let's go."

That is a prayer based upon his father's communication. That is a prayer inspired by the revelation which his father has made of his desire. So that lad grows up, and little by little his father shares with him his larger views of life. If and when the boy comes to adult age, attains his majority and becomes his father's heir, and enters into possession of all that his father had planned for him, he has a vague recollection of those days of his infancy will he not say, "What if my father had limited his work for me to my poor, lame requests?"

Do you see my parable? Here was David playing about with some cedar blocks and a few other things, saying to Nathan, "Come on; we will build a house." But his great Father in heaven said, "No! No! I will build you an house, and I will show it to you little by little. I will unfold it to your wondering view." Study it at your leisure, and you will find David going over all that the prophet had said to him. But, let me read you David's prayer. That will be better than anything I can say to you:

"Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God: but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Lord, art become their God. And now, O Lord God, THE WORD THAT THOU HAST SPOKEN CONCERNING THY SERVANT, AND CONCERNING HIS HOUSE, ESTABLISH IT FOR EVER, AND DO AS THOU HAST SAID. AND LET THY NAME BE MAGNIFIED FOR EVER, SAYING, THE LORD OF HOSTS IS THE GOD OVER ISRAEL: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. FOR THOU, O LORD OF HOSTS, GOD OF ISRAEL, HAST REVEALED TO THY SERVANT, SAYING, I WILL BUILD THEE AN HOUSE: THEREFORE HATH THY SERVANT FOUND IN HIS HEART TO PRAY THIS PRAYER UNTO THEE. And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it

may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever."

Divine revelation is the only possible basis for effectual prayer. I said just now I do not go downtown very often; I will tell you why: "What the eye does not see, the heart does not crave." There are many things downtown I never think of except when I go downtown; because I cannot have them, I do not go where they are. It ministers to my peace of mind to stay away. But let us go window-shopping with God. Let us see all the treasures of grace on display. When we do that we find ourselves saying, "I want this. I want that. I want it all." Talk to God about it; tell Him that is what you want. And as you do He will say, "That is what I have planned to give you." Thus we shall pray for the things that God wills to give us. That is the philosophy of prayer—and that is enough for to-night.

Only 16 Days to March 31st

You have said:

"I must send something to The Gospel Witness"; or

"I must send something to The Seminary"; or

"I must send something to the Radio Fund."

As a member of Jarvis Street Church perhaps you have said:

"I must make up my weekly offering arrears"; or

"I must send in a thankoffering over and above my weekly contribution, for the blessings I have received."

Have you said one or any of these things?

HAVE YOU DONE WHAT YOU SAID YOU MUST DO?

If not, do it at once! Do it now!

Time waits for no man, and
March 31st will soon be here.

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

Vol. 9

No. 2

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 13

SECOND QUARTER

April 1st, 1934

INTO CAPTIVITY

Lesson Text: 2 Kings, chapter 25.

Golden Text: "And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the wall of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain."—2 Kings, 25:3, 4.

Bible School Reading—2 Kings 25:1-17.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS:

Monday—Jer. 34:1-7. Tuesday—Isaiah 64:1-12. Wednesday—Amos 5:21-27. Thursday—Ps. 74:1-9. Friday—Acts 13:44-52. Saturday—2 Cor. 4:13-18.

I. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM (vs. 1-21).

In this lesson we come to the end of Israel's pre-exilic national existence. At their entrance into the land, the prospect before this people seemed so bright, they were then a united nation, gaining victories over their foes, with the evidence of God's presence in their midst, and later on giving manifestation of true national greatness; but at the period of our lesson they were but a defeated remnant, given over by God to the tender mercies of a heathen conqueror. The studies we have pursued furnish us with a reason for this disappointing and terrible culmination to what might have been a prosperous and happy national life. God planned the very best for them, but they disobeyed Him, refused His counsel, and brought upon themselves the evil consequences.

