

A QUEST FOR SOULS

Comprising all the Sermons Preached and Prayers
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SEVENTEEN -

THE CONFESSION OF SIN

NIGHT SERVICE, JUNE 20, 1917

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

Through these several days of the meeting, many touching requests have reached us, by letter and otherwise, asking specially for prayer for certain specified objects. I wish I had time to read you these many requests. Time and again, parents have requested that groups of Christians in these meetings, would join the parents in prayer for their sons and daughters. Time and again, modest, shrinking, but devoted wives, have asked certain praying ones quietly - and that is the better way for it to be asked - that they would join them in special prayer for their husbands. And friend after friend, a large group of friends, have presented their friends, saying to men and women here and there in the meeting: "Won't you join us in special prayer for these friends?" Now I indicate these requests in this way, that you may be much in prayer for them all. Note after note has reached me, in which the request has been made that the whole multitude be asked to join in special prayer for definite persons. The limits of the hour would not allow for such notes to be read, even if it were proper to read them, but the fact is a most challenging call to us to be much in prayer. I should like for us in a moment to make mention of these requests, everyone, to Him who knoweth all about each case, in a special prayer.

And yet before we offer that prayer, I should like to give others the privilege of voicing, in just one moment, when I shall indicate, their special requests for prayer. I shall put it by groups, by sections of people, as I ask that question.

I should like, if there are parents here, whose children are not yet saved, and you would have all these who pray to join you in prayer for them, to witness to such desire by lifting the hand for a moment, as my eye shall glance over the audience. I see - there are many hands that are lifted. That is, indeed, an appealing sight.

I should like again to see every person here whose heart has some person or persons for whose spiritual welfare you yearn, for whose salvation you pray, and you would like for us to join you in such prayer, manifest it by lifting your hand as my eye shall again glance over the audience.

Oh, there are many! And in this choir, let me see. I trust every member of this choir loves CHRIST. How indebted we are to them for their devotion! Very helpful is the part that they render in a meeting like this, and we are profoundly grateful to them. Your every hand was lifted. There were many, many, many wishes voiced by the uplifted hands, just now. GOD saw and knows about every case that was indicated by such uplifted hands. Let us pause a moment to speak to Him now, in their behalf,

THE OPENING PRAYER.

We would wait upon Thee, O GOD, yet a moment longer, at the throne of grace. We bring Thee all these requests for prayer, and pray Thee to visit each one with light and love, with mercy and grace, in Thine own time and way. Regard, we beseech Thee, these parents, whose uplifted hands witnessed to the alarming fact that they have children who are out of the ark of safety. O, may parental interest for the salvation of such children be so quickened and deepened by the spirit of GOD, that all these parents will, by precept and example, go to the utmost of devotion to win their children to CHRIST.

And we unite our prayers with those of these wives, who in one way or another have indicated their deep concern that their lost husbands might be saved. O, strengthen Thou the faith of every Christian wife whose husband is an unbeliever, and speak to such unbelieving husband through the wife, or in any way Thou wilt, Thou sovereign Saviour, so that he shall be saved. O, grant that these Christian wives may not always have to go life's way alone in the deepest, highest things, but may they have their husbands with them, that wife and husband, the mother and Father, together may journey on in the heavenly way, and there bring with them those whom Thou hast given them.

And we pray with every friend here to-night, whose uplifted hand witnessed to the fact that he or she had some person or persons for whose salvation they would pray. We would unite our prayers with them, for every person represented. And if it would please Thee, O Lord, for these men and women to go in person and speak to such lost ones concerning CHRIST and His great salvation, whatever their modesty, whatever their timidity, whatever their sense of unworthiness and of unfitness, yet let them go, clinging to CHRIST to guide and help them. May there be such worthy personal attention to souls, such right approach to souls, by these all about us who care for souls, that GOD will come with divine reinforcement, and make their witnessing triumphantly effective in winning many to CHRIST.

Lord, help every one, here and there and everywhere who is engaged in this great work. Quicken our consciences until they shall burn with personal concern for the salvation of the people. May every one of us utterly refuse to allow the painful consciousness of our unworthiness and our unfitness to deter us from the holiest work of all - the converting of sinners from the error of their ways. Give us ever to remember that we watch for souls as they who must give account to GOD. May we so watch that when we give our account to GOD we shall give such account with joy, and not with grief. And may the Divine spirit guide us in all these visits, in all these conversations, in all these approaches to human souls. We would utterly yield ourselves to Him for His light and leading. We would be led, literally and utterly and only, of GOD. We would have divine wisdom to guide us at every step, so that we may do that only which will please CHRIST our Lord.

May the service to-night be altogether under the divine direction. May the preacher speak just as CHRIST would have him speak. May he have the temper that will have CHRIST's approval. May these hearts all be opened by the great, good spirit Divine, so that they shall heed the word that shall be spoken. In all this throng of people, may the men and women, and even the boys and girls, now open their hearts and minds, that they may respond just as GOD would have them respond, to the call of His own truth. May His will, whatever it is, be accomplished through us and with us this night.

