

DELAY IS DANGEROUS

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*“And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us
a few days, at least ten; after that she shall go.”*
Genesis 24:55.

You know the story of which these words form a part. Abraham was anxious to secure a wife for his son, Isaac. He sends, therefore, his well-trying servant to the land of their forefathers and takes an oath of him that he will bring a maiden from there who should be, by her birth and character, suitable to her future destiny. The venerable servant departs on his delicate and difficult errand. He took all precautions and then commended his case to the wise disposal of his own and his master's God. Success, which was in perfect harmony with his faith and with the Divine promises, at once crowned his efforts. The maiden best adapted above all others to be the spouse of Isaac is sent to meet him. She immediately responded to his wishes and conducted him to the house of her brother.

The aged man was wise in his generation, and knew that a key of gold has the power to open the heart most tightly locked either by prejudice or pride—everything gives way before its subtle influence. He had calculated wisely and his plans are matured at once into all he had fervently desired and prayed for. No sooner had Abraham's servant exhibited his offerings—jewels of silver and gold, with earrings and bracelets of precious metal—then he at once won the consent of Laban, Rebekah's brother, and of her mother. For what would not Laban have agreed to do for the sake of such valuable things?

The good servant, therefore, when he went to his bed that night, might well have slept soundly, congratulating himself that he had found in his anxious mission an easy task—that he should be able to go back the next morning to his master, taking Rebekah with him—and that the whole matter would be carried through with surprising speed. Judge of his surprise when, the first thing Laban said in answer to the good man's request, “Send me away,” was, “Oh no, we cannot afford to let you go just yet. We must have the damsel here a little while longer, ten days at least.”

I do not know what may have been Laban's particular reason, but I suspect his motives were in keeping with his character. If you observe his subsequent conduct with regard to Jacob, you may rest assured that there was something in the background. He thought, perhaps, that there were more golden bracelets to be had—that he was parting with his sister rather too cheaply, that he must not let the priceless gems go out of his hands too soon—therefore he would keep the account open and bargain some more.

Or, if he could not get more out of the servant, he might at least get ten days more service from the maiden, for she appears to have been the keeper of the sheep of the household, and to have performed the usual menial duties attended to by the young women of the family in the East. So Laban may have thought he might as well have her for ten days longer. It was just like he—he would have as much as he ought to have, and as much more as he could get—that was his honesty. He would get all that it was possible to squeeze out of everybody—that was his generosity. We shall not, however, have anything more to do with Laban tonight than to use his desire to retain his good sister, Rebekah, as an illustration of the way in which this wicked world endeavors to meet the invitations of the Gospel—by trying to retain the awakened sinner a little longer in its grasp.

I believe there are many here who have a hope that one day or other they will be saved. They have consented, in their judgment, that it is a right thing to be converted, but not yet. The world says, “Yes, these are weighty considerations. You shall go with that Man. You shall have Christ—you shall put your trust in Him—but not yet! Stop just a little while.” Satan's last counsel to his servants seems to have been, “Do not openly oppose the Gospel. Give way to it, but suggest *delay*—do not set men's consciences in opposition to Gospel Truth, for that is a hammer, and perhaps it will break their rocky hearts to pieces—but tell them to yield to the hammer. Tell them to say, ‘Yes, yes, it is all true, quite

correct. But we must wait a little longer, at least ten days. There is plenty of time. There is no need to hurry. Let the damsel wait a little while, ten days at least.’”

I want to draw your attention, first of all, to the world’s pretext for this delay. I stand knocking tonight at the world’s door, and I say, “There is a young heart here I want for Christ.” The world replies, “All right, you shall have it one of these days, but there is time enough, yet.” I say of another, “Here is a man whose strength and vigor I want for the Savior.” “All right,” says the world, “do not be in such a fever about it. We are all agreed with you—we all think as you do, that religion is important—but wait awhile, put it off, take your time, tarry a little! There is no cause for all this hurry and this fuss.”

If I ask the world what it means by talking like this, it says, “Well, you see, some of these people are so *young*. It is too soon for them to think of giving their hearts to Christ—would you have all the boys and girls turn saints? Would you have all the young men and women walking in the ways of Christ, and following in the footsteps of the Crucified?” I answer, “Yes, indeed, I would!” But I wonder at the world’s impudence in putting such a question as this concerning some of you, for some of you are *not young*. You have passed the period of youth years ago, and yet you are unconverted! And if I might hold parley with the world about some of the youngsters, I cannot about you.

