

YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14.

There was a time when the daughters of Israel sang this song: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (I Samuel 18:7). The words of this eulogy may be used with equal truth, though with far sadder meaning, about two other slayers of thousands and tens of thousands; and the names of these two are "Yesterday" and "Tomorrow."

I. Yesterday.

Yesterday has a meaning. Although it has passed, its shadow stretches ever before us. Let us thank God for yesterday. However, yesterday hath slain his thousands. Furthermore, he will slay me too, unless I know how to withstand him. He would force me to turn the two-edged sword of memory into my own bosom. He would wound me so sorely with unhelpful recollections that he might lead me to despair.

Yesterday thrusts at me certain ceaseless reminders. Memory brings to our attention the following:

1. Yesterday's unrepeatable opportunities.

In the good providence of God we have reached the last Sunday of another year. We have come to it in safety and peace because of a goodness that has never failed us. The old year is behind us. Its record is made. Doubtless there is much in it that we would like to change. We have done some things of which we are ashamed. We regret that we have left some things undone, but the year is gone, the page is turned, and its record stands for good or bad, for weal or woe, to shame or praise us, as the case may be.

Yesterday says, "What a flagrant ingrate you have been!" He exclaims, "Golden chances you have treated as worthless straws. Priceless opportunities you have trodden underfoot as the farmer treads down the graceful bluebells beneath his heavy boots. As Ephraim despised the great things of God's law, so have you despised your God-given opportunities." This is how Yesterday seeks to slay me. "There will be no more such opportunities," he says. "It will be with you as it was with old-time Israel--the people that 'would' not shall not."

To the Christian, Yesterday says, "You have had your chance to climb the heights and live the higher life of sanctification. It is no use hoping any more. You had better sink back and resign yourself to an average Christian life." To the unconverted, Yesterday says, "It's too late now. The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and you are not saved." This is how Yesterday seeks to slay us.

2. Yesterday's unrecallable joys.

This slayer of thousands seeks to wound me to despair by persistently forcing upon me the memory of yesterday's unrecallable joys. He would have me sit down under some juniper tree and water its roots with my tears because of joys that are gone and which can never be mine again. He would have me moan the poet's dirge:

"Break, break, break,
On thy cold grey stones, O sea;
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

That loved one is no longer with us. Life can never be the same. That prosperity has given place to leanness. The seven years of plenty have passed and the seven years of scourging adversity are upon us. The sunny days of vigor have been quenched by a breakdown in health. The rosy bloom of youth has fled. Companions of our life's sunrise are no longer here with their laughter and comfort. Things are not as they once were. Oh, for yesterday! Yes, that is another thrust by which Yesterday seeks my undoing.

3. Yesterday's unerasable failures.

This slayer seeks to bring us down into despair by chaining our memory to yesterday's unerasable failures. He would fling Pilate's words in our teeth. When the chief priests saw the title, written by Pilate, nailed over the head of Christ Jesus as He hung upon the cross, reading, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews," they did not like it. So they went to Pilate and said, "Write not the King of the Jews, but that He said, I am King of the Jews." But Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

These words are capable of a wider application than Pilate intended. Not only were they applicable to the inscription which he had placed upon the cross, but they were applicable as well to the history of his whole life and conduct. What he had written, he had written unerasably, unalterably and irrevocably. It availed him nothing to take water and wash his hands and say, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." What he had written, he had written, and the blood of the innocent One Whom he surrendered to death is still and always will be a stain upon his name.

That which is true of Pilate's record is true of all others. What we have written, we have written. The record is unchangeable. This is a very solemn thought which comes to us with peculiar force as we come to the end of another year. What we have thought, felt, willed and done in the past year--yea, in all the years that are past--is indelibly and unalterably written on more than one record.

One record on which we are continually writing is memory. Memory is that wonderful power of the mind by which we retain knowledge and preserve the continuity of life. It is the storehouse in which we keep the treasures of the past. Memory preserves the record of our lives, of what we see, hear, think, feel and do, just as a delicate meteorological instrument records all the changes in the weather. What we have written remains there permanently and unchangeably.

None of us can erase the handwriting of the past. Our shameful fallings short are forever written against us as with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond. As the tree has fallen, so it must lie. Yesterday's failures can no more be erased than the spots on Lady Macbeth's hand. "Do not write there," said a newsboy to one who was about to scratch something with his diamond ring on the mirror in a railroad station. "Why not?" asked the

other. "Because," was the answer, "you can't rub it out." Remember that. As you are writing the records of your life, remember that you cannot rub it out. It will remain written on your body, in your face, on your nervous system, in your memory, on your character, on the lives of others and on the history of the race.

You cannot rub it out, but thanks be to God, there is One Who can. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). For those of us who are Christians, He has blotted out the handwriting that was against us, having taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. Apart from Christ the case was hopeless. Death cannot change the record, but Christ can. "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins."