We pray in CHRIST's conquering name. Amen.

THE CONFESSION OF SIN

Text: "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.**" - I John 1:9.

This is the text: "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,**" It is from the first chapter of John's first Epistle. Its primary application is manifestly for Christians, as the context indicates, but its gracious truth may be applied to all who sin, and are therefore in need of GOD's forgiving mercy:

Somebody has well said that the three hardest words to say like they ought to be said are these: "I have sinned," You will grant the truth of that saying upon a brief moment's reflection. The three most difficult words to say like they ought to be said are these three: "I have sinned." And yet confession of sin lies right at the foundation of our coming to CHRIST. If one be not a sinner, then for him there is no Saviour. For him, CHRIST's Gospel does not have any appeal, if one be not a sinner. JESUS tells us: "**They that are whole (or well) do not need a physician, but they that are sick.**" And again JESUS tells us: "**I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**"

And again He tells us: "**The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.**"

Oh, are you a sinner? Then I preach to you a Saviour, for JESUS came to seek and to save sinners. Forgiveness of sins is a real experience. Sin is as real as your hand or eye.

Sin obtains with every rational soul. The forgiveness of sins is as real as the sin itself. the Lord JESUS CHRIST came to grant forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins is a personal experience - a real personal experience. There can be no forgiveness except between persons. That chair could not forgive you. That tree could not forgive you. That beast of the field could not forgive you. Forgiveness is always between persons.

Now GOD, the Great Person, comes to you and me, the little, finite, human, mortal, dependent, sinning persons, and says to us: "If you will turn to me with right attitude, I will forgive your sins."

Oh, I ask you, one by one, as my eye sweeps the audience: "Have your sins been forgiven of GOD?" Could you lay your hand upon your heart and say: "I have the consciousness within me, that GOD has forgiven my sins?" I would press that upon you, one by one - have your sins been

forgiven of GOD? And I would pray you, do not stop until you can give a complete, satisfactory answer to that great question - have your sins been forgiven of GOD?

Our text tells us, "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.**" Be not deceived, I pray you, my men and women, on this crucial point, the reality of sin, and the inescapable fact that sin must be confessed in the right way, if we are ever to get forgiveness for our sins. Be not deceived at such crucial point, the fact of sin in your life and mine - the awful fact of sin.

There are two chief causes that conspire to deceive us at this point, and the one is the ignorance that we have of our own hearts.

Who has ever sounded the depths of his own heart? Who knows every secret expression and bias and motive of his own heart? No one but GOD has ever sounded the depths of a rational, responsible, human heart. So the proneness is constant with us not to know our own hearts.

GOD tells us in His Word, pointblank, that "**the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**" That is the solemn asseveration of GOD's Word. "**The heart is deceitful in all things and desperately wicked.**" That is GOD's own indictment of the human heart.

And now, if we will pause to consider now the human heart treats GOD, we will see how wretchedly sin has played havoc with the human heart.

Look at the attitude of the human heart toward GOD, in two ways.

Look at the ingratitude of the human heart toward GOD. That sin, the sin of ingratitude, is one of our commonest sins, and surely one of our wretchedest, one of our most heinous sins. Oh, the sin of ingratitude, anywhere, how base, how bad it is! How terrible is the sin of ingratitude of a child toward its parent. "**How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!**" said the great dramatist.

Ingratitude anywhere is a terrible, most reprehensible fault. Ingratitude even among men is despicable, and when we relate it to our chiefest, our supremest benefactor, even to GOD, how base, how terrible, is ingratitude seen to be in His sight.

GOD gives our lives, and crowns us with every mercy and blessing, from the largest to the least, and yet we are forgetful and indifferent and ungrateful toward that infinitely benevolent Being. If there were no other motive to bring every rational person to the feet of CHRIST, this motive ought to bring us all - the motive of gratitude. With such a Friend and such friendship, such mercy, such patience, such kindness, such forbearance, such a Friend ought to have from us our best devotion and love. The human heart is deceived by sin, and that drowns the expression of gratitude to GOD.

And then the human heart, in its deception, may be seen in our disobedience toward GOD. Obedience is a mighty principle, that everywhere must work its mighty sway.

- You let obedience be trifled with in the home, and the home will go to rack and confusion and

ruin.

- You let obedience be trifled with in the school, or trifled with in the army, and chaos will follow such trifling.

Now when we think of obedience in the highest realm of all, even obedience to GOD, which is the chiefest and first duty of every human life, and when we remember that GOD, the holy Lawgiver, with His laws and precepts for human guidance and government, is trifled with and disobeyed, how terrible is the fact of sin, that it could make us to be both ungrateful and disobedient in the sight of GOD!

And then our lack of recognition of the undoing power of sin in human life comes from another cause, and that is, ignorance of GOD's Word, which Word reveals GOD's will for the children of men.

