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

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

THE BELIEVER'S AND THE CHURCH'S ONLY SAFE ALLIANCE

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

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Morning, June 9th, 1912

"For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying,

"Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.

"Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

"And he shall be for a sanctuary."—Isaiah 8:11-14.

This book of prophecies is described as "the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah". We must have some understanding of Judah's religious and political conditions during these reigns if we are fully to appreciate the prophet's message.

Uzziah is one of the pathetic figures of history. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God, and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." "And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong." But like many another "when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction". He considered himself competent for anything, and "he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense". And for his sacrilegious usurpation of the priest's office he was smitten with leprosy, and spent the close of his long reign of fifty-two years in isolation. Jotham his son succeeded him. He followed his father's example only so far as it was right: "Howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord." "So Jotham became mighty because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." But notwithstanding the king's good example; "the people did yet corruptly" in Jotham's reign.

The last of the four kings named was the best of all Judah's rulers, with the single exception of David:

"Hezekiah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that David his father had done."

A considerable part of the book relates directly to Hezekiah's reign, and is historical rather than prophetic, and is parallel to passages in Second Kings and Second Chronicles. The first six chapters evidently relate to the closing years of Uzziah's reign, the vision of the sixth chapter being seen in "the year that king Uzziah died."

During the reign of Jotham it would appear that Isaiah was silent, or, if otherwise, his prophecies are unrecorded. The passage before us has to do with the days of the other king whom I have only mentioned, the third of the four, the wicked king Ahaz. He was remarkable for his want of faith in God; and from the root of unbelief his life was abundantly fruitful in evil.

Because of his sin the peace of his kingdom was disturbed, and its integrity threatened. Political complications ensued. Syria and Israel combined against him, and "the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria"; and Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah one hundred and twenty thousand in one day "all valiant men; because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers".

But Ahaz discerned no connection between his political and military reverses, and his disobedience to God. He utterly failed to see that his political difficulties were the fruit of his own unbelief. Therefore, instead of becoming a penitent, he became a politician. He determined to meet a confederacy with a confederacy, a conspiracy with a conspiracy. Accordingly he sent mes-

sengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, "I am thy servant and thy son: come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver and the gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria."

And it was at this time that the Lord spake to Isaiah, warning him against the example of the people, and the king; and showing him the way of victory. I believe this text contains a message for our own times. Here is a path to be avoided, and a power to be invoked.

I.

A PATH TO BE AVOIDED: "The Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me; that I should not walk in the way of this people."

The way of Ahaz was the way of unbelief. Jotham had "prepared his ways before the Lord", but his son walked not in his footsteps. Instead, he turned aside from the simplicity of his father's religion, and imitated the religious inventions of Israel; "for he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim". He thought he could improve on a religion which consisted in obedience to a divine revelation; and from that root of unbelief every imaginable evil sprang.

It appears to me that he must be blind indeed who is unable to see that there is a similar tendency in the collective life of the professed people of God to-day. If you read the account of the deliberations of many church assemblies which bear before the world the name of Jehovah as Judah anciently did, it might be supposed that the divine oracle has ceased to speak. There is no longer a spiritual Voice of authority to be heard. There is no reference to any infallible revelation of the divine will. It would appear that God has left us to grope in the darkness, without any authoritative standard of direction for the conduct of His work. It is assumed that God wants something done, but has given no instruction as to how it is to be done.

I am not an alarmist, but I am compelled to admit that a condition strangely and sadly parallel to that of Ahaz's days is upon us.

But observe further: this was a way of confusion. Judah had lost prestige. Enemies were conspiring against her on every hand, and the old days of victory by divine power seemed to have departed. And that is the complaint we hear on every hand. The church has lost her power. She is no longer a spiritual force. It is popular to sneer at a spiritual religion. On every hand we are told that the church is not equal to its task, that men are not flocking to its services, but more and more are turning away from evangelical religion. I am not disposed to accept all these estimates as correct. I should be slow to believe all that Germany might say of England, or France of Germany. But when statesmen speak for their own country it is wise to listen. And when Christian leaders, with the reports of churches' activities before them, speak in this strain, one may well believe that the church of Christ has fallen upon somewhat evil days. And that is the fact. Read the accounts of the annual assemblies of different denominations, and you will find there is pretty general agreement that the Christian churches are not

holding their own against the forces which are arrayed against them.

But look again. It was a day when the people of God were deceived by the deceitfulness of sin. Ahaz saw his difficulties multiplying, the political situation was becoming increasingly complicated. Judah had for some reason lost her power to stand before her enemies, while her enemies seemed to be growing in strength and number daily. And the deluded king supposed that he was a victim of circumstances, that the alliances of the nations opposed to him were products of a peculiar time. Everywhere there were "confederacies", or "conspiracies", more accurately; and he and his people were martyrs to a particularly untoward age! But never for one moment did he discern any connection between the political dangers which threatened, and his own and his people's spiritual condition. He had no sense of God's sovereign rulership, and therefore it never occurred to him that all these things were really divine chastisements to bring him and his kingdom to a proper frame of mind.

The same is true of the present religious condition. On all sides we are told that men are unresponsive to the church's spiritual message. It is said that, while materialism as a philosophy is dead, as a rule of life it everywhere abounds. Religious leaders are fond of "diagnosing", as they are pleased to call it, the need of the times. And when it is admitted that the people of God are being beaten back by the forces opposed to them, it is ever remarked that the times have changed, and the church must change to meet it. But only here and there is it suggested that the church's failure is due to the fact that she has changed. The explanation of the failure is commonly looked for without. No relation is discovered between the spiritual drought, and the prevailing unbelief.

Observe still further, that Judah's way was a path of invention, of imitation, of resort to carnal expediency. Ahaz determined to meet his enemies on their own ground. If they could form new alliances, so could he. If they could make a great display of force, so could he. If apostate Israel could join hands with Syria, then Judah would meet the new alignment by an alliance with Assyria. Accordingly, messengers are sent to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, and his aid is sought. The house of the Lord had been called a "house of prayer". In this house Solomon had prayed: "If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the Lord toward the city which thou hast chosen, and towards the house that I have built for thy name: then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause."

