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Testimonials for Old-Fashioned Truths.*

I.

LUKE 13, 24—30.

The sermons of our Savior sparkle with telling parables. As we peruse the record which the evangelists have given of His active ministry, we cannot but be impressed with the fact that they were distinct favorites in His public and private discourses. I call them telling parables because they are striking illustrations to drive home momentous and important truths. Some one has said: "They are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning." Such a parable has been selected to rivet our attention to-day. Under God's gracious guidance let us, then, consider:—

THE CLOSED DOOR.

1. *The door is now open.*
2. *The door will surely be closed.*
3. *The closed door will find you within or without.*

The Savior had just been asked by one of the audience to whom He had been preaching: "Lord, are there few that be saved?" This man had evidently missed the point which our Lord had made in His sermons. He was asking about a matter which was of no concern to his soul's welfare. Hence Christ gave him an answer which should set him right. He told him: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." That was equivalent to saying: "No man who thinks seriously about his eternal salvation will worry about such a question, but will rather focus his attention upon this one thing that he be saved. To engrave this truth indelibly upon his heart, the Lord tells this parable: The master of a house is anxiously waiting for more and more guests to come to his beautiful mansion. At his hour he will arise and

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shut the door, after which no more guests will be received. Heaven is the mansion. Jesus is the Master of the house. He is eager and anxious to have His mansion filled with guests. To that end He has His messengers out everywhere, not merely extending, but pressing the invitation to come unto Him, and to come now, ere it is too late.

The very fact that the Savior uses such language as: "Strive to enter in," and that He speaks of the time when the master is risen up to shut the door, shows that the door is still open. Men still have opportunity to enter into the glories of heaven. In fact, Jesus has set the door ajar for the very purpose that sinners such as you and I might have opportunity to enter. Man had really closed the door against himself. Like unto an insurmountable barrier sin lay before the door, and man could do nothing whatever to remove it. Or, take another view of it if you will. By rebelling against God, man had compelled God to shut the door against him, and until the cause of God's wrath would be removed, cherubims with flaming swords would hinder man from entering into Paradise again. That, however, excluded every possibility for man to gain entrance, for he could not remove sin. But Christ, out of boundless love toward us sinners, undertook to perform the task. Not only did He undertake it, He actually performed the stupendous task. By suffering and dying for the sins of mankind which He bore, He appeased the wrath of God, He removed the barrier, He opened the door. This is not merely a beautiful fancy and an imaginary creation, but an actual fact and a joyous reality. The Word of our God attests everywhere the glorious truth which our text presents that the door of heaven is open for us.

My friend, I want to proclaim with all emphasis possible: The door of heaven is *now* open. It is open for *you*. You are still living in God's time of grace. The Savior is busy with the preaching of His Gospel. Thereby He is inviting you and urging you to come in. He tells also you: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." He calls you now. He pleads with you to come unto Him. He declares unto you: "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." Will you not come unto Him, then? Will you not enter in unto Christ? Will you let Him plead in vain?—Do you ask how you may come? The Scriptural answer is: By sincere repentance and faith. Come to Him just as you are, confessing your sins and transgressions, relying solely upon the shedding of His precious blood and His innocent suffering and death for the forgiveness of your sin. Come and say with the Christian poet: "Just as I am, without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,

O Lamb of God, I come! I come!" But, you say that Jesus speaks here of a *strait* gate. That is true. It is not a way suitable to the flesh. The flesh would rather continue in sin. True repentance, however, excludes that. It includes an abhorring of sin, a denial of self and the world.

When God urges you to come *now*, He means just exactly what He says. He does not want you to delay. You cannot afford to delay. Such procedure is too dangerous. The door to the Master's house will not always remain open. The Master Himself will surely arise to shut the door. This is the truth which Christ declares most emphatically in our text. The Christ who has now ascended into the glory of His Father, who is keeping the door to heaven ajar that we sinners might enter, who by His Word is urging us to enter in, will surely come in His glory to judge the quick and the dead, and then heaven's doors will be closed. When we study the signs of the times, the signs which He has predicted as such, which would precede His second coming, and see for ourselves that they are daily being fulfilled before our eyes, we cannot but be impressed with the fact that this day is rapidly drawing nigh. The world's time of grace is nearing its end. The door will soon be closed.

