

Except ye Repent

By Paris Reidhead*

I turn you this evening to the words of our Lord as they're found throughout the Gospels. There are five Words that I wish to bring to you. Some of you may have heard me use these Words before, but they're true –and truer tonight in my own mind than they've ever been before – and therefore I must share them with you again.

The first Word is found in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 20. You recall the third verse of Hebrews chapter 2 – “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord.” What was it that our Lord first began to say and to speak? Well, this, I believe, is one of the first occasions, and we have a recorded message of our Lord, given in its entirety: it's called the Sermon on the Mount. It begins with the beatitudes.

How often we have heard the beatitudes presented by some who deny our Lord and the blood by which we are purchased, as being just a sort of a standard of conduct, more or less just a ten-rung ladder, by which they hope to climb to heaven. It's not so at all. The beatitudes are the full length portrait of the child of God, the description of the blessed one – and who is blessed but the one that's a new creation in Christ Jesus? And here our Lord describes not how we become blessed, but those who are blessed. It's interesting that at the conclusion of this sermon, as they came down from the mountain, the first one that they met was a leper.

You understand, of course, that according to the laws of Israel, lepers were not to be on the path, as this one was. He was to be out in the place assigned by the priests, equivalent to what we would call the city dump. There, in the caves, he would reside. But this one has heard that the Lord is present, and he has heard that this One, the Lord Jesus Christ, is able to heal lepers. And so he's broken all of the taboos and all the rules and he's right there at the path, as the Lord comes down from the mountain, followed by the entire company that's spread out behind Him on the hillside. And instead of cringing in fear at the side, drawing the black cloth across his lips and crying as he was commanded to do – “Unclean!”, he stands out right in the way of our wonderful Lord, looks Him square in the eye and gives a statement of complete confidence – “Lord! If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean” (Mat. 8:2).

He had come to the right One. He had come in the right frame and state of mind – hopeless, helpless. He knew that all Israel had no answer for him. The only thing that they could do was, would be to isolate him, and confine him to an area where he wouldn't infect others. His case was hopeless – separated from his family, from his friends, doomed because of this terrifying disease, this loathsome disease. Yet he stood there in front of our Lord, saying “If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.”

I'm so glad that the record is complete. Our Lord looked at him and said, “I will. Be thou clean” (Mat. 8:3). And He touched him, and immediately his leprosy departed from him. If you'll study the beatitudes carefully, you will discover that they are a picture of the kind of spiritual health that you do not possess naturally – by nature and by choice, by attitude and by practice. You were not broken in spirit, nor was I – we were haughty and proud and arrogant and rebellious and selfish. We were not pure in heart – impure and vile, lustful and lecherous were we. We were not peacemakers, but troublemakers.

Now as God sovereignly chose that the leper should be the picture of the sinner – so by contrast in considering ourselves in the beatitudes, we discover our dire plight and desperate need.

Have you ever been lost? Some years ago I asked a congregation, “How many had ever been lost?” Four hands went up out of a hundred or more that were present. Now, I said, “How many of you are saved?” And all the hands went up, that I could see. Then I mentioned to the people, “What a strange thing this is – four of you have been lost, and all of you are saved!” And yet the Lord Jesus Christ said, “That He came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luk. 19:10).

Before God even can save anyone He must see them slain. How strange it is that we often pray – “O God, save my loved ones.” Are you prepared to pray in accordance with the sovereign and gracious operation of God? If you are, then you're going to change your praying. Instead of saying, initially, “Lord, save him,” you're going to say “Lord, slay him! Bring him to the awareness of his desperate plight, awaken him to his danger, convict him of his crimes!” This will be the order of your praying.

Here was one that had been awakened to his need. He remembered the day when he first saw that spot on the back of his hand; and touching it, felt no pain; pricking it, felt no pain. He went to try to cover it as long as he could, had the sleeves of his clothes lengthened, but soon it was out – as sin will ever be out. And then it came to the time when he stood before the priest, and was pronounced unclean, a leper. He was awakened, and then he was convicted, and sent out into that place, there to live out his days in fear, being ostracized from family and friends and everything that was dear and precious to him. But there came that hour when he said, “I will arise and go. I’ve heard that this One is there and He’s able to help people such as I am. ‘And Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.’”

