

PATH-MAKERS

"And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." Hebrews 12:13.

In the Bible there is a peculiar insistence on straight paths. The Old Testament and the New Testament emphasize their importance. Men of different temperaments, and of different periods of history, urge their making as indispensable to certain conditions of life and certain benefits to mankind. The Psalmist desired straight paths from God -- "Make Thy way straight before My face." Psalm 5:8. The Prophet Isaiah commanded them for God -- "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Isaiah 40:3. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews urged them for the sake of less fortunate people -- "And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." Hebrews 12:13.

Jesus came and established a true standard of values. He came into the world at a time when men had magnified trifles and minimized essentials. They were placing ritual above righteousness. They were giving the body pre-eminence over the soul. In their eagerness to grasp material gain they forgot their obligations to God, and the affairs of time outweighed the issues of eternity. Mental astigmatism, and moral curvature of the spine, and spiritual degeneration of the heart were hastening the race to its doom. Into the midst of this people came the Great Physician with His startling message and His revolutionary method. He came to bring to men, not a religion, but a life.

Of all the creatures God has placed upon the earth man alone is lost in the midst of his own inheritance. The birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish in the sea need no other guide than the light which nature gives them. From our Northern woods to the Sunny South our feathered songsters take their flight, and they are neither helped nor hindered by the fact that others have gone before them. Across three thousand miles of sea, without compass or chart, fish will take a course. But man who is lost in the jungle of sin, and it is only by stepping into the footprints of Him Who is the Way, that he can reach his goal, and make a straight path for the generation coming behind him. Dr. A. J. Jordan translated our text, "Make straight tracks with your feet, lest the weak joint become dislocated; rather cause it to be healed." Here is a fundamental principle that is to govern our conduct as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of us are path-makers. There may be no aim and purpose in it, and we may be unconscious of our work, but we are making paths. Every step that we take is the making of a track. Every day and every hour we are busy at the work of path-making. What sort of paths are we making? Why ask the question? Because somebody is following on and will use our paths. And perhaps the one following on is lame in will, purpose, desire, self-control, and affection! The paths we make are no better than ourselves.

In the light of this text certain things are obvious in connection with living the Christian life.

I. It Is To Be Positive.

"Make tracks." or "Make paths for your feet." Some people pass through the world as the bird passes through the air, without leaving even a feather showing the way they went. They were born, they lived and they died, but even that much would not have been known had not some kindly hand chiseled the record on the stone that marks the grave.

One great need in every church today is for men and women of strong convictions, who have come into vital fellowship with Jesus and are as sure of His Saviourship and Lordship as was Paul after his experience on the Damascus road. Convictions are as rare as pearls, and as precious. If we are to become path-makers for our generation and the

succeeding ones, we must press the feet of our confidence in the path that was opened by the great Galilean. Look back back across the centuries and note the tracks that the sands of the ages have failed to obliterate. They were made by Abel and Enoch, by Joseph and Moses, by David and Daniel, by Peter and Paul, by Luther and Knox, and by others of like precious faith who could face the fires of persecution, but who could not be swerved from their purpose to do the will of God and to give to their children a better world than the one in which they were living, and make clearer and broader the path that leads to the throne of God.

II. It Is To Be Progressive.

"Make tracks," or "Make paths for your feet." That can only be done by making progress. He makes no tracks who stands still. We are in pursuit of eternal verities. God's revelation of Himself is a continual unfolding, and Christ is the textbook through which He is to be studied. Jesus assured His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came He would guide them into all truth. We ought to surpass our fathers both in knowledge and in achievements, but that does not mean the rejection of the fundamental doctrines on which they built. We use the same alphabet and the same multiplication table that they did, but we ought to excell them in our knowledge of arithmetic and literature.

III. "Make straight tracks," or "Make straight paths for your feet." That means not only that we march, but that we march in a straight line, Jesus Christ has passed along before us, has indicated a way that is both straight and narrow and has called upon us to follow Him. The will of the Lord must be the way of the disciple. In proportion to our submission to the will of the Master will we have power and service. There have been in the churches men of exceptional intellectual power and training who have accomplished but little of value, while men of very ordinary gifts and little training have achieved marvels. The difference has been in the measure of their submission to the will of Christ.

Straight paths have certain obvious advantages: --

1. Simplicity.

They are easy understood. They lead forward with easy directness. The great things of God and the gospel do not wait for trained intelligence and expert skill.

2. Safety.

Accidents usually take place at the turns in the road. Dangers lurk at unseen curves and hidden corners and unsuspected crossings. The straight road eliminates the unexpected and makes for the safety of travelling. Straight paths are the only safe paths.

3. Swiftmess.

Speed is easy on a straight road. Progress is slow on a twisting, turning road. The path of faith is a straight road.

IV. It Is To Be Helpful.

"Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." This brings us to the motive for Christian living. The straight and narrow path is the best for us, but that is not the supreme reason for walking therein. We are to make straight paths for the sake of the weak and sprained ankles of others. "Ye who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." That means putting ourselves so completely in their places that we will do the things we would have them do if we were the weak and they the strong.

We are part of a great caravan moving across the world, on our way to a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Within the company there are many who walk with halting steps, and to whom each morning brings a struggle and each evening a weariness. The way seems long and the road rough, and they are ready to faint by the way. God asks us to think of them when we choose our paths, and set the pace so that the weakest may not fall out by the way. The test of the road will be, not that we arrived safely, but how did others fare who used it after us, especially the lame. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye did it unto Me."