Sin was the cause of Israel's undoing. Sin caused divisions among the people, brought suffering and death upon them, and separated them from God, and from their land. It is not altogether uncommon to find churches having a similar experience, with dissension, and disintegration manifesting the presence of sin in the midst. It should be noted in this connection that Israel's overthrow was due primarily, and in a very real manner, to the unrighteous actions of her people. The outside enemies would have been powerless to overthrow them if they had lived in obedience to God. And the church which walks with God need fear no outside enemy. When Christian work fails it is due, generally, to internal conditions, to departure from the teaching of God's Word in life and conduct. Care should, therefore, be exercised by each saint of God to the end that no self-will or other work of the flesh shall hinder the divine operations.

In this record of the destruction of Jerusalem a somewhat graphic though brief description of the siege of the city is given. The time of the siege is stated, together with the manner, duration, and suffering caused by the same, (v. 1-3). This fearful experience need not have come upon the people unawares, for in the time of Moses warning had been given concerning its possibility, (Deut. 28:49-58), and Jeremiah in their own day had predicted it, (Jer. 37:6-10). Note the great straits to which the people were reduced owing to the close investment of the place, (v. 3). In his lamentation over Jerusalem, Jeremiah refers to the fact of cannibalism during the siege, (Lam. 2:20; 4:9, 10), surely a dreadful condition, betokening loss of humanity, and descent to despair. Witness the human wrecks in our cities, also such persons as Ahab, (I. Kings 21:25), and Iscariot, (John. 6:70).

Zedekiah with his men of war left the city by night by a gate which evidently was not strictly guarded, but his escape was discovered by the enemy, by whom he was pursued and brought back, his companions being scattered from him (vs. 4, 5). Judgment was given concerning him and in punishment for his rebellion, his sons were slain before him, his eyes were put out, and he was carried into Babylon, (vs. 6, 7), where he died in prison, (Jer. 52:11). This fate was also in fulfilment of a divine prediction through

Jeremiah, (Jer. 32:1-5) and Ezekiel, (Ez. 12:13). In this we note man's cruelty to man, the spirit inherent in it being manifest throughout the years, and causing suffering in our own day: "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn", so spake the poet, and so we find in our world experience. Observe further the certainty of the fulfilment of God's Word. The Lord is the Omniscient One, and knows the future, as well as the past, and it is the part of wisdom to be guided by Him in all things. The wages of sin may also be noted, (Rom. 6:23), together with the principle that whatsoever we sow we reap, (Gal. 6:7).

Following the punishment of the king, the record is given of the sack of the city. The Lord's house, and other private dwellings were burnt, (vs. 8, 9), and the walls were broken down, (v. 10). The people were carried into captivity, with the poor of the land who were left for the purpose of cultivating the soil, (vs. 11, 12). The treasures of the city were carried to Babylon (vs. 13-17), and certain leading men of the nation were slain, (vs. 18-21). The complete and systematic destruction of the city is evident from this description. One cannot read it without sadness. The beautiful house set apart with such elaborate and solemn ceremony to the service of God, (I. Kings 8), was plundered of its precious contents, and then destroyed; and the city which stood at the centre of the worship of the One True God was laid low. What became of the testimony to Jehovah? His worship would surely suffer in the estimation of those heathen despoilers of His house and city, and all because His worshippers were untrue. Are we careful in our actions, lest His cause suffer by our conduct? (2 Cor. 6:3).