Have you ever seen yourself the traitor that God declares you are? Have you seen yourself the rebel that your treason led you to? Have you seen yourself an anarchist willing your own will and choosing your own way, an enemy of God – God living and governing the universe to secure the greatest blessedness and happiness of all men including Himself – and you, and you a moral gangster and anarchist, living only for your own whim and pleasure? Have you ever discovered that sin is the committal of the will to the principle and the policy and the practice of pleasing self – regardless of the will of God and the rights of others?

It’s interesting that in reading the 13th chapter of the book of Leviticus, you discover that the only one that could be pronounced clean by the priest was the one who had leprosy from the top of his head to the sole of his feet. When there wasn’t a place on him as big as the end of his thumb that wasn’t soiled by the disease – then the priest would pronounce him clean.

And you recall the procedure? How that the priest took this one that was covered with leprosy down to the brook of flowing water, and there, the clay pot would be put in the water gathered? Two turtledoves were brought – one was left bound, the other had its throat cut, and the blood was pumped from the body into the water until first pink, and then rosy, and then finally scarlet. It proved that the life of the bird had flowed into the water. And then the living bird was dipped seven times into the water, until its white feathers were likewise scarlet. The little thread that bound the wings was cut, and the bird began to beat its wings, and the drops of blood would fall upon the leper. And then the string around the feet would be cut, and this one would go off into the sky, carrying with it the proof of the death, the blood that had been shed.

What a picture it was of the Lord Jesus Christ, who could say to that leper, “I will – be thou clean.” What a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, who could say to you, a moral spiritual leper; to me, undone because of our sin – “I will; be thou clean.”

But in order for it to be possible for Him to make you clean, He had to be made what you were, in order that you could be made what He is. There had to come that hour when, innocent of all sin and without sin, He reached out and drew you to Himself, and stood before His Father as you, as me, and died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

And thus our Lord Jesus Christ could stand that day, in the presence of that multitude, and say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” because He was providing everything (Mat. 5:3). He was making it possible. He’d come to do a new thing, to bring an entirely new thing into being. And thus His testimony, “These are the blessed.” And we have it today; we know that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away, and all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17).

But the Word. Let’s come to the Word. It’s that twentieth verse, I said, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 5:20).

There would be the possibility that His hearers, listening to Him describe this new creation, would say, “Oh, we know the ones of whom He speaks. There sit the Pharisees and the scribes, and the Sadducees, and these extremely, diligently religious men – certainly these are the blessed.” But our Lord wanted them to understand, all His hearers to understand, that that which He was doing was completely other than anything they had known previously. And so His Word was the categorical statement to which you can bring no challenge, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Let’s look for a moment in that in which this righteousness did consist. We’re too apt to think of the scribes and Pharisees simply as whited sepulchres, and as platters clean on the outside and foul within. But we must give credit where credit is due, and evaluate this properly, if we’re to make the application correctly. Remember that there were in those days two classes in

Judaism. There were the Sadducees, who were the liberals of the day. They didn't believe in the existence of angels, nor in the resurrection from the dead, nor did they believe in the necessity of blood atonement.

There was another group, a much larger group, that had the attention and influence with the common people, called the Pharisees. The Pharisees were fundamental in their theology. They believed in the inspiration of the Torah. In fact, they almost went too far, believing also in the authority of the Talmud, which was the commentaries, or the rabbinical writings. They believed in the existence of angels and expected the supernatural. They believed in resurrection from the dead. They believed in the necessity of blood atonement. They were fundamental, they were orthodox in their theology – as orthodox as you could be.

Then they also were evangelistic in their zeal. So successful were they in their personal evangelism, converting people from heathenism to Judaism, that when the plans for the reconstructed temple, that is the temple of Herod, were drawn up, a greatly enlarged, "Court of the Proselytes" had to be provided, in order to accommodate these that had converted from heathenism to Judaism. They had been circumcised and baptized and given new names. The Pharisees were diligent in witnessing to all who came to Jerusalem – and remember that Jerusalem was the crossroads of the world.

