

THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE LARGER CHRISTIAN LIFE

TEXT: “**He brought me forth also into a large place**” (Psalm 18:19).

YOU observe that we have here a testimony, not a promise.

God actually had done this thing for David. He was a shepherd lad; obscure, conscious but dimly if at all of his own capacities; shut up to the small things and small thoughts of a young rustic. Then God began to work in his life, stimulating him with great promises, leading him into great ventures, beating him with the hammer of adversity till the crude ore of him was turned into tempered steel; but all the while breaking shackles, tearing away enmeshing nets, lifting the wings of his soul, filling him with divine in-breathings, expanding, enlarging, disenthraling him; until at last David came to the consciousness that he was a free man and in a large place.

He could stand with lifted head, strong young arms outflung, upraised chest breathing deep the free, ample air, a man at home in the universe. I repeat it, David is testifying here, not theorizing. He had found it so. Upon which I remark:

THE REAL CHRISTIAN LIFE IS LARGE

It is the men who are living without God who are living in a small and narrow place. There is no more shameless lie afloat among men than that the Christian life is a narrow life, and that the life that does not subject itself to the will of God is a high, free thing.

We are all, I believe, passionate lovers of liberty. We seek room; we want a place in which we may expand and broaden out. A great many young people of today have a fancy that to come into the will of God is to come into narrowness. It is Satan’s lie. But let us not blame the devil overmuch. He never could have got his lie believed if so many of God’s people had not made “religion” a poor negative thing: a system of “don’t” and of outward observance.

It was to intensely “religious” people—in this sense—that Christ spoke His great word, “**If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.**” He came to preach deliverance to the captive of formalism no less than to the captive of sin. The gospel is a call out of littleness, out of pettiness, out of insignificant things, to the breadth and sweep of great thoughts and forces, and to the wide horizon of limitless possibilities.

Now it is true of every child of God that he is brought into a large place. Unfortunately, many persist in living narrow lives in the large place. To be free and not to know it, this seems to me tragic and pathetic beyond words. One thinks of old prisoners set free, and weeping for the old dungeon again.

CIRCUMSTANCES CANNOT NARROW IT

Just here permit me to anticipate a very natural objection. You say, "I live in obscurity; God has set me in narrow circumstances, in a routine of petty duties. I live in a farm house; I live in a village; I toil in a factory; I monotonously feed pieces of leather or wood into a machine and never see them again; I plow, I delve, I sell cloth by the yard, I wash pans and dishes. I know of no large and beautiful way to wash pans. I keep a little district school; I must have my mind on my work; my back grows bent and my muscles stiff and sore. I am no exultant young David, anointed of the Lord, free to go and come, to sing deathless songs, to rule over men."

PATIENCE, DEAR HEART, HEAR THIS

Jesus Christ lived thirty years in Nazareth, but He never permitted Nazareth to give the measure of His life. You may think of Him as a boy helping His mother, holding baby, fetching water from the fountain and chips from the shop. He made yokes, I suppose, not wholesale with a big iron machine, but one by one, patiently fitting them to peasant shoulders, broad and narrow, stooped and straight. Thirty years He lived there, and there was matured the finest human character the world ever saw.

The baptism with the Spirit added power; suffering perfected sympathy, but it was the largest, freest man that ever lived who laid down His carpenter's tools one day and walked down to Jordan to be baptized of John.

Do you not see the secret? He never permitted Nazareth to put its littleness upon Him. The one man upon whom there are no limitations whatever of race, of circumstance or of character was a villager who toiled for bread!

It is not given to many of us to live in great scenes and to be a part of great transactions. Our life is a round of small cares and duties. But Jesus Christ lived in narrower circumstances than ours. The newspapers, the telegraph, the railway and steamship bring largesse to the remotest of us.

- Homer chanted his deathless songs from door to door, in poverty, unappreciated, for a crust of bread.
- Milton, shut up to physical blindness, ranged in spirit from the Paradise that was to the Paradise that shall be.
- Dante, in exile, in a petty, mediaeval town, learning "the steepness of another's stairs and the saltiness of another's bread," fathomed the upper and the nether depths.

Do you say, "But we are not Homer, Milton, and Dante?"

Thank God! I would rather have my two eyes than Milton's fame; my own good native land than Dante's exile; my humble home than Homer's wanderings. But surely our souls have some power of flight; their wings may beat the upper air for some distance, somewhere, if they may not take Dante's tremendous spirals.