But Ahaz had outlived the age of sentiment. He belonged to a very practical age. The priest and the prophet were to him anachronisms which a progressive nation could well dispense with. He therefore stripped the temple of its gold and silver, and substituted the soldier for the priest, the warrior for the intercessor. Not that Ahaz was irreligious! Far from it. He only wanted a new religion, suited to the times. And when Tiglath-Pileser had subdued the Syrians, Ahaz went to visit him in the former capital of his now conquered foe: "And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the

fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof. And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against king Ahaz came from Damascus. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon."

Uzziah the king, the grandfather of Ahaz, had been smitten with leprosy for not minding his own business, but Ahaz has a new altar, from a foreign country, a new religion, bought with the gold from the house of God; and like a child with a new toy, he must use it first himself—and the king turns priest of the new religion.

Is not that a mirror in which our own times are reflected? When spirituality declines, religious inventions flourish. Days of spiritual deadness have ever been prolific of new movements and new organizations. I do not overstate the case when I say that the house of prayer is neglected—that we are told the age requires a more "practical" religion than that which is sustained by prayer. A few years ago a Canadian theological professor said if he were a rural pastor again he would close the church prayer meeting, and hold meetings in the homes of the people; he would open the church for farmers' institutes, and he would announce football matches and other athletic games from the pulpit. All this is approved by the secular press. Apparently the only thing it is useless to announce from the pulpit is a prayer meeting. Even in the country, people assemble themselves for anything but prayer.

This is only an indication of the drift of the tide. Nearly every issue of certain religious magazines contains a description of the "fashion" of some new altar which some clever Ahaz has discovered in Damascus, "and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof", and forthwith the pliable, "scholarly", very modern priestly but practical Urijahs busy themselves making altars after the heathen pattern against Ahaz comes from Damascus. And then what a blowing of trumpets and display of fireworks we are treated to, to celebrate the discovery of the new and only religious movement suited to the times!

No one but God Himself can save us from this folly. It may be many of you will disagree with me this morning. It would appear that even Isaiah was in danger of being carried away with the multitude. The new method was so plausible, it was so popular, it was so similar to the practices of the enemy, it seemed so reasonable, so businesslike, so very "up-to-date", to beat the Syro-Israelitish alliance with its own weapons, at its own game! It would have been small wonder if Isaiah had been carried along with the crowd. But "the Lord spake thus to him with a strong hand, and instructed him, that he should not walk in the way of this people". It was as though God were moving in the opposite direction from Ahaz and his people, and meeting Isaiah. He spake with "a strong hand, and instructed him"; at the same time arresting him, and turning him back saying, "They are all wrong. Don't be carried away. Say ye not a confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Do not allow yourself to share their apprehensions. There is a better way."

And, brethren, I must deliver my soul. Surely there

is need of prophets in Israel. I am sure that the tendency I have remarked upon is all in the wrong direction. The explanation of the church's failure, if failure there be, is not in the condition of the world. The conditions were not new, as Ahaz may have supposed. Syria was ever Judah's foe. It was a sign of Israel's apostasy that she could ally herself with Syria. And so the carnal mind was ever enmity against God. The world was unfriendly to Jesus. What of Greece and Rome in apostolic times? What of the condition of Judah? Were conditions favourable to the spread of the new religion? They had no wealth, nor learning, nor prestige of any sort. They were the followers of One Who had been despised and rejected of men, and driven, so far as men could drive Him, out of the world. And yet the early Christians triumphed. They reported continual increase. How was it accomplished?

Therefore, my brethren, I would summon you and myself to a fuller devotion of ourselves to God. If we fail, let us acknowledge our sin; let us repent before God. Let us not evade the issue, and seek to cover our defeat, and the shame of it, by the invention of new machinery. Let us acknowledge that the change responsible for spiritual barrenness is not in the world, but in us. Let us hear this word of the Lord: "Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Is Israel a servant? is he a homeborn slave? why is he spoiled? The young lions roared upon him, and yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant. Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of thy head. Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, when he led thee by the way? And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river? Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts."

II.

The text suggests A POWER TO BE INVOKED. The nation was admonished not to attempt to contend with their enemies by imitating them; to put no reliance upon an alliance with Assyria as an offset to Israel's alliance with Syria; but to turn away from all these carnal expedients, and deal with the root-cause of their trouble, their spiritual apostasy, by returning wholeheartedly to God. Instead of seeking alliances with earthly kings, however great, they were counselled to ally themselves with the King of kings and Lord of lords, to "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself", to fear Him only, and to dread nothing so much as His dis-

pleasure. Then it was promised, "And he shall be for a sanctuary."

Look for a moment *at the negative side of this question*. There are some things we must not do if we are to "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself". We must, above all things, be delivered from the habit of imitation. We must be willing to wear old-fashioned clothes religiously. We must be convinced that some things are unbecoming to the children of God, and to the church of Christ. There are "business" methods so-called that should have no place in Christian enterprise. There are a thousand "attractions" of the world which we may be tempted to dress up religiously and import into the church, but against which we must steel ourselves. We must remember that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. There is no analogy between the interests of "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life", and the vital interests of the church of Christ.

The disposition to imitate carnal men has been the bane of the godly in all ages. Jeremiah was troubled because they were happy who dealt very treacherously. And, said Asaph the seer: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He was in grave danger of substituting the cleverness of the wicked for the clean heart of the righteous, of putting subtlety in the place of spirituality. And by the mere contemplation of it, "his steps had well nigh slipped". It was at once the salvation and the glory of David that he refused to fight either Saul or Goliath with their own weapons, but chose rather to "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself". And in the realms of religious belief and practice—and the two are one—we must stand against the common human imitative tendency, and ask for the old paths and walk therein.

This necessity is strikingly illustrated in the case of Ahaz of whom it is said, "And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel." Such a course will ever be the ruin of those who pursue it.

