

# The Gospel Witness

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

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## The Jarvis Street Pulpit

### CONVERSION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS EXPLAINED

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

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Canada, Sunday Evening, January 20th, 1935

(Stenographically Reported)

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."—I Peter 1:23.

I have a vivid recollection of ministering for a few weeks some years ago in a community settled by Scotch people where there had been a succession of faithful ministers of the gospel who had spent their time expounding the Word of God. Those people were thoroughly instructed in the Scriptures. Many of them were not Christians, but they at least had read their Bibles; they knew the letter of the Word, even though they had not yet experienced that divine visitation which would quicken them into newness of life.

A generation ago it was perhaps safe to assume that almost any congregation had a general knowledge of the Bible. They had been instructed in Sunday School, and then had been taught from the pulpit. But for not a few years now even many of the Sunday Schools have been engaged in other tasks than teaching children the Scriptures; and the pulpits, in many instances, have been engaged in destroying people's faith in the Bible. Others, while professing to believe the Bible, instead of expounding it, have been content to discuss it topically; thus many have skimmed over the surface of things instead of occupying their own and others' thought with the great verities of the Christian gospel. Nowadays it is a common thing to meet people of education, and who are at least ordinarily intelligent in other matters, who are almost as ignorant of the Bible as Pagans. University graduates, and even professors of universities, who are fond of denouncing the Book, it often transpires on examination, know almost nothing of the Bible itself. Hence the preacher's task to-day is to deal very often in elementary things, to teach the alphabet of the gospel, if he would be sure that the stray hearer shall know the first principles of the gospel.

It is said of all men that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap". There is nothing arbitrary

about the divine government. It is, if I may so say, a constitutional government, in the sense that He Who is our Ruler, the Sovereign of all, never does violence to His own nature; and He is the Centre of all things, and from Him all laws proceed. So that, whatever there be of punishment for the future, for those who deliberately, having sinned against God, reject all the overtures of mercy—such judgment will be meted out according to principles of justice and of truth. Every man will be given his utmost chance, if I may so say, in that last great assize. If anything can be said in extenuation of our sins, opportunity will be given. But alas! alas! "every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God".

On the other hand, the mercies of God are not arbitrarily scattered abroad, but they too are bestowed in harmony with principles of righteousness and truth. I know that salvation is eternal life, and is the gift of God; but God's gifts are not haphazardly bestowed like Christmas charity, nor without judgment like many other gifts, but always in obedience to and fulfilment of law.

We shall look at this text this evening in an endeavour to get a clearer view of what is really involved in being saved, in receiving the salvation that is in Christ.

Of such as are saved it is said that they are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever". Hold that text in your mind this evening as you are able, as a light that we may bring certain things under its illuminating judgment. By its light we shall try to understand something of *the nature of conversion*. That is a strong word. Nature goes to the heart of things. I do not mean the mere externals of it, or even the character of it, but what is the true nature

of the miracle involved in a soul's conversion. Then we shall examine some of the implications of this text in respect to *the truth of the perseverance of the saints*, and in conclusion we shall consider the text's teaching concerning *the potentialities of holiness* implanted within every soul that is really quickened by the Spirit of God.

## I.

What, then, is the teaching of the text in respect to **THE NATURE OF CONVERSION**? It will do those of us who are Christians no harm to re-examine ourselves, to be reassured as to the reality of that blessed experience which was ours when we passed from death unto life; I trust also it may clarify the subject of conversion in the minds of some who are groping after Christ, and desiring really to be saved. This evening I shall not labour especially to interest or entertain, but rather to instruct you in the things of God.

From the teaching of the text we may conclude that salvation is *very much more than a commercial bargain*. You and I have run into debt to God to a hopeless degree, with no possibility of our being able, by any effort of our own, to meet and discharge that obligation. Therefore we welcome the teaching of Scripture—surely it becomes a veritable gospel to us—when we find it written in the Word of God that Jesus Christ paid the price of our redemption, that we are redeemed, as we have it in the context, “not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”.

Let us bear it clearly in mind, then, that our sins have been paid for, that the deficit has been made up, that “Jesus paid it all”. But we have not exhausted the significance of salvation when we have said that. It is much more than a discharge from a debtors' prison, more than freedom from certain obligations to a law that has been violated. It is that. But if we would enter happily into relation with God, we must conceive of Him as being far more than a merchant behind a counter, or standing beside his scales.

