

GOOD NEWS

A Collection of Sermons

by

Sam Jones and Sam Small

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SERMON NINE

A BAD BEGINNING

(Morning service at the Chicago Avenue Church)

This is the sixth service that I have been with you, and this is the last service I shall be with you, perchance. We concentrate our forces in the organized union effort on the South Side next week; but I shall carry many of your faces, and I trust all of your spirits, upon my heart in prayer. I want you to pray for me and pray God that I may be efficient and useful and only

USEFUL AND GOOD

Give us your prayers that God may make this specially a sweet service to us, and that we may have a foretaste of what we shall enjoy, not only the balance of our lives here, but with the everlasting life in the world to come. If I have done nothing more, in the few services I have been with you in this church, I trust I have engaged an interest in your prayers for me, for my home, and for my work. We select this very familiar text to all of us as a very appropriate one, not only for this occasion, but for us to think of occasionally:

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joys of thy Lord.”

Everything must have a beginning. Every religious life, like every physical life, had its beginning. And there is a great deal in a good start. That old adage is the very essence of nonsense, that we frequently quote, “A bad beginning makes a good ending.” It’s false — false in philosophy; it’s false in the nature of things that a bad beginning makes a good ending. It is not true of it in farming. It is not true of it in merchandising, and it is not true of it in anything: but, above all things, it is fatally untrue in a religious point. And really, brethren, I have but to watch the beginning of any cause to determine whether it will

SUCCEED OR NOT

For instance, I see a man beginning the year as a farmer. I see him loitering about his home during the months of January and February and March. He doesn’t turn his hand to do anything; he loiters about until it’s along about time for him to plant and hoe. When I see that man beginning the year that way as a farmer, I unhesitatingly pronounce him a failure and the crop he gathers, or the piece of crop he gathers that fall, will prove my prophecy.

When I see a young lawyer, or rather a young man in the profession of law, and see him as he loiters away day after day and spends his evenings with the young ladies at their homes, I soon say, “Well, I don’t know what you may make in other directions, but you will never succeed as a lawyer.” So we might say of every undertaking. But when I see a farmer is as busy in January as in June, and as active in February as in July, I’ll tell his neighbors,

“You watch that man; he means business; he commenced right; he’ll make a crop.”

And when I see a young lawyer burning the midnight gas, and see him poring over Blackstone, Greenleaf, and Chitty, and studying the code, I see, as I watch the color fade from his cheek and the light of his eye growing brighter every day — as I watch that young man, I say, “That young man

WILL MAKE A LAWYER

That this country will be proud of.”

There is a great deal in starting — a great deal in a first-class start, whichever direction you take. Above all things, I want a man to take a good start in religion. Even a child born in an ice-house may live, but, as Talmage says, it will never get over the chill of its birth.

The speed and momentum and destination of a cannonball are to be determined always by how much powder is behind it; and your speed and course to the good world will depend a great deal upon how you start. To start well, and to hold on to what you have got and to get more if you can — that’s it. You have seen many men come into the church slowly and uncertainly, and make but little headway in their religious life. If I had to go to hell, I think I should like to hit that gait, and go there as slowly as possible.

Slow Christianity does not mean anything:
In vain we tune our formal songs.
In vain we strive to rise.
Hosannas languish on our tongue,
And our devotion dies.

Some people go toward heaven with a great deal more heaviness, and a great deal more slowness and a great deal less activity than other people go to hell. That’s a fact.

I can see a sinner in this town

ON A DOUBLE-QUICK

every minute going toward hell and laugh in joy on his way, while a great many of God’s people are dragging along as if they were going to misery, and say, “I’ll put the fearful day off as long as I can.” That won’t do, brother; it’s wrong.

The fact is, I am out of patience with this slow-moving Christianity. The devil can run a mile a minute while we are pulling on our boots, and he gets there and gets the game before we've gotten ready to start.

This world has gotten to a point — for instance, in a railroad phase — this world has come up to a point where it won't put up with those little two-wheeled engines running along at the rate of three miles an hour. What did the world? It said, "You hasten up that machine; we don't want to ride on that schedule." What did the railroad do? Why, it just pried up that engine and put eight more wheels under it. Now it goes sixty miles an hour. The world says, "We like that."

These little two-wheeled concerns, that go jigger, jigger, jigger all the time, and don't make but three miles an hour, they make schedule time — their schedule time — but it isn't but three miles an hour. Ah me! Brother, we have got tired of that sort of thing. And now, brother is your religious life like one of these little two-wheeled engines on the track? The Lord God

SIDE-TRACK ALL SUCH!

