

CHASING A FLEA

"After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea." I Samuel 24:14.

For at least four years those of you who are members of the Class of 1958 have looked forward to this happy occasion with great anticipation. Now that you have reached this goal, it is my delightful privilege to commend your parents, to compliment the faculty and to congratulate you upon your graduation from Murray High School.

For you, commencement has been a goal; now, it is a starting point. The opportunities and responsibilities of these four years are gone forever. You have reached this goal by the goodness and grace of God, the labors and sacrifices of your parents, some work on your part and some generosity on the part of the faculty.

Most of your parents have made some sacrifices in order that you might be where you are tonight. I hope that you will appreciate the sacrifices which have been made for you and the opportunities which have been given to you. Your parents and your teachers have worked for you, believed in you and counted on you, and they are expecting you to make good. They have a right to expect you to make good. For their sakes, I hope that you will live victoriously and that you will see to it that your life counts for that which is noblest and best. In case you make good in life, your parents, teachers and friends will rejoice with you. If you fail to do so, they will be sadly disappointed, greatly humiliated and sorely grieved.

Upon this occasion of your baccalaureate exercises, which certainly mark a distinct epoch in your lives, I offer you my most cordial felicitations. At your invitation I come to bring this message. In doing so, I shall not make any attempt to entertain, to give a scholarly exposition of a text, to roll the thunders of eloquence, to dart the coruscations of genius, to scatter the flowers of poetry, to diffuse the light of science or to enforce the precepts of morality. Instead, as a fellow-student and friend, I hope to bring a simple message which will help you to live a well-rounded, full and complete life. The subject around which I now invite you to pitch your mental tents is "CHASING A FLEA." Lest you might think that this subject is far-fetched and ridiculous, I take you to one unappreciated gem in an obscure verse in the wide continent of God's revelation for a text on which to base my remarks. It is recorded in I Samuel 24:14. "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea."

King Saul hated David and determined to slay him. David had an opportunity to kill Saul but refused to do so. Instead, he followed him out of the cave and said, "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea" (I Samuel 24:14).

Saul was exceptionally attractive--tall in stature, graceful in build, princely in bearing and kingly in appearance. He commanded the admiration of a nation that was fond of pomp and grandeur. His possibilities were immense as the ruler of Israel. Think of it! A king who was a choice young man, standing head and shoulders above any man in Israel and wearing the garments of royalty! He had a crown, a scepter and a throne. He had an army at his command. But, what was he doing? He was chasing a flea. It was a ludicrous comedy which was all tragedy. He was a king

prostituting his great authority to ignoble ends and wasting great energies in cheap trivialities. He was a king dishonoring himself with cheap littleness--shooting cannon at sparrows, seeking to capture a flea.

Saul is a type of all who use their physical energies, mental endowments, educational advantages and spiritual privileges in seeking those things that matter so little, in following the paths that inevitably lead to the land of nobodyism. He is a type of all who are slaves to small anxieties, small ideas and small ambitions.

This comic and tragic picture is re-enacted by every person who:

I. Strives For A Life Of Pleasure.

You are now in the springtime of life when numerous voices will call to you to make pleasure the chief aim and prime motive of life. Persistently and insistentlly, they will say to you, "Get satisfaction out of life." They will never urge you to put meaning, service and sacrifice into your life, but they will insist that you make life a scheme and a trickery.

These voices will urge you to be deaf to Bulwer who said, "The life of pleasure makes even the strongest mind frivolous." They will urge you to ignore Shenstone who said, "What leads to unhappiness is making pleasure the chief aim." They will declare that Parker was wrong when he said, "A life merely of pleasure, or chiefly of pleasure, is always a poor and worthless life--always unsatisfactory in its course, always miserable in its end." They will say that Beecher blundered when he remarked, "Mere pleasure, sought outside of usefulness, is fraught with poison." They will deny the truth that "Pleasure seekers are like those letting empty buckets down into empty wells and growing weary with drawing nothing up." They will say that Paul uttered a falsehood when he said, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." If your one purpose in life is to have a good time at any cost, paralysis of the heart and palsy of the soul are inevitable. Any who are chasing the short-lived butterflies of pleasure need to learn and remember that:

"Pleasures are as poppies spread;
You seize the flower, the bloom is shed.
Or like the snowflake on the river,
A moment seen, then gone forever.
Or like the borealis rays
That flit ere you can point the place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Vanishing amid the storm."