Why, surely, the world cannot have the gall to tell me that you who are 30, 40, 50, or even 60 years of age are still too young! I should not wonder, indeed, but that it will turn around and tell me that you are too *old*, and that your time of mercy is past and I am too late! At any rate, Satan often does play both tunes, and while today he says, “Too soon,” tomorrow he cries, “Too late.” Too young to be saved? Is anyone too young to be happy? Too young to be a Christian? Is anyone too young to get the richest treasure that can make human hearts glad?

O young people, do not let the lying world tell you that you are too young! When our Lord was on earth, He said, “Let the little ones come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.” Do not believe that it is too soon for Christ to welcome you! Your need of Him begins with your *birth*—for you are born in sin and shaped in iniquity. As soon as ever you begin to act, you begin to sin in acting. Your first tendency is to fall as soon as ever you are on your feet. It is never too soon to have the strong arm of a Savior put around you to hold you up, that you may be safe.

Then the world says, “O wait a little longer! We should like these young people to know something about *life*.” Well, but, base world, what do you mean by that? What have you to do with *life*? We, too, want the young people to know something about life—but what is life? Why, true life is to be found only in the followers of Christ in whom is Life! “Well,” says the world, “but we mean the life”—I know what you mean! You mean the death. You want the young people to know something about life, you say. I hear you. It is the voice of the same hissing serpent that said, “You shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”

And our mother Eve, in order to know evil as well as to know good, has destroyed this race! And many a young man and young woman, in trying to know good and to know evil, has come to know that which has made the head to ache, and the heart to palpitate, and the nerves to tingle with exquisite pain! That pain which has brought the frail body to an early grave and the doomed soul down to the lowest Hell! I pray God that our young people may not know life in *that* aspect, but that they may know life in the *true* sense, and search for it where only it is to be found—

***“There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
There is life at this moment for you.”***

“Ah, then,” says the world, putting on its best smiles, “it is all very well for you to talk, but we do not want our young people to give up all their pleasure.” And what have you to do with pleasure, you painted Jezebel? What have you to do with happiness, false deluder of souls? The world—this canting, hypocritical world—dares to utter and dwell upon that word, “pleasure.” But it does not know what it means—ask those who have tried its joys—its princely minds such as Byron, who, like an angel, flew through the Hell of this world’s pleasures. Ask them what they have made of it all, and their only answer is in a groan and with a sigh, deeply heaving from their inmost spirits. They join in modern times with the verdict of the ancient royal philosopher who said, “Vanity of vanity, all is vanity!”

Pleasure, indeed! Happiness, indeed! You base world, what do you know about it? It is because we would have these people possessed of pleasure that we wish them to be converted and that we desire to see them joined to Christ! It is false, as false as God is true, that religion makes men miserable. Spurious religion may do so. They who worship Moloch may adore him with shrieks and cries! But the worshipers of Jehovah bow before their God with gladness! They come into His

Presence with thanksgiving, and into His courts with joy! The richest joy, the noblest festivities, the most enchanting mirth that hearts can know is that which we find at our Father's Throne when we adoringly worship Him and do Him active service.

When the prodigal came trembling back from the far-off land to his father's house, his misery ceased and his joy began as soon as his father had spoken. What bliss must have thrilled him with the word of his gracious parent's lips! The best robe! The precious ring! The costly shoes! The fatted calf! All for me? Why, it seems too good to be true! But so it is to be—and not only in his case, but with us all! “Religion's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” Our cup has joy's quintessence distilled into it and it is filled to the brim. “That your joy may be full,” said the Master. And it is full—as full as God's eternal love, as Christ's most precious Grace and the Spirit's blest communion can make it! Yes, as full as Heaven and eternal bliss can fill it.

Now I wonder what else the world has to say by way of wishing to keep these people a few more days? Oh, yes! Oh, yes—I know—it brings out the ledger and puts the pen behind its ear and it says, “A young man ought to mind the main chance. He should get on in business and then, when he has made a competence, he may sit down and think about the world to come. But his first object should be to make money.” Yes, my good Sir, and if you would but speak the whole of your mind, you would say that he ought, in the last place, to make money, too. I knew your father well! He began life as you would have these young people begin, and he plodded on, and plodded on to the end of his allotted term—never having had time to think about religion.

