

A TRAP BY THE WAYSIDE

"Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me." Psalm 140:4-5.

In the long ago there lived a young man who, when he was eighteen years of age, went out and both whipped and slew the man every man in his nation feared to meet or to attack. This young man was small in stature, but he was mighty in strength. The big bully came out and challenged him. The two men faced each other, and the huge man sneered at the little fellow, and his countrymen joined him by doing likewise. The countrymen of the little fellow were trembling in their shoes. They expected to see their man defeated and slain. They forgot the source from which the young stripling drew his strength. This young fellow was an expert with the sling. He took his sling and five smooth stones out of the brook and went out to meet the giant. The first shot from David's sling brought down the giant, Goliath. Then David severed his head from his body with a sword. Immediately the pessimism of his people was turned into shouting, and the sneering of his enemies was turned into fear, and they fled.

It was this young fellow who performed this remarkable feat with his sling who penned the words of our text. He prayed, "Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man....they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me." He was perfectly willing to go out in the wide open space and meet the giant, but he was afraid of sly, cunning traps that were being set for his young life.

Most of us lads who were reared on the farm had experience in setting traps of various kinds and for different animals. With a pocket knife we would cut notches on pieces of wood, put a chunk of apple or some other kind of bait on the long piece that extended back under a sizeable limestone rock that was propped up on edge by the other pieces. When a rabbit would come near, smell the bait, and nibble on it, the rock would fall on it and kill it. That sort of a trap was usually called a dead-fall. Another kind of trap that was used rather extensively was a snare. It was made by cutting off the limbs of a sapling, bending it over, and fastening it down with a string in such a way that when a rabbit or other small animal would bite the bait attached thereto it would release the sapling and the string would form a loop around the neck of the animal and jerk it up and leave it hang in the air to die. At times and in certain places steel traps were used to catch the varmints. The jaws of the steel trap were opened and fastened by a spring, which was adjusted by a smooth pedal. It was then tied with a chain to something that was stationary. It was placed where the animal could not get to the bait or into the den without stepping on it. Usually some leaves or grass were placed on it. When the foot of the animal touched the smooth pedal, bang came the jaws of the trap and he was caught by his foot or leg. There he was. Next morning he was found, not only in pain, but in captivity, caught by the trap he did not see.

There are literally thousands of young men and young women, some of whom are now listening to me, and many others residing in our community, who

are being caught in traps in the same fashion. They do not see the trap until it springs and they get caught. Many are literally trapped already, but who do not seem to realize it, and perhaps it will be too late before some do realize it. Satan sets various traps for us. I want to name a few of them in order to keep some of you from getting caught in them.

I. Ignoring The Value Of Little Things.

I shall never forget the huge redwood trees in California. They are the most majestic trees in the world. The largest one towered 364 feet, or two thirds the height of the Washington Monument, and was twelve feet and seven inches in diameter. Driving a car through a passage cut in one of these trees was a unique experience. It takes well over a hundred years to grow a redwood of any size. The amazing thing is that these trees had their origin from little seed, of which you could hold several in one hand. A small beginning, but a wonderful growth.

In various sections of India the natives protect their homes against reptiles by building on poles and posts. You may pass a house in the morning and adjudge it a comfortable home for the average Indian. When you come back that road before night you may discover that the house has fallen over. You wonder why. The truth is that little white ants, which are so small that they can scarcely be seen, have worked themselves into the wood of the posts, literally perforating it, until they have eaten away the strength of the supporting posts, and the house has fallen. Little, but destructive.

When a cowboy awakened out of his sleep on the prairie grass he found himself alone, completely separated from his fellows and the herd. He was dazed. He did not know the direction back to the camp. He untied his pony from the stake and decided that he would ride in the direction he thought would bring him to the camp. After riding awhile, he came to a clump of trees. As he approached them he heard a noise. When he looked, to his amazement a bear was gazing straight at him. He wondered what he should do. He knew that the bear could run, and could climb a tree, as certainly as he could. He remembered that he had two cartridges in his pistol in his belt. He decided quickly, took his revolver, fired, and killed the bear.

After resting a while, he and his pony continued the journey. Then he heard the baying of a hungry wolf. He knew that following that leader would be a pack of wolves. When the leader approached him he took his pistol with his last cartridge and, in real cowboy fashion he straightened himself in his saddle, took aim, shot and killed the leader, and then turned and rode away.

