

THE CONQUEST OF INNER SPACE

Romans 7:21-25

Man has always found it easier to conquer his environment than himself. New continents have been explored and claimed more rapidly than new spiritual territories. Today the conquest of outer space is proving a much easier venture than to conquer the inner space of ideas, emotions and attitudes. It is also much easier than it is to advance in the proper human relationships.

One of the greatest needs today is the conquest of inner space. It is within the minds and emotions of us all that we are suffering our most serious defeats and where human progress is slowest. As a result, while we open space to our penetration, we also project into it fears and bitterness and hate. While victories in space are spectacular, defeat and failure mount up within the inner space of our lives. Delinquency, abnormal behavior, broken homes, nervous breakdowns and war continue to be unpleasant features of our age.

The turmoil, the conflicts and the failures of inner space have never been expressed better than Paul expressed them in the seventh chapter of Romans. All of us know that we have more trouble with ourselves than anyone else. It is for the conquest of inner space that we yearn.

Our text is a profound one, and yet very simple. It is a mirror in which universal human experience is reflected. It is the story of every life. We have, so to speak, a dual personality -- on one side it is good and on the other it is bad. That accounts for the popular axiom, "There is some good in the worst of us, and some bad in the best of us." Nothing is more obvious to the careful student of life. The man who can kill in cold blood in his gangsterism may be extremely fond of children and may contribute generously to an orphanage. The man who is the leading philanthropist may at the same time be living in immorality.

This duel of conflicting forces within our personalities is an important factor to be considered by those who are interested in character building, and of the utmost importance to those who are interested in applied Christianity. It is the most important single factor to be considered in the business of developing a Christian character.

Paul was extremely conscious of this duel between good and evil in human nature on the basis of his own self-diagnosis. "For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Romans 7:19-21). Good and evil are present and active within each of us. Where is the power which will resolve the conflicts within us and give us the victory? Our conquest of inner space depends on certain things such as the following:

I. The Vision of Possibility.

Conquest of space, whether inner or outer, begins with an idea, a dream or a vision. Only as and when one sees the possibility of victory does he attempt to win it.

It must have been a very thrilling moment in Russia when after years of work scientists stood waiting to touch the switch which would release the first rocket that was to carry a satellite away into outer space. There was perhaps another moment which was less spectacular but more significant. It was the time when some scientist peered through his telescope away into outer space and conceived the idea that some day man himself would penetrate the

vast distances that were there. The really significant happening was when man's mind penetrated space, for then it was but a matter of time before the objects he made and he himself would follow. The really creative moment was when an idea was born and a conviction hardened that such things could be and would be.

We must begin with an idea, a dream or a vision if we are to conquer inner space. So many of us are being defeated in our moral struggles and overwhelmed by the tempter because we have not had a vision of what we may yet be. We have become conditioned by our former weaknesses and conflicts to expect nothing better. Our minds and our aspirations are not penetrating to any higher level than the one we have reached. Until we see what we may be we shall not strive to be the persons we may become.

As we grow older we come to accept a picture of ourselves as we think we are. In our earlier years we dream our dreams. We probably set our goals far beyond our abilities. Then the encounter with others and the world around us develops. Presently we have made a re-appraisal of ourselves and our personal possibilities. We begin to build up an image of ourselves to which we become adjusted and with which we live. We have our weaknesses, but we accept them. We know the limitations of our abilities, but we have made our peace with them. We learn to live with our compromises. Consequently, our sins have made our Christian lives unattractive to others, unsatisfactory to ourselves and displeasing to God.

The trouble with many of us is that the picture we have accepted of ourselves is not good enough. We could be better and do better. Our need is to catch a vision of goals far beyond our achievements. Our lives will never advance unless our vision goes ahead of us. If we are to conquer inner space, our deepest need will be to stand looking away into the distance seeing afresh the person we might be.

Many of us can tell of the influence in our lives of somebody who pointed us to greater possibilities. One of England's great preachers told of an incident in his early years. So frequent and serious were his delinquencies that even his family prophesied that he would come to a bad end. After one bitter evening when criticism and condemnation had fallen on him he left those who were attacking him and started toward his room. Along the way his grandmother suddenly stepped out of a door, put her hand on his shoulder and said, "John, I believe in you." It was a challenge. Someone believed in him. He would justify that trust. Christ has pointed many young people to the men and women they might be. He has set ideas soaring and struggle and achievements have followed. It is this ministry Christ is seeking to exercise in your life and mine. He points us to the victories that may be ours.

If we are to conquer inner space, we must begin by seeing ourselves not as we are but as Christ sees us.

II. The Discovery of Power.

The conquest of inner space is dependent on the discovery of power. The forces opposed to us are great; our need is to find a greater power that will give us the victory. Many of us have had visions of what we may be, but we have never been able to achieve it. We understand what Paul meant when he wrote, "I desire to do right but wrong is all I can manage" (Moffat). The problems of conquering inner space are the same as those for outer space. It is the puzzle of how to discover adequate power.

Recognize that evil is present in you and around you. Remember that you will never completely destroy it. Turn to Christ in complete dedication and let Him give you the power to master the evil forces that are within you. He has mastered and used many strong men. The power that has been revealed in their lives has come from harnessing the driving forces and the fundamental instincts of strong personalities.

Christ does not frustrate personality. He is able to harness and direct the instinctive, impulsive life. He is able to release into our lives the power that will make conquest possible.

III. The Plunge in Faith.

The conquest of inner space cannot take place without a plunge in faith. Only as we are ready, as Paul was, to commit our lives to Christ can His strength flow into us.

The parallel between the conquest of outer space and inner space is very close. When scientists conceived that the penetration of space was possible, and had overcome the problems of harnessing power, all had to be put to the test. The making of space rockets was after all a tremendous plunge in faith. Scientists risked their reputation in seeking to prove the truth of their theories. When the day came and space rockets were ready for launching there must have been many a quiet fear. Perhaps there were conditions nobody had anticipated which would destroy any possibility of achievement. There was only one way to prove it. It was to take the plunge, in faith. This is what was done and faith was justified.

There is a great power available to us for living. We can never have it without a personal surrender to it. That power flows as we surrender our lives to Christ. Through His life and death and resurrection we discover a new force for living. "Who shall deliver me?" God will deliver, but no one else can do so. Let us surrender to Christ and He will give us the victory.