

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." Joel 3:14.

The day of the Lord is the keynote of this brief and most wonderful prophecy of Joel. This man had a method which is marked clearly. First, he looked round about him; saw the situation of devastation and desolation in which the people were living; and then declared that the things which they might have been inclined to account for, on natural grounds, were evidences of the presence and the activity of God. This, said he, is the day of the Lord.

Then, climbing to a higher height of prophetic outlook, he saw that a new and grave peril was imminent in the national life, and of it he said the same thing; it is the day of the Lord which is at hand.

Finally, in supreme exaltation of soul and spirit, lifted high above the darkness of his own day, he looked down the ages, and saw the intervention of new forces, and foretold with marvelous accuracy of detail the wonderful outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Our text is taken from the last section of the prophecy, that in which Joel was looking on to the final movements of the Divine judgments of humanity. The paragraph from which it is selected gives a graphic description of the gathering of the nations to war. Viewing the gathering of the nations to war, Joel broke out in the poetic and revealing words of our text, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." Thus the prophet viewed the assembled nations, swiftly armed, and that under divine compulsion, in the valley of decision.

The first half of our text is a good description of the age in which we live. Never were so many decisions called for as today. Never were so many questions debated, never so many problems discussed--intellectual problems, social problems, religious problems. Never was there so much searching of heart about the right way of life. It has been said that the mark of the present age is a question-mark. Everything is being scrutinized and examined.

Joel lived at a time when it seemed that his whole world was breaking up. It was a time of great depression. But, he did not whine about what a dark world it was. He did not regard the hour of tragedy as an hour for pessimism, but as an hour for moral choice. It was an hour of sadness and gloom, but also of opportunity such as they had never had before.

The battle between good and evil, light and darkness, is always going on. "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune: omitted all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries," said Shakespeare. James Russell Lowell expressed the same truth in the familiar lines, "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide." It is not only once that such opportunities come, but often. Life indeed is made up of them. Every day we make choices, and they go to form character.

I. We Can Make Decisions.

That is a glorious truth. We are not the playthings of chance. God has given us the prerogative of choice. We can exercise freedom of the will. We can decide to love God or to defy Him. He gives each of us that privilege. Each can choose for himself. When we do wrong there is something within us which tells us that we need not have done what we did. When we make the wrong decisions, we thereby reveal the depravity of human nature. Our remorse is due to the fact that we are aware that we possess the power of decision and choose wrongly. You can make or mar your life by the way you face this inescapable challenge: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve."

God is calling men to His side. "The day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

The age of the question-mark must precede the age of the answer. The valley of decision is the road to the mount of vision. It is for each of us to decide what we can do to stand for truth, sanity, mercy and lovingkindness in a world that has gone mad. God is calling us to stand for these things which are dear to His heart. They are being challenged today. We must see to it that they are kept alive in our own hearts and that they do not perish from the earth.

II. We Must Make Decisions.

There is no getting around this fact. Life is full of choices and decisions that have to be made. We are constantly coming to a point where two roads meet, and we have to make up our minds which of them we will take. No one else can choose for us, and all through our lives we find ourselves in the valley of decision. All men must decide for themselves whether they are going to live their lives in God's way or in the manner which Satan wants them to conduct themselves.

The valley of decision is not the kind of place in which men like to linger. Many of them much prefer to take the line of least resistance. John Wesley said, "The people I am afraid of are the almost-Christians." Those who are not for Christ are against Him. All are called upon to yield to the will of Christ and then go all out in living for Him.

Joel said that the sadness and gloom were due mainly to the indecision of the people, who did not know whether to trust Jehovah or foreign alliances. So, as he indicated, they would have to be led into a valley of judgment, from which they would not emerge until they had come to a decision.

In our day much of the prevailing darkness is due to indecision. Multitudes are trying to put off the hour of decision. But, it is an impossible attempt. Indecision is decision. To refuse to decide for the highest is to choose to have one's decisions made for us by the lower. James said, "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." James 1:6-8.

Double-mindedness is half-heartedness. It is the source of much unhappiness and moral weakness. The necessity of choosing frightens some people. Accidents are often caused because people cannot make up their minds. It is the same in moral accidents. It is fatal to dilly-dally in the choice between right and wrong. All through the Bible the note of decision is sounded. At the end of his life, Moses said to the children of Israel: "I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life that thou mayest live." When his life was drawing to a close, Joshua said to his people, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Elijah appealed to the Israelites on Mount Carmel saying, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow Him." The challenging words of Jesus Christ ring in our ears as we face the dilemmas of modern life: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." We begin to live wisely when we realize that we must make decisions and need daily guidance in doing so.

III. We Do Make Decisions.

That is why we are where we are today. We have chosen one way instead of another. Our decisions are reflected in our lives and walks. What we choose shapes our future.

Every day a pattern of character is being woven on the loom of your life. We must not allow circumstances to mold us. We must not take our tone from the society around us. As we call our wills into play and decide, our manhood and womanhood will have a chance to develop in the manner in which God wants it. Everything which is really worth having is at stake. The call comes to us to place ourselves on the side of things eternal, to be men and women of decision. "Who is on the Lord's side?"

The valley of decision is the valley of the verdict. We must choose a faith for life. Only deep convictions can carry us through dark days victoriously. Many have already accepted Christ as their Saviour and given Him His rightful place in their lives. Many others have listened to the gospel of Christ for years and are still in the valley of decision.

Some of the things about which you have to make a decision are the following:

1. Whether you will repent of sin or continue in it.
2. Whether you will accept Christ or reject Him.
3. Whether you will confess Christ or deny Him.
4. Whether you will be His friend or His foe.
5. Whether you will be for Christ or against Him.
6. Whether you will follow Christ or turn away from Him.
7. Whether you will have Christian associates or unchristian ones.
8. Whether you will be happy or unhappy.
9. Whether you will be obedient or disobedient.
10. Whether you will go to heaven or to hell.