And in this connection let me put you on your guard against *another danger*. No one, I think, will charge me with leaning toward what is called "liberalism" in theology. I am not ashamed to be known as a conservative. But there is nothing I dread more than the commendation of a certain kind of orthodoxy. I am never so tempted to heretical utterances as when some people approve of what I say. I feel it to be a slander on any ministry that they should be pleased with it. I warn you against an ultra-spiritual profession of a mere intellectual orthodoxy. You know what I mean? You can worship the Bible instead of God. You can make a Shibboleth of the gospel, and, as in the ancient story, make the passages of Jordan instead of a path of conquest and triumph for the people of God, a place of slaughter for your brother Ephraimite, because he cannot frame to pronounce it.

I do not plead therefore for slavish prescription to religious—orthodox religious—formulas as the alternative to the assiduous imitation of Syrian altars, and the

worship of the gods of Damascus. I fear even the path to hell may be paved with texts of scripture, as well as with good intentions. Judah needed something more than the truth *about* God—and so do we.

Nor must we swing from this to a spirituelle heterodoxy, to a beautiful disregard for all forms of truth, and a dreamy devotion to spiritual ideals.

It is God Himself, as revealed in His word, we need. The mighty power of the Spirit of God alone can suffice us. God must come to us Himself, and He will come to us in ways made plain to us in this Book. Let us give ourselves to Bible study; to the habit of inquiring of the Lord; to a sane interpretation of His word and will; to a life of increasing prayer; to the practice of His commandments, a patient doing of His will day by day.

Oh, my brethren, better than I can tell you, each of you knows for himself or herself what is involved in this: "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; let him be your fear." Attend immediately to the neglected duty; forgive the trespasses of those who trespass against you; confess your Lord in your family, and in your business. Get down on your knees before God, and begin anew the battle against sin in your own life. Make haste to furl the flag of truce which you have waved in the face of the forces of evil. Throw wide every avenue of your soul toward God, that the Spirit of God may come in, as when the house is filled with vitalizing air when all the doors and windows are thrown open to the life and music of the springtime.

Learn to wait for God. Listen until you hear His voice, and discern the noise of His footfall, until your soul is ravished and raptured with the vision of faith, until you can say, "The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone: the flowers appear on the earth: the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

That is the prospect of faith. It is always morning when Jesus comes; it is always springtime when the Beloved bids us "come away"; there is always victory when we "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself". When He becomes our sanctuary we find Him "like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men".

But we shall appreciate the full significance of this admonition if we glance at *an historical illustration of the effect of obedience to it*. The life of Ahaz, alas! supplies no such illustration, but we find it in that of his son Hezekiah. Thus he signalized the commencement of his reign—"He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them." He gave instructions to the priests and Levites, and they cleaned the house of the Lord, and restored all the vessels which "Ahaz in his reign did cast away". And the king gathered the rulers, and went up to the house of the Lord. The sin offering was presented, and the smoke of sacrifice and of incense ascended once again. The blood was sprinkled, and atonement was made for all Israel. The Levites were set in their places with cymbals and psalteries and

harp, according to divine direction given through David, and Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet. "And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves and worshipped. Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped."

Letters were sent throughout all Israel and Judah, calling the people to the observance of the passover in Jerusalem. And while some in Israel "laughed them to scorn and mocked them", "divers humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the Lord." The multitudes came together; they destroyed the new-fashioned altars, and cast them into the brook Kidron, and they kept the feast of unleavened bread with great gladness, and so great was their joy that they extended it other seven days. So there was great joy in Jerusalem, "such as there had not been since Solomon's day, and the prayer of the people came up even to heaven. And the king rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly."

Taken together, the story means this: religion was cleansed of all its human corruptions, and given its proper place and function, a way of approach to God in accord with divine revelation; then the central fact of that revelation, the blood of atonement, became the ground of confidence and rejoicing. Public worship was restored to its place of importance—the people resorted to the house of God. The ordinances of God's house were honoured, the passover kept, effectual prayer ascended, and once again the joy of the Lord became the nation's strength. Thus there came about a nation-wide revival of spiritual religion.

Need I make application of this? Individually we must "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself", as I have said; but what does such action mean on the part of the church collectively? It means a renewed allegiance to revealed religion, as distinct from human speculations and inventions. It means a renewed emphasis on the central truth of it—"The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin." It means a new devotion to the house of God, a revival of public worship. It means, too, a faithful keeping of the New Testament passover feast, the Lord's Supper.

But *what effect had this upon the fortunes of the nation?* Did it in any way effect the removal of those disabilities under which Ahaz laboured in vain? Did this national devotion to a spiritual religion serve to restore the nation to her former glory? Did this alliance with God do more for her than her alliance with earthly kings? Can it be shown that the way of triumph for the church of Christ is along the old path of trust in the supernatural?

Scarcely had the revival come to its full strength in Judah when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them to himself. And especially he purposed to fight against Jerusalem. I cannot rehearse all the history, it is enough to say that Hezekiah was a great general. He made every provision possible for the military defense of the city. But he told the people, "With us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles."

And when Sennacherib sent him a letter in which he challenged Judah's God, "Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And they prayed unto the Lord, saying, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib which hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only."

And our prophet of the text brought the answer: "The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. Then the angel of the Lord went forth"—

"For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of his foes as he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still.

"And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
And through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold on the spray of the rock-beating surf.

"And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpets unblown.

"And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal:
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

But all that was in the Old Testament. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."

I have no time to discourse on church history in general, but select a passage from a chapter with which you are all familiar. Go back to the beginning, to the apostolic age. Consider the condition of the world—the cities of the gospel's early triumphs,—Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Rome. Most of these were cesspools of iniquity. The entire life of these localities was antagonistic to the gospel. On the other hand, the church was without material wealth, without social prestige, without an inspiring history. But they trusted in God, and the gospel proved "the power of God unto salvation".

Nor are the darkest spots of earth more difficult than these centres in which the gospel won its initial triumphs. The gospel needs no amendment; the Word of God, no additions. The way of salvation must ever be the same. We need only to sanctify the Lord our God in our hearts, to put His promises to the test, to be enabled to cry, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

SOLOMON'S CHOICE OF WISDOM

A Bible Lecture by Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto,
Thursday Evening, February 28th, 1935

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

(Stenographically Reported)

Lesson Text: I. Kings, chapter three.