The tragedy of any life that strives chiefly for pleasure is that it moves among sublimities but never sees them, and plays marbles with diamonds but never suspects their value. Are you striving for a life of pleasure only? If so, you are chasing a flea.

II. Seeks A Life Of Ease.

It is a law of the universe that nothing which is really good can be gotten or held by an easy means. You cannot dream yourself into character; you must hammer and forge yourself into character. The tempter will say to you, "Soul, take thine ease." If you heed what he says, you will be chasing a flea, which, whether caught or uncaught, will be worthless. Great is the danger and disgrace of abandoning one's self to a life of ease in the face of the wanderings, wonderings and wickedness of this head-dizzy, body-weary, heart-hungry and soul-sick world with its millions who are untaught and mistaught, unled and misled.

Surely, each one of you wants to succeed in life. Success is a goal within your reach if you have the determination to reach it and if you are willing to pay the price for it. What is success? It is coming up to the level of your best, making the most of your abilities and possibilities. But, no one can succeed anywhere who makes ease the aim of his life.

George MacDonald said, "No amount of wealth can set one free from the obligation to work in a world the God of which is ever working." Despise ease and really work, for nothing worthwhile is ever attained without it. Set a high goal and go to it over any rough road, up any high hill or through any dark valley. Live so as to be a stinging rebuke to apathy, accelerating the triumphant progress of all noble enterprises. The race is not to be run in short heats amid the plaudits of spectators. It is an endurance test which lasts as long as life and whose hardest stretches are run without applause, amid misunderstanding abuse and discouragement.

III. Seeks A Life Of Worldly Praise.

Popularity is one of the most coveted goals of human life. Many are the sickly victims of advertisement. They are striving for the applause of the world because they are diseased with the notion that only publicly touted folks are interesting. Merely to seek and to secure the praise of the world is a poor purpose for any life.

Foolish as men who burn lamps at noonday are they who prefer the praise of the fickle populace to the knowledge that they are well-pleasing to God whose scales weigh differently than the scales of men. Listen to these statements from the lips of famous men:

Burke said, "I wouldn't give a peck of refuse wheat for all the fame of the world." Charles Lamb said, "I walk up and down thinking I am happy and knowing I am not." Smollett, whose pen brought him much money and publicity said, "I am sick of praise and blame." Dante said, "Worldly fame is but a wind that blows now this way and now that, and changes name as it changes direction."

Worldly praise is often fickle. Quite frequently the bouquets which the public throws are followed by brickbats. Nobody can afford a feast today that brings a fast tomorrow. Nobody can afford a comedy that ends in tragedy. Nobody can afford the gain today that will bring a loss tomorrow. Nobody can afford to miss the crown by refusing to take up the cross.

If you are seeking worldly praise, then you are chasing a flea, and, whether or not you catch it, the flea is worthless.

As a means of helping you to avoid the re-enactment of this comic and tragic picture of chasing a flea, by striving for a life of pleasure, by seeking a life of ease or by seeking a life of worldly praise, let me challenge you, in the next place, to:

IV. Spend Your Life Following Christ And Serving Humanity.

The life of Christ was the glorious and triumphant accomplishment of a noble purpose. His mission was heavenly, heroic and sublime. He came to bring people to God, to cause them to know Him, and to make them happy in Him. What food is to the body, air is to the lungs, heat is to fire, fragrance is to flowers, matter is to physics, numbers are to mathematics, and the sun is to the universe and a thousand times more, Christ is to your life and mine.

Christ wants to save your soul and your life. He longs to have you dedicate your life to Him. He wants your personality or all that you are, your possessions or all that you have and your plans or all that you hope to be. He asks you to come to Him as you are, bring Him what you have, give Him your all and stand by Him and for Him whatever the cost. Christ has claimed many lives and made them gloriously worth-while. If you will surrender your plans to Him, He will not blight them, but He will bless them.

There is for you in following Christ all that is better than the best, purer than the purest, sweeter than the sweetest and brighter than the brightest. Only in Christ can you measure up to the fulness of your possibilities. Only He Who gave you your powers knows their possibilities. What marvelous possibilities in you, for you and through you under the mastery of Christ! Dedicate your all to Christ now, and then spend the remainder of your life in following Him and serving humanity. Give your best to Him and the best will come back to you.