Then the third place, the Pharisees were missionary in their fervor. For it was said – the adage, the watchword was – that the Pharisees would encircle the world to make one proselyte. There wasn't a trip too difficult, too dangerous, too arduous, too distant – if at the end there was the possibility of persuading someone to convert to Judaism. For they believed that only those that had come into the truth that had been revealed to the fathers, and had renounced the idols and had been circumcised and baptized and committed to the faith of Israel – only these could ever be saved from perdition.

They were also premillennial in their hopes. They were looking for the personal, bodily, imminent coming of Messiah, to establish the kingdom of David, and to give back to Israel the glory that she had had under Solomon. Think of this. They were anticipating His coming.

Then, they were devout in their practice. We sometimes forget this, but they fasted two days every week. So diligent were many that they wouldn't even swallow their spittle from sunup until sundown on the day of fast. They prayed three times every day. They prayed, it's true, on the street corners, and some, the more inordinate ones – desiring the praise of men – would manage to be on the street corner at the time of prayer, but not all. Many of them prayed in their own courtyards, earnestly and sincerely. The shortest of their prayers would require ten to twelve minutes.

Then they observed all of the Talmudic requirements regarding dishes and diet and food. They also brought all of the offerings. The reason that you're allowed a thirty percent deduction on your income tax is because the Council of Rabbis, in studying the Talmud in the Scripture, discovered that the Pharisees had, in those days, given the equivalent of about thirty percent of their income. And so, lest there be a penalty of tax to obedience to faith, you have been given this privilege that, incidentally, very few exercise.

So here we have a people that are fundamental in theology, evangelistic in zeal, missionary in their fervor, premillennial in their hope, devout in their practice (and we must recognize that many of them were sincere and earnest in what they knew and what they taught, what they practiced).

And our Lord said: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven."

Now let me ask you, Does your righteousness consist in theology? Theirs did. Does yours consist in zeal? Theirs did. Does yours consist in missionary enthusiasm? Theirs did. Does yours consist in premillennial hope and expectation of the Lord's return? Theirs did. Does yours consist in devotion, praying, tithing, fasting? Theirs did. Well, was this wrong? No. Our Lord simply said it wasn't enough! All of this could be, as it was in their case, the product of intellectual, personal endeavor. All of this could be naturally produced. All of this could flow out of what a man is. But a man can't take away his leprosy! A man can't make himself whole! A man can't make himself alive!

And our Lord said, Those that are prepared to enter into My presence in that day are those that have had something supernatural, miraculous, transforming... [break in tape] ...first began to teach, this is what He said as He began to speak of so great salvation.

Another Word that I give to you is found in Luke chapter 13, verses 3 and 5. It's key to us by this same word: "unless" or "except". This time our Lord is speaking to current events, so we have good reason for doing as He did. Two accidents have happened, or two events have taken place. One was an accident – the falling of the Tower of Siloam. The other was Caesar's soldiers entering into the temple to find certain Galileans, and there to slay them and mix their blood with the blood of the sacrifices. And so they come to the Lord, and said, "Lord, what does this mean? Interpret it for us." And our Lord looked at this company and said, "Do you think these are sinners above all men? I say unto you – nay, but except" – there's the word – "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luk. 13:2-3).

Now when I approach this word, I do it with a deep desire that we might see again – republished and made available to the Christian public – a book by Harry Ironside that was the prize-winning treatise of that year, published by the American Tract Society, entitled, Except Ye Repent. I've read it, I've tried for years to secure a copy, I know the one who holds the copyright, and only wish that someone would make possible a republishing of that splendid little volume.

But there's been a great deal said about repentance. One of the things that I would have you see today is that the word itself means a change of mind, a change of will, a change of intention and a change of purpose. It brings us back to that word to which I referred last night – Romans 10:9, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord."

You see, the sinner has, by every attitude, confessed that he is lord. I remember in my own home, some years ago, my little daughter was in the living room, plucking the leaves off of one of her mother's plants. And I said, "Sarah, stop that, honey." And she looked at me and took another. I said, "Sarah, dear – stop that." She looked at me and took another. I went over and stood in front of her, and I didn't want to do as we fathers are so often forced to do – you know – apply the board of education to the seat of learning. But it was necessary. I said, "Sarah, stop that!" And she put her little foot down and her little chin out and she said, "I won't!" Well, she did. I saw to the matter immediately. But here was something in this little child of mine, that so was of me and so like me that it was an illustration of the very thing that characterizes Adam's family, "I won't!" – to the will of God.