He was such a rare sensible old gentleman, such a wise man! “What I want, are facts and figures,” he said, “none of your nonsense! Do not tell me about your opinions! I cast my books up on Sunday—that is the way to spend your Sunday. I dare say when I have nothing else to do I shall have time to think about my soul.” He was a rare “fine old English gentleman.” A very wise old man. But one night he lifted up his eyes in Hell, and with all his accurate bookkeeping and balance of accounts, he had to sum it up—“No profits! I have gained my wealth, but lost my soul!”

And oh, if he could come back again, he would say to his son, “My son, you have better begin business at the right end. Make the *soul* sure, first, and then look after the body. Hook yourself fast to eternity and make that right—and then see after the slippery things of time as best you can in subservience to that.” At any rate, let Mr. Worldly-Wiseman say what he may. God, who knows more about us than we do about ourselves, says, “Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.”

What is the drift of all this waiting? What the world means is just this, “Ah,” says Madam Bubble, “here is a young person impressed—if we laugh at him it will deepen the impression. But we will say to him, ‘Come, come, let the impression go for a little while. This is not the fit time. When you have a more convenient season you can bring it on again.’ ” This game the old Tempter keeps on playing over and over again. He does it very blandly—he does not oppose religion, but “everything in its proper place,” says he—“and this is not just the time for it. Wait a little longer.” He said this to some of you ten years ago, and he is saying the same to you tonight. And if you live he will say the same ten years from now, and again when you are on your dying bed!

And so with this cunning he will cheat you out of your soul! The world says, again, to itself, “Every time we get this impression put off, we get the conscience more unlikely to receive it again, for no man cripples his conscience without suffering injury.” If I say to my awakened conscience, “No, I will not hear you,” my ears get less retentive of the sound, and Mr. Conscience himself grows less able to speak. When the knocking at the door has been heard for a long time and not answered, a man gets to be so in the habit of hearing the alarm that he could go to sleep and let a man knock all night.

Moreover, the world says, “Well, if they do go at last, yet we will exact from them as long a time of service as we can. Suppose they do leave us and engage in the service of Christ, yet we shall have had their help in the work of the devil for a good long time, and they will be poor old lame things when they go limping into Christ's service. They will not be good for much, then.” The devil knows that Christ loves the young, and therefore he tries to keep the young from going to Him. “No,” Satan says, “if He will have that flower, I will not let Him have it in the bud if I can help it. He shall have it when it gets full blown and much of its beauty has gone from it. I will keep it with me while in its prime as long as I can.

“Yes, and there is this thing in addition, that while I have it in my power, I can do that to it which it can never get rid of in this life—I will lead it into sins that shall cleave to its *memory*. I will teach that young man vile songs that shall

someday come up in his mind when he begins to pray. I will show him scenes that shall stagger him when he grows old, and make him cry as though his very bones were broken.” That is what the devil says! He wants to have you altogether, or if he cannot do that he would have you wait a little while.

O may God’s eternal mercy come to your rescue and may you be saved from Satan without waiting the ten days! May your hearts be brought to Jesus *now*! And how sad the thought that Satan is getting service out of some who will have to spend much of their afterlife in trying to undo what they have, in their blindness, been led to perform for the god of this world! What a waste of time and talent to build up in misery today what you will wish, for very shame, to pull down tomorrow! Some men have written books, or done deeds in early life which will meet them as long as they live—confronting them in the path of service and proving to be their direst foes. It will be a source of ever recurring grief to find yourself wounded by an arrow feathered thus out of your own wing—to feel yourself crushed by stones your own heads set a rolling in days gone by.

Thirdly, having exposed the pretexts of the world, and tried to show its cruel designs, our real object is to have our hearers *saved*—and to have them saved *now*. I never did come upon this platform desiring that my ministry might be blessed to you months after you had heard the sermon! I trust I have prayed times without number that it might be blessed at once to the salvation of souls. It is an *immediate* result that we must look for and labor to achieve. There were three reasons why Abraham’s servant wished Rebekah to go with him at once—and these move me to desire your conversion tonight.