Again, my friend, you may be called away by death at any time. That moment will summon you before the judgment of God. Regardless of what the Roman Church may teach about a purgatory, from which they offer the souls of the departed an opportunity to escape the punishment of hell if sufficient cash is paid into the treasury, or regardless of what the Millennial Dawnist may claim to know about another opportunity being given to man after death, you can put it down that the moment of your death will end your time of grace and close the doors of heaven for you. Listen to what God has to say on the subject: "It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the Judgment." That clinches all argument. More than that, it emphasizes the urgent necessity of coming unto Christ now, because the moment of your death may be closer at hand than you think.

There is still another thought which arrests our attention as we study this text, and that is this: When once the door is closed, it remains closed forever. The closed door will find us either within or without. If we have believed in Christ, we shall be with Him in the heavenly mansions. The Lord speaks here of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and the people from the East and from the West and from the North and from the South who shall sit down in the kingdom of God. He speaks there of the hosts from all parts of the earth who have come to faith in Christ like unto the patriarchs of old.

They are assured of being within the kingdom of heaven. They shall sit at Christ's heavenly table, and eat of His eternal manna and drink of His river of pleasures forevermore.

On the other hand, Christ speaks of such as will stand without and knock at the door, pleading: "Lord, Lord, open unto us!" They are all such as have neglected their time of grace, and have refused to accept Christ as their only hope of salvation. But then it will be too late. The door will not be opened for them again. Christ will tell them: "I know not whence ye are." They refused to know Him here. He will refuse to know them there.—But think not that this means only such as have never joined the Church. There will be a great number of outward church-members without the door on that day. The Lord speaks of those who will begin to argue: "We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets." This was spoken first of all to the Jews, who claimed to be the seed of Abraham, but whose heart was far from God. It is equally true of the many who in our day claim to be church-members, while their whole religion is a matter of the head and lips and not of the heart. Unto these hypocrites Christ will say: "I tell you, I know not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity!" They shall be compelled to spend eternity without, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The door is closed, forever closed, against them.

My friend, this is God's truth plainly told. What great earnestness ought to seize us as we think of it! How about you? Where will you be when the door is closed? Will it find you within or without? Have you accepted Christ as your Savior? Are you now a believer? Do you say: I am too busily engaged with other matters? Then you have more earthly business than God wants you to have. Remember this is your time of grace. The door is now open for you. Your most important business of life is, and should be, to strive to enter in at the strait gate. O therefore: "Admit Him lest His anger burn, And He, departing, ne'er return; Admit Him, or the hour's at hand When at His door denied you'll stand." Amen.

II.

ACTS 16, 29—31.

The world is full of religions, which aim to offer unto man the peace and hope and joy which his heart craves. We are wont to divide them into two classes: the Christian religion and the non-Christian religions. Such a division is absolutely fair, because all

other religions are diametrically opposed to the Christian religion. They teach a way unto salvation which is the direct contradiction of salvation by the blood of Christ, which we Christians teach and confess. Ever since the Savior commissioned His Church to go out into the world and preach the Gospel unto every creature, the Christian religion has challenged the right of every other religion to exist, and has set up for itself the claim that it is the only right religion. In clear, decided language do we proclaim the ringing challenge: "There is salvation in none other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

Will this challenge stand? Since a matter of such paramount importance as our soul's salvation hinges upon it, we ought to be eager to investigate it thoroughly. In the text read to you we have an opportunity to see the false and the Christian religion put to a test.