What does our text say? It says that salvation is a new birth; we are “born again”. Obviously therefore *that lifts it out of the sphere of all possible human endeavour*. There is something in the salvation that is in Christ, that is entirely beyond all human power. It is beyond our ablest endeavours. It involves something that not one of us can ever do. It is the beginning of a new life, a new life imparted. God has reserved a point in all realms at the genesis of life for His own direct appearing. Men can destroy life, they can take away life, but they cannot give life. All that we know of life is that it is produced from antecedent life, but it is not within any human power to bestow life where no life exists, to make a living thing out of a non-living thing.

Science has wrestled with that problem for generations. I recall not many years ago reading the address of the President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, in which he said he still hoped and believed that the day would come when science would demonstrate the possibility of the chemical production of life. He was followed in the Presidency the next year by a scientist equally notable, who said that science had made absolutely no progress in that matter, and that life is still a mystery, that

all we know of it is that it comes from antecedent life; and that no single case of spontaneous generation had ever been proved.

But here is the impartation of spiritual life. Obviously we have here a sphere in which human power cannot operate. There is something in salvation which only God can do. The text excludes all human endeavour, and shuts us up to God. Ah yes, the Christian is “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”. He, in the beginning, communicated life to the non-living: He said, “Let be”, and it was. No one but God can do that. No one else has ever done it. If this building were ten times as large, and were crowded with all the scientists and the near-scientists of the earth, I would dare, without risk of my challenge being accepted, challenge them to give one solitary instance in the record of all human investigation of demonstrated spontaneous generation. There is death, and there is life. Only God can bridge that gulf. We must have God or we cannot be saved, if salvation involves being “born again”.

This is a *work of regeneration*, not being born, but being born again; born, as it is in the chapter we read, “from above”, by the stoop of a higher power, communicating its life to this lower realm. Salvation involves an act of regeneration. If there be someone here this evening who says, “Sir, I came here hoping to hear something of what I must do”, I reply that with the Lord's help we shall try to tell you; but I tell you first of all that salvation involves something that you cannot do. I care not how able, how moral, how wise, how resolute, how strong your will, here is something that is entirely beyond the bounds of human power. It is an act of regeneration; the communication to man of something that was not there before.

There is the old nature, the “old man” that Paul speaks of; but as to our spiritual nature, there is spiritual deadness, we are “dead in trespasses and sins”. You remember what we read this evening? “That which is born of the flesh is flesh”—we are here as men and women who have been born of the flesh—“and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” We are told that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”. It is a spiritual kingdom, and the inhabitants thereof must be spiritual beings, partaking of the nature of the kingdom itself, having received life from the King Himself, being born again “not of corruptible seed”, not of seed which has in its very nature that which tends to degeneration and decay, but of “incorruptible” seed; the soul is quickened into newness of life by an element that is not subject to corruption.

What is faith? Faith is the first evidence of the work of God in the soul. You thought it was the condition of the work of God in the soul? Logically, it may be; but chronologically, it is not. Faith is the first evidence that God has quickened the soul. Faith, indeed, is the breath of God in the new-born spirit. He hath given us “the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father”. It is by His quickening power, by the incoming of the living Spirit, that those who were dead in trespasses and sins are made alive again: are “born again”.

Have I said enough to make it clear that all efforts of the flesh—and I use that word, not in any gross sense, of course: I mean of the man who is unregener-

ate—let me rather say, that all efforts of the natural man, the psychical man, untouched by the Spirit of God, to save himself, must fail; for salvation involves something of which God Himself has the monopoly. That is why we must believe in Him. That is why we must come to Him. Ceasing to trust in ourselves, we must trust in Him.

One may enquire, "If faith is the work of the Spirit of God, I must be regenerate before I believe?" I talked to a young man to-day who was earnestly seeking salvation, and I said to him, "I have gone into an orchard where the fruit was hanging from the trees. I have touched a peach or a plum lightly, given it a slight pull; but it would not yield, it was green. I have said, 'It is growing. I did not make it grow: God made it grow. The sun has been shining, and the rain falling: that is why it has reached its present stage of development. But it is not ripe yet. I must leave it alone. I must leave it in the sun a little longer, and when the sun has completed his work, by and by when I touch it, it will fall into my hands as ripe fruit.'"

When we go into the garden of the Lord we need sometimes to learn to wait for the Spirit of God, to wait as the Sun of righteousness continues His shining. Do not pluck the fruit while it is green. Recognize conversion to be God's work.