And this is an attitude, this was something that she'd learnt, she probably learnt it from the children, but it was natural to her. It came by her, it had just run in the family for generations, ever since back in Adam's time. "I won't!" And we find it expressed by the attitude that's given in *Invictus*, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."¹ "I will!" is the attitude of the sinner.

Now, we recognize that this can be manifest subtly or it can be in some overt and some ugly manner, but it still characterizes every sinner – "They have turned everyone to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). In other words, they've gone into the God business for themselves. They've determined how and when and where and the manner in which they'll please themselves. It is a policy of committal of the will at the age of accountability to this principle of making one's own pleasure the end of their being. "I'm gonna do what I wanna do, be what I wanna be, get what I wanna get, have what I wanna have." And Christ said, "Except your mind changes, and your will changes, and your purpose changes, and your direction changes, you'll perish." And in Romans we read, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord."

Now you recognize that God demands perfect obedience. If, from the moment that one determines to please God, he were to perfectly please God – now hear me – if, from the moment one repents, he were to perfectly please God... That perfect obedience from that day on would not acquire enough merit to atone for one sin, because God has demanded obedience, and that minimum that God demands carries with it no acquisition or accumulation of merit. So repentance cannot be viewed as a work. It's a change of attitude. But you know that there is no pardon for the criminal who holds a smoking gun with which he's taken a life, as he looks into the face of the judge and says, "Listen, judge, I know that there was a man who died for murderers, and I'm claiming interest in his death, and let me go, because I've got a long list of people to kill." You know that

¹ "Invictus" By William Ernest Henley, 1888.

there is no possibility for pardon for such a one as that. And so Christ said, “Except you repent, except you realize the enormity of your crime of getting on the throne of your heart, and ruling your life, and playing God, you’ll perish.”

Now, we realize that this is what Peter preached. I remember some years ago, a dear friend saying to me, “You understand, of course, that Paul never preached repentance. All Paul said was ‘Believe’.” Well, I had been taught the same thing and, parrot-like, I repeated it. And one day I took my Bible, and went to it, and you know, I discovered that when Paul stood on Mars Hill, in the presence of heathen philosophers, he said, “Now God commandeth all men everywhere to repent!” (Act. 17:30) It never changed, never abrogated it – (it’s) still there. And then again, when he took leave of the Ephesian elders, he said, “I was with you night and day, from house to house, teaching repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act. 20:20-21). And still again, when he stood before King Agrippa, and recounted how the Lord had spoken to him, saying “I’ve appeared unto thee for this purpose – to make thee a minister and a witness, to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, wherefore O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but I delivered to them of Damascus and Jerusalem, the Jews and the Gentiles, how that they must repent, and turn to God, and bring forth works meet for repentance” (Act. 26:16-20).

Repentance is the product of that work of the Holy Ghost producing conviction. It is that change of intention from pleasing self to pleasing God. It is the right-about-face in purpose, from “I’m gonna live to please me!” to “Thy will be done!” And Christ has said it, “How shall we escape! O how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord!” (Heb. 2:3)

I talk with pastors all over this country, and they tell me that their hearts are breaking as they see their young people going on, claiming every verse in the Bible that has to do with salvation, and yet living in sin, living without concern for the will of God, and even without the common decencies, often, of the community, and doing it all in the name of Christ.

I submit to you that we have produced in America a Frankenstein which, if we are not careful will turn and rend us. For when you have salvation preached apart from a breaking upon the rock, then you have made moral monsters who have taken the grace of God, turned it into lasciviousness, and have found license for every sin. Antinomianism has ever been considered by the church a heresy. Paul saw that rodent born in hell, stick its filthy nose up through the grating over the pit, and stomped upon it in Romans 6 – “What then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!” (Rom. 6:1-2) And yet there are people that take that blood of Christ, as though it were a carte blanche credit card, and they can charge their sins to Jesus and live as they will. This, I say, is turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.