Paul and Silas had been arrested in Philippi because they had driven an evil spirit out of a certain damsel which brought her masters much gain by her soothsaying. They had been dragged before the magistrates and accused of rebellious conduct and dangerous teachings. The result was that a mob formed and treated them most brutally and shamefully. After this they entrusted them into the hands of the jailer for safe-keeping. This hard-hearted ruffian took pleasure in adding to the tortures of these men by thrusting them into the inner prison, and making their feet fast in the stocks, a device which forced their feet apart and held them in a viselike grip. I mention this because it throws some light upon the character of this man, concerning whom we have little or no direct information otherwise. We know, however, that prison-keepers in that day of Rome's declining glory were rough characters. This Philippian jailer was without question a man saturated with heathenism. The position which he held, and the fact that he had been given such strict instructions regarding the safe-keeping of these prisoners, warrant the statement that he must have known something about the events which led to their arrest, and consequently he must have heard something about the truths, the way of salvation, which they had proclaimed. But he treated all of this with utmost contempt. He wanted nothing to do with the Christian religion. His own religion was good enough for him. He may not have said this in so many words, but his actions spoke louder than words could tell. With haughty demeanor he did all he could to increase the tortures of the tortured messengers of Christianity, and then, as if with a feeling of satisfaction that his own religion supplied his every need, he fell asleep.

All was well until midnight, when God answered the prayers of His servants by an earthquake, which shook the foundations of the prison, and opened the heavily bolted doors, and loosed the bands of every prisoner. The jailer, aroused from his sleep, saw the prison-doors open, and his first thought was that surely his prisoners must have escaped. He was frightened and frenzied. He knew that his life would have to answer for their escape. What shall he do? His heathen religion offered him no comfort and hope. It drove him to despair. He drew his sword to end it all, and the records of that Roman prison would contain the account of this jailer's suicide, had not the loud cry of Paul's voice stayed his hand. Heathenism would have hastened another soul to hell. It had failed most miserably in the crucial test. Nor was this all. His religion was brought face to face with Christianity to meet the challenge. He called for light and hastened into the prison trembling. He saw and convinced himself that none of his charges had escaped though they had every opportunity of doing so. What a flood of thoughts must have rushed through the mind of this man! What remarkable behavior for prisoners! Who were they? Ah, had not the soothsaying damsel called them servants of the most high God? And did not the terrible earthquake, the open prison-door, the release of their feet from the stocks, show positively that this was absolutely true? And, oh, how had he mistreated these messengers of God! How have I sinned against God! What shall I do? What shall I do? Heathenism again failed most miserably. It could not stand this acid test. It had not even the faintest ray of hope to offer to this despairing soul. But he had heard that these men show the way of salvation. The damsel had cried that after them. Would they be able to help him in this fearful trouble? Look, that erstwhile hard-hearted ruffian came with trembling step, quivering and shaking all over his body, and fell down before two of his charges, and begged of them: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" With that question he had thrown heathenism overboard, had admitted that it was bankrupt, and openly declared it to be a dismal failure.

Now Christianity was put to a test. Paul and Silas were more than anxious to have the test applied. They knew what it could accomplish. They answered the anxious inquirer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." What a brief answer! Yet what a volume of meaning! It is the Christian religion in a nutshell: "Man is hopelessly lost. Jesus came into the world to save us. He offers this salvation to us. We are to accept it by faith in Him. Any sinner who believes this is saved. Any

sinner who rejects this is lost." All of this was embodied in the brief answer which Paul gave.

I stated a moment ago that Christianity was put to a test. Did it stand this test? My friend, can there be any doubt on this point as you read the account before us? Is not this portion of Holy Writ known as "The Conversion of the Philippian Jailer"? Was not this man's bitter despair changed into brightest hope, his terrible trembling into exceeding joy, his stubborn unbelief into fervent faith? Or do you doubt the sincerity of all this? Look at the fruits which his faith bore! This former heathen becomes an active Christian missionary, wants his house instructed in the Christian religion, and desires to be baptized with them. This erstwhile ruffian, who had inflicted pains and bruises, becomes a merciful nurse, who with his own hands washes the stripes of his prisoners. The cruel brute of the evening, who had left his charges in their fever without even a drink of water, becomes a willing host, who sets a table for these men in his own house. Truly, the Christian religion had stood the test. It had worked faith in his heart. It had comforted this despairing man. It had changed his life. It had given him salvation.

My friend, I would offer this to you to-day as irrefutable proof of the fact that the Christian religion will stand the test in trouble. Do you say now that this is but a single instance and proves nothing? I want to ask you to consider that this Philippian jailer represents a great class of people, who are all like him. He is a true picture of every person who is not a Christian, it matters not whether he be an ignorant idol-worshiper in heathen lands, or an educated churchless unbeliever in our civilized countries, or even one of these spiritually clad hypocrites in our visible Christian churches. Of course, in many respects they may differ from the jailer, but in this one thing they are his counterpart: they are all saturated with the heathen doctrine of salvation by their own merits, and not by the blood of Christ. This is the religion of natural man. For that reason you find natural man so haughty and defiant. He wants nothing to do with the Christian religion. He has a religion of his own, which suits him so much better.

