

JOSHUA'S OBEDIENCE

NO. 796

A SERMON

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*“Only be thou strong and very courageous,
that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law,
which Moses my servant commanded thee:
turn not from it to the right hand or to the left,
that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.”*

Joshua 1:7

JOSHUA was very highly favored in the matter of promises. The promises given him by God were broadly comprehensive and exceedingly encouraging. But Joshua was not therefore to say within himself, “These covenant engagements will surely be fulfilled, and I may therefore sit still and do nothing.” On the contrary, because God had decreed that the land should be conquered, Joshua was to be diligent to lead the people onward to battle. He was not to use the promise as a couch upon which his indolence might luxuriate, but as a girdle wherewith to gird up his loins for future activity.

As a spur to energy, let us always regard the gracious promises of our God. We should sin against Him most ungratefully and detestably were we to say within ourselves, “God will not desert His people, therefore let us venture into sin.” And we are almost equally wicked if we whisper in our minds, “God will assuredly fulfill His own decrees, and give the souls of His redeemed as a reward to His Son Jesus, therefore let us do nothing, and refrain altogether from zealous Christian service.”

This is not proper language for true children. This is the talk of the indolently ignorant, or of mere pretenders, who do but mock God while they pretend to reverence His decrees. By the oath, by the promise, by the covenant, and by the blood which seals it, we are exhorted continually to be at work for Christ, since we are saved in order that we may serve Him in the power of the Holy Ghost, with heart, and soul, and strength.

Joshua was especially exhorted *to continue in the path of obedience*. He was the captain, but there was a great Commander-in-chief who gave him his marching orders. Joshua was not left to his own fallible judgment or fickle fancy, but he was to do according to all that was written in the book of the law. So is it with us who are believers. We are not under the law, but under grace. Yet still there is a Gospel rule which we are bound to follow, and the law in the hand of Christ is a delightful rule of life to the believer.

We are not to follow, in the service of God, our own fancies. We are not allowed to frame regulations according to our own conceptions, but our direction is, “whatsoever HE saith unto you, do it.” His servants shall serve Him, His sheep follow His footsteps, His disciples obey their Lord, His soldiers fulfill His pleasure, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” If we are not obedient unto Christ, we may rest assured that we have not the spirit of Christ, and are none of His.

I. In speaking upon the obedience which was enjoined upon Joshua, I would remind you that OBEDIENCE IS THE HIGHEST PRACTICAL COURAGE.

Read the text, “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee.” You supposed when you heard the words, “Only be thou strong and very courageous,” that some great exploit was to be performed, and the supposition was correct, for all exploits are comprehended in that one declaration, “That thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded thee.”

The highest exploit of the Christian life is to obey Christ. This is such an exploit, my brethren, as shall never be performed by any man, except he has learned the rule of faith, has been led to rest upon Christ, and to advance upon the path of obedience in a strength which is not his own, but which he has received from the work of the indwelling Holy Ghost.

The world counts obedience to be a mean-spirited thing, and speaks of rebellion as freedom. We have heard men say, "I will be my own master, I shall follow my own will." To be a free thinker and a free liver seems to be the worldling's glory, and yet if the world could but have sense enough to convict itself of folly, upon indisputable proof being afforded it, it were not difficult to prove that a reviler of the obedient is a fool.

Take the world's own martial rule. Who is accounted to be the boldest and the best soldier but the man who is most thoroughly obedient to the captain's command?

There is a story told of the old French wars which has been repeated hundreds of times. A sentinel is set to keep a certain position, and at nightfall, as he is pacing to and fro, the emperor himself comes by. He does not know the password. Straightway the soldier stops him. "You cannot pass," says he. "But I must pass," says the emperor. "No," replies the man, "if you were the little corporal in grey himself you should not go by," by which, of course, he meant the emperor. Thus the autocrat himself was held in check by order. The vigilant soldier was afterwards handsomely rewarded, and all the world said that he was a brave fellow.