Christ said, “Except you repent, you’ll perish.” I press upon every pastor the reading of the sermon by Charles Spurgeon² from Psalms 7:11. On that text, “God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, He will slay him. He hath whet His sword; He hath bent His bow” (Psa. 7:11-12). I say, it is one of the most needed sermons in the twentieth century, and probably one of the most important sermons ever preached in the English language. And I pray, give it to you, for your thought. Because the lost note in modern preaching is a breaking upon the rock of the authority of Christ.

And we’ve had people who have exercised a head faith in Christ, agreeing to the plan of salvation, or a dead faith appropriating the doctrines and rituals and the taboos of Christianity, or a devil’s faith, emotionally responding to the truth, but they’ve never had heart faith, because the Scripture says, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord.” It’s not the same – “Not everyone that sayeth to Me ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 7:21).

John Bunyan³ saw “Ignorant coming out to the gate, and the men on the top of the gate” said in Pilgrim’s Progress⁴, “Do you have a certificate? And Ignorant fumbled in his bosom, and then said not a word. And the angels went to the King of the place, and said, ‘There’s one standing out there who claims that he knew you, that you taught in his streets and he’s eaten with you in the marketplace. But he doesn’t have a certificate. Shall we let him in?’ Then the King said, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and take him away.’” Then John Bunyan said, “I saw that they came and bound him hand and foot, and took him to the mountain,

² Charles Haddon (C.H.) Spurgeon (1834-1892) British Particular Baptist Preacher

³ John Bunyan (1628-1688) An English Christian Writer and Preacher

⁴ “The Pilgrim’s Progress” By John Bunyan, 1678.

and a hole opened in the mountain, and he went into destruction.” “Then,” the writer of the Pilgrim’s Progress said, “I saw that there was a way to hell from the gates of heaven.”

My dear friends, “Not everyone that sayeth unto Me ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto Me in that day, ‘Lord, didn’t we teach in Your name? Didn’t we prophesy in Your name? Didn’t we cast out devils in Your name?’ And I will say unto them from within, ‘Away with you! I never knew you.’”

I never ask people anymore, “Do they know the Lord?” I never ask that question any more. The way I have to do it, because of deep conviction, is this, “Does the Lord know you?” – “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God” (Joh. 17:3).

When the angel spoke to Mary and told her the birth of Christ, she said, “How can these things be, since I know not man” (Luk. 1:34). “And Mary knew not Joseph until she’d conceived and brought forth her first-born” (Mat. 1:25). This “knowing” makes the difference. It’s that impartation of divine life by a miracle of God’s grace. And that’s why Christ said, “Except you repent, you’ll perish,” because He will not impart Himself to an impenitent heart.

Another Word that I give you quickly, Matthew 18:3. There you have again the situation where these that professed faith in Him had forsaken all to follow Him, and yet in the morning on the walk, they’d been arguing as to who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and our Lord said, “What did you talk about on the way?” They didn’t answer; they were ashamed. He said, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 18:3).

When Peter said, “I will never forsake You; if all the others forsake You, I’ll never do it, our Lord said, Peter, you’re going to deny me three times before the cock crows” (Mat. 26:34-35). “I’ve prayed for you. Satan wants to sift you as wheat, but I’ve prayed for you. And when you are converted, strengthen your brethren” (Luk. 22:31-32).

You know what it means to be converted? To be “turned again”. “Turned again”. “Turned into the way”. Let me ask you, Do you have a broken spirit? Speaking of the matter of repentance, Spurgeon had this to say, “It must be, to be genuine, it must be hearty, and not reluctant. It must be entire and not partial; it must be permanent and not temporary.”

And I submit to you that the evidence of the genuineness of God’s work in your heart is the fact that when you are led aside by your appetites and you do fall into sin, your heart is broken! Not because of what it will do to you, but because of what it will do to Him, Who loved you and gave Himself for you. The best evidence that you’re born of God is threefold: First, that you have a hatred for sin, secondly that you have a hunger for God, and thirdly that you have a heart of compassion for the lost.