First, he desired it for his Master’s sake. He knew that Isaac was looking forward to the happy day when he should be married to his chosen bride. And oh, the heart of Jesus is longing after sinners. It is a happy day for the Savior when He welcomes the lost ones. It is one of Christ’s wedding days when He gets a soul to come to Him. Oh how the bells of Jesus’ heart ring when He hears a soul say, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” You know how He suffered! See Him fastened to the tree! What is to pay Him for all His pangs? Nothing—nothing but the love of your hearts when you come to Him with all your sins, and say, “Jesus, forgive me!” May you, then, come and trust Him now, saying—

*“Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Your blood was shed for me,
And that You bid me come to You,
O Lamb of God, I come!”*

Our Lord, for the “joy set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame.” It is written that He rejoices over us with joy and singing, so that He reaps the fruit of His pains and groans in our salvation.

When the shepherd lays the sheep on his shoulders, he returns home rejoicing for he has found the sheep which was lost. The joy of finding the strayed one compensates him for all his toil. He forgets the length of the road, the toilsome climb up the mountains in search of it. It is found! It is found! That is enough—that one joyful cry embodies the measure of his satisfaction and rewards. How Christ delights to save! This is how Christ is rewarded for His soul’s travail. Abraham’s servant, too, desired it for his own sake because he was a faithful steward, and wanted to do his business well.

And how we desire your conversion for our sake! It will make us so happy! There is no bliss that can come to the soul of the Christian minister like the bliss of knowing that he has been made the means of bringing some to Christ. It is in this way that we receive at once the fulfillment of the Scripture, “In keeping His commandments there is exceedingly great reward.” We get our reward while we are obeying His precept, “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel unto every creature.” Our chief reward is in Heaven, but even now, whenever a lost sheep is found or a prodigal restored by Sovereign Grace through us, we immediately receive a recompense.

My dear Brothers and Sisters in the Sunday school, your reward is on high, but do you know what it is to have a crown of rejoicing even here? I am sure you do, if ever you have seen that some young spirits have been led by you to the Savior! Your hearts, full weary before, have been refreshed and you have gone back to your labor with more zeal than ever. Your desire has been increased and you long more intensely after souls. Ask our Brothers, the city missionaries, and our Sisters, the Bible-women, “What is your encouragement in your arduous work?”

They would reply that next to the Master’s Presence and the hope of His commendation at last, they placed the joy of doing good and seeing men, once as heathenish as any found in foreign lands, sitting at the feet of Jesus, all their nature changed, a legion of demons expelled, and now clothed and in their right mind—these once lost ones are found—the dead are alive again!

But the principal reason that the man wished it was for Rebekah's sake. He knew that Isaac would make a good husband for her. And we know that Jesus Christ will make a blessed Husband to your souls. He will enrich you with all the treasure of His Grace. He will clothe you with His robe of righteousness. He will comfort you with His love. He will cheer you in this world. He will take you Home to dwell with Him in the many mansions above. You will find Him to be a precious Christ to you, and when you get to Him you will say, "I never knew what happiness meant till I found You." You will be grateful to think that you are saved, and therefore, for your own sakes, we desire that this very night you may give up your sins and that the Spirit of God may draw you, by His Grace, to cast yourselves upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus, trusting in Him to save you, as He will do if you put your faith in Him!

Think for a while, I beseech you, how much is to be gained by your immediately seeking the Savior! You at once are free from the guilt and condemnation of sin. You are at once clothed with a peerless robe of righteousness. Immediately "all things are yours"—that very moment—"all things begin to work together for your good." You have Heaven, then, for your home and your citizenship is in the kingdom of Glory. You shall never more lack any good thing. No evil can befall you or any plague come near your dwelling. Time would fail me to try to calculate your immediate blessedness.

And then you make eternal life sure and certain, whereas you may delay and delay till you lose the life which now is and that which is to come! For your sakes we desire your immediate salvation! Our hearts are filled with joy and gladness as we sit at the King's table in His banqueting house and His banner over us is love! But we remember our friends outside, in darkness, poverty, and need and we would gladly call them in to our feast. There is room enough—and our hearts would be yet more filled with joy if we could see the edging completely filled with guests! O all you hungry ones, come and eat with us of angels' food, and drink with us of cups of salvation! Here is a royal feast—oxen and fatlings are killed! All things are ready—come to the wedding—the Master bids you come at once! Why remain in hunger and fear outside? Enter freely!