Now, from that instance, and there are hundreds of such which are always told with approbation, we learn that obedience to superior commands, carried out at all hazards, is one of the highest proofs of courage that a man can possibly give, to this the world itself gives its assent. Then surely it is not a mean and sneaking thing for a man to be obedient to Him who is the Commander-in-chief of the universe, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

He who would do the right and the true thing in cold blood in the teeth of ridicule, is a bolder man than he who flings himself before the cannon's mouth for fame, ay, and let me add, to persist in scrupulous obedience throughout life may need more courage than even the martyr evinces when once for all he gives himself to burn at the stake.

In Joshua's case, *full obedience to the divine command involved innumerable difficulties*. The command to him was that he should conquer the whole of the land for the favored tribes, and to the best of his ability he did it. But he had to besiege cities which were walled up to heaven, and to fight with monarchs whose warriors came to battle in chariots of iron armed with scythes. The first conflicts were something terrible. If he had not been a bold and able soldier, he would have put up his sword and desisted from the strife, but the spirit of obedience sustained him.

Though you and I have no Hivites and Jebusites to kill, no cities to pull down, no chariots of iron to encounter, yet we shall find it no easy thing to keep to the path of Christian consistency. Count well the cost, you who have just enlisted under my Lord's banner. You shall not find it to be child's play to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." To put on the pilgrim's dress of white linen, and then carelessly to bespatter it with unholiness, and anon to profess repentance only to fall again, and bemire it in the dirt, and then time after time to wash it, or say you have washed it—this is easy enough. Fits and starts of godliness many have who end their lives in despair.

The Christianity of some people costs them little cross-bearing, much less any "resisting unto blood, striving against sin." A merely nominal profession is easy enough to make and to maintain after the manner of the times. But to be a Christian indeed, through and through, to eat, and drink, and sleep eternal life, to live the life of God on earth—this is the work, this is the difficulty. You will need to have the strength of Samson, and something more, to pluck up the gates which block up your onward road, a strength divine must be yours if you are to keep the crown of the causeway against all comers.

Moreover, Joshua had not only difficulties to meet with, but *he made a great many enemies through his obedience*. This was naturally so. As soon as it was known that Jericho had been taken, that Ai had been carried by assault, then we read of first one confederation of kings, and then of another, their object

being to destroy the power of Joshua, since these kings well knew that he would crush them if they did not crush him.

Now, the Christian is in a like plight. He will be sure to make enemies. It will be one of his objects to make none. But on the other hand, if to do the right, and to believe the true, and to carry out the honest, should make him lose every earthly friend, he will count it but a small loss, since his great Friend in heaven will be yet more friendly and reveal Himself to him more graciously than ever.

O ye who have taken up His cross, know ye not what your Master said? "I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Christ is the great Peacemaker, but before peace, He brings war. Where the light comes, the darkness must retire. Where truth is, the lie must flee. Or if it abides, there must be a stern conflict, for the truth cannot and will not lower its standard, and the lie must be trodden under foot. If you follow Christ, you shall have all the dogs of the world yelping at your heels.

If you mince matters, and hold with the hare and run with the hounds, you may be a Christian and a worldling too, after a sort, but if you would live so as to stand the test of the last tribunal, depend upon it the world will not speak well of you. He who has the friendship of the world will find that he is an enemy to God. But if you are true and faithful to the Most High, men will resent your unflinching fidelity, since it is a testimony against their iniquities.

Fearless of all consequences, you must do the right. You will need the courage of a lion unhesitatingly to pursue a course which shall turn your best friend into your fiercest foe, but for the Love of Jesus you must do it. For the truth's sake to hazard reputation and affection, is such a deed that to do it constantly you will need a degree of moral principle which only the Spirit of God can work in you. Yet turn not your back like a coward, but play the man.

Yet, again, Joshua, in his obedience, needed much courage because *he had undertaken a task which involved, if he carried it out, long years of perseverance*. After he had captured one city, he must go on to attack the next fortress. The days were not long enough for his battles. He bids the sun stand still, and the moon is stayed. And even when that long day has passed, yet the morning sees him sword in hand still.

Joshua was like one of those old knights who slept in their armor. He was always fighting. His sword must have been well hacked, and often must his armor have been blood red. He had before him a lifelong enterprise.

