

"LET US ALONE"

"And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God." Luke 4:33-34.

The teaching of Jesus was far removed from the conventionality of that day in which He was here in the flesh. It was remarkable for its originality. It made men acquainted with truths concerning which they had been entirely ignorant. Jesus set before men the nature and attributes of God. He gave to men a wide and far-reaching interpretation of the law to which they were so fond of alluding, and which they were so far from keeping. He unfolded to them the love of God as Father. He exposed the hollowness of mere outward service, and warned them against the hypocrisy of offering their prayers or doing their righteousness to be seen of men. He exalted character above reputation, religion above ritual, substance above form, and reality above appearance.

His teaching was peculiarly illustrative. He spoke of the lilies of the field, the sparrow on the housetop, the fig tree, and the vine and the branches. He made vehicles of truth such commonplace realities as the sower going forth to sow, the fisherman casting his net, the housewife kneading dough or seeking a lost piece of money, the shepherd tending his flock, the husbandman reaping his harvest, and the children playing in the market-place. All these were woven into the fabric of His discourses and made them more luminous and glorious. With a discernment far deeper than ours, He sees and shows clear lines where our discriminations between truth and falsehood are vague and general. With a sense acute and penetrating, Jesus was authentic and authoritative where we hedge and hesitate.

His teaching was wonderfully adaptable to his hearers. "He knew what was in man." His words were always in season and fitly spoken. He said the right thing at the right time in the right way to the right people. His preaching was not an effort to elicit human applause; nor an intellectual wrestle with some great subject for a display of Himself; it was a grappling with conscience and a pleading with the heart, an interblending of faithfulness and pathos that is without a parallel in the history of the race.

On the occasion when this text was spoken, in the synagogue in Capernaum, the special attribute of His teaching was authority. This called forth the amazement of the worshippers. And while He taught there was an interruption as violent as an explosion. "And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God." Verses 33-34. "Let us alone." That voice spoke centuries ago. That voice is often heard today. By attitude, by manner, by deeds, and by voice, many utter that cry today. There are the cultured, the educated, the scientific, the rich, the poor, the high, and the low who repeat in various ways that wild cry of the demoniac of the long ago. That appeal is often on the lips or in the hearts of multitudes today.

"Let me alone," that I may enjoy life, and do not harass me about righteousness, guilt and judgment. "Let me alone," and cease to interrupt my money-making by giving me thought of my duty to God and His kingdom. "Let me alone," leave us a while to ease, to pleasure, to prosperity, and to our wills and our ways. Forgetting the deeper truths, many cry, "Let us alone." Some say, "Let us alone":

I. When the necessity for an open alliance with Christ's cause is urged.

Many concede the beauty of Christ's character, which is spotless. They gladly agree that temptation never loosened a fiber of His moral being, and that circumstances never left a fingerprint upon Him. But when they are urged to make an open alliance with His cause, they cry "Let us alone."

Many are conscious of Christ's increasing world-influence and will tell you that He has bannered whole continents with His love. But "Let us alone" is their cry when the necessity for a public confession of sin and a public profession of faith in Him are emphasized. Many agree that Christ is far above all this world has ever known, yet they say "Let us alone" meaning there is no necessity for any open alliance with His cause. There are those who are in sympathy with the objects for which His followers are toiling, but they go on year in and year out, denying the need and demand from God for an open stand for Him. If you say that Jesus, without a pen, an army, a navy, a sword, money, or even a place to lay His head, has changed the world and the course of empires, they will say, "Yes," but still withhold public and open allegiance to Him. They never openly say, "Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, into thy freedom, gladness and light, Jesus I come to Thee." They never openly say,

"When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord! that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Nor "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

II. When they see the mistakes and sins of professing Christians.

Many are offended by the mistakes and sins of those within the churches, just as once men were offended by Peter's denial and Jonah's cowardice and Judas' treason and Thomas' doubts. I do not offer any argument in defence of those who have confessed Christ and failed to live up to their obligations--professing tons and possessing pounds, professing much and possessing little. When the sun goes into eclipse, everybody notices it. One star falling from the sky attracts more attention than thousands of them that shine faithfully night after night. Some have put mud on the shields of their lives. But not one rascal or one thousand should cause us to doubt humanity.

Is it right to rail at an institution or a home or a business concern because of the blunders and transgressions of some who are identified therewith? Of course, there are those in churches who stumble and fall prostrate; there are jurists who are tempted

and fall; there are merchants who are dishonest but we keep on buying from merchants; there are quack doctors who do wrong, but we do not shun all doctors because some are quacks; there are garage men who say your car needs something expensive when it does not, but people go to garages just the same; there are telephone girls who give you wrong numbers, but you use phones just the same. Do you withdraw from business because dishonest men are in it? But "Let us alone" is the voice and the attitude and action of many of whom we urge the need for open allegiance with Jesus. "Let me alone"--I can live just as good a Christian life outside the church as I can in it. If that is so, then Jesus made a mistake when He organized the church.