Now, lastly, we believe that this desire of ours is a very reasonable one and we think we can prove it without the necessity of entering upon a long argument. We will put before you, with this view, two or three little pictures. Alexander conquered the world and we should like *you* to do so, in the best of senses. We will ask Alexander his secret. "Alexander, you have overcome Darius. You have driven the Persians before you as a lion drives a herd of sheep. How have you done it?" The very question was once asked of him personally, and his answer was this—"I never delayed."

Everybody admits that, in his way, Alexander was a worldly-wise man and eminently successful—and here was the secret of it—"I never delayed." Do you hear that, young man? You want to be great? You want to be happy? What is your ambition? Learn from Alexander! I think that a greater than he could have said that in his life—I mean the Apostle Paul. How was it that he was able to do so much during that latter part of his life in which God blessed him? Why, he could have said, "I never delayed."

A number of men are upstairs in a house, amusing themselves with a game of cards. What is that? The window is red! What is that cry in the streets? "The house is on fire!" says one. "Oh!" answers another, "Shuffle the cards again, let us finish the game. We have plenty of time." "Fire! Fire! Fire!" The cry rises more sharply from the streets, but they keep on. One of them says, "It is all right, I have the key of the door on the roof, and we can get out at the last minute. I know the way over the leads—it is all right." Presently one of them says, "Are you sure we can get through that door?" and he goes to try, but finds it locked. "Never mind," is the answer, "I have the key." "But are you *sure* you have the key?" "Oh, yes! I am sure I have—here it is, try it for yourself—do not be such a coward, man, try it." The man tries the key. "It will not turn!" he says. "Let me try," says his friend. He comes and tries, and puts it in the lock, "O God!" he shrieks, "it's the wrong key!"

Now, Sirs, will you go back to your game again? No, now they will strain every nerve and labor to open the door, only to find, possibly, that it is all too late for them to escape! So, some of you are saying, "Oh, yes! What the man says is well enough, but you know, we can *repent* whenever we like. We have a key that can turn the Grace of God whenever we please. We know the way—has he not told us tonight it is just? Trust Christ, and we can do that whenever we please—we shall get out." Ah, but suppose you cannot do that whenever you please? Suppose the day comes when you shall call and He will not answer—when you shall stretch out your hands—but no man shall regard?

Suppose, suppose you should cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," and the answer should be, "I never knew you! Depart, you cursed!" Besides, if you think that key will open the door, and you can repent *now*, why not repent *now*? You believe

that you have full power to do so! O do it, do it, and do not trifle with that power, lest when the power is gone, you find too late that in one sense it never was there! Do you want one other picture of the folly of delay? Ah, you heard of it some time back last winter, and I should think you must have heard of it with tears in your eyes—I mean that terrible accident on the ice in Regent’s Park.

Why didn’t the people get off the ice when they could see it was rotten? Why did they not leave it when it was beginning to be cut up into such small pieces as to be scarcely larger than paving stones? It was all very well to be on it when it was a solid cake—but why did they not flee at once when there was danger? Nobody can now answer that question, and there is only this to be said—it is most probable that all those who were there meant to get off very soon. Probably nine out of ten of them may have thought to themselves— “Well, it *is* getting rather dangerous, and it is not quite the thing to be here, but just one more merry ring—let us just cut one more ‘figure eight’ and have just one more dash up and down the slide! It will be firm enough for that—let us stand here for two or three minutes at any rate.”

They were all going to get off, but, ah, there is the end of the story—except that it is, even till this day, continued by other people with the sighs, and cries, and lamentations of husbands and of wives, of children and of parents who can now only regret the fatal delay—but can do nothing to make amends. Ah, some of you are on the rotten ice of the world’s pleasures and of your own confidence. It is all rotten—why don’t you get off?

“Oh,” you say, “I shall get off by and by.” Oh, I see you—there is something fascinating in your pleasures, and a man likes to see his neighbors happy. I see you skating over that dangerous ice, but why don’t you get off? With some of you life is getting very frail. Ah, those lungs are hardly sound—you are spitting blood. The gray hairs are getting pretty plentiful on your head. You have had a warning—you have had one seizure and the doctor has told you what will be the consequences of another. Why don’t you get off when the ice is breaking up like this? You may get off—you may get off tonight.

If you perish it will not be the fault of one who would act the part of a Humane Society man and say to you, “Now, before the last breakup comes—now, before the rising of tomorrow’s sun which may bring the final breakup—escape for your life! Look not behind you! Stay not until you have reached the Savior, and found mercy in Him!”

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