All of this seems very well and good until trouble arises. When misfortunes and afflictions set in and the heart yearns for true comfort; when the voice of conscience begins with its thundering accusations; when the search-light of God's Law reveals so many sins and transgressions; when death stares him in the face and would summon him before the judgment throne of God, — then his religion fails him. Then the gods whom he has served will, like Baal, let him cry in vain

for help. Then the abyss of endless despair opens before him. For such a one there is but one help, and that is the religion which will stand the acid test of trouble, the religion which took hold of the heart of the Philippian jailer, the religion which changed a Saul into a Paul, the religion which has brought salvation to every one who is now or ever will be with the Lord in the realms of glory, the religion of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God and Savior of the world.

My friend, you, too, are serving some god. You are professing some religion. Will your religion stand the test in trouble? You may rest assured that the time is coming when it will be put to a test. May God grant you grace that you embrace, and cling to, the only religion which will stand the test: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Amen.

III.

PHIL. 1, 21.

In the theme announced for to-day's consideration we meet the grimpest reality on earth. The very mention of it makes many shudder. There are those who will even try to drown every thought of it, and lead themselves to believe that they are indifferent about it. But what is the use of all this? It does not alter the fact in the least that the dreadful monster Death stalks about through the land and claims his victims everywhere. When the parents of our land received the telegrams two years ago: "Your son was killed in action," they knew that death was a reality. When the terrible epidemic claimed our loved ones here, it was brought home to us. Yes, every time we see a funeral procession pass through the streets of our cities, we are forcibly reminded of the fact. My friend, unless Judgment Day come before that time, also you and I will be called upon to die. Let us not strive to evade the thought of it. You are not going to stay the hand of death even a moment by doing so, nor will you in that way be able to change the grim aspect of death even in the slightest degree. Why, then, should we be so foolish and refuse to weigh and consider the most certain and most important moment of our lives? We do not otherwise act in that way. Why should we act thus regarding our death? Ought we not rather inquire diligently what our death will mean to us? Will it be our loss or our gain?

In the text chosen for to-day Paul speaks of his death, and he makes this positive statement: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Can you and I make the same assertion regarding our

death? That all depends. Not every death is gain. To some people death means an irreparable loss; in fact, they lose all in death.

Death was not always in the world. When man issued forth from the hands of the Creator, he was a perfect being. He lived in happy communion with God. There was within him nothing which would either cause or permit death. But man sinned, and with it he ushered death into the world. God says: "Death entered into the world by sin." Again: "The wages of sin is death." Now, when we bear in mind that God also says: "It is appointed unto man once to die, but after that the Judgment," we see that death embodies an enormous loss. It leads to the judgment of God, that judgment in which absolute righteousness and justice will be meted out, that judgment which will result in everlasting punishment for every one who will not be able to stand without even the slightest flaw and blemish before the all-beholding eye of the heavenly Judge. On that day there will be no hiding of any guilt, no resort to mere technicalities, no bribery of judge or jury, no giving of any distress signal, no suspended sentences. The Lord tells us: "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

But this places us in a most terrible dilemma. We have sinned. We cannot stand in that judgment. We are facing eternal damnation. Yes, my friend, unless some decided change is wrought, this is only too true of every one among men. If a person remains in that horribly sinful condition which our first parents have brought upon the world; if he continues to live in sin; if his life here upon earth means nothing more than the gratification of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; if he lives only for this world, or, in short, if he has to change the words of our text to read: "For to me to live is myself," — then he will have to add: "To die is loss." This is true not only of the man who by his death is called upon to leave behind great riches and earthly pleasures and a host of friends, but also of him who had a most miserable existence here, so that we would be inclined to think that death is a relief for him. No, such a death is the worst loss a man can sustain. It means more than the loss of earthly possessions and pleasures and friends. It is a gateway through which he must pass out of this life into the fearful eternal death which awaits him. It hurls him into the abyss of eternal damnation.