III. When they want to lead the unrestrained life.

"Let us alone! We want to be free to live our lives in our own way." All such think the real life is the untrammelled life--the life that never takes on the yoke, that never feels the rein, that never takes the whip, that never bends to the will of God. "Don't bother me. If I want to do wrong that is my privilege." That want to be wild Absaloms, blind to the road of ruin they follow. They want to be Lots, unaware of the tragedy that follows pitching the tent toward Sodom. They want to be prodigals, coming to want in a far country.

But no man escapes the reign of law by refusing obedience to it. Natural laws do not ask whether or not we give allegiance to them. Gravity will crush us if we disobey it. Fire will burn us if we are careless. Poisonous herbs will kill us if we eat them. Cold will freeze us if we disregard it and clothe not our bodies with proper garments and feed them with sustaining food. Whether you promise to obey the laws of God or not, nature will deal out her judgments impartially. You escape no law by refusing obedience. There is no land to which you can flee where you may have license to be lawless. Freedom comes through obedience to law. Happiness follows the surrender of the will to God. The path of duty is the path to glory without and to peace within. Duty is binding upon us because we are in God's world, supported by God's bounty, and under obligation incident to His mercy and love.

Why say, "Let us alone," when we would warn you of the chasm ahead? Why say, "Let us alone," when we would have you come from death to life through acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Saviour? Why say, "Let us alone," when we would have you to do that which is best for you and your loved ones? Why say, "Let us alone," when we would have you turn from the husks and the hogs to feasts and joy and blessedness? The gains of ungodliness are weighted with the curse of God.

"Let us alone"--this bold statement sets forth the peace terms of evil. One fact concerning evil is never disputed--it is engaged in a desperate warfare with good. All its powers are arrayed against right. Right and wrong cannot live together; one exterminates the other. In the face of the overpowering might of right, evil offers peace on simple terms--"Let us alone." The cry of the man with an unclean spirit is the cry of evil all down the ages--"Let us alone." Any generation can get along with evil and be popular with evil if it will accept the one condition--leave it alone. That is what the liquor business asks. That is what drug traffickers ask. That is what the vice lords ask. That is what drunken drivers ask. The evil within us is willing to make terms on the same condition. No man ever knows how great the force of evil is until he begins to battle with it. Let him declare war on unholy habits, on unclean thoughts, on unruly tempers, and he will soon discover the savagery with which they contend. Life would be easy if no war on evil was ever necessary.

It must never be forgotten that evil will not leave us alone. We may allow the liquor business to run undisturbed. But it never ceases its attack on the home, the family, the church, and the state. Bad habits may go on in their undisputed sway, but they do

not leave us alone. They debauch and debase. To accept evil's terms is to die. To war against evil is our only chance to live.

Sometimes we think that God impoverishes us with too many demands; that He exhausts us by appeals too numerous to be answered. But when we ask to be let alone it is our weakness that speaks, not our strength; our foolishness that jabbars, not our wisdom that speaks; our exhaustion that speaks, not our reason. The prayer we should offer is not to be left alone, but to be an object of divine solicitude and called upon to answer divine claims. When God lets a man alone his doom is sealed.

IV. Because they do not want to think of the judgment.

There is a great judgment day somewhere in the future--a terrible day already set down in the purposes and plans of God. "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man Whom He hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." Jesus Christ will be the Judge. The secrets of men will be revealed.

Let me say,

V. "I will not let you alone."

You are a drowning man. I have the Gospel life-boat. I will not leave you to drown. You are a starving man. I have the bread of life. I will not leave you without food. Look to Jesus who is heaven's bread for earth's hunger. You are a poisoned man, full of the poison of sin. I have Christ's gospel antidote. I will not leave you to die. I will not leave you alone. You are in the dark, and I would speak the truth that would bring you to light. You are in bondage, and I would speak the truth that would bring you to liberty. You are in sickness, and I would speak the truth that would bring you to health. You are in the broad way that leadeth to destruction, and I would speak the truth that would bring you to the narrow road that leads to life. You are on a wild sea, and I would speak the truth that would bring you to the harbor. You are in the grip of the boa-constrictor of sin, and I would release you. You are in death, and I would give you life.

I will not leave you alone. Deride me as you will, I point you to the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world. Regardless of your attitude, still I would urge you to come out of your shameful failure and loss into the glorious gain of Christ's cross. Come to the Saviour and do so without delay.