Such is the life of the Christian, a warfare from end to end. As soon as you are washed in Christ's blood and clothed in His righteousness, you must begin to hew your way through a lane of enemies, right up to the eternal throne. Every foot of the way will be disputed, not an inch will Satan yield to you. You must continue daily to fight. "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved," not the beginner who commences in his own strength, and soon comes to an end, but he who, girt about with divine grace, with the Spirit of God within him, determines to hold on till he has smitten the last foe, and never leaves the battlefield till he has heard the word, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Let the man who says that the Christian's life is mean and devoid of manliness, let him go and learn wisdom before he speaks, for of all men the persevering believer is the most manly. You who boast of yourself, of your courage in sinning, you yield to the foe, you are a cringing cur, you turn tail upon the enemy, you court the friendship of the world, you have not courage enough to dare to do the right and the true, you have passed under the yoke of Satan and your own passions, and to conceal your own cowardice you are base enough to call the brave Christian a coward. Out on you, for adding lying to your other vices!

Oftentimes, if we follow Christ we shall need to be brave indeed in facing the world's customs. You will find it so, young man, in a mercantile house. You will find it so, husband, even in connection with your own wife and children, if they are unsaved. Children have found this so in school. Traders find it so in the marketplace. He that would be a true Christian had need wear a stout heart.

There is a story told of Dr. Adam Clarke, which shows the courage which the youthful Christian sometimes needs. When he was in a shop in the town of Colerain, they were preparing for the annual fair, and some rolls of cloth were being measured. One of them was too short, and the master said, "Come, Adam, you take that end, and I will take the other, and we will soon pull it, and stretch it till it is long enough." But Adam had no hands to do it with, and no ears to hear his master's dishonest order, and at last he flatly refused, whereupon the master said, "You will never make a tradesman. You are good for nothing here, you had better go home, and take to something else."

Now that thing may not be done now, for men do not generally cheat in that open downright kind of way nowadays, but they cheat after more roguish fashions. The records of the bankruptcy court will tell you what I mean. Bankruptcies one after another of the same person are doubled-distilled thieving generally. Not old-fashioned thieving like that which once brought men to transportation and to the gallows, but something worse than highway robbery and burglary.

The genuine Christian will every now and then have to put his foot down and say, "No, I cannot, and I will not be mixed up with such a thing as that," and will have to say this to his master, to his father, to his friend, whose respect he desires to gain, and who may be of the greatest possible assistance to him in life. But if it be your duty my dear brother and sister, thus to do the right, do it if the skies fall. Do it if poverty should stare you in the face. Do it if you should be turned into the streets tomorrow.

You shall never be a loser by God in the long run, and if you have to suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are you! Count yourselves to be happy that you have the privilege of making any sacrifice for the sake of conscience, for in these days we have not the power to honor God as they did who went to prison, and to the rack, and to the stake. Let us not, therefore, cast aside other opportunities which are given to us of showing how much we love the Lord and how faithfully we desire to serve Him.

Be very courageous to do what the Lord Jesus bids you in all things, and let men judge you to be an idiot if you will, you shall be one of the Lord's champions, a true Knight of the Cross.

II. Secondly, I learn from the text that THE EXACTNESS OF OBEDIENCE IS THE ESSENCE OF OBEDIENCE.

"That thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left."

The world saith, "We must not be too precise." Hypocritical world! The world means that it would be glad to get rid of God's law altogether, but as it scarcely dares to say that point-blank, it cants with the most sickening of all cant, "We must not be too particular, or too nice."

As one said to an old Puritan once, "Many people have rent their consciences in halves. Could not you just make a little nick in yours?" "No," he said, "I cannot, for my conscience belongs to God." "We must live, you know," said a money-loving shopkeeper, as his excuse for doing what he could not otherwise defend. "Yes, but we must die," was the reply, "and therefore we must do no such thing." There is no particular necessity for any of us living. We are probably better dead, if we cannot live without doing wrong.

The very essence of obedience, I have said, lies in exactness. Probably your child, if sometimes disobedient, would still, as a general rule, do what you told him. It would be in the little things that thoroughgoing and commendable obedience would appear.