I know full well that in our day we hear a great deal of talk which is supposed to soften the sound of these words. They tell us that

God is a God of mercy, and that He will surely not inflict such terrible punishment upon any one. Such talk is nothing short of rankest nonsense and has absolutely no Scriptural warrant. That amounts to nothing else than picturing the merciful God as a good, weak old father, who will simply close an eye over against the sins of His children. That cancels every semblance of justice. That totally destroys the picture of a perfect God whom the Scriptures teach. I do not want to be understood as though I wanted to deny the mercy of God. Far be it from me to create such an impression. Thank God that we are permitted to preach God's mercy! But I want to impress upon your minds that the mercy which we preach, the only mercy of God which the Scriptures know, is a mercy which does not sacrifice the justice of God, but one that is based upon satisfied justice, a mercy that has been rendered possible by the suffering and death of the only-begotten Son of God, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This very fact, and this fact alone, enabled Paul to speak of his death as gain. He did not base this conviction upon anything within himself, upon his own good works or his good conduct. Do you not notice that he prefaces this assertion with the remark: "For to me to live is Christ"? The reason for regarding his death as gain he finds in Christ. Paul had not always viewed the matter thus. There was a time when he was a bitter enemy of Christ, and of every one who professed faith in Christ. He even went so far as to persecute the Christians. He was on that kind of mission when the resurrected Christ took hold of him, and taught him the folly and sinfulness of his course. The outcome of that meeting was that Paul was called to be a minister of the Gospel, to receive instruction, and by this Gospel this greatest enemy of Christ was changed into a firm believer in Christ. He had learned that all his own supposed holiness and righteousness would never stand in the sight of God, and that if he had died before his conversion, his death would have been an indescribable loss. But by God's grace he had learned to believe that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This Christ became his one and all. He even went so far as to tell his congregations: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

Do you ask, Why such an astounding change in this man? I will answer: Because God Himself taught him that Christ, and Christ alone, has changed our loss in death into a gain. You must read what he has to say to appreciate the truth of this statement fully. When you hear him exclaim exultantly: "Christ has abolished death, and

brought life and immortality to light," and again: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," you will understand that Paul firmly believed that Christ through His suffering and death had fully satisfied the demands of God's justice, and thus changed our temporal death, which led to the fearful loss of eternal damnation, into a gateway leading unto the glorious gain of eternal life. That is precisely what Christ meant to Paul. Hence he had committed himself unto Christ. He lived in Christ, and Christ in him. Yea, his whole life now had but one source, one foundation, one aim and purpose, and that was Christ.

Should he, then, fear death? Ah, no! His death would be gain to him. It would lead him unto Christ, lead him there where he might be with Him forevermore. It would lead him to see his Savior face to face. It would change his walking by faith into walking by sight. It would bring him into a full realization and a perfect enjoyment of his new life in Christ.

"For me to die is gain." Paul could say this not because he was an apostle, but because he was a Christian. Like unto him every Christian gains by dying. I say every Christian because the Bible states emphatically: "Whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life." True enough, death may end a happy life here on earth, but it leads to the far greater happiness of eternal life; it may snatch us away from a circle of loved ones on earth, but it unites us with the loved ones, yea, with the dearest Friend in heaven; it may deprive us of the enjoyment of our temporal possessions, but it brings us into full enjoyment of the glorious eternal treasures before the throne of our God. We are thereby exchanging the temporal for the eternal, the earthly for the heavenly.

My friend, do you want your death to be such a gain? You are going to die. Every tick of the clock brings your death just that much closer. Do you want your death to be gain? Oh, by God's grace come to Him who said: "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Amen.

IV.

JAS. 5, 16.

"What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!" Thus the Church sings with the Christian poet in that well-known church-hymn. What a volume of truth these words contain! Prayer is indeed a privilege, one of the grandest privileges which Christians

enjoy. Think of it! We poor sinful mortals are permitted to speak with the great Father in heaven, and make all of our wants and requests known unto Him. We are allowed to "ask Him with all boldness and confidence, as dear children ask their dear Father."