“Except you be converted, and become as little children...” What is this? This is an attitude that whenever you tend to turn out of the way, you come to God’s Word, and you turn back in. I think you can bring it in correspondence with that Word which you have in Romans 12:2 – “transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Oh, how many there were that if today they met Christ, they were willing to break, but they haven’t broken since. What about you? Does brokenness characterize you? When you find that you are led aside by the habits of your mind, the attitudes of your heart, the temptations that assail you on the way; do you come in brokenness before the Lord? You’ve been converted, and you are as a little child, you walk in the way He’s given you. And something happened that made you hate sin, and made you want to please Him.

I give you a third Word. There’s so much more I’d like to say about each of these, but I quickly pass on to John 6:53. I mentioned it in passing last night, but I’d like to give it to you again tonight. Our Lord had this company of people that had eaten the bread, and they stood before Him and He had spoken to them saying, “Except you eat My flesh, and drink My blood, you have no life in you.” “Except you eat My flesh, and drink My blood, you have no life in you.”

You understand, do you not? That salvation is not from the Lord, but it is the Lord. How frequently we think that the Lord died to provide salvation. The Lord is there, and salvation is in our hearts. But that’s not the case at all. The Lord is salvation. His name is Joshua – Jehovah Savior. We saw it last night from Psalm 27 – “The Lord is my light and my salvation” (Psa. 27:1). “He that hath the Son hath life” (I Joh. 5:12). The plan of salvation doesn’t save, the decision doesn’t save, Scripture verses don’t. He does. He is salvation. And when He comes, He brings life, because He is life, He is eternal, the eternal son. Oh, you might

have everlasting life, life that didn't cease, without Him, but you couldn't have eternal life. To have eternal life, you must have someone who is eternal. And God only is eternal. And therefore "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

And so He spoke to that company that had called themselves His disciples. And He told them how to have eternal life. He said, "You must eat my flesh, and drink my blood." And all they could think of was a cannibal feast. They couldn't comprehend; they couldn't understand. And they went away. And you remember –they said to Him something like this, "We're rejecting You." And He said, "No, you're not rejecting Me. Because all that my Father will give Me will come unto Me." You recall that He said that they'd been rejected by the Father.

Listen to me, dear heart. Do you know what we have done? By changing "the word that first began to be spoken by the Lord", we have filled our churches with people that have less than Christ – fifth columnists for hell, that have been inoculated with just enough of the truth of God to immunize them often to the work of God. And the consequence of this is, as I pointed out last evening, there is the possibility that the church as we know it is an organization that's useless and hopeless to God. Oh, I trust I'm wrong. I trust I'm wrong. But as I read church history, I discover there was a period in the history of England, when the church was useless to God. It was orthodox. It had the thirty-nine articles; it had all of the crystallized orthodoxy of the century, and yet it was useless to God. And God raised up John Wesley⁵, who went out preaching, and he took the broken – this man, and that woman, and this young person – and he met with them at five o'clock in the morning often. For nearly forty years he had a class meeting at five in the morning. Because he knew that there could be nothing done through the organized church. But God had something to do, and it could only be done by those that had met God on His own terms.

"The class meetings," said Macaulay, "was the instrument that God used to save England from the abyss into which France fell." It may be that America has seen the infusion of its organized church with so much that has word and name and form – without life – that it's useless to God, in such an hour of jeopardy as this. It may be that God will have to turn to something like the class meetings in order to find broken people that can be the two or three where the Lord Himself meets, and where there can be released more of spiritual power of the risen Christ, that will change the day in which we live. I hope I'm wrong. I hope I'm wrong.

But I submit to you, dear heart, that if the Lord Jesus had changed His message to hold that crowd, He would have ruined everything the Father had sent Him to do. I can see Peter standing there as the Lord begins to preach about, "eating His flesh and drinking His blood." And Peter's just chewing his fingers, and turning to the disciples and muttering under his breath, and said, "You know, we've told Him not to preach that. We've told Him not to preach that sermon. Every time He does, He loses His crowd, and there goes the offering, and oh, everything we're working for." And finally, when the Lord is finished, they've all gone, He turns and... "Well, what about you fellas? You gonna go?" And they stand there, their hands over their eyes and they're rubbing their chins and, after a while, Peter says, "This is a hard thing, Lord." And then I can hear (it isn't in the Scripture, but I can hear something like this), he stands there and says, You know, Lord, You came to us up there in Galilee, and You told us that You were the Son of God, and God the Father confirmed it; we know You're the Christ. We know that. And You know that we sold everything – we've just sold everything. We know, we've given up our business, our homes and our families and everything. We've committed all to You. We've burned our bridges. We've cut all our ropes that hold us. We don't understand this, Lord; we don't know what it means. But we can't go away. We've come to stay. "Thou only hast the words of eternal life" (Joh. 6:68).