Let the world judge of this for itself. Here is an honest man. Do people say of him, "He is such an honest man that he would not steal a horse"? No, that would not prove him to be very honest. But they say, "He would not even take a pin that did not belong to him." That is the world's own description of honesty, and surely when it comes to obedience to God it ought to be the same.

Here is a merchant, and he boasts, "I have a clerk, who is such a good accountant that you would not find a mistake of a single penny in six months' reckoning." It would not have meant much if he had said, "You would not find a mistake of ten thousand pounds in six months' reckoning."

And yet if a man stands to little things, and is minute and particular, worldlings charge him with being too stringent, too strict, too strait-laced, and I know not what besides, while all the time according

to their own showing, the essence of honesty and of correctness is exactness in little things. If I profess to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, the crucial test will not be in great actions, but in little ones.

My dear brethren, I wish the Christian church really thought this. There is so much in many churches of trifling with words—I mean by people professing to believe what is not believed—putting another meaning upon words than what is the plain natural sense, which is nothing better, I conceive, than lying in the sight of God.

I know, too, members of churches who say, “I do not approve of a great deal that is in our creed,” and yet they remain members of such a church. I do not understand it. I cannot comprehend how a man can bear to partake in the doings of any church, whatever that church may be, when he knows those doings to be wrong—making it a part of his religion to do wrong, winking at and shutting his eye to what his own conscience tells him is not according to the will of God.

If I thought that in any of our proceedings in this place we did not do according to God's mind, I would humbly desire to alter at once. And I do pray that we, as a church, whenever we err, or in anything may not have acted according to Scripture, may be willing to bring ourselves to holy Scripture, and to be always schooling our minds to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may do that will in all things.

The church may be wrong in a great many points, and yet be accepted before God, because the conscience of the church may not be enlightened. But what I plead for is that as far as our conscience is enlightened, we are bound to act up to it, and that we have no right to do anything about which we cannot be sure that we are right, and no right to be uniting ourselves to any body of professors who are not carrying out the Lord's commands and laws in all things so far as we can judge. Not in some things, but in all things we are to be observant of the divine will.

Is there any ordinance of Christ which some of you have never attended to? Have you attended to baptism and the Lord's supper? I charge you, before the living God, see to it as you value your own peace of mind. “He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

I am not now speaking of the discipline of the law—the Christian is not under that—I *am* speaking, however, of the discipline of Christ's own house, over which Christ is the Master, and this is the law of Christ's house—if we will not be obedient we shall not abide in the comfortable enjoyment of His love, but we shall be chastened, and scourged, and smitten, until we become willing to yield ourselves up to the Lord's mind.

Through thick and thin, through fair and foul, through poverty or wealth, through shame or honor, Christian, cling close to your Master. Be you among those virgin-souls, who—

*“Whitherso'er the Lamb doth lead,
From His footsteps ne'er depart.”*

Those are the men who shall be honored of heaven, who have peace with God unspeakable within their souls today, and shall have the brightest crowns of immortality upon their brows tomorrow. The exactness of obedience is the very essence of obedience. Let us keep to it, then.

III. But now, thirdly, THE PATH OF OBEDIENCE IS GENERALLY A MIDDLE PATH.

“Turn not from it, to the right hand or to the left.”

There is sure to be a right hand, there is sure to be a left hand, and both are probably wrong. There will be extremes on either side. I believe that this is true in ten thousand things in ordinary life, and also true in spiritual things in very many respects.

The path of truth in doctrine is generally a middle one. There are certain tremendous truths, such as divine sovereignty, the doctrine of election, covenant transactions, and so forth. And some men cast such a loving eye upon these truths that they desire to be, and are, quite blind to all other truths besides. These great and precious doctrines take up the whole field of their vision, while another and equally

valuable part of God's Word is either left unread, or else twisted around into some supposed reconciliation with the first-named truths.

Then, again, there are others who think much of man. They have deep sympathy with the human race. They see man's sin and ruin, and they are much charmed with the mercy of God and the invitations of the Gospel which are given to sinners, and they become so entranced with these truths in connection with the responsibility of man and man's free agency, that they will see nothing else, and declare all other doctrines, except these, to be delusions.