This privilege is by no means the result of our own merit or worthiness. We have not earned it, nor are we worthy of it. By sin we have rebelled against God, and deserved the rebel's reward. But boundless grace has moved God to send His only-begotten Son into the world that by His suffering and death He might atone for our sins and reconcile us unto Himself; and for the sake of His Son He adopts us as His children and grants us the full privilege of a child. My friend, is prayer a privilege? I pray you, stop, and look, and listen, and wonder! Just this fact that it has been earned for us at so astounding a price as the holy, precious blood of Christ and His innocent suffering and death ought to move our hearts and lips to sing with humbler reverence, deeper gratitude, and higher joy: "What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!"

It would seem, then, that men would eagerly enjoy and make use of this grand privilege. But just the opposite is true. How sorely is prayer neglected! What shameful reluctance, carelessness, and indifference do men show everywhere! I know full well that in our day many utterances are made which are supposed to be prayers, but that is about all you can say for them. They are far from being prayers in the Biblical sense of the term. They lack all fundamental requirements of a prayer. How often do not men say, "Let us pray," and then follow up their invitation with all manner of elaborate phrases addressed to some Supreme Being or Deity which is the creation of their own mind, but surely not the God whom the Scriptures reveal. I refer here to all church-bodies, secret societies, and organizations that either openly deny the doctrine of the Triune God, or else purposely formulate their "prayers" so that no mention of Christ or the Triune God is made in them. Let no man deceive himself into believing that they can be called prayers. God's Word makes it very plain that the Triune God is the only God, and that every true prayer must be addressed to Him. "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve," again: "I will not give My glory to another," are His unalterable statements. Again the Word of God states positively that Christ dare not be omitted. Jesus says: "All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him." That settles the matter once for all. Only a prayer to the Triune God is a true prayer.

Another fundamental requirement of a true prayer Jesus mentions when He says: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in My name*." That expression leaves no room for doubt. We can pray to the Father only in Jesus' name. What can the Savior mean by this expression? Consulting His Word elsewhere, we find that He means, on the one hand, that we are to ask "according to His will." The things for which we ask must conform to His good will and pleasure. When we ask for things spiritual, we can come unconditionally, because we know that they are always according to His will. But when we ask for temporal things, we do not know what really serves our best interests. He does. Being the omniscient God, and, furthermore, ever bent upon our welfare, He knows and wills that which is really for our good. On the other hand, to pray in His name means to pray relying upon Him and His merit. You and I have need of this. We cannot stand before God in our own righteousness. We lack the perfection which God demands. We need Christ as our Mediator. We need His blood to wash away our guilt. We need the garments of His righteousness to cover our guilt. Even as of old Joseph's brethren could not see his face unless they brought Benjamin with them, so we cannot come before God unless we have Christ, our Brother, with us. But having Him with us, we have access unto the Father; for God cannot and will not deny the merits of His only-begotten Son.

St. James, in the text read to you, speaks of *fervent* prayer, and thereby mentions another fundamental requirement of a true prayer. This strikes at the root of another grave abuse of prayer. There were such in the days of Christ, and to this day there are such as imagine that they are praying when they recite certain formulas. The Savior pointed to the Pharisees as a warning example. Again He applied to the scribes and Pharisees the word of the prophet: "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me." And who does not think here of that pertinent statement taken from Christ's Sermon on the Mount: "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking"? These statements deal the practise of thoughtless prayers a telling blow. They eliminate them from the category of prayer; yes, they really do not count them worthy of that name. If that could be called prayer, then you could teach a parrot to pray. No! A true prayer must proceed from the heart. The Bible knows no other. Well ought we take this matter to heart. How often are we guilty of saying our prayers and not praying them! How often do they

sink to the level of mere cold, thoughtless lip-service! It is no wonder that such prayers do not accomplish anything.

True prayers, however, are a mighty power. Our text calls them "effectual," and tells us that they avail much. By such prayers great things have been accomplished. I would like to call your attention to the fact that immediately following the assertion which our text makes it furnishes undeniable proof of the power of a true prayer. It reminds us of the great thing which Elijah accomplished by prayer. He prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Again we know that by prayer Moses gained a decided victory over the Amalekites for the children of Israel. By prayer the disciples of our Lord accomplished wonders. By prayer God's people have called even the dead to life again. I might continue and greatly lengthen this list from the Word of God, but time is too short, and, besides, these instances surely suffice to prove the claim which our text makes.

