

BACK TO BETHEL

Separation from Sin, and Fellowship with GOD

by

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"Old Testament Heroes," "Meet for the Master's Use," etc.

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CHAPTER TEN

LIFE, A POEM

Man has but one life to live, and each must be desirous that that life should tell to the very uttermost for GOD and for humanity. In Ephesians 2:10 we find words which will help us as long as we live:

"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

The word "**created**" in the Greek is "*poem*." We are GOD's poems. I suppose that each life is a definite thought of GOD. He has incarnated one original idea in each of us. As no poet repeats himself, but puts a distinct thought in each ode or poem, so GOD never repeats Himself in any human life. He breaks the mold as soon as He completes His work. Let us remember, therefore, to be original. I lost ten of the best years of my life by trying to imitate other people. Although we may all derive help from the study of biography and from friendship, yet we must always be going back to GOD to know what He means for us, and then ask Him to work out in our lives His thought to the very highest possibility.

Are you prepared to accept this, and to yield yourself to GOD day by day that He may accomplish through you the full purpose of His will, and give a listening world His poem of power or purity or love?

This epistle to the Ephesians is the epistle of "In-ness." That is, it is the epistle in which from first to last Paul uses the little preposition "**in**," and tells us what we are in CHRIST JESUS.

Just as this whole creation slept in the mind of GOD to be elaborated step by step to its consummation, so the whole church of JESUS CHRIST lay in the mind of GOD before the mountains were brought forth or ever He had formed the earth. And you and I were appointed to a definite place in that wonderful body.

What that place was will not be made fully clear to us until we stand before GOD in the eternal light, but it is comforting to know that there was a definite place in the purpose of GOD for you and me.

Doesn't that give a new meaning and dignity to your life, that it is the working out of the conception of GOD, and that every day you must try so to walk as to realize the purpose which was in the mind of GOD when He created you in CHRIST JESUS?

As one looks out upon men and women and things, life seems so full of commonplaces and little anxieties, worries, troubles and misfortunes that one is apt to get into the way of supposing it does not matter very much how he lives. But if we remember that there is an eternal purpose in CHRIST in our regeneration, we shall always try to act worthily of our high calling in CHRIST JESUS.

The greatest thing you can do in this world is to live a saintly, holy, lovely life.

All the small things of your life, the worries, anxieties, the troubles, your location and environment, the lines you are compelled to follow all these have been contrived by GOD to give you the best opportunity possible to become what He wants you to be. GOD could have made you anything He liked. He could have made that woman a queen; He could have made that man a millionaire or a prince. But out of all the myriad opportunities of this world GOD Almighty chose for you just that position in which you find yourself today because He knew that was the one place in which you could come nearest His ideal. It may be there is some awful sorrow in your life. It may be someone is wearing you away by constant, tiresome worry and trial. But always bear in mind that nothing is so small as not to have been contrived by GOD to make you as much His ideal as it is possible.

Now face your life. You have been fretting, murmuring, envying and longing to be free; overlooking the beautiful things because of two or three miserable ones. You have not heeded what would elevate and comfort you because you are so oppressed with what hurts you.

That is not the true way to live: but every day to learn your lesson, and every day to bring your will to the will of GOD, that your will and His may coincide.

GOD'S PERMISSION

But someone says, "I am quite prepared to admit that my present position is in general the result of GOD's choice, but not that the troubles and worries that come to my life from other people are GOD's choice. I draw a distinction between what GOD directly appoints and what comes to me through the intervention of other men and women."

I used to make that distinction once, but could find no rest while I did. Besides, I saw that you and I are enveloped in the care of GOD.

Supposing a man out yonder shoots a poisoned arrow at me, in some newspaper article, or caustic remark, and it comes winging its way toward me. GOD Almighty might ward that arrow off by the shield of His protection. But supposing He lowers the shield and lets it reach my heart, has it not become His will for me? I therefore go through the world daring to believe that not one thing, however minute, occurs to me without being GOD's chisel chipping away a little more of myself and producing a more perfect likeness to the conception which was in His mind for me.

PARABLE OF THE BLACKBERRY BUSH

Last summer I was in Luther's country, and I took a trip through the pine forests. I do love the pine forests of Germany, so absolutely quiet, with their colonnades of trees like the colonnades of a temple. About noon I was extremely tired and exhausted, and coming out from the forest to the fringe of it I found a blackberry bush full of the choicest, richest, most enjoyable blackberries I think I never tasted blackberries that were so luscious. Within ten minutes I had rifled that bush of all its produce. I was quite ashamed of myself, and said:

"I am sorry to have treated you in this way."