And our Lord built with those that He couldn't drive away. And when He could drive them away, He let them go. His Father said, "I've given You a people, and the only way You will ever know who the people are that I've given You, is if You say what I've told You to say. You speak that which I've commanded You, and I'll give You Your people."

If He had changed the message, He'd have changed the people. And that's what we've done. What is He saying? He's saying, "Except you eat My flesh and drink My blood..." He's saying that just as in hunger, in dying of thirst and starvation, you come on bread, and you come on wine. And in desperation, you take the bread and eat it, and take the wine and drink it, and in the

⁵ John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican cleric, Christian theologian, and founding the Methodist movement

process of digestion and assimilation, that bread becomes the flesh of your flesh, the wine becomes the body of your body and it's part of you... So said He. In your death, in your desperation, in your lostness, you come to a table in the wilderness. What table is that? The cross. And there you see Me, with My body nailed to the cross, and My blood poured out, and you take Me, and eat Me, and just as food becomes part of you, I'll join Myself to you in a miracle that will make Me part of you.

The last Word I give you in closing, John 3:3 and John 3:7, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Except you be born of water and of the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" (Joh. 3:5). "Except your righteousness exceeds..." "You won't enter the kingdom of heaven except you repent, except you be converted, except you eat My flesh," "except a man be born again" (Joh. 3:7). Oh, dear heart, have you been born of God? Did God come down to make you alive in Christ? Has he? Has he?

I went down to Asheville, North Carolina, to our Alliance Church. The first night I was there, the invitation was given, several came to the altar, knelt in front of the platform. The pastor said to me, "There's Mr. Brooks, he's one of my most faithful elders. You'd better see what he wants." So I went right down. "Mr. Brooks, what is it?" He said, "Brother Reidhead, for the last several months, I've been troubled, I believe, by the Lord, as to the superficiality of my personal relationship to Christ. I think it's all in my head. I'd like to talk with you and pray with you." So we made an appointment, and then another, and a third, during those two weeks. Here was a man, twenty-three years an elder in that church. He knew the plan of salvation, he knew Scripture verses. But God had been troubling him – I hadn't. It wasn't my preaching, it – the first night – not even pertinent to the subject, actually. Then, I left. I looked over the heads of the crowd. "How is it, brother Brooks?" He shook his head. I didn't see him for several months, then down at the camp meeting at Hendersonville, North Carolina, I saw him – so different. He came up to me after the service. I said, "What happened? How is it with you?" "Ah," he said, "you see, I was counting on you. I'd gone to others in years past when I didn't have assurance, and they'd given it to me. And you hadn't done it and so when you left I didn't know what to do, and so I did what I should have done all the time, I turned to the Lord. And one night, in my room, about one-thirty, all alone, I broke before the Lord." He said, "Jesus Christ came into my heart and made me a new creature." And then tears streamed down his cheeks, he said, "Think of it, brother – twenty-three years an elder, and not born of God."

What about you? What about you? What about your loved ones? What about your family? What about people you know? "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?"

In Pittsburgh a few years ago, Dr. Tozer⁶ said, "In his estimation only twenty percent of the members of evangelical churches in America gave Bible evidence of regeneration." Down in Spartanburg, South Carolina a few years ago R. G. Lee said, "Only ten percent of the members of his fellowship gave Bible evidence of regeneration."

I don't know if they're right. I only know that when you neglect "that word which at first began to be spoken by the Lord", you fill the church with some other kind than His kind. Couldn't possibly be you... could it? Those you know? Those you love?

Shall we bow in prayer.

* Reference such as: Delivered in the Evening by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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