The point which we ought to consider here is, that this assertion of our text concerns also you and me. True prayer is still a mighty power, by which much can be accomplished. "It availeth much," has been written to urge and encourage us to pray. God wants us to know that true prayer is not in vain, in order that we might grow all the more willing and anxious to make our requests known unto Him. This is not the only instance where God speaks of this. Think of the many admonitions to prayer which the Bible contains. Nearly all of them add the promise that God will hear prayer. Think how often our Savior speaks of prayer! What remarkably positive language He employs when He speaks of the answer to prayer! Hear Him saying: "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Again: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you." Again: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Such promises of God are no meaningless phrases. The guarantee of Almighty God stands back of every one of them. Just this fact makes prayer such a mighty power. It calls the omnipotence of God into action. That is precisely what God has graciously consented to do for us. God is so eager and anxious to place His omnipotence into our service, for the sake of what His Son has done for us, that He not only permits us to pray, but urges and commands us to do so.

Oh, how this ought to arouse us from our carelessness and

indifference! How eagerly we ought to pray! How much more could be accomplished if there were more fervent prayer by the individual Christian, in the family circle, at the bedside of the sick and suffering, in our meetings in the house of God! Only too often does the Biblical accusation strike us: "Ye have not because ye ask not."

Do you pray? Are you a child of God who can pray? Are your prayers true prayers? God grant grace that we may learn to know prayer as a mighty power which God has placed into our hands, and that we may realize, experience, and appreciate more and more: "What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!" Amen.

V.

JOHN 14, 6.

"Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" "Whom do ye" (*i. e.*, My disciples) "say that I am?" "What think ye" (Pharisees) "of Christ?" These questions of our Savior have sounded, and caused to be put on record, the opinions which men in general, and His disciples and His enemies in particular, held concerning Him. Jesus was anxious to have men know who and what He is. Such knowledge is absolutely essential to salvation. You may be ever so wise and learned in temporal matters, you may have all manner of degrees from colleges and universities, you may be a recognized authority in various fields of learning, if you do not know who and what Christ is, you are hopelessly lost. For that very reason the Savior has left no room for doubt about His person and work. He spoke of it again and again, sometimes in plain, simple language, sometimes in most excellent and striking figures of speech. In the text upon which we desire to focus our attention to-day He declares Himself to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

When Christ calls Himself "the Way," He means to say that He is the only way unto the Father, the only way unto heaven; for He adds: "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Originally no such way was necessary. When God had finished the crown-work of His wonderful creation, man was with God. The eating of the forbidden fruit ended this bliss. Man had chosen to trod the way of sin, and sin led away from God. Man was driven out of Paradise. There was now an awful chasm between the creature and his Maker. Sin had separated man from God. The road which our first parents chose to walk is truly a most horrible one, because it leads ever farther and farther away from God. It is not a pleasant thing about which to think, but it is a fact clearly taught in Holy Writ, that sin is an endless road leading the wayfarer unto the

horrible side of that great gulf which is fixed between heaven and hell, between God and the devil.

Unto us sinners, who by nature are all walking that horrible way, Christ comes and says: "I am the Way that leads unto the Father." Mark well, He does not say: I show the way, as so many in our day teach about Him when they present Him as nothing more than a pattern for our life. Ah, no! Christ says: "*I am the Way.*" If you stood on this side of the Grand Canyon of Colorado, and some one were to point out unto you some precious gem of inestimable value on the other side, and offer it to you if you will cross the deep chasm and get it, such an offer would be worthless. You could not cross. Thus it will never do to point out unto you the indescribable glories of eternal life and offer them to you if you will live like unto Christ. You cannot live like unto Him. The great yawning chasm of sin separates you from the glories of heaven. But Christ says: "I am the Way." He has bridged that chasm. It was a staggering task, but He performed it. I call it staggering because it led the Savior through Gethsemane to Gabbatha and finally out to Golgotha. We are now in that season of the church-year when in our study we concentrate upon the extremely sad events which transpired there. Our time is too limited to enter in upon all of the details. I want to ask you, however, to behold your Savior lying as a prostrate form upon the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane; again see Him standing before Pilate with His head crowned with thorns, His face bespattered, bloody and gory, His back bruised, battered, and beaten to pulp; finally view Him hanging upon the accursed tree of the cross a limp and lifeless form. This is the Christ who is the Way to the Father. In this way He became the way, for in this way He removed sin.