The one supreme standard by which all conduct and character and creeds shall be tried is by GOD's Holy Word. GOD's Holy Word is the guide-book to point men and women in the right way forever. And yet oftentimes we do not know what that Word says, where that guide-book points. But when we open its pages to see what GOD says about mankind, there it is, luminous as the sun in the heavens at noontime.

- When we open the Scriptures, there stands out the solemn word of GOD: "**God looked down from heaven, to see if there were any that did good, and there was not one, no, not one.**"

- We open the Scriptures and read again: "**There is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.**"

- And we open the Scriptures again and read them: "**There is no difference. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.**"

- And again we open the Scriptures: "**Marvel not that I say unto you, except you are born again, [born from above] you cannot see the kingdom of God.**"

- And we open the Scriptures and quote them again: "**Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.**"

Now, we are often ignorant of what the Word of GOD says about human conditions and human character and human need and human destiny, which ignorance does not excuse us; and because of such ignorance of GOD's Word and of our own heart, we do not realize as we ought the undoing and destructive power of sin in human life.

Oh, my fellow-men and women, I pray you, let us all take our proper place at GOD's feet, and realize as He would have us, the awful fact that sin has come with its crippling power into our every life, and we must have deliverance from such sin, we must have absolution from it, we must have forgiveness for it, we must turn from it to be saved from its fearful penalty and power.

And now, our text points the way for our forgiveness and recovery: "**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.**" Here we are face to face with the solemn matter of confessing our sins. How shall we confess our sins? Solemn matter that! If we will confess our sins in the proper way, we shall have forgiveness for them, and we shall be saved out of them and in spite of them, and peace here and forever shall be our portion.

How then shall we confess our sins?

The Bible points the way for us, and we will look at that way to-night. The Bible indicates the wrong way, that we may be warned concerning such way and refuse to walk in it. The Bible gives us case after case of men who confessed their sins, but in the wrong way, to their own hurt and undoing and destruction. Let us look at such wrong way, pointed in the Bible for us that we may be warned and not take such way. I call your attention to two or three cases that the Bible holds up for our warning and counsel.

Pharaoh confessed his sins, but in the wrong way. Pharaoh was the king, as you recall, down in Egypt, and the time came when, under heavy pressure, Pharaoh made confession of his sins. You remember the circumstances, do you not? GOD had sent Moses a little while before this occasion, to tell Pharaoh, the king, that he must let the children of Israel go out of Egyptian bondage to their appointed land yonder, which GOD had promised His chosen Israel. Moses stood before Pharaoh, the king, and gave the king the message from GOD, and Pharaoh scouted it all.

Pharaoh scornfully mocked it all.

Pharaoh said: "**Who is God, that I should obey Him?**" Pharaoh said: "I am a king myself. Leave my presence," said Pharaoh to Moses; "I will do as I please with these slaves. They shall yet grind at my mills, and they shall yet do obeisance to the bidding of my people." And Moses went his way, but GOD has His own ways of making His authority and righteousness effective.

You recall that there came plague after plague, until ten plagues fell upon Egypt in swift succession. You remember that the water was everywhere turned into blood; You remember that the cattle on the hills and in the valleys were stricken with murrain, so that presently they lay dead everywhere. And on and on the terrible plagues fell over Egypt, until the last and culminating plague came, namely, the first-born in every Egyptian family, whether of man or beast, lay dead in one night. And when the morning came there was wailing throughout Egypt, from one border to the other, for the first-born both of man and beast, lay dead in every Egyptian family.

At last Pharaoh was serious, and he sent for GOD's man, Moses, and when Moses confronted him, Pharaoh said: "I have sinned. Go tell your GOD to stay these clouds of :wrath and trouble that are falling upon my people. I have sinned. I relent. I change my way. I yield to GOD's great call. Tell your GOD that, and I change my way."

And Moses prayed, and the clouds lifted and the sunlight came again throughout Egypt. And then Moses started with the children of Israel to the land of Canaan, which GOD had promised them. Yonder Moses goes, with that nation of spiritless slaves following at that valiant leader's heels. Yonder they go.

Would you believe it? Pharaoh took it all back. Pharaoh summoned his men and sent them in swift haste after Moses and the retreating Israelites, and said to his men: "Re-capture, recover them all, and bring them back, that they may yet grind at our mills." And you remember how they pursued the retreating hosts led by Moses, until they came to the Red Sea, and GOD by a miracle opened that sea, and Moses with the hosts crossed swiftly, and then the reckless,

presumptuous champions of Pharaoh plunged into the opened sea, and the standing mountains of water came down to submerge them, and they were destroyed.

Now, this case is typical of the hardened sinner, and such are to be found, I fear, in every community in this Gospel country - the hardened sinner; one who under pressure feels and hears GOD's call, and relents and concedes, and makes his promises, and yet puts them all away and goes deeper into sin and darkness than ever before - the type of the hardened sinner.

