

BARRIERS TO BLESSINGS

"And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay." Mark 2:4.

Perhaps in your school days you read the story of the dikes of Holland. According to that story, one day one of the dikes sprang a leak and the water began pouring through the hole. But a heroic boy thrust his arm into the hole and held the waters back and thereby saved the city from possible destruction. No doubt you and I have held back some waters too—the waters of blessing. God has wanted to bless us, but our lives have not been what they should have been and we have held back and deprived ourselves of His blessings. He has wanted to bless other lives through ours and we have held back His blessings from them, too.

One day Christ was preaching in a certain house in Capernaum. A crowd of such proportions had gathered that it filled the entire house and overflowed into the yard. Down the street lay a man who was paralyzed. This paralytic had some friends who were believers in Christ. These four men loved the palsied man and had a feeling of compassion for him. They made their way to his house and advised him of their desire to carry him to Christ. When they arrived the house was filled and the door was blocked.

Even though the crowd was a barrier between the man and the blessing which the Lord had for him, the four friends resolved to get him into the presence of Christ in some way. Their inventiveness prompted them to climb the outside stairway to the low and flat roof and to walk out on it. They laid the paralytic down on the roof, removed some of the tile, and let him down through the opening into the presence of Christ. Admiring the faith, love, courage, ingenuity, and perseverance of these men, Christ stopped His sermon and turned His full attention to this one man who needed help. Because of the faith of the paralytic and of the four men who brought him to Christ, the Lord Jesus forgave the sins of the man and healed him. What a pity that the crowd had erected a barrier between the needy man and the blessings that Christ had for him! We, too, have been barriers to blessings. If our hearts are not right with God, and if we are not living as we ought to live, we erect barriers that keep blessings from us and from others.

In the living of the christian life, it is the spirit that you have that really counts. If you have the wrong spirit, blessings can never flow to you or through you. What kind of a spirit is a barrier to blessing?

I. A Rebellious Spirit.

God wanted to bless Jonah and to make him a blessing to the people of Nineveh. To this prophet and preacher God spoke one word, "Go." That is a very small word, but it carries a tremendous blessing with it. But Jonah responded to God's command to "go," with the reply "No." That, too, is a very small word, but it cuts off the blessing. Jonah's rebellious spirit did not profit him in the least. There came a time when God conquered Jonah's rebellious spirit, but He had to send Jonah through much trouble before the preacher learned his lesson.

It has been my lot in life to see people rebel against God. Time and again I have observed their refusal to do what He had commanded them to do, but have never known one of them to profit by his disobedience to God. Frequently a loved one dies and some member of the family thinks that God did wrong in taking him or her. The rebellious one remarks, "He should not have been taken away from me." Sometimes a person has a hard time and he says, "Why has this happened to me?" Many people want to blame God for all of their trouble. With their rebellious spirit they build a barrier between them and God, and no blessings can get over or through that wall.

God has a plan for your life, but if you rebel against that plan you need not expect this blessings of God. You certainly do not have any right to blame God or anyone else for the barrier to blessings which you have erected yourself by your own rebellious spirit.

II. A Covetous Spirit.

Through Joshua God ordered the legions of Israel to destroy the rich and licentious city of Jericho, but He forbade them to keep any of the spoils. After God's order had been executed Achan "saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight." When Achan saw these things, they were extremely fascinating to him and he coveted them. There were three steps in his disobedience to God: first, the look—"I saw"; second, the lust—"I coveted"; and third, the larceny—"I took." His act was deliberate and inexcusable. Fearing that somebody might discover his crime, Achan hid the spoils which he had taken, but God saw and knew it all, for nothing ever escapes His all-seeing eye. Because of Achan's sin of covetousness, defeat came to the Israelitish army. When the culprit was discovered and exposed, Achan made his confession, whereupon he was stoned to death and the lives of the members of his family were sacrificed. God would have blessed Achan and his family, but his personal covetousness cut off the blessings.

Blessings are frequently cut off by the covetousness of God's children. The Bible says, "The tithe is the Lord's." God commands us: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). If you keep that from God which belongs to him, you are certainly erecting a barrier which will cut off His blessings. God cannot bless you as long as you erect a barrier by your own covetousness. When we see others enjoying thing we do not have, we ought not to allow the spirit of covetousness to cut off the blessings of God.