"I am the Truth," is another statement of the Savior in our text. There is so much in this world which lays claim to being the truth; but when the search-light is turned upon it, it turns out to be the rankest falsehood. This is especially true in the realm of religion. The devil, that father of lies, has filled the hearts and minds of men with all manner of religious falsehoods. When he succeeded in getting our first parents to doubt the truth of God's statement concerning the forbidden fruit, he had brought them under the influence of his tyranny of lies. Oh, what horrible tyranny it has proved itself to be, entangling man ever deeper into that awful network of lies. You find this illustrated most convincingly in the various forms of heathenism, which still holds the majority of men under its baneful and destructive influence. What is this other than a system of religion

based upon the damnable lies which the mind of the devil has invented? The Word of our God says about this: "They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator."

Into this deceived world Christ has come to bear witness unto the truth. This is His own declaration before Pilate. Which is that truth? He says: "I am the Truth." He had come into the world to testify concerning Himself. And when you peruse the sacred account of His life, there is surely no lack of such testimony. He leaves no room for doubt about His person. He is the "Son of Man," but He is also the only-begotten Son of God. He and the Father are one. Not only did He declare this in so many words, but He furnished convincing and undeniable proof of it in His many wonderful works, which go begging for an explanation unless we accept them as proof of His divinity. But if this were the end of the testimony concerning Himself, you and I would have reason to quake and to tremble rather than to leap for joy. But thank God! The Truth has also revealed the purpose of His coming. He states: "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." Again: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Thus He challenged the lie which Satan has injected into all other religions. Sift them down, and what have you? Nothing but the brazen lie: Man must save himself. Over against this Christ proclaims: "*I save man.*" That is the truth which God would have the world know. In this Christ, who is not only the Truth, but the saving Truth, God has revealed Himself unto men as the God, who desires our souls' salvation. Not only did Christ claim to be this Truth, He proved it by His life. He actually saved man. His whole life, but especially the sad events which are crowded into the last few hours of His early life, prove that He is the Truth, the saving Truth.

"I am the Life," is Christ's final statement. Again would I call your attention to the blessed condition of man before the Fall. He had life, true life. He lived in blessed communion with God. He was with God, and that is life. But sin entered and not only marred, but ended that life. It robbed the holiness in which God had created man. The result was that man was separated from God, the only Source of Life. He was wholly unfit to serve his Creator. "Dead in trespasses and sin," is the description which the Word of God employs. True enough, he still had temporal life, but this was a living death, and even this temporal life was like worm-eaten fruit. Man was subject to temporal death, and then, yes, then, he faced

eternal death, eternal separation from God. My friend, do you realize into what a sorry plight sin has brought us? Remember this is true of you, of me, of every one among us.

But, thank God! Christ has come to be our Life. He entered into death for us. He endured the death which we had deserved. Do you see Him grappling with death in Gethsemane? That was for you. Do you see Him enduring the horrible tortures before His judges? Do you see how they inflict the horrors of crucifixion upon Him? That was for you. Do you hear Him crying out as He hangs upon the accursed tree: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" There He endured the most horrible feature of death. "Forsaken of God"—only the sufferers of eternal death cry thus. That was for you. Finally, do you see how He bows His head in death? That was for you. Jesus did this that He might destroy death and bring life and immortality to light. Yes, He did it that He might be our Life. The great Resurrection morn proved this beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Beloved, God wants you to have this life. He does not desire your death, but wishes to reunite you with Himself as the only Source of true life. Do you ask how? Jesus says: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Again: "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Without faith in Christ—only death; by faith in Christ—life! God grant us faith that we may live! Yes, O Christ,

Thou art the Way, the Truth, the Life:
Grant us that Way to know,
That Truth to keep, that Life to win,
Whose joys eternal flow.

Houston, Tex.

J. W. BEHNKEN.