What then? He will communicate His truth because the religion of Christ is for the whole man. The man thinks, the man has intelligence, he has judgment. His judgment is informed, and he begins to turn over these great truths in his mind. He has an affectional nature, and, like Wesley and his companions, his heart is "strangely warmed". He does not know why, but there is a new interest in the name of Christ. Perhaps he may say, "I should not like to say I am a Christian, but I must confess that I feel a new interest in the name of Christ." His heart, his affections, are engaged. Then memory begins to work. The seed that has been sown in his mind for years past, verses of Scripture he had learned, come before him, like green blades pushing their way through the earth. Conscience that seemed to be drugged, and to have lost its warning voice, to have ceased to be a monitor,—suddenly awakes to say, "Not that; choose this." The man may be almost startled. He says, "What is that within me? There must have been some change effected. My affections are going out to other things, and I find that things I loved before have lost their charm. I think I see things a little more clearly." If you ask him, "Are you a Christian?" He may still reply, "I dare not say that yet, but I am certainly interested in Jesus Christ."

I have often motored home a hundred or a hundred and fifty miles after a meeting in some other town or city, arriving home just as the grey streaks of dawn were coming up. I had my lights on, and as this change gradually took place I have said to myself, "What is it? Is it moonlight? No; it must be getting day; it is getting toward morning." I still needed my lights. There were shadows yet, and I could not do without them. But in a few minutes the shadows were gone, the night was past, and I could say, "It is useless to try to compete with God's light. Let it shine. The morning has come!" When the sun had risen I switched off my lights.

So is it sometimes as Jesus Christ dawns upon the darkened souls of men. Their minds are enlightened,

consciences quickened, and their affections are warmed toward God, and cooled toward the things that are not of God. By and by the truth shines clearly, and the man can say, "I know the morning has come. I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I am saved." But it is God's work. It is the light of the Sun of Righteousness, Who has risen with healing in His wings.

## II.

Let me bring another principle into the light of the text, and ask you to consider the teaching of the text in respect to what theologians used to call "THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS". Call it, if you like, the security of the believer, the eternity of our salvation.

Let it be clearly understood that *our continuance as Christians is never conditioned upon our behaviour*. Christians ought to behave well. Those who say they believe in God should be "careful to maintain good works". The children of God ought to behave like children of God. Children of the light ought not to walk as children of darkness. There ought to be a marked difference between the one who has been born again and the one who is still in a state of nature. But his salvation is never conditioned upon that difference. That difference is the fruit, the issue of the fundamental fact, and never the ground or the occasion of it.

What gives us standing before God? Our new birth, the fact that we are born again.

We had a man in this church years ago who was the son of a man whose name was known around the world, rather a famous one, certainly a man who was very widely and favourably known. I received many letters from him about this son. The son had inherited none of his father's greatness. He was not a man of great promise; a decent, good fellow, and a professing Christian, but a very ordinary man. Notwithstanding, he was his father's son—and he was his father's son, not by virtue either of his intelligence or his stupidity, but by virtue of the fact that he was so born.

We who are Christians are Christians, not because of what we have been or done, nor because of what we are now or are now doing, or may yet be or do; we are Christians, if Christians at all, solely because, by the sovereign act of the Spirit of God, we have been regenerated, we have been born again, begotten of the Spirit of God. We are the subjects of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. As such we are a new creation. That is the fundamental fact, that determines our relationship to God through Christ.

We are born again "not of corruptible seed". That which is corruptible is as mortal as it is corruptible, and leads inevitably to death and disintegration. We are not born of seed that has death at the heart of it. We are born of incorruptible seed, "by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever". Jesus Christ said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." When He speaks to us He communicates His Spirit in His word; and just as at the beginning the whole created order came into being at His command, so when the word of God finds entrance to the human heart there is implanted within us that incorruptible seed, that incorruptible principle of life, "which liveth and abideth for ever". You see, therefore, our salvation does not consist in the quantity of life bestowed but in its quality, its nature and essence, as of a seed that is "incorruptible".

That is of the very essence of the thing. That is why I speak of the "nature" of salvation, rather than of its

outward form: it is essentially the life of God communicated to the soul.

