"POWER OF A GREAT IDEAL"

Sunday Discourse by Dr. Chapman, the Noted Pastor Evangelist.

A Beautiful Sermon on the Comfort and Happiness of Having an Ideal to Anchor One to the Better Things of Life,

NEW YORK CITY.—The Rev. Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman, who has recently resigned the pastorate of the Fourth Presbyterian Church in this city in order to devote himself to evangelistic work, has prepared the following sermon for the press. It is entitled "The Power of a Great Ideal," and was preached from the text, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Psalm 16: 8.

If you look at the top of this Psalm you will read the Michtam of David. There are differences of opinion as to the meaning of this expression. Some have said that it means victory, and this would seem to be true, since there is a particular Psalm bearing the same title, whose subject matter is on various themes, but all of which end in triumph. Psalm 56, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death;" Psalm 57, "My heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise;" Psalm 58, "There is a reward for the righteous;" Psalm 59, "God is my defense and the God of my mercy;" Psalm 60, "Through God we shall do valiantly."

There are others who say that the expression means golden, and so we might infer from the margin, which means that it is worthy of being written in letters of gold, and may have been in some conspicuous place in the temple. At any rate we know that its truth is better than gold; yea, than much fine gold. There are still others who declare that its meaning is precious, and certain it is that it is a precious privilege to walk with Christ ever before us.

"So on I go, not knowing,
I would not if I might,
I'd rather walk in the dark with God,
Than go alone in the light.
I'd rather walk by faith with Him,
Than go alone by sight."

Some teachers say that the meaning of the expression is secret, and what follows it is hidden truth. Certainly it is true that the "secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and there is a secret place of the Most High. The first is learned when we walk with Him, the second is reached at the end of the journey. But if you put all these interpretations together you have the golden Psalm of the precious secret, which would seem to be a fitting introduction to all that follows. This Psalm is about Christ. We know it, because Peter said, "For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face; for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved." Acts 2: 25. If David could have strength by looking forward to Christ, what may I not have as I look back at His history and life in the power of His presence by the Holy Spirit.

I.

It is the instinct of a human soul to have an ideal. Every child has. The boy longs to be like his father. The girl has a desire to resemble her mother. What a responsibility rests upon each. Men and women have whether they will acknowledge it or not. They long to be like some one else. The musician has his Mendelssohn, the poet his Shakespeare, the artist his Da Vanei, the preacher his Spurgeon. David knew this and so he said, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." To imitate any one else in the world is to become ridiculous, but it is remarkable that people all over the world may seek to imitate Christ and be the better for it. Let it be noted that this is a definite experience or conclusion which David has reached. I insist upon the definition of it because it is scriptural. Notice Romans 6: 13, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." And also Romans 12: 1, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." The tense of the verbs in both verses indicate definite action. It is really putting one's self over into the keeping and control of Christ.

A man has a threefold nature, spirit, soul and body, and in this order. I Cor. 6: 20, "For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Romans 13: 1, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." Romans 12: 1, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." All of which indicate that He will fill the spirit, inspire the soul and control the body if given the right to do it. Then everything has become sacred in our lives and living itself is a sacrament. I do not much believe in the world's division of all things into sacred and secular, for all things ought to be sacred to the child of God, and all days ought to be holy, and they would be did we but live in the spirit of the text. Some people meet temptation and fly to Him. It is infinitely better to fly to Him and then meet trial in whatever form it may come. There is great power in the word "because" in the text. This is not just a flash of an experience, it is the deliberate outcome of a long and varied retrospect, and will not in any true sense be before our face until we set Him there. It is first decision and then practice, and the text must become the habit of our lives. It certainly was in the experience of David, for he said, "I have set the Lord always before me." There are certain Old Testament characters which furnish us an illustration of this text.

First. Abraham. Christ said it, John 8: 56, "Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad." The Scribes and Pharisees about Him when He spoke of Abraham answered with a sneer, and the Jews said, John 8: 57, "Then said the Jews unto Him. Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?" When the answer of our Master was, John 8: 58, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, Verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am."

There is something pathetic about these words of the Jews, "Thou art not yet fifty years old." In fact, He was only about thirty. His face must have been marked with pain and suffering. How old is He, do you ask? There are different ways of answering. By the record He was thirty; in looks He must have been a thousand; according to His work He is ages old. The inspiration of Abraham's life was that the Lord was ever before Him. Genesis 12: 1, We deny ourselves for success in business, apparently little caring whether this business will help or hinder us in spiritual development. See the lesson in Lot's case. He pitched his tent toward Sodom and then moved into the city. His family became identified with the life of the city, and he a part of its government. In the end of the story he has lost his power to witness, all his property, his political position, his influence over men, over his own family, and even with God. Abraham was very different. God choose for him. Genesis 13: 14-15, "And the Lord said unto Abraham, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up thine eyes and look from the place where thou are northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever." How like this is to our own inheritance. Ephesians 3: 17-19, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." The story is told of a man who was confined in a prison cell. Being an artist his paints and brushes were given him, and on the wall of the cell he painted the picture of the cross with Christ on it. Over the cross he painted the word love, at the top and the bottom of the cross the words height and depth, at the cross beams the words length and breadth, and indeed, it is true that no one ever quite appreciates what the love of God is to him until he has this picture of the cross clearly in mind.

