

THIS BUSINESS OF LIVING

"And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see." Deuteronomy 28:65-67.

The Jews have been more honored, praised, promoted, hated, penalized, and persecuted than any other people in all the world. The Jew is the world's chief mystery. In science, medicine, philosophy, music, business, and industry his stamp is on the very threshold of every advance. The next time you hear or read the accusations and charges against the Jews, think of their discoveries, gifts, and philanthropies in so many avenues of human need. Bear in mind that a Jew wrote the Pentateuch, a Jew penned the Psalms, a Jew died on Calvary's cross, and a Jew preached the gospel to the Gentiles. The many-sided Jew beggars description, defies analysis, and defies comparison.

The heritage of the Jew:

- (1) Jehovah gave the Jews a law.
The law was holy, divine, and perfect. It safeguarded every right, provided for every contingency, and insured every privilege. It led to wisdom, self-restraint, health, and prosperity. Nobody has ever been able to improve on the "thus saith the Lord" of the Mosaic deliverances.
- (2) Jehovah gave the Jews a land.
It was a good, fertile, and fruitful land. It would have fed, clothed, sustained, and enriched them had they walked in obedience to God.
- (3) Jehovah gave the Jews a Lord.
When the law had been defied, the land defiled, and the nation degraded, Jehovah sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, to lead the chosen people back into the way of righteousness.

What did the Jews do with this threefold heritage?

- (1) The Jews defied the law. They broke its commandments, transgressed its requirements, defied its regulations, and persisted in disobedience. God's chastisements rested upon them time and again.
- (2) The Jews defiled the land. The sabbatical year was forgotten or violated. The Jubilee year was not observed. Oppression became the common rule.
- (3) The Jews denied the Lord. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). Calvary's tragedy is the key to the misery of the Jews.

Moses vividly described the fate that would overtake the children of Israel who disobeyed the divine law. With biting detail and burning invective he pronounced the doom: "In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning"(Deuteronomy 28:67).

This almost merciless description of futility could be made of the inner life of many Gentiles also in these days. We know what it is to have a spirit that languishes

away, unable to have any confidence in life. We have a colloquial expression for this mood: "Fed up." So often we hear somebody say, "I'm fed up." This business of living becomes a burden to some people. Life seems dull, uninteresting, inconsequential, and futile to them.

There is nothing new about this mood. The fact that Moses described the condition indicates its age.

The old monks knew about this mood. So, they withdrew from the world and sought peace in cloistered places, but they did not always find it. When they became fed up they described it as a weariness of spirit, a crushing sense of futility.

There are various causes for this. One may find the fight against temptation too much; the hard struggle to make a living too hard; living and working with uncongenial people too difficult; or, it may be due to the dullness of the same old routine. Sometimes the symptoms may be seen in irritability, temper, resentment, bitterness, etc., while inwardly the victim sulks against life.

Those around us are frequently aware of such a mood before the victim is. Sometimes, if they know the victim well, they tell him or her to "snap out of it." Sometimes that works, but in other cases it does not.

But usually the exhortation is not enough -- it tells us what we ought to do, but not how to do it. Ours is a spirit that languishes. We are unable to have any confidence in life, and the best many of us can do is to live out our lives in quiet desperation.

Others surrender to the mood, and all but give up this business of living. Such persons sulk at life; they take the gift which God has given them and wrap it in a napkin, despise self, and curse God or fate.

Most of us, fortunately, are not in that state. We do desire to master this business of living, and we know that we can never do that until we master this mood. We hear Paul saying: "I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4: 11), and we would give anything to be able to say the same thing.

How do we learn the secret of victorious living? There is no simple formula. That is why the proverbs we recite to one another seem so inadequate: Cheer up! Snap out of it! Forget it! Don't worry! All of these maxims have some sense in them, but they do not go deep enough.

I. This Business of Living Is Personal.

After we have made allowance for all the unfortunate factors in our heredity and circumstances, the fact remains that the condition which hinders us is within us. We have to accept responsibility for ourselves. Nobody ever finds life worth living; he has to make it so. Our disillusionments and our weariness of spirit are not questions for the world to settle. They are questions that each must settle for himself.

You may be in a far country of anxiety or fear or boredom. But you need not stay there. The prodigal went into a far country but within him something operated to show him that he was there, but he need not remain there, but that he could return home. He had freedom of initiative and choice; so have you. His spirit was languishing away, he must have lost confidence in life, and found morning and evening alike well-nigh intolerable. But he came to himself -- so can you!

II. Scattered Self Is A Basic Cause of Boredom.

We sometimes hear the expression, "Pull yourself together." When you have heard that, have you ever asked, "But how? Pull myself together around what?" When you accept the statement that to have a master-sentiment is the way to organize your divided disposition, then you are on the way to fulfillment.

III. Christ Gives Direction And Meaning to This Business of Living.

It is not enough to discover Christ as the towering figure of human history. His true meaning and power are experienced only as we maintain a spiritual fellowship with Him. We know that others have experienced in Him moral illumination, forgiveness, transformation, assurance, invigoration, and victory. Can that happen to us? Most assuredly, if we desire these things.

Begin with a contemplation of Christ as you see Him in history. Bring your whole self into conscious and sustained contact with the selfhood of Christ. This involves memory, imagination, attention, and humility. Your contemplation of Him must be both intelligent and honest. You must try to see Him as He is. Inner discomfort will be your first feeling, but you will not be left in that attitude, for your aspiration will be awakened and your confidence will be increased.

This business of living is only great and meaningful when you undertake it with a great purpose. This purpose will be achieved when you commit yourself to the fulfillment of the vision Christ gives to you. When a person commits himself to Christ, he keeps the way open for new insights into the character of Christ, and thereby into the meaning and possibilities of life.

As we keep Christ in sight, as we keep sensitive to His spirit, life becomes renewed, enhanced, and challenged. It requires technique — beginning the day, and continuing the day, and ending the day in fellowship with Him, through prayer. It means discipline; doing in our situation what we believe to be His desire, bearing the burdens which life imposes and need suggests, as Christ would do. To those who have undertaken this discipline it is harder to do wrong, it is easier to go out into life confident, serene, and eager to make this business of living significant for others.

No one is ever lonely or bored, or "fed up" who looks on other people through the eyes of Christ. We see them not as hindrances or helps to our selfish ambitions, not as nuisances because they disturb our comfort. We see them as He would see them, men and women with fears and hopes, temptations and crosses and needs just as we have. Once you take an interest in other people they cease to be dull. They become fascinating and bring thrills to living. Will you dedicate your life to Him? Will you commence and close each day with Him? Will you seek to follow Him, not only here in the atmosphere of worship, but also in the more difficult climate of an exacting world tomorrow?