II. GEDALIAH MADE RULER, (vs. 22-26).

The poor people, with a few court officials, being left in the land, Gedaliah, a friend of Jeremiah (Jer. 26:24), was made governor over them, (v. 22). Acting on the counsel of the prophet he had possibly fled from the city before its capture, and surrendered to the Babylonians. In such a crisis it would seem as if he was well qualified to govern, but he was not permitted to carry on his duties for a long period, due to the antagonism of a number of the fugitive Jews who had returned after his accession to power. Among these was one named Ishmael of the seed royal, (v. 23), who, accompanied by ten men entered the presence of the ruler at Mizpah, his seat of government, and slew him, (v. 25), after which, in fear of the Babylonians, all the people fled to Egypt, (v. 26). Gedaliah was warned of the intention of Ishmael but refused to believe the information given him, nor would he permit anything to be done to prevent his doing as intimated, (Jer. 13-16). He was thus a man of honest purpose, desirous of carrying out his duties in the best interests of his people, (v. 25). The deed of Ishmael, therefore, meant the removal of a generous, right-minded, wise leader. In itself it was cruel, foolish, desperate, despicable. Note how one rash person may create trouble for many, and how one foolish act may involve lasting and lamentable consequences.

III. JEHOIACHIN RELEASED FROM PRISON, (vs. 27-30).

Jehoiachin captured and carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, (24:11, 12), had been kept in prison by this monarch until the day of his death. But on the accession of his successor Evil-merodach, the king of Israel was liberated on parole, and given sustenance by him all the days of his life. The story is told that this favour was granted owing to a friendship which had sprung up between the two while the Babylonian monarch before his accession, was in prison for some offence, real or imagined, committed during the life of his predecessor. But possibly a higher reason may be given, wherein may be seen the over-ruling providence of God, and the manifestation of His loving care for a member of the house of David. Though cast away from his land, God had not forgotten him; nor had God deserted His people. After seventy years many of them would be permitted to return to their own land, (Jer. 25:11, 12,) cured of their idolatry. Note the fact and purpose of chastisement, (Heb. 12:6-11). He loves them, (John 3:16), He has manifested that love in a most obvious manner in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (I. John 4:10). And that love is still evident in the work of the Holy Spirit, (John 16:7-11), in the salvation of individuals, (Rev. 1:5), and in the tender care with which He deals with His own when they disobey Him, (John 21:15-19).

The Union Baptist Witness

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"NOW CONCERNING THE COLLECTION"

Is your Church helping to reach the objective of \$2,000.00 as a special Home Mission offering? A few of the churches have set a later date to present this need to their people. Whatever you do, do not fail to make this an urgent appeal.

In a letter from one of our Home Mission causes the following occurs: "According to your request, we had yesterday the special collection for the Home Mission work. As all our men are on city relief the collection was not large, but I can assure you that every one of us did his utmost in sacrificing a meal a day for four days to be able to do something."

Some of our churches have boxes distributed among their members asking for a cent a meal, but here is a church which gives from its membership a Meal a day for four days. They did this to help keep a ministry amongst them; and to assist other causes of a similar status. They were willing to go hungry, and deprive themselves of even their necessary food for the cause of Christ. Self-denial is not practised very much in our churches. It is a little-known Christian grace among many who name the name of Christ, and yet it is the very essence of Christian discipleship. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

In another letter, from the Executrix of an estate, the following is sent showing the degree of sacrifice made by some of our Union supporters to maintain our Home and Foreign Mission work. "I am forwarding to your office with this letter two dresses of the late _____ to be given to some needy pastor's wife. These were given to me by her sister, but I feel that it would be a shame for me to keep them in these distressing times when I have what I need, and some pastor's wife not having what she requires. I trust when you give them you will let the recipient know that they belonged to one whose whole life went out to those who were holding forth the Word of Truth to those dead in trespasses and sin. I was intimately acquainted with the deceased; in fact she was my sole companion and many times of fellowship we had in the gospel and in reading THE GOSPEL WITNESS and following the work of the Union. I may also say that these two dresses represent all the said lady owned in what you would call special dresses. When you realize the amount she left for the Union you can form some idea that she had a scriptural insight into what one may truthfully call sacrificial giving. Her treasures are certainly put up in the Heavenly Bank. Hoping the information herein contained may encourage the Union in knowing what at least one of its sympathizers practised in her earthly pilgrimage, Very sincerely."