We have now to deal with a very interesting character, and one which requires very careful analysis, that we may avoid misunderstanding. There is a passage in the New Testament which says that God "winked" at certain things because of the people's ignorance. Our Lord prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The Apostle Paul spoke of himself as having been "before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief".

It is said of God, "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed." It is impossible for you or me to weigh anybody's actions. We do not know what lines of influence find their culmination in others' actions. Perhaps if we were able to judge according to knowledge, some whom we are disposed to blame, or treat with contempt, we might regard with infinite pity. Others whose character and conduct seem to be eminently commendable, if all that they might have been were known, would appear to us as people who are most blame-worthy.

Some actions of Solomon during his earlier years did not immediately bear fruit. There is a scripture which says, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Notwithstanding, it is written in Galatians, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." There are some seeds which germinate slowly, and require a long period of time to reach maturity. There are thoughts, and actions, too, which do not immediately display their ultimate results.

In some respects the life of Solomon presents one of the greatest tragedies of history. This chapter informs us that, "Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh, king of Egypt." He formed his associates without the circle of the elect. There is a proverb which says that "a man is known by the company he keeps"; and another that, "birds of a feather flock together". It is not possible for one long to associate with another without being influenced in some measure by such association. The dropping of water, in time, will wear the hardest stone. We cannot be too careful of our associations.

Sometimes we are disposed to flatter ourselves that we take certain courses with a view to helping other people. Before you go into a malaria-infested swamp to study yellow fever you had better be sure you have taken every possible precaution to render yourself immune to the attacks of the organism you are attempting to isolate. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sit-

teth in the seat of the scornful." Nothing is said here of the evil of Solomon's course in joining affinity with Pharaoh, but it bore terrible fruit in Solomon's later life.

I have no doubt that many people, face to face with some tragic element in life, will discover, if they examine the steps by which they have reached that stage of the journey, that the beginning of their deviation from wisdom's path seemed innocent enough, and scarcely recognizable as a departure from the strict path of rectitude. While passengers in a sleeping car are sleeping the flange of the wheel takes the switch in the night that turns them from one track to another without waking them—but in the morning they arrive hundreds of miles away from where they would have arrived if they had not taken the switch. Beware of the turning places in life; be on the alert at the forked roads, lest, meeting Pharaoh, or others as evil as he, you join affinity with them and are led astray.

"The people sacrificed in high places (Gibeon, among others) because there was no house built unto the name of the Lord." God will judge us all for our conduct according to the measure of our privileges; but He will not judge us for doing things we could not avoid doing, or for failing to do things that were beyond our power.

When God appeared to Solomon in a dream He disclosed His own attitude toward him by saying, "Ask what I shall give thee." You and I profess to believe the Bible; I say, *we profess to believe the Bible* as the word of God. But to what extent do we believe?

Suppose a man of unlimited resources were to come to you and say, "I have so much wealth I scarcely know what to do with it. Will you not do me the favour of asking what I shall give you?" Do you think you could offer him any suggestions? If someone whose resources were without limit were to say to you in all sincerity, "Prefer any request you like; ask what I shall give you", I have little doubt that many a dream of what you have thought you would like to do, would emerge from your subconscious mind; and you would have a long catalogue of wants ready for presentation. If one were to say that to me I should say, "Let me see, at the rate of interest that now prevails, I should like about four million dollars." Then I should have income for the Seminary, and many other enterprises of which I have dreamed. Who of us could not think of a thousand things we should like to have, or do?

Our gracious God is without limit. We are never straitened in Him: "Our sufficiency is of God." He is independent of the depression, and of all earthly circumstances. There is no limit to His material wealth: "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills"; "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." All realms are subject to His command.

Was Solomon specially favoured? In the New Testament our Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The Bible abounds with promises which are as full and broad as the invitation which the Lord gave to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give thee." James tells us that we have not because we ask not. I have no doubt we could all receive far more than we do if only we were to ask for it. There

is a world of real wealth that is ours for the asking. But we are so accustomed to deception and fraud in every direction that when we read God's promises, to a larger extent than we realize we read them as we do the advertisements of a departmental store, and unconsciously question their value. Men discount what God has said because too often they interpret Him in view of their experience with their fellows.

Yet faith puts God as a Person apart. It is the function of faith to differentiate God from all others, to distinguish between His promises, and the promises of men. Faith is a recognition of God as God. Everyone else may deceive, but God that cannot lie has bade us trust Him. He bids me ask, and promises that asking, I shall receive. That is but a further illustration of the principle we discussed on a recent Sunday evening, that literally God is "for" us. He is on our side, and stands ready always to enrich us.

Solomon furnishes us in this instance with an example we may well seek to emulate. He was a man who occupied a very important and responsible position, and he showed his greatness by his recognition of his own limitations. He felt that he was but a little child, and had no ability for the exercise of his great and truly grave responsibilities. It is an evidence of true greatness when a man feels the responsibilities of his position. However humble the task, at some point the position we occupy will test us to the utmost—either our wisdom, general mental qualifications, or our physical strength. In some respects we shall find ourselves deficient and in need of reinforcement.

That applies to ministers. There are three vices to which ministers seem naturally to be exposed, and in the direction of which, for some strange reason, they seem to be predisposed. One is indolence, downright, unmitigated, laziness. That is the right name for it. I have known ministers who had capacity for great usefulness had they not been too lazy to work. Another ministerial vice is jealousy. It is very common for ministers to be jealous of each other. Shame on us that it should be true! The third is the strangest of all, conceit. Many ministers who have very little capacity, get on by what they call in business, their "turn-over". They use their mental capital again and again, they are equal to anything. Some such ministers think no one is competent to instruct or advise them on any subject.

It was not so with Solomon. He said, "I am but a little child." He felt he especially needed divine help.

Notwithstanding all the advantages which were his by virtue of the fact that he was himself a king's son, he felt himself but as a little child in view of his great task. One might reasonably expect much from the son of a man like David. It was an undoubted advantage to have the example and instruction of a father like David. But when David had done his best for his son, Solomon still felt that he was but as a little child.