If they admit the doctrines of grace to be true, they think them valueless, but they generally consider them to be untrue altogether. It seems to me that the path of truth is to believe them both, to hold firmly that salvation is by grace, and to hold with equal firmness that the ruin of any man is wholly and entirely his own fault. To maintain the sovereignty of God, and to hold the responsibility of man also, to believe in the free agency of both God and man, neither to dishonor God by making Him a lackey to His creatures' will, nor, on the other hand, to rid man of all responsibility, by making him to be a mere log or a machine.

Take all that is in the Bible, dear friends, to be true. Never be afraid of any text that is written by the sacred pen. Dear brethren, when you turn the pages over, I do hope you never feel as if you wish that any verse could be altered. I trust you never desire that any text might be amended so as to read a little more Calvinistic, or a little more like the teaching of Arminius.

Always stand to it that your creed must bend to the Bible and not the Bible to your creed, and dare to be a little inconsistent with yourselves, if need be, sooner than be inconsistent with God's revealed truth. You will find the path of duty there, I think, to be neither to the right hand nor to the left.

So I think it is in another respect, in which the tendency is to one of two extremes. Some people say of *ministers*, "These are God's priests. They can distribute grace to us." Others cry out, "No, they do not, and cannot. We are all equally able to dispense the truth. We need none to instruct us, we are all of us to be pastors, or rather, to be sheepish enough to think we are."

Now, there, I think, the safe path lies between the two. The minister is no priest, but still, God does enable some men by His Spirit to teach others. He does raise up pastors after His own heart. We will magnify the office, but we will not magnify it too much. We will not suffer any to speak against it, for we believe it to be a God-sent gift. On the other hand, we will not slavishly prostrate ourselves before any man, however gifted he may be.

You will notice, in connection *with the ordinances of God's house*, one extreme about sacraments is that they are channels grace. Baptism and the Lord's supper are saving ordinances, according to certain ignorant people. The opposite extreme is to leave ordinances alone altogether, and to say there is nothing in them, and that it is of no use to attend to them. Surely the proper thing is to believe that, as acts of obedience, they are acceptable to God. And as signs and tokens of great spiritual truths, they are instructive and edifying to the saints, and therefore not to be neglected. In this matter, I would have you "turn neither to the right hand nor to the left."

So, too, I think it should be *in our general conduct*. With regard, for instance, to our words, the course of speech generally is, on the one hand to say too much, or on the other hand to say too little, to be silent when the wicked are before us, or else to be rash with our lips and betray a good cause through our rashness in defending it.

There is a time to speak, and there is a time to be silent, and he that judgeth well will mark his opportunities and take the middle course. He will neither be garrulous with advice that is not required, nor will he be cowardly and dumb when he ought to bear testimony for his Master.

The same holds good with regard to zeal. We have some abroad nowadays whose heads are very hot. They will be doing this, and that, and I know not what besides, all in the twinkling of an eye. They talk as if they would turn the world upside down, while it is their own brains that need first to be turned into a right condition.

They foment revivals, but not revivals such as we should approve of—their revivals are blown up like bladders with mere human excitement and playing upon men's passions, and this brings true zeal into contempt. Theirs is a fire which burns down the house instead of burning in the grate and warming the household. But shall we therefore not be zealous? God forbid! Shall we fall into the opposite extreme of those who fold their arms and say, "Why make this noise? God will do His own work. Things will go well enough, let us be quiet, let us sleep as do others"?

Brethren, there is a middle course of true, sensible, prudent zeal—adhering to the truth and never believing that people can be converted by lies, however earnestly bawled into their ears. Walking within the bounds of God's truth, and being persuaded that the best seed to sow is that which God puts into the basket of His Word, and that sinners are not to be saved by rash statements nor by extravagant declamation, but that they are brought to Christ, as they were of old, by the simple telling out of the story of the cross affectionately, and by the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Here, again, "turn neither to the right hand nor to the left."