Oh, I wonder if I speak to such! How difficult such case is!

Years ago I was ready to close the midweek prayer meeting where I was pastor, and I had lifted my hands for the benediction, and the people were standing, and just then there came rapidly to the church door one of our physicians - a noble, Christian physician. Oh, how great a thing for a physician to be a devout Christian, and how important! He came in and waved his hand and said: "Pastor, have the people to be seated. I have a statement to make." And we were seated, and then he told us of one of our well known citizens, whose wife was a devoted Christian and member of the church.

He told us how ill such man was, and how he, the doctor, had just left his bedside, where five doctors had had an extended consultation, and the decision of those five doctors was that, speaking after the fashion of men, the great citizen had already passed beyond the reach of medicine, and would die before morning.

"But," said this doctor who came to the prayer meeting, "I believe in GOD, and that He can turn the battle back from the gate when all hands human are helpless." Don't you prize a doctor who talks like that?

Then said the doctor: "We told this citizen just what his case was and is, and he was utterly horrified, for he is not prepared to die. For a moment, he grasped after something, and finally he said: 'Isn't this the night, Wednesday night, when the people meet at the church to pray?' The doctor said: 'Yes, it is.' Then the sick man said: 'Doctor, you hasten down there and tell those people where my wife goes to church - tell those people who pray - that I solemnly promise that if GOD will spare me, and raise me up from this sick bed, when the tide is turned and I am well, I will go to GOD's house, and I will seek His face, and I will follow the light He gives.'"

The doctor told the story, and I said: "Every head will be bowed. We will pray for him." And I led the people in that prayer, and we commended him to GOD, and we begged that he might live, on the one ground, that when recovered he might make good his pledge, he might redeem his promise, and live thereafter in harmony with GOD.

The next morning early, the doctor phoned me that the tide had turned, and that the man was incomparably better, and would undoubtedly live; and day by day that was the word that came from his sick bed, where no one was allowed to enter, save the doctor and the nurse and the wife.

At that time, I visited another community, to aid in some Gospel meetings, and was gone some two or three weeks. When I came back, and made inquiry, they said: "He is out on the streets, and practically well," and a few minutes after my inquiry, I met him on the street, face to face, and I hurried to him, and took his hand, and rejoiced with him with most grateful joy. And then I

said to him, for it was Saturday: "You will be at GOD's house with us to-morrow."

I yet held his hand, and he winced and said: "Oh, no! I am behind with my mail. I have a large number of letters unanswered. I have lost so much time, I must put in to-morrow looking over that mail."

And I still held his hand and searched his heart, as I looked through his eyes, and said: "Oh, no, my man! You will, of course, be at GOD's house to-morrow, I take it."

He winced yet more, and his face colored crimson, and he said: "I know what you are thinking about."

I said: "Indeed, you do."

He said: "I was in a close place. I had to do something, and do it quickly, and I did as I did. But I cannot be at church to-morrow. I am behind with my work. I will be there later, when I get up with my work. I cannot be there to-morrow."

I still held his hand, and I said: "Man, man! You have come back from the very gates of the grave. You have been spared, evidently, in answer to prayer, on your high pledge that when GOD recovered you, He should have your best. Come to GOD's house to-morrow, and give heed according to your serious pledge to Him."

He fairly rushed away from me, as he said: "Oh, I cannot! By and by I will. I cannot now. Business engrosses me now."

And he was gone, and the weeks went by, and he never came, and a group of citizens were making ready to go on a trip to the East, a group of business men, and they stood there in the depot, waiting for the train, all chatting happily, when suddenly this man trembled, and put his hands to his face, and before the others could realize what was happening, he fell with heavy fall there on the depot floor. The ambulance was summoned, and the doctor, and they carried him away to his home. But the hours were just a few, until apoplexy had done its work, and all unconscious, the man went out into the other world to reap the harvest of his own sowing. The physician called me and told me the tragical ending a little later, and for days and days there was only one Scripture that swept through my soul - this Scripture: **"He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy!"**

Such man is the type of the hardened sinner, the sinner, who, under pressure, makes his high pledge to GOD, and then puts it all away. Such sinner, one day, finds a black Friday enshrouding the whole home. A loved one is ill almost unto death. The black shadows throw themselves everywhere about the place, and the man's heart is in his throat, and he goes out alone and utters one cry, over and over again. He walks alone, saying two little words, and those words a cry: "Oh, GOD! Oh, GOD!" And on and on he says just that: "Oh, GOD! Oh, GOD!" And then, later along, he gives his high pledge that, if GOD will turn the battle back from the gate, he will repent, he will turn to GOD. And that vow is heard, and GOD's mercy is shown, and the battle is turned back from the gate, and the black Friday passes, and the man, with his pledge, goes his way and forgets it all.

Oh, do I speak to somebody in this vast throng to-night who has forgotten his vows, who has murdered his covenant, who has strangled his good resolution?