Issuing from that, there must inevitably be, as we shall see in a moment, Godlikeness; but I am speaking now of the duration of the salvation thus communicated. How long must it last? As long as the Word of God. I mean to say, that that new life, which is given as God's free gift to the believer, is as indestructible as the Word of God. What Word? The written Word? Yes; if you like. The Bible is indestructible. Men have tried to destroy it—but they have found it indestructible. But I go farther than that and say that that element that is implanted within the soul at the new birth, which comes from God, and is a part of God, "the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever", is as indestructible as Jesus Christ Himself, as the Word Incarnate.

How they tried to kill Him when He was a Babe! It seemed so easy! Surely when a man like Herod, with all the power that was at his command—when he set out to destroy the life of an infant child, he ought to have been able to do it! But he could not! You remember how it was said to Joseph and Mary that they might now return with the young Child—why? "For they are dead that sought the young child's life". Again and again men sought to put an end to the life of Jesus Christ before His time had come. They took Him to the edge of a crest "whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way". At last when He spoke of dying He said, "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep . . . Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." There was not power enough on earth, or in hell, to take the life of Jesus Christ from Him; "for as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself". "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." There was no power in the universe that could take His life. He laid it down, and took it again.

When a soul is regenerated, the risen Christ communicates His life. When He said, "I give unto them eternal life", He meant a life upon which death has no power. Therefore when we are born again "by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever", there is implanted within us an eternal principle that is as eternal as God is eternal; and God—I say it reverently—can as soon cease to be God as a really regenerate soul can cease to be a child of God. He is one with God for ever, as safe to-night as when he has walked the golden streets a million years, if there time could be measured and recorded. When thus we see that salvation is not the result of our laborious efforts, but of an act of God, and is the power and life of God in the soul, what comfort it brings to the true child of God!

### III.

Finally, I would have you see, in the light of this text, **THE POTENTIALITIES FOR HOLINESS THAT RESIDE IN EVERY TRULY REGENERATED SOUL.** Someone will say, "If that be so, it does not make any difference how we live." If you plant a tulip bulb, for example, how do you know what will come up? Because wrapped up in that dry, unattractive root, there are potentialities which the sun will bring to fruition. By and by out of it the beautiful flower will develop. You planted some tulips last fall.

You have not seen them since. The earth has been covered with snow, and the snow and the rain have alternated, and the frost has bound them fast. But you are not at all anxious. You know that in God's good time the snow will melt away, the sun will return in his strength; and by and by up from the dark earth will burst those beautiful flowers. Why? Because they are all wrapped up in the root.

We are born of incorruptible seed, and in that principle implanted within the soul by the Spirit of God there are all the potentialities of a holiness that is like unto the holiness of God. "Be ye holy, for I am holy, saith the Lord." But, Lord, we cannot be! No; we cannot be unless it be true that we are born again of that "incorruptible" seed: "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." That is what we are saved for, that by and by we may all be like Jesus Christ. We are not very much like Him now perhaps. Perhaps the dry and ugly bulb, or just a little green shoot, is all there is to see; but the divine Gardener will care for it, and by and by when our Beloved shall come into His garden to eat His pleasant fruits, when He shall come to admire the work of His hands, He will see the flowers of His own planting, and will find infinite satisfaction in the beauty that will be there displayed. For Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as every one of the flowers of His planting shall be:

I read of a great multitude clothed in white raiment, with palms in their hands; I read of some who are without fault before the throne of God; I read of a day when the divine Bridegroom will present His bride without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, in the presence of His Father, when she shall be holy and without blame before Him in love. What is our hope? That God has implanted that holiness within our spirits by the "incorruptible" seed. As that seed unfolds into beauty at last, we shall be perfected in glory—not here! Oh no; not here! We shall need heaven's sun here. There are some countries where they cultivate certain bulbs and seeds and export them to another country. In that new country they are matured. The illustration is not perfect, but perhaps suggestive: some day we shall be transplanted into the heavenly garden, that we may bloom in perfection there.

I wonder if that may explain the absence from us of some we loved? I wonder if the Lord was not eager to have them in his own garden, to see them come into full beauty before Him? Whether that be so or not, sure I am of this, that every one who is really born again of this incorruptible seed, by God's good grace, at last shall stand unabashed in the presence of the Holy One, envied even of the angels, bearing the perfect likeness of Him Who is "the express image of the Father's person".