I don't want you in my way; I can't put up with your schedule of three miles an hour. I want you sidetracked or dumped in the ditch, for you are a nuisance on the main line of the grand trunk railway to heaven. You are a nuisance, you are in the way. If I had a Southern audience, I'd say you'd never "get there, Ely," on that line — and you never will.

Of course Northern or Western people never indulge in slang or other expressions than those pleasing to the ear, or utterances except courteous and respectable. You manufacture more slang in Chicago in one day than we use in one year in the South. That's the plain, honest truth. But, thank God, slang is not sinful unless it is sinful in its meaning. God does not care how you put words to glorify Him. We have never heard of a grammar school in heaven yet. I can get along with a critic's criticism as to my doctrine and teachings, but I have the profoundest contempt for those little nibblers who are always asking,

"Did you notice how he butchered the English grammar?"

"Did you observe how he annihilated rhetoric?"

Now, when a whale comes along and swallows me up I can sort of stand it, but this way of being nibbled to death by minnows I have no patience with. I had just as soon be beaten on the head by a rubber balloon; it don't hurt any; it's just an annoyance. I would a great deal rather that a police-officer should knock me on the head with his club and be done with it at once than to be pounded by these rubber balloons. That just annoys me, and a decent man does

HATE TO BE ANNOYED

I say we want a better start somehow or another — better momentum, that's what we need. This little two-wheeled Christianity! What's the matter with it? There is but one trouble. It hasn't wheels enough. You say your little prayers and read your Bible.

But listen. Praying in your family, praying in public, visiting the sick, relieving the needy, giving to missions, supporting the gospel, if you will just put about eight of these wheels under your engine, you will roll along toward the good world at the rate of a mile a minute. You can't afford at a less gait than that, or the devil will catch up with you.

The devil don't run after some of you, anyway; he just lies down and goes to sleep and lets you catch up with him. The devil just looks behind him to see how long it will be before we catch up to him. Listen, we want activity; we want movement; we want to get a good start. Are you in earnest? Do you mean it? Are there dangers behind me, and difficulties all around me?

Is it necessary that I lay aside every weight — anything that will hinder me in running?

Running, running. That was Paul's word. No crawling in church; no creeping in church, but running, running, running, with all your might.

Movement. The speed of an engine is determined by the height of

ITS DRIVING-WHEEL

and your speed to the good world, the height and depth of your purpose will determine the time you make in conquering evil, and you will make your way to the good world in spite of the difficulties that follow in your track.

“Well done, well done, thou good and faithful servants; enter into the joy of thy Lord!”

Well finished! You know that everything that is finished had a beginning. Well-done purpose; well completed.

You start well. I like a good start, brother, and that means I will forsake everything that's wrong; I will do everything that's right; for every half a chance I get I won't wait for a whole chance. I'll take a two-point chance, and that's getting down pretty near as low as the exchange quotes it.

Well, now, listen: “Well done” means not only well commenced, but it means well rounded, completed. Brother, sister, it means not only well commenced, but to carry it on. As you receive Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk ye in Him. Will you seek religion and go to the theater while you are seeking it?

Can you get religion and go to the theater? If so, how? It's sorter like a character in the minstrels. He plays the character of a white man one night and that of a negro the next. He blacks up his face one night, and to save his soul he can't wash the black, oily stuff off to play the white man. There are bound to be

BLACK SPOTS ON IT

A man seeking religion and going to the theater! It can't be done. It's impossible. The two things are incompatible to each other. A man can't play cards and seek religion too.

Brother, sister, I cast all these things from me that hinder me in that heavenly race. Blessed be God, I won't do a thing now that I would not have done when I was seeking religion.

Here, I was preaching in a city once and a man came up to me and said:

“ I am outraged with the Christianity of some of the churches in this city.”

“What!” said I.

“Why, I saw the bishop, last night, lay his hands on a class of twenty and confirm them, in the name of the Trinity, with the most solemn ceremony;” and he said, “Twelve out of that twenty were in a ballroom the next night, dancing.”

“Well, what about that, whether it's the very next night or the very next year, after they were confirmed. How long ought a fellow to wait after he is received into the church before he dances? How long ought a woman to wait, after her husband dies, before she gives a fashionable entertainment?”

Let me tell you, God helping me, if I've got to dance I wouldn't do the dirty work the next night and go on and be religious. If we are going to dance at all, let's just not do it and pretend to be religious. It does not accord with Christianity. Because, forsooth, twelve of them were in the ballroom the next night, how long

OUGHT THEY TO WAIT?