BLESSING CONTINUES AMONG THE CHURCHES

Briscoe St., London

Much blessing is being experienced under the ministry of the pastor, Rev. R. D. Guthrie. "For several weeks there has been a marked increase at all services. The growth has been steady, and last Sunday, March 11th, the Bible School reached its highest number, one hundred and twenty-one being present. The congregations both morning and evening, are also on the increase. The unsaved are coming to the evening service in larger numbers than heretofore.

"For several weeks the Lord has given decisions of one kind or another. There have been some wonderful experiences amongst them; some really definite conversions; backsliders restored and added to our membership. Also stray Christians have been reached and brought into our membership. We have had two baptismal services lately, and others are considering the matter. Others are almost persuaded to trust Christ. The Lord has been answering prayer in a real way, for both our temporal and spiritual needs, and we desire to ascribe all the praise to Him and share the little revival that we are enjoying with others.

"Next Sunday we shall be on the air again. The Lord is blessing this ministry to the salvation of some, and to the

blessing of many. Tune in to CFPL, London, 11.00 a.m. to 2.30 p.m., Sunday, March 18th."

LIBERIA

Mr. Clubine's letter of January 19th, is continued herewith from last week's UNION BAPTIST WITNESS.

"I am sorry that I have not tried to keep a diary, but the days are so short, even if we do get up at six o'clock; and the time goes so quickly that often we do not find time for much writing. We get up soon after daybreak, and as soon as dressed we find that the school children are also up and have filed over to bid us good morning. Then we go over to the church for prayer with the Christians. After this we have breakfast, followed by our own time of worship, and then the work of the day begins. At present it is holiday time, and no school is held, so things are different, but there is the medical work, the supervision of the boys who have their work as wood and water boys, or farm boys, who hoe out the banana or pineapple plantations, or cook boys who peel the cassava.

Liberian Paths and Farms

"The paths or roads, if you wish to call them that, in Liberia are very narrow, and on hills they are single rungs which are very hard to walk in. They wind about continually, seldom being straight for ten feet, at one time. They are often cleared of grass and bushes on each side for about three feet, but sometimes they are not, and one is continually rubbing against the undergrowth. This is especially uncomfortable in the early morning when the grass is drenched with dew, which soon gets one soaked almost to the waist. In some districts the path consists of nothing but up hill and down vale, and thus deviating from the straight line in two dimensions at once, it is a marvel how we are able to keep free from a sort of terrestrial sea-sickness as we do. The country through which these paths go, except when it is covered with dense forest, resembles land at home where the trees have been cut and the ground allowed to grow up with a dense undergrowth of hazels and bracken. This is the Liberian farm land, which is cut and burned off every few years to plant cassava or rice. During this time of the year one can see plenty of these slashings, and from our hill we can see the smoke of many burning farms every day. At present the people are planting cassava, which looks like a tall, slender bush with leaves at the top. The field is like a thick brushy undergrowth with much grass and bracken. The root of this plant is the part eaten, and contains nothing but starch. To plant it, it is only necessary to cut the stalk into pieces about three inches long and stick three of these in the ground in hill fashion. For a time after this the crop is hoed to keep the ferns down until the cassava shoots have a start.

Cause For Rejoicing

"The work here has its problems, but it also has its joys, especially when we see someone come to Jesus. I am thinking of one example which made our hearts rejoice. A big boy named Morgan had been opposed to the gospel. He said that he wanted to learn to read, etc., and is getting along well at school. He wanted to be a town master, or to get a position in the government, or something like that, but when asked by the other boys to go with them to the villages to help them hold a service he said that he would not even put his foot out on the path at night to preach the gospel. However, the people here prayed for him, and God dealt with him. Later he asked to go out with Kanga our head boy, and the night before we set out on our trek he surrendered his life to Christ. No one knew of it till we returned, although we noticed that it was Morgan who often told us that the people of the villages through which we passed wished to have the gospel preached to them. The night after we returned, at prayer meeting he prayed and later confessed to the boys and then to Mr. Hancox that he had decided to take Jesus as His Saviour and to leave all his sin and follow Him. I shall leave you to imagine our rejoicing."