Is that a salvation worth having? I cannot give it to you. I told that young man to-day, "I wish I could go farther with you, but I have gone as far as I can. I can only ask the Lord never to leave you alone, but to let the sun shine until the fruit becomes ripe, and you fall at His feet." Shall we pray that He will do that with all of us, and lead us from strength to strength, until we shall all appear in Zion before God, for "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

## DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN

A Bible Lecture by Dr. T. T. Shields

*Fifth in the 1934-35 Series of Thursday Evening Lectures on Biblical Theology, which Subject is Included in the Curriculum of Toronto Baptist Seminary*

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Thursday Evening, January 10th, 1935.

Lesson Text: II. Samuel, chapters twenty-two and twenty-three.

The twenty-second chapter is a song of thanksgiving, uttered in the day that the Lord delivered David out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul. I shall not attempt an analysis of this psalm—written in pregnant speech, every word of it, of course, has its significance—but merely remind you of the importance of giving thanks when deliverances have been wrought by the hand of the Lord.

I suppose we all have had experience with people in distress—as other people have had experience with us. We all need help, even human help, at some time; for no one is sufficient of himself for all the exigencies of life. But too often is it true that when people have received help, any kind of help, not necessarily financial, but when they have leaned upon you, and in some way or another, by counsel or companionship, been directed to a source of help, when you have rendered real assistance—too frequently those who have received help are like the nine lepers who did not return to give thanks.

I have observed in our prayer services that we receive far more requests to have fellowship with people in trouble, and to pray for their help when they need a helper, than we have suggestions that we unite in praise and thanksgiving for deliverances wrought.

Why should we not be as ready, speaking familiarly, to say, Thank you, to God, as common courtesy requires us to be in respect even to the slightest favour from our fellows? Indeed, "it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High". It is a good thing to reckon up the occasions for thanksgiving, to take stock of our deliverances, and see how much we have to praise God for—indeed, to

"Count your many blessings,  
Name them one by one".

Only I fear we could not do so. The Psalmist on one occasion said, "If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand." He was lost in wondering contemplation of the mercies of God.

It is enough to say that throughout this psalm David ascribes all praise to God for the deliverances, for all the miraculous assistance that had come to him throughout his career. David smote the lion and the bear. He did it, and yet he recognized that he did it because God was with him. That experience left with him a residue, a deposit, in his character which enriched him so that on a later occasion, when Saul rather contemptuously challenged his fitness to meet Goliath, David answered, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." When he went against Goliath, Goliath boasted of what he would do: "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of

the field"; to which David replied, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand." Thus the habit of recognizing God in the difficulties of life, and of praising God for deliverances wrought, only multiplies the occasions for thanksgiving.

Then this noble spirit contemplates his deliverances from all his enemies, "and Saul". Saul is particularly mentioned. Most of us have had a Saul. I mean, there has been some outstanding experience, some event that has been more conspicuous in our history, than many others. Let us include them all, and be thankful when God saves us from lesser enemies—and from the hands of Saul. Let us be thankful when He saves us from the big opponent, and equally thankful when He saves us from hordes of mosquitoes.

How often have you read of a man who has fallen on his own back door step, and suffered an injury from which he died. In reporting the death the newspapers say he passed through, perhaps, the Boer War, that is, the South African War, and the Great War—and yet died on his own door step. The habit of giving thanks for lesser mercies will yield large revenues of inspiration. Such lesser mercies may be strong links in the great chain of providence. Sure we are of this at least, they are numbered among the "all things (that) work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"; and therefore are among the things for which God is to be praised. If someone is seriously ill people say, "Let us pray for him; he is very, very sick. His illness is serious." But if one has a cold, it is considered scarcely worth praying about! A great enemy fills us with fear: but some little affair we think we can manage ourselves. Yet in the long result the apparently trivial incident may prove the factor in one's career which determines his destiny. The extraordinary thing about David is that he recognized God in the little things as well as in the great things. Hence, his life was full of praise; because life, for the most part, is made up of little things.

You remember how his associates suggested to him that a certain day was the day of his opportunity, and that he could terminate Saul's opposition very quickly. But he refused to put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed. He said, "I will not touch him. I will leave him to the Lord." When at last Saul was removed, he did not take a step without enquiring of the Lord: "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" After he had been anointed king, and had had a long and successful reign, when Absalom's rebellion broke out, as he was leaving the city and going back to the beginning of things—out into the wilderness as he had gone in his youth—when they would have carried the ark after them, he said, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation."