I pray you, summon yourself again to the right consideration of that serious promise made in the other days.

There was another man who confessed his sins, but to no good purpose. That man was Balaam, the false prophet, whose story is told for us in the Old Testament.

You recall the circumstances under which Balaam confessed his sins. He was in the presence, one day, it would seem, of a good man on his death-bed, and that scene made an impression upon Balaam that provoked his cry of the confession of sin. He saw a good man there in the death chamber, passing away, and it moved Balaam to his heart's depths - a sight that is never to be forgotten, to see a good man die, or to see a bad man die. It is a sight from which there is no getting away.

When I see how my people can die, I come back to my pulpit brave as a lion to preach CHRIST's Gospel to the world - when I see how CHRIST's friends can die. So it would seem that Balaam saw a good man die, and he came out of that death chamber with the cry: "**I have sinned. Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!**" That was his promise; that was his prayer; that was his wish. would you believe it?

The very next day Balaam took it all back.

The very next day Balaam summoned about him a group of men whose avowed purpose was to exterminate from the face of the earth all of GOD's prophets and people, and get rid of them every: one - the very next day.

What about this man Balaam? He is the type of the undecided man, the type of the vacillating, hesitating, irresolute, wavering man; and that is the most difficult type of all, I have thought, to reach with the Gospel - the man one day serious, and the next day putting it all away; one hour saying: "I have sinned. Let me die like a good man ought to die," and the next day mocking it all. He is the type of the wavering soul.

How difficult to reach such soul with the Gospel of grace!

- For convictions not followed get fainter and die.
- Impressions not followed blow away like the blossoms are blown from the trees in the orchards in the springtime.

Every time a conviction to do a duty is felt and not followed, the life-blood is let out and the soul is weaker. Every time one's duty on any subject is clear and plain, and the man hesitates, through policy, through fear, for any cause, he is weaker thereafter in his deepest manhood. Oh, soul, wavering, irresolute, undecided soul, how difficult to reach your soul with the Gospel! The alarm clock you set to wake you in the morning will wake you, if when you hear it you will obey it and rise from the bed promptly in response to the summons. But you let that alarm be sounded, and

you turn over and say: "I will sleep a little more; I will take a dozen minutes, or half an hour," and trifle with the clock like that, and keep that up a little while, and you may put that clock under your pillow at last, and it will give its alarm, as usual, but you will steep the sound slumber, and will not respond at all.

Oh, like that there comes in the awful power that undoes the soul, when one hears and feels and knows that duty calls, and yet puts it all away, as did this man Balaam.

There was another man I would name, who confessed his sins to no good purpose, but made his case worse, and that was that man Achan, a soldier in Joshua's army.

You recall the circumstances, do you not, under which he made his confession of sin? A soldier he was in Joshua's army, and specific directions had been given for the guidance and government of such army, and there was a fixed penalty, severe and terrible, if such directions should be trifled with by the soldiers.

Away they went to the conflict, led by Joshua, and yet, strange to say, Joshua's army, brave and mighty, was completely routed, and the hearts of his men were poured out like water, and they fled like the wild beasts of the hills, and Joshua was on his face, ashamed and broken-hearted because of the shameful defeat.

And GOD said to him: "Get Thee up, Joshua, and search the army, and thou will find the reason for the fearful failure."

And you recall that the whole army was searched, company by company, regiment by regiment, man by man, the whole army, and at last the searchers came to the last company, came to the right man, and put their finger on the right man, who was the culprit, who had made the mischief, who had wrought the awful defeat, and this man was led away to meet his awful penalty in death. And as he was thus led away, poor, doomed Achan blurted out his confession, "**I have sinned!**", as they led him away to the awful penalty of death.

Oh, I do not need to follow Achan further, to ask what became of him! I do not know. But I do need to say, with all the emphasis with which I can marshal words to say it, that I personally have little confidence in death-bed confessions, when the soul is leaving the suffering body and going out into eternity. I will not be understood as saying that a dying man may not truly repent of his sins and be saved. He may. The Bible gives us one case where a dying man did truly repent - the thief on the cross - and JESUS made answer to him: "**To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.**" He did repent, but the Bible gives only one example of one in the last hour who repented of sin. The Bible gives only one example - one, that people may not utterly despair, and only one, that people may not recklessly presume.

Oh, men and women, with your wits about you, with your judgments clear, with your consciences sensitive and responsive, I pray you, in such a time as this, calmly and deliberately and thoughtfully, face the question of what you will do with GOD. I follow Achan just a moment more, for Achan could not die to himself.

I have been saying, according to the Scriptures, that no man can live to himself, nor can anyone

die to himself, and Achan is an awful illustration and demonstration of that momentous truth.

Read the story of Achan and you will come across this awful sentence: "**That man Achan perished not alone in his iniquity;**" and read the story a little further, and a little more closely, and you will find that thirty-six men went down with Achan to his awful fate. Oh, influence!