Beloved, this is a point we must take care to observe *in the matter of our confidences*. Neither to the right hand nor to the left must the Christian turn, with regard to the reliance of his soul, in the matter of his eternal salvation. "None but Jesus" must be the constant watchword of our spirit.

Some will call us in this direction, and some in that. The wrecker's beacons would entice us upon the rocks in a thousand directions, but let us steer by the sun or by the polestar, and not trust to the treacherous guides of human fancy.

Keep close to this, that "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ the righteous." Rest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and put all your reliance upon Him as crucified, risen, and pleading for His people. Settle it in your hearts that you are not to be led away from Jesus.

*"Should all the forms that men devise,
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I'd call them vanity and lies,
And bind the Gospel to my heart."*

So in *the matter of faith itself*, let us keep the middle place. Let us not be as some are—presumptuous, and refusing to examine themselves, declaring that they must be right. Let us remember that—

*"He who never doubted of his state,
He may—perhaps he may too late."*

Let us not fall, on the other side, into constant doubting, imagining that we never can be fully assured, but must always be raising the question—

*"'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His, or am I not?"*

Let us ask God to guide us into the middle path, wherein we can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until that day," careful, watchful, prayerful, as much as if our salvation depended upon our own vigilance. Relying upon the sure promise, and the immutable oath, knowing that we stand in Christ, and not in ourselves, and are kept by the mighty God of Jacob, and not by any power of our own.

This middle path, wherein we turn not to the right hand of presumption, nor to the left hand of unbelief, is the path which God would have us tread.

This rule, too, for I might continue to apply it in scores of ways, will *also hold good with you in your daily life in the matter of your general cheerfulness or otherwise*. Some people never smile. Dear souls! They pull the blinds down on Sunday. They are sorry that the flowers are so beautiful, and think that they ought to have been whitewashed. They almost believe that if the garden beds were of a little more serious color, it would be advisable.

I have known some, and some whom I very greatly respect, talk in this way. One good brother, whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose, said, on one occasion, that when he went up the Rhine, he never looked at the rocks, or the old castles, or the flowing river, he was so taken up with other things!

Why, to me nature is a looking-glass in which I see the face of God. I delight to gaze abroad, and—

“Look through nature up to nature’s God.”

But that was all unholiness to him. I confess I do not understand that kind of thing. I have no sympathy with those who look upon this material world as though it were a very wicked place, and as if there were here no trace whatever of the divine hand, and no proofs of the divine wisdom, nor manifestations of the divine care. I think we may delight ourselves in the works of God, and find much pleasure therein, and get much advanced towards God Himself by considering His works.

That to which I have thus referred is one extreme. There are others who are all froth and levity, who profess to be Christians and yet cannot live without the same amusements as worldlings, must be now at this party and then at that, never comfortable unless they are making jokes, and following after all the levities and frivolities of the world. Ah! the first is a pardonable weakness in which there is much that is commendable, but this is a detestable one, of which I can say nothing that is good.

The Christian, I think, should steer between the two. He should be cheerful, but not frivolous. He should be sustained and happy under all circumstances, have a friendly and a kindly word for all, and be a man among men as the Savior was, willing to sit at the banquet, and to feast and rejoice with those that rejoice, but still heavenly-minded in it all, feeling that a joy in which he cannot have Christ with him is no joy, and that places of amusement where he cannot take his Lord with him are no places of amusement but scenes of misery to him.

He should be constantly cheerful, happy, and rejoicing, and yet at the same time he should evince a deep solemnity of spirit which removes far from him everything that is sacrilegiously light and trifling.

By the same rule *arrange your business*. Some men in business act in such a way that from morning till night they can think of nothing but business. I have had to mourn over some Christians who, when they have had enough, did not know it—when they were doing as much as they could do with health to their souls, and had no more need of gain, yet they must needs launch out into something else that would take away all opportunities of serving God’s cause, and all time for reflection and thought, and that would thus bring barrenness and leanness into their souls.

Others we have to complain of, who do not work enough at their callings. They are at a sermon when they ought to be behind the counter, or they are enjoying a prayer meeting when they ought to be mending their husbands’ stockings. They go out preaching in the villages when they had better be earning money to pay their creditors.

