

THE WAY OUT

"I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: ... and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne." Revelation 4:1-2.

John has had the door of banishment closed on him by the imperial hand of Rome; but the ascended Lord had opened to him the door of heaven. He tells us that he was "in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Satan was running an account with John, and thought he was paying him off in depriving him of his liberty; when, in fact, he was contributing to his highest freedom. Depriving him of his earthly friends, he had thrust him into the close and intimate companionship of the great Friend, Jesus Christ.

He runs an account with everyone who is faithful to Jesus Christ, but what he intends for evil God turns to good. Romans 8:28. The barren island intended for John's prison becomes his observatory. The place where, in the providence of God, we find ourselves is the place of vision and promise. Take the case of Abraham. "And the Lord said unto Abram -- Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." Abraham didn't say, "Let me get to higher ground where the horizon rolls back further." God had described the bounds and that was enough. He looked, and believed, and obtained.

High visions are often seen from lowly places. With Stephen it was from the place of martyrdom. With Peter it was from the housetop of the home of the Joppa tanner. With Ezekiel it was from out by the river Chebar among the captives. With John it was from the isolated Mediterranean island, but he could look from the place where he was into the open door of heaven. Imprisoned, but there was a way out the upward way. The upward way is always the way out. There are bounds beyond which forbidding circumstances cannot go nor opposing forces oppose; a heartening truth for the troublous times which are now come upon the world. The way out is the way up, and men must find it, or die hopeless and in despair.

Life has its difficult crossings that none may escape. The matter of concern is not that we have them but how we conduct ourselves when we come to them. We cannot choose the circumstances life orders, but we can determine the spirit in which we meet them. Quarreling with life will not solve its problems. We do not bring brighter days by rebelling against the days overcast by clouds. Hiding in the shadows will not bring the sunshine.

There is the story of the cowardly soldier who complained about his poor equipment for battle, broke his sword, cast it away, and fled. But along came the king's son wounded and bleeding, stripped of his weapons, who seized the broken sword the coward had thrown away and led his men to victory. There is no defeat for lofty souls. To this President Faunce gave witness on his sixty-ninth birthday. Said he: "The steady succession of birthdays brings to me the sensation of being lifted by an elevator through the successive floors of some lofty building. On each new floor the horizon is wider, the sunlight brighter, and distant things seem nearer."

It is the upward look that sees:
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which
The first was made. -- Robert Browning.

Life has its varied experiences -- misfortune, disappointment, illness, sorrow, pain--not easily understood now; but later we shall learn how they contributed to its greater fulness.

If every way of earth is closed, there remains the upward way; if its door is shut, the door of heaven is open, It is for each one to choose whether his soul shall grope in the dark or soar in the light. John Oxenham has expressed it for us:

... to every man there openeth
A high way and a low,
And every man decideth
The way his soul shall go.

Jesus describes them as the "narrow way" and the "broad way"; one that leads to "life" and the other that leads to "Destruction." Whether one is saved or lost, whether his eternal abode is heaven or hell, becomes a matter of his own choice. God says, "I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil"; and we choose which of these we take.

It is told of a wealthy old gentleman in London that on one of his birthdays he invited his servants into his house to receive from him presents. He held in his hands a Bible and a twenty-dollar bank note. "Which will you choose," he asked the keeper of his horses, "the Bible or the twenty-dollar note?" "I would like the Bible, sir, but I cannot read," he replied, "and so I think the money would do me more good." "And you?" he asked the gardener. "My poor wife is ill and I greatly need the money," he responded with a bow. To his cook he said, "Mary, you can read, how about the Bible?" "I never get time to look into a book," she replied, "and, what's more, I need a new dress." Next came the chambermaid, but she had a Bible and did not need another. Finally, to the errand boy he said: "My lad, will you take the note and replace your shabby clothes, or would you prefer the Bible?" The lad replied: "My dear mother used to read to me that the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, and that his judgments are better than fine gold. Sir, I will take the Bible." "God bless you, my boy!" said the benefactor, "and may your wise choice prove riches and honor to you! As the lad received the Bible and unclasped its covers, a bright gold piece rolled to the floor. Turning the Bible's pages, he found them here and there interleaved with bank notes, while the others, seeing the result of their worldly selfishness, departed, rebuked, and chagrined. He who chooses the way of the Lord chooses the path that grows brighter unto the perfect day; and he who chooses the things of the Lord, chooses the riches that abide forever.

All the more impressive is this vision John saw, when we consider where he was when he saw it. It was not in Jerusalem, the Holy City. It was not in Ephesus, where, under the preaching of Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, a revival meeting continued for two and a half years. Nor was it in some other of the cities where churches had been established. It was on barren, lonely Patmos to which he had been banished. His persecutors had meant it for ill, but God had turned it to good.

What a rich appraisal we have given us here of life's real values! What lessons of incalculable worth are here taught us!

I. Life's most enriching experiences are not to be found in material values.

It is often true that from fields of sorrow, pain and loss are garnered richest harvests. In the garden of adversity some of the rarest flowers bloom. Without Bedford Jail there would have been no Pilgrim's Progress written. Physical vision gone, John Milton had the spiritual vision to see Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. It was while a prisoner in bounds that Paul wrote some of his most inspiring epistles. And from bleak Patmos John looks through open doors into heaven.

Whatever the privations and loss, the compensations of God more than make up for them. It is enough, if in these days of shaken earthly foundations, overthrowing of human plans and the destruction of material things that obscure spiritual vision, if we see more clearly those things which cannot perish, and put more firmly our trust in him whose throne is in the heavens and whose kingdom rules over all.

- II. Sometimes God must shut off our view from the things of earth that He may reveal to us the things of heaven.

With the door of banishment closed on John, he is shut out from all earthly scenes surrounding him; but there is open to him heaven's door revealing blessings abounding. With his ears shut to all earthly voices, he hears more clearly the voice that speaks from heaven. Patmos becomes a heavenly listening post: a heavenly watchtower. When walls of limitation are thrown around us, there is no cause for despair. There is a way out; the upward way that leads from things that perish to things that endure forever. Whatever may be the Patmos, yours and mine, it holds for us infinite blessings.

- III. Confidence that One is managing for us who knows He is about "And behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne." The trouble with our poor human weakness is that we think we must manage for ourselves; and we exhaust ourselves in futile efforts to do so. Through heaven's open door we have access to him who rules the universe and orders the events of our little lives.

A strong man and his little son with some friends were climbing a mountain. When they came to a dangerous place, a voice called out to the lad, "Have you fast hold on your father?" "No," replied the lad, "Father has fast hold on me." Not by our own power but "by the power of God through faith" are we kept unto the day of salvation. "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

I shall not worry about the road,
Its hills and its deep ravines;
Its dismal path, or its heavy load ---
I am kept by hands unseen. Millard A. Jenkins.

That which the soul craves and by which it is fortified against the ills that oppress it and against the enemies that beset it, is the thing the apostle is here talking about -- the open way to God, to whose throne of grace we may come boldly and find grace to help in time of need. He who sitteth on the throne is the same who was nailed to the cross. When there He said, "It is finished": the door of salvation opened wide, and all who will come by the blood cleansing way to enter in, go not out forever.

Have you entered? If not, will you enter now? The Master says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."