- When will we be done with influence?
- We will be done with it not at all.
- We will be done with it nowhere.
- You can no more be separated from your influence than you can be separated from your shadow as you walk in the sun.

Achan did not die alone, but took thirty-six men down with him to dusty death. Oh, influence!

How serious, how momentous, how terrible, is the fact of influence!

I wonder if a parent could have another hell quite so horrible as for a child to look the parent in the face, Father or mother, and say to such parent: "You brought me here by your own example!" Could there be another hell quite so terrible as that? I wonder if there could be another remorse quite so consuming for any man or woman, as for some soul in the world hereafter to say to such man or woman: "I imitated you, and you brought me the downward way!"

I pray you, oh, I pray you, save your influence to the right side!

I have one more case to present, telling how sin is confessed, but that is the right case.

I could present a number, but one will do. There is a right way whereby to confess sin, and if we confess our sins in that right way, we shall have forgiveness. What is the right way?

One case will illustrate.

I take the story of the prodigal son, the most familiar story, perhaps, in all the Bible. You remember how he went away from home, and wasted his substance rapidly in riotous living, and went down, and down, and down, and was at last yonder in the swine field, feeding the swine and eating of the food wherewith he fed the swine. But one day he came to himself, and he followed such self-awakening with thought, with resolution, and with action, and he brought himself back the homeward way.

Look at his case just a moment.

First of all, the Bible tells us that he came to himself.

He came to himself at last, far from home, down yonder in the world, in the field of waste and failure. He came to himself.

How significant that expression: "**When he came to himself.**"

Oh, Spirit of GOD, give the people to come to themselves, religiously and spiritually! He came to himself, and he bethought himself: "Back yonder at home, they have plenty and to spare, and here I am starving among the swine. What wretched waste is my portion!" said the prodigal. But he did not stop with that. He was filled with sorrow over his course, and said: "I will go back and tell Father, and in the sight of GOD make my confession that I have sinned against Father and against Heaven, and no more am worthy to be called my Father's son. I will take a place unknown as one of the hired servants, and I will go back and make that confession of my wrong, my waste, my sin."

Right there are the beginnings of repentance.

- He sees his wrong course.
- He acknowledges his wrong course.
- He sorrows over his wrong course.

Right there are the beginnings of repentance.

But then he rises up, for that is not enough, and he makes a great resolve, and the resolve was this: "I will arise and go back to my Father, and make my confession full and complete."

What wonders are wrought by resolution! Mountains are transformed into molehills by resolution. What Wonders are wrought by resolution! - He rises up and says: "I will! I will! I will decide. I will choose. I will make up my mind. I will!" Oh, how grand a thing is resolution!

Alexander was asked how he conquered the world, and he said that he conquered it by making up his mind, and then by not delaying to act when his mind was made up.

And Lowell magnifies this truth when he sings:

Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide.
In the strife 'twixt truth and falsehood,
For the good or evil side.

This prodigal son made up his mind. But that was not enough. The Bible tells us in the next sentence that he acted.

In the next sentence, the Bible tells us that he arose and came to his Father.

Now, that is vital. That is the gist of the whole matter. He arose and came.

- It is not enough to wish.
- It is not enough to desire.
- It is not enough to feel.
- It is not enough to long.
- It is not enough to purpose.
- It is not enough to resolve.

The very gist of it is to rise up, as did this prodigal, and act. He arose and came.

You know the rest. You know how he was welcomed. You know what he received. The old Father was waiting for him and looking for him down the long road, which road the boy had traveled when he went away. And one day, the old Father saw the son coming; when the son was yet a great way off, that Father's eye of constancy and love discerned him, and down that road the Father went hastily to meet that returning son. Down the road the Father went, and up the road there came the son, and when the son was yet a great way off, the Father saw him, and ran toward him, and had compassion on him.

The Father took that son, now all rags and shame, to his fatherly heart, and the son began his confession: "I have sinned, Father, against you and in the sight of Heaven. I have made shipwreck of my life."

- And the Father said to his servants: "Bring the best robe for this our son."

- And to others: "Kill the fatted calf and provide for this son."

- And to another servant: "Bring the ring to put on his finger" - the ring, emblem of the love that never ends.

And the welcome given to the returning son was unspeakable, and the sweetness and power of it all is such as to melt all our hearts.

What is that story? What does it picture? Just this: It is a picture of how much GOD wishes to forgive any person anywhere, who would come to Him and have His forgiveness.

As I come to the last moments of this message, I am coming to ask, are there men and women here who say: "We are wrong with GOD, but we wish to be right with GOD?" Do they say, whether members of the church or not: "We are wrong with GOD, but we wish to be right with GOD; we wish our sins forgiven; we wish to be recovered from the wrong road and the wrong life?" In the church or out, professing religion or not, do they say: "We are wrong with GOD, but in GOD's own time and way, we would be right with GOD?"