But the bush said: "You need not be sorry, I have been waiting for you to come for the last three or four months. I was created for this. It is very lonely here, and I have kept vigil all through the winter storms and the long, dark nights until the spring came, when I began to prepare this banquet for you. I have had such pride in getting ready the basket of fruit that you have enjoyed. Now that you are satisfied, my year's work has received its crown."

I thanked the bush, and said: "Good-by. If I come again next year will you have another feast ready for me?"

"Yes," said the bush.

And I answered: "You remind me of many a lonely saint of GOD, who through the long months of pain and suffering is preparing a basket of fruit, of which, if no earthly saint partakes, the Master Himself will eat."

That is what I mean by being just where GOD wants us to be; willing to stay at the stake without being bound because GOD has put us there, to keep standing quietly at our post amid pain and suffering, preparing baskets of fruit of which JESUS and our fellow believers may partake.

Providing the fruits of a holy life in this world is fulfilling CHRIST's purpose for your life.

WALK IN THEM!

"Created in Jesus Christ, unto good works, which God before prepared THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM."

You have not got to create your path, but to find it - not to cut your way through the tangled undergrowth, but to discover the path which your heavenly Father has prepared for you from the moment you first gave yourself to JESUS to the moment when you will be welcomed home.

Never forget that you have been created for a prepared path. GOD, who knew exactly what was in the path, created you for the path and the path for you, and your life is simply the discovery of GOD's prepared path for that day. It may lie over greensward or down the steep incline; it may be lonely and solitary or through the busy populace; but your path, beloved friend, has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world, by the wisdom and love of GOD.

There are two things, therefore, which are necessary for all of us. The first is to know the path, and the second is strength to walk in it. I want to speak a little on those two.

GUIDANCE

First, how may I know which is my prepared path, either for a day or for my life?

Hebrews 8:11 gives you a never-to-be-forgotten challenge, which (in point of fact) is repeated four times in the Bible and when the Bible says one thing four times you may depend upon it - it is well worth your notice: **"They shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest."**

Preceding the account of the new covenant, you have GOD's word to Moses: **"See that thou make all things according to the pattern shown thee on the mount."** Be still before GOD. In that silence your own restlessness, your own energy, the activity of your flesh will die down. You will put aside a good deal of what you originate, and you will learn to see GOD's plan and pattern, which will probably be a very different thing to that of your own invention. Be in prayer, open your heart to GOD, and presently the pattern of the tabernacle, with every letter and tassel and hanging, will appear before you, and then you will go down into the vales beneath to produce what GOD hath revealed.

And remember when GOD commands He provides the stuff.

He never gave any plans to Moses for which provision was not made. If Moses had put in one thing extra he would have had to have a collection for it; but as long as he worked on GOD's pattern, GOD was responsible for the provision of the material.

Let me just indicate how you may know the path of GOD's will.

When I was crossing the Irish channel one dark, starless night I stood on the deck by the captain and asked him:

"How do you know Holyhead harbor on so dark a night as this?"

He said: "You see those three lights? Those three must line up behind each other as one, and when we see them so united we know the exact position of the harbor mouth."

When we want to know GOD's will there are three things which always concur:

- The inward impulse: GOD in the heart, impelling you forward;
- The Word of GOD: GOD in His Book, corroborating whatever He says in the heart;
- The trend of circumstances: GOD in circumstances, which are always indicative of His will.

Never start until these three things agree.

You may have an inward impulse to be a minister, young man, but you have that invalid mother to support. Therefore the trend of circumstances and the inward impulse do not tally, and you must wait. If you do not know what to do next, stand still until you do.

If GOD has not indicated the path beyond a certain point, remain quiet until He does.

Throw the responsibility back on GOD.

There is a remarkable illustration in Acts 12:12 of the way in which GOD leaves us to the action of our judgment, when our judgment is enough.

Peter was in prison. He could not emerge, and the angel therefore came to him and led him out, the gate opening of its own accord. You will always find that the gates will open of their own accord if you are in the company of GOD's angels.

The angel then took Peter through two streets, because he was so dazed he thought he was dreaming. But when the night air had revived him the angel left him.

"And when he had considered the thing he came to the house" of John Mark. You see the angel was there when he was dazed, but when he woke up the angel said:

"Now, Peter, you have your senses. You can find your own way without me, and so I will leave you."

GOD will lead you by your own judgment, and when judgment is enough, don't expect a miracle, for GOD uses His miracles sparingly.