He felt that, notwithstanding he occupied an exalted position. I hope you will never, as ministers, expect to find favour with men solely on the ground of your position. Putting a man in office does not necessarily make him wise. A man cannot be made a minister by the putting on of a ministerial dress. Had we in our Seminary legal authority to confer degrees, and were you to

earn all that we had power to confer, even that would not necessarily make you wise. Some of the biggest simpletons I have ever met in my life have been decorated with degrees.

I knew a man once who spent his life in obtaining degrees. I once told him that he had diplomas enough to paper his study walls it would count for little in the long run. Academic degrees have value only as they represent solid learning and worthy achievement. As ministers, I hope you will never depend upon your condition of life. Solomon did not. He was king. He wore a crown. Everybody bowed to him. But still he said, "Nobody knows better than I do how unworthy I am of this position. I have no ability for this task." Therein he showed his real greatness.

When the Lord asked Solomon what He should do for Him, he replied, "Give . . . thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" There is a great problem there. How far can the bestowments of grace enrich a man mentally? What can God do for a man in respect to his natural faculties?

For example. Suppose a man with a wooden leg were to enter a marathon—would God help him to become a champion runner in the Olympic races? Would you expect the Lord to answer his prayer? Would He give that man who naturally was incapacitated for the thing for which he asked, by working a miracle, the desire of his heart, and enable him, with a wooden leg, to outrun a man with two good legs? Some one may say the question is absurd. No, it is not. The only difference is that a wooden leg is a little more apparent than a wooden head! What if you have a wooden head—can you reasonably expect the Lord miraculously to make a Solomon of you?

Solomon was a man of at least ordinary intelligence; and he may have been—I rather think he was—a man of great erudition. Think of his proverbs, and of all the things he spoke of, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall. He was a great naturalist: he was able to speak with accuracy of the habits of all sorts of God's creatures: the spider in kings' palaces, and the conies in the rocks. He learned lessons from the ant and other creatures with whose habits he was thoroughly conversant; for "he spake of beasts, and of fowl, of creeping things and of fishes." In short, Solomon was what we should call in modern terms, a man of education, a man of thoroughly informed mind.

But that did not make him wise. Many men have much knowledge, but do not know how to use it. Wisdom has been defined as "the right use of knowledge". I have known ministers who would have been splendid men if they had had a little common sense. They were educated, well informed, able to preach well; but had no sense. Spurgeon once said that if a man had no common sense neither God nor man could do anything for him. What Solomon needed in this task of governing a kingdom was an extra supply of that very thing which is so uncommon, though we call it common. He needed wisdom.

On the other hand, how many there are who have had but little opportunity to acquire knowledge, who yet have an innate sense of the fitness of things, and who

invariably act wisely. If you have never arrived at a place where you have been perplexed, you have not gone very far. You will reach an intersection on the road where it appears that whether you go north, south, east, or west, you will be wrong. What are you to do? To stay where you are, may appear to be equally foolish. We need wisdom.

Do not allow yourself to suppose that you are sufficient for any task, whether great or small. We shall do well to take Solomon's attitude and recognize that the task of living is such a tremendous one that we shall none of us do it successfully without divine help.

But my question still remains unanswered. Can God enlarge a man's mentality? Can He really give a man, by supernatural means, abilities which he does not naturally possess? I know that one may be spiritually energized by the gift of the Holy Ghost, and that in the writing of the Scriptures, for instance, God inspired men, and gave them His own words to write. And yet you will find that He usually employed a fitting instrument for the task. He selected Moses to write the Pentateuch, and He selected the great scholar Paul to write the greater part of the New Testament, for instance. Nowhere does the Bible put a premium upon ignorance, but rather the teaching of Scripture is to the effect that we are under a solemn obligation to develop all our powers of mind and of body to the utmost. The Lord never gave the Holy Ghost to save us the trouble of learning.

When a boy I heard someone tell of being at a meeting where there was an ultra-spiritual brother scheduled to speak. In his zeal for the honour of the Holy Spirit he said, "Preach the gospel, and the Holy Ghost will teach you grammar." An old minister sitting on the platform interjected, "He will do nothing of the kind. You will have to learn that yourself." And that is true.

On the other hand, He may use us in spite of our defects. I read recently of a man who went to Mr. Moody at the close of a service, and told him of a number of grammatical errors, eighteen, I think it was, he had committed in one address. Mr. Moody smiled and said, "I use all the grammar I know to the glory of God; I hope you are doing the same." That was Moody's common sense!

There is a principle here to which we must give thought. There is a real unity in every human personality, that is part mind, part body, and part spirit. The mind ought to be the servant of the spirit, and ought to be dedicated to spiritual uses. I have a conviction that however well trained a man may be, whatever natural powers he has to begin with, or howsoever thoroughly disciplined they may be by educational processes, no man can possibly be at his best mentally apart from the light that shines from heaven: "The entrance of thy word giveth light." I dare to believe that if a man has the light from God's word, he will be a better, shrewder, cleverer, business man; he will be a keener student; he will have a truer appreciation of intellectual values, he will be able to perceive things that are hidden even in the mental realm from the natural man. I believe the entrance of God's word bringeth light to the entire intellectual realm. All our powers may be augmented by spiritual anointing.

If one should enquire, "You do not mean to say all our powers may thus be augmented?" I reply, I mean

just that. "Our physical powers?" Yes. I believe that the Holy Ghost can, and does, quicken our mortal bodies. I believe God will give us physical strength for our task, whatever it may be. I am positive I have had help from God physically on many occasions. I believe He will help you to train your voice, and discipline it, and increase its power, if you ask Him; as He will the mind. It will be that which is distinctively and peculiarly yours, and if you come like Solomon, saying, "I am but a little child", and put your self at God's disposal, He will make you wise, for the holy Scripture is able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Does such a principle apply in business? Yes. I read of one who cornered the market years ago. He knew all about the depression before it came. That is the difference between a poor man and a wise man. Joseph knew the famine was coming, and advised the king what to do in preparation for it. That is why the storehouses of Egypt were running over with corn while the rest of the world was starving. You say, "That was a special miracle." It was. But I believe God will help us in our material affairs. Sometimes He requires us to suffer His will, and sometimes in His providence it may be His will to bring us into a strait place that He may teach us. But I believe we ought to take this question literally and no matter what problem we face, whether in business, in our domestic affairs, or whatnot. Our gracious God in effect saith to us, "I sympathize with you deeply. You have a heavy task on your hand. Before you begin, can I do anything for you? Ask what I shall give you."