WHAT WE ARE, NOT WHAT WE DO, DETERMINES THE LARGENESS OF LIFE

Lacordaire says: "A king may pass through our streets clothed in purple and fine linen, and he may be a mean and base man, because his thoughts are mean and base; and there may pass by a poor man in vile raiment and he may be a great man, because his converse with himself is high and great."

That is true. Things do not make life large. Men do large things sometimes in small places, and others do small things in large places. If we are of kin to the great souls we shall some time be known as of that strain.

A homely American poet has put this into his poem: "*The Unexpressed.*" Three men, writer, musician, builder, plod through life, toiling day by day for daily bread; and the writer never pens the epic which he dumbly feels; the musician never composes the oratorio which resounds in his soul; the builder builds wooden houses instead of the cathedral of which he feels himself capable. And then they die, and the three men who greet them are Homer, Mozart, and Michel Angelo!

"This dead musician's soul went forth
 Into the darkness drear—
A glad voice smote the clouds apart—
 The brother-greeting of Mozart,
 Who hailed him as his peer.
‘Souls know,’ he said, ‘that music best
 That haunts the dumb soul unexpressed.’"

Yes; many a life of obscurity, poverty, neglect, self-denial and pain is essentially great because it is lived in fellowship with great things—the things of God. Such a soul can wait.

It is elect, and shall yet come to its own.

"Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
 Nor care for wind, or tide, or sea;
I rave no more ‘against time or fate,
 For, lo, my own shall come to me.

"I stay my haste, I make delays;
 For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
 And what is mine shall know my face.

“Asleep, awake, by night and day,
The friends I seek are seeking me.
No wind shall drive my bark astray,
Nor change the tide of destiny.

“What matter if I stand alone?
I wait with joy the coming years;
My heart shall reap where it has sown,
And garner up its fruit of tears.

“The waters know their own and draw
The brook that springs in yonder height
So flows the good with equal law
Unto the soul of pure delight.

“The stars come nightly to the sky,
The tidal waves unto the sea;
Nor time, nor tide, nor deep, nor high,
Shall keep my own away from me”

THE SECRET OF THE LARGER LIFE

If now you ask me how all this larger Christian life may be lived, I shall venture three suggestions:

1. Put your life under the great law of exclusion by preoccupation. Keep littleness out by being with greatness. There was no place in Christ for mean things. It was not that Christ refused small cares, drudgeries, duties. It was that He accepted them and was filled with the joy of doing them.
2. Live your Christian life in the sense of its great verities. You are children and heirs of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Say every day, “I am a child of God.” I defy circumstances to narrow and dwarf the life that is lifted by the consciousness of divine sonship and divine fellowship.

“The larger Christian life is independent of circumstances.”

There drifted into my house once a human wreck. He had been the editor of a great daily newspaper, and was a man of rare gifts. It was the old story; little by little the drink habit had fastened upon him and had dragged him down to a living hell. I could not tell him to “assert his manhood;” he had none.

I had a better gospel than that. I told him that he could be born again; that he could become a partaker of the divine nature, and a son and heir of God. He fell upon his knees. “My God!” he cried. “Can a dog like me become God’s son?” And he poured out his heart, giving himself away to Christ. I shall never forget his transfigured face, nor the singular solemnity and loftiness of his bearing as he took my hand and said: “I am a child of God.”

Get out under the stars on a clear night, and look over your estate. The stars are yours and Christ's. Know that as a child of God you are greater than any possible estate, and you will not wash pans, plow and reap any less thoroughly, but you will do these things royally, like a king or queen. Remember, you are of the family of God.

A poor saint went into a very aristocratic church in a strange place. "I believe," said the usher rather dubiously, "that I do not know you." "Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ?" asked the poor saint. "Oh, yes." "Well," said the poor man, "I am a poor brother of His."

3. Be a vital part of Christ's work.

"The field is the world." Your field is the world. Keep your sympathies worldwide. If your heart is in China or Africa or Central America, and with the work there, it is just the same as if you were there, wherever your body may happen to be.

At the Student Volunteer Convention in Cleveland they had Carey's cobbler's hammer. It was better worth seeing than the crown jewels in the Tower. No scepter in Christendom is so venerable as that hammer. It is as if it came out of the shop in Nazareth, almost. Carey beat hobnails into peasants' shoes with that hammer; beat sturdily and well. But, as one thinks of him, the narrow walls of his cobbler's stall fall away, and his humble bench changes to the likeness of a throne, and one sees a pierced hand hold over his head the diadem of righteousness.

For that cobbler, bowed over his daily task, was sweeping the darkened continents into his yearning, and holding a world up in prayer to God.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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