A little while ago I asked those who had special objects for whose forgiveness and salvation they would have us unitedly pray, to witness to such fact, and many were the uplifted hands which gave such witness.

Now, I would ask, are there souls here who lift their hands to say: "I am wrong with GOD and know it, but I wish you to pray for me, for I wish to be right with GOD, in GOD's own time and way?"

Before we have a moment of prayer my eye sweeps the audience to see if souls are here to-night who say: "Yes, I lift my hand, that you and others may speak to GOD for me, for I am wrong with Him, but wish to be right."

My eye will search the audience for just a moment, to ascertain, if candidly and earnestly, hands are lifted to witness to the fact:

"I am wrong with GOD, but I wish you to pray for me that I may be right with GOD in GOD's

own time and way."

This is, indeed, a solemn moment. There were many uplifted hands. GOD be merciful to you, and forgive you!

He surely will, if you will only turn to Him now in the right way.

Now, listen! You wish to be right with GOD. Oh, He wishes it for you a thousand-fold more than you can wish it. GOD wishes your life to be made right a thousand-fold more than you wish it. GOD wishes it enough to give His Son to die for you!

Be not afraid just now to surrender your all to Him, Oh, man, or woman, or child here to-night, saying in heart: "I am wrong with GOD." Be not afraid just there to surrender your case to CHRIST.

- He does the forgiving, but you are to give up to Him.
- He does the saving, but you are to decide that He may.
- He does the changing within you that is necessary, but you are to yield to Him that He may.

Be not afraid to make that surrender to Him now, to be His from this hour, forever.

Outside of one of our cities, some time ago, a train was wrecked, and a crowded Pullman of people were killed in that frightful wreck, and every man on such Pullman train was a citizen of the city, except one man.

He was a stranger, and they did not know him, and they carried those bodies back to the city and had a funeral service for them all, there in a large hall. Women and men came, and took their last look at that row of caskets, their last look on the faces of their beloved. And wives and sisters and daughters came, and bent over the caskets here and there, and imprinted the last kiss - the kiss of love upon the faces of the loved ones. But nobody kissed that stranger's face. Nobody knew him.

But presently there came a little woman, aged and poor. She had looked at the other faces, and had watched their loved ones kiss them, and seeing everybody pass by this stranger's face, she bent over that face a moment, and looked intently, and then she sobbed as she said: "I will kiss him once for his mother's sake!" And she gave her kiss.

Oh, soul, far more quickly than that does the Lord wait to give you His forgiving kiss - the kiss of reconciliation, the kiss of pardon, the kiss of peace, the kiss of salvation, if you will only yield yourself to Him! Be not afraid to do it now!

Yonder in London, an aged woman heard that glorious preacher, William Dawson, say one night, that CHRIST wanted to save the worst man in London, and would save him, if such man would just give up to CHRIST.. And the little, aged, kindly woman, who was always trying to do good, went out to see a man whom she knew, dying on his pallet of straw, dying from consumption, and she told him what the preacher said - that CHRIST wanted to save the worst man in London.

The man would not accept it, but shook his head. The man was very sinful in life and hard in heart. The man said: "It could not be so. I am that worst man, but CHRIST has no love or interest in me."

Then the gentle woman went back after the preacher and said: "You must come to help him. I cannot. I am unable."

And presently, William Dawson was there bending beside him, and Dawson said: "How is it, friend?" The poor fellow, there in his place of squalor and wretchedness, answered:

"I am not your friend, and you are not mine. I do not have any friends, and I am not entitled to any."

But Dawson went on with gentle words, and said: "Yes, I am your friend, and therefore have I come;" and he talked on and on, and said presently: "That is not the best of it. JESUS, the great Saviour, is your friend, and loved you enough to die for you, and if you are just willing, He will take you and save you, even in this awful plight to which you have come."

And the man listened, and the man's heart softened and responded, and he said: "Oh, if it could just be so, I would like to be forgiven. I would like to be saved, if He would just do it!"

Then Dawson quoted some of the great promises: "**Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.**" And again: "**Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.**"

And on and on Dawson talked, and then he said: "My friend, I will pray for you, and while I pray, you just tell the Saviour what a poor sinner you are, but that you will just give yourself up to Him, that He may be your Saviour."

The poor fellow made his surrender, and deep was his joy and peace, while they talked afterward. But presently, he said to Dawson: "I could die in absolute peace, if just one thing were granted me."

"What is it?" asked Dawson.

The man replied:

"I am the black sheep of my Father's family. I committed an awful crime when I was a young fellow, and broke my parents' hearts, and disgraced my home, and when at last I went home, Father was stern. He met me and said:

'Joseph, if that is the best that you can do, there is the gate, and you need not embarrass us by your presence.'"

And said Joseph: "I took him at his word, and I did not go about them any more. I went into the deepest sin. I have come to the depths of sin. But now at last I, have turned to CHRIST, and in

His marvelous mercy He has forgiven me. If I could just hear Father say: 'Joseph, I will forgive you, too,' I could go away without one cloud."