Have you ever noticed the differences in the ending of the lives of Abraham and Lot? Lot's story is written in Genesis 19. It is an awful picture. His wife is taken from him, his daughters are disgraced and he is in despair, while with Abraham the picture is exactly the opposite, and to my mind is most beautiful. Genesis 25: 7-8, "And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred three-score and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people."

Second. Moses was an illustration of the text. In Hebrews 11: 27, "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible. That explains the mystery of the burning bush and this vision of Christ explains how it was that when your hope seemed to be consumed and the dearest plan of your life was burned as in the fire, you rejoiced. David has learned the secret of happy living when he says in the text, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." This vision enabled Moses to surmount every difficulty. What did he care that the mountains were on every side, certain of the Egyptians behind him and the Red Sea before him. He marched like a conqueror until the water parted in advance of him and dry shod he went over to the other side. But such pictures as these have been realized in our day when men have passed through Red Seas of difficulty where other men of the world have gone down in defeat and all "because they endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

Third, our Saviour is an illustration. He always set God before Him. As He came into the world He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will;" as He sat on the well curb of Jacob's well, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me:" as He bowed in Gethsemane, "Not My will, but Thine be done." At the beginning of His ministry, in the midst of it and near to its close He gave forth the same music. What a life it was.

"The strong man's strength to toil for Christ,
The fervent preacher's skill,
I sometimes wish, but better far,
To be just what God wills.

No service in itself is small,
None great though earth it fill,
But that is small that seeks its own,
That great which seeks God's will."

Fourth. Paul was certainly an illustration of the spirit of our text. He caught that vision in the sky as he made his way to Damascus and he never forgot it. He said truthfully, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." This made him insensible to him surroundings. There is really nothing more pathetic than his renumeration of his trials. II Cor. 11: 24-27, "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." And yet here he says, "I have learned with whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. He was with Paul to the very end. II Timothy 4: 7-8, "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."

That was the secret of his victorious life, and that the secret of his triumphant death.

II.

If He is before me no path is too hard for me to travel, since He walks in every way in which He would have me go; nor shall I ever walk in darkness, for "He is the light of the world, and in Him is no darkness at all," nor shall I ever be moved. Have you never noticed the differences between the second and sixth verses in the Sixty-second Psalm. The second verse reads, "He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved." And the sixth is the same with the exception of one word. "He only is my rock and salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved." That word is "greatly." There is deep meaning in the omission of "greatly." Confidence has grown evidently. In the first, hope was that the waiting heart should not be much shaken, that the tottering fence should not be quite thrown down; the second is that it shall not be shaken at all.

III.

He is before me in all experiences, whether of sorrow or of joy, but since men are born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward it is well to remember that He is before us in suffering. There never has been a heart ache on the part of any of His followers that the pain did not reach Him, and He had fellowship with us in our sufferings, as we are privileged to do in His. He shall be with us even in death.

"Since Jesus is mine I'll not fear undressing,
But gladly put off these garments of clay,
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
Since Jesus to glory, thro' death led the way."

IV.

It is an awful thing for a life not to have the helpful presence of God.

"Oh to have no hope in Jesus,
How dark this world would be."

One of the ocean dangers that captains fear almost more than anything else is the danger of coming in contact with a "derelict," as a ship abandoned at sea is called. There are now supposed to be about thirty of such vessels floating about at the will of the currents in the Atlantic waters. They are without pilot, have neither crew nor rudder, are bound nowhere and carry no cargo to any port. One of them, which has a cargo of mahogany on board, and is level with the water's edge, has been drifting about since March, 1891.

The perils of collision at sea have been reduced since the steamship companies adopted what is known as the lane routes. Now the route a steamer follows after leaving New York is fifty miles away from the route taken by steamers bound west. One steamer, therefore, is little likely to meet another and come into collision with her. But these abandoned ships, not being under control, and carrying no lights, are a continual source of danger. The Gulf Stream carries them northward and then eastward, and the captains of incoming ships have warned the Government of their whereabouts. One of them has been cut in two and the two halves are drifting in company.

There is scarcely any peril of the sea which is so terrible to the mariner. No sound will reveal their nearness, no temperature of air or wave will make known their approach. Though it carry no guns a "derelict" is often a more deadly enemy than a man-of-war.

The ship that steers for no port can only have one influence, and that is to be a stumbling block in the way to send other ships to the bottom of the ocean. God help us that not one of us may become a spiritual "derelict." God pity that man who has pushed God out of his life and goes along in his journey to eternity, not only having sorrow in his own soul, but standing in the way of the progress of others.

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