There are extremes, but the true Christian is diligent in business, and is also fervent in spirit, seeking to combine the two. The believer should be like one of old, “a just man and devout,” not having one duty smeared with the blood of another duty. Having a due proportion of all the graces, he seeks in his life to follow out his calling as a man, as a parent, as a member of the church, or whatever else he may be.

IV. Now we shall close, and our last remark is that THE PATH OF RIGHT IS THE PATH OF TRUE PROSPERITY.

Observe, the last paragraph of the text, "That thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest." Let no man be deceived with the idea that if he carries out the right, by God's grace he will prosper in this world as the consequence. It is very likely that, for a time at least, his conscientiousness will stand in the way of his prosperity. God does not invariably make the doing of the right to be the means of pecuniary gain to us. On the contrary, it frequently happens that for a time men are great losers by their obedience to Christ.

But the Scripture always speaks to us of the long run. It sums up the whole of life—there it promises true riches. If you would prosper, keep close to the Word of God, and to your conscience, and you shall have the best prosperity. You will not see it in a week, nor a month, nor a year, but you shall enjoy it ere long. Hundreds have I seen, and I speak within bounds when I speak of that number, who in different times of dilemma have waited upon me, and asked my advice as to what they should do.

Now, brethren, I have almost always noticed that those persons who temporize, or attempt to find out a policy of going between, and doing as little wrong as possible, but still just a little, always blunder out of one ditch into another and their whole life is a life of compromises, of sins, and of miseries. If they do get to heaven, they go there slipshod, and with thorns piercing their feet all the way.

But I have noticed others who have come right straight out, and rent away the cords which entangled them and have said, "I will do the right, if I die for it," and though they have had to suffer (I could mention some cases where they have suffered for years, very much to the sorrow of him who gave them the advice upon which they acted, not because he regretted giving them the advice, but regretted that they had to suffer), yet always there has been a turn somewhere or other, and by and by they have had to say, "I thank God after all, notwithstanding all my crosses and losses, that I was led to be faithful to my convictions, for I am a happier man, if not a richer man."

In some cases they have absolutely been richer men, for after all, even in this world, "honesty is the best policy." It is a very low way of looking at it, but right and righteousness do in the end, in the long run, get the respect and the esteem of men. The thief, though he takes a short way to get rich, yet takes such a dangerous way that it does not pay. But he who walks straight along the narrow road shall find it to be the shortest way to the best kind of prosperity, both in this world and in that which is to come.

If not, beloved, if we get no outward prosperity here, I trust you and I, if we love Christ and are filled with His Spirit, can do without it. Well, if we must be poor, it will soon be over, and in heaven there shall be no poverty. Well, if we must fight for it, in order to maintain our conscience, we did not expect to come into this world that we might—

*"Be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease."*

If it must come to this, that we must suffer hunger and even nakedness itself, we shall not be worse off than the apostles—better men than we. We shall not be brought lower than the martyrs—with whose names we are not worthy to have ours coupled. Let us, then, run all risks for Christ. He is no soldier who cannot die for his country. He is no Christian who cannot lose his life for Christ.

We must be willing to give up all things rather than sell the truth or sell the right, and if we come to this, we shall have such courage within our spirits, such a quiet consciousness of the presence of God the Holy Ghost, and such sweet smiles from the once suffering, but now reigning Savior, that we shall have to bless God all our days for these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, which shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I may not have spoken much to the comfort of God's people, but I shall be glad if I have said only half a word that may tend to nurture in the midst of our church earnest obedience, practical piety, real positive godliness carried out in ordinary life. We have plenty of doctrine, plenty of thinking, plenty of talking, but oh, for more holy acting!

It is sickening to see the inconsistencies of some professors. It is enough, indeed, to make the world ridicule the church to see how many profess to follow Christ, and then keep any rule rather than God's rule, and obey anybody sooner than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brethren, let us pray to God that our hearts may be sincere in the Lord's ways, and that we may be guided by His Spirit even to the end.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOSHUA 1

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.