Absalom's rebellion was quelled, then the rebellion of Sheba, and all the experiences in the land of Philistia, as well as in the land of Israel,—and God was enthroned above it all. David's life had been one long conflict, one continuous trial, one great answer to prayer; and therefore one great occasion for praise. That is true of all of us. Into the details of it we

shall not go this evening. Take that psalm and study it at your leisure.

## II.

Come we now for a moment or two to the twenty-third chapter, "These be the last words of David." By which I think we may understand that this particular chapter is not in chronological order. In your newspaper you often get the last words first. You have observed that, have you not? A summary of the news is given in the first paragraph, and then an elaboration of it afterward. Sometimes in a biography you may get an account of the death of the hero of the tale, or some significant message he left at the end, which was characteristic of his life—in the first chapter. However, here is a record of David's last words, of the "man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel".

That is a fine title. How long his psalms have persisted! How accurately they mirror common human experience! How often have we all made the psalms of David vehicles by which to convey our petitions and our praises, our complaints sometimes as well as our songs of thanksgiving!

"The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me." You have expressions similar to those throughout the Bible, notably in the Pentateuch, then throughout the prophetic books: the writers claiming to be recording that which God had spoken to them.

We pass by these words save only to read them: "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." Oh that we had such rulers in our day!

Here is a text for you, see what you can make of it: "Although my house be not so with God"—there is the minor strain, and that I suppose enters into all our singing, that note almost of dissonance. Alas! alas! we are not what we ought to be—"yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow."

After all, dear friends, that is the secret of our continuance, as of David's. Our house is "not so with God". We stand not upon our own merit, either here or hereafter. We must ever say:

"I stand upon His merit,  
I know no other stand;  
Not e'en where glory dwelleth,  
In Immanuel's land."

You remember one of the apostolic benedictions?—"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever."

I suppose your New Year's resolutions are broken already. Perhaps you did not make any this year—but saved yourself the trouble. You did with your resolutions as some people do with their Christmas cards, re-mail them if they are undated! Last year's would do because they are not worn out. What a blessing it is that there is a resolution, a covenant, that is an everlast-

ing covenant, ordered and sure! Upon the promises of divine grace our hope is built.

At the eighth verse we come to the beginning of a very interesting chapter: "These be the names of the mighty men whom David had." It is most interesting to observe that one of the outstanding characteristics of the reign of David was the production, under the inspiration of his example, of mighty men, towering individuals. David did not build great cities, he did not effect great organizations; but somehow or another, being himself a mighty man, he gathered about him men of might, men of war fit for the battle.

How often you find it true that when very complicated organizations are elaborated, men seem to sink to a monotonous level! There is a kind of prairie appearance to human life, no mountains, no men of size: only a monotonous level of mediocrity. David produced great men. And that is our task. That must be your concern, you students, first of all to let God make great men of you, and then by His power to go out and make other men. That is the mission of the church. Paul said his great concern was to present every man perfect in Christ. He said that that is the end of the whole economy of grace. Gifts were bestowed for this purpose: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The end of His predestinating grace is not merely that we should escape from perdition and arrive in paradise, but that we should be conformed to the image of God's Son.

I hope you will always be individualists religiously as well as politically: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." We are personally responsible for the lives we live, to God; and if we feed upon this heavenly food, and allow our characters to be fashioned by the principles of this Book, we, in our measure, shall be mighty men.

Let me pause to say that David "had" these men: "These be the names of the mighty men whom David had." That is the big thing, after all. They were David's men. They borrowed whatever greatness they had from association with him, and they continued to be great because of the influence of his character upon theirs. If we are to be in any measure mighty men, let us see that we are among the mighty men whom David has, even great David's Greater Son. Let Him have you, and hold you, and keep you, and use you.

Let us see what they did: "The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite: he lift up his spear against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time." I do not know that he ever did anything else. You say, "Is that all he did?" Perhaps so. It is the only accomplishment recorded to his credit. It is a good thing to fill our lives with useful service, but I suppose few of us accomplish great things. We may be thankful if one great opportunity comes our way, as did this to one of David's mighty men. And because the opportunities for real distinction may be few, let us see to it that we are ready when they come; do not let the eight hundred people escape when, in the name of the Lord, you have opportunity to account for them.

"After him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to

battle, and the men of Israel were gone away." How significant that is! He was "one of the three mighty men with David"—when? When "the men of Israel were gone away". You will have plenty of opportunities to distinguish yourself when other people have gone away. I do not know whether they had run away or not—very probably they had. There are many people who, when emergencies face them, or difficulties confront them, or when they are even approaching, make themselves scarce.