I'll say this much, I might afford to wait ten days, but God keep any man from an experience of dancing ten years after he had joined the church. I want to grow up with the ten years to make me decent. Well carried on! I begin well, and not only do I begin well, but I carry on this life in cold-blooded earnest.

Now, brother, isn't that best? If I ought to start and carry on well I ought to see what gave me a good start, and just as that gave me a good start, so I ought to continue.

What starts that engine? The strength of the steam in the piston head. Just keep the throttle wide open and keep the steam up, and as the steam rushes in the engine dashes along. Ask yourself what started it, and say, “O God, I take myself from all bad surroundings and start for the good world and Christ.”

How can you keep on? “I give up every bad influence.” There's some force playing on the piston-heads of souls then, and we move on to glory and to God. I wish all of us could see this.

Brother, it takes exactly the same force always to keep it up that it took to start it.

“Well carried on.” Then, as I purpose only to talk twenty-five minutes, we will notice this in conclusion.

“WELL DONE, WELL FINISHED”

Oh, what a bright day in a man’s history when he looks back and can thank God for a good start, and then, looking from the start to the crowning glory, say, “Blessed be God, not only have I started well, but I have been faithful to my duty as a Christian!”

Paul said, “**I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course.**” “Brother that is the grandest thing ever said in the world. “**I have finished my course.**” I have done the work God gave me to do. The last brick is put in its place; the last piece of carpenter’s work has been performed; the last touch of the brush has been given, and there we behold it, finished, rounded, completed, and God says, “Enough, come up higher.”

Oh, the aspiration of every true Christian is to finish the work God gave him to do.

Ah, brother, some of us have not our foundations laid yet, and some of us have been running the Christian race for forty years and we haven’t gotten a half-mile yet. The Lord be merciful to us and give us time. If he does not, we are gone. Redeem your time. Here’s a farmer, for instance.

In July the grass takes possession of his crop, and it’s

“NIP AND TUCK”

Between the grass and the crop; and the crop is injured and he has lost his time, but now he is going to redeem it. He rises early, works late, and doubles his forces, and at last he says, “I have redeemed my time by rising early and working late and putting on a double force.”

Sister, brother, let us work in the moral vineyard of God so it can be said to us, “Well done, well finished.” Brother, we are terribly behind. Oh, brother, let us go to work with all our power.

It’s just thirty days, and the doctor says, “Your case is a hopeless one.” It’s just five minutes, and the doctor says, “Your case is hopeless.” Just two years, and he says, “Your case is hopeless.” Oh, brother, these, and many more will soon be gone. The Lord help us all to arise early and to work late, and to put on increased force and redeem the time, if we can. “Well done, well done,” well finished, well rounded off for the good world. Oh for God to call me good, call me faithful! Let the world’s maledictions and the world’s forces be heaped upon me, but, Blessed Father, help me to live so Thou shalt say, “**Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.**”

Brother, let’s work for that commendation, for that

GLORIOUS BENEDICTION

at last, when God shall say to us not only, “Well commenced and carried on,” but, glory be to God, “Well done, well finished, thou good and faithful servant to the joy of thy Lord.”

I have sat down and buried my face in my hands and thought upon the grandeur of heaven. I have lain down at night and slept and dreamed of heaven. I have sat in my library and read the best and sweetest authors on heaven, and then took my Bible and read, "**Ear hath not heard, nor eye seen, neither hath it entered into the mind of man to know of the good things that are laid up for those who are faithful and love Him.**"

Brother, let's, you and I, sacrifice everything for the good world. But what is this sacrifice we talk of? We give up a copper, and God gives us gold in return; we empty our pockets of coal cinders and have them filled with jewels. That's what our sacrifices are. Talking about sacrifices, shut up about that. I gave up nothing, and I get everything, and go on my way rejoicing.

Brother, you can't make any sacrifice for God. And, brother, in the end we shall have

EVERLASTING LIFE

Thank God for the bright world where there will be no death, but where we shall have the palm, the harp, towering spires, jasper walls, and pearly gates. But, thank God, there is a country where wife and sweet children shall live, where there shall be no pale faces, no sick body, no grave, no grief, and no black veil, no widows' weeds, but we shall live in perfect peace and happiness forever.

God help us to attain unto the place worthy of our resurrection, and crown you all with everlasting life.

And before we dismiss you I want to know how many there are here who will say, "God help me, not only to begin well, but to begin well now," and say you will continue in well doing. God bless you all.

~ end of sermon 9 ~

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