If we could meet each new day in the consciousness that He knows what is before us, and were therefore to seek His counsel, His wisdom would solve all life's problems. Had you not better have a word with Him before you begin the day? Ask what He shall give you. The Lord would disentangle many a knot that is altogether beyond our skill, and smooth out many a rough path, if we would but ask Him.

Solomon asked for the main thing, wisdom to live, wisdom to serve. Let us ask for that, above all else. It is said of David that he "served his own generation by the will of God", and fell on sleep. What a fine thing it would be if every one of us here this evening, as Christians, could take Solomon's position as a little child, and tell the Lord we are afraid of to-morrow, with all its responsibilities and perplexities, that we are not equal to the task, no matter what it is; and that we put ourselves at His disposal, for His guidance and wisdom! That is our privilege as simple believers, as it was the privilege of Solomon the king of Israel. The Lord always does "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think".

"And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing", that he had put first things first. Life is largely a problem of order, the keeping of paramount values in their proper place. How terribly at sea we should be in our business affairs if we had not discernment enough to distinguish between a five-dollar bill, and a one-dollar bill! If you were to put down a five-dollar bill to buy ten cents' worth of something, and the man should give you change of a one-dollar bill, would you say to him, "I thought I gave you a five-dollar bill?" If the merchant were to say, "The bills are the same size. Put them on the scales and they weigh

the same", I think you would say, "True, but the one is worth five times as much as the other."

There are many things in life like those two bills. One is worth five dollars, and the other but one; one is worth a million, and the other has scarcely any value. The problem of life is to have wisdom to discern between the precious and the vile.

What pleased the Lord? That Solomon asked for the uppermost thing, the *sine qua non*; the thing without which there could be no life for him. He put that first. It was exactly what our Lord taught when He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." These other things are important, and your Heavenly Father knoweth you have need of them. There is no argument about that, but put them in their proper order. When you get the second thing in the first place, you upset the order altogether; and very often it is the devil's trick to make the good the enemy of the best.

Churches to-day discuss Social Service, economic reforms, and many other things, none of which are without value; but they should be secondary and subordinate to the main thing. When they are put in the first place instead of being relegated to a subordinate relation, it becomes sin to us. God was pleased because Solomon had thus, at the beginning, been made wise to ask for the most important thing first.

Once more let us remember when God says, "Ask what I shall give thee", He will make us wise to ask the proper thing, if we are willing. It requires some wisdom to know how to place an order at the store even though you are free to order whatever you like. That wisdom God gives by His Spirit through His word. Solomon was given wisdom above all that were before him, and above all that should come after him, so that his name to the end of time should become synonymous with superhuman wisdom—in answer to his childlike prayer, "Make me wise enough to govern the kingdom as it ought to be governed."

The Lord said, further, "And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days." Again I refer to our Lord's saying: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you—on condition that you put the kingdom of God and His righteousness first, I will look after the rest." Solomon was made rich and honourable above all his predecessors, so that our Lord Himself when He looked for a standard of comparison, in order that He might show forth the skill of the Father in heaven, said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." God did not exhaust Himself in His gifts to Solomon. He can still make a lily more beautiful than Solomon ever was.

We shall come upon this later, but I anticipate it for the moment. The queen of the south "came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon." My dear friends, we must bear this in mind, that we have here a type of Christ, for our Lord Himself said in the passage to which I have referred, "She came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solo-

mon is here." The wisest of all kings is our King; and the richest of all kings is our King; and He whose glory is above the heavens is the One Whom we worship as Saviour and Lord. And we are heirs to that wisdom, and to that wealth, and to all His glory, if we are in Christ.

I will keep you only for a moment to add this word. One would have expected, when a man was thus supernaturally endowed with extraordinary wisdom, that a great national event, a great national crisis, would emerge in order to provide an occasion for the exercise of this superior wisdom. And yet how commonplace it was! Two women came to Solomon, troubled about a domestic affair, about their children. According to some standards that was a very small affair. It is assumed that men need wisdom for their work, but affairs of the home, the nursery and the kitchen, anyone can manage! You were a little thing yourself once! These men come home from their business, and they think they have had a hard day, that they have had problems to face. They think they are the only ones who know what it is to battle with difficulties. Let them try their hand at what their wives have to do all day—about fifteen minutes of it would be enough for them. Wisdom! Wisdom to adjudicate between two children, to settle domestic problems, to keep peace in the kitchen, in the nursery?

Let no one say that is easy. I have been a Pastor too long to believe you. I have seen too many instances where godly men and women, fathers and mothers, have been at their wit's end to know what to do with their children. I have known men who seemed to be equal to almost every difficulty except those they met at home. For them they could find no solution. I have met men of affairs, large affairs, who have confided in me that very often it requires more grace, more wisdom, more patience, to do the right thing at home than anywhere else in the world.

I am rather glad that Solomon had his first opportunity to show how wise he was in a domestic matter. It suggests that it is in these commonplaces of life, these ordinary things, character is really tested. When some great event advances, the man braces himself for it, faces it, deliberates, and prepares himself; and at last meets it triumphantly. But that is not the test of real living. The mariner is not afraid of the occasional big wave that threatens to swamp the ship. It is when the waves pound all the time, without cessation, that the stuff the ship is made of is tried. There are some things you cannot get away from. You must live with them day after day, and show yourself wise. Then you will glorify the grace of God as you never will in the public forum where there are multitudes of people to applaud.

Let us pray for grace, and patience, and wisdom, to meet the commonplaces of life where everybody must walk; grace to relate ourselves to the people about us, people who are unfair, people who claim more than their due; "in the midst", as the Bible puts it, "of a crooked and perverse generation". To be a Christian there, to shine as a light in the world there, is the real test. And our God stands ready thus to fortify, to equip us to live, to make us wise. May He make us all heirs of the wisdom that is in Christ Jesus, wise unto salvation, through the faith that is in Christ.