III. A Wordly Spirit.

One day, when Demas was a young man, he heard Paul preach and was charmed by his personality and message. Everything that he said was a challenge to the heart of Demas. In a moment of spiritual ecstasy he decided to accompany Paul in the services of Christ. Demas started out in a fine way. He was right by Paul's side. He was real helped until they journeyed to a great city, and the bright lights of the world blinded the eyes of Demas. Paul penned these sad words about him: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (II Timothy 4:10). Thus Demas cut off many blessings from himself, as well as from so many others whom he might have served and helped.

Demas deserted Paul because of his love for the world. He just loved the world more than he loved the Lord. He couldn't take the discipline which was necessary to be the right kind of a Christian.

There are so many like Demas who start out for Christ in a wonderful way, and then one day the world calls to them. They listen to and heed the call, and from that time on the Lord and His church do not have any room in their lives. Consequently, the Lord's blessings cease to come to them and through them to others. God wants you to be a channel through which His blessings flow to others, but instead you have become a barrier because of your worldly spirit. When the spirit of the world gets hold of a man it always takes him down.

IV. A Prayerless Spirit.

James 4:2 says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not." That means that God wants us to have the blessings, but we deprive ourselves of them by our neglect of prayer. God has all that we need. If we do not get all that we need, it is because we do not ask Him for it in the way that we should.

"Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear--
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer."

John Knox of Scotland invited some friends to his house to meet a group of people. After a time they missed their host. After a search they found him in the garden, with his face buried in the hands, and in deep agony he was crying, "O God, give me Scotland or I die!" God did something through Knox. Scotland has never lost the spiritual impact that came to her through John Knox. God can and will use us, too, if we will but pray as we should.

V. An Unforgiving Spirit.

Outside the walls of Jerusalem on a skull-shaped hill three crosses were erected. On each of these crosses a victim was dying in agony and bloodshed. The crowd was taunting and jeering these men. From the central cross a voice was heard. It was the voice of Christ. Was He condemning? No, He was praying. Listen to Him saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:24). Though they were killing Him, He asked God to forgive them. If you do not have this unforgiving spirit, you are not following Christ, and the blessings of God cannot flow to you or through you to others. This barrier to blessing can be removed by you, if you want it removed.

VI. A Critical Spirit.

Criticism does not require intelligence, character, or Christianity. If any Christian is doing his duty, as he should, he is too busy to be meddling with the affairs of others or finding fault with them. Censoriousness is the poorest substitute in the world for service. A store displayed this motto: "Come in without knocking--go out the same way!" Thank God, we don't have to belong to the "knockers' gang." A critical spirit is a barrier to blessing.

A learned man said to the famous evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, "You made thirty-eight grammatical errors in your sermon today." Mr. Moody replied, "I am quite sure that I must have made more than that. I have not had the educational advantages that you have had, but I am trying to use all that I have for the glory of God, are you?" How much did that man get out of Moody's sermon? The person who looks only for the mistakes of others find little in life with which to enrich himself.

VII. An Indifferent Spirit.

Gallio was deputy at Corinth, and he had an opportunity to hear a great preacher deliver a great message when Paul was brought before him. But his very character revealed in these words: "Gallio cared for none of those things" (Acts 18:17).

This is true of so many people today. God gives a church a good service, people are saved, and Christians have fellowship. They next day you can ask, "Were you at church yesterday?"

"No, I wasn't there," is the reply, and then you must listen to a long list of excuses. But the sum total of all that is said is this: "I do not care for those things." The Psalmist said, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122:1). But today multitudes of church members say, "I do not care to go to the house of the Lord." They have an indifferent spirit. And yet the community would not be worth living in if there were not a church in it.

VIII. A Disobedient Spirit.

King Saul was chosen for a mighty work. He had the promise of a great future as the leader of God's people. But he refused to obey the commands of God, so it became necessary for God to say to him, "Since you have refused to obey Me, I must take the kingdom from you and give it to another."

In contrast with him is the Apostle Paul, who asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord told him that he must suffer for his name's sake. Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, or to the commands of the Lord. Because of his obedience the Lord sent numerous blessings into his life, and through him to multitudes of others. No wonder that at the end he could truthfully say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:7-8).

In obedience to God there is an abundance of blessings for you and for others. In your disobedience to God you erect barriers and cut off numerous blessing that would come to you and through you to others.

Do you have either of these eight evil spirits in you? If so, you are hurting not only yourself but others also. God wants you to be a channel of blessing to others. There are many around you who need the Lord's blessings, but if your life is choked with wrong, they will never receive them. Take out of your heart and life that ugly and unchristian spirit, whatever it may be. Find the thing that stands as a barrier between God and you, tear it out by the roots, cast it aside, and let the blessings of God flow into your life and out to refresh the lives of others.