By these thrusts--unrepeatable opportunities, unrecallable joys and unerasable failures--Yesterday slays his thousands. Therefore, as we stand on the threshold of a new year, let us surrender the old blotted book of our lives to Christ. Let us start the new year with a clean page.

II. Tomorrow.

Tomorrow hath slain his tens of thousands. His tactics are often very different from those of Yesterday. He would beguile us before he smites us to the earth. Among his favorite ways of slaying us are the following:

1. By procrastination.

He comes to us with bland smile and Russian-sounding name as Mr. Putitoff, assuring us that we have more than ample time in the big future to do all those things which we know we ought to do. To the unsaved who have been awakened to their need of Christ, he says, "You can be saved tomorrow just as well as today." Tens of thousands have perished through putting their faith in Tomorrow instead of in Christ. He bids us say to the Spirit of God what Felix said to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25).

2. By good resolutions.

Tomorrow also slays tens of thousands by the deadly device of causing us to put our faith in self-reliant good resolutions, instead of in the grace of God and the strength of Christ. He would have us make all manner of valiant vows and brave promises that can never be fulfilled by us of ourselves. Then, when our matchwood structure has collapsed before the first puff of adverse wind, he would leave us mocked by a bitter sense of self-frustration, amid the debris.

3. By apprehensiveness.

This great slayer sometimes adopts the guise of a fierce Goliath, seeking to slay us by apprehensiveness. He would have us tremble at the burdens that are coming to us, or the tragic things that are going to happen to us. He would paralyze us with fear, and then smite us down into a state of cringing defeatism. Oh, that Tomorrow might never dawn! Yes, indeed, Yesterday hath slain his thousands, and Tomorrow hath slain his tens of thousands!

III. Today.

There once lived a man who had learned the way to deal with Yesterday and Tomorrow so as to make them serve him in the present; and this is what he says, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are

behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Paul had realized that to be forever remembering certain things of yesterday is a bane and not a blessing, a hold-back instead of a help-on. Except in so far as he may learn a lesson from his experience in the past, he will not remember the neglected opportunities of yesterday, for the guilt arising therefrom is done away in Christ. He will not weep for the unrecallable joys of yesterday, for they may be replaced today by even richer spiritual joys in Christ. He will not let the shame of yesterday's failures keep him in dust and ashes, for "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Nor, as he views the future, will he put faith in self-reliant vows, for he has a new song--"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Nor will he stagger with apprehensiveness at what tomorrow may bring; for gleaming before him is "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

If we are truly Christ's we need not be broken to pieces by Yesterday or Tomorrow. The all-important thing is to learn the one vital lesson of yesterday and the one vital fact about tomorrow--our need of Christ. The one real spiritual occupation of the present must be concentration on "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Our steady focus must be this "upward calling." What is it? It is the divine call to a higher life in the power of the Spirit of Christ.

Christian friends, are we concentrating on this upward calling of God in Christ as we ought? Have we ceased to sing with a heaven-inspired gladness, "Oh, happy day that fixed my choice on Thee, my Saviour and my God"? Have we grown cold in our praying, and in our service for Christ? Have we ceased to glory in suffering for Him? Have we ceased our earlier endeavors to win souls to Christ? Have we wandered from the Fountain of living waters, to drink at the world's broken and dirty cisterns again?

When the time comes for us to cross the river of death, we shall then wish we had lived wholly for Christ. Those who are "all for Christ" find that He never fails them. There is a strength given that makes them equal to the stiffest challenge. There is a joy, a peace, a companionship which can only be described as heaven begun below. The harder the devil makes things for us, the more wonderfully will Christ strengthen and enrapture us, if we are really true to Him.

Let us view things in the light of eternity and become yielded completely to Christ. Let us live climbing. Years ago an inscription was written upon a marker at a mountainside grave in Switzerland. A young man had gone forth to scale the heights, but mishap overtook him and he lost his life on the steep slopes and in the snows of the Alps. His friends inscribed these simple but suggestive words on the marker of his grave: "He died climbing." There could scarcely be a finer tribute to anyone or a more delightful epitaph. But he could not have died climbing if he had not first of all lived climbing. For the most part when a man dies climbing he has been living that way for quite a while. It is a way of life before it can become a way to a glorious death. On the grave of J. R. Green, the great historian, at Mentone, are inscribed the words, "He died learning"; meaning that right up to the end he was adding knowledge to knowledge and strength to strength.

See the progress in Paul's words: "This one thing I do"--there is focus. "I press on"--there is effort. "Toward the mark"--there is purpose. Ah, this is the way to redeem yesterday, sanctify today and glorify tomorrow. There must be focus--a concentration on the "one thing." There must be effort, but in the strength of Christ. There must be the one holy purpose steadily kept in view.