When you have become pastors of churches, you will, for example, have an important business meeting. The church will have to face a very critical hour, an hour upon which great issues hang. In advance of it some one of your church officers, or some man of influence, will have said, "It will be all right, Pastor." But when the hour comes, and you look around, you will find he has "gone away". He is not there. You will often find yourself alone in situations from which many people will have "gone away". You will test your mettle, and prove what is in you, by your ability to stand alone.

As there was nobody else to do it—mark that—"he arose". Often you will be tempted to say, "Why should I do this? Why should I step into the breach? Why should I bear the brunt of the battle? Why should my shoulders carry the load? Why should I be expected to take the initiative? Let somebody else do it." It is almost proverbial—certainly it is a colloquialism in Canada, perhaps on this Continent—and is very expressive of a very common attitude,—I do not know who the gentleman George happens to be, but you have heard of him, "Let George do it." But here was a man who saw there was something to do, and nobody to do it but himself. The Philistines were there, and so "he arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword; and the Lord wrought a great victory that day", through the individual, personal heroism of Eleazar.

You will be a strong man only as you do what Eleazar did. You will never really enjoy life, and get the best out of it, until God has providentially put you in a place where everything is made to depend upon your personal conduct. When you feel, "It is *my* job. It is *my* responsibility. The battle is *mine*," and, meeting the emergency, fight through to victory, life will take on a new significance. One can find excuses for following the crowd, but whoever would be ranked among David's mighty men, must learn to stand alone.

At a Convention in Ottawa when our great fight in the Baptist denomination began, the night before the day of the debate I met a very prominent professor on the Faculty of McMaster University. He said, "Come aside and let me talk with you." We went to one side of the building, and he said, "A public discussion of these matters will cause dissention. Could we not have a committee appointed, and take it from the floor of the Convention?" I replied: "You have been having committees for years, sir. You have been taking this subject out of the Convention, and letting your Board do as it liked privately for years. The Convention must be the committee to-morrow. I am going to discover once and for all where this Convention stands." The professor said it was a world movement, and that he did not see what could be done. I said, "Professor, let us stand up to it. Let it overwhelm us if it must, and go down under it; but let us go down with a clear conscience, faithful to our God, and with flags flying, even if we are beaten."

"The men of Israel had gone away." Eleazar looked around, and he found himself alone. The Philistines had been having their way all too long. At last he drew sword and said, "While there is an ounce of energy left I will slay them in the name of the Lord." By and by his hand clave to the hilt of his sword, and he could not let go—but the Lord stood by the man who was ready to stand by Him. Eleazar did not do it alone—Eleazar could not have done it. But when God saw that Eleazar would rather die in a righteous fight than surrender, the Lord stood by his side and wrought a great victory.

It is a great thing to feel that some one day in your life, somewhere, some time, God has honoured you in choosing you to be His man, to do a really big job.

"And the people returned after him only to spoil." They came back then! Nothing succeeds like success. After Gideon and his three hundred men had routed the Midianites, and they were fleeing for their lives, the men of Ephraim said, "Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply." There are always plenty of volunteers to chase a fleeing enemy! But you will have to turn the tide of battle alone.

"After him"! Are you willing to be "after" someone else? I noticed as I drove along the street to-night there was one man who was not willing to be "after" anybody! I do not suppose he was going anywhere in particular; he was only going. It is a great honour to be after the Tachmonite. It is a great honour to be next to Eleazar. There is plenty of room in front—and sometimes there is room at the back too. Ask somebody roundabout your house after dinner is over! There is room always to help wash the dishes when dinner is over and the diners have "gone away." There is always plenty of "mopping up" after the battle.

"After him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentiles: and the people fled from the Philistines. But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the Lord wrought a great victory." I do not know whether the lentiles were of very great value, but they belonged to Israel, and "the people fled from the Philistines." That was the order of the day! That was the proper thing to do! Plough, and sow, and get the field ready for reaping—and when the Philistines appear, run away!

I have known a great many preachers do that. They go to a comparatively difficult situation; they meet it manfully; they plough and sow, put in two or three years of faithful service. The lentiles are up and about ready for reaping, and they are on the eve of a great blessing. Then a few Philistines push their heads over the hedge, and the poor man says, "I do not want to fight. I think I will run away." When we had our great revolution in Jarvis Street in nineteen hundred and twenty-one a certain minister called to me and said, "I think you are all wrong. I never do that. As soon as I find people do not like my ministry I run." I did not say what I might have said, or I should have said, "If you only knew the truth, you would be running all the time!" "I run"! And he did!