William Dawson said: "Where does your Father live, and who is he?"

The dying man told him, and William Dawson said: "I will try to find him."

And across great London, William Dawson went, street after street, over long distances, and at last he reached the right street, the right home, and he rang the bell, and the door opened, and a white-haired old man, venerable and dignified, stood in the door, and William Dawson asked his name. He was the right man.

Then William Dawson began: "I have come to tell you about your son Joseph," and the man's hand was up, like that, repellent and quieting. "I once had such a son," said the old man, with his face white from bitter memories, "but he shamed us all, and I showed him the door and the gate, If you have anything, sir, to say about him, there is the door and the gate for you!"

William Dawson paused.

What could he say? He waited a moment more and said:

"Well, I will go, sir. I am sorry. Your son Joseph is dying, and will soon be dead, and GOD has forgiven him, and he longs for you to tell him that you forgive him, too."

And then the proud head of that Father came down, and he cried out as with a great pain: "Oh, man, is my Joseph dying? My little Joseph? My boy, who used to sit on Father's knee? My boy is dying and wanting me to forgive him? Oh, man take me to him as quickly as you can!"

William Dawson said they hurried over that city as fast as cab and car could take them, and after awhile they had reached the place, and the old man was beside his dying Joseph, and took up that skeleton in his arms, and embraced him as a mother presses her child to her heart, and sobbed out his own broken heart.

And the dying Joseph said: "Father, GOD has forgiven me. I know it. Poor sinner that I am, I have surrendered to Him, and He has forgiven me. Oh, Father, I just wanted you to forgive me, too!"

The Father said: "My boy, my precious boy, if I had only known that you wanted me to forgive you, never did I see the day that I could have held out against your wish that I should forgive you!"

Tell me, will a man forgive, and GOD be hard-hearted and unresponsive?

The one thing the great pitying Father in Heaven wants to do this hour is to forgive every man and woman in this press of people who wants to be right with GOD. Just give up to Him. He will forgive in His own way. Just pray this simple prayer and follow it:

"Here, Lord, I give myself to Thee; it is all that I can do."

It is all He asks. It is all He wishes. Do that, I pray you. Do that while you may. Do that while you wish to do it. Do that here, in this place of prayer, even this very hour.

Two voices are here to-night, two voices, and I can hear them now. The first voice makes its cry: "Not yet!"

You know where that voice comes from. It is Satan's voice: "Not yet! Not yet!" It is the way of death. "Not yet!" Oh, listen not to it! Put it away.

There is another voice that can be heard, if you will only listen: "I will! I will! I will!, GOD help me! I will, and I will now!"

We are going to sing that Gospel song: "Jesus is tenderly calling Thee home, calling to-day, calling to-day." As they sing, I stand here to greet you. Is the man here, or woman or child, that says: "I am that person who has been wrong with GOD?" In the church or out, does one say: "I have neglected duty. I have broken vows. I have sinned. I have wandered. I have drifted. I have gone into backsliding. I am that person in the church. I want to renew my vows. I want CHRIST to make my case right, and I will surrender to Him, and renew my vows with Him, publicly to-night?" Come and take my hand.

But does somebody say: "No, that is not my case?"

Does somebody say: "This is my case: I have already surrendered to CHRIST, but I never did make it known. Here to-night I will make it known?"

Does somebody say:

"That is not my case yet. This is my case: I want to surrender to Him. I want His forgiveness. I want Him to save me, and to-night He offers to save me, if I will just come to Him, just decide for Him, just surrender to Him; I will gladly surrender to Him now." Do you say: "That is my case?" Then come and take my hand.

Is the case here that says: "One of those three cases includes me?" Come, take my hand, as they earnestly sing this Gospel song, before our final prayer.

THE CLOSING PRAYER

We go now, O gracious Father, with hearts profoundly grateful to Thee. For thou art good and ready to forgive, and thou art plenteous in mercy unto all who can upon Thee. We commend these who seek Thee and yield to Thee one by one, and every one, to Thy mercy, praying Thee that from this night their surrender to Thee may be a complete and an eternal surrender. We pray also for men and women who have said they want to be right with GOD, but are hesitating to come to Him. They are in life's middle time, numbers of them, strong and mature in mind and body, and there are others, young men and women, who are seeking the Lord. O, we commend every one to Thy mercy - to Thy leading. Give that to-night they shall come utterly and finally and decisively to the end of their waiting, and that each one shall say: "As for me, to-night and

forever, from this hour, I give myself to CHRIST, that He may be my Saviour and Master forever." Day by day, and hour by hour, give Thy people, Lord, to speak and to do and to pray according to Thy righteous will.

And now as we go, may the blessing of the triune GOD be granted us all and each, even as He deemeth best for us. for CHRIST's sake. Amen.

~ end of chapter 17 ~