Later he came to another clump of trees. He entered them for the purpose of resting. Staking his pony, he raked up a bunch of leaves for a pillow, stretched himself on the ground, pillowed his head on the leaves, and fell asleep. While he was sleeping a little scorpion, smaller than your little finger, came out of the leaves, and bit him

on the lobe of his ear. He became deathly sick. He was unable to get up. He realized his condition. In a little while he was dead. He was able to overcome the apparently big dangers of the bear and the wolves, but it was the little scorpion that got him.

Even so, there are young men and young women who are able to escape the traps of big dangers, but are being caught by the little scorpions, or the sins of the mind, the body, and the soul.

One thing about these little unobserved traps is that they are no respecters of persons. When that wonderful artist, Leonardo da Vinci, was painting the picture of "The Last Supper," and got ready to paint the face of Christ, he sought out the cleanest, purest man that he could find. He found this young man singing in a choir in one of the Cathedrals. Everything about him suggested that he was just the one to pose for the Christ. He was engaged and so used. Later, for the picture took a long period of time in making, when he wanted to paint the face of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Christ, da Vinci went into the slums of the city and sought for the basest looking character that he could find. When he had found him, he engaged him for a price to pose for the picture of Judas. As he was painting the face of the debased character, he asked him his name. He replied, "My name, sir, is Pietro Bandinelli." "Why," said the painter, "that's strange. That was the name of the young man whom I used when painting the portrait of Christ." "Strange, passing strange," said the young man, "I am the same Pietro Bandinelli. Then I was pure and clean. First I yielded to a little drink at a social engagement, and a little more at the requirements of society, in order to do what others did, and little by little, I fell from one position to another." Satan had led the pure young man all the distance to the debased character posing as Judas Iscariot.

II. Low Ideals.

In life we usually get what we center our gaze on and strive to get. The thing we go straight for, whether it be good or bad, is the thing that we are most likely to get. So many are falling into the trap of low ideals, and are being prevented from being successful in life.

1. Money.

Money is valuable and is needed for many things, but to have the acquiring of money as the aim and ideal of life is all wrong. The young person who sets his aim in life the making of money will ultimately have the real life of manhood or womanhood squeezed out of him or her. To make money the aim of life is to set a low ideal that will catch you in the trap of failure.

2. Fashion.

Some seem to think that they cannot live unless they comply with the styles in vogue among their associates. It is strange that the people who strive to imitate others nearly always strive to copy their weaknesses instead of their strong points.

I am grateful that the Lord let me be born and grow up in a generation and in an area where young people sought to look as nice as possible. We were taught to strive for cleanliness, neatness, attractiveness, and decency. It was our desire to look as well as possible. There are those in this generation with culture and who have a sense of propriety who are striving for the same things. If you are going to follow the example of some group, why not choose to be like the respectable, clean, decent, neat, and attractive, instead of trying to look and act like the filthy, slovenly, unattractive, and hideous?

3. Fame.

Fame and reputation are good things, but to make them your ideals in life is to fall into a trap. Alexander the Great determined to conquer the world. He did it and then wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. According to his own estimate he was a bitter failure in the end. Cardinal Massini, as a young man, announced his intention of becoming famous and having a great reputation. He got both and as he was passing out of this life he exclaimed, "I have provided in life for everything except death. O, my poor soul, what is to become of you?"

III. Idleness.

Nothing in nature is static or idle. Men and women try to be idle and stand still, but they fail. They are either going backward or forward. An idler is not a gentleman, but a tramp. The idler is usually the fellow who is never satisfied with what happens. The idler and the pessimist are twins. You never saw a satisfied lazy person in your life.

IV. Bad Associates.

One of the greatest blessings in life is good associates. Few things can do us greater injury than associating with the wrong crowd. As certainly as a tree toad takes on the color of the tree on which it lives, people are influenced by the company they keep. One cannot go down into the coal mines when they are in operation and come back without getting black. Neither can you run with bad associates and live as you should.

With these traps about us on every side, as they were around the youthful David, we want to pray the prayer which he did, "Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked. They have set a trap by the wayside." The most manly and the most useful lives are those who unlock their own wills and give the will of God the right of way. The time to do that, if you have not already done so, is now.