Do not run. Do not run away from difficulty when you have ploughed your field, and the harvest is nearly ready for reaping. When you have been in a church

three or four years you will be likely to have some difficulty. Some Philistines who have perhaps been wearing Israelitish robes will tear off the disguise. I know a pastor who boasts that he never has any difficulties. He will know better and speak more truly some day.

What will you do when difficult situations like that arise? Do as Shammah did. He said, "I cannot afford, for my own sake, to take to my heels. It will get to be a habit." There is a ditty that is popular in principle that runs like this,—

"He who fights and runs away  
Will live to fight another day."

But of what use is it to contend, if we accomplish nothing? What is the use of fighting for the faith if by so doing you do not establish somebody in the faith? Why plough if we do not intend to reap? What is the use of preaching if you do not see souls saved? Of what value is to plough and sow, and then let the enemy come and take away the fruit of your labour? Do as Shammah did. "He stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines"—and again "the Lord wrought a great victory". Make up your mind that you will be God's man, and will stand where He puts you until the victory is accomplished.

"And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men." Similarly has the Lord brought to us from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate the priceless draught of living water; let us pour it out unto the Lord.

"And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruah, was chief among the three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, and slew them, and had the name among three." One man against eight hundred, and now one man against three hundred. How many men are you worth? "How much then is a man better than a sheep?" Their heads are better than sheep's heads, no doubt; but how many men are you worth? One man equal to three hundred, and another to eight hundred!

There came a time in David's life when he would have gone forth to war, but his people having estimated his value said, "Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us; but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city." Three hundred! Eight hundred! Ten thousand! I believe that is possible, dear friends. God can make us so mighty that one shall "chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight".

"Was he not most honourable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the first three." There are many ranks. If you cannot

distinguish yourself in one sphere, the Lord will give you charge somewhere else. You may not be a general, but the Lord may make you a colonel; and if you are not equal to that, the Lord may give you rank as captain, or a sergeant, or only a private in the ranks: to every man according to his several ability. If you cannot attain to the "first three", do not be content to attain to nothing at all. There are people who insist on playing first violin, or they will not play at all. Those who want to be first or nothing are usually nothing in the beginning—and therefore are nothing in the end.

"And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts." Here is another type, "many acts"—too many to mention all of them. Adino the Eznite did one act, Benaiah did "many acts"; but one eclipsed all others in importance: "He slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow." That was one special act of valour. John McNeill, the great John, who recently went home to stay, had a sermon on that text. When he came to Toronto some years ago I represented the Baptists at his reception. I told a story of a Methodist minister who told me that he went to the World's Fair at Chicago in eighteen hundred and ninety-four. He went to see the fair, but lost all interest in it after hearing Mr. McNeill, then, I suppose, comparatively a young man. He said that for the remainder of the time he was in Chicago, he followed Mr. McNeill to hear him preach. Following my speech a Methodist minister spoke and said he too had heard Mr. McNeill in Chicago, and that he heard him again eight years later—and that he preached the same sermon. "What was the text?" asked Mr. McNeill. "It was about Benaiah's slaying a lion in a pit on a snowy day." "Aye", said the great preacher, "that is a good one; you will hear it again"! Thus Mr. McNeill multiplied Benaiah's one great achievement into "many".

Benaiah's is a very suggestive story of the multiplied difficulties of life. A pit is bad enough; snow is worse; but a lion in a pit on a snowy day is worst of all. The man who can overcome all three of them is really a mighty man! Doubtless you will find the pit, plenty of snow, and a lion or two beside.

"And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear", and so on. If you have only a walking stick appropriate your enemy's spear.

Here follows a long list of men still less distinguished than the thirty, but all of them, in their measure, worthy of mention. They did not win the Victoria Cross, but they were "mentioned in despatches". When the pen of inspiration writes a man's name for succeeding generations to read, you may be sure he has lived a life worth recording.

If we do our best to make our mark in life, and are numbered among the mighty men, whether the first three, or the next thirty, or those who are somewhat less honourable but whose names are recorded as men of distinction who had accomplished something, we shall do it only by our association with our David. His is the power, His is the example, His is the inspiration, throughout. May the Lord make us at least strong with the strength which He supplies.