Whole Bible Course Lesson Leaf

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No. 1

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR

Lesson 13

First Quarter

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PATIENCE IN SUFFERING

Lesson Text: Psalms 37 to 39.

Golden Text: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."—Psalm 37:3, 4.

Bible School Reading: Psalm 37:1-20.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS: Monday—Is. 58:8-14; Tuesday—Prov. 14:27-35; Wednesday—Jer. 20:7-11; Thursday—Dan. 3:12-18; Friday—Luke 2:25-32; Saturday—I. Pet. 3:8-16.

PSALM THIRTY-SEVEN

In this psalm a contrast is instituted between the righteous and the wicked respecting life and fate; and the former are instructed concerning the upright life. There is first an exhortation to avoid fretting over evil-doers, or becoming "envious against the workers of iniquity". We are tempted to adopt such an attitude in times of depression and trouble, when we see many of the wicked practically, if not quite, unaffected by prevailing conditions; while the righteous suffer in material things. But life is not always what it seems to be; wealth is not the source of true happiness; and sin is sure to bring its own punishment (Gal. 6:7). Therefore we can leave such persons with God, and neither fret over them nor become envious of them. Their time is short; for soon they will be "cut down, and wither as the green herb". Our duty is to seek to lead them to repentance and faith in Christ (2 Pet. 3:9).

Following this, several exhortations are given bearing on trust in God, and promising blessing for obedience to His will. The first of these relates specifically to trust in God, and doing good; and the promise attached thereto assures of permanency of residence in the land, and certainty of provision for daily needs. These were material blessings, applicable particularly to Israelites, yet having a due significance for Gentile believers, inasmuch as faith in God leads to the supply of all needs (Phil. 4:19; Matt. 9:29). The second exhortation emphasizes the need for delighting one's self in God, and gives the promise of the fulfillment of the heart's desires. This would seem to be an addition to simple trust, although it should always accompany it. It means to make the Lord the centre of our affections, to let Him have full possession of the heart; then necessarily the desires of the heart will be His desires, and will be granted readily. It also implies obedience to His will, and a right relationship with Him. Emphasis requires to be laid on the necessity and blessedness of this attitude (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 15:29).

The third exhortation relates to committing the way unto the Lord, and promises the manifestation of God's power on our behalf, in doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves respecting the vindication of character. It is hard to be misunderstood, especially when we are seeking to benefit others, but we need not worry about it: if we trust implicitly in God, He will take care of that. Job could testify to this (Job 42:10-13), as could Joseph (Gen. 50:20); and our Lord Himself left His accusers to His Father. The fourth exhortation would lead us to rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. This implies calmness of soul, and expectancy of divine help. Observe the need for this attitude in this perplexing, troublous age; and the possibility of being possessed with peace in the midst of unrest (Phil. 4:7). The last exhortation of this section urges cessation of anger, wrath, and fretting; and points out the contrast in fate of evil-doers and those who wait upon the Lord. It is only as we walk in the Spirit that we overcome the sins of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Note the duty and privilege of living the resurrection life (Col. 3:1-4).

Continuing the psalm a series of contrasts are instituted between the wicked and the righteous—all bearing on the blessedness of the latter. The wicked shall be removed, but the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (vs. 10, 11). The wicked plot against the just, but "the Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming". The upright have the support of God, and need fear no one (Rom. 8:31). The wicked attack the poor and needy, but they will be punished for it. The wicked may have much of this world's goods, but the little that a righteous man hath is better than such riches. He has the blessing of a good conscience, and the consciousness of the divine approval on his conduct. Then follows the contrast in fate of these two classes of persons (vs. 17-20), the contrast in actions (vs. 21, 22), the blessedness of the righteous under the protecting care of God (vs. 23-29), the wise conduct of such persons (vs. 30, 31), their deliverance from the wicked by divine power (vs. 32, 33), the blessing of waiting on God, the passing away of the wicked, with the contrasting salvation of the righteous (34-40). It is perfectly clear by this record that the righteous person has the best of life here and hereafter, and that it is the part of wisdom to serve God faithfully.

PSALM THIRTY-EIGHT

This psalm contains the sad complaint of David respecting his condition, and an appeal to God for relief from chastisement. The description of the divine chastisement is graphic in its portrayal of physical affliction. After referring to the hot displeasure of the Lord, which he had incurred by his sin (v. 1), the psalmist informs us of the heavy hand of God upon him, and of its result upon his flesh: his wounds were offensive; his loins are filled with a loathsome disease; he is feeble, and sore broken; he groans; his heart parts; and the light of his eyes had departed from him (vs. 3-10). His condition reminds us somewhat of that of Job, who also for a time was a poor sufferer. Under such circumstances one might naturally expect sympathy, but David's friends stood aloof; his enemies laid snares for him; but he replied not to their insults, resting his case with the Lord, Who was his hope (vs. 11-15). To Him he prayed, requesting deliverance, confessing his sin, stating the conduct of his enemies, and praying for help (vs. 16-22). Observe in this, the attitude of God toward sin; the reality of divine humility, faith in God, and expectancy of an answer to his prayer. God never winks at sin, even in the life of one of His own. His attitude is always one of antagonism thereto; for He is a holy God (I Peter 1:16). He is gracious, however, to the sinner, in that He forgives sin when repentance is manifest, and confession of it takes place (Prov. 28:13; I John 1:9). David had more than one experience of divine mercy in this respect (2 Sam. 12:13; 24:25); and others have been likewise blessed (Jonah 3:10; Acts 2:37-41).

PSALM THIRTY-NINE

In this psalm the wicked are again before David. He is tempted to murmur concerning them, but refrains from doing so, and prays for aid in understanding his condition. He announces that he will take heed to his ways, and keep his mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before him. The child of God cannot be too careful of his conduct in the presence of the wicked, inasmuch as Christianity is judged from the attitude of those professing it (I Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 6:3). Much harm is done, we fear, from the loose tongue, and from the careless conduct of believers. The psalmist kept quiet before men, but his emotions were stirred, and he spoke to God requesting knowledge of his end, and understanding of the measure of his days, in order that he might know his frailty. His days were but an handbreadth, and at his best state he was altogether vanity (vs. 4, 5). The truth of this statement is most obvious. At the very longest man's life is very brief; and all his activities under the sun are classed as vanity (Eccl. 12:8); and his tenure of life is uncertain. This statement is followed by a prayer expressive of the psalmist's hope, requesting deliverance from chastisement, and pleading with God to hear his cry, and spare him, that he might recover strength before he departed this life (vs. 7-13). Observe David's appeal for the manifestation of the divine compassion; his estimate of life in its duration and natural value; his trust in God; and his carefulness before men. God understands us, loves us, and we can trust Him implicitly.