GOD'S STUPID CHILDREN

The more stupid you are to understand the more you must rely on GOD. I think stupid people really get on the best with GOD if they are content to be stupid and not seem wise.

Thomas was so dull he lived a week behind the other apostles; but you know how eager JESUS was to explain to Thomas the mystery of His resurrection, and came specially to help him.

If I had in my family three or four children who were really bright and one who was stupid and obtuse in his intellect, and I told the children that on a Saturday afternoon I would go with them to the woods to gather the spring flowers if they would meet me at a certain place - perhaps I might find the little fellow's face still dull and cloudy because he could not understand my meaning. Would I let him miss the treat when he needed it so much more than the others? Am I going to punish him for his stupidity, which may in some part be attributable to me? No, I take him on my knee and explain it to him again. If still he does not understand, I say to him:

"Wait right here, and after dinner I will take you with me."

So the stupid child gets more of my kind and loving help than the others who have gone on and are ready to meet me at the appointed place.

If you are one of GOD's stupid children who cannot catch His meaning, stand still until GOD takes you by the hand and says: "Come along with Me." GOD is bound to make you know.

When you have asked GOD to guide your judgment, and have thought it well out and acted as you thought the wisest, seeking His will and moving forward, suppose you find yourself in some great difficulty?

That does not prove that you have made a mistake, or that you are not in GOD's path. It simply proves that any other path would have been impassable. There is a way under the difficulty, or around or above it, and presently it will be made passable. Whenever you decide on a course, trusting GOD and asking Him to block you if you are wrong, go on; for if it were not His path for you He would have told you. Dare to go on.

KEEPING

When you know what your path is, you must learn to appropriate the power which is within your reach to walk in it.

For these "**good works**" there is a sufficiency in JESUS CHRIST, in whom we were created. For every good work there is a counterpart of grace in CHRIST.

The pain, the sorrow, the worry are all pre-determined, and the grace for them all is in CHRIST. And further, the special form of trial was intended to compel you to take from CHRIST what otherwise you would have missed.

- Blind men were permitted to come to CHRIST to show that there was eye-salve in Him;
- Deaf and dumb men were permitted to come to elicit hearing and speech;
- Dead men were brought to CHRIST for all the world to know the life that was in CHRIST.

As I understand it, even sin can bring out qualities in GOD which otherwise would never have been realized.

Up to now you have probably been looking at some trial in your life with a great deal of anxiety, and you have been trying to cope with it and have been mastered by it, perpetually beaten down to the ground.

That is only because JESUS wants to show you what He can do.

In Ireland a friend of mine once went to call on what we call a decayed Irish nobleman; that is, he had seen better days. He had a title, and was nominally the owner of a large tract of country. My friend passed in the gateway and proceeded up to the old ancestral house, but on reaching it he found there was only a housekeeper there.

It was a lovely place, but she said that her master, the nobleman, might be found at the gate lodge which he had passed. My friend found that he was stricken with a strange disease, which led him to think that he had no money at all, and in order to economize he deserted his magnificent home, which he could well keep up, and live in the lodge.

It was a queer thing to do, wasn't it? But it is what you have been doing all your life. GOD meant you to live a royal life, and He put into JESUS CHRIST everything to enable you to live that life. You have seen the plan, and you have not dared to realize it because you thought you had not capital enough, whereas in JESUS CHRIST GOD has put the fullness of His possession.

- **"Blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ"** Ephesians 1:13.
- **"In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"** Colossians 2:9.
- **"His divine power hath given unto us all things,"** (II Peter 1:13).

If ever GOD puts me forward to new responsibility I always go back to Him on an honorable understanding that He will give me more of His help.

You probably understand intellectually what I am saying, but have you never learned the art of TAKING from CHRIST? If I were to say to you, "Stop praying; you have prayed enough; give up praying and take," would you understand what I meant? You have been praying to GOD as though you had to wring it from Him with the greatest difficulty. When you have prayed for a thing, take it! At the end of your prayer, stop still and take!

"Believe that ye receive, and ye shall have" (Mark 11 124) . When you have definitely and reverently believed on a promise go away and reckon that, whether you feel it or not, you have received.

All these things will be taught you one by one if you will only present yourself to GOD.

- Give Him your mind, that He may think into you His thoughts.
- Give Him your heart, that no love may be there but His own and such love as He permits.
- Give Him your hands, your body, the whole of your life, that through it He may fulfill His own will.

Then keep looking up to Him and receive from Him that which you need.

That is, as far as I know, the secret of living well. May GOD teach you further and help you to give up all to Him!

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