The Cry of Our Hungry Children

The readers of this paper will have had a weekly visit from the eldest of our children,

The Gospel Witness

throughout the year. The paper has maintained a consistent testimony, we believe, to the gospel of grace. During the year we have heard from a good many, most of whom were ministers, telling us that their income was so greatly reduced that they were unable to continue the paper. In not a few instances we have continued sending the paper, and in some cases the subscriptions have been covered by others' contributions.

We have maintained the strictest economy in the publication of THE GOSPEL WITNESS, but the fact remains that the subscription price does not, and cannot, pay our bills. We are therefore under the necessity of making

Our Annual Appeal to the Whole Gospel Witness Family

We believe it is not possible to estimate the blessing which the paper has been God's instrument of conveying, first, in the salvation of the lost; then in the edification and comfort of God's people; and, we are happy to say, in not a few instances, in affording some inspiration to hard-pressed ministers who find their task particularly arduous in these trying days.

The end of our fiscal year will be reached March 31st, and we appeal to every member of the GOSPEL WITNESS family—THAT MEANS YOU—to send us at once as generous a contribution to The Gospel Witness Fund as is possible. You cannot send too much. We shall need all that our most generous friends can send us, to enable us to close the year without a deficit. Large numbers of religious periodicals have had to cease publication from want of funds. Hitherto the Lord has helped us, and He has helped us through His believing people who have fellowship with us in the testimony this paper has endeavoured to give. We have never needed your friendship, and fellowship, and practical help, more than now. *Please help us!* HELP US ALL YOU CAN! AND HELP US NOW!

All that we have said about the hungry WITNESS Fund we can say with even greater emphasis about

Toronto Baptist Seminary

The work of the Seminary amazes us. We are only in our eighth year, and yet we have more than forty pastors and ministers preaching in Ontario and Quebec; a number in the Prairie provinces; some in British Columbia; several in the United States; one in Scotland; three in Jamaica; one in Central America; one in China; four in Africa; one in Palestine; and a large number of others who have taken the Seminary course, and as trained workers, have resumed their places in the churches to which they belong.

All this has been done without a cent of endowment. We need at least \$15,000 a year. We need about \$10,000 immediately. But do not let

the large amount frighten you, nor say to yourself, "What I could give would be but a drop in the bucket." Let us have the "drop in the bucket", if that be all you can give us. We mention the larger amount to remind any of God's stewards to whom He has entrusted some of His funds, that there is no better place to invest money in distinctively Christian Education than in Toronto Baptist Seminary.

Remember the Seminary in Your Will

May we remind our readers also of their privilege in remembering Toronto Baptist Seminary in their wills. Many are being suddenly called away in these days. If you intend to remember us, please do it now. We know of some cases where procrastination in this matter deprived the Seminary of funds that their owners intended we should have. But do not wait until you die. Having given the Seminary a place in your will, send us also a contribution to meet our present need.

And over and above all this, join us in earnest prayer that God will move His stewards so to give of their substance that the need of these hungry enterprises may be supplied. In naming the Seminary in your will, to avoid all possibility of mistake, name it as "Toronto Baptist Seminary, Associated with Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto."

**The Children are still hungry
ONLY TEN DAYS MORE
and the Dinner Hour will be
over for these hungry ones
for this fiscal year.**

**Send them a Roast, a Loaf,
or at least a Sandwich, at
once.**

"OTHER LITTLE SHIPS"

FREIGHTED WITH COMFORT

Is the Title of a New Book by the Editor

The book will consist of a selection of Jarvis St. sermons designed to bring sinners to Christ, to build up the saints, and to comfort the afflicted.

It contains 280 pages and is bound in cloth boards with gilt title letters.

It will be suggestive for ministers, and therefore would make an ideal gift for a pastor; it will be especially useful as a chalice of comfort for the bereaved; and may well be employed to send a message to the unconverted; and to establish in the faith any disposed to be driven about by every wind of doctrine.

"OTHER LITTLE SHIPS" are off the stocks and ready for sale, to sail, THURSDAY AFTERNOON, MARCH 21st.

The size of the book is 7½ by 5 inches and the price one dollar and a half. It will make an appropriate gift with which to remember your friends at Easter.

It is now on sale at the Church office, and will be obtainable at the leading Book Shops in Toronto and other Canadian cities within a week. For prompt delivery write THE GOSPEL WITNESS, 130 Gerrard St. E., Toronto.

ABOUT THE FREE COPIES

A free copy will be sent to the first person ordering from Great Britain or Ireland; one to the first from Australia; and one to the first from New Zealand.

In order to qualify for a free copy the order must be accompanied by cheque or money order for one dollar and a half (if cheque, plus exchange). The winners of the free copies will have their money returned.

It will be seen that the requirement that money accompany the order will ensure every order's being *bona fide*.

AUTOGRAPHED COPIES

A few friends have requested that their copy be autographed by the Editor. While he cannot understand why anyone should want his scrawl, yet he will gladly comply; and, as there may be others, he promises whoever desires an autographed copy may have one if ordered direct from THE GOSPEL WITNESS Office, 130 Gerrard St. East, Toronto.

ORDER FORM FOR DR. SHIELDS' NEW BOOK

THE GOSPEL WITNESS,
130 Gerrard St. East,
Toronto, Ont.

Please find enclosed ^{cheque} _{money order} for one dollar and a half for which please send me one copy of "Other Little Ships", as soon as launched. I understand by GOSPEL WITNESS advertisement of February 28th that should my order qualify for a free copy my money